

RCAS Annual Report

2025



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About RCAS

香港亞洲研究中心| The Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies (RCAS) is a nonprofit research organization focusing on Asian affairs. It is a newly established institution founded in February 2022 by Dr. Nian Peng in Haikou and subsequently moved to Hong Kong in September 2023. We currently have an international research team with nearly 100 resident/nonresident researchers from China and other countries.

RCAS aims to become a leading research institute and think tank on Asian affairs in the Indo-Pacific region. To date, RCAS has conducted research programs on maritime disputes in the South China Sea (SCS), China's relations with the Indo-Pacific states, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), terrorism/counterterrorism in the Afg-Pak region, and so on. It is committed to promoting maritime cooperation, regional integration, and regional peace in the Indo-Pacific region at large.

RCAS has published nearly ten books in Chinese and English and more than 20 papers in SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *The Reality and Myth of BRI's Debt Trap-Evidences from Asia and Africa* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2024); *The Uncertain Future of Afghanistan: Terrorism, Reconstruction, and Great-power Rivalry* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2024); *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *Territorial Disputes, The Role of Leaders and The Impact of Quad: A Triangular Explanation of China-India Border Escalations* (2023); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches* (2022); *China-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan: Assessing Key Interests and Implementing Strategies* (2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988* (2021); and *China-Pakistan Conventional Arms Trade: An Appraisal of Supplier's and Recipient's Motives* (2020).

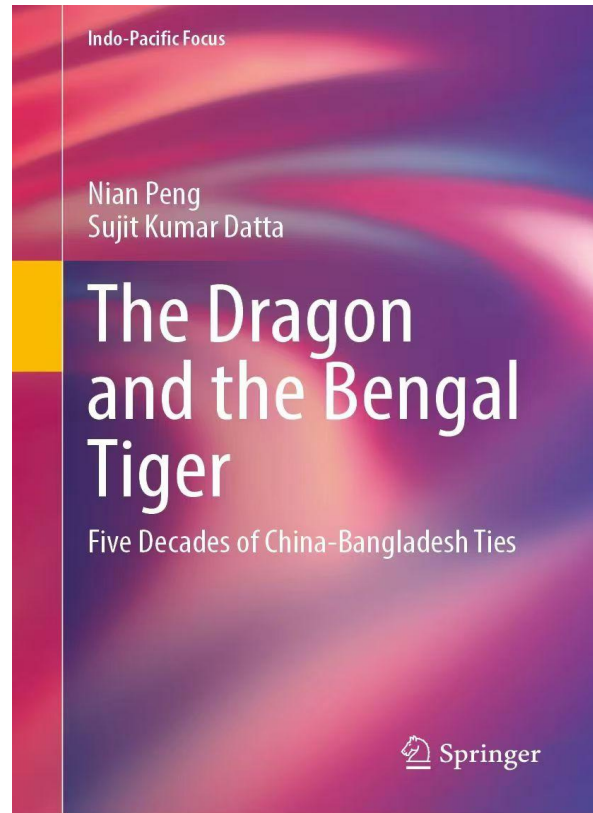
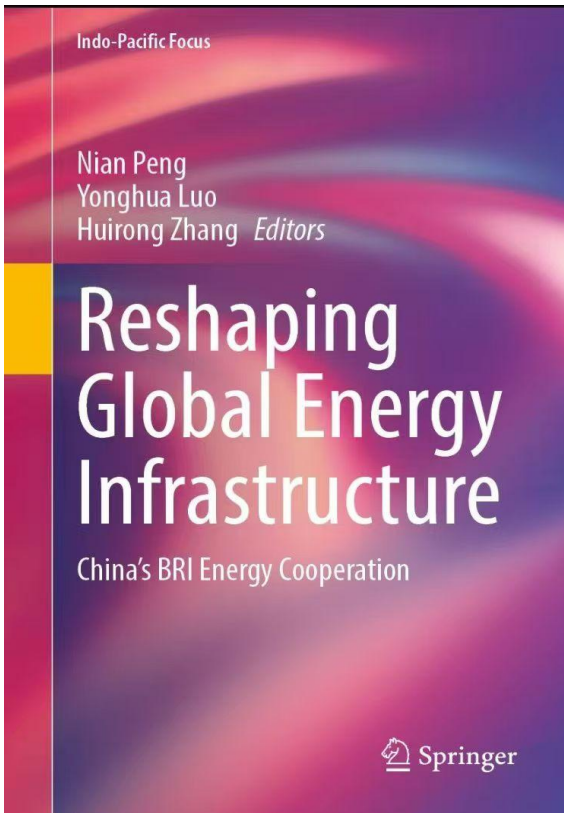
RCAS has also published hundreds of articles, and its researchers have been interviewed in various local and international media outlets, such as *The Diplomat* in the United States, *East Asian Forum (EAF)* in Australia, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Jakarta Post* in Indonesia, *Lian He Zao Bao*, *Think China* in Singapore, *Dhaka Tribune* in Bangladesh, *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *CGTN*, *Global Times*, *World Affairs* in China. RCAS researchers have actively participated in international conferences or study visits in the United States, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, and other places.

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Featured Publications



SPEKTRUM, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2025
p-ISSN: 1829-6580, e-ISSN:
28095642 spektrumfsp@unwahas.ac.id

EMERGING POWER RIVALRY: ANALYZING SHIFTS IN SINO-INDIAN POLICY TOWARDS THE SOUTH ASIAN REGION

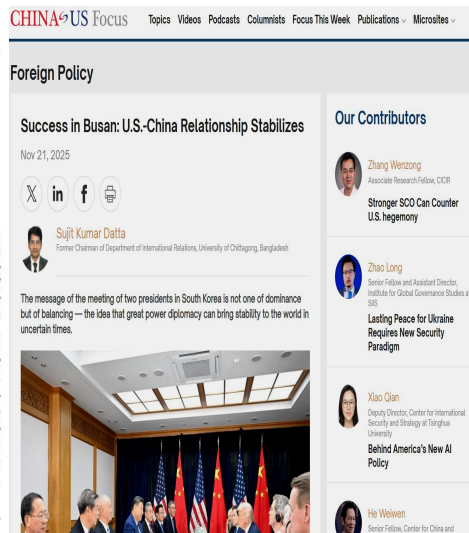
Sujit Kumar Datta

Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh,
Deputy Director, Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies (RCAS)

Abstract

This article delves into the evolving power dynamics between China and India in the South Asian region, aiming to scrutinize how their respective policies have shifted in response to emerging geopolitical rivalries. The research objective is to dissect the strategic maneuvers and policy adaptations of both nations, with a focus on understanding the implications for regional stability and power balance. Key research questions include: How have Sino-Indian relations evolved in the context of South Asian geopolitics? What are the primary drivers of their policy shifts? How do these shifts affect the smaller South Asian states? Through a comprehensive analysis of policy documents, diplomatic exchanges, and strategic initiatives, the research finds that both China and India are increasingly asserting their influence through economic investments, military presence, and diplomatic engagements. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and India's Act East Policy are pivotal to their regional strategies. The research argues that while these policies aim to bolster their respective spheres of influence, they also exacerbate tensions and competition, thereby impacting regional alliances and economic development. The findings underscore a nuanced power rivalry where economic diplomacy, infrastructural projects, and security concerns intersect, revealing a complex interplay of cooperation and contention. This rivalry not only reshapes bilateral relations between China and India but also significantly affects the geopolitical landscape of South Asia, necessitating a reevaluation of existing regional policies and alliances.

Keywords: Sino-Indian Politics, Belt and Road Initiative, Indo-Pacific Strategy, Act East Policy, Rivalry, Geopolitics.



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US

The Future of NATO Under Trump' s Presidency

written by Professor Dr. Sujit Kumar Datta | January 10, 2025



Type and hit enter...

Recent Posts



US Envoy to Meet Putin in Moscow as Ukraine Peace Talks Intensify

December 2, 2025

A Young Bangladesh Entrepreneurial Interview [ব্যাংলাদেশি উদ্ভাবনী মনোভাব](#)

Xi's bold defiance of the US-led order

Prof. Sujit Kumar Datta — December 23, 2025 11:24 am — Updated: December 23, 2025 2:18 pm



Photo: Collected

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RCAS Event

Dr. Nian Peng was Interviewed by Global Times on ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat

RCAS, Jan. 19, 2025

Southeast Asian foreign ministers gathered Sunday for their first meeting this year under the regional bloc's new chair, Malaysia. At the meeting, the bloc discussed transnational crimes including online scam syndicates, and called for closer cooperation with China to combat the issue, according to media reports.



▲ Malaysia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohamad Hasan delivers his speech during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers' Retreat in Malaysia's Langkawi Island on January 19, 2025. Photo: VCG

The theme of this year's meeting was "Secure, Innovative, Inclusive: Shaping ASEAN's Digital Future," a reflection of ASEAN's commitment to building a safe digital environment. This

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includes responding promptly to online threats and cybercrime, developing new innovations and technology and ensuring equal access to technology, Bangkok Post reported on Saturday.

At the meeting, foreign ministers of ASEAN discussed the recent hotspot issue of online scams. At an interview following the meeting on Sunday, Singaporean Minister for Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan said "(there are) now scams and other crimes will take advantage of interconnected digital economies. And again, this illustrates, just as it is in the case of drug trafficking, the need for a collective approach."

Thailand Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra also emphasized the need for regional cooperation to combat online scams, address fake news and promote responsible AI use at the 5th ASEAN Digital Minister's Meeting in Bangkok, according to the Pattaya Mail on Saturday.

According to the Bangkok Post, Myanmar has pledged to collaborate with Thailand in combating transnational call center gangs, according to Digital Economy and Society (DES) Minister Prasert Jantararungtong. Participants at the 5th ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting in Bangkok agreed that online fraud and call center gangs are urgent problems and require a concerted effort to tackle, he said.

The DES Ministry has made agreements with several countries to address the problems, but these pacts provide only a framework and need concrete measures for effective enforcement, he added, the Bangkok Post reported on Saturday.

"Effective institutional arrangements and cooperative frameworks are essential for cross-border collaboration, particularly at the regional level within ASEAN," **Peng Nian, director of the Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies**, told the Global Times on Sunday.

Peng pointed out that if ASEAN countries establish an internal mechanism to combat cross-border crime, China could directly engage with this regional framework, avoiding the need for

individual coordination with each country, thereby reducing time and risks while enhancing the effectiveness of cross-border crime prevention.

As ASEAN chair, Malaysia has proposed cooperating with China, which could play a role in promoting and implementing collaborative efforts, Peng said.

Cross-border law enforcement faces challenges such as differences in legal systems, insufficient responsibility sharing, and issues of illegal movement, resulting in complex coordination and low efficiency, Gu Xiaosong, dean of the ASEAN Research Institute of Hainan Tropical Ocean University, told the Global Times on Sunday.

If ASEAN can establish strict institutional arrangements and promote a regional mechanism for combating cross-border crime, cooperation with China will become more efficient, Gu said.

Member states need to actively take responsibility, strengthen border management and build a more coordinated legal enforcement system, which will significantly enhance the effectiveness of cross-border law enforcement collaboration, he added.

The ministerial meeting also discussed various frameworks for cooperation including cybersecurity, cross-border data exchange and joint development of the digital economy.

On Thursday during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's meeting with diplomatic envoys from 10 ASEAN countries in Beijing, Wang said China stands ready to work with ASEAN countries to crack down on cross-border online gambling and telecom fraud.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, said that the recent vicious cases of online gambling and telecom fraud along the Thailand-Myanmar border have threatened and harmed the vital interests of citizens of China and other countries, a situation that demands a great deal of attention.

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Wang said it is hoped that the relevant countries will take responsibility and strong measures to resolutely crack down on these crimes, safeguard people's safety and property, and never allow criminals to evade punishment.

China is willing to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation on law enforcement and security with ASEAN countries to provide a safe environment for people-to-people exchanges and sound order of cooperation among neighboring countries, Wang said.

The interview can be seen on the Global Times page:

<https://enapp.globaltimes.cn/article/1327181> (<http://www.rcas.top/event/276.html>)

RCAS Event

Dr. Nian Peng was Interviewed by Global Times on China-Cambodia Ties

RCAS, Mar. 9, 2025

Top US Army officer for the Asia-Pacific region Gen. Ronald P. Clark was in Cambodia for a two-day visit this week, aiming to improve relations between the two nations and their militaries. According to media reports, the two discussed the possible resumption of the joint Angkor Sentinel military exercises, which was suspended by Cambodia in 2017.

The visit came as Western narratives have recently run deep surrounding Cambodia's foreign policy under Prime Minister Hun Manet. Some media outlets have questioned if Cambodia is "slipping out of China's orbit" and if the China-Cambodia "ironclad friendship" is starting to rust. When reporting on the top US general's visit, the Associated Press did not forget to mention China, claiming that there is particular concern about Cambodia's close ties with China.

Zhou Shixin, director of the Institute for Foreign Policy Studies at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, told the Global Times on Tuesday that compared to the previous Hun Sen government, the Hun Manet government indeed is trying to improve ties with the US, but it does not mean that Cambodia will completely lean toward the US at the cost of its China ties.

For a long time, the US has been saying that China would use the renovated Ream naval base in Cambodia to control nearby waters, even though the Cambodian side has made it clear that the Ream naval base is not for China or to be used by any military against another country. An analysis published last December by the Lowy Institute, a think tank based in Australia, a close US ally, asserted that "China could gain preferential access to the base or use its facilities there to collect intelligence against other states." This is just the typical Western narratives of "China threat" and "China expansion."

Peng Nian, director of the Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies, echoed Zhou's view. He said that "Cambodia will not pick a side between China and the US." Maintaining a balanced and pragmatic diplomacy benefits all countries, and Cambodia is no exception. The Cambodian media once noted that one of the central tenets of Hun Manet's foreign policy

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doctrine appears to be a commitment to an independent and non-aligned stance. Meanwhile, Cambodia is committed to friendly policies toward China and remains steadfast to its China approach. Assertions that Cambodia is pivoting toward the US while distancing itself from China are unfounded.

The China-Cambodia friendship, cultivated by the older generation of leaders of both countries, has stood the test of the changing international landscape. China and Cambodia see each other as the most trustworthy friend and the most reliable partner, and always firmly support each other's core interests. This is the defining feature of China-Cambodia relations and also serves as the foundation of the time-tested friendship between the two countries.

At present, China and Cambodia are guiding the high-quality development of bilateral relations with high-level mutual trust, continue to enrich the "Diamond Hexagon" cooperation framework, and formulate cooperation plans for the Industrial Development Corridor and the "Fish and Rice Corridor." These cooperation projects are a clear answer to disruptive voices.

Ge Hongliang, vice dean of the ASEAN College at the Guangxi Minzu University, told the Global Times on Tuesday that driving a wedge between China and Southeast Asian countries is a key component of the US policy toward Southeast Asia, and at the defense level, the policy, as part of the US' Indo-Pacific Strategy, is likely to continue under the current US administration.

Nonetheless, the US' unwarranted concerns, as well as its interference in China's legitimate cooperation with regional countries like Cambodia, will only lead to growing discontent toward itself in the region and can hardly affect the ironclad friendship between China and Cambodia.

The interview can be seen on the Global Times page:

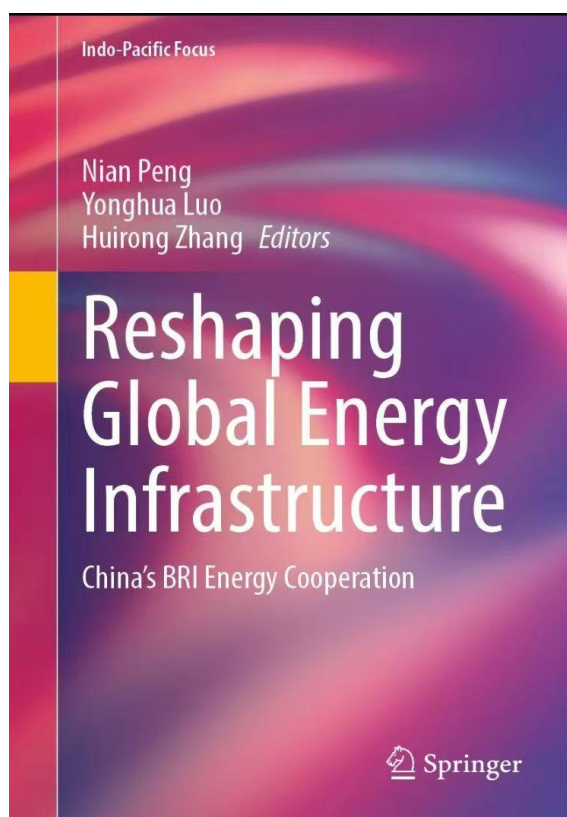
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RCAS Book

RCAS New Book of BRI Energy is Published by Springer Nature!

RCAS, Dec. 31, 2025

RCAS is proud to announce that the new book-*Reshaping Global Energy Infrastructure: China's BRI Energy Cooperation* is published by Springer Nature in December 2025. Nian Peng, Director of RCAS, and Yonghua Luo and Huirong Zhang, Professor at the Guangdong University of Petrochemical Technology, Maoming, China, co-edited this book.



▲Nian Peng, Yonghua Luo and Huirong Zhang(2025), *Reshaping Global Energy Infrastructure: China's BRI Energy Cooperation*, Singapore: Springer Nature.

This edited book provides an in-depth analysis of the new developments in China's energy cooperation with Asian and African countries under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) over the past decade. It seeks to analyze the driving forces, new progress, and main challenges of energy

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cooperation between China and BRI route states. This book adopts a multi-dimensional perspective to analyze China's energy cooperation with BRI route states, combining economic, political analysis, cultural narrative, and environmental governance. In contrast to traditional books that focus solely on energy security, this book combines economic and cultural dimensions, incorporating a broader framework.

This book offers new perspectives on studying BRI energy cooperation. First, it emphasizes both China's and BRI route states' roles in BRI energy cooperation and highlights the common interests and mutual benefits between the two sides. It shows how China and BRI route states benefit from the energy cooperation. Second, the book also examines energy competition, particularly in energy infrastructure, between China, the United States, India, and Japan in Asian and African states, and how the competition could reshape the global energy infrastructure. Third, the book discusses environmental governance under BRI energy cooperation and reveals how China and BRI route states promote governance capabilities in the energy sector.

The book has a vast readership and is suitable for academics and policy-minded readers. Scholars of international relations, energy policy, Asian and African studies, the BRI, and Chinese foreign policy will find the insightful views presented in the book valuable for their research. Policymakers and diplomats will benefit from its practical analyses, particularly in energy cooperation and competition.

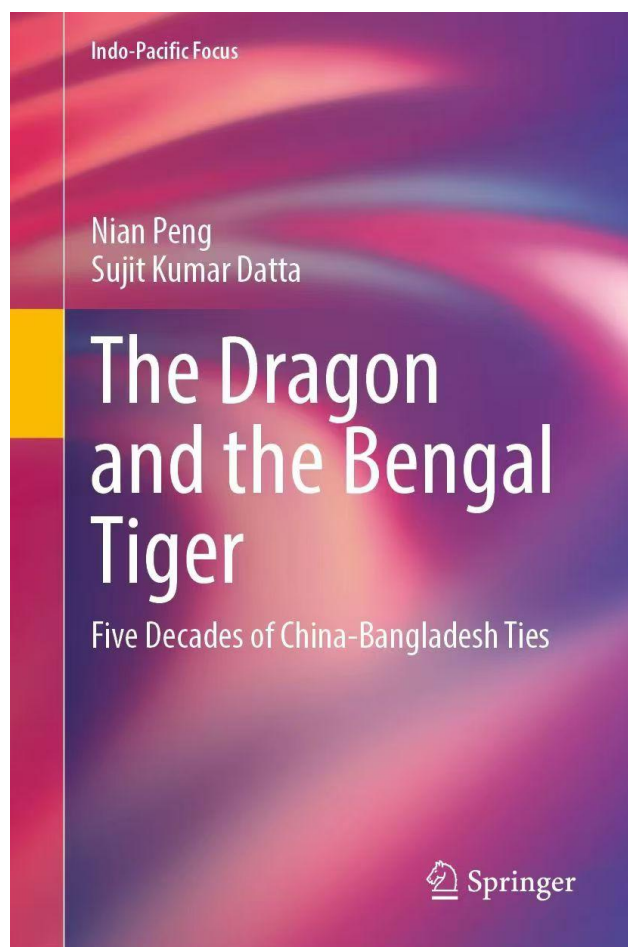
The Springer Nature links: <https://link.springer.com/book/9789819548521>

RCAS Book

RCAS New Book of China-Bangladesh Ties is Published by Springer Nature!

RCAS, Dec. 31, 2025

RCAS is proud to announce that the new book-*The Dragon and the Bengal Tiger: Five Decades of China-Bangladesh Ties* is published by Springer Nature in December 2025. Nian Peng, Director of RCAS, and Sujit Kumar Datta, Professor at University of Chittagong, Chattogram, Bangladesh and Deputy Director of the Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies, Hong Kong, co-edited this book.



▲ Nian Peng and Sujit Kumar Datta(2025), *The Dragon and the Bengal Tiger: Five Decades of China-Bangladesh Ties*, Singapore: Springer Nature.

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This edited book provides an in-depth analysis of the development of China-Bangladesh relations over the past fifty years. It seeks to understand bilateral relations' diplomatic, economic, and strategic dimensions by examining historical trends and contemporary developments. This book carefully explores and highlights key aspects of economic partnerships, geopolitical alliances, and cultural exchanges, making it a valuable resource for scholars and policymakers. This book adopts a multi-dimensional perspective to analyze China-Bangladesh relations, combining historical narrative with political, economic, and security analysis. In contrast to traditional books that focus solely on diplomatic interactions, this book combines regional and global contexts, incorporating a broader framework.

This book is intended for a wide range of academic and policy-minded readers. Scholars of international relations, South Asian studies, and Chinese foreign policy will find the theoretical insights and empirical data presented in the book valuable for their research. Policymakers and diplomats will benefit from the practical analysis of China-Bangladesh cooperation, particularly in trade, security, and regional diplomacy. Although the book is based on meticulous research, it remains accessible to the general reader interested in geopolitics and international affairs..

The Springer Nature links: <https://link.springer.com/book/9789819556885>

RCAS Paper

Emerging Power Rivalry: Analyzing Shifts

In Sino-Indian Policy Towards The South Asian Regios

RCAS, Feb. 7, 2025

SPEKTRUM, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2025

p-ISSN: 1829 – 6580 , e-ISSN:

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EMERGING POWER RIVALRY: ANALYZING SHIFTS IN SINO-INDIAN POLICY TOWARDS THE SOUTH ASIAN REGION

Sujit Kumar Datta

Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh,
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Keywords: Sino-Indian Politics, Belt and Road Initiative, Indo-Pacific Strategy, Act East Policy, Rivalry, Geopolitics.

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Keywords: Sino-Indian Politics, Belt and Road Initiative, Indo-Pacific Strategy, Act East Policy, Rivalry, Geopolitics.

Sujit Kumar Datta(2025), Emerging Power Rivalry: Analyzing Shifts In Sino-Indian Policy Towards The South Asian Region, SPEKTRUM, Vol. 22, No. 1. (<http://www.rcas.top/Paper/292.html>)

RCAS Report

Comments on Lankan President Dissanayake's China Tour in January 2025

RCAS, Mar. 26, 2025

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's visit to China marks a significant milestone in the evolving bilateral relationship between Sri Lanka and China. This visit, his second state visit since assuming office, follows his earlier trip to New Delhi, reflecting the established tradition of Sri Lankan Presidents prioritizing India for their first official visit. This custom underscores the importance of Sri Lanka's relationship with its closest neighbor. The subsequent visit to China aligns with a growing pattern of Sri Lankan leaders seeking to balance ties with the two regional powers.

President Dissanayake's visit to China is both an opportunity and a challenge. It underscores the importance of sustaining and strengthening ties with China while addressing domestic concerns about transparency, sovereignty, and economic equity. At the same time, it highlights Sri Lanka's delicate position in managing its relationships with both China and India. As his administration continues to refine its foreign policy, the ability to balance these competing interests will be crucial in shaping Sri Lanka's diplomatic and economic future.

President Dissanayake's visit to China is expected to focus primarily on economic development and debt restructuring, critical priorities for Sri Lanka's ongoing recovery from its economic crisis. As the country continues negotiations with bilateral donors to manage its debt, discussions with China are particularly significant, given its status as Sri Lanka's largest bilateral creditor, holding \$4.2 billion in debt. The visit is anticipated to include talks aimed at enhancing economic collaboration and securing favorable terms for debt restructuring, a crucial step toward stabilizing Colombo's financial position.

Additionally, reports indicate that the visit will culminate in the signing of seven Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) covering a range of sectors, including trade, investment, technology, and cultural exchange. These agreements are expected to deepen bilateral cooperation and reaffirm

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the growing partnership between the two nations, underscoring China's pivotal role in Sri Lanka's economic and strategic trajectory.

Since coming to power, President Dissanayake's government has placed a strong emphasis on safeguarding Sri Lanka's sovereignty, particularly in relation to India's security. He has committed to ensuring that Sri Lanka's territory will not be used in any way detrimental to India, which is a crucial aspect of maintaining positive relations with Sri Lanka's largest neighbor. However, this commitment is increasingly under strain as Colombo grapples with the pressures of its economic dependence on China, especially given the controversy surrounding Chinese research vessels docking at Sri Lankan ports, which has raised concerns in New Delhi.

China remains a significant creditor to Sri Lanka, having provided substantial loans for infrastructure projects such as the Hambantota Port. Managing this debt while pursuing economic recovery poses a major challenge for the Dissanayake administration. While the government has expressed gratitude to China for its support during debt restructuring efforts, it must also prioritize the formulation of sustainable economic policies that will allow Sri Lanka to reduce its dependency on foreign loans and foster long-term growth.

India's recent decision to convert a significant portion of its loans to grants is a strategic diplomatic move that is likely to enhance its public acceptance in Sri Lanka. This shift, which positions India as a more supportive partner, presents a challenge for China to counter, as Sri Lanka's economic situation requires substantial external support. To maintain its influence and improve its image, China needs to focus on fostering local economic growth through investments rather than simply providing loans. One way to achieve this would be by creating more job opportunities for Sri Lankans, particularly by collaborating with local subcontractors for construction projects. This approach would help combat the perception that China's investments are primarily about taking on debt while depriving locals of employment opportunities.

China can further improve its public image by offering more favorable terms for restructuring Sri Lanka's debt. By doing so, China can position itself as a supportive and reliable partner, helping to ease economic tensions and reshape public perception. Regaining trust will require demonstrating that China is committed to Sri Lanka's long-term prosperity and not just its own

strategic interests. Greater transparency in its projects is also crucial. Ensuring that agreements and investments are clear, beneficial, and fully understood by the Sri Lankan public will build confidence in China's role as a positive contributor to the country's development. Providing detailed information about contract terms and engaging in active public consultation for new projects will help address concerns about sovereignty loss.

Additionally, improving cultural relations and public diplomacy can play a significant role in reshaping public sentiment toward China. Engaging with the general public in a more approachable and practical manner will help build goodwill. Expanding opportunities such as scholarships, cultural programs, and language training for Sri Lankans will foster deeper bilateral ties and demonstrate China's long-term commitment to enhancing people-to-people exchanges. These efforts, alongside a more transparent and inclusive approach to economic collaboration, can significantly improve China's standing in Sri Lanka and contribute to stronger, more sustainable relations. — — **Chulanee Attanayake, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia.**

The top priorities of the president's visit to China would include conversation on debt sustainability and how to service loans in the future. Dissanayake would have long conversations about how to re-evaluate some of the loans Sri Lanka obtained from China before. Moreover, Sri Lanka would require new projects in the country to develop, so I think some of the conversations would revolve around that.

The biggest challenge of the Dissanayake administration on dealing with China is how to maintain the momentum of the bilateral relations. It is uncertain that Dissanayake can maintain the same momentum that was experienced. India's gaze would be stronger on Sri Lanka, so diplomatically navigating that would also be a potential challenge for Sino-Lanka bilateral relations.

China should look at healthy publicity in Sri Lanka and beyond. Changing the hearts and minds of locals in Sri Lanka is something that has been missed out on. So it's important to focus on improving

China's image in Sri Lanka.——**Bhagya Senaratne, Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies, Sri Lanka.**

Chulanee Attanayake, Bhagya Senaratne, “Comments on Lankan President Dissanayake's China Tour in January 2025,” RCAS Report, No.1, Mar.26, 2025, <http://www.rcas.top/Report/303.html>

RCAS Report

Comments on Chinese President Xi Jinping's Southeast Asian Tour in April 2025

RCAS, Apr. 12, 2025

The contemporary 'shock' by Trump administration's tariff policy would somehow create an isolated situation in which countries might looking, beside bilateral trade negotiation with US, for alternative options for international trade. Those alternative trade activities would embrace two main elements as international liquidity currency and attractive market. Renminbi and China market would be an option.

For this context, the visit to countries like Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia in the coming time might be understood as the beginning of a journey for force-gathering of China. Vietnam and China share similarities in Culture, Politics, History and being the most neighbors each other would place Vietnam as an important position in implementation of China Foreign Policy.

Moreover, China as an important partner embracing 3 main pillars of Vietnam foreign policy as Power, Neighbor, and Party Diplomacy, would be more active showing the goodwill for healthy development the relationship of the two countries base on mutual respect and benefit.

Enhancing bilateral trade connections bywhich maximizing the comparative advantages of both. The benefits would share for the two countries as adding more options in international trade for both. The current incident would impact on FDI as foundation for technology transffer from the US and boosting the development of Vietnam. The withdraw of US manufaturing FDI could creat a gap for technology needs in the country. The investment into the sector might be advantage of China and promote the relations.-**Nguyen Tuan Khanh, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University of Hochiminh City, Vietnam.**

The visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Malaysia in April 2025 occurs at a critical juncture, marked by escalating global trade tensions and growing tariff concerns. Both sides would like to

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enhance collaboration in strategic and emerging sectors such as high-level manufacturing, digital economy, robotics, green development, artificial intelligence, and clean energy; strengthen the long-term sustainability of Malaysia-China relations, beyond trade and investment, particularly through talent development and innovation partnerships; reinforce ASEAN-China cooperation, particularly through the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) during Malaysia's 2025 ASEAN Chairmanship.

From Malaysia's perspective, it is important for China to take more proactive actions in the following areas to develop a sustainable and win-win cooperation with Malaysia.

Firstly, promoting shared economic benefits by enhancing the competitiveness of Malaysia's domestic market. Chinese investments and enterprises should aim to complement the local market, ensuring that Malaysian businesses, especially SMEs, can develop alongside Chinese partners.

Secondly, strengthening collaboration in technological innovation to ensure that the benefits of innovation are equitably shared among all partner countries. This includes actively supporting meaningful technology transfer and capacity-building, minimising long-term technological dependency.

Thirdly, deepening supply chain integration by aligning Chinese investments more closely with Malaysia's local industrial ecosystem. Efforts should focus on supporting the upgrading and modernisation of domestic industries.-**Cheng Mingyu, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman(UTAR), Malaysia.**

Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit in April 2025 is a pivotal moment to advance and enhance the 'ironclad friendship' between Cambodia and China. China can elevate the 'ironclad friendship' by deepening investments and injecting tangible projects that operationalize the 'Diamond Hexagon Cooperation' framework-political, economic, security, cultural, multilateral, and capacity-building ties-across the three corridors: the 'Industrial Development Corridor,' the 'Fish and Rice Corridor,' and the BRI connectivity corridor.

The ‘Industrial Development Corridor’ needs more expanded Special Economic Zones (SEZs) like Sihanoukville’s, which created hundred thousands jobs, with new factories in electronics or green tech to diversify our \$51.15 billion GDP economy, supporting Cambodia’s vision of upper-middle-income status by 2030 and high-income by 2050. The ‘Fish and Rice Corridor’ demands agro-processing hubs-milling rice or packaging fruits-linked to the 2025 Fangchenggang-Koh Kong cold chain route, boosting our \$14.4 billion trade in 2024. The broader BRI corridor could see billions-dollar Build-Operate-Transfer (BoT) high-speed rail network from Phnom Penh to Sihanoukville, Phnom Penh to Siem Reap, and Siem Reap to Vientiane and Bangkok, cutting travel time and smoothing regional trade and economic activities from Kunming to Phnom Penh.

China should invest heavily in capacity building, particularly education, to empower our youth- 60% of our population- as architects of this partnership. I would like to emphasize that ‘Education builds futures that outlast fleeting politics.’ Funding the planned China Studies Center at RUPP and expanding scholarships (from 151 (2024) to 1,000 annually since Xi’s 2016 visit, with a threefold increase proposed) would train Cambodians in trade, technology, and governance, strengthening the capacity-building pillar.

Tangible environmental investments are vital for grassroots trust. Injecting \$200 million into solar or wind projects along the BRI corridor, rather than solely hydropower, aligns with the 2024-2028 Action Plan’s green focus, offsetting Mekong impacts and supporting the ‘Fish and Rice Corridor’.

China should deepen cultural and people-to-people ties-the cultural pillar of the Diamond Hexagon-through tangible initiatives. Building on 2024’s People-to-People Exchange Year and 2025’s Year of Tourism, a \$50 million fund for more Khmer-Chinese language courses, heritage exchanges, and tourism infrastructure in Siem Reap could push Chinese arrivals past 3 million annually.-**Chandarith Neak, Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia.**

For Cambodia, the visit is primarily seen as an opportunity to deepen economic collaboration with China. The focus is on two flagship initiatives: the “industrial development corridor” and

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the “fish and rice corridor,” which align closely with Cambodia’s national development vision, the Pentagonal Strategy.

Furthermore, the Cambodian government is hoping to secure more direct investment from China, not only in agriculture and infrastructure but also in manufacturing, tourism, and digital technology.

For Cambodia, expanding the BRI beyond traditional infrastructure projects like ports to sectors such as agriculture, technology, and renewable energy could offer a more diversified economic pathway.

These sectors align with Cambodia’s long-term development goals of modernization and sustainability, reducing the country’s reliance on a few sectors like construction and infrastructure. For example, Chinese investments in agricultural modernization and clean energy would not only support Cambodia’s rural economy but also help the country transition toward a greener, more sustainable future, addressing growing environmental concerns.

Moreover, with the dismantled of USAID programs, increasing Chinese investments in social sectors could fill a critical gap in Cambodia’s development. By shifting focus to social welfare alongside infrastructure, China could demonstrate a more comprehensive and responsible approach to Cambodia's development needs, thereby improving its image and making its investments more palatable to the Cambodian public.

China’s increased support to countries in SEA amid U.S. tariff pressures positions it as a “helping friends in need,” reinforcing its long-term goal of expanding influence in SEA, and this gesture is especially strategic as China vows to “fight to the end” against U.S. trade measures, using economic cooperation to counterbalance the U.S.-**Po Sovinda, Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia.**

Nguyen Tuan Khanh, Cheng Mingyu, Chandarith Neak, Po Sovinda, “Comments on Chinese President Xi Jinping's Southeast Asian Tour in April 2025,” RCAS Report, No.2, Apr.12, 2025, <http://www.rcas.top/Report/304.html>

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RCAS Report

Sri Lanka's Shifting Stance on SOPs and Its Multiple Impacts

RCAS, Aug. 18, 2025

The government of Sri Lanka imposed a moratorium on foreign research vessels for year 2023 and started designing a Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to regulate visits by foreign vessels. This committee was headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and comprised of other stake holders in maritime domain. The new government in 2024 wanted to study the SOPs in depth, and this SOP is yet to be finalized and implemented.

The main scope of the SOPs would be the need to regulate port visits or engaging in Marine Scientific research by foreign vessels in Sri Lanka's EEZ so as to monitor and coordinate such activities and to ensure that as far as possible such ships do not pose a threat to national security of any other country in the region. However, the SOPs would not be able to guarantee adherence to the conditions therein. Sri Lanka will not be able to monitor a research vessel engaged in innocent passage through its EEZ by carrying out research activities during the passage although such actions are illegal as per the UNCLOS iii.

Due to the delay of the implementation of the SOPs, Sri Lanka tend to lose by not engaging in maritime research since these research data would be very valuable in understanding the nature and size of fish stocks, threats to marine eco-systems, impact on global warming and sea level rising and increasing ocean temperature. This lack of oceanic data would hamper the country's aspirations on embarking on a Blue Economic model of economic development.—**Jayanath Colombage, Pathfinder Foundation, Sri Lanka.**

The core issue with the research vessels in Sri Lanka waters came after the diplomatic protest of India with the arrival of the “Yuan Wang 5” in 2022 which got huge media attention. As Sri Lanka-India maintain a security pact, India questioned how can Sri Lanka guarantee of the security concerns of India when approving such vessels with advance tracking equipment.

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During the time Sri Lankan authorities didn't have the capacity to determine such scope for vessels with advanced technologies arriving in Sri Lankan waters. Due to this issue, the core concern of the government was, how to regulate such vessels, and ways to draw its strategic autonomy between superpower in such incidents. The core interest of Sri Lankan authorities will be as following: Sovereign Maritime Resources, Illegal Fishing, Naval Modernization.

Sri Lanka also enacted new laws and established a National Hydrographic Office under the Ministry of Defence to further this goal and adopt a new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for foreign marine research vessels in a new Act which was introduced last year (National Hydrographic Act No.7 of 2024) and it was envisaged that Sri Lanka would streamline its national approach, capacity build, and improve its sovereign capacity. It also aims to ensure security of sensitive bathymetric data collected from Sri Lankan waters, with the act, the Sri Lanka National Hydrographic Office (SLNHO) was established.

According to the Act, the updated SOPs, which governs the granting of diplomatic clearance for conducting marine research in Sri Lankan waters, its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and the continental shelf, is aligned with Articles 238 and 265 of the UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) and international law. The SOP covers the approval process for foreign marine scientific research (MSR) vessels to conduct research and dock at Sri Lankan ports.

The focus of the State Security Council of Sri Lanka will be on technicalities, such as the ship's equipment, the required activities in the marine research domain, the areas of research, the results, and ownership of the findings. Besides the geopolitical issues will be addressed in a Cabinet meeting, following consideration of the Security Council's recommendations.

The SOPs regulate all foreign flag vessels entering Sri Lankan waters call at all Lankan ports, for research purposes or for Replenishment or any other purpose. Once the operations procedure is completed it will be presented to the cabinet and parliament will be adopted as law and further forwarded to respective bodies including the foreign missions in Sri Lanka and Lankan missions abroad. Lankan government won't focus on promoting its legal frameworks and it will

be up to the respective nations to follow the updates and new amendments via their respective bodies and missions.

Sri Lanka has embarked on a proactive strategy of forging partnerships with key allies to safeguard its territorial waters and assert its sovereignty. Sri Lanka's partnerships with the United States, Japan, and France encompass a spectrum of initiatives aimed at enhancing maritime security and bolstering capabilities which can be considered as strategic collaborations. By diversifying partnerships and leveraging the expertise of key allies, Sri Lanka seeks to fortify its maritime capabilities, safeguard territorial waters, and uphold regional stability in the Indian Ocean. These collaborative endeavors exemplify Sri Lanka's commitment to enhancing maritime security cooperation and asserting its role as a key player in the maritime domain. Apart from this, it seems due to various reasons Sri Lanka is distancing China from its Maritime research programs.—**Yasiru Ranaraja, BRISL, Sri Lanka.**

Sri Lanka's primary concerns regarding foreign research vessels in its waters revolve around balancing scientific advancement with national security and sovereignty. The lack of comprehensive and transparent Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) is a critical issue, leading to inconsistent decision-making and creating a vacuum for geopolitical pressures. There's a legitimate fear that "research" vessels, particularly from major powers, might engage in dual-use activities, gathering intelligence or mapping strategic maritime areas under the guise of scientific exploration. This directly impacts Sri Lanka's security interests, especially given its strategic location in the Indian Ocean.

Furthermore, the repeated delays and cancellations of legitimate scientific collaborations, like the recent FAO vessel incident, highlight how the current uncertainty hinders vital marine research crucial for Sri Lanka's blue economy and climate resilience efforts. Developing robust, science-based SOPs is crucial for Sri Lanka to assert its sovereign rights while fostering genuine scientific cooperation.

SOPs for foreign research vessels are crucial for ensuring scientific integrity, data standardization, and operational safety. They aim to foster transparent international collaboration

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while safeguarding national interests, particularly concerning maritime security and resource management. Effective SOPs prevent geopolitical tensions from hindering vital marine research, ensuring ethical conduct and minimizing environmental risks.

The comprehensive and transparent SOPs are crucial for Sri Lanka to regulate foreign research vessels effectively. While UNCLOS grants coastal states the right to control research in their EEZ, the lack of finalized and consistently applied SOPs leaves Sri Lanka vulnerable to geopolitical pressures and hinders its ability to leverage scientific cooperation for national benefit. Without clear guidelines, instances of ad-hoc decisions and missed research opportunities will persist.——**KalingaTudor Silva, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.**

Jayanath Colombage, Yasiru Ranaraja, KalingaTudor Silva, “Sri Lanka's Shifting Stance on SOPs and Its Multiple Impacts,” RCAS Report, No.3, Aug.18, 2025, <http://www.rcas.top/Report/315.html>

RCAS Report

Interpreting China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030)

RCAS, Nov. 30, 2025

October 2025 has been a month of intense great-power activity. Under President Trump's second administration, the United States finds itself paradoxically divided at home and assertive abroad. Domestically, the federal government has been shut down for over a month; internationally, Washington continues to project military power in the Caribbean Sea and the Middle East, while Trump's recent visit to ASEAN countries seeks to project a peacebuilder's image. This duality, instability within, activism abroad, has not gone unnoticed. Western media and scholars have begun to contrast this paradoxical American moment with China's apparent stability and strategic clarity. It is within this context that China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030) and the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) assume particular significance.

The Western Gaze and the “China Question”

Recent Western analyses, prominently featured in *The Economist* and U.S. policy circles, focus obsessively on China's slowing economic growth, shrinking population, rising youth unemployment, and the increasing concentration of authority under President Xi Jinping. These analyses tend to converge on a familiar conclusion: that China's political system is brittle, dissent is suppressed, and that social discontent may one day rupture the CPC's hold on power.

This narrative of impending instability is deeply ingrained in Western strategic thought. It presumes that political centralization and societal control must eventually lead to collapse, as if the Chinese system is merely an autocracy waiting to fail. Yet this perspective often underestimates the CPC's institutional adaptability and the Chinese state's capacity for course correction.

There is, however, a more nuanced counter-perspective emerging among seasoned China-watchers. Jonathan Czin, a former CIA analyst, articulates this in his insightful article “China Against China” (*Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2025). Czin warns that much of

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Washington's confusion about Beijing stems from a profound misreading of how the Chinese system actually functions. "The painful irony," he writes, "is that under Xi, China's opaque polity... has proved adept at frankly acknowledging many of its weaknesses and taking steps to remedy them, arguably even more adept than the supposedly supple and adaptive American system."

Jonathan Czin's "China Against China" is similar to Wang Huning's "America Against America." Wang wrote his book during his academic visit to the US in 1988, predicting that the decline of the US will be because of "individualism, hedonism and democracy" that would create domestic unrest and internal strife. Wang's book became popular again after the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, as people felt his warnings about America's internal troubles had come true.

The comparison shows that both Wang Huning and Jonathan Czin use an analogous way of thinking, they focus on the other countries' problems, stating that the greatest threats for a country are not external competitors but the internal divisions, values, and systems that weaken it from the inside. Wang argued that America's decline came from its own social and moral weaknesses. In the same way, Czin suggests that China's biggest risks come from its internal tensions and rigid system, not from Western pressure.

Czin's observation captures another central paradox: China's political opacity coexists with a technocratic pragmatism that enables mid-course corrections in ways that often elude Western democracies. Similarly, another renowned American China scholar Elizabeth Economy in a recent interview with Ravi Aggarwal of Foreign Policy Magazine, echoes the same concern, she says, 'the steps Trump is taking at home can weaken the United States when it comes to dealing with China.' (FP, November 2025). The latest Five-Year Plan illustrates this dynamic vividly.

The 15th Five-Year Plan: Blueprint for Adaptation and Continuity

The Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee, held in October 2025, unveiled the broad contours of China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030). The session's Communiqué offers not just a policy framework but a strategic vision linking short-, medium-, and long-term national goals. The 205 full members and 167 alternate members of the Central Committee, the CPC's highest authority, crafted a document that continues the Party's tradition of long-term

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planning amid global uncertainty. In my view, the Plan’s logic can be grouped into three broad components.

Integrated Planning and Policy Synergy

The Communiqué sets out an eight-point agenda to harmonize domestic priorities with international imperatives. It emphasizes:

- Balancing internal development and external engagement;
- Ensuring both economic growth and national security;
- Deepening structural reforms;
- Promoting high-quality, innovation-driven growth;
- Advancing social welfare and environmental protection;
- Strengthening democracy, rule of law, and Party discipline;
- Enhancing public communication and cultural work;
- Modernizing national defense and ensuring political loyalty within the armed forces.

Unlike the electoral term driven policymaking common in Western democracies, this integrated planning process reflects a systems approach, linking governance, economy, society, and defense under a unified strategic vision. The Plan marks China’s effort to structure domestic governance around strategic continuity and adaptive resilience. While it remains a top-down model, its operational success depends on coordination with provincial and local governments, suggesting that the CPC’s command structure is less monolithic than usually portrayed.

Science, Technology, and Human Capital as Drivers of Growth

A defining feature of the new Plan is its emphasis on technological sovereignty and human resource development. The Communiqué calls for strengthening education, science, and technology “in a well-coordinated manner,” promoting breakthroughs in core technologies, and achieving leadership in key industrial sectors.

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China is rapidly emerging as a global technology powerhouse, leading or competing at the top across nearly every major advanced field. For example, on the Critical and Emerging Technologies Index by the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, China ranks second globally, nearly matching the United States in biotechnology and quantum technologies.

There are similar results by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) Critical Technology Tracker, which finds that China now leads in 37 of 44 critical and emerging technology fields, such as defense, space, robotics, energy, and advanced materials. In quantum technology alone, China holds 60% of global patents as of 2024, showing its strength in next-generation technologies. These are strategic investments. The total R&D expenditure exceeded US \$500 billion in 2024, up 8.3% year-on-year, and the input accounted for 2.68% of China's GDP.

Bloomberg reports that China already leads in or is globally competitive across 12 of 13 advanced technologies, from renewable energy to artificial intelligence and quantum computing. The Plan's emphasis on "original innovation" and "integration of technological and industrial innovation" underscores Beijing's recognition that future economic competitiveness and national resilience, depends on innovation ecosystems rather than export-led manufacturing alone. The Digital China Initiative, integrated within the Plan, seeks to consolidate data infrastructure, enhance digital governance, and leverage AI for public administration. It is targeting breakthroughs in critical sectors—semiconductors, AI, biotechnology, advanced materials, digital economy, aerospace, deep-sea technology. "Investing in people" is specifically emphasized: access to childcare, education, employment, medical care, elderly care, housing, support for the vulnerable. The Plan calls for stabilizing employment (especially among youth and rural migrant groups), increasing household income, and thereby stimulating effective consumption. The ambition is not merely economic modernization but societal renewal: a digital, educated, and technologically confident China.

Xi Jinping's speech during the 15th FYP drafting emphasizes that China must "boost full integration between technological and industrial innovation" and "deliver substantial progress in original innovation and core technologies in key fields". Beijing's urgency is shaped by external constraints since U.S. President Donald Trump has assumed office. On several occasions, the U.

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S administrations have frequently justified export controls. For example, in a session at the U. S House of Representative one hundred eighteenth Congress held in December 2023 where the US senior officials clearly state that their “export controls are meaningful in slowing China's advanced technology acquisition. And as we stay on top and proactive about how we institute our controls to match our national security and foreign policy interests, we will keep them behind and we will not allow them to outpace U.S. performance”. Washington has tightened restrictions on semiconductors, quantum computing, and AI chips ever since.

The Communiqué therefore calls for expanding domestic demand and “opening China wider... and pursuing high-quality Belt and Road cooperation,” signaling a twin strategy of self-reliance and global outreach. Its recommendation to “accelerate agricultural and rural modernization,” “narrow the rural–urban gap,” and promote cultural and economic integration reflects the Party’s view that modernization must be nationally cohesive. Regionally, the Plan’s support for BRI aligns domestic upgrading with multilateral connectivity, trade, education, and cultural exchange.

Defense Modernization and Civil-Military Integration

The third major pillar of the Plan concerns national defense and military modernization. The CPC reaffirms its principle of absolute Party control over the military, ensuring that the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) remains the armed wing of the state under Party control. The communique has been emphatic in upholding the centrality, unity of the party and supremacy of the Xi Jinping thought. Thus theoretically, ideologically and in practice adherence to party line and subordination to the CPC’s Central Committee and Xi Jinping Thought is critical. It is interesting to note that the communique is emphatic in conveying continuity of thought, planning and policy by underscoring: “stay committed to Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, and the Scientific Outlook on Development, and fully implement Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.”

The Communiqué outlines a three-step modernization strategy: enhancing political loyalty, reforming command structures, and advancing the military through technological innovation and legal regulation. The focus on “mechanization, informatization, and intelligentization” marks a

decisive shift toward smart warfare capabilities. In effect, China seeks to synchronize its economic and military modernization, ensuring that technological advances translate into national security strength.

It is worth noting from the graph “Military Spending of Major Powers” (all figures taken from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)) that China’s defense spending has more than doubled over the past decade, rising from about US \$225 billion in 2015 to around US \$350 billion in 2023. This steady increase shows Beijing’s commitment to modernizing its military alongside its economic and technological rise.

While China still spends far less than the United States, whose defense budget is around US \$850 billion, the gap is gradually narrowing in terms of capability and efficiency. Compared to other powers like Russia, India, and Japan, China’s defense investment is now several times larger, firmly placing it as the second-largest military spender in the world.

Reading Between the Lines: The Logic of Chinese Planning

Three insights emerge from a close reading of the recommendations of the 15th Five-Year Plan’s communique.

Institutional Continuity with Adaptive Capacity. The CPC’s approach to planning demonstrates a deliberate linkage between policymaking and implementation. While the system appears hierarchical, it relies heavily on feedback from local administrations, allowing pragmatic adjustments. This embedded flexibility explains why China’s long-term plans have achieved measurable outcomes across decades, unlike the often politically volatile policymaking cycles in the Western democracies.

Human Capital and Innovation as the Core of National Strategy. The Plan recognizes that sustained power in the 21st century depends not merely on GDP growth but on the quality of human capital and technological competence. By prioritizing education, research, and skill formation, China aims to cultivate what Xi Jinping has called “new quality productive forces.” This strategic pivot from low-cost manufacturing to innovation-led growth marks a structural evolution in China’s development model.

Security as Development, Development as Security. The Chinese framework views economic vitality and citizen welfare as integral to national security. The modernization of the PLA is inseparable from social stability and prosperity. In this sense, the Chinese model fuses security and development, whereas Western paradigms often treat them as separate domains. This demonstrates how long-term strategy can coexist with adaptive governance, even under a centralized system.

The CPC's approach, grounded in iterative learning from previous plans, as the Brookings Institution report (Brookings Brief, October 18, 2025) incisively notes, the 15th Plan, showed continuity and consistency with the 13th & 14th Five-Year Plans. The 13th Plan (2016-2020) launched 'Made in China' with a primary focus on R&D spending on AI, robotics, high speed rail and semiconductors. Through 'Made in China', it identified AI as 'core technology', 'indispensable for future intelligent manufacturing and China's economic plans. While 14th Plan focused on innovation but also introduced the idea of 'dual circulation', whereby emphasizing domestic consumption along with high quality exports. Countering the U.S policy of Containment and restriction of technological exports, China has responded by devising policies of 'self-reliance'—by developing emerging technologies, AI, Green energy and semi-conductors. During 2025 on more than one occasions President Xi has reiterated, science, technology and innovation as the drivers of new productive forces and talent integration.

Reflections: What can Pakistan Learn?

As Western analysts and policymakers debate the implications of China's new planning cycle, it would be prudent for other countries, including Pakistan, to engage with it not as simply CPC's agenda tool but as a case study in planning, policy making, governance and resilience.

Artificial intelligence emerges as a major point of convergence between China's 15th Five-Year Plan and Pakistan's evolving digital strategy. Pakistan's National AI Policy 2025, released in July 2025, positions the country as an early adopter of frontier technologies among developing states. In an article for The Nation in August, the Chinese Consul General emphasized this alignment, noting: "I'm happy to note that our ironclad friend Pakistan has recently unveiled its National AI Policy 2025, which demonstrates remarkable consistency with China's Action Plan

both in philosophy and practice, reflecting not only global trends in AI development but also the shared aspirations of developing countries in the digital age.”

This convergence is significant because the 15th FYP calls for advancing the Digital China Initiative, as mentioned in this article earlier as well, strengthening data governance, and accelerating breakthroughs in semiconductors, AI, biotechnology, and advanced materials. Pakistan’s policy framework, prioritizing AI governance, public-sector digitization, indigenous R&D, and skills development, mirrors China’s emphasis on innovation ecosystems rather than hardware-driven growth alone. As CPEC enters its second phase, cooperation (here the two countries can put Joint Cooperation Committee to effective use) on AI can expand into agriculture, health diagnostics, smart cities, and vocational training, providing Pakistan with access to Chinese research networks and digital infrastructure. For Beijing, Pakistan serves as a model partner showcasing how AI-driven development can be diffused across the Global South through BRI and China’s Digital Silk Road.

From my perspective, the takeaway is clear: planning isn’t just for economics, it is for strategic positioning. Building internal capacity, investing in innovation, balancing development and security, and monitoring global shifts must be part of national policy. The 15th Five-Year Plan offers a case study, not to copy wholesale, but to adapt key lessons to local realities. Institutions such as Pakistan’s Planning Commission, the Council of Common Interests (CCI), political parties, academia, and the media could draw valuable lessons from how China integrates planning, execution, and accountability. Under conditions, when the domestic and global order is in turbulence, having a structured plan allows alignment of government, industry, contending interest groups and society is imperative and in Pakistani case demands priority. China emphasizes “investing in people”—education, health, employment— alongside infrastructure.

For Pakistan, balancing hard and soft investment may boost consumption and resilience. In a world where technological competition and supply-chain shifts are rapidly reshaping advantage, investment in R&D, innovation ecosystems, and industry-academia linkages is key. Trade tariffs, protectionist policies and coercive economic deals reveal that reliance on external markets is risky; therefore, building strong domestic markets, consumption, rural-urban integration can stabilize growth. As global imperatives around climate increase, development plans must

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incorporate environmental, regional and social equity goals. As noted above, the Plan knits a symbiotic relationship between development and security. Stability, governance, institutional capability, defense, technology, these are interlinked. A planning system that neglects one faces risk of failure. The success of planning depends on coordination mechanisms, local, provincial and federal linkages, monitoring and course correction. Pakistan's experience indicates bottlenecks in execution are often the limiting factor.

In a world increasingly defined by disorder, economic volatility, geopolitical fragmentation, and technological disruption, China's persistence with long-term planning challenges the assumption that planning is obsolete. On the contrary, it reveals that structured foresight, when coupled with institutional flexibility, remains an indispensable tool for navigating uncertainty.—**Saeed Shafqat, Shafqat Institute for Pakistan and Emerging Geopolitics (SIPEG), Pakistan.**

Saeed Shafqat, "Interpreting China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030)," RCAS Report, No.4, Nov.30, 2025, <http://www.rcas.top/Report/334.html>.

RCAS Commentary

The Sino-Russian Alliance: Reality or Strategic Advantage?

Sujit Kumar Datta, Jan. 2, 2025

China and Russia elevated their relationship in February 2022, just ahead of the start of Russia's military campaign against Ukraine. A "limitless friendship" between Beijing and Moscow, jointly announced, will underpin deeper trade, energy, and security cooperation. The announcement comes against a backdrop of global politics exacerbated by the Ukraine crisis and a dramatic downturn in Russia's relationship with the Western world. This alliance between China and Russia made many people think it would forge a new style of cooperation that would contend for a new powerful bloc to rival the West.



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However, doubts about the relationship's importance and strategic benefits have emerged. China's foreign policy has always had a two-tier approach, particularly with its strategic interests and economic ties with the West at the forefront of its ties to Russia and other great powers in

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international relations. China is strategically standing with Russia by announcing that it is standing with Russia in the war in Ukraine, but China has not been directly involved in this war.

Instead, China wanted to preserve its role as a “practical mediator,” which would not take a side in the war but would shore up its position on the world stage. This policy suited China. Because this is the world’s second-largest economy, and most of the world’s trade is with the United States and Europe. China knows close relations with Russia are risky for its economic and strategic relations with the West. Consequently, China has been careful in its engagement with Russia. While “limitless friendship” sounds graphically attractive, the relationship between China and Russia is predicated on strategic gain.

The relations of Beijing and Moscow have stirred a flurry of discussions in China in recent months. Although some even back closer ties with Russia, many doubt excessive reliance on Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s May visit to China is a glaring example of this conundrum. While Putin called Xi Jinping “as close as a brother” during the visit, Xi Jinping called Putin “a good friend and a good neighbour.” Such a reaction shows China is beginning to draw the line on its relationship with Russia. China has tried to make it clear that it does not want to become directly involved in the war in Ukraine or any other military conflict and that it does not want to identify itself as an ally of Russia. Two years into the war, the crisis in Ukraine has no foreseeable resolution and military and political chaos in Russia is increasingly becoming an issue of interest to China.

The mutiny by the Wagner Group in 2023, while forces have moved into Russia’s Kursk region, has drawn attention to Russia’s fragility in the eyes of China. Such events are an important sign to China that the time has come to rethink the Russian state’s capabilities and its armed forces readiness. The Wagner mutiny mirrors Russia’s internal tensions and security struggles. The history of the past three decades tells us that regime stability in Russia declines whenever the country is confronted with severe internal or external crises. Chinese rulers are also learning from these disputes and are behaving more cautiously in their relations with Russia.

Trust each other enough intensely for the stability of the region. Russia has never committed to stand by China, especially in a dispute over Taiwan, and China has never directly backed Russia

in its war in Ukraine. In Hicham's case, the absence of this trust is a hurdle to a potential partnership between the countries. The other hot topic of the China-Russian partnership is economic cooperation. Despite being China's most powerful economic partner, China's overall trade aligns more with the Western world than with Russia. China's main trading partners are Europe and America; these partnerships matter more to the Chinese economy than any other. Old habits are hard to break, and China knows it has to use the economy to influence the world stage—the West's ventures.

China has repeatedly proven its stagnant economy and weak trade with Russia depend on the Western economic system. Russia, by contrast, wants to obliterate the current international order and create a new one, whereas China wants to reshape the existing order by establishing itself at its centre. Older than in the system. For this reason, China's policy toward Russia is risky. History has demonstrated that China's attempts to tie up with Russia were always defeated. Moreover, the Sino-Soviet struggle, particularly in the 1960s, damaged China strategically.

Right now, China is critical to keeping strategic ties with the West. China knows that Europe and the USA are essential for China. A China-America relationship helps secure long-term stability and economic growth for China. If China draws too close to Russia, it risks being drawn into, if not conspiracies of isolation from the West that will imperil China's strategic stance. China needs to take a significant role in leading the world.

As for China, it must define its relations with Russia and limit them to security, even in politics and the economy. With the new international inventory, China became a strong country that now sets the rules in the economy. Still, there is a strategy, too. However, China, in this respect, does require a balanced foreign policy, on the one hand, keeping relations with Russia while, on the other hand, continuing economic cooperation with the West.

Meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the margins of the BRICS conference, Putin said: "It can be stated with confidence that China and Russia have become examples for the rest of the world, providing the models for how relations between states should be built in the modern world." The Russian leader noted that this is a mutually beneficial multilateral cooperation

relationship on an equal footing. A three-day BRICS summit is in progress in Kazan, Russia. Some world leaders at the top level went to Russia to participate in this conference.

The first large-scale international conference has been held in Russia since military operations began in Ukraine. Although Russia and China are considered ‘borderless’ strategic partners, they compete for interests and influence in Central Asia. Moscow has historical links with five countries—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. However, China’s growing economic muscle and investment in these countries have reduced Russian influence.

Russia’s relations with the West are at their lowest point since the Cold War. For its part, Sino-U.S. relations have also turned perilous. Time for China to respond soberly to Russia’s suspension of the New Start Treaty. The agreement is of great significance in promoting peace and stability, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said of the agreement. Beijing hopes the two can properly manage their differences.

In contrast, Russia has sided firmly with China as tensions have flared between China and the United States over the Taiwan question. The two nations also demonstrate their close connections in the defence sphere through military exercises. China, Russia, and South Africa are conducting naval exercises this week in the Indian Ocean. Two countries’ good relations do not look right to the West. US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, concerned about Chinese help for the Kremlin’s war effort, said Thursday that any such effort would be a “serious problem”.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, the US-led military alliance, said in an interview that the group had some indications that China may provide arms support to Russia. He made the remarks after being asked by the AP news agency in the Polish capital, Warsaw. The NATO chief again strongly urged Beijing against taking such steps, warning that such an initiative by China would seriously violate international law. However, many believe the US and its allies have ‘perceived the Russia-Ukraine conflict through tinted glasses’.

This article was first published at Press Xpress, United Arab Emirates, December 31, 2024, <https://pressxpress.org/2024/12/31/the-sino-russian-alliance-reality-or-strategic-advantage/>.

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RCAS Commentary

Afghanistan: The New Fault Line in China-Pakistan Relations?

Ghulam Ali, Jan.12, 2025

In late December, when Pakistani jets and drones were pounding bombs on alleged hideouts of the Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP) in Afghanistan under the Taliban, China was dispatching equipment to Afghanistan via Iran's Port Bandar Abbas-not via Gwadar Port. These divergent actions of Pakistan and China reflect their contrasting approaches toward the Taliban and bear long-term repercussions.



▲ Afghan labourers shovel coal onto a truck bound for Pakistan, at a coal yard on the outskirts of Kabul on 6 January 2025. (Wakil Kohsar/AFP).

Pakistan's confrontational policy

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On 26 December 2024, Pakistani jets and drone strikes in Afghanistan killed 46 to 71 people. Pakistan claimed that the victims were TTP terrorists involved in the killings of 16 security personnel in South Waziristan on 21 December. The Taliban rejected this claim, termed Pakistan's attack a barbaric act that primarily killed women and children, and vowed to retaliate. The fact that UN special rapporteur Richard Bennet "deplored" the Pakistani bombing and demanded an inquiry raised questions about the credibility of the Pakistani claim.

Most absurdly, Pakistan conducted its air strikes while its delegation led by Ambassador Mohammad Sadiq, special representative for Afghanistan, was in Kabul and had already held talks with the Taliban's Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani and Minister for Industry and Commerce Noorullah Azizi. This was the second air strike inside Afghanistan in 2024; Pakistan conducted the first in March.

The Pakistani airstrikes derailed the negotiation process that was started after 15 months of hiatus. A spiral escalation followed. Within days, the Taliban forces retaliated by attacking several Pakistani border posts and inflicting "heavy casualties" beyond the "assumptive line", referring to the Durand Line. On 3 January 2025, Pakistani forces fired mortars inside Afghanistan, an act that is likely to provoke a reaction.

The Durand Line, the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, was drawn during the colonial period, but no Afghan government accepted it. Afghanistan lays claim to large parts of the territories under Pakistan's control. This is one of the major issues between the two countries.

China: bypassing Pakistan and scaling back on mediation

China's engagement with the Taliban stands in sharp contrast to Pakistan's confrontational policy. China's shipment, which arrived in Afghanistan on 28 December, contained 1,000 tons of steel coils. Beijing transported it via the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas and the railway network to the Rozanak station in Herat province, Afghanistan.

Intriguingly, China did not use Gwadar Port, which it controls and from which, it receives 90% of its revenue. In late November 2024, China sent a direct shipment to Afghanistan via

Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. China's bypassing Pakistan underscores growing lukewarmness and mounting concerns about the security conditions in Pakistan.

China's optimistic outlook and desire to cooperate with the Taliban regime are reflected in its projection of the group's positive image. A survey of Chinese media shows its reporting on the Taliban's measures against drug dealers, facilitation of polio vaccination campaigns, establishment of rehabilitation centres for drug addicts, substantial reduction in poppy cultivation, initiation of development projects, and improvement of security situations. This image contrasts with the portrayal of the Taliban in most Pakistani and international media. In fact, Pakistani media have recently been overwhelmingly negative towards the Taliban.

Seemingly, China has also scaled back its mediatory role in Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions. This was evident, at least during recent clashes. On many occasions in the past, both during the Republic period (2004-21) and the Emirates (since 2021), China mediated between Pakistan and Afghan authorities. However, given China's longstanding relationship with Pakistan, Beijing's role was often viewed as an advocacy for Pakistan's viewpoint. The Taliban became straightforward in expressing their dislike for such a role. The Taliban spokesperson openly accused the Pakistani military of attempting to "damage the trust between Afghanistan and China".

In November 2024, during his visit to regional countries, China's special representative for Afghanistan, Yue Xiaoyong, sought to convey Pakistan's concerns about the TTP's presence in Afghanistan. However, the Taliban's supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, refused to meet with him. Yue only managed to meet with the governor of Kandahar, Mawlawi Shirin, and Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid. Since then, few Chinese mediation offers have appeared in the media. Perhaps China is distancing itself from being viewed as an advocate of the Pakistani military's viewpoint.

China did not endorse Pakistan's claim that the March 2024 attacks in northwest Pakistan, in which five Chinese were killed, were carried out by an Afghan national. Instead, China emphasised the need to apprehend the culprits. Similarly, China perceived the security failure and possibly an insider's job that led to the killings of two Chinese near Karachi airport in October 2024. Both countries also differ on the role of India in Afghanistan. China hardly

considers it a matter of concern. For Pakistan, however, India's presence is a critical issue that dominates its strategy.

China getting regional countries on Taliban's side

Several regional countries are following China's lead in their policy toward the Taliban. Central Asian states have signed agreements worth billions of dollars. Iran is training Afghanistan's railway staff, expanding rail connectivity, and proposing direct trilateral connectivity involving Afghanistan and China. Russia is set to remove the Taliban from its list of terrorist organisations. The Saudi Arabian embassy has resumed full operations.

Unlike China, which devised its Afghan policy in such a way that relations would remain unaffected regardless of who ruled the country, the Pakistani military had a history of interference, attempted to install friendly governments, and regarded Afghanistan as its backyard. A Pakistani general who infamously termed Afghanistan a "strategic depth" reflects this mindset. The Pakistani military, actively involved in the US war against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s, created the Taliban in 1996. Its double game during the US war on terror by supporting both the US and the Taliban simultaneously manifested its policy of interference.

China's proactive engagement with the Taliban is occurring alongside Pakistan's deteriorating relationship with the group. This is another sign of growing lukewarmness in a decades-old "all-weather" friendship. These diverging perspectives may delay, if not completely derail, the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan. Afghanistan was the only country to which CPEC was officially extended and pursued since 2017. Given the Taliban's adamant position, China is unlikely to voluntarily offer a mediatory role. The evolving situation, if not handled properly, may lead to instability affecting regional connectivity.

The article was first published at Think China, Singapore, January.12, 2025, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/politics/afghanistan-new-fault-line-china-pakistan-relations>.

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RCAS Commentary

The Future of NATO Under Trump's Presidency

Sujit Kumar Datta, Jan.12, 2025

The newly elected United States President Donald Trump has once more thrust NATO into the spotlight by forcefully calling for significant alterations to its funding structure. Trump's suggestion to heighten the defense outlay requisite for NATO members from 2 percent of their national product to 5 percent has triggered considerable discussion and apprehension among the alliance's 32 member states. This suggestion emerges against the backdrop of exacerbated security challenges following the Russia-Ukraine war, which has amplified the fiscal demands on NATO.



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NATO, established in 1949, has long acted as the cornerstone of Western military cooperation, aimed at confirming collective defence and maintaining peace in the North Atlantic area. Conventionally, NATO's funding structure has necessitated member countries to contribute no

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less than 2 per cent of their GDP to defence expenditure. However, this target has been a contention, with numerous member states failing to meet the agreed-upon threshold.

During Trump's previous tenure, he was vocal about the disproportionate financial burden borne by the United States. Trump's rhetoric often centred on demanding fairer financial contributions from European allies, who, in his view, relied excessively on U.S. military backing. His push for a 5 per cent contribution mirrors a prolongation and intensification of this stance, emphasizing the necessity for NATO members to take greater accountability for their defence.

Some view Trump's recommendation to increase defence spending to 5 per cent of GDP as a necessary manoeuvre to reinforce NATO's abilities amid evolving worldwide dangers. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has illuminated the necessity for a robust and well-resourced military alliance to counter potential aggressors. The amplified fiscal commitments could improve NATO's readiness, modernize military infrastructure, and ensure technological progressions in defence capabilities.

However, this proposed expansion poses significant challenges. Numerous NATO members, particularly smaller and economically weaker countries, may struggle to meet this elevated spending target. Allocating 5 per cent of GDP to defence could necessitate cuts in other critical areas, for example, healthcare, education, and social services, potentially resulting in homegrown discontent. Moreover, the financial aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has left many countries with strained budgets, making it difficult to justify such a substantial increase in defence expenditure.

Trump is not the sole proponent of higher defence spending within NATO. NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte has also called for amplified contributions, highlighting the growing security threats and the necessity for a more resilient alliance. Rutte's alignment with Trump's viewpoint indicates a shared worry about NATO's future strength and sustainability. However, the push for higher spending is met with blended reactions among member states. Increased defence expenditure is more likely supported by certain countries, such as Poland and the Baltic states, that perceive Russian aggression as an imminent threat. In contrast, other members, particularly

in Western Europe, may be more hesitant, fearing the domestic political backlash and economic strain that such actions could entail.

The proposed effects of Trump's suggestions on geopolitics add intricacy to discussions on foreign policy. His claim underscores confidence in strong leadership and direct negotiations with opponents, which he argues may have prevented the ongoing conflict.

While speculative, it represents Trump's broader strategy of assertive participation internationally. The recommendation to boost NATO expenditures will undoubtedly carry significant ramifications globally. It could demonstrate to rivals such as Russia and China the alliance's reinforcement of commitment and arsenal. Still, it risks exacerbating tensions, potentially triggering an expensive and destabilizing arms race in volatile regions.

Balancing fair contributions and collective protection presents perpetual difficulties for NATO. The organization's potency stems from unity and shared vows of mutual defence among members. While appropriate fiscal participation is important, overzealous demands risk fracturing accords or alienating key states. If actualized, Trump's plan could prompt re-evaluations of NATO's strategic priorities and resource distribution. It may also cause rethinking of relationships with non-European partners and emerging dangers such as digital threats and terrorism. Rather than abrupt 5 per cent demands, NATO could consider a phased financial increase, allowing nations to reallocate budgets step-by-step and circumvent economic disruptions domestically.

To allay concerns about funds being used effectively, NATO should bolster mechanisms, ensuring transparency and shared responsibility for tangible improvements to defence capabilities that match higher contributions. NATO must explore alternative but synergistic strategies beyond traditional military spending, incorporating sizeable investments in cyber protection, information sharing across borders, and diplomatic outreach to tackle intricate threats. Upholding the political cohesion of the alliance is paramount. NATO needs continuous, solution-oriented discussions with each member to ensure higher costs do not undermine our unison commitment to mutual protection.

The future course of NATO under President Trump's leadership arrives at a pivotal crossroads. The proposed rise in defence expenditures underscores the need for a robust and capable alliance against evolving global dangers.

However, it also presents challenges requiring prudent navigation to guarantee the sustainability and unity of NATO. As the alliance considers the next steps, it must balance financial burden-sharing with the overarching goal of collective security. By adopting a thoughtful, inclusive approach, NATO can reinforce its position as a cornerstone of worldwide peace and stability, adapting to new tests while preserving the solidarity defining its legacy.

This article was first published at Press Xpress, United Arab Emirates, January.10, 2025, https://pressxpress.org/2025/01/10/the-future-of-nato-under-trumps-presidency/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR0G910RKZrGDHZ2QVlx2OuqPYNDKJUOlldoE-N-IBaMF38ShTv6dTUhhcs_aem_OhjccrXjUtNEdYjqlwfxfw.

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RCAS Commentary

Ceasefire in Gaza: A Fragile Peace or a Lasting Solution?

Sujit Kumar Datta, Jan.21, 2025

The ceasefire's longevity is contingent upon establishing a political framework that ensures permanence between antagonists, necessitating ongoing collaboration and commitment to preserving peace and prosperity for Gazans.



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The enduring bloodshed in Gaza is far more than simply a geographic conundrum but rather a complex tableau of global politics. The warfare between Israel and Hamas has disrupted the lives of millions, leaving in its wake untold suffering. The armistice brought fresh hope in this time of strife and discord. However, queries have emerged about whether tranquillity can endure. It is not merely a cessation but rather a political understanding, and its future rests upon the alignment of diverse factions.

The conflict between Israel and Hamas has fashioned an exceptionally dire circumstance not exclusively for the inhabitants of Gaza but for the entire region. Just recently, Israel and Hamas

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agreed to a ceasefire accord in Gaza, unveiling novel possibilities. However, the interrogation remains: Is the warfare in Gaza ending? A novel skyline has materialized with the declaration of the armistice. As outlined in the ceasefire contract, Israeli forces will be withdrawn from Gaza along with the emancipation of hostages and detainees.

Qatar and Egypt are brokering the pact, which has initiated innovative negotiations at the international level. Attempts at armistice have been made repetitively throughout the Gaza warfare, but each time it has broken down. However, this time, Israel and Hamas have agreed to a ceasefire accord. Per the agreement, phases will be taken to liberate hostages and prisoners, which is perceived as a significant step forward.

Qatar and Egypt are brokering the deal, elevating hopes for concord in the region. The initial stage of the ceasefire will initiate on January 19, which will persist for 6 weeks or 42 days. During this period, measures will be undertaken to free inmates and withdraw Israeli forces from Gaza.

The Prime Minister of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman bin Jassim Al Thani, divulged this guidance. It was a high-level diplomatic initiative in which Al-Thani declared that a ceasefire understanding had been achieved due to the joint endeavors of Qatar and Egypt to conclude the warfare in Gaza.

The deal is functioning not solely between the two factions but in addition with the backing of the global community, where both the next US President, Donald Trump, and the Biden administration have exhibited enthusiasm. As per Trump's remarks, "We have an agreement for the hostages in the Middle East. They will be released exceedingly soon." The Trump administration's interest and concentration will gain novel momentum after the merger.

The next US President Donald Trump played a distinctive role in this pact. He has rendered this issue public through various posts. Under his leadership, the US national security team is working intimately with Israel and allies to confirm that Gaza is never again a sheltered haven for terrorists.

The Biden administration declared that it was working as a unit to restore peace to Gaza. Soon, their schemes will be exposed, and the preliminary 6-week truce may last longer. An important aspect of the ceasefire accord is humanitarian aid. Gaza is a war-ravaged country, and its inhabitants are in a dire humanitarian crisis.

International teamwork is crucial to the release of detainees and support for war victims. Sending relief to the war-ravaged would heighten their hope of starting a renewed life. In this case, there is also a discussion of sending humanitarian support to the war casualties. The inhabitants of Gaza urgently need help to overcome the emergency they have faced as a consequence of the warfare.

Qatari Prime Minister Al Thani asserted, “We are happy to declare that the joint initiatives of Qatar and Egypt to conclude the ongoing warfare in Gaza have been successful.” This aid is an important step in restoring new life to war-torn Gaza. While a ceasefire is conceivable, it has some difficulties.

One of the main difficulties is to what extent this agreement will be effective and to what extent it will be implemented. The situation in Gaza is exceedingly complicated, and if the circumstances improve somewhat, the border clash could reemerge. The strife between Hamas and Fatah is also an obstacle to this peace. Reconciliation between them is necessary to render the ceasefire permanent. Otherwise, their aftermath will pose a central obstruction to enduring peace.

Several significant crises remain within the ceasefire accord. First, interregional consensus is essential for lasting peace. If only the release of detainees and legal issues were resolved, would the situation last? Second, the extent to which the spending disaster for reconstruction in war-ravaged regions will be assured after the ceasefire is also open to query.

If properly nurtured, the Gaza ceasefire agreement holds the potential for a new beginning. A political reconciliation process could emerge from what began as solely a cessation of violence. While questions linger around its longevity, maximum cooperation between parties may herald a watershed moment of peace for Gaza’s populace. Only time will reveal the ultimate consequences of this fragile accord.

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However, the hope sparked by this deal undeniably invites constructive development. The ceasefire's longevity is contingent upon establishing a political framework that ensures permanence between antagonists, necessitating ongoing collaboration and commitment to preserving peace and prosperity for Gazans.

The establishment of a firm agreement between Israel and Hamas has the potential to introduce a new perspective for the residents of Gaza. The international partnership proves essential for conflict resolution's sustainability.

The momentum towards comprehensive Middle Eastern amity could expand if cooperation maintains the current calm. Nevertheless, this gleam of expectation signifies the redoubling of intensive peace-forging efforts, as time will reveal. Additional proactive measures are necessary to prevent future conflicts.

This article was first published at Press Xpress, United Arab Emirates, January.19, 2025, <https://pressxpress.org/2025/01/19/ceasefire-in-gaza-a-fragile-peace-or-a-lasting-solution/>.

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RCAS Commentary

Bangladesh Faces Uncertainty Amid Trump's Global Aid Reductions

Sujit Kumar Datta, Jan.23, 2025

The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th president ushered in seismic changes felt globally. Trump swiftly overturned dozens of executive orders under Biden while implementing over two hundred new directives. Chief among the reversals was the curtailing of humanitarian assistance worldwide. This policy shift imperils nations hosting vast numbers of refugees, most acutely Bangladesh, sheltering over a million Rohingya. Bangladesh has offered sanctuary to Rohingya fleeing horrific persecution since 2017's exodus, though resources prove scarce.



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Previously, generous international support coordinated by the U.S. sustained the refugee population through necessary provisions. However, Trump's "America First" agenda portends dwindling donations, jeopardizing efforts to meet basic needs and exacerbating suffering. As the

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crisis' top benefactor, a significant American retreat would cripple life-saving interventions for trapped Rohingya and overload Bangladesh's already overburdened infrastructure.

Since the violent expulsion of 2017, Bangladesh has served as a haven for over one million stateless Rohingya escaping ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. Refugee camps remain precariously dependent on foreign funding for supplying food, medical care, schooling, and shelter. As the crisis' most significant contributor, diminishing U.S. commitment endangers assistance on which Rohingya subsist.

Trump's sudden announcement to slash worldwide humanitarian aid could drastically diminish funds available for such efforts. This would not only impact the displaced people but additionally burden Bangladesh's already limited resources.

The reduction in support would likely cause decreased food supplies, insufficient medical care, and inadequate educational resources for the Rohingya. Many of these refugees live in precarious circumstances, and any decrease in assistance could exacerbate their suffering, resulting in increased malnutrition, disease outbreaks, and heightened vulnerability to exploitation.

Though Bangladesh has shown remarkable generosity in hosting the Rohingya, it has come at a significant economic cost. Diminishing aid would impose extra monetary hardships on the country, obligating it to allocate more provisions to refugee care, potentially at the expense of addressing its developmental needs.

The prolonged presence of a vast refugee population without proper support can lead to social tensions and political instability. Local communities in Cox's Bazar, where the refugee camps are found, have already voiced concerns about the economic and social consequences of the crisis. Reduced global backing might exacerbate these strains, amplifying friction between displaced people and host communities.

The reduction in support would undoubtedly exacerbate the suffering of the Rohingya people. Decreased funding risks shortages in life's necessities like nourishment, healthcare, and educational opportunities for the refugee population, potentially generating anguish and unrest. Already hosting over one million refugees has impacted Bangladesh's economy significantly.

Diminished international aid would necessarily place an even heavier financial duty on the Bangladeshi administration, diverting monies from other crucial developmental ventures and negatively influencing the nation's overall economic fitness.

The Rohingya crisis is not simply a local matter but a regional one. Insufficient backing risks destabilizing refugee camps, including heightened migration pressures on neighbouring countries, increased regional tensions, and probable security issues. Lesser aid could strain Bangladesh-U.S. relations meaningfully. Bangladesh has substantially relied on its partnership with the U.S. for economic and humanitarian backing. A perceived abandonment may compel Bangladesh to pursue different alliances with countries similar to China, which could offer aid but with strategic and political strings attached.

Reducing aid at this pivotal juncture conveys a worrying message about the global dedication to humanitarian principles. The Rohingya crisis serves as a stark reminder of the world's ongoing refugee challenges, necessitating a concerted and sustained campaign to manage such issues. The withdrawal of U.S. assistance under Trump's policies could motivate other nations to follow suit, resulting in a cascading impact that weakens the global reaction to crises.

International and domestic campaigns must highlight the severe humanitarian and geopolitical impacts if aid is reduced to the Rohingya crisis. Expressing these implications can compel the Trump administration to rethink its position. Bangladesh should cultivate support from multiple worldwide allies by engaging global institutions like the United Nations, the European Union, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to diversify international aid sources.

Southeast Asian neighbours should share responsibility through cooperative efforts that boost stability and collective problem-solving, decreasing reliance solely on Western help. Long-term plans to develop Rohingya vocational abilities, such as skill-building programs and livelihood opportunities, can curb external dependency and foster tenacity.

Trump's policy aligns with prioritizing national concerns over global commitments, his "America First" philosophy. While resonating with supporters, withdrawing leadership in aid risks undermining America's humanitarian role. Historically, America has critically addressed

crises worldwide, so the absence of leadership endangers global stability and aid. Aiding refugees and Bangladesh's socioeconomy, aid reductions significantly imperil well-being.

As the world struggles with this emerging crisis, strengthening diverse, collaborative responses becomes increasingly pressing. Maintaining aid and cooperation regionally and self-reliance are key to mitigating policy shifts' adverse effects. The international community must recognize sustaining aid's critical importance to prevent undoing progress made addressing this crisis.

This article was first published at Press Xpress, United Arab Emirates, January.22, 2025, <https://pressxpress.org/2025/01/22/bangladesh-faces-uncertainty-amid-trumps-global-aid-reductions/>.

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RCAS Commentary

China's Mainly Homegrown C919 Is Ready For Take-off

Ghulam Ali, Jan.24, 2025

China's homegrown C919 airplane has soared to new heights. The aircraft carried its millionth revenue passenger on 19 December 2024, and was used for the first time outside mainland China-on a commercial route operated by China Eastern Airlines-from Shanghai to Hong Kong on 1 January 2025. These are remarkable milestones, accomplished in just over a year since its service debut in May 2023.



▲ A COMAC C919 flies during an aerial display at the Singapore Airshow at Changi Exhibition Centre, in Singapore on 20 February 2024. (Edgar Su/Reuters).

Designed by the Shanghai-based state-owned Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC), the C919 is a narrow-body, twin-engine, single-aisle aircraft that could challenge the global dominance of Boeing's 737 and Airbus's A320 families. COMAC was established by

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China in 2008 to develop homegrown aircraft and reduce its reliance on foreign aircraft. As China began ascending to great power status, it realised that its airspace was dominated by planes manufactured by foreign companies. The Chinese leadership dreams of making Shanghai the next aviation manufacturing capital, like Everett in the US-home to Boeing's largest manufacturing facility-and Toulouse in France, known as the "European capital of aeronautics".

The C919 airplane can accommodate between 158 and 192 passengers. By December 2024, COMAC had delivered 16 C919s to three Chinese airlines: China Eastern, China Southern and Air China. The company has already received record orders for over 1,000 units and will increasing its production capacity from one to 11 units per month by 2040. Most recently COMAC said that it has a target of delivering 30 C919s this year.

In February 2025, China Eastern Airlines, thus far the largest recipient, will expand its capacity by offering 260 flights with 42,400 seats per week using C919s. This represents about 1.4% of the airline's overall scheduled capacity.

In addition to its flagship C919, COMAC has developed the C909 (formerly known as ARJ21). Indonesia's TransNusa became the first overseas airline to operate a C909 aircraft, connecting Manado and Guangzhou in October 2024. Brunei's new carrier, GallopAir, has also placed orders, while Cambodia has shown interest in purchasing. COMAC is also developing its first widebody aircraft, the C929, although it will not be able to bring it to market until the 2040s.

Patches of turbulence

Headwinds and turbulence are part of a flight experience, and COMAC is no exception. In order to fly on international routes, COMAC needs certifications from two key global regulators: the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). By August 2024, EASA had completed its fourth round of on-site assessments, but the regulator is still far from issuing a certification.

Like other international brands, COMAC products are not 100% homegrown. It receives engines from the Franco-American venture CFM International and auxiliary power units from the US-based Honeywell. China's dependence on the West for these key parts exposes its vulnerability.

How would these companies react if their governments considered COMAC a threat to Boeing and Airbus? In the age of hyper-geopolitical rivalry, such concerns cannot be ruled out. China has already faced bans and heavy tariffs on EVs and computer chips in recent years. Simultaneously competing with the world's most established manufacturing companies, Boeing and Airbus, which have monopolised the aviation industry since its inception, will be an uphill task for COMAC.

Once COMAC passes through this turbulent phase, the rest of the journey will be relatively pleasant. As COMAC prepares for take-off on international routes, a huge domestic market awaits homegrown aircraft. As mentioned before, COMAC has received orders many times more than it can produce, even with increased capacity.

International outreach and expansion

Experts suggest that COMAC can start international expansion from Southeast Asia for several reasons. Firstly, C919's existing travel range is best suited for flying to Southeast Asia. Secondly, the airplane has already conducted demonstration flights to Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia. In February 2024, the C919 and ARJ21 participated in Singapore's international airshow, marking their first international appearance.

Thirdly, China Eastern and China Southern's existing networks in Southeast Asia can provide a strong foundation. Fourthly, China has secured mutual recognition of airworthiness certification with Singapore, Indonesia and Myanmar. This means that C919 can fly to these countries even though it has not yet received certification from US and European regulators.

COMAC's marketing team also explores businesses in the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa and Latin America. Following Saudi Arabia's May 2024 announcement of the purchase of 105 Airbus planes, Dongfeng He, CEO of COMAC, made a whirlwind visit to the country to explore the vast market. Additionally, China has a significant market comprising Belt and Road Initiative member countries, to which it has exported its signature products, such as EVs and high-speed railways. At the moment, however, increasing production, obtaining certification, and ensuring exceptional safety as the world watches closely are greater challenges than selling new units.

COMAC's entry into the market could not have come at a more appropriate time. It benefits from the challenges faced by its dominant rivals, Boeing and Airbus, as both grapple with safety concerns, supply chain disruptions, and logistical inefficiencies.

Developing a national aviation industry

The C919 is part of President Xi Jinping's "new whole-nation system" which was reinvigorated in 2019 and integrated into China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021 to 2025). The plan was conceptualised against the backdrop of China-US tech rivalry, in which the US has attempted to limit China's access to high-tech by imposing curbs. In response, Beijing demonstrated its resolve to advance its technologies to reduce Western dependence.

With huge domestic demand, a growing regional presence, and an eye on the international market, COMAC's C919, in particular, and other airplanes in general, have the potential to succeed. Building a competitive aviation industry will break Boeing and Airbus's monopoly, reduce China's dependence on these companies, enhance China's prestige, and provide the world with alternatives. Frequent travellers might have the opportunity to board an aircraft "Made in China", possibly operated by a Chinese airline as well.

The article was first published at Think China, Singapore, January.23, 2025, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/technology/chinas-mainly-homegrown-c919-ready-take>.

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Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics(London: Routledge, 2022); *Perspectives on Contemporary Pakistan: Governance, Development and Environment*(London: Routledge, 2020); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry*(Singapore: Springer, 2022); *China-Pakistan Relations: A Historical Analysis*(Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2017). His articles have been published in SSCI-and Scopus-indexed journals such as *Issues&Studies*, *The Pacific Review*, and *Pacific Focus*. Email: ghulamali74@yahoo.com.

RCAS Commentary

China Prepares for Trump 2.0

Ghulam Ali, Jan.28, 2025

The inauguration of Donald Trump for his second term as U.S. President on Jan. 20 carries potential global significance. Most analysts see major consequences for China. But China appears to be far better prepared than many expected.



▲ President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump attend the Commander-In-Chief inaugural ball at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 20, 2025. JIM WATSON/AFP via Getty Images.

In the Asia-Pacific region, where the China-U.S. rivalry will manifest the most, the country's preparedness consists of three main pillars:

- Strengthening relations with regional countries;

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- Promoting a multilateral economic framework; and
- Introducing domestic reforms to address economic challenges.

These measures will absorb the major impact of Trump's (un)expected imposition of tariffs, diversify markets for Chinese goods, lessen the chances for China's rivals to form strategic alliances and attract foreign investment to China.

Strengthening relationships

Today, most of China's relations with Asia-Pacific countries are stronger than during Trump's first term. Beijing has addressed key issues with regional players such as India, Australia and New Zealand, and with the exception of the Philippines, relations with ASEAN members have improved — both with claimants and non-claimants in South China Sea disputes — as evidenced by high-level visits. In fact, each sub-region of the Asia-Pacific (Oceania, Southeast Asia, East Asia and South Asia) exhibits an upward trend in relations.

Of the 14 countries of Oceania, Australia and New Zealand are the heavyweights and important U.S. allies. China-Australia relations, which were tense from 2018 to early 2022, have steadily improved since the election of the Anthony Albanese government in 2022. Last year, Chinese Premier Li Qiang visited both Australia and New Zealand. Later, President Xi Jinping held separate meetings with Prime Minister Albanese and New Zealand's Prime Minister Christopher Luxon on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Peru. As of the end of 2024, most trade-related restrictions between the two countries had been lifted. China's extension of visa-free travel for New Zealanders and the country's promotion of the Chinese language through Confucius Institutes helped strengthen two-way people-to-people ties.

China has also strengthened relations with the 12 smaller countries of Oceania (Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Micronesia, Vanuatu, Samoa, Kiribati, Tonga, Marshall Islands, Palau, Nauru, and Tuvalu) based on the “four fully respects” principle, namely respecting their sovereignty, independence, will and cultural traditions. Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka of Fiji visited Beijing in August, reflecting the positive development of two-way ties.

Beijing's ties with Southeast Asia are particularly strong. Vietnam's President To Lam visited China in August, marking his first international trip since taking office. And General Min Aung Hlaing, the head of Myanmar's military government, visited China in October.

Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto visited China twice in 2024. He first traveled there soon after winning the February elections and again after taking the oath of office. In November, Anwar Ibrahim, the prime minister of Malaysia and the chair of ASEAN, visited China. During that visit, Anwar invited Xi to participate in the ASEAN-GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) Summit. On the Chinese side, Premier Li visited Malaysia, Laos and Vietnam last year.

In East Asia, while challenges persisted in China's relations with Japan and South Korea (two key U.S. allies), Beijing expanded its diplomatic engagement. Li's visit to Japan and the visits of the Japanese and Korean foreign ministers to Beijing reflected more of this engagement. More important, Xi met with the Korean prime minister and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba at the APEC meeting in November.

In South Asia, the normalization of the China-India relationship proved a significant development. The rapprochement started when Xi and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held their first summit meeting after a four-year hiatus on the sideline of the BRICS Summit in October in Russia. Both sides decided to demilitarize their contested border and restore the relationship to a pre-2020 status. Following this, the normalization process between the two giant neighbors progressed swiftly. With regard to other South Asian countries, Premier Li visited Pakistan, and China received political and military leaders from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives in Beijing last year.

Promoting multilateralism

Another important component of China's moves in the Asia-Pacific is the expansion of engagement with multilateral institutions. China is a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Plus Three and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia. Most notably, China is a member of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP, the world's largest free-trade agreement, which was signed in November 2020 and took effect in January 2022 for the initial 10 participating countries.

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In addition to this, China has shown interest in joining the ASEAN-GCC Summit, which will be held in Kuala Lumpur later this year. The first summit took place in Riyadh in October 2023. On that occasion, both regional blocs decided to hold a biennial summit alternately. As the chair of ASEAN, Malaysia will organize the second summit. As mentioned before, Prime Minister Anwar invited China to participate.

Subsequent developments indicate that Malaysia is taking trilateral cooperation between the two blocs and China seriously. Although China still has to decide whether to participate as an observer or become a regular partner, the latter option appears promising. China maintains close relations with both regional blocs, the GCC and ASEAN. If cooperation between them materializes, they will form one of the world's largest political and economic blocs.

Parallel to China's participation in these groups, several Asia-Pacific countries have joined China-led institutions, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). Indonesia's full membership in BRICS in January 2025 is the latest development in this regard.

Domestic reforms for business

China's domestic fiscal reforms to address economic challenges and open its huge market to investors are other initiatives to deal with the potential consequences of Trump's tariffs and economic strangulations.

Some of these measures include Beijing eliminating access restrictions on foreign investment in the manufacturing sector. Foreign manufacturers in China can now avail themselves of the same benefits as Chinese nationals. This provides foreign enterprises with broad opportunities for investment in China.

Under capital market reforms, China has simplified investment rules for foreigners in the stock markets (A-share market) by lowering shareholding thresholds, reducing lock-up periods, and expanding investment channels. Additionally, to improve the business environment, it introduced tax cuts, streamlined customs procedures, and enhanced regulations for cross-border data

transfers. Consequently, in the first 11 months of 2024, more than 50,000 foreign entrepreneurs established businesses in China, marking an 8.9 percent year-on-year increase.

Finally, China has taken several steps to change its export-oriented economy, at least partly. It will raise its fiscal deficit ratio to around 4 percent of GDP this year and issue RMB 2 trillion (double the previous year) in ultra long-term special government bonds in 2025 to fund major national strategic projects and capacity-building initiatives related to security. In addition, Beijing authorities intend to introduce economic stimulus measures, implement SOE reforms and eliminate local protectionism and market segmentation.

These reforms demonstrate China's commitment to using fiscal and monetary tools to stimulate economic growth, address structural issues and navigate the challenges posed by domestic and international factors. Project Syndicate indicated that if China continues its reforms, it could maintain economic growth of up to 5 percent.

Conclusion

The aforementioned explains that China has a favorable political and economic environment in the Asia-Pacific region. Improved relations with India and Australia will contribute to this positivity while reducing the likelihood of their alignment with the United States against China. The vast Asia-Pacific region, along with several multilateral economic platforms, gives China significant leverage to counter U.S. tariffs and sanctions. China's measures to address domestic economic challenges and attract foreign investments will help, at least in part, to “de-Americanize” the economy. Beyond China, America's Asia-Pacific allies are also concerned about Trump's unexpected policies. This inevitably inclines them toward China, which is geographically close, predictable and economically compatible. Today, China is far more resilient than it was four years ago.

The article was first published at China-US Focus, Hong Kong, January.27, 2025, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/china-prepares-for-trump-20>.

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RCAS Commentary

Myanmar's Prolonged Emergency Rule: A Setback for Human Rights and Peace

Sujit Kumar Datta, Feb.7, 2025

The political and humanitarian situation in Myanmar has worsened, with the governing junta extending the state of emergency for another six months. Myanmar has experienced instability, bloodshed, and human rights violations since the February 1, 2021, military coup that overthrew the democratic government of Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. The junta defended the prolongation of emergency rule as necessary for a “free and fair” election, which both local and international observers denounced. This move undermines peace and democracy and worsens the suffering of the Myanmar people, who have already seen military brutality for two years.



▲ PRESS XPRESS

The present issue in Myanmar stems from the military's unwillingness to acknowledge the results of the November 2020 general election, in which Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD won a

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landslide majority. The military fabricated election fraud allegations, detained Suu Kyi, President Win Myint, and key officials, and declared a one-year state of emergency. The junta has regularly prolonged the emergency rule, citing the necessity for stability and election preparation. Critics argue such extensions are used to reinforce military power and suppress opposition.

The military has caused civil war-like unrest, with pro-democracy groups, ethnic armed organizations, and people retaliating. International criticism of the junta's aggression of protestors, mass arrests, and civil unrest persists. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), over 3,000 individuals have been slain and over 20,000 jailed since the coup. The humanitarian situation has deteriorated, causing millions to face food insecurity, lack of health care, and other basics.

In announcing the prolongation, the junta said that the emergency rule ensures a “stable” general election. State-owned media MRTV said additional time is needed for stability and peace, which are essential for free and fair elections. This explanation has been widely criticized as a pretext to delay the restoration of civilian administration. Critics argue that Myanmar's objective is to maintain power, suppress opponents, and manipulate elections to justify its rule.

The record of the junta is not promising. Military administrations have been accused of electoral fraud, voter intimidation, and opposition party exclusion during elections. There are growing concerns that the next election may be a sham to reinstate military rule instead of democracy. The junta's communication with pro-democracy movements and ethnic groupings undermines its claims.

Extending emergency rule in Myanmar has severe human rights effects. While claiming to restore order, the military has increased fear and repression. Security forces have targeted civilians, including women and children, via raids, airstrikes, and arson attacks. Numerous human rights crimes, including extrajudicial murders, torture, and sexual assault, have been widely publicised.

The junta has successfully repressed dissent by restricting freedom of speech, assembly, and press. This issue is also devastating from a humanitarian standpoint. The UN reports that over 1.5 million people have increased their area of residence, and over 18 million need humanitarian

aid. Blockade from military locations hinders help from accessing conflict-affected regions, worsening its impact on civilians who need food, medication, and shelter. The junta has ignored international calls to stop bloodshed and give humanitarian organizations access to people.

The global response to the Myanmar issue is uneven. Although numerous countries and organizations have condemned the junta, the impact has been negligible. Myanmar has faced criticism for its participation in ASEAN, which has struggled to meet its required criteria of conduct. Although ASEAN approved a Five-Point Consensus in April 2021 to cease violence and promote constructive debate, it has only held its members accountable, not the junta that caused discord and lack of progress.

The UN and Western governments have not exerted significant pressure on the junta. Despite targeted sanctions and diplomatic isolation, the military's campaign persists. China and Russia, as permanent UN Security Council members, have shielded the junta from more decisive action, citing non-interference in domestic matters. The current geopolitical split hinders prompt disaster action.

Expanding emergency authority in Myanmar is a significant threat to human rights, democracy, and peace. International cooperation is necessary to break the cycle of violence and repression. The following stages towards settlement may include:

Increased International Pressure: The global community should apply targeted sanctions, weapons embargoes, and accountability measures to the junta. The UN Security Council must overcome geographical divides and act decisively to prevent a catastrophe.

Increased assistance for pro-democracy groups, ethnically armed groups, and civil society: The international community should assist democratic forces, ethnic armed groups, and civil society players. Examples include humanitarian help, technical assistance, and diplomatic support.

ASEAN must adopt a principled and firmer stance against Myanmar: It involves implementing the Five-Point Consensus, engaging in inclusive discussions, and halting Myanmar's participation until the outcomes are clear.

Global Community Collaboration: The junta should guarantee that humanitarian groups have unrestricted access to provide relief to people in need. The global community should collaborate with local partners to assist conflict-affected communities.

Accountability: Increased accountability is needed to hold the junta responsible for human rights breaches. It includes supporting international inquiries like the ICC and documenting war crimes.

Reconciliation: A sustainable crisis resolution requires inclusiveness, including the junta, pro-democracy movements, and ethnic groupings. The international community must support and assist these initiatives.

The ongoing emergency rule in Myanmar highlights the challenges the country confronts and the international system once again fails to address. The junta has violated democracy and human rights and perpetuated bloodshed and suffering. For a secure, peaceful, and prosperous Myanmar, the international community must collaborate for long-term justice, accountability, and respect for the people.

This article was first published at Press Xpress, United Arab Emirates, February.1, 2025, <https://pressxpress.org/2025/02/01/myanmars-prolonged-emergency-rule-a-setback-for-human-rights-and-peace/>.

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RCAS Commentary

Middle East Nations Woo Chinese Tourists with Grand Chinese New Year Celebrations

Ghulam Ali, Feb.7, 2025

Member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) celebrated the Chinese New Year (CNY) of Spring Festival this year, with leaders sending congratulatory messages, illuminating iconic buildings in their respective nations, and hosting various events such as fireworks displays, traditional dances, feasts and galas. These celebrations were mainly organised by Chinese embassies in collaboration with host countries. Compared to previous years, these events were more extensive and reflected a strengthening relationship between the two sides.



▲ On 28 January 2025, the Wahda Arch in Doha, the capital of Qatar, was illuminated with Chinese New Year-themed lights. (Xinhua).

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In 2024, this resulted in a 9% year-over-year rise in Chinese visitors to the UAE, while nearly 400,000 Chinese reside in the UAE on a long-term basis.

The year 2025 marked the first time since UNESCO included the Spring Festival in its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, recognising it as the 44th Chinese tradition officially acknowledged by this global cultural body. This, along with the Chinese government's extended holiday, provided the public with the opportunity to travel overseas, including to the GCC region.

CNY festivities in the UAE

The UAE took the lead in celebrations among the six GCC nations (the other five being Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia). Activities in the UAE began as early as 12 January, with the CNY Gala at the Coca-Cola Arena. On CNY eve, UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan sent best wishes to all those celebrating in the UAE and worldwide. “May this year bring peace, prosperity, and joy to you and your loved ones,” he said in a social media post. Other prominent CNY events in the UAE included floating dragon dances on Dubai Creek and holographic fireworks illuminating the Burj Khalifa.

China's selection of Abu Dhabi as one of the seven cities worldwide to host New Year festivities was well-founded. The UAE's visa-on-arrival policy for Chinese nationals, along with direct flights from 14 Chinese cities and the acceptance of Alipay and WeChat, has significantly encouraged tourism. In 2024, this resulted in a 9% year-over-year rise in Chinese visitors to the UAE, while nearly 400,000 Chinese reside in the UAE on a long-term basis. Last year, China and the UAE celebrated the 40th anniversary of their diplomatic ties.

Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, hosted a “Warmly Welcoming Spring, Celebrating Chinese New Year Together” themed market.

CNY festivities in other GCC countries

Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, hosted a “Warmly Welcoming Spring, Celebrating Chinese New Year Together” themed market. King Abdulaziz University initiated a new four-week course, “Discover China and Learn Basic Chinese”, through its Institute of Chinese Science and Culture in collaboration with Safia, a subsidiary of Jeddah Valley. This event marked the

beginning of activities commemorating the 35th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Saudi Arabia. Beijing and Riyadh designated 2025 as the Year of Culture, organising a series of events.

Elsewhere, Bahrain's crown prince and prime minister, Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, sent a congratulatory cable to Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang for CNY. In January, the Confucius Institute at the University of Bahrain arranged a Bahrain delegation's visit to China.

In Qatar, iconic landmarks throughout the city, such as the Museum of Islamic Art, the National Museum, the Sheraton Hotel, the Wahda Arch and the Torch Tower, were illuminated in red along with messages that read, "Happy Chinese New Year" or "Happy Spring Festival" in both Arabic and Chinese.

Kuwaiti Princess Al Anoud Alsabab extended her greetings for the CNY in a video message, describing China as Kuwait's primary trade partner and a key ally in achieving its sustainable development goals, particularly in relation to Kuwait Vision 2035. The Chinese embassy in Kuwait, meanwhile, hosted a reception and organised cultural events. Simultaneously, Chinese media highlighted a group of Chinese construction workers who continued work on a housing project during the Spring Festival to ensure timely completion, symbolising China's commitment to Kuwait's development.

In Qatar, iconic landmarks throughout the city, such as the Museum of Islamic Art, the National Museum, the Sheraton Hotel, the Wahda Arch and the Torch Tower, were illuminated in red along with messages that read, "Happy Chinese New Year" or "Happy Spring Festival" in both Arabic and Chinese. For the first time, the Mall of Qatar also organized events featuring Chinese drummers, a dragon parade, Chinese calligraphy, face painting, oil-paper umbrella painting, and ribbon dancing.

The growing influence of Chinese culture

During the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, China sent two pandas to the country for the first time in the Arab world and built the iconic Lusail Stadium, which hosted key matches, while Chinese-made buses transported fans to the games.

In addition to showcasing traditional cultural artefacts during the CNY celebrations in the region, China highlighted its modern technological achievements, including drone light displays, popular games like Black Myth: Wukong and Honor of Kings, and various brands of electric vehicles.

The festive celebration of Spring Festival in countries like Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam has deep roots due to the longstanding presence of Chinese communities that back decades, or even centuries. The rapid rise of CNY festivities in GCC countries—which do not have prominent Chinese communities—is thus a noticeable trend.

What makes this even more interesting is that the GCC countries have a distinctive Islamic culture that differs significantly from Chinese culture. Moreover, since their independence, all GCC countries have remained under Western political, military and cultural influence. Western culture and the English language are widely known among their citizens, with the West long serving as a favoured destination for education, business, and even settlement.

However, this trend is gradually shifting. At the state level, the GCC countries and China have steadily strengthened their mutual relations, driven by shared interests in a rapidly evolving world. Both sides take pride in their cultures, which is reflected in their national outlooks and relations with other countries, and both make efforts to promote them.

As Chinese cultural influence in the GCC nations expands—evident in the increasingly vibrant CNY celebrations each year—GCC countries are also actively promoting their culture in China through various initiatives. GCC nations, especially Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar, have signed multiple agreements with China to promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges. In particular, they are competing to attract the world's largest source of tourism: China.

Given this trajectory, cultural engagement between the two sides appears set to grow, and one might expect upcoming CNY celebrations in the GCC to become even more significant. Enhanced cultural understanding will invariably strengthen the overall China-GCC relationship.

The article was first published at Think China, Singapore, February. 7, 2025, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/economy/middle-east-nations-woo-chinese-tourists-grand-chinese-new-year-celebrations>.

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RCAS Commentary

The Future with Trump Again

Sujit Kumar Datta, Feb.8, 2025

Sino-U.S. relations have entered a new phase of uncertainty with the return of Donald Trump to the White House. Continuity from his first term is expected, but leadership changes could signal changes in American foreign policy as it interacts with an increasingly powerful China.



▲ China-US Focus

Trump started strong and, at times, aggressively toward China, which responded with a plethora of tariffs and countercharges in the trade war that erupted. Officials in the administration described China as a strategic competitor that needed to be balanced as it rose.

However, the adage broke down in different areas. It added to economic tension but found its way into tech tension, military positioning in the South China Sea and arguments on human rights and democracy. Whether the hard-line, confrontational policies that characterized this era, from sweeping travel and trade restrictions to tit-for-tat tariffs, will remain transformative forces in the geopolitical landscape has yet to be seen.

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These screeching, intertwined and clashing roles in business and competition—a sort of crossing of wires—are part of the inning-by-inning game of human conflict, collaboration and cooperation for these two giants in a complex geopolitical market.

Trump's first presidency was dominated by rising tensions between America and China, including a trade war, technology restrictions and a clampdown on academic exchanges. Such moves dealt a double blow to China's financial future, particularly in areas such as technology and manufacturing. A hallmark of Trump's administration was to attack China's economic and technological ambitions, and it appears that these aggressive policies can be expected to continue. The tariffs and embargoes on technology are meant to slow China in critical areas such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence and others.

Still, these same pressures also pull China toward a much greater focus on independence from external technologies and innovation, working hard to drive domestic innovation and domestic technologies, and to do so more rapidly. At the same time, the strategic competition between the two superpowers, as Trump finds his way back into office, will remain and perhaps deepen.

Moreover, in Trump's eyes, China is not just the biggest threat to the U.S. economy but to national security. At the heart of his campaign rhetoric on China was the "America first" policy, which demanded a more hard-line approach and kept the door open to expanded protectionist measures. But the reality is ongoing tension in the Indo-Pacific region, where the U.S. is expected to reinforce its partnerships with Japan, India and Australia to check the increase in China's military and economic sway.

Another potential area of confrontation is the Taiwan question. The Trump administration had already given a green light to arms sales and high-level engagement. These policies will probably remain in place, and possibly even intensify, in the second Trump term, pushing tensions across the Taiwan Strait higher and higher.

Despite the recent adversarial politics, the U.S. and China are deeply economically interdependent. They continue to exchange billions in goods and services each year, making China an important trading partner for the United States. The ramifications of decoupling would be colossal, not just for the two economies but for the global economy as well.

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Trump will likely continue to seek reductions in the U.S. trade deficit with China and will repeat that America needs a level playing field in trade. Nevertheless, a full break is unlikely, considering the extent of economic entanglement. The focus may instead shift to diversifying supply chains, reducing dependence on Chinese manufacturing and promoting indigenous industries. If Trump follows through with additional tariff threats, expect China to respond by moving against U.S. companies operating there or adding duties on American goods coming in.

Worse, such financial countermeasures can exacerbate antagonism and prolong the trade war to undermine the global economy. Along with the global supply chain changing under Trump's America first policy, China might also diversify its trade partners with Asian, European and African countries.

Trump's second term will probably see the escalation of Sino-U.S. technological competition. Further restrictions on Chinese tech behemoths, especially in the area of 5G infrastructure and AI, will drive greater Chinese self-reliance in solutions development. Strategic decoupling in technology could generate two different spheres of influence, polarizing the relationship between the superpowers even more.

The South China Sea is ripe for further Sino-U.S. tensions. These are expected to include expanded naval patrols, joint exercises with allies such as Japan and the Philippines and show-of-force air missions. In response, China might bolster its naval forces in the area, together with regular exercises to exert state sovereignty. The potential for dangerous encounters at sea could increase, ramping up tensions and possibly causing an exchange.

If Trump maintains a NATO posture and sticks by his excessive defense spending agenda for NATO members, will this automatically play into China's hands? A divided NATO would weaken the U.S. in Europe, while China would make use of its economic power and the vision of the Belt and Road Initiative to expand its influence. Further, Washington's transactional form of leadership stands to push traditional allies into the welcoming arms of Beijing, thereby altering the global balance of power. Beijing's diplomacy toward ASEAN countries is likely to intensify across the Asia-Pacific region. In cultivating these relations, China wants to gradually balance U.S. primacy and establish stability to protect its own interests. By sidestepping America,

initiatives show China as a responsible stakeholder and portray the U.S. as an unwelcome interloper.

These ideological shifts could complicate foreign relations, particularly with China. A more assertive approach may be perceived as a defense of Western values against the growing influence of Beijing. High-level communications, such as that of former U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, indicate the state of China-U.S. ties. The Trump-Xi phone call was a “compass” showing the direction of the relationship. This phone call represents the highest-level interaction between the two sides, indicating their profound understanding of the importance of Sino-U.S. ties and a positive attitude toward cooperation.

In this regard, hard as it might be, constant exchanges are necessary to clear up any miscommunications and build trust. Rivalry may define much of the coverage, but planet-scale problems offer opportunities to cooperate. Working together would also help alleviate global challenges such as climate change, pandemics and economic stability that neither can solve alone. The unilateralism charge stemmed from Trump’s abandonment of agreements such as the Paris agreement. However, in his second term, the realities of planetary management might drive cooperation on such fundamental issues. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, illustrated the need for America and China to work together on a global health crisis that would yield dividends for both nations.

A balance between collaboration and competition is necessary to make the Sino-U.S. relationship less unstable in the future. While competition for global business supremacy and trade issues are inevitable between any two great world powers, areas of cooperation such as climate change and the prevention of pandemics provide opportunities for collaboration. Bridging this gap requires a more constructive conversation between governments, academia and civil society to allow them to reach beyond mutual distrust and frustration through transparency and dialogue.

Second, active support for international regimes continues to strengthen multilateralism, enabling the two states to address shared problems and suspend unilateral moves that increase tensions.

Third, promoting people-to-people exchange—not least in education and culture—contributes to mutual understanding and counters the negative stereotypes that underpin distrust. Exchanges

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clear the pathway for a future of bilateral relationships that are far more secure and responsive to the needs of peace.

Goodwill and understanding are critical for keeping a neighborly peace, but wariness can be deadly. This balance between competition and cooperation is a delicate one that Trump will have to walk. While a rivalry on methods of trade, innovation and arms will perhaps remain, planetary problems are too heavy to disregard. Joint efforts must be encouraged. Trump's policies will define how the relationship moves forward and influence not just bilateral engagement but the broader international order. Despite their differences, both countries benefit greatly from stable and constructive linking and both countries suffer greatly from continued antagonism.

The next few years are crucial for determining whether Sino-U S. relations will develop into a new cold war or move toward a more equitable form of coexistence with competition and cooperation co-existing.

This article was first published at China-US Focus, Hong Kong, February.7, 2025, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/the-future-with-trump-again>.

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RCAS Commentary

China-Cook Islands Deal Raises New Zealand's Concern

Ghulam Ali, Feb.23, 2025

On 15 February 2025, visiting Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Mark Brown, and his Chinese counterpart, Premier Li Qiang, signed The Action Plan for Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) 2025-2030 in Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang province in northeastern China. The undisclosed agreement has raised the Cook Islands' tensions with New Zealand, with which it has constitutional ties. Western nations, including Australia and the US, share Wellington's concerns about Beijing's growing influence in the Pacific region.



▲Cook Islands' Prime Minister Mark Brown visits National Deep Sea Centre in Qingdao, China, in this picture released on 12 February 2025. (Mark Brown, Prime Minister of the Cook Islands/Facebook via Reuters)

The Cook Islands were a dependent colony of New Zealand from 1901 to 1965. Afterward, they decided to become a self-governing nation in “free association” with New Zealand. In 2001, they signed a Joint Centenary Declaration, which committed the parties to “consult regularly on

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defence and security issues ” . Based on this agreement, Wellington expected the Brown government to disclose the details of the proposed agreement.

The Cook Islands comprise 15 islands with a total population of 15,000 and an approximate land area of 236.7 square kilometres. The nation is situated halfway between New Zealand and Hawaii. These 15 islands are dispersed over about 2,000,000 square kilometres (770,000 square miles) of the South Pacific Ocean. Cook Islanders hold New Zealand passports. Regarding currency, the nation has its own banknotes and coins but officially uses the New Zealand dollar.

Brown, in power since 2020, has sparked a second controversy with New Zealand in a short period. Just weeks ago, he dropped the idea of issuing separate passports for Cook Islanders after Wellington insisted that the Pacific nation first revoke New Zealand passports.

A month before Brown ’ s visit to China, New Zealand began requesting the details of the proposed agreement. Wellington ’ s deputy prime minister and foreign minister, Winston Peters, made a phone call followed by a letter highlighting the need for transparency and proper consultation, citing the constitutional ties between the two sides, which include obligations to consult on defence and security matters. Brown set aside these concerns and proceeded with the agreement.

Brown regarded the Cook Islands-New Zealand relationship as reciprocal, rather than one that requires the Cook Islands to seek permission from New Zealand.

Cook Islands expectations of a ‘reciprocal’ relationship from New Zealand

He stated, “There is no need for New Zealand to sit in the room with us while we are discussing our comprehensive agreement with China.” He added that because there were no clauses related to security or loans, consultation with Wellington did not fall under the Centenary Declaration of 2001. Brown regarded the Cook Islands-New Zealand relationship as reciprocal, rather than one that requires the Cook Islands to seek permission from New Zealand.

In Avarua (the capital of the Cook Islands, located in Rarotonga, the largest and most populous island), some locals termed New Zealand ’ s attitude as “bullying”, whereas opposition MP Teariki Heather opposed any agreement that could affect relations with New Zealand. He also

organised a protest and submitted a motion of no confidence, which was unlikely to succeed due to a lack of support.

In China, Brown engaged in extensive discussions covering various topics, including investment, tourism, ocean science, aquaculture, agriculture, infrastructure (such as transport), climate resilience, disaster preparedness, creative industries, technology and innovation, education and scholarships, and people-to-people exchanges. He also sought China's assistance in acquiring new vessels to replace ageing ships for inter-island connectivity and in supporting seabed mineral development.

He reiterated his support for the "one China" policy, which should have appeased Beijing amid tense cross-strait relations. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs downplayed the hype regarding Brown's visit, terming the country's relationships with both the Cook Islands and New Zealand as friendly.

New Zealand contributed the most, US\$219 million, while China, the second-largest donor, gave US\$112 million-more than double Australia's share.

Economic opportunities and aid from China

China established diplomatic relations with the Cook Islands in 1997 and elevated them to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2018. Between 2008 and 2022, the Cook Islands received US\$517 million in foreign aid. New Zealand contributed the most, US\$219 million, while China, the second-largest donor, gave US\$112 million-more than double Australia's share. China's grants and loans have been utilised for public infrastructure development, such as the courthouse, police station, and agricultural equipment, for public events like the Pacific Mini Games, and in constructing the arena that hosted them. In partnership with New Zealand, China also helped build Te Mato Vai, a large-scale water infrastructure project to replace the Cook Islands' old water network.

Among Western nations, New Zealand initially took a moderate approach to China's rise but became increasingly concerned after Beijing's 2022 policing deals with the Solomon Islands and

Kiribati. New Zealand's then Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern termed those agreements “gravely concerning”.

US's attention turns to the Pacific region

Most importantly, China's growing influence in the Pacific region has brought the US back to the region. In February 2023, the US reopened its embassy in Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands, after nearly three decades, and in May of the same year, in Nuku'alofa, the capital of Tonga. Washington also plans to open an embassy in Kiribati.

Over 70% of the Cook Islands' economy relies on tourism, which was severely impacted during the Covid-19 outbreak. During this time, the Pacific nation chose to diversify its economy. China, the largest source of tourism globally and the second-largest economy, emerged as a natural option.

On the other hand, for a resource-hungry China, the Cook Islands are a natural attraction as well. Although the Pacific nation's total land area is small, due to the sparse distribution of 15 islands in the vast Pacific Ocean, it possesses a huge area under its exclusive economic zone. This vast ocean area is rich in polymetallic nodules containing essential metals such as manganese, cobalt, nickel and copper, all of which are necessary for technologies ranging from electric vehicles to advanced weapon systems.

Prime Minister Brown has said that “there is nothing to worry about” and has made the agreement public as promised. Even so, the Pacific region may still become another theatre of rivalry between China on one side and the US-led New Zealand, Australia, and the West on the other.

The article was first published at Think China, Singapore, February. 20, 2025, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/politics/china-cook-islands-deal-raises-new-zealands-concern?ref=top-hero>.

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RCAS Commentary

New Gwadar International Airport: Another China-Built White Elephant?

Ghulam Ali, Mar.1, 2025

After several delays in its inauguration, the first flight finally landed at NGIA on January 20, 2025. A domestic ATR 42-500 flight—a small twin-turboprop plane operated by the national carrier, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA)—transported officials without any paying passengers on board. Since the inauguration of NGIA, no international airline other than PIA has expressed interest in launching flights to Gwadar.



▲ This photo taken on Sept 13, 2024 shows a terminal at the New Gwadar International Airport in Gwadar, Pakistan. (Xinhua/Ahmad Kamal)

The NGIA is Pakistan's largest airport by area, covering approximately 4,300 acres (17 sq km). It has a single runway measuring 3,658 m in length and 75 m in width, and its terminal building covers approximately 14,000 sq m. The airport can accommodate 400,000 passengers annually, with the potential for expansion to 1.6 million. This places the NGIA in the 4F category of airports, capable of handling various types of large, narrow-body, and small aircraft.

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While this profile is impressive, what is the commercial use of the NGIA in a highly security-fragile part of Pakistan?

China and Pakistan, which have maintained a strategic partnership for decades, launched the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in April 2015. The CPEC comprises a series of projects focused on energy, infrastructure, investment, and collaboration across various fields. Over the years, China has committed tens of billions of dollars in investment. Among the various projects China has pledged to build, the NGIA was funded entirely through grants.

When the CPEC was planned a decade ago, there was hope that Gwadar would become another “Dubai” or “Shenzhen”, turning Pakistan into a hub for regional connectivity. Based on this assumption, China agreed to provide a generous grant for a new international airport. However, these hopes proved to be miscalculations.

Instead of CPEC and Gwadar Port providing China access to the Indian Ocean and establishing a regional hub, they presented a significant threat to Chinese nationals in Pakistan. Most attacks on Chinese engineers in Pakistan were linked to China’s involvement in Balochistan, particularly in Gwadar.

China in the Crossfire

The conflict in Balochistan, now in its fifth wave, traces back to the 1950s. It is fought between the Pakistan military and intelligence agencies on the one side and Baloch insurgents and political forces on the other. China, which has no concern regarding this insurgency, was caught in the crossfire.

China entered Balochistan to build Gwadar Port from 2002 to 2006. Once the port was completed in 2007, it left the region. The Pakistani authorities leased Gwadar Port to the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA). However, due to a dispute between PSA and the Pakistani authorities, both sides terminated the contract, and Gwadar Port was then leased to China in 2015 for 40 years.

While disgruntled Baloch factions do not hold direct grudges against China, Beijing is viewed as both a supporter of the Pakistani military and an exploiter of Balochistan’s natural resources,

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making it a target. Furthermore, due to the strategic nature of Sino Pakistani relations, attacking China could swiftly attract international attention, which the Baloch separatists seek. The Chinese have faced more attacks in Pakistan than in any other country.

Grievances of Gwadar Residents

Balochistan's people have long-standing grievances. Weak state-local connections have further deepened these issues, with development in Gwadar exacerbating tensions. Gwadar is heavily militarised, with police and military checkpoints at every corner, restricting the locals' movement in their own areas.

Residents lack access to basic necessities such as clean water, healthcare, and education. They feel disconnected from development projects and express concerns over resource exploitation, persistent underdevelopment, and the erosion of their identity. Many fear that the rapid influx of outsiders, including Chinese workers and investors, will displace them from their homeland.

Commercial, Security, and Political Challenges

The viability of NGIA's development can be evaluated from commercial, security, and political standpoints. Gwadar has a population of approximately 85,000, with the nearest major cities, Karachi and Quetta, located over 630 km and 970 km away, respectively. The city lacks a railway network-the most cost-effective means of transporting goods and people – linking it to the rest of the country.

Gwadar currently relies on a single major highway to Karachi and another to Quetta via Turbat. Both highways are heavily burdened by passenger and freight traffic, often exceeding capacity. These highways are not only congested but also susceptible to blockades and terrorist attacks.

On several occasions, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), a terrorist group fighting the Pakistani military, has blocked roads, targeted individuals from other provinces, and carried out deadly attacks. Moreover, Pakistani expatriates primarily originate from other provinces, particularly those working in the Middle East. The local population hardly requires an international airport for overseas travel. For the outside world, Gwadar offers limited opportunities for commerce, tourism and business.

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Perpetual security challenges remain the most severe impediment to Gwadar's progress. The most daunting is the insurgency led by the BLA, which has escalated both the frequency and intensity of its attacks on the military and Chinese entities in Pakistan. It has evolved from isolated strikes to coordinated assaults that undermine the military's capabilities.

In August 2024, while a visiting Chinese general met with Pakistani military leadership, the BLA launched its most audacious, coordinated attacks across multiple cities. A few days before Chinese Premier Li Qiang visited Pakistan in October 2024, the BLA carried out a suicide attack, killing two Chinese nationals. As a result, Premier Li was forced to inaugurate the NGIA virtually from Islamabad, over 1,000 km from Gwadar. The security situation in Gwadar is underscored by China's decision to bypass Gwadar Port to ship goods to Afghanistan, opting for Iran's Bandar Abbas instead. Given Pakistan's persistent security issues, Beijing is avoiding Pakistan and exploring alternatives, such as the Wakhan Corridor.

Conclusion

Gwadar already had an international airport sufficient to meet demand; there was no need to build a new, larger airport in a desolate region. Due to a lack of commercial, tourism, and business opportunities, the NGIA is likely to remain underutilised, much like the Chinese-funded Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport in Sri Lanka.

Without any commercial use, it would be challenging for cash-strapped, technologically backward Pakistan to maintain such a large airport, risking it falling into disrepair. Like Gwadar Port, the NGIA could potentially become another white elephant adding to the woes of China's infrastructural projects in Pakistan.

The article was first published at RSIS Commentary No.040, Singapore, February. 24, 2025, <https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/new-gwadar-international-airport-another-china-built-white-elephant/>.

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RCAS Commentary

China Rises as U.S. Retreats

Sujit Kumar Datta, Mar.8, 2025

The 2025 Munich Security Conference revealed a significant transformation in global power relations. While delegates for the United States argued in favor of their nation's increasingly isolationist policies, Chinese diplomats captured attention by outlining a vision of global collaboration and shared prosperity.



▲ In Munich, U.S. Vice President JD Vance said that the greatest threat to the Old Continent was neither Russia nor China but ‘the retreat of Europe from some of its most fundamental values.’(China-US Focus)

The discrepancy highlights a significant trend: America’s withdrawal from global leadership, the result of President Donald Trump’s actions, has accelerated China’s rise as a dominant power. The U.S. retreat has led to vacuums in climate action and health governance, which Beijing has readily filled. Trump-era policies-his orders to withdraw from the Paris agreement, defund the

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World Health Organization and reduce humanitarian aid-have propelled China's ascent and transformed the global order.

Trump's order to exit the Paris agreement, the global treaty on climate change adopted in 2015, signals that neither he nor his administration cares about the climate crisis. The U.S. plays a massive role in greenhouse gas emissions and has been a sizable partner in global efforts to solve climate change. Withdrawal will jeopardize progress on the reduction of greenhouse gases and undermine the ability of many countries to adapt to climate change. Clearly, U.S. leadership is lacking.

Bangladesh and other countries, for example, are currently suffering from rising sea levels, cyclones and floods. Trump is sending the wrong message to other rich countries who have played a role in climate change. The U.S. retreat from climate leadership provides China with a sweet opportunity to position itself as a global leader in climate diplomacy through its green and renewable energy investments.

The WHO has played a foundational role in global health governance, coordinating responses to outbreaks and organizing vaccine distribution. Trump's withdrawal from the WHO significantly limits the world's ability to respond to any new health crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates the importance of international cooperation in addressing health concerns. An American withdrawal from the WHO will likely result in gaps in funding and coordination.

But it will also pave the way for China to assume global health leadership. It may deepen its presence through the Belt and Road Initiative, potentially embracing health diplomacy by increasing contributions to the WHO and providing health assistance to impoverished countries.

One of the most dangerous of Trump's executive orders is ending U.S. humanitarian aid. The United States has been a top contributor for decades in helping desperate people with health needs. It has provided disaster relief, poverty alleviation and refugee assistance worldwide. Trump's cuts could trigger a global ripple effect, leading other countries to impose similar restrictions that could further exacerbate humanitarian challenges in conflict zones and impoverished areas. Weak anticipated leadership will permit China to step in to strategic assistance programs and encourage beneficiary nations to join its strategic agenda.

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China is interested in taking on these roles as the United States steps back. It is ready to take on leadership through its Belt and Road Initiative, investments in green energy and greater involvement in global organizations. China is an important partner for growth in Bangladesh, providing money for projects in the energy and trade sectors. As the United States pulls out, China's presence will likely expand and have more impact, changing the power dynamics in areas Western countries have always assumed they controlled.

China's climate discourse conceals some inconsistencies, however. Despite its leadership in renewable energy, it remains the world's foremost coal user. Nevertheless, its commitment to achieve peak emissions by 2030 and the green energy projects of the BRI-such as hydropower in Africa-establish it as a realistic ally for poor countries. China's Health Silk Road expanded after the pandemic, with hospitals established in Southeast Asia and training conducted for medical personnel in Africa. During the recent Munich Security Conference, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus commended China's "unwavering solidarity" and highlighted the notable absence of the United States.

By 2025, the Belt and Road Initiative will encompass 150 nations, with an emphasis digital infrastructure (5G networks) and green technology. European opponents warn of so-called debt traps, but speakers from Pakistan to Peru at Munich highlighted the BRI's significance in addressing developmental disparities. At the conference, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi characterized the U.S. withdrawal as "isolationism" and called for a world community with a shared future. In contrast, the speech of U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio touting "democratic resilience" was received with skepticism. German Chancellor Annalena Baerbock said, "Leadership necessitates presence, not merely promises."

Trump is moving toward doing things alone and pulling back from others, which puts at risk the idea of nations working together that was established after World War II. This could harm global partnerships and undermine international rules. The impact could be profound for emerging countries like Bangladesh. If such countries see U.S. assistance vanish in important areas such as climate change, global health and aid for refugees, they will be more vulnerable. Hence, the most important thing is to promote multilateralism in response to the Trump's abdication of global

leadership. U.S. short-sightedness needs to be addressed by the international community so that the growing vacuum now hindering global cooperation can be filled.

Regional organizations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the African Union, can step up to proactively oversee coordinated measures to fight climate change, improve public health and deliver humanitarian aid. NGOs and international financial institutions must redouble their engagement, especially in countries where the politically driven realignments are most acutely felt-including the possibility of engaging with China as it becomes increasingly more global.

China's dominant role in international organizations and its massive Belt and Road portfolio offer developing nations a path to basic infrastructure and economic growth. But cooperation with China should also take place under the umbrella of common international standards.

The world must continue to engage with China constructively, pressing for greater transparency, environmental sustainability and human rights as the Asian giant pursues a new, more equitable and greener path. This type of replication-as opposed to copying-would be beneficial to states, international organizations and multilateral institutions as China becomes an increasingly constructive participant in global governance and development. This approach allows for the upside of such efforts while minimizing the negative downside of exploitative practices through excessive power.

The focus must also be on building the resilience of developing countries to reduce their exposure to external shocks and the subsequent dependence on external assistance. The power dynamics between the U.S. and China is neither predetermined nor unalterable. Nonetheless, Trump's actions have brought a deterioration of U.S. influence, which China has skillfully capitalized on to change the nature of global politics.

This article was first published at China-US Focus, Hong Kong, February.26, 2025, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/china-rises-as-us-retreats>.

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RCAS Commentary

Trump's Asia-Pacific Playbook: More Weapons, More Uncertainty

Ghulam Ali, Mar.9, 2025

The Asia-Pacific region began to exhibit signs of easing major geopolitical tensions in late 2024, but has started to heat up again following President Trump's return to power in the White House. During the 'easing' period, although low-level disputes persisted in the vast region, in the South China Sea, and in cross-strait relations, the risk of a conflict involving regional heavyweights was not imminent.



▲ The title page of RCAS new book on BRI.

Starting from around mid-2024, relations between Australia, Japan, and India, three key members of Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), with China began to improve. Chinese Premier Li Qiang's visit to Australia in June 2024, followed by a meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in November on the

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sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, ended the trade war, putting the relationship back on track. The summit between President Xi and Indian Prime Minister Modi led to the de-escalation of tension and demilitarization of the Sino-Indian border in rather a quick time. China-Japan relations also saw a positive shift following a meeting between Xi and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba during the 31st APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in November. Trump's return to the White House has brought these countries back into the US geopolitical agenda in the Asia-Pacific.

On January 21, 2025, on his first day in office, the new Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, held a meeting with his Quad counterparts from Australia, India, and Japan. Four ministers reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing cooperation and emphasized a "shared commitment to strengthening a Free and Open Indo-Pacific," an implied reference to China's 'assertiveness' in the South China Sea. Rubio was a well-known China hawk, his starting the new portfolio by activating the Quad reinforced this impression. This meeting followed visits by the top leaders of Japan, India, and Australia to the US.

On February 7, 2025, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba met with U.S. President Donald Trump at the White House. This meeting marked Ishiba's first official visit to the U.S. since taking office and underscored the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance. During their discussions, Trump reaffirmed the US's total commitment to Japan's security. Ishiba announced plans for Japan to increase investments in the U.S. to US\$1 trillion and discussed raising Japan's defense spending to 2% of GDP by 2027, aligning with U.S. defense strategies against China. The meeting was described as cordial and reinforced bilateral ties in the face of regional security challenges. While cross-strait relations do not directly pertain to US-Japan bilateral relations, both countries included it in their joint statement. This elicited a response from Beijing and gratitude from Taiwan.

Within a week of Ishiba's visit, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Trump in the White House. Although the Trump-Modi meeting took place shortly after Trump's announcement of intended tariffs on various trade partners, including India, under shared geopolitical interests, both leaders emphasized their friendship and mutual respect during a joint press conference, whereas Trump reaffirmed strong cooperation among Quad members. The US President specifically promised the sale of advanced weapons worth billions of dollars to India,

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including the possibility of an F-35 fighter jet in the future. Modi's efforts to acquire weapons and strengthen the alliance with the US come at a time of rapid improvement in China-India relations.

At the same time as Modi, Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Richard Marles was in the US to meet his counterpart, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, and members of Congress. Among Quad leaders, while Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has not yet met Donald Trump in person, the two leaders held a 40-minute telephone conversation. The discussion focused on defense, AUKUS (Australia-United Kingdom-United States), Australia's nuclear-powered submarine program, technology sharing, and strategic coordination, among other topics.

In addition to reactivating the Quad, Trump's apparent de-militarizing measures would, in essence, lead to further militarization in the Asia-Pacific. His demand that allies share a greater burden of the US security measures and expand their defense budget to at least two percent on the one hand and relaxing sales of US weapons for commercial purposes on the other in practice adds to militarization. Japan expressed its resolve to expand defense spending by up to two percent by 2027. For 2025, with a significant increase of 9.4 percent from the previous year, Japan's defense budget reached approximately US\$55 billion. Under its national security strategy developed in 2022, Tokyo has accelerated militarization, with most of its purchases coming from the US. The Modi government, having already allocated \$250 billion for a 10-year military modernization initiative, will also expand its weapon procurement efforts. Taiwan is currently in discussions with the US to buy arms valued at US\$7 to US\$10 billion. Security is a convenient excuse for politicians to ignite nationalism and channel resources from development to defense. For the US, these purchases will support its defense contractors.

The ripple effect of Trump's push for militarization is reaching the farthest parts of the Asia-Pacific. New Zealand, the most neutral nation in the Pacific, is reviving its colonial and imperial identity, aligning with the Anglosphere and becoming part of the US military-industrial complex. Wellington expressed outright displeasure that the President of the Cook Islands did not show the contents of the agreement it signed with China on 15 February.

What is notably interesting is that alongside the push for alliances, Trump is advocating for major powers to cut their defense budgets and reduce the number of nuclear weapons. In

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response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun stated that the US should take the lead in setting an example for military spending cuts.

Trump's Asia-Pacific Strategy Faces Headwinds

While Trump's policies mirror the policies of his first term (2017-2021), much has changed in the Asia-Pacific over the past eight years. Unlike late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (2012-2020), who proved to be a key US ally in the region and the main force behind the resuscitating of the Quad, Japan's current Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba lacks charisma and leads a weak government. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured 240 seats in the Lok Sabha, down from 303 seats during his second term. The US receives strong support from the current governments of the Philippines and Taiwan, but most of the Asia-Pacific countries are loath to become part of a great power rivalry. There is a louder call for new non-alignment and new partnerships than dancing on the tone of military paybooks.

As the ASEAN Chair, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim emphasized that ASEAN and Malaysia will uphold a non-aligned stance. Addressing a conference on February 17, 2025, he opposed economic coercion and unilateral actions, an implied reference to Trump's tariff war. Anwar also highlighted the importance of diversifying partnerships beyond traditional allies, aiming to strengthen ties with emerging economies like China and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to ensure ASEAN's strategic relevance in a multipolar world. Indonesia echoed similar views on these issues.

Despite its assertive agenda, the US, under President Trump, faces tangible challenges in the Asia-Pacific. Apart from select countries, the majority prefer to steer clear of geopolitical rivalries. If these countries can handle their own affairs and dismiss outside agendas, they will attain economic development.

The article was first published at China-US Focus, Hong Kong, March. 4, 2025, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/trumps-asia-pacific-playbook-more-weapons-more-uncertainty>.

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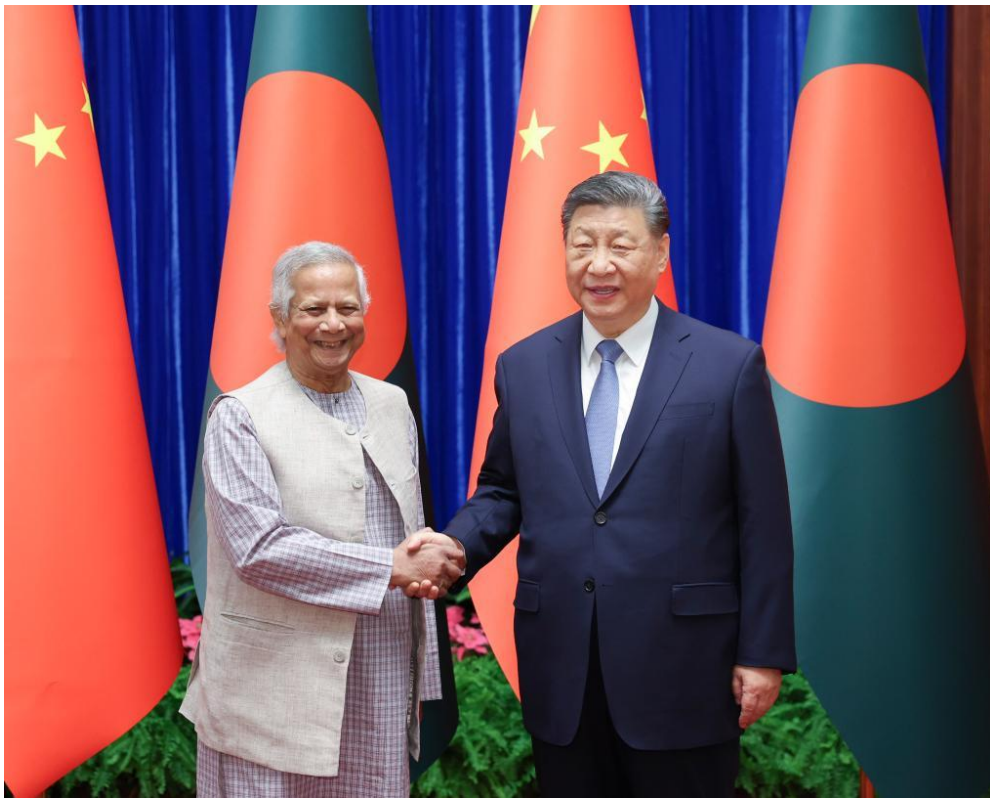
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RCAS Commentary

A Visit to China Invigorates Relations with Bangladesh

Sujit Kumar Datta, Apr.14, 2025

The 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and China gained momentum during the four-day official visit to Beijing of Mohammed Yunus, chief adviser from Bangladesh, in late March. China established diplomatic relations with Bangladesh in 1975, and the relationship has grown stronger over the years, particularly in the areas of infrastructure development and trade cooperation. Given the current global power distribution, Yunus must forge significant partnerships with Beijing, as the regional balance between China and South Asia remains complex.



▲ Chinese President Xi Jinping meets with Bangladeshi interim government's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, capital of China, March 28, 2025. (Photo: Ding Haitao, China-US Focus)

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By facilitating the advancement of massive infrastructure projects throughout Bangladesh, China can solidify its position as an essential development partner for the nation via the Belt and Road Initiative. Multiple large infrastructure initiatives have been propelled by collaboration, reshaping the country's economic system and infrastructure framework.

The Padma Bridge Rail Link Project aims to create better connections between the city of Dhaka and southwestern areas of Bangladesh to boost both trade and transportation systems. One new development is the Karnaphuli Tunnel, South Asia's first underwater expressway tunnel, which will enhance transportation networks across Chittagong and enable economic growth in the port city.

The Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway provides solutions for traffic jams, while making improvements to urban transportation within the capital area. Power projects initiated with Chinese investment form an integral part of China's activity in Bangladesh's energy sector and support rising domestic energy needs. China is building 21 bridges across the national landscape to strengthen regional connections and boost economic development.

The ambitious projects demonstrate China's strengthening bond with Bangladesh, which involves sustainable development and economic and regional integration. Unfortunately, political turmoil within Bangladesh has led to a temporary freeze of the close relationship between both nations.

When the new interim government took control in 2024 it introduced a different scenario for China, so the visit to China by Yunus is significant. It will inspire China to review its funding and working relationships as it steps up its expansion strategy in South Asia through its BRI. Bangladesh is a significant partner.

Yunus's visit to China garnered significant worldwide interest, as it reinforced diplomatic relations and signaled the emergence of a new, evolving regional power dynamic. The implementation of seven memorandums of understanding-centered on technology-between Bangladesh and China will formalize advancements in diplomatic ties that will impact the future of South Asia. Yunus has concentrated his efforts in China on the transfer of modern technologies within the healthcare, digital economy and agricultural sectors.

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To enhance relations, the governments of China and Bangladesh have signed seven new agreements that broaden their collaboration beyond the BRI infrastructure initiative into technical domains. Bangladesh has established a robotics practice center that uses Chinese healthcare technology to enhance medical services and solidify its status as a premier medical hub. The program showcases China's technological soft power while providing immediate advantages to Bangladesh.

Collaborations of 5G, AI and fintech within the digital economy indicate that Bangladesh is participating in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The expertise and resources provided by China, a global leader in several domains, are invaluable. The digital transformation of Bangladesh can be accelerated through such fields of collaboration, which build enhanced network connectivity and financial solutions for industry.

The rapid development of AI and other digital technologies presents emerging countries such as Bangladesh with both significant potential and formidable difficulties. Because of its robust infrastructure and extensive technical expertise, China has eclipsed all other nations to emerge as the world leader in several technological domains. Bangladesh can modernize its economic sectors via collaboration with China to develop digital infrastructure, implement e-governance using artificial intelligence across diverse market sectors and facilitate technology transfers.

AI-powered collaborations between entities have substantial capability to enhance government systems, educational structures and disaster response operations. By working together in the fintech space, Bangladesh can update its banking system to provide better financial services to all of its customers.

The government of Bangladesh has brought food security, together with agricultural productivity advancements, to forge its enduring top goal of optimizing agricultural modernization schemes for national targets. Through precision irrigation technology and crop mixtures, youth technology programs from China provide major advantages to Bangladesh's farming sector. The collaborative projects will help agricultural yields rise while minimizing dependency on imports and creating enhanced economic opportunities for farmers.

China has become a significant economic partner for Bangladesh. The BRI projects, in which China spent around \$10 billion, have had a significant impact on Bangladesh's economy. To become a middle-income country and maintain economic growth, infrastructure improvements in the transportation, energy and communication sectors are crucial. Infrastructure development partnerships tend to favor China because its significant investments proceed at an efficient pace.

Yunus's China visit is historic because of its implications for South Asia diplomatic relations. Bangladesh's future relationship with China depends on win-win cooperation, while maximizing beneficial tech partnerships and the active development of multiple international relationships.

Yunus's visit to China proved fruitful, but there are many untapped opportunities for cooperation between the countries of South Asian and China. China is a global leader in high-tech and innovation, and South Asia is actively participating. With China's technological advantages and investment opportunities, South Asia can develop faster and better.

This article was first published at China-US Focus, Hong Kong, April.9, 2025, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/a-visit-to-china-invigorates-relations-with-bangladesh>.

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RCAS Commentary

ASEAN Should Choose Engagement over Retaliation in US Trade War

Ghulam Ali, Apr.14, 2025

While no country, friend or foe, is spared from Trump's barrage of steepest tariffs announced on 2 April, export-reliant Southeast Asian countries are among those hit the hardest. Economic naivety dominated the Trump administration's calculations. He arbitrarily halved the US trade deficit with other countries to determine the tariff ratio.



▲ Vietnamese garment factory workers stitch apparel at a factory in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, on 3 April 2025, after US President Donald Trump unveiled sweeping new tariffs on trading partners. (Huu Kha/AFP)

On Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states and Timor-Leste, the US imposed tariffs of 49% on Cambodia, 48% on Laos, 46% on Vietnam, 45% on Myanmar, 47% on Thailand, 32% on Indonesia, 24% on Brunei, 24% on Malaysia, 17% on the Philippines, 10% on Singapore, and 10% on Timor-Leste. Although Singapore and Timor-Leste are a few exceptions to having a trade surplus with the US, they also received flat 10% tariffs applied to all US trade partners.

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Just business

While imposing these tariffs, Trump disregarded the nature of US ties with these countries, their economic conditions and their willingness to address US concerns. For instance, Thailand is a treaty ally, the Philippines has strategic significance in the context of confrontation with China in the South China Sea, and Vietnam signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with the US in 2023.

Trump also disregarded the consequences of these tariffs on their economies. For instance, in 2024, Cambodia exported 37% percent of its total exports and Vietnam 29% of its total exports to the US. Given their heavy dependence on exports to the US, these tariffs could lead to mass layoffs and unemployment.

Likewise, countries' efforts to address US concerns bore no fruit. Prior to tariffs, Vietnamese officials engaged with the US to address concerns about its lopsided trade imbalance. Hanoi removed tariffs on a range of US products, increased the import of US liquified gas, and provided Elon Musk Starlink permission to begin operations in Vietnam. Thailand also made various attempts to appease the Trump administration, but to no avail.

These tariffs indicate that the Trump administration views geopolitics and bilateral relationships as separate from trade, which emerges as its top priority.

The devastating implications can be assessed by the fact that the tariffs announcement caused stock prices to plummet in the US and many other parts of the world, devalued currencies, and led rating agencies to revise GDP growth projections for most countries by reducing some of the percentages from earlier predictions.

On the other hand, starting from 5 April, US seaports, airports and customs warehouses began collecting 10% tariffs on all products entering US territory. The higher levies on goods from larger trading partners will begin on 9 April. Singapore's Prime Minister Lawrence Wong termed US measures an end to the era of rules-based globalisation and free trade and a potential start of a global trade war.

How ASEAN can weather the storm

These measures can risk upending the entire global trade order, sending shock waves and leading to global recessions. This is particularly challenging for export-oriented Southeast Asian economies. However, ASEAN has a history of resilience, weathering various storms like the

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1997 Asian financial crisis, the 2007-2008 global financial turmoil and the Covid-19 pandemic to name a few. With its proven resilience, ASEAN countries can take measures both individually and organisationally to mitigate the repercussions of tariffs, as elaborated here.

ASEAN countries should avoid retaliating with tariffs in the way that China and some other countries have done. Instead, member countries should engage with the US. Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia have already stated that they would negotiate with the Trump administration to find a common ground. Vietnam officials held a “very productive” call with Trump and immediately sent a delegation to the US to negotiate a deal. Other member countries should also engage with the US.

The US has also released a list of more than 1,000 product categories exempted from the tariffs. ASEAN countries should explore how they could benefit from this exemption. At the same time, governments should offer tax breaks and subsidies to exporters and most affected industries.

ASEAN should also engage with existing mechanisms established with the US, such as the ASEAN-US Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the Post-Ministerial Conference.

A unified strategy

In addition to bilateral engagement, member countries should utilise the ASEAN platform to develop a unified strategy. Efforts in this regard have already begun. Prime Minister Lawrence Wong spoke with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, the rotating chair of ASEAN. Anwar also made telephone conversations with other member countries. The ASEAN finance ministers’ meeting on 10 April provides a timely and appropriate venue to explore collaborative efforts. Following this, the ASEAN Summit, along with ASEAN-GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) plus China, is set for the end of May.

Clearly, the US has adopted protectionist policies, raising barriers to its market. Therefore, besides immediate measures, ASEAN countries should devise mid-to long-term strategies. They should expand partnerships with other big countries such as China and India and regional blocks such as the GCC and EU. President Xi Jinping reportedly is visiting Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia in mid-April. This will provide an opportunity to discuss economic and trade cooperation in the context of tariffs.

ASEAN should diversify its partnerships and explore alternatives. GCC, with its predominant export being energy, provides complementary opportunities to ASEAN. ASEAN should leverage

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its upcoming summit-level engagement with the GCC, which will take place in late May 2025. GCC countries that have started rapid modernisation and reforms provide a large market and investment for ASEAN.

The EU, which is equally hit by US tariffs, is also thinking outside the box to find reliable partners, and ASEAN could be one of them.

ASEAN, both as a bloc and as individual members, should also expand engagement with other groups that promote trade liberalisation and economic integration, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), among others.

These policy measures might help ASEAN cope with the unprecedented challenges triggered by Trump's tariff bombshell.

The article was first published at Think China, Singapore, April. 9, 2025, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/economy/asean-should-choose-engagement-over-retaliation-us-trade-war>.

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RCAS Commentary

Trump's Self-Inflicted Tariff Debacle

Ghulam Ali, Apr.22, 2025

On April 2, U.S. President Donald Trump imposed sweeping tariffs on virtually every one of America's trade partners. These tariffs increased from an initial baseline of a flat 10 percent on every country and grew by cutting the U.S. trade deficit in half with trade partners. For China, which responded tit-for-tat, tariffs increased to 150 percent (as of April 13). Overall, these tariffs fell as a bombshell on global trade which had just started to pick up after the pandemic, creating panic in most countries.



▲ Trump's tariff war. (China US Focus)

The tariffs are the latest addition to Trump's delusions, following his earlier shocks: the U.S. absorption of Canada, a sovereign country, to become America's 51st state; taking control of Greenland; occupying the Panama Canal; and the eviction of nearly 2 million Palestinians from Israeli-occupied Gaza to transform it into the Riviera of the Middle East. While these follies mainly worried concerned countries, the tariff bombshell is targeting friends and foes alike

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around the world. Trump is undermining the very system that the U.S. established to become the top economy, as well as the norms of free trade, market economies and the WTO-which it never tired of championing. Trump believes that the U.S. trade deficit is the root of all America's problems and that tariffs are the panacea that will make the U.S. "great again."

But the way tariffs were implemented resembled a scene from an action movie more than an act of a superpower claiming to be the world's leader. Trump imposed them without any consultation with other countries. The so-called Liberation Day on April 2 kicked off with the excitement of a blockbuster premiere. In less than a week, however, Trump faced reality on the ground and made a U-turn by providing a 90-day pause in the implementation of tariffs-except for China.

While the Trump administration called the break a strategy, plummeting U.S. markets, a bond-market revolt, a devalued dollar and a thrashing of stocks told a different story. This led Trump to modify his first-term conviction that "trade wars are good and easy to win" to a degree of alarm that "there'll be a little disturbance" on the way to greatness. He was preparing American consumers to brace for hardships. Most headlines are focused on calculating tariffs and their implications for the global economy and established trade norms. The world will certainly suffer, and the United States is not exempt.

Tariffs harm America's credibility as a reliable partner. As mentioned earlier, the U.S. imposed these tariffs indiscriminately on both allies and adversaries without consultation, which instilled a sense of panic. Trump was blunt in pointing a finger at long-term allies such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Australia, Canada and others for taking advantage of the U.S. for a long time. In fact, Trump's tariff measures proved more shocking to U.S. allies than to rivals.

The tariff bombshells also affected the status of the U.S. dollar as the world's reserve currency. Countries have long used USD as the primary currency for international trade. A change in this practice first began as the U.S. increasingly employed the dollar as a geopolitical tool to punish other nations through sanctions. Sanctions on Russia, Iran and North Korea are examples that accelerated the demand for alternative currencies.

Tariffs would also impact household items, increasing commodity prices (mainly due to short supply) and pushing inflation above 4 percent by the end of last year. Inflation can skyrocket if uncertainties continue. A study by Johns Hopkins University showed that high inflation during

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the Biden administration (2021–25) was one of the factors that penalized the Democrats and contributed to victories by Trump-led Republicans nationwide.

But no relief for American consumers is in sight. Instead, the negative consequences of tariffs are likely to hit the middle and lower-middle classes even harder. Perhaps realizing this, Trump has pointed toward what he euphemistically called “a little disturbance” in the future.

The U.S. doesn’t just import household items from China. Numerous U.S. industries also rely on key imported components. Many imports from China are difficult to replace, at least in the short term. Staggering tariffs of 150 percent on Chinese goods will damage U.S. production lines as well. Suppliers for top U.S. tech giants Nvidia, Apple, Google and more say they are facing higher levels of uncertainty because of Trump’s tariffs than during the COVID-19 pandemic. They felt as if there were no tomorrow. Many suppliers involved in the production of smartphones, PCs and servers—including Nvidia’s AI servers—have been compelled to make drastic changes to their production and shipping plans within a matter of days.

Notably, consumer spending has remained the bedrock of the U.S. economy. Beyond commodities, rising prices, high interest rates and speculation about the U.S. sagging into recession further impact consumer behavior. The sudden rise in consumption starting from late March, with consumers flocking to discount warehouses and stores to stock commodities, is one of the symptoms.

Trump’s belief that tariffs will draw investors to move manufacturing to the United States is based on raw assumptions. Setting up a factory is not a short-term task; it requires mid-term planning, policy stability and sustained government support. Given the uncertainty and presidential elections every four years, with no idea what the policies of the next administration might be, investors are understandably hesitant to risk their money in the U.S.

In an interview with the Harvard Kennedy School, international trade expert Robert Lawrence said that the manufacturing sector was a very small part of the U.S. labor force. Just over 8 percent of Americans worked in this sector. Even if the U.S. addressed the trade gap, it could increase manufacturing by a maximum of only 2 points—meaning a total of 10 percent of Americans would be working in the sector. This will not make any big difference. In Lawrence’s opinion, both the Biden and the Trump administrations were obsessed with the flawed thought

that manufacturing could revitalize the American middle class, especially those without a college degree.

Analysts argue that mere trade in goods is not a good way to measure an economy. If the U.S. faces a trade deficit in goods, it holds a surplus in trade services.

The U.S. will also lose its status as a cherished destination for tourism and talent. As the Financial Times reported on the basis of ITA data, "The number of European travelers visiting the U.S. has fallen sharply as political and economic tension and fears of a hostile border under President Donald Trump threaten the world's most lucrative air routes."

Reductions can be seen in transatlantic air traffic, the most profitable routes in the world. In 2024, international visitors spent more than \$253 billion on U.S. travel and tourism-related goods and services. The decrease in European travelers should have raised concerns among U.S. authorities. Similarly, the decline in overseas student enrollments in U.S. universities, whether due to strict immigration policies under the Trump administration or the perception of the U.S. as a less desirable destination, is also accelerating. Talented students and high-skill migration have contributed to elevating America's status as a hub of scientific, technological and innovative advancements.

In 2016, the United Kingdom embarked on a similar economic isolationist path-called Brexit. Politicians sold voters with similar narratives that the EU was taking jobs and that immigrants posed a significant challenge to the nation's progress. Brexiteers claimed to revitalize the economy and protect workers in left-behind hinterlands from open borders and globalization. Nearly nine years after the Brexit referendum, the country is still grappling with the consequences. Studies by UK-based professors demonstrate that Brexit did not correct any of the problems caused by deindustrialization. Instead, made them worse. After the UK left the EU, it experienced a record surge of migration, mainly from South Asia and Africa.

So it seems that Trump did not learn any lessons from Brexit and embraced isolationism by erecting walls around the U.S. His poorly conceived global tariff war will severely affect U.S. consumers, increase inflation, damage America's reputation as a reliable partner and put the entire global trade system and practices that the U.S. once championed at risk. Trump has unleashed uncertainty across the entire planet.

The article was first published at China US Focus, Hong Kong, April. 16, 2025, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/finance-economy/trumps-self-inflicted-tariff-debacle>.

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RCAS Commentary

Why US-Philippines Military Exercises won't Stop China in the South China Sea

Nian Peng, May.20, 2025

The annual US-Philippines “Balikatan” (shoulder-to-shoulder) military exercise is taking place in the northern Philippines from 21 April to 9 May. The 2025 Balikatan military exercise, despite the financial difficulties in the US and the Philippines, still involves 14,000 soldiers, just 2,000 fewer than last year. It is also much bigger than the 2022 exercise involving about 9,000 American and Filipino troops. It is clear that Washington and Manila have sharply expanded the Balikatan military exercise since Philippine President Marcos Jr assumed office in June 2022.



▲ AFP Chief of Staff General Romeo S Brawner Jr with LtGen James F Glynn, U.S. Exercise Director, and MGen Francisco F Lorenzo Jr., Philippine Exercise Director unfurl the Exercise Balikatan 40-2025 flag during its Opening Ceremony on April 21. (Photo by AFP Public Affair Office).

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The US and the Philippines have also actively sought to involve their allies in participating in the Balikatan military exercise to transform the bilateral exercise into a multilateral one and thus deter China's "aggression" in the South China Sea (SCS). This year, the Japan Self-Defense Forces participated in this exercise independently for the first time, and 16 observer states were invited to observe the military exercise.

The 2025 Balikatan military exercise took place as usual in the northern Philippines' Luzon Island and expanded to the Batanes Islands, much closer to the Taiwan Strait. Located at the northernmost tip of the Batanes Islands, Yami Island is just 142 kilometres from Taiwan Island and 99 kilometres from the Taiwanese outlying island of Orchid Island, much closer than the over 200 kilometres to Luzon Island.

Enhancing US-Philippine maritime strike and deterrence capabilities

Because of the geographical proximity, the US military airlifted several anti-ship missile launchers from northern Luzon to "several islands" in the Batanes Islands during the Balikatan exercise. Moreover, the US military collaborated with the Philippine Marine Corps to create a forward expeditionary base on Luzon Island for simulating missile launch missions.

For the first time, the US military deployed the Navy/Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System (NMESIS) in the Balikatan exercise, providing air and maritime missile defence to the Philippines and enhancing the US-Philippine maritime strike and deterrence capabilities in the waters surrounding the Taiwan Strait. It confirms that the US and the Philippines are strengthening their joint air, land, and sea combat systems around the Taiwan Strait.

It is worth noting that just a day before the Balikatan exercise kicked off, the Philippine Navy's BRP 36 patrol vessel intruded into Huangyan Island, claimed by China. Eventually, the Philippine vessel was driven away by the Chinese vessels from the People's Liberation Army Southern Theater Command.

This incident underscores the strategic consideration between the US and the Philippines. They aim to continue their "harassment" operations in the SCS while preparing for intervention in the

Taiwan Strait in an attempt to create more “troubles” for China and prepare for the coming military conflicts in the two waters.

Philippines may not achieve its aims so easily

Although the Philippines tries to get US protection to resist the so-called China threats through military exercises with the US, achieving the goal is not easy.

First of all, the US’s defence commitments are unreliable. From the beginning of Trump’s presidency, he frequently complained about its allies taking advantage of America’s security guarantees. He pressured them to bear the cost of stationing US forces and increase their military expenditure to protect themselves. Given the rising economic recessions amid the tariff war launched by Trump, the US is unlikely to arm the Philippines persistently, and the joint deterrence developed by the US and the Philippines has failed to deter China’s countermeasures.

Second, China has rejected the US and Philippine provocations and enhanced its deterrent power in the SCS and the Taiwan Strait. Regarding the Balikatan exercise, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun warned that “those who play with fire will burn themselves”.

Although the CCG claimed that it aims to dispel the Philippines, which illegally entered into this tiny reef, it is believed that China intends to retaliate against the provocative Balikatan exercise.

Soon after this warning, China’s Coast Guard (CCG) was reported to land on a disputed reef in the SCS-Tiexian Jiao (Sandy Cay)-and actually seize it. Although the CCG claimed that it aims to dispel the Philippines, which illegally entered into this tiny reef, it is believed that China intends to retaliate against the provocative Balikatan exercise.

In practice, China has consolidated its control of the disputed reefs and islands in the SCS since Marcos Jr expanded defence cooperation with the US and launched provocations in the SCS in the past two years. As a result, the Philippines has suffered from the “reactive force” of these aggressive actions, including the Balikatan exercise.

Not just the US

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Third, the US-Philippines military exercises depart from the neighbouring countries' peaceful claims. Soon before the Balikatan exercise, Chinese President Xi Jinping launched a "charm diplomacy" in Southeast Asia and signed dozens of cooperation agreements with the Southeast Asian states. The SCS claimants, such as Vietnam and Malaysia, agreed to properly manage the SCS disputes and accelerate the Code of Conduct in the SCS (COC) Consultations. In that case, the Philippines would be perceived as a "troublemaker" by other claimants.

To achieve peaceful dispute management, the Philippines requires immediate diplomatic engagement with China and regional actors through active diplomatic actions.

The Philippines needs to develop multiple security strategies that depend only on US protection through military drills to achieve comprehensive national defence goals. To achieve peaceful dispute management, the Philippines requires immediate diplomatic engagement with China and regional actors through active diplomatic actions. Expanding strategic partnerships with entities extending beyond American alliances improves nations' flexibility. A strong economic resilience achieved through well-developed programmes builds national security by minimising threat exposure.

To conclude, joint military exercises between the Philippines and the US combine effective coordination with assurance signals. However, they do not provide complete security protection against China's focused pursuit of SCS interests. Due to its geopolitical advantages, the Philippines is a vital region that both nations and countries seek to control. A comprehensive approach to protecting the Philippines' future depends entirely on combining these strategic elements into one cohesive framework.

This article was first published at Think China, Singapore, April 29, 2025, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/politics/why-us-philippines-military-exercises-wont-stop-china-south-china-sea>.

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RCAS Commentary

China-Cambodia Drills Counter Hype with Openness

Nian Peng, May.23, 2025

The China-Cambodia "Golden Dragon 2025" joint exercise kicked off on the morning of May 17. Under the theme of "peace, friendship, and cooperation," this year's joint exercise focuses on the topic of joint counter-terrorism and humanitarian relief operations.



▲ A Chinese robot combat dog, fitted with an assault rifle, takes part in an earlier exercise (The Phnom Penh Post)

The "Golden Dragon" joint military exercise began in 2016 and has been held seven times so far, becoming a regular activity for military exchanges between China and Cambodia and a symbolic representation of the friendship between the two countries. Unlike previous years, this joint exercise is the first to rely on the China-Cambodia Ream Port Joint Support and Training Center for maritime operations.

Ream Port is located in the Gulf of Thailand, about 1,000 kilometers away from the Strait of Malacca and about 1,000 kilometers from the Nansha Qundao. It holds an extremely important strategic position. For this reason, since China's participation in the construction of the Ream

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Port Joint Support and Training Center, the US has always hyped that China intends to build an overseas military base in Ream.

In April this year, the China-Cambodia Ream Port Joint Support and Training Center was officially put into use. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet clearly stated there was "nothing to hide" and welcomed all friends to hold joint exercises in the Ream base. Cambodia also invited the US Chargé d'Affaires to Cambodia, Bridget Walker, to attend the opening ceremony of the center.

This time, Cambodia also invited military attachés from the US, Russia, France, Germany and Japan, among other countries, to observe the China-Cambodia joint military exercise, fully demonstrating the openness of the exercise and dispelling the false information fabricated by the US that the Ream Naval Base was "exclusively" used by China.

In addition, this joint military exercise aims to strengthen multi-level exchanges and cooperation, enhance joint counter-terrorism combat capabilities, and strengthen actual combat response and coordination mechanisms in the field of emergency humanitarian rescue. A Cambodian military spokesperson said that the drill was not aimed at, nor did it threaten, any country.

In recent years, joint military exercises between China and ASEAN countries have become increasingly regular, and defense cooperation has gradually entered a deepening stage. Before the China-Cambodia joint military exercise, China and Singapore held the China-Singapore Exercise Cooperation 2025 joint maritime exercise at the Changi Naval Base, and China and Thailand held the Blue Strike-2025 joint naval training. Even earlier, China also held joint maritime exercises with several ASEAN countries.

This indicates that both China and ASEAN countries have the need to strengthen military exchanges. It also demonstrates the efforts of China and ASEAN to jointly maintain regional peace and stability.

In contrast, the US-Philippine "Balikatan" military exercise is a real "show of muscle." Not only are the themes and subjects of the exercises full of "offensive implications," but the number of troops participating in the exercises has also repeatedly broken records. This kind of military exercise will only intensify regional security conflicts and undermine regional peace and stability. In short, the US should not always look at the joint military exercises between China and ASEAN countries through tinted glasses.

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Unlike the US, most of the joint military exercises between China and ASEAN countries focus on low-sensitivity areas of practical maritime cooperation, such as joint counter-terrorism, joint search and rescue, and maritime rescue. These military exercises will not deteriorate the regional security situation or trigger a regional arms race. However, they can help enhance military mutual trust between China and ASEAN countries, contribute to combating non-traditional security threats in the region, and help maintain regional peace and stability. From this perspective, the more of these "peaceful" military exercises, the better.

The US should reflect on itself, stop imagining China's joint military exercises with neighboring countries as China's "military expansion," and focus more of its attention on matters that can promote regional peace, stability and development.

This article was first published at Global Times, China, May 20, 2025, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202505/1334490.shtml>.

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RCAS Commentary

A New Economic Dawn

Sujit Kumar Datta, Jun. 10, 2025

At a time when the global economy is reeling from trade wars and geopolitical tensions, regional trade alliances and economic integration offer new hope. New dynamics in worldwide trade and investment are emerging, as most recently demonstrated by the summits involving the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Gulf Cooperation Council and China. The recent decision by the United States to increase tariffs has alarmed its trading partners around the world, and the trilateral alliance is of immense importance in addressing the issue—especially for those dependent on exports.



▲ ASEAN-GCC-China Summit, Kuala Lumpur, March 27, 2025. (China-US Focus).

The strategic alliance between ASEAN, the GCC and China is necessary in such a situation to enable all three to maintain economic stability and open new investment opportunities. The primary objective is to enhance financial integration and ensure resilience to changes in global

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trade. The growing ASEAN economic region—comprising Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam—is an integral part of the global supply chain.

GCC countries are among the world's largest oil producers, and their outputs make an essential contribution to global energy security. They are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

China, the world's second-largest economy, has the world's most significant manufacturing capability and extensive domestic market. It is making striking progress in advanced technological development,

These three regions account for approximately \$25 trillion of the global economy. The existence of more than 2 billion people presents a huge market that offers enticing opportunities for promoting cross-regional investment and trade. These numbers signal the enormous economic potential of the alliance.

The unilateral decision by the United States to raise tariffs worries trading partners around the world—particularly developing countries with export-dependent economies. Tariffs put them at risk. Given this situation, a new strategic alliance is necessary for ASEAN, the GCC and China to protect their economic stability and create new investment opportunities. The goal of the alliance is mainly to boost economic integration and resilience in an environment of volatile global trade.

The ASEAN region is a rapidly developing economy that represents an important, integral part of global supply chains. The GCC is the world's largest exporter of oil, and its role in global energy security is undisputed. China, the world's second-largest economy, is situated at the center of international trade, boasting huge production capacity, technological advancements and a vast domestic market. The combined market of more than 2 billion people is itself a source of enormous opportunity for encouraging cross-regional investment and trade.

Given all these perspectives, the economic strength of this alliance is one of the largest consumer markets in the world, with immense consumer power. It is impossible to ignore such a large population, which generates massive demand for goods and technological services in all sectors. This will trigger a rise in domestic production in the cooperating countries, generate jobs and improve living standards.

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Agricultural products, mineral resources and emerging manufacturing industries are some of the diversified resources of ASEAN. China, an industrialized country, needs oil and gas, which the GCC countries can accommodate. China, on the other hand, has advanced technology and is developing more. It has extensive infrastructure and extraordinary production capacity. When used properly, all these diverse capabilities and resources can form a strong, self-reliant and robust supply chain with significantly reduced reliance on the vagaries of global volatility. In the GCC, for example, more than a third of China's total crude oil imports are covered, which is crucial for the smooth turning of China's industrial wheels.

The economic power of the three-way alliance can be analyzed from different perspectives:

- New avenues for intra-regional investment: The alliance will provide the basis for cross-regional investment opportunities. The Belt and Road Initiative, which is already in place, aims to connect regions in Asia, Africa and Europe through infrastructure investment. The alliance will enhance Chinese investment in ASEAN and GCC countries alike, and facilitate infrastructure development, industrialization and technology transfers. Capital from ASEAN and China could also fund new business undertakings in GCC countries, which would be uplifting to the economies of both regions.
- Trade diversification and risk reduction: By attempting to mitigate the risks of potential U.S. tariffs, the alliance will enable ASEAN and GCC countries to diversify their trade. Reducing reliance on a single market and connecting to multiple robust markets helps mitigate the risk of sudden changes in global trade policies. So it will help more countries feel more confident that the multilateral trading system is effective.
- Strategic alliance will have geopolitical influence: This alliance holds immense geopolitical importance beyond simply being a powerful economic bloc. In its rivalry with the United States, China is working hard to show itself to be a reliable ally of ASEAN. Meanwhile, even though GCC countries have always maintained close relations with the United States, they are also equally eager to build ties with China, a hallmark of their trade-centric policies. ASEAN, the GCC and China can all employ their unique characteristics to create a more connected, resilient and prosperous future. All of this will strengthen their combined geopolitical and economic might.

China aims to strengthen economic ties with the GCC region, and ASEAN is its top trading partner. Meanwhile, at a time when China is embroiled in a growing so-called trade rivalry with the United States, it is marketing itself as ASEAN's trustworthy ally. But trade is just one of the elements. We can also discuss the situation in terms of infrastructure development, technological cooperation and people-to-people exchanges.

In addition, the nations within ASEAN have a massive impact on China's capital and technological posture. Chinese investment aims to fill infrastructure gaps, accelerate industrialization processes and revitalize local economies. On the other side, GCC nations allow China to fulfill its massive energy needs, ensuring a stable export market for the economies of the Gulf nations.

There are traditionally very close ties between GCC countries and the United States. The United States remains a vital partner in military cooperation, energy security and political support. While GCC countries desire to improve their relationship with China. This is where they don't want to overuse a single superpower. Rather, they want to have a window to all the other big powers in the world that can take care of their interests.

Economic interests have coalesced between GCC nations and China since the Trump administration's recent "charm offensive" in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Moreover, GCC countries have also indicated that they assign great importance to economic opportunities and striving for a brighter future in global trade. Geopolitically, the new alliance will help cement their position.

This simultaneous challenge and opportunity has incredible potential. Regarding investment and trade, specific issues may arise due to differences in political systems, legal frameworks and cultural backgrounds across various countries. For instance, trade imbalances and their environmental impact should also be taken seriously. It's not easy, of course, but a good plan needs to be in place with regular chats to get through the bumps.

The principles on which the alliance can move forward are anchored in transparency, mutual trust and shared interests. A brighter future is possible through the ordinary dividends of investment in areas such as infrastructure development, digitalization and the green economy.

From an economic and geopolitical perspective for China, the GCC and ASEAN, alignment is an essential event of the 21st century. The union's large market, strategic position and significant

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economic base promise a new way of stabilizing global trade, as tariffs were about to be announced by the United States. The new grouping's activities and its global impact in the days to come are likely to be closely watched, and many expect it to shape the future direction of world trade.

This article was first published at China-US Focus, Hong Kong, June.6, 2025, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/finance-economy/a-new-economic-dawn>.

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RCAS Commentary

U.S. Shapes New Strategy to Counter China's Ascent

Sujit Kumar Datta, Jul.12, 2025

There is no doubt that the shifting relationship between the United States and China ranks among the most significant geopolitical issues of the 21st century. The rapid upward rise of the Chinese economy and military power over the last several decades has unequivocally transformed the global power structure, directly challenging the long-time dominance of the United States in the post-Cold War era. Washington, in turn, is carefully developing a new, multisided approach aimed to tactfully counter the expanding influence of Beijing.



▲(Illustration: Lazaro Gamio/Axios)

The adjustment of strategies—characterized by economic decoupling, high-tech restrictions and military posturing in the Indo-Pacific region—will transform the bilateral relationship and the shape of global security itself. Changes that began during Donald Trump's first term, including the implementation of tariffs, the emergence of supply chain resiliency and the launch of Indo-Pacific defense programs, are not about to evaporate. They constitute the foundation of a bipartisan consensus in Washington regarding China.

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Nevertheless, more strategic adjustments are taking place, pointing to a more delicate and precision-oriented strategy. These consist of the planned, selective decoupling of essential sectors, a revised method of dealing with sophisticated partnerships to perpetuate multilateral alliances, the extended use of soft power to resist China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative and a more aggressive policy in dealing with Taiwan.

Such actions are not merely about deterrence. Instead, they reflect an effort to control the rising influence of China within a finite system and to maintain the current rules-based international order, in which the United States has played a leading role.

Economic decoupling and technological limitations are the two key factors driving the relationship between the United States and China. The primary objective of Washington is to limit China's technological progress and reduce the threat to national security posed by giant Chinese enterprises. Companies such as Huawei and TikTok have been subjected to stringent regulations as the United States criticizes the threats to data security and the potential impact on national security. More seriously, the U.S. is enforcing export controls and investment reviews to curtail China's ability to acquire advanced technologies in key areas, such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence and quantum computing.

The real reason behind all this is to ensure that China does not utilize such high-tech capabilities to modernize its military or push its surveillance capabilities into every area of society and life, as technological superiority has now become one of the major factors in future military dominance and global domination.

Economically, the U.S. has focused on diversifying supply chains. It wants to alleviate its overdependence, and that of its allies, on China for essential products—a vulnerability that the COVID-19 pandemic brought into high relief. Such ideas as friendshoring and nearshoring are being promoted, with various manufacturing and sourcing activities shifting toward countries that are similar or geographically more accommodating.

The tariff war initiated by the Trump administration is ongoing and continues to put pressure on both economies. It is not an economic and technological separation in the sense of a total breaking of ties, which would be useless and harmful to both sides. Instead, it is a tactical move to uncover and address weak links, to undermine what the U.S. considers to be unjust trade

practices and ultimately to demonstrate the superiority of market-based systems over state-controlled capitalism in China.

Another critical pillar of the new U.S. strategy includes military and geopolitical dimensions. The Indo-Pacific region is considered to be robustly militarized in direct reaction to China's active behavior and modernization of its armed forces. The vast territorial claims by China in the South China Sea, its growing military presence in the Taiwan Strait and its activities in the East China Sea have set alarm bells ringing in the region and in Washington.

The US is strengthening its military presence, conducting regular joint training exercises with partners in the area and prioritizing freedom of navigation operations in specific waters. The objective is to prevent Chinese aggression, ensure regional stability and comply with international maritime law.

This plan entails a considerable overhaul in terms of alliance management. The U.S. is not only consolidating its traditional bilateral alliances with important partners such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and the Philippines but also establishing new multilateral coalitions. The formation of groups such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), comprising the United States, India, Japan and Australia, and the AUKUS security pact with Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, aims to establish a networked security architecture. These coalitions aim to counter China's emerging strength, promote regional security burden sharing and foster the development of joint deterrence. Even for NATO, which is predominantly an Atlantic institution, a new kind of economic powerhouse is beginning to emerge as a challenge, as is a more unified and comprehensive method of evaluating global security.

Moreover, the United States is becoming increasingly aggressive with regard to Taiwan. Although formally adhering to the "one China" policy, which is based on a tacit recognition of Beijing's claims without taking sides, Washington is deciding to provide the island with significantly more arms to defend itself in case of an attack by the mainland. It is supplemented with a greater sense of diplomatic strength although this is unofficial. It is a show of the island's intent to meet any aggression. The concept of "strategic ambiguity" is also in play, as the U.S. is increasingly interested in strengthening Taiwan's self-defense capabilities and preventing a forcible takeover, given the enormous military and economic consequences of a war.

In addition to its brutal power and economic dominance, the new U.S. strategy places great emphasis on soft power and the provision of alternatives to China's international initiatives. The Belt and Road Initiative, a grandiose global infrastructure and investment project developed by China, has expanded Beijing's economic and geopolitical influence in Asia, Africa, Europe and perhaps Latin America.

In response, the U.S. is bolstering its campaigns of soft power, advocating democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law, while promoting attractive and sustainable options in global development. It engages in more public diplomacy, cultural exchanges, educational programs and the empowerment of organizations in civil society. It is working to encourage hearts and minds to join the Global South, primarily by providing the advantages of open societies and transparent governance.

At the same time, the U.S. and allies are busy creating alternative models of development and financing in place of the BRI. Initiatives such as the Build Back Better World (B3W) and its successor, the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, aim to provide developing countries with an alternative.

Where U.S.-China relations are headed is anyone's guess, with several possible scenarios that portray a long-term strategic competition, including a military standoff, intense technological rivalry and even proxy war—though not an all-out hot war, as was the case in the Cold War era. Relations will also be characterized by ideological polarization, economic and security blocs, a renewed arms race and international power jostling.

Although direct military conflict between the two nuclear powers will be cordoned off by the devastating effects of mutually assured destruction, the competition will insinuate itself into just about every aspect of international affairs. Regional military conflict is a more dangerous situation in which confrontation over contentious issues such as Taiwan, the South China Sea or cyberspace can escalate into full-scale wars. The cause of such a conflict may be a miscalculation, an accidental escalation or domestic pressure on one or both sides. The effects would be disastrous, not only affecting the involved parties but also the global economy, its supply chains and intercontinental stability. A war could potentially force the involvement of other regional and international forces. The most preferred, yet also the most challenging, approach is managed competition.

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According to the realist approach to international relations, competition is a traditional trend that persists in an anarchic international system. Because of self-interest and the desire for power and security, states will naturally find themselves in a state of rivalry. Thus, realism maintains that competition will always prevail in U.S.-China relations over cooperation.

In the international system, one of the basic features is power struggle. Realism, however, does not always translate to inevitable war. The two countries, the United States and China, are not natural rivals. What remains, then, is that the two factions competing for power must negotiate their way out of the struggle without conflict degenerating into a raging conflagration. This requires prudent leadership across the Pacific—clear communication, the creation of effective crisis management measures and a practical understanding of the fundamental interests of each party and their respective red lines.

Global stability depends on their ability to navigate this multilateral competitive environment successfully and avoid triggering a global disaster due to the effects of national interests. The international community is a spectator, hoping that wisdom and blueprint thinking will prevail over the failures of intrinsic impulses and fluctuations in the balance of power..

*This article was first published at China-US Focus, Hong Kong, July.9, 2025,
<https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/us-shapes-new-strategy-to-counter-chinas-ascent>.*

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RCAS Commentary

Alaska Summit: Putin's Gambit, Trump's Retreat

Sujit Kumar Datta, Aug. 27, 2025

The Trump-Putin summit held recently in Anchorage, Alaska, had the potential to open a pivotal phase in global relations. There was hope all over the world. Diplomats, political analysts, journalists and ordinary people crossed their fingers, hoping that a meeting of the U.S. and Russian presidents would mark a turning point in the war in Ukraine.



▲ U.S. President Trump and Russian President Putin sat down with senior advisers from each country at a highly anticipated summit in Alaska, August 15, 2025. (China US Focus)

The collapse of European security, transatlantic solidarity and Western leadership depended on the success of this high-stakes meeting. However, the summit in real life did not provide much in the way of solutions. After almost three hours of talks, there was no cease-fire declaration, no roadmap to a peace treaty, no specific action plan.

Nevertheless, the symbolic meaning and strategic messages have significantly impacted the world's politics and reshaped not only Ukraine's future but also the security in Europe, the cohesion of NATO countries and the global strategic balance. In diplomacy were a game, then

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without a doubt Vladimir Putin scored the winning goal in Anchorage, while Donald Trump went home empty-handed.

Always the showman, claiming to be the world's greatest deal-maker, Trump had vowed on the campaign trail to end the Ukraine war within the first 24 hours after taking office. Eight months after assuming the presidency of the United States, the battle is still on. He is said to have summoned Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the White House to scold him, claiming that Zelenskyy held no winning cards in the game with Russia. When Trump later failed to put a stop to aggressive airstrikes by Moscow, his attention was on Putin, whom he labeled as not worth his sweet words.

Irritated, he threatened extreme action against Russia unless—within a period of 10 or 12 days, a cease-fire was accepted. Shockingly, he did not insist on additional sanctions or tariffs, and ended up at the Alaska summit with Putin and no conditions.

Trump had given assurances that an agreement would not be made without the presence of the Ukrainians and even suggested the possibility of a three-way meeting that included Zelenskyy. That, however, didn't materialize, probably because Putin had no interest in inviting his opponent.

Some who know Putin contend that he went to the Alaska summit with no intention of negotiating a cease-fire. At this stage, as Russian troops are fighting in Ukraine, Moscow is proudly celebrating victory. Thus, a cease-fire at that point was not possible. The fundamental aim behind Putin's attendance was to make a grand comeback onto the world stage. He had been invited by the very president of the United States of America who had given him a red-carpet welcome on American soil. So simply meeting Trump was a titanic diplomatic win. An equally important purpose was to buy time to prevent the imposition of additional tariffs or other sanctions by the Trump administration.

Another significant part of Putin's victory was the opportunity restate his demands regarding the war's termination. He was very clear that the dilemma of the war ought to be resolved so that its deeper origins could be addressed. Among the demands were Ukraine's demilitarization, assurances that it will not join NATO and new elections. It is also believed that he told Trump

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that the international community had already accepted Ukraine's eastern territories as being under Moscow's control and part of Russia.

The list of demands, which was powerfully showcased on a global stage, significantly enhanced Putin's strategic advantage and underscored his undeniable progress toward his goals.

Amid the aforementioned factors, the impact of the "America first" policy pursued by Trump—particularly the aggressive application of tariffs—has been significant, albeit unintentional, as it has compelled countries to diversify their partnerships and reassess their economic relations. The recent U.S. tariff imposed on Indian goods—now totaling 50 percent—as punishment for India's purchases of Russian oil is a good example of the consequences of taking sides. Not only has this introduced a sense of urgency in the short term for Indian exporters, who now face a huge competitive handicap, but it also strained a key strategic alliance that the U.S. had carefully nurtured in the face of emerging Chinese influence.

The reaction of India has been one of principled defiance and practical readjustment. Although both the United States and European Union have criticized India for its continued use of Russian oil, New Delhi has raised the strong argument that its oil business has been effective in stabilizing global energy markets. It noted the level of hypocrisy by the West, which continues to trade with Russia—even highly valued imports to U.S. nuclear plants that contain uranium and palladium.

India has become more assertive in its foreign policy, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently commented, emphasizing that India would place the utmost importance on its national interests and economic security. India, as one of the world's fast-growing economies, is sending strong signals that it will not bow to external pressure and instead will work toward achieving energy security and economic stability.

Pressure from Washington has driven India to pivot toward closer economic and diplomatic links with both China and Russia. Even though some border issues have persisted and its most recent military confrontation with China was not long ago, India is showing a more practical readiness to de-escalate the situation and seek mutual gain. Recent warming with Beijing, such as renewing pilgrim traffic to Mount Kailash and Mansarovar, issuing tourist visas to Chinese

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citizens and talks on easing investment restrictions all point to the realization in New Delhi that it needs China to protect its global manufacturing and supply chains.

It has been reported that Indian industries, primarily in the electronics sector, have incurred substantial losses as a result of prior restrictions, prompting a drastic reconsideration of whether a complete decoupling of the Chinese economy can be achieved. This conditional accommodation of China can be described as a strategic move, as India is geopolitically trying to strike a balance while anchoring its economic growth.

At the same time, India has a long-standing and robust strategic and economic relationship with Russia. Russia remains an essential source of military hardware, and its cheap oil has assumed importance in terms of energy security for India. The never-ending travel of Indian leaders to Russia seems to confirm the strength of the bilateral relationship. The recent visit of India's national security adviser to Moscow further seals this unbroken trend.

A multi-alignment approach will enable India to pursue strategic autonomy and not become entirely tied to any single actor, thereby allowing it to navigate the complex landscape of great power politics without a single, strong anchor.

The merging of the Trump administration's self-proclaimed shift in priorities, such as putting America first, has by default lost friends in the process and weakened the teeth of multinational organizations. Coupled with the aggressive, pragmatic reinforcement of relationships between India, China and Russia, it heralds a dramatic change in the world balance of powers. The U.S., which was the undeniable architect and remains a guarantor of the liberal international order, is increasingly regarded as an erratic ally, one that prioritizes unilateral benefits over collective stability. This perception has compelled other key powers to consider alternative structures and systems.

A more active collaboration of India, China and Russia, frequently relayed through initiatives such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, represents a concerted effort to create a more multipolar international sphere. Details of talks in these blocs regarding de-dollarization and the establishment of alternative payment mechanisms pose a direct threat to decades of U.S. dollar and Western financial dominance. As these three giants of the economic

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and military world strengthen their cooperation in the realms of trade, energy and defense, their total impact on global affairs will increase significantly.

China, in particular, is likely to emerge as the dominant power in this evolving global landscape. Beijing is already transforming the global economic landscape with its unrivaled manufacturing capabilities, ambitious Belt and Road Initiative and increasing technological prowess. Should India, a fast-growing player in the worldwide economy, and Russia, a vital energy and military actor, continue to align their interests with those of China, the center of the global economy will likely shift in an easterly direction. This would represent a weakening of America's economic hegemony, which does not mean irrelevance but does mean the termination of the unipolar moment.

The legacy of Donald Trump may endure, not because he made America first but because he contributed to a new global order through the law of unintended consequences. His "America first" policy has indirectly paved the way for China's rise and is leading to a truly multipolar world order, since it has taken down many of the established rules of trade and alienated strategic partners. "America first" has set in motion a major power shift in which China will become the global captain over the next 10 to 20 years.

This article was first published at China-US Focus, Hong Kong, August.26, 2025, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/alaska-summit-putins-gambit-trumps-retreat>.

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RCAS Commentary

Bangladesh's Blue Economy Ambitions:

Geopolitical Hurdles and Opportunities

Sujit Kumar Datta, Sep. 6, 2025

Bangladesh, as a nation, was formed out of a riverine delta surrounded by the Bay of Bengal, and over the years, the country has continued to show great interest in its oceanic domain. Bangladesh has given a central position to the concept of Blue Economy in its national development toolbox, where the sea is viewed as a means of sustainable economic growth, improved livelihoods, and the preservation of ocean ecosystems. The total length of the coastline is over 710 kilometers, and the total size of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is 118,813 square kilometers, which Bangladesh has gained after maritime disputes between Bangladesh, Myanmar, and India were resolved.



▲ Times of Bangladesh.

As such, Bangladesh can now leverage a substantial maritime space with considerable potential for exploration. However, the process of bringing such dreams into reality is not purely an economic one, as it is closely related to complex geopolitical problems, regional disputes, and

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the strategic interests of the two superpowers. In the case of Bangladesh, the crucial issue is to navigate this web with caution while safeguarding its national interests.

The Blue Economy has the potential to be more than just significant in the case of Bangladesh; it represents a revolutionary change. It is in its immense possibilities of resource extraction. The bay has abundant fishing resources, and when these resources are exploited sustainably, it will play a crucial role in improving Bangladesh's food security, not to mention the export earnings it is capable of generating. In addition to the fisheries, it is believed that there are significant deposits of oil, natural gas, and minerals distributed along the seabed and the continental shelf. These non-living resources have the potential to be utilized effectively and efficiently to generate energy in Bangladesh, which may lead to the replacement of energy-importing countries and establish a sustainable industrial base.

Another opportunity brought about by the Blue Economy is economic diversification, where the paradigm shifts to garments and remittances as the backbone of this economy. There are possibilities for new businesses, such as shipbuilding, marine biotechnology, aquaculture, and coastal tourism, which will generate millions of job opportunities and provide resilience and diversification to the country's economy. However, it is also imperative to keep in mind that all these opportunities need to be embraced by practicing sustainable activities, thereby ensuring the health and sustainability of the oceans.

Another strategic location is the head of the Bay of Bengal, which is the location of Bangladesh, making the country a key point in trade and maritime connections. The construction of Matarbari and Payra deep-sea ports, which are in continuous development, together with the development of Chittagong port, is projected to introduce Bangladesh as a regional-level transshipment hub. The enhanced port facility would not only be in a position to facilitate greater trade with landlocked neighbours like Nepal and Bhutan, but it would also offer an opportunity for products to flow in and out of the northeastern states of India. In addition to increasing national revenues through the services and logistics provided in the ports, the developments place Bangladesh at a deeper level in the regional and global supply chain, thereby making it a stronger geopolitical entity.

The other potential, which has yet to be fully utilized, is economic activity, which could receive a boost through foreign investment and local employment, especially in coastal and marine-based tourism. This industry is located in areas with the cleanest beaches and mangrove forests, boasting high biodiversity.

However, on the way to cashing in on this blue promise lie potent geopolitical impediments. It is not a stretch of water in the Bay of Bengal, but rather a sphere of intense strategic competition and overlapping interests. Bangladesh has had to navigate intricate relations with its neighbours, India and Myanmar, throughout its history. Despite the settlement of the controversies surrounding the maritime rivalries amicably, sensitivities and rivalry persist in terms of competition for resource potentials.

Both India and Myanmar have interests in the blue economy, and Bangladesh should maintain a careful balance, as pursuing the same may give rise to new tensions and conflicts. The governance of common fish stocks, delimitation of prospective oil and gas blocks in the vicinity of the tri-junction area, and the elimination of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing all require ongoing discussion and joint planning. In addition to local politics, the great power rivalry between China and the United States has turned the Bay of Bengal into a zone of interest, with the entry of Japanese forces in the region.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has witnessed significant Chinese investments in infrastructure in Bangladesh, including the development of ports, as illustrated by the deep-sea port at Payra and facilities in Chittagong. Although these investments are essential in terms of Bangladesh's developmental needs, they also raise concerns among certain foreign observers regarding the potential debt trap and the dual use of this infrastructure for both civilian and military purposes. Bangladesh should carefully screen such investments and make them only to the extent that they serve the long-term interests of the nation, without impairing national sovereignty or inducing excessive economic and strategic reliance.

In the meantime, speaking of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the United States emphasizes the importance of the free and open Indo-Pacific, conventionally regarded as a bulwark against Chinese expansion. The US interests in the region include expanding security relations, ensuring

democratic rule, and promoting regional economic cooperation. Sharing infrastructure, Japan is another important development partner that is particularly active in the Matarbari deep-sea port in Bangladesh and tends to emphasize the need for quality infrastructure and transparency. Bangladesh is currently in an uneven balancing act, where it is forced to accept investment and technological assistance from the central power without becoming a literal pawn in their geopolitical feuds. A non-aligned and non-partisan attitude toward foreign countries, a greater focus on economic relations with other countries rather than security ones, and diversifying development partners are key steps that Bangladesh needs to take to maintain its strategic autonomy and reap maximum benefits.

In addition, any security-related issues at the maritime sector level are major setbacks. The problem of piracy is of minor scale, but still concerns piracy. Of more concern are the problems of illegal fishing by foreigners, drug trafficking, and human smuggling, which weaken the sovereignty of Bangladesh and its economic interests.

To protect its maritime interests and maritime territories, as well as the application of its legal rules and regulations to its EEZ, Bangladesh needs an efficient and modern maritime security force of the navy and the coast guard with appropriate equipment. It typically involves international collaboration, including the exchange of intelligence and joint patrols. This collaboration should be managed tactfully to maintain Bangladesh's national security without compromising the country's sovereignty.

Finally, there is the factor of the environment. The Bay of Bengal is also vulnerable to climate change-related impacts, including rising sea levels, intensified cyclone activity, and ocean acidification. Attaining an optimal balance between the exploitation of marine resources and the necessity to sustain them and to protect the environment, and the consistency with international laws, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), is an inseparable component of the blue economy, and one that could propel sustainability in Bangladesh. The right approach is to have an all-inclusive and wide-ranging strategy that can break down such barriers and render them as opportunities based on Bangladesh's national interests. First of all, it is a matter of strategic diplomacy. Bangladesh needs to continue actively participating in bilateral and multilateral events, promoting maritime collaboration with India and Myanmar on

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marine matters of mutual interest, such as resource management, maritime security, and other related issues.

At the same time, it must make itself heard by the major powers in the world on its terms, with a special focus on economic cooperation and development assistance to the world, and a strong resistance to any calls for security alignment with other powers at the expense of its strategic autonomy. Second, there should be substantial capacity building. It involves the promotion of marine scientific research, the adoption of more advanced technologies for exploring and monitoring resources, and the upgradation of its maritime security forces.

It will also be important in ensuring that new marine industries have a skilled workforce that is developed through education and vocational training. Third, all Blue Economy activities should be sustainable. It implies that the adoption of sound regulatory regimes in fisheries, oil and gas exploration, and seabed mining, as well as the exploitation of resources, will have no adverse environmental impacts.

A sustainable future for the Bay of Bengal ecosystem can be ensured by adhering to international environmental standards and investing in ocean conservation activities. Finally, regional cooperation, including BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) and IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association), should be promoted to promote the emergence of the Bay of Bengal as a zone of peace and prosperity where there is more convergence of interests than the existence of competitive impulses. At a geographical and strategic point of interest, a pragmatic non-aligned foreign policy will enable Bangladesh to attract a variety of investments, expand its connectivity, and secure its future at sea.

Concisely, the prospective Blue Economy strategy in Bangladesh can yield unprecedented levels of utility in both economic and strategic dimensions for this nation. Tapping this potential, however, can be a challenging endeavor due to the sophisticated way of thinking about the intricate currents of geopolitics that swirl around in the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh will be able to tackle the geopolitical challenges, turn its maritime space into a driver that it has long aspired to become, and ensure a brighter future for its people through its national interests, prudent diplomacy, capacity building, and sustainable activities.

This article was first published at Times of Bangladesh, Bangladesh, September.2, 2025, <https://tob.news/bangladeshs-blue-economy-ambitions-geopolitical-hurdles-and-opportunities/>.

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RCAS Commentary

Back to the Future

Sujit Kumar Datta, Sep. 27, 2025

This year is the 80th anniversary of the Chinese victory in its War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, which was an important milepost in global history, along with the victory of the Allies in the worldwide anti-fascist war. Both the Chinese and American people were fighting together in the smoke and debris of the 1940s, pushing back fascism. Now, eight decades on, with geopolitical tension, the spirit of fraternity supplanted by suspicion, we are left to wonder how wartime allies became today's rivals.



▲ China showcased its developing military might at a parade marking the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II on Sept 3, 2025. The parade, which lasted about 90 minutes, exhibited missiles, fighter jets and other military hardware, some of it displayed publicly for the first time. (Photo: Xinhua / Liu Xu).

Despite the upsurge in tariffs, decoupling in trade, strategic encirclement and a freeze in diplomatic ties, there remains one key fact: The relationship between China and the United States is currently one of the most important bilateral relations in the 21st century. The way the

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two parties investigate and discover their shared history allows for a stabilizing effect or explains why the problem can lead to a prolonged confrontation.

China and the United States developed a strong relationship on battlefields and airfields during World War II, which included American pilots known as the Flying Tigers. These pilots participated in life-threatening missions while working in areas where Japanese fighter aircraft were required to provide air cover.

Examples of weapons Washington has employed lately include trade wars with tariffs and wide technology bans on Chinese firms like Huawei and SMIC, as well as export controls to deter China's efforts to create semiconductors. In the military domain, the U.S. has been steadily growing its presence in the Indo-Pacific by establishing new bases and drills under the AUKUS pacts. From the South China Sea to the Taiwan Strait, American warships sail with ever-increasing frequency, moves that Beijing sees not as stabilizing but provocative and dangerous.

China, for its part, has responded with rising assertiveness. It sees Washington's efforts to contain its legitimate growth and deny it a valid role on the world stage. In speeches, white papers and diplomatic communiques, Beijing has emphasized the importance of mutual respect, sovereignty and non-interference. Eighty years ago, the world was at war, a war in which more than 70 million lives were lost. A point of convergence existed between China and the United States, despite their essential differences in culture and politics, as well as their shared concerns over aggression and the need for peace.

Such a collaborative spirit in the face of a common enemy is needed now more than ever. The modern-day challenges are not easy: climate change, pandemics, terrorism, the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Chinese and American soldiers once dined with one another, fought alongside one another and at times died with one another. Their epic struggle still lives in the memories of many Chinese families who were especially touched by the bombings of Chongqing or the cruel actions of the Japanese in Yunnan province.

China has never forgotten. The image of Sino-American cooperation during wartime continues to have symbolic power in museums, textbooks and national commemorations. It was an era in which huge forces stuck together against a familiar and well-known enemy, one in which ideology was a minor thing compared with a shared cause, and in which the notion of mutual trust was a daily reality, not an idealistic dream.

The end of World War II should have marked the beginning of a new era of cooperation. However, the world that emerged from the burnt remains of war was soon divided again, not by borders but by ideological lines. The either/or logic of capitalism and communism promoted by the Cold War pitted China and the United States against each other in a divide that would take decades to heal.

Although Chinese civil war came to an end with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Washington chose to accept the Republic of China as the legitimate government, and foreign relations were suspended. Worse, U.S. policy early in the Cold War was more focused on containment and less on comprehensive dialogue.

However, what occurred in the shadow of the Tokyo tribunals was the worst — protecting the lives of Japanese war criminals, particularly those involved in Unit 731, the chemical and biological weapons operation. Responsible for one of the most horrific instances of human experimentation and torture in history, this secret division of the Imperial Japanese Army conducted live vivisections and chemical and biological tests on Chinese civilians and prisoners of war. Rather than seeking justice, American intelligence services granted immunity for members of Unit 731 in exchange for their experimental data.

Such a betrayal to gain an advantage in biological warfare against the Soviet Union exacted a heavy price on the Chinese psyche. It was not perceived as a moral failure only but as an example of the kind of realpolitik Washington was ready to adopt, despite its cost in terms of truth and justice.

Despite this setback, the thaw in the 1970s was dramatic. One of the twists was the visit of U.S. President Richard Nixon to Beijing in 1972. The practice of strategic necessity — i.e., the Sino-Soviet division — led China to re-link with the United States. As early as 1979, diplomatic

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relations were fully normalized. China's reform and opening-up policy, initiated by Deng Xiaoping, was supported by the U.S. and helped China integrate into the global economy.

Chinese scientists, engineers and policymakers began to seek educations at American universities. American businesses arrived in China with technological advancements, financial expertise and administrative experience. The accession of China to the World Trade Organization in 2001 was packaged as a win-win event — a rising China would become a responsible stakeholder in an American-led liberal order, and American corporations would have a massive new market.

During this stage, trust built during the war was restored to a degree. However, at the bottom of it all, strategic distrust remained. Beijing considered the military relations Washington established with Taiwan, as well as alliances with countries in the Asia-Pacific region, as a threat. Meanwhile, U.S. policymakers became increasingly concerned about the rapid emergence of China as a significant force in the world. The story of convergence became a struggle for power.

Alliances formed intuitively, which is why they persist. But Chinese-American cooperation during wartime was the result of human contact, not high-level arrangements. Modern diplomacy will need to revive that spirit. Second, strategic trust must be earned; it cannot be demanded. The postwar shielding of Japanese war criminals may have been in America's interest during the Cold War, but it was an enormous blow to moral credibility. Similarly, today's moves involving technology bans and military encirclements cannot be separated from the historical reverberations. Third, the world is too interconnected now to think in zero-sum terms. Competition, if channelled constructively, can fuel innovation and progress, but if it's weaponized, it will only lead to resentment, division and ultimately, conflict.

In tense times, it's tempting to retreat into grievance and suspicion. The ghosts of the past, including betrayal, occupation and war, loom large. But nations, like individuals, are not defined only by what happened to them but by how they decide to respond. China and the United States have both been through extraordinary transformations since 1945. They are no longer wartime allies or Cold War adversaries but grown-up powers with responsibility to the world. They must

know that the world cannot afford another great power clash, not in an age of nuclear weapons and planetary crises.

A new model of coexistence is not only desirable, it is critical. This is not to ignore differences or pretend that problems do not exist. It simply means recognizing these things honestly, dealing with them responsibly and remembering that peace is always more difficult and more precious than war.

As China marks the 80th anniversary of its victory, it does not do so with triumphalism but with solemn remembrance. The sacrifices of millions, the heroism of Chinese and American fighters and the indomitable hope for peace are not ghosts of the past but stars pointing the way to the future. The question now is whether we will respect past sacrifices with wisdom or waste them in a fog of rivalry. Let history not be a chain that binds us to conflict but a bridge that leads to understanding. For the sake of the Chinese and American people — and indeed for all humanity—it is time to rediscover what we once knew: that even in the darkest hour, unity is possible, and peace is worth fighting for.

This article was first published at China US Focus, Hong Kong, September.19, 2025, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/back-to-the-future-25880>.

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RCAS Commentary

Arab-Islamic Summit: A Call for Unity against Aggression

Sujit Kumar Datta, Sep. 27, 2025

Recently, Doha saw the meeting of an Arab and Islamic Presidential conference, called to talk about the rising and impudent aggression of the Israeli regime. The expectations of this meeting were enormous against a backdrop from a highly complex crisis in the region. However, towards the end, when the last communiques were given, there was a kind of anticlimax in the air. The summit, though a symbolic and diplomatic achievement, ended up in what can best be termed as lukewarm condemnations and a show of solidarity. It was the moment when the long-standing and vexing disconnect between the strong rhetoric and the political determination to act decisively in a particular way was highlighted. Unless properly addressed, the Arab and Islamic world will remain in a constant state of vulnerability.



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What prompted this important meeting was an open display of aggression; the aerial attack of the Israeli regime on Qatar, the same nation that facilitated the shaky ceasefire between the regime and the Hamas resistance movement. It was not an assault on an unknown enemy in a far-off land; it was a point-blank assault on a state which was frantically working to de-escalate a war and save lives. The daring nature of the operation was thunderous, particularly to the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, who termed it cowardly and treacherous. How could he receive delegations of the Israeli regime, and at the same time receive their aerial attacks on his country, resounded his torturous question: how could it be otherwise said-how could he not feel betrayal and exasperation at the whole position?

The declarations of the key actors in the lead were solid and unambiguous, by any measure. The Secretary General of the Arab League, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, issued a moral statement which was not diplomatic at all, and he said that doing nothing in response to a crime is a crime in itself. His statement was a straightforward, face-to-face challenge to the lack of action that has plagued regional responses to aggression. The President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has been a vocal critic of the Israeli government without a second thought, took it a notch even higher as he labelled it as one that had a terrorist mentality. It was not just political posturing, but a clear and powerful statement of state policy that has repeatedly demonstrated disregard for international law and now even basic decency as a human being.

Despite the presence of such a powerful and cohesive rhetoric, the summit was unable to turn its denunciations into a concrete and practical approach. The most conspicuous and discernible exclusion from the discussion was the arms race between the mass economic strength of Islamic countries. It stems from deep frustrations and is a hallmark of extraordinary strategic incompetence. The economic strength of the Islamic nations, and especially the Gulf nations, can dominate Israel and its allies. It can exert a strong influence on financial markets, consume a tremendous amount of energy, or control major trading routes, and it can exert some degree of control that should not be overlooked. The potent deterrence would consist of the economic reaction, the oil embargo, some sanctions or the reconsideration of trade relations. It is the leverage that has not been made, even when it comes to such violent action against a member country that does not exactly ring a bell.

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The existing situation of doing nothing presents a stark contrast to one of the most significant events of recent times, the oil embargo of 1973. After having reacted to the aggressiveness of Israel in the Yom Kippur war, the Arab countries were willing to transform their economic resources into military resources, halting the export of oil to the United States and to other nations that aid Israel. The world experienced the effects of this move in the global economy, and they achieved this as a reflection of their immense strategic abilities. It was an effective appeal: supporting aggression against Arab nations would be a real and cost-effective price. The political audacity which exists today has been replaced by a bashful indecision, by a fear of offending old friendships and commercial clubs, even where these commercial clubs are with nations which facilitate aggression on their part.

The Gulf, Arab, and Islamic summits are not only a diplomatic move but also a breakthrough in regional action. The causes of the difficulties in the 21st century, including external aggression, territorial issues, economic instability, and climate change, are too complex and too vast to be addressed by any given state. The summits reiterate a fundamental truth: nothing can prevent aggressive policies and protect the sovereignty of countries except the genuine unity of nations. Their predecessors represent a more long-term strategic approach, characterised by the perspective that Arab and Islamic security are closely interconnected, without reference to national boundaries or individual issues. With such a vision, a collective security system that is effective and proactive is required to replace traditional transactional politics.

The start of the improved defence cooperation pact between the United States and Qatar was made at the periphery of the summit as one of the most noticeable tendencies. Marco Rubio, the US Secretary of State, who had left Tel Aviv for Doha, insisted that the two countries were on the verge of closing the deal, which is aimed at persuading Doha following the Israeli attacks. The vagueness and contradictions of regional unions are also represented by this move, which is a move towards more security. It sets a premonition on the level of knowledge that the US possessed of the Israeli strike and what kind of relationships can be characterised as impudent attacks on such an important ally. Such a deal would be a bitter yet necessary trade-off to Qatar, which has always taken pride in its strategic independence and its situation as a mediator of the region. It is an unconscious recognition that even a country with enormous economic potential

and the ability to find partners in the global arena still needs the support of a world superpower to be sure that nobody will attack it.

Finally, the Doha summit was a powerful manifestation of the overall exasperation and moral indignation in the Arab and Islamic world. It gave strong, required criticism and declared a vision of togetherness. This cohesiveness, however, is not evaluated by what is said within the walls of conference halls, but rather what is done after. The moderate denunciation era has long gone. The power is in the economic and strategic ability of the Arab and Islamic countries to hold the aggressors accountable, as they have definitely done in history. It is to cede power, to be at the mercy of fear and economic profit in the here and now, in order to decide the policy of action. It is to invite further aggression and to lose the harmony and independence, which the summit was intended to confirm. The only way is clear: no compromise, no half measures.

This article was first published at Times of Bangladesh, Bangladesh, September.23, 2025, <https://tob.news/arab-islamic-summit-a-call-for-unity-against-aggression/>.

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RCAS Commentary

Beijing Xiangshan Forum Promotes Peaceful Development

Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, Sep.27, 2025

The 12th Beijing Xiangshan Forum commenced from September 17 to 19, 2025. The theme of the forum was ‘upholding international order and promoting peaceful development.’ The forum provides opportunity for dialogue and consultation processes to resolve the conflicts. During the three days, there were four plenary sessions focussing on international order, security, equitable governance, etc.



▲ The Venue for the 12th Beijing Xiangshan Forum in Beijing, China, September 17, 2025. /CFP

Besides, there were many sessions, in which experts debated the emerging technologies merits and demerits for the humanity, arms control and disarmament, regional securities especially Asia-pacific, Middle East, Ukraine, etc. interestingly, the Palestinians and Israelis shared the same table while discussion the war in Gaza , similarly Russian and Ukrainian delegates shared the same podium.

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Indeed, it was a good opportunity for the conflicting parties to exchange views at the neutral forum. Being a speaker in one of the sessions; titled: The current situation and future of arms control, I found everyone was allowed to speak his own mind.

The emphasis was on the emerging technologies impact on the nuclear armed states relations. The speakers belongs to Russia, China, United States, Pakistan, etc. It was highlighted that four-day skirmishes between India and Pakistan was alarming for the international community due to the risks of escalation of the conflict involving exchange of nuclear strikes.

It was recommended that both states must start dialogue process and initiate nuclear confidence building measures to prevent the escalation of the conflict and prevent strategic instability in South Asia. It was pointed out that the emerging technologies could destabilise the deterrence stability entailing to strategic instability in South Asia.

On September 1, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the Global Governance Initiative (GGI) at the “SCO Plus” Meeting in Tianjin, China. In February 2023, President Xi announced Global Security Initiative (GSI). These initiatives spirits were shared and debated by the speakers.

It was noted that peace and security is the responsibility of states and it's the responsibility of states to build peace and ensure prosperity of the people. The participants appreciated the organisers of Xiangshan forum for providing opportunity to deliberate on contemporary trends in the international politics, dynamics of multipolarity and need for upholding multilateralism.

The scholars noted that President Xi's GSI and GGI are important initiatives for addressing both traditional and non traditional challenges to the humanity. Many speakers including the ministers speaking at the plenary session underscored the significance of the shared future of humanity. They gave their countries perspectives on sustainable development.

The delegates of the forum endorsed and appreciated Chinese endeavours to ensure equal rights of all countries and to provide an institutionalized platform for wider participation in global governance, especially for developing nations. Indeed, peaceful and prosper world requires the upholding of rules based international order grounded on the United Nations Charter.

The participants also highlighted that climate challenge cannot be addressed alone. We need to work together to resolve the climate challenges.

Notably, many Indian scholars participated in the dialogue but there was no separate session for India and Pakistan as they arranged closed door seminars on Ukraine crisis and on the security trends in Middle East.

The article was first published at RCAS, Hong Kong, Sep.27, 2025, <http://www.rcas.top/Commentary/322.html>.

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RCAS Commentary

Global Governance Initiative Provides a New Paradigm for the World

Jayanath Colombage, Sep. 28, 2025

It is with great pleasure and honor that I participate in the 12th Beijing Xiangshan Forum. I believe that the consensus and recommendations reached at this forum should be taken seriously by all countries and transformed into feasible policy actions, so as to jointly build a better world for ourselves and for future generations.



▲Beijing Xiangshan Forum

Since the end of the Cold War, the international landscape has been undergoing profound changes. The unipolar world order once dominated by a single hegemon no longer exists while the rise of multiple regional powers is inevitable, and the tide of multipolarity is unstoppable. This historic turning point raises a core question: will the advent of a multipolar world open up a new future for humankind, or will it carry the risk of triggering another Cold War?

At present, we are witnessing intensifying major power rivalry, power struggles, and strategic competition. In some regions, the situation is becoming increasingly unpredictable, even plunging into the abyss of conflict, with spillover effects imposing unexpected costs and

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consequences on many countries. Against this backdrop, the question we must ask ourselves is: do we allow this instability and confrontation to spread, shaping the future of human society? Or do we guide the world back onto the path of peaceful coexistence? These are precisely the issues we are addressing during this year's Xiangshan Forum.

On September 1, President Xi Jinping proposed the Global Governance Initiative, which provides a new paradigm for managing the current turbulence. While the vast majority of countries generally uphold the UN-centered governance framework and the principles of peaceful coexistence, there remain some states that apply them selectively or refuse to be bound by them.

In this context, the strategic value of the Global Governance Initiative becomes clear: it emphasizes sovereign equality, respect for international law, and adherence to multilateralism. In my view, what makes the initiative innovative is precisely its emphasis on putting people at the center. This is crucial, because whatever decisions governments make ultimately affects the people.

It is also important to stress that the Global Governance Initiative seeks practical outcomes rather than empty rhetoric. It aims to deliver tangible benefits to the world. Therefore, the international community must give serious consideration and undertake a comprehensive assessment of the concepts advanced by this initiative.

The world is now at a historical crossroads, facing unprecedented multiple risks and challenges. Security threats are rising sharply, local conflicts are erupting frequently, and climate change together with extreme environmental events is intensifying. Confronted with these overlapping challenges, we must adopt new ideas that seek to build consensus and enhance cooperation, rather than create divisions and widen differences.

We also need the Global Security Initiative proposed by China. Its vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security is of decisive importance. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries must be respected; all states should be treated as equals in the international system. Today we must adhere to the UN Charter and strengthen UN institutions, rather than withdraw from them or abandon international treaties for narrow national

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interests. Territorial disputes and other conflicts must be resolved peacefully, giving full scope to diplomatic dialogue, rather than resorting to force. The use of force is never the right way to resolve disputes—it only exacerbates them. What we truly need is the peaceful settlement of differences through bilateral, regional, and international mechanisms.

In today's world, we face not only traditional military and defense threats, but also a wide range of non-traditional security challenges. We must establish systems for early warning, rapid intervention, and prompt prevention of risks before they escalate into full-scale wars. At the same time, we need to build a security governance framework grounded in mutual understanding and multilateral cooperation, in order to effectively address both traditional and non-traditional security threats.

What the world needs is a peaceful international stage and platforms for dialogue and consultation, not an arena for power competition. This is the only way to achieve lasting peace. Every country has the responsibility to respect others' core interests and major concerns. No state should interfere in another's internal affairs or attempt to take sides in a way that would worsen tensions.

What the international community needs is for major-power relations to move in a positive direction, creating an environment conducive to growth and peaceful coexistence. Many countries are unwilling to be forced into making choices, to follow the tide, or to be caught in dilemmas between stronger powers. Therefore, small and medium-sized countries should pursue diverse and pragmatic policies that balance sovereignty, independence, and development needs.

Most importantly, we must uphold multilateralism and reject unilateralism. Moving beyond traditional axis-based structures, all nations should seek strategic balance and economic resilience. Ultimately, all countries should be brought together into a community of shared future—partners in common development and progress, not vassals subject to hegemonic ambitions.

The article(Chinese edition) was first published at Global Times, China, Sep. 22, 2025, <https://m.huanqiu.com/article/4OQB43g12d2>.

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RCAS Commentary

Trump in UN: From Dialogue to Disruption

Sujit Kumar Datta, Oct. 6, 2025

For many years, American presidents have pledged their support for human rights, multilateralism, and the liberal international order that emerged after World War II before the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). However, rather than being a conversation and reassertion exercise, Donald Trump's day on stage was a radical disruption exercise. He was a well-known orator whose remarks established the confrontation-first concept of sovereignty. He put an end to long-term engagement diplomacy, thereby changing the direction of traditional American foreign policy. Trump used the UN as a forum to vent his frustrations because he had a fundamental pessimism about international collaboration.



▲ Times of Bangladesh

The reaction that followed was sufficient to raise questions about the fundamental tenets of the UN itself, creating further diplomatic rifts and confirming the anxieties of nations that had been comforted by the idea of a steady U.S. foreign policy. Trump's assault was primarily directed at the United Nations organization. He criticized the group for not realizing its vast potential and

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contested its reputation as a bureaucratic institution that valued rhetoric over results. In contrast, the UN was a meaningless show that was content to make forceful statements but vehemently opposed any action that was taken.

This criticism went even deeper when he questioned the UN's humanitarian and security mandates. Trump directly challenged the UN aid to asylum seekers in the U.S. by not necessarily presenting it as a humanitarian role of the UN, but as a waste of resources that implicitly promoted migration. His accusation that the UN is tasked with preventing aggression, not creating and funding it, distorted the humanitarian aspect of the institution into an implication that the UN assists in making the world an unsafe place. This rhetoric was used to weaken the global agreement on supporting refugees and communal security, turning the U.S into a supporter of UN goals instead of its greatest domestic critic. Many observers recognized Trump's attempt to convert the UN into an instrument of the United States' national interest, which has enormous potential but is primarily implemented covertly and with little fanfare. Within a larger plan to reframe American foreign policy as independently assertive and not dependent on a lack of international consensus, it was a strategic blow to the UN's tactical effectiveness.

However, in a stunning break from the accepted rules of diplomacy, Trump saved his harshest words for the European nations to which America had most trusted, rather than those whose animosity was the source of her affront. This emphasis meant that he was fighting for the principles of post-war Western liberalism itself, rather than a foreign nation. His objections centered on two fundamental policy areas: unsustainable immigration and self-immolating renewable energy plans. His remarks about immigration were apocalyptic. He drew a drawing of a continent on the outside and said that illegal immigrants had entered Europe, causing a major catastrophe that had never been seen before. The author intentionally sought to incite and alienate readers by employing exaggeration and military terminology to characterize a demographic and migratory crisis. The most well-known prediction he made was that Western Europe would inevitably perish as a result of unrestricted borders and what he called catastrophic energy choices. It was a massive shift in philosophy. Similar democratic principles and a common defense have long been characteristics of transatlantic alliances; Trump's position

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suggested that any European dedication to liberal immigration policies and environmental consciousness would have been much more dangerous to the West than the adversary overseas.

He applied the same feeling to the subject of climate change, calling it the biggest deception in history. He loudly criticized European nations for slamming fossil fuels and squandering money on renewable and multifunctional energy. The Paris Agreement and the worldwide decarbonization effort in general were overtly challenged both intellectually and policy-wise. In addition to forcing the United States to withdraw from a central international accord, he was also pressuring other nations to do the same by driving up the price of fossil fuels and demeaning climate research on the periphery of the global stage. As a result, a significant moral and policy divide has emerged between the U.S. and its European allies, making their security and economic cooperation somewhat precarious. His breakdown of these alliances was calculated such that, under his administration, the United States placed a higher priority on national energy and economic self-defense than on the long-standing ties in environmental and ideological care.

Besides the especially critical assessment of the UN and Europe, in his speech, Trump also added an unclear assessment of geopolitical confrontations and an inflammatory list of his own diplomatic successes. Regarding Russia, he surprisingly described the country as a paper tiger, as it lacked actual military strength. This remark was a good omen to the diplomats accustomed to the diplomacy of the UNGA, which is neither usual nor very straightforward. Some interpreted it to suggest that Trump might move his policy on the Russia matter to a more skeptical position in the future, a change from his traditionally deferential stance. It was also employed to contribute further disorientation to the Western perception of Russian might and intentions, rendering the U.S. policy to Moscow all the more erratic and capricious in the minds of its allies.

The most factually challenged section of his speech was when he claimed to have halted seven wars in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. An analysis of the international situation, however, revealed a much more complex and, in many cases, unresolved reality. Although he provided an account of a successful and decisive American intervention, several of the listed conflicts remained volatile with no real resolution, and the role of his administration in others was highly controversial. Such a penchant for exaggerating or distorting diplomatic successes was another common thread throughout his tenure as president, indicating that he favored image over

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practical, long-range peace. Of particular instructive interest was the example of the dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), a \$ 4 billion project on the Nile River, which involved transactional and polarizing diplomacy. According to the author of the source, the two countries were not at war during his presidency. However, the dispute over Nile water rights caused intense diplomatic tension between them, as Egypt and Sudan feared that the flow of water would be limited.

All things considered, Donald Trump's addresses to the UN General Assembly were a clear and intentional change in tone from discussion to disruption. The post-war consensus, which valued transatlantic unity, international institutions, and cooperative efforts on global issues like climate change, was rejected entirely as the uber-topic. He reframed the UN as a pointless, resource-clogging bureaucracy, shattering the previous notion of it as a forum for moral discussion. Simultaneously, he denounced the American policy choices of her closest friends, particularly those related to immigration and energy, which he believed to be ideologically reprehensible and ultimately fatal to Western culture.

Constant instability and his own government's politicized, contentious intervention, such as the GERD, frequently undermined his claims for international conflict resolution. One of Trump's contributions to the UN is not a diplomatic victory, but rather a purposeful, global systemic event that has made nations reconsider the reliability of American leadership and the prospects for future international collaboration. His blunder may have put out a local political fire. However, on a global scale, it left a legacy of diplomatic misunderstanding, strained friendships, and a rediscovery of the purpose and value of multilateralism in the twenty-first century.

This article was first published at Times of Bangladesh, Bangladesh, September.30, 2025, <https://tob.news/trump-in-un-from-dialogue-to-disruption/>.

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RCAS Commentary

The Bagram Bargain: Less Tension, More Influence for China

Sujit Kumar Datta, Nov. 29, 2025

News of an antagonistic order from Donald J. Trump to reopen the Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan signifies an American foreign policy turnaround—from a melodramatic two-decade war on terror to the new great power competition with China. The strategic value of Bagram is being marketed by the U.S. president as a means to see the strategic underbelly of China and a way of policing Beijing. However, it pretentiously computes geopolitical neutrality incorrectly.



▲ Afghan soldiers stand guard at a checkpoint outside the U.S Bagram air base, on the day the last of American troops vacated it, Parwan province, Afghanistan July 2, 2021. (FILE PHOTO: Reuters / Mohammad Ismail).

The silence that follows is a premonition of an unsavory fact: Although the U.S. presence in Bagram is deemed strategically advantageous, its current absence is now the more advantageous strategic option, at no cost to Beijing but serving its interests much better.

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The Chinese Bagram bargain is simple: The more America is irritated, the less Chinese domination results. And a clear Western front emerges. Among these is the reoccupation issue being discussed by Trump, which is rooted in the fact that Bagram actually occupies a geographical location comparable, in a way, to that of China. It lies 800 kilometers from the Chinese frontier, and situated near sensitive Xinjiang province. It is pure gold in the classical geopolitical mentality, which is obsessed with direct territorial domination and the extension of hard power.

Clearly, a Bagram reoccupation has theoretical benefits. The U.S. presence in Central Asia would significantly increase military surveillance and intelligence-gathering in the region. A base such as Bagram, with a runway 3.6 kilometers long—enough to accommodate enormous military cargo jets—can be transformed into a stepping-off point that extends U.S. air power, along with its electronic warfare capabilities, far into an area currently becoming a zone of influence for both China and Russia.

The hyperbolic political language Trump uses (he claims that the base is only an hour away from being a manufacturing plant for Chinese nuclear weapons) is a calculated effort to convey a message: The re-establishment of a military presence in the heartland of Afghanistan is to counterbalance the all-encompassing Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. With Central Asian states already wary of their growing economic reliance on China, the logic would be that a U.S. presence would offer some kind of insurance, serving as a second security guarantor in case of Chinese overreach.

In theory, Bagram would serve as a hard-power response to China's soft-power BRI expansion. However, this argument is dead on its feet, as it overlooks the cost, the local opposition and the strategic bounty the U.S. retreat has already handed to Beijing.

The U.S. occupation of Bagram was also a constant source of expensive strategic headaches for China over almost two decades. The American presence compelled Beijing to continuously invest in military, intelligence and diplomatic capital resources to reduce the threat of a foreign superpower working right on its western doorstep. In this case, the most critical parameter is the security of the Xinjiang autonomous region. The location is essential to the logistics of the BRI

in China, as well as a concentration area for sensitive military gear, which could be directly monitored by the U.S. base a few hundred miles away at all times.

The U.S. presence, which was always high in terms of military and intelligence, needed to be constantly defended against counter-intelligence activities and the arm-twisting of diplomats by the Chinese. The U.S. left Bagram in 2021 on condition that it would be destroyed. It gave ground to the world with no conditions, which is a rather severe strategic failure on a historic scale in the framework of containment.

The U.S. withdrawal fulfilled the fundamental Chinese security requirement of a demilitarized and secure western flank, without Beijing firing a single bullet or spending a single yuan in the conflict. The strategic advantage of a vacuum in hard military power is much more beneficial to China than the hypothetical surveillance that Bagram might provide.

Today, the U.S. must sustain its policy of containment at a thousand-mile distance, utilizing expensive offshore resources in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, as China has its borders restricting its freedom of action in between. The Bagram withdrawal, however, did not result in an American victory in the war on terror or even a strategic pivot in a containment strategy. It was merely a strategic subsidy to the long-term security architecture of China.

The second strategic benefit of the U.S. withdrawal, in terms of its size, is the virtually complete elimination of military opposition to the BRI in the Eurasian heartland. The presence of the United States, however well-intentioned as a check on China, had the inadvertent effect of drawing regional powers—Russia, Iran and Pakistan—into an anti-U.S. alliance. These nations had a similar interest in eliminating the American military presence. Since Bagram is no longer staffed, this local opinion has shifted from being opposed to U.S. military occupation to supporting regional stability and economic integration. It's a story that hinges heavily on Beijing.

China is now able to implement its BRI expansion without any apprehension of a strong military combatant on the ground. Rather than spending money on military counterbalances, Beijing can devote its full attention to what it has excelled in: economic participation and infrastructure development. Central Asian countries, which probably could have turned to the U.S. as a means of balancing the region, are finding no viable option in China. They are being incorporated into

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China's economic realm of influence. And China is consolidating its leading role. It is gaining the affection and trust of the region as it becomes the leading investor and economic partner, all while promoting the idea of non-interference—a powerful soft-power antidote to the history of American military intervention.

A reoccupation of Bagram by the United States, which is unlikely to be peaceful this time, would unleash multi-state resistance and thrust the U.S. into an entirely alien, antagonistic and prohibitively expensive military effort. By staying out, China would be able to use its economic might to play a containment role itself, attracting countries to it through trade and economic infrastructure, rather than relying on military pressure. It would be a complete strategic bargain: China has a say, and the U.S. withdraws.

The international response to Trump validates the fact that his Bagram proposal is going nowhere. The Taliban has clearly rejected the demand, and regional powers, including China, Russia, Iran and Pakistan, have also voiced opposition to any move to reintroduce a foreign military presence into the region. Lin Jian, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said that weaving tension and conflict in the region will not bode well.

This is a foreign policy victory for Beijing. China's reaction reinforces its image of a responsible member of the region concerned with stability and Afghan self-determination—which is precisely the opposite of the U.S. image as a country that is constantly intervening. Trump's obsession over the geographical location of Bagram as an offensive strategic site is a 19th-century military thought process.

The 21st-century power game with China can be described as more of a geo-economic one, waged through infrastructure, trade, technology and regional alignment, rather than by remote military bases deep within the Eurasian landmass. The cost of maintaining a position at such a remote base today is not so much a strategic weakness as it is reflective of the political cost of maintaining a position contrary to the mutual will of every regional power. It would once again overtax American military resources, estrange Washington diplomatically and provide Beijing with all the bargaining chips it requires to call upon its neighbors to rise against U.S. imperialism.

The Bagram bargain offers a practical geopolitical lesson: At some point, the absence of a superpower is more tactically favorable than its presence. Trump's obsessive insistence on restoring Bagram Air Base—which had been abandoned under the pretext of a necessary operation to check China—shows that he has no concept of the strategic position Beijing inherited when the U.S. pulled out. The fact that the western Chinese border is demilitarized and stable provides the nation with an opportunity to promote the BRI without hindrances and to avoid incurring immense spending to counter American surveillance and containment.

The U.S. pullout from Afghanistan, rather than being a tactic in a great power competition, was a strategic debacle. Going back to Bagram would not reinforce its Indo-Pacific strategy but only sink the U.S. into another costly, divisive and failure-prone intervention in the geo-economic war at the center of Asia.

This article was first published at China US Focus, Hong Kong, October.10, 2025, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/the-bagram-bargain-less-tension-more-influence-for-china>.

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RCAS Commentary

The Gaza Truce: A Pause Button, Not A Permanent Solution

Sujit Kumar Datta, Nov. 29, 2025

The information that the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas is not permanent and that the two years of endless and destructive warfare ended, constitutes a factor that the world is rightfully swamped with a sense of weary fatigue. The fact that a peace has been successfully temporarily established in the war in Gaza, which comes after a brutal campaign that costs tens of thousands of people, and virtually destroys the infrastructure in Gaza, is a moral victory of humanity.



▲ Photo: Collected.

However, to call such a development a step towards peace would be disgustingly naive. This accord, the simple signature of which is still awaiting the final approval, a discussion of the 20 points in the Israeli Knesset, which is not a solution, a kind of pause button, pushed by a shattered Hamas, with the conditions of which it is set, is the solution to make the political subordination of the Palestinian people permanent. Hamas releases at least 20 living Israeli hostages on the 72-hour Plan. The deal will also result in the release of up to 2,000 Gaza

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inhabitants in the custody of Israel. However, the release will not come with a single deadline, already signaling the imbalance of power the document conveys.

The offer of survival is more than any other consideration to the inhabitants of Gaza, who have already passed through an unimaginable apocalypse, in which, as far as can be calculated, 68,000 have been killed during the last two years. Even the assurance of life as such, should even this be inaccessible, is an unattainable distant luxury that is the ideal of freedom. The world's plea is only: 'Cease the slaughter.' The 20-point Plan is a standard shell game that merely reacts to humanitarian demands, yet it constitutes a future geopolitical map of the takeover. The surface arguments can be applauded, as can the clean-up exercise, the opening of highways, the supply of aid, medicine, and the required products, and a promise to rebuild the infrastructure, all made through the Rafah border crossing. It is a minimum of what is needed to prevent immediate death in Gaza society.

The compromise is radical, not to rebuild houses but to demolish the Palestinian authority and to plant another government system that can not be defined as anything other than a neo-colonial government. The most outrageous ones are regarding the future discipline and security of the Strip. Gaza is ruled by a new technocratic administration that has been seen as neutral. Security will be controlled by an external organization, which will be suggested to be a peacekeeping operation, such as the UN's. Suggested leaders of this new government are frighteningly sensational, a governing board consisting of Donald Trump, and a chief executive office consisting of Tony Blair. This very man has been quoted extensively and widely quoted as having been a mastermind in the disastrous Iraq War that took place in 2003.

The legacy that Tony Blair has left behind is inexplicably linked to the Western intervention and resultant confusion in the Middle East. The fact that the fate of Gaza is entrusted to the man who made the Iraq calamity could only demonstrate the insensitivity to the history and the expense of the region. It is a system of government that is the direct result of a project once considered the most insane. It is closely reminiscent of a wholesale evacuation of Gaza that was floated by the Trump circle in February 2023, and which implied the offering of the Strip inhabitants the possibility to leave the territory at a per capita price of 9000 dollars, and the transformation of the Strip into a pleasure center. Such unseemly words are not uttered by the current 20-point

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programme and its technocrats and rebuilding, but the end is the same: the irreversible political and territorial neutrality of Gaza.

The most unfortunate aspect of the 20-point deal may be its handling of Palestinian statehood, which is the source of the problems. The international peace concept, which has never been realized, is oddly absent from the Two-State Solution. Though the final line of the agreement is heretically feeble in offering any ray of hope, it states that after the above 19 points are put into practice, it might open the door to 19 points that could address a Palestinian state. This effectively shelters the dream of an independent state. Statehood is no longer an innate right or even a bargaining outcome; it is a reward; it is conditional, and it is conditional upon the accomplishment of a very long list of conditions implying the imposition of Gaza on the administration, the politics, and security of foreign forces – a purpose which may never be fulfilled. To Palestinians who have fought for decades to acquire autonomy of their country, it is a blow to the head; rather than having a picture of an independent state, they now have a picture of a protectorate that is internationalised, but is still occupied.

The ceasefire is therefore not an initiative to peace but a calculated withdrawal. Hamas wastes precious time in taking the truce and the seemingly impossible conditions. Time to stop the murder of its nationals, time to reorganise what remains of its political basis, time to reestablish its disorganised body forces, and time for its regional sponsors to regain. Along with it comes a sad choice: to resort to some immediate annihilation, or to a temporary political loss, with the slight hope of a reunion in the struggle sometime in the future. In the case of an existential threat, the most logical, but extremely unsatisfactory, option is survival.

The reaction of Palestinians is predictable. The Western media showcases the movies of celebration in Gaza City, the liberation of the families from the bombardment. Simultaneously, the Middle East sources also provide the reason behind the fear: the initial joy of survival is followed by the feeling of terror that this ceasefire will turn out to be the final suppression of their land by the Israelis and Americans. The simple, undeniable fact is that what the people of Gaza need at this point is life, particularly the traumatised ones who are fed up. It is the guarantee of survival, however wobbly and conditional it may be, that is the most significant victory that 68,000 of those lost lives are languishing amid the ruins in the streets.

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This temporary truce of violence should not be mistaken for a peace foundation. Its structure is faulty and full of security loopholes, and it shows no serious commitment to statehood. It is a well-thought-out standoff button that allows the world to have a minute to take a sigh of relief and, at the same time, establish a new colonial reality in Gaza. It is an irony that the ceasefire, which is currently saving lives, may be taking away the dream of a free tomorrow. The path forward is the international community demanding, not just the hostages and aid being handed over, but with a strict deadline and a promise of an actual and full-fledged Palestinian state; otherwise, this procrastinating will only be preceded by more calculated and devastating political invasion.

This article was first published at Times of Bangladesh, Bangladesh, October.14, 2025, <https://tob.news/the-gaza-truce-a-pause-button-not-a-permanent-solution/>.

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RCAS Commentary

Geopolitical Stakes in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Crisis

Sujit Kumar Datta, Nov. 29, 2025

It was October 2025, a bleak and ominous turning point of an already hostile relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. What had begun as a low-profile intelligence problem, solved by porous border controls and silent diplomacy, turned into open military action. The proclaimed airstrikes of the Pakistani Taliban command, in large cities of Afghanistan on October 9, Kabul, Khost, Jalalabad, and Paktika, and the subsequent devastating, fatal retaliation of the Afghan Taliban on Pakistani military posts across the border mark the catastrophic failure of the Pakistani strategic calculations of 2021.



▲Photo: Collected

The truce that was soon to be negotiated with the United Nations, compelling the need for a permanent ceasefire, is a temporary relief. It is not merely a local border conflict. However, an extremely distant geopolitical crisis has exposed Pakistan's underlying security vulnerabilities, threatened China's regional ambitions, and given India a perfect opportunity to engage in a

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brilliant diplomatic juggling act. The stakes are titanic; the safety of the Eurasian heartland depends on the ability to withstand the new phase of open conflict.

This outcome was a triumph in the Pakistani military and political community as the Afghan Taliban came back to government in August 2021. The Taliban government was believed to be led by fraternity, which would be used as a deterring factor to any security threat that was not within the country, especially to the TTP. The idea of strategic depth has turned into a fiasco.

The thing is that the Afghan Taliban and the TTP have a strong ideological connection, and the latter regard the former as the mother ship of their movement and promise their allegiance to the Afghan supreme ruler, Maulvi Hibatullah Akhundzada. Although Pakistan has always had Pakistan charges that the TTP has been enjoying immunity and free rein within the Afghan soil, Kabul remains cautious and noncommittal to a decisive crackdown. As a matter of fact, the Afghan Foreign Minister once stated that the 2400-kilometre long border cannot be controlled and the struggle against terrorism is a domestic Pakistani matter.

The fact that the Pakistani strikes against TTP leader Noor Wali Mehsud in Kabul have never been seen before is evidence that Islamabad has lost the facade of relying on diplomacy. The action to conduct a cross-border military operation in the Afghan capital, which resembles a direct assault on the sovereignty of the Kabul government, brings to the fore a desperate transformation of proxy warfare into open-ended deterrence. Such development is perilous, since the Afghan Taliban Ministry of Defense had already managed to report on swift and retaliatory efforts on the border, threatening a solid retaliation if Pakistan violated the Afghan territorial integrity once again.

Despite the TTP being an ideological and security concern to Pakistan as such, the most significant determinant that is leading the country to the extreme of militarisation is the security of its strategic ally, China. The TTP is highly precise in its assault on Chinese interests since it is an ideological fight against the Pakistani state and allies. It has taken the form of attacks on Chinese citizens and infrastructure that are of concern to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The security of CPEC personnel and the facility is a pressing issue for China. The anger of Beijing at the inability of Pakistan to eliminate these threats has been felt over the past years,

and it has been expressed in an unfriendly way, where the officials have urged Islamabad to eliminate its citizens from the security threats.

In the case of Pakistan, the ties with Beijing, which have been the pillar of its foreign and economic policy, cannot be sacrificed. The repetitive and open violence of Chinese property is a threat not only to stopping Chinese investment but also to a large diplomatic rift. The airstrikes in Afghanistan can be understood, however, not simply as a need to preserve national security, but as a frank, open operation to fulfill Beijing's non-negotiable security needs. Pakistan is demonstrating that it is willing to sever its old friendship with the Afghan Taliban and even run an open war in a bid to preserve its friendship with China.

As the cross-border violence has reached its peak and due to the strategic vulnerability that Pakistan is presently undergoing, India has scored a classical textbook geopolitical counter strike. This crisis occurred at the most symbolic time in India's shift in policy to the Taliban. The visit of the Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to the Indian capital was indeed an eye-opener, given that he remains on the UN sanctions list, and this is the first visit by the Taliban administration to the Indian capital that is going well. India is one such nation that has always been antagonistic to the Taliban, owing to the security concerns that the country has had in the past, but is now reconsidering its stance on the matter, owing to the regional pressure, including the fact that Pakistan has gained the backing of China.

The External Affairs Ministry of India issued a strong diplomatic statement on the Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions within no time, stating that it remained fully committed to Afghanistan's sovereignty, territorial and political integrity, and independence. It is a calculated diplomatic weapon. It seems through its apparent support of the Afghan sovereignty at this very moment when the identical treatment is being administered to it by Pakistan in the form of airstrikes, India has cleverly positioned herself as the regional champion of the Afghan autonomy, and at the same time, in the form of poking at the historic failure of Pakistan to give due respect to the Durand Line border.

Besides this, India is also gaining power by employing economic diplomacy, repairing previous projects, promising six new projects, and exploring profitable mining prospects in Afghanistan.

It is a tactical intervention, and the plan to transform the Indian technical mission in Kabul into a full-fledged embassy is an apparent attempt to balance the infiltration of Pakistan, in order to secure the interest of India in the connectivity of the region, particularly by the Chabahar port in Iran to trade with Central Asia.

The regional mediators (Qatar and Saudi Arabia) are negotiating a 48-hour ceasefire, and it is a golden opportunity to de-escalate. However, the truce does not resolve the issue of the TTP sanctuary, which was the main factor behind the war. A new low violence threshold has been set in the recent border fights, where both sides have lost their lives. It is the failure of Pakistan as a strategic action in Afghanistan that has resulted in a crisis in the region that is now driving the ambition of its competitors. The UN's request for a permanent truce is hollow until the TTP threatens the geopolitical interest currently in Beijing's hands and operated by New Delhi.

This article was first published at Times of Bangladesh, Bangladesh, October.21, 2025, <https://tob.news/geopolitical-stakes-in-the-afghanistan-pakistan-crisis/>.

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RCAS Commentary

Trump-Xi in Busan: US-China Coexistence in the Strategic Rivalry

Sujit Kumar Datta, Nov. 29, 2025

The future of U.S.-China relations has sparked a fresh wave of conservative optimism with the pending summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Busan, South Korea. It was also the first physical contact between the two leaders since 2019, when they reached an agreement to halt the ongoing trade war between their countries, which had caused a commotion in the global economic sphere and heightened tensions between the two most powerful states in the world.



▲Photo: Collected

The so-called Busan Truce, as many are calling it, is not a peace treaty in the economic sense, but a ceasefire that seeks to buy time. The fact that the two leaders had already decided to escalate the tariffs when the time came is encouraging and suggests that there is no eagerness to restore some sanity. Trump, in his flamboyant manner, hailed the meeting as a 12 out of 10 successes. Xi, in his turn, was more moderate and demanded additional conversation and realistic cooperation. It is a classic example of asymmetry, which defines the current relationships

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between the United States and China, where Washington seeks to achieve visible triumphs. In contrast, Beijing seeks to achieve its long-term objectives.

The treaty of Thursday is preceded by years of struggle that ensued due to higher tariffs and technological limitations, making it a rare diplomatic success. Washington has already agreed to lower some of the tariffs it imposes on Chinese imports, as indicated by certain statements made afterwards, and Beijing has removed its policy of banning exports of rare earth minerals, raw materials used in smartphones, electric cars, and other high-tech military equipment. These concessions are not token gestures. The rare earth minerals have also been employed as a bargain in the current technological competition between the two superpowers. Restricting their exports to China would be highly risky to the industries in the United States, as China is the world's largest producer. The lifting of the export controls is a positive indication from China that it is not interested in further aggravating the situation, at least in the short run. In the meantime, the U.S. move to reduce tariffs indicates that it is not surprising that American consumers, along with American industries, have become the losers to the same extent, as Chinese exporters have been the victims in the long-term economic confrontation.

Trump is in a state of coexistence with China, which is founded on strategic competition rather than collaboration. Beijing has become an adversary and a compulsory opposite to his government. The United States is unable to fully disentangle itself from China and disrupt the global supply chains. However, it is unwilling to relinquish control of significant technologies, such as semiconductors and artificial intelligence, to China. Thus, Trump is practical regarding the suggestion to put the trade war on hold, which is not an ideological compromise. The optics, too, in this instance, are essential, but they are presented in a different way to Xi Jinping. The state media in China described the meeting as a move to demonstrate China's maturity and readiness to cooperate in a win-win manner.

The strategy of Beijing is long-term, whereas that of Trump is focused on achieving short-term results. This patience is evident in the fact that China recognises it cannot outwit the U.S. in the short term, whether through military or economic means, but can outlast the Bush administration by maintaining a steady state and focusing on gradual gains. Its initial statement was diplomatically humble, with attention directed at the need for negotiation and follow-ups. Later,

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a larger leakage was indicative of what Trump alleged to mean, suggesting there would be a moment of congruity in message but not necessarily in objectives. The recent policy of Beijing has been focused on preserving economic sustainability and strengthening its position through initiatives such as the Belt and Road and the BRICS economic system. The Busan truce would give China time to continue gearing its economy towards domestic consumption and sufficient technology. It can also be used to normalise relations between Washington and the South China Sea, as well as in the air over Taiwan, which might provoke uncontrollable situations—the problems in which tension remains too high.

The Busan truce initiated a new golden age despite the rhetoric being jovial. Instead, it is a strategic pause until what is likely to be a long strategic rivalry. The battle on the structural level, founded on economics, political ideals, and security interests, remains unsettled. The United States continues to view China's rise as a threat to the liberal world order. At the same time, China considers American dominance an obstacle to the country's legitimate presence in the global arena. Thus, the coexistence of the two powers will not mean peace, but rather the balancing of war at acceptable levels. The Busan gathering, in this respect, is not concerned with the ending of the trade war, but rather with establishing the rules of action for the future. The two parties understand that decoupling cannot be done well. Instead, they are moving to a new paradigm of competitive coexistence, characterised by a rivalry that is accompanied by selective cooperation. World politics is likely to be affected by this model for decades to come. The Trump-Xi truce is a temporary salvation for other nations. The international markets responded favourably, and some of the Asian economies that were heavily dependent on trade between the U.S. and China celebrated the declining tensions. The question remains, however, how long such a peace will last.

It has made the world quite cynical about so-called summit diplomacy, which provides temporary breakthroughs but does not alter the fabric. The waves of great power struggles are not easily reversed, and that is how history has manifested itself. However, even such a small ceasefire is of international significance, as it demonstrates that communication, despite its imperfections, can still occur.

A Trump-Xi meeting in Busan is an eye-opener, showing that coexistence is not a matter of friendship, but rather a balance. Both leaders are in the process of breaking up and not being reversed. They are attempting to protect national interests, rather than being drawn into catastrophic conflict. China and the U.S. must be friends and collaborators, as Xi has aptly quipped. That is the history has taught us, and that is what reality teaches. The friendship in this case, however, is not based on trust, but rather on coexistence out of necessity. The coming months will determine whether the Busan truce can be expanded into something bigger. It will hinge on whether the two parties can translate symbolic gestures into actual policy changes. However, meanwhile, in a world weary of geopolitical turmoil, a low degree of peace between Washington and Beijing is to be celebrated.

This article was first published at Times of Bangladesh, Bangladesh, November.4, 2025, <https://tob.news/trump-xi-in-busan-us-china-coexistence-in-the-strategic-rivalry/>.

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RCAS Commentary

Sudan's Tragedy Exposes Africa's Failing Peace Architecture

Sujit Kumar Datta, Nov. 29, 2025

The capture of El Fasher by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) last week led to the killing of hundreds of Sudanese civilians; another sad reality was placed in the spotlight once again that Africa can no longer afford the luxury of ignoring. The peace and security infrastructure of the continent is starting to fail its citizens. What is happening in Sudan is not merely a civil war between two warring generals, but the institutional collapse of a state as a result of the fact that it is becoming weaker internally and is being played with externally. Sudan is disintegrating, and yet Africa, more so, must contend with its own inability to check a tragedy that says much about the natural vulnerability of the regional systems of regional peacekeeping, mediation, and collective security.



▲Photo: Collected

On October 26, the RSF seized control of the city of El Fasher in Darfur and ended an 18-month siege that had already reduced much of that city to rubble. They were initiated with the murders in the aftermath. Whole communities were displaced by civilians who were attempting to escape the war that had already claimed over 150,000 lives and had been ongoing for the last two and a

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half years. UN calculates people displaced internally to be more than 9.5 million, the biggest in the world, with another 4.3 million refugees spilling into Chad, South Sudan, Egypt, and others. All this goes to the extent of the displacement of one out of four Sudanese. The International Organisation of Migration indicated that more than 81,000 people have escaped El Fasher alone since its capture, mostly on foot.

Sudan's geography is such that it is one of the desired regions by both regional and world players. It possesses nearly 500 kilometres of coasts stretching along the Red Sea, rendering the country susceptible to maritime commerce, considered most important worldwide. It boasts of numerous gold reserves, good agricultural fields, and the supremacy of the Blue Nile; a crucial resource for those who desire to possess economic and political influence in the Horn of Africa. The intervention of the foreign powers in the Sudanese turmoil has implicated the countries in the United Arab Emirates and those in Egypt, Russia and Saudi Arabia, among others, to various degrees. The UAE has been accused of supplying weapons and money to the RSF, and Egypt has provided its support to the Sudanese army. Meanwhile, the Wagner Group in Russia has enjoyed historical relations with the Sudan militia, accessing the gold mines in the state. These external actors are all pursuing selfish interests at the cost of Sudanese citizens.

This is what the African Union (AU) had been boasting of the Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) to prevent. All the above were aimed at making the principle of providing African solutions to African issues meaningful, in that the African Standby Force, the Peace and Security Council, and the Panel of the Wise were to be the embodiment of the same. However, as in Libya, Ethiopia, and the Sahel, such edifices have been vacant. Since the start of the fighting in April 2023, the AU has already conducted numerous emergency conferences and issued countless communiques – but that is all. It has compromised its mediation processes due to a lack of cohesiveness among the member states and by the other regional bloc called the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which also claims Sudan. It has resulted in redundancy, confusion, and a lack of political determination. Also, to the surprise of the carnage of war, are the weaknesses of Sudan in the environmental and humanitarian parameters. The condition of climate change has been at the forefront of the country, and it has had its quota of radical droughts and even killer floods. The tragedies have devastated harvests, displaced

nomadic people, and augmented food insecurities with the war aggravating these pressures by destroying the supply chains and annihilating the little infrastructure that sustain the rural livelihoods.

To the outside world, Sudan is not a humanitarian problem but a chess piece. The Red Sea route that connects the Suez Canal and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait is regarded as very important regarding world trade and transfers of energy. Controlling the coastline of Sudan equals influence both on Africa and the Middle East. The level of territorial superiority war with multiple layers has transformed the war into a battle for ports and resources of Sudan among the Gulf states, Russia, and the Western powers. The weapons that the UAE is accused of importing to the RSF are said to be motivated by the desire of the country to showcase the military presence of the Red Sea. Moscow has always been concerned with the presence of a naval base in Port Sudan, which would enable the country to have access to the warm water and would give the government a counterweight to Western influence. This geopolitical crossfire has been at the cost of the people of Sudan, and has not demanded much intervention from outsiders, even though they seem to have no interests in the war. The African states also must manage their diplomacy and not struggle for influence. The duplication of the efforts of the AU, IGAD, and the domestic one is projecting the African voice and weakening its authority. It is necessary to have a unique and exclusive unitary mediation framework by African leaders with the help of external partners, without bias.

Suffering in Sudan is not an isolated one. It is part of a bigger pattern, the decline of state authority, the emergence of militias, the global intrusion into the Sahel to the Horn of Africa, is now the order of the day. The most recent epitome of this corruption is the massacre of El Fasher. Africa cannot tolerate such atrocities, and that is why the dream of unity and self-sufficiency of the continent cannot be in vain. The African Union was formed due to the legacies of colonialism, with the assurance of collective security and unity. The pledge has never been tested like it is now. The war in Sudan is a metaphor of the war on the African conscience. It portrays a continent of capabilities, but of low resolve, a continent which must either reform its peace system, or proceed to lose further of its peoples to anarchy. The silence has been broken.

Something must be done about Africa, or Sudan must be remembered in history, not as a tragedy, but as a lesson.

This article was first published at Times of Bangladesh, Bangladesh, November.11, 2025, <https://tob.news/sudans-tragedy-exposes-africas-failing-peace-architecture/>.

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RCAS Commentary

Oil, Power, and Sovereignty: The U.S.-Venezuela Confrontation

Sujit Kumar Datta, Nov. 29, 2025

The already teetering relationships between the United States and Venezuela have literally boiled over, and the scene has hit a new and even more perilous dimension. When the USS Gerald R. Ford, the largest aircraft carrier in the world, and a formidable demonstration of American might, made an important and threatening departure in Latin American waters last Tuesday. Even though the deployment represented by Washington is a necessity to stop drugs at international levels, the groundwork and the political situation of the region show that there is much more at stake than drug control. It is fundamentally a battle over oil, power, and holiness for sovereignty in the Americas.



▲Photo: Collected

The justification is that the massive ship weaponry is to annihilate the drug cartels across the lines. Actually, the US Navy has already executed operations against at least 20 suspected drug boats on the Latin coasts of the Caribbean and Pacific, which have claimed the lives of 76 individuals already. However, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro is categorical in his

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thoughts: the actual intention of such a military demonstration is to destabilise his government and arrange a change of government. It is difficult to dispute his statement due to the scale of such deployment. According to the sources in the US defense, the second aircraft carrier will soon be sailing very close to the Venezuelan waters. To worsen the situation, several warplanes are already stationed in the US-controlled territory of Puerto Rico, and six other warships have been dispatched to the Caribbean Sea, which puts the situation at the edge of a near-crisis level. The F-35 fighters, warships, and a nuclear submarine, as published by Reuters, is a firsthand agreement that it is not a regular anti-drug operation, but a wide-scope power projection that squarely points at Caracas.

The administration of Maduro has responded to it with resistance, whereby he announced a massive force deployment, and he says that a full mobilisation of the US army would undoubtedly lead to open warfare. It is the logic of an endangered sovereign nation. However, economic circumstances bring it to the level of sanctions, which proclaim its right to self-defence against what it sees as foreign aggression.

To reveal the real motivation behind this confrontation, one must go beyond the humanitarian and anti-drug rhetoric and focus on the latent strategic interests. Venezuela holds the largest known oil reserves in the world. The problem of a belligerent Venezuela, i.e., a Venezuela that does not acquiesce to the US geopolitical agreement and that instead allies with its adversaries such as Russia and China, is something Washington finds unacceptable as a breach of the hemispheric order.

It is founded on the conflict between US hegemony and Venezuelan sovereignty. The US seeks to maintain its traditional preeminent status in its own backyard, ensuring that local resources and political systems align with its strategic interests. The opposition to Maduro, a disciple of Hugo Chávez, in turn, is rooted in the right to national self-determination and the fight to escape the inescapable US political and economic pressure. The last coercion method is the use of the USS Ford, which is heavy-handed pressure to achieve a political outcome that cannot be accomplished in a few years of sanctions and diplomatic pressure.

To President Donald Trump, the Venezuelan crisis is not a foreign policy matter, but rather a domestic politics trap. He knows that his failure in overthrowing Maduro will be a personal humiliation to him. There are, however, disastrous consequences to an open military operation. After senior officials in the Trump administration realised the gravity of the situation, they held three meetings this week at the White House to discuss the possibility of taking military action. The unanimity that was declared is that the White House should be highly doubtful of its ability to bring sanity to Venezuela without exposing the US soldiers to an all-out war. The desperation may be felt: the civil war that would follow the military intervention and the resultant civil war would be a river of blood, which would hold the US President accountable.

Although the Senate failed in its endeavor to limit the President's authority in waging war, the President ultimately has the final decision to make. His current formula of balance between military bullying of the enemy and precision operations has yet to yield the desired results. He is also torn between the political need to be perceived as tough and the terrifying fact that the escalation process may culminate in a geopolitical disaster that cannot be reversed.

Above all, the US military build-up has already created an inferno of criticism in Central and South America. The regionals have been viewed as a blatant opposition to a historical accord due to their military posturing. Later that year, a block of 33 countries (the US is not a member) formed the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which termed the region a Zone of Peace. This statement is entirely contradictory to the military presence in the present age. It is quite correct when Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla said that the US presence is a provocative act that threatens the self-determination of our people. The same is reflected in the high-profile regional leaders, such as Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Colombian President Gustavo Petro, who have both been vocal against US attacks and military fortification. This backlash suggests that Latin American states are no longer satisfied with Washington's unilateralism, but are instead firmly pursuing the doctrine of non-intervention and sovereignty.

To complicate the matter even further, the US-Venezuela dispute is already being drawn into the larger geopolitical conflict between global powerhouses. It was highlighted by the Venezuelan President Maduro, who alleged that the Trump administration was launching a new perennial

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war in the region, a war that he is prepared to retaliate with an epic mobilisation of his own soldiers. Foreign player intervention is very obvious. One such case is the study by Chinese scholars of the Russian strategy in Venezuela as a case of Hybrid Power Projection in the American traditional region of influence. It means that oil and the future of Venezuela is not an up or down affair anymore, but a proxy war whereby Moscow and China are attempting to intimidate the hegemony of the US and ensure that the crisis is not resolved to the satisfaction of the strategic antagonists.

A nuclear submarine carrying F-35s to the doorstep of Caracas would be a desperate gamble. It is not a battle of drugs, but a definitive battle over who will possess the vast resources and political future of the Western Hemisphere. Military training can only turn the Caribbean Sea into a battlefield, destroy the region's tradition of peace, and plunge an already impoverished country into the depths of disaster. The avenue out of this fast-growing confrontation that can be offered is supported by international pressure and diplomacy.

This article was first published at Times of Bangladesh, Bangladesh, November.18, 2025, <https://tob.news/oil-power-and-sovereignty-the-u-s-venezuela-confrontation/>.

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RCAS Commentary

COP30 in Amazon: Fossil Fuel Pact vs National Interests

Sujit Kumar Datta, Nov. 29, 2025

The COP30 conference, held in Belém, was marked by its location on the outskirts of the Amazon River, which symbolised a shift in global climate politics. Therein, a United Nations climate conference (popularly known as the lungs of the Earth) was organised, in the biggest rainforest on Earth that ever existed. Having high expectations was only natural. Many people hoped that the ecological significance of the Amazon would force the negotiators to take the most drastic step ever: recognising fossil fuels as the culprits of global warming and devising an ultimate means to eliminate them. Instead, COP30 was a cautious, voluntary decision that, in addition to demonstrating the limitations of climate diplomacy, also reflects the continued tug-of-war between collective climate responsibility and national interests.



▲Photo: Collected

The haggling process was sad, and the 12-hour negotiation took a long time and paved the way for a deal involving 194 countries and territories. The agreement provides additional funding to needy nations and calls on developed nations to triple climate financing to developing nations by 2035. It is a wide success. Countries that are vulnerable to climate change, such as rising sea levels, storms, and drought, have long lamented their inability to adapt and mitigate climate change without adequate financial support. However, the agreement's triumph is deeply deceptive. The deal is not binding, and any party to the contract can opt out at any time. Voluntary undertakings, especially to most developing countries, and, most significantly, to the

least developed and small island states, do not offer much assurance against the growing climate crisis.

More to the point, what the agreement fails to state. Although the deal was pushed by over 80 countries vulnerable to climate change, the U.K. and the European Union, the pact does not explicitly address fossil fuels. This omission is not accidental; it was strongly resisted by powerful actors in the fossil fuel industry, such as Saudi Arabia and Russia, who believe that any direct reference to oil, gas, or coal would be an existential threat to their economic status quo. Ultimately, the summit produced no better than an empty pledge to initiate negotiations to reduce the rate of consumption of fossil fuels. It is a hollow promise that is nowhere near the kind of revolutionary move that scientists have been calling on.

The fact that fossil fuels are not given any specification compromises the entire essence of COP meetings. The UN climate process has been circling the naming of fossil fuels for decades, even though the preponderance of evidence shows they are the primary cause of global warming. They grow increasingly hopeful that the tide will turn; geopolitics and the interests of nations intersect. COP30 was not an exception. The world was again placed in the spotlight on how the security of energy, export sales, and geopolitical leverage are outwitted in the calculus of great powers.

The summit was also inappropriate in its position. The vision of COP30 was one long held by Brazil: an Amazon-centered conference in which the protection of forests, indigenous rights, and the conservation of ecosystems would have been central to climate policy. Nonetheless, the final agreement fails to provide a roadmap for stopping deforestation. This omission was disappointing to Brazil and to environmental groups, which have argued that deforestation reduction cannot be achieved without broader climate mitigation. The Amazon rainforest is gradually approaching its ecological breaking point under increasing pressure from agriculture, mining, and illegal logging. It is contradictory, and more or less paradoxical, that there should be a climate assembling in the Amazon, where deforestation is not discussed, except as a strategy.

The political relations among Latin American states were also evident. Colombia, Panama, and Uruguay denounced the negotiation process, saying there was insufficient transparency during the Brazilian COP presidency and no plenary discussion. Their anger is a manifestation of the building of fault lines in the global South, fault lines that are frequently ignored in mainstream

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climate politics, which generally demands that the global South be considered as a unit. Instead, COP30 highlighted the divided nature of developing countries regarding the volume and pace of climate ambition, especially within their development agendas.

The other colour that fell upon the top was, more importantly, the absence of the United States, the world's most significant historical carbon emitter and one of the world's most powerful geopolitical actors. Washington's failure to dispatch a representative cast doubt on the agreement's viability. Will the rest of the world cooperate when one of the major emitters is not addressed? Is climate finance a reality? Not only was the morale of diplomats shattered by this, but it also underscored the unpredictability of the great powers' climate pledges.

However, despite the deficiency, the financial investment is an incremental advantage, at least on paper. The developing nations will receive an annual sum of \$120 billion, pegged to a higher figure of \$300 billion that the wealthy states have already committed. However, this was not a sufficient financial injection. The needy nations were hoping that the \$120 billion would be translated into new funds, not the redistribution of funds already promised. The shift towards deferring additional funding contributed to overall disillusionment, and it is dubious whether COP funding will be delivered at the scale of the climate crisis.

Ultimately, the contradiction revealed at COP30 is the eternal dilemma in the world: the scientific imperative to stop using fossil fuels and the economic interests of nation-states that keep them reliant on them. In the Amazon venue, this contradiction could not be overcome. The necessities of science, which were urgent, came into conflict with political reality, and political realism prevailed. Amid global power struggles, the green transformation of Europe, the expansion of coal in China, the oil politics of the Gulf countries, and the various developmental models of the Latin American region, people are not in unison about what a transition from fossil fuels ought to entail.

Naturally, incrementalism will go on strike and fail to do the job. According to climate scientists, the world is rapidly losing time to keep warming below 1.5 °C. Nevertheless, COP 0 proves that the global society is still missing the most essential step that can be made, the one against fossil fuels. Summits will continue to generate lengthy papers, high hopes, and little action until climate diplomacy becomes honest, grounded in national interests, and establishes institutions strong enough to make powerful states feel their responsibility.

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Again, having finished COP30, the Amazon rainforest may be understood as a cause for hope and a caution. Its ecological significance is on a phenomenal scale. However, the reluctance of nations to commit to reducing the use of fossil fuels beyond the frames of sovereignty, profit, and geopolitics should be regarded not only as a sign that climate talks remain behind the curtain of these factors. The world could have agreed, and then the real battle, the one between fossil fuel addiction and the life of the world, would not have been won.

This article was first published at Times of Bangladesh, Bangladesh, November.26, 2025, <https://tob.news/cop30-in-amazon-fossil-fuel-pact-vs-national-interests/>.

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RCAS Commentary

Success in Busan: U.S.-China Relationship Stabilizes

Sujit Kumar Datta, Nov. 29, 2025

U.S. President Donald Trump visited Asia recently, an event that was both exciting and feared by the world. His “America first” diplomacy, which is personal and transactional in nature, was on full display in a continuation of the drama and unreliability that have defined his overall foreign policy. It is not conducive to multilateralism.



▲ Chinese President Xi Jinping meets with U.S. President Donald Trump in Busan, South Korea, Oct. 30, 2025. (Shen Hong).

U.S. President Donald Trump visited Asia recently, an event that was both exciting and feared by the world. His “America first” diplomacy, which is personal and transactional in nature, was on full display in a continuation of the drama and unreliability that have defined his overall foreign policy. It is not conducive to multilateralism.

The most remarkable aspect of the trip came during Trump’s stop in Busan, South Korea, where he met with President Xi Jinping of China—remarkable not only because the meeting alleviated months of economic pressure but also because the interaction of the two leaders brought some much-needed stability to the U.S.-China relationship and positive international implications.

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The Busan meeting was the first personal encounter between Trump and Xi since 2019. After years of tariffs, sanctions and suspicions, both sides finally engaged head-to-head on an economic battlefield. The United States had imposed high tariffs on Chinese goods, and Beijing had tightened restrictions on the export of valuable minerals, including rare earth elements essential in modern technology, including military equipment.

The two leaders agreed to de-escalating tensions. Trump was willing to lower specific tariffs, and Xi was willing to lift certain bans on the export of rare earths and return to buying large amounts American agricultural products, oil and gas. It was not a general breakthrough but rather a compromise made on their mutual understanding that confrontation was not sustainable.

By the time the meeting concluded, Trump was visibly euphoric. He referred to the talks as “amazing” and even rated it on a 1 to 10 scale as a 12. His exuberance contrasted oddly with Beijing’s reserved optimism. State media in China said the meeting was positive and seemed to move relations back toward a state of normalcy. In other words, China was willing to engage in mutually beneficial cooperation if doing so supported the country’s long-term goal of national revival.

The U.S. claims its foreign policy has never been ideologically driven. China says it is not involved in any fight but will not compromise its core interests in pursuit of short-term peace—those interests being sovereignty, security and development. At the same time, China sees that a total breakdown of relations with Washington would jeopardize the stability of the entire globe, as well as its own economic modernization. Leaders in Beijing understand that the interdependence of the U.S. and China is profound, yet they claim it is decoupled.

Not only would destabilization harm Chinese exports, but it would also pose a threat to China’s connection with significant technologies and markets, which are essential for building a high-quality country.

Thus, the Busan negotiation can be supported within the broader framework articulated by Xi Jinping, who has sought to create a community with a shared future for mankind. Stable relations with Washington can buy time for China to reform its domestic economy, consolidate regional alliances and achieve technological independence.

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By contrast, immediacy is the dominant characteristic of Trump's diplomacy. His dealings, as opposed to dogmas, demonstrate that he is of the view that U.S. power must yield measurable results within a short period. The tactic may have strategic benefits, but it's unstable.

Neither enemies nor allies are in a position to know America's long-term intentions. Asian political leaders were well-aware of this when Trump visited them. From Tokyo to Manila, capitals welcomed Trump warmly with flattery while also serving their own interests. He has scorned multilateral forums, such as the East Asia Summit and ASEAN meetings, which has allowed individual countries to negotiate directly, in most cases, to secure concessions.

But Trump has challenged bilateralism in his dealings with China. However confident and brash he might be, he can't put much economic pressure on Beijing. The manufacturers, consumers and farmers of the United States have had to bear the costs of tariffs. Inflationary pressure and slowing markets in foreign countries have necessitated a review of the confrontation strategy. China has actually been a significant casualty of the trade war. Its strategic composure has paid off.

The more Washington identifies with partners such as Japan, South Korea and the Philippines in its Indo-Pacific policy, the more it is perceived as trying to contain China's rise. Meanwhile, the growing economic and diplomatic prominence of China, whether through the Belt and Road Initiative or its primacy in new international organizations such as BRICS, is an indication that it is no longer content to be a junior participant in the world system.

The Busan meeting can be viewed more as a hiatus rather than a point of transition. It allows for breathing space to have a discussion. But the threat of confrontation is still alive. Busan is a political truce more than it is an achievement of peace. It's a recognition of boundaries. Collaboration will contribute to global economic confidence.

The result of a positive relationship between the two major economies is the stabilization of markets, restoration of investment flows and the ability of markets to address multilateral issues of global concern, such as climate change, health and global debt. Conversely, negative ripple effects are felt when there is a conflict. Supply chains are disrupted, and smaller economies are

forced to make decisions that result in shutdowns or even the freezing of international institutions.

Such instability that has been seen during the past few years. Trade wars and bans on technology have been particularly severe. Thus, even the slightest improvement in relations after Busan will be felt far beyond the Pacific. Busan demonstrates that the two superpowers, despite being at odds with one another, realize the importance of living together. To China, development and modernity are of the highest significance, whereas the U.S. is concerned with economic supremacy and global leadership. The question is how these goals can be balanced.

The Chinese modus operandi was summed up by President Xi in Busan: Reforms are sweeping the globe like a tidal wave. China and the United States are expected to be friends and partners.

The message of Busan is not one of dominance but of balancing—the idea that great power diplomacy can bring stability in uncertain times. This is not merely about the national interests of China and the United States but what brings peace to the world and allows it to thrive.

This article was first published at China US Focus, Hong Kong, November.21, 2025, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/success-in-busan-us-china-relationship-stabilizes>.

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RCAS Commentary

Russia-Ukraine Peace Deal: A New Beginning for European Security?

Sujit Kumar Datta, Dec. 2, 2025

Even a non-perfect, naturally unsatisfactory outlook on a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine has sparked a heated debate in Western capitals. No one is saying that the situation being placed on the table is fundamentally unfair: Ukraine, as an independent country being forcibly invaded, might be forced to make definite trade-offs in territory and politics with the invader. This type of outcome is psychologically torturous and tactically unnerving.



▲Photo: Collected.

Under the proposed conditions, Ukraine would not have an actual limit on its peacetime military force, which is a significant win given that Russia consistently aims to keep its forces at a minimum. It should not have been capped at 600,000, as such a figure is by no means a constraint; rather, it would have been far more than Ukraine would retain in the long term. Even better, both the United States and Europe would ensure that Ukraine is provided with security never seen before. It would be the best package of security guarantees Kyiv has ever had, and the balance of power would change radically in Russia's favour, but not to the point of the entire

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NATO mutual-defence obligation. This would make Western military and political support official and would make Ukraine feel better than before the 2022 invasion.

In practice, Vladimir Putin's invasion was an effort to interfere with Ukraine's westward orientation; a peace settlement built on such values would do the opposite. Ukraine would emerge better integrated into the Western security system, stronger militarily, and even more aggressive towards Moscow than ever before. The geographical positioning of Russia, whether or not it acquired territories, would be undermined in the long run. This is lost to the absolutist rhetoric that reigns in Washington. The Republican hawks and the Democratic hawks all take the view that failure to defeat the Russians except in a total defeat is surrender. The compromising efforts by senators like Mitch McConnell and Jeanne Shaheen approach the undermining of global norms without regard for the ugly truth that they want perfection, leading to further destruction and worsening the endgame, as Ukraine will never be able to win the war in its entirety.

Ukraine has found itself on a cliff between the idealism of morality and the material world. Probably, an extension of the war would lead to a smaller, weaker, and more broken Ukraine. This is not pessimism; it is the reasoning of attrition. In Kyiv, the demographic casualties, the economic crippling, and exhaustion of the battlefield are accruing. The West, however, is not aware of how it can be sustained in the long term due to political polarisation and global crises. It may sound pious here at Washington, it may sound pious here in London, it may sound pious here in Brussels, to call out that entire world to a full throttle in demand of complete justice, but the human cost of complete justice is paid by Ukrainian rubble, by Ukrainian loss of life, by Ukrainian inability to protect themselves.

This is the attitude behind it. Since time immemorial, the US has misunderstood the meaning of the war it is fighting, and has been unable to accept an imperfect outcome. In Vietnam, when Washington refused to acknowledge defeat, Richard Nixon took the war four years further, throwing Cambodia and Laos into covert bombings, vainly attempting to give a false peace with honour. The result was catastrophic: hundreds of thousands of dead people, destabilisation of the situation in the Southeast Asian region, and finally, collapse, which could not be deferred. On the same note, in Afghanistan, each administration that followed the others was unwilling to accept

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that it could not win. The war was fought year after year because the end was not possible, but because the leaders feared the political price of facing the truth. The result was a prolonged, more humiliating, and demeaning withdrawal.

The United States is today at risk of repeating two mistakes. Failing to accept an imperfect victory and failing to acknowledge the weaknesses of its military might. This means that, in the case of Ukraine, Washington is also unable to define success in an absolute way. The fact that the peace agreement leaves Ukraine independent, with weapons and becomes more pro-Western is not a loss but a tactical victory in a world where justice cannot always be perfect. The Europeans would see the Russia-Ukraine accord on peace, if rooted in a sound security guarantee, as the beginning of a new era of security in Europe. Europe has been fractured in its perception of a post-Cold War order of institutions, law and interdependence. The invasion of Ukraine revealed NATO structural weaknesses, the inefficacy of hard power deterrence, and the strategic oneness of the EU. Crisis is a change-bringing. A deal that would entrench Ukraine's western orientation would see Europe build the security it has been neglecting.

The very fact of the war has already hastened defence integration, increased discussions of military budgets, and raised the issue of autonomous deterrence capabilities. First, institutionalisation of these changes could be achieved through a post-peace-settlement environment that would enable Europe to do so. Second, Ukraine's integration into the European security system, encompassing defence, arms assistance, and long-term strategic coordination, would reorganise the continent's geopolitical landscape. Safe Ukraine is a buffer, a partner and a pointer of European strategic resilience. Third, the stabilised Eastern Europe will allow the EU and NATO to reallocate their efforts toward emerging issues: countering hybrid threats, managing migration pressure, ensuring energy security, and increasing China's presence in European territories. The peace settlement may be the place of departure for a more realistic, more consistent European security order, which accepts the world as it is, not as Western idealists would have it. People often confuse compromise and appeasement, even though the two are distinct. An enemy gets strength through true conciliation, and a duly constructed peace settlement can bind him. Russia would gain a territory that would be lost forever in Ukraine. It would look less promising in the long term, more strategically vulnerable. It would have an

enhanced Western alliance against the discomfort of reward to stabilise Europe and prevent the collapse of Ukraine.

This article was first published at Times of Bangladesh, Bangladesh, December 2, 2025, <https://tob.news/russia-ukraine-peace-deal-a-new-beginning-for-european-security/>.

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RCAS Commentary

Why India Remains Russia's Most Reliable Strategic Partner

Sujit Kumar Datta, Dec. 18, 2025

The visit by Vladimir Putin to India was not defined by the transactions that were reached, but rather the symbolism that ensued after the visit. The government actually received him with open arms. Prime Minister Narendra Modi received Putin at the Delhi airport, offered him a special dinner, and, after that, Putin accompanied President Droupadi Murmu in a state banquet in his honour. This is the kind of treatment that is accorded to a few leaders in the world, and more so in New Delhi. Modi even called the India-Russia relationship a pole star, a reliable and constant one.



▲Photo: Collected

However, even in the luxurious look, the contents of the summit were more prudent and moderate. It was in striking contrast to weeks of conjecture in the Indian media about big defence deals, be it fighter aircraft, drones, missiles, or air-defence systems. The protracted discussion between the Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Russian counterpart ended without any promise that showed the India-Russia defence cooperation, which was viewed as the cornerstone in the relationship in the past, did not evolve in any significant way. Instead, more

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emphasis on long-term economic interaction rather than short-term defence acquisition was put by the two locations during the visit.

This transformation signifies an increased amount of strategic realignment. Dependence on Russian military equipment has gradually declined over the past decade, but the operational predicaments of the old Russian systems have been on the rise. The war in Ukraine has also hampered Russia in terms of keeping to the timetable of supplies, providing advanced technology, or complying with previously reached-out-contract agreements. Against this backdrop, the recent India-Russia Economic Cooperation Roadmap 2030, which was published during the visit of Modi to Moscow earlier this year, has become the new point of reference against which the partnership is being restructured. Putin's visit was the opportunity to assist in that change.

The most significant effect of the visit was the signing of the long-awaited Labour Mobility Agreement. By the end of the decade, Russia is expected to experience a shortage of about 3 million employees due to the decline in population and discontinuities in labour due to wars. In the instance of India, which has a surplus of skilled labour in sectors such as construction, engineering, metallurgy, shipbuilding, and healthcare, the agreement opens a new frontier of economic cooperation. Laid properly, this would be like the successful Indian labour mobility agreements with West Asia-with a great Eurasian power.

The summit also reached an agreement on maritime cooperation, port connectivity, and customs cooperation. They are technically what they purport to be, but a very important stratagem. They are expected to accelerate the implementation of two of the large connectivity projects: the Chennai-Vladivostok Maritime Corridor (CVMC) and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). These corridors would transform the flow of trade across India, Russia, Central Asia, and the Arctic region when operational, since a significant amount of time would be saved in terms of shipment and freight. The ability to split trade routes and reduce reliance on the chokepoints controlled by the West is seen as a key strategic need in both countries in the multipolar world order.

It was interesting, however, that there were no announcements especially in the oil procurement, space cooperation, and nuclear energy collaboration. Russian crude oil, which skyrocketed after the Western sanctions in 2022, has already become the centre of bilateral trade, and neither of the parties could offer assurance regarding the long-term pricing models and supply assurances. Similarly, the space industry projects that had taken longer before completion, like the joint moon missions, were untouched. Nuclear cooperation, which has been among the aspects of India-Russia relations, has not seen any advancement other than the routine technical discussions. This mismatch of symbolism and outputs has contributed to maintaining the impression that the summit was not rich in its deliverables.

However, it will be a mistake to assume that the visit was a boring exercise. Even in the case of India, there are still a number of strategic reasons associated with further relations with Russia. New Delhi appreciates the fact that Russia remains a significant player in Eurasia, which contributes significantly to the world energy markets, and is a dominant player in supplying discounted crude that has helped India to survive the turbulent times. The Russians also provide India with some strategic cushion on the international platform, such as the UN Security Council, where Russia has stood in a consistent position to support India's positions. India needs to keep Russia on a good footing in order to afford some degree of flexibility in an ever-polarised world order.

However, India feels that the conflict in Ukraine and its' de-escalation will allow India to take the geopolitical pressure it is currently experiencing off its hands. The war has forced New Delhi to walk a fine line in trying to maintain the long-time defence ties with Moscow, as well as the expansion of its strategic and economic ties with the United States and Europe. The longer the conflict lasts, the more irritated India is between these conflicting relationships.

Meanwhile, India is growing worried about the fact that Russia is getting more dependent on China. This has made Beijing the largest economic lifeline of Moscow since the outbreak of the war, since it has significantly reduced the strategic independence of Russia. This gives some concern to Moscow gravitating towards Beijing because India is the primary long-term opponent, whose main opponent is believed to be China. Improvement of India-Russia relations, even in other spheres of labour mobility and sea infrastructure, helps New Delhi to maintain a certain

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degree of leverage over Moscow and to ensure that Russia does not enter into the strategic orbit of China in its entirety.

Unlike the majority of Western powers, Russia does not have to make a choice in the Indo-Pacific on the side of India. New Delhi is making an additional investment in a bigger Eurasian policy that leaves the doors open on all fronts. The Russian concern over security in Central Asia, its new ties with the leaders of West Asia, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, and its growing role in the Arctic are all part of the wider Indian foreign policy aspirations. By not breaking its ties with Russia, India will continue to have access to a diversity of geopolitical theatres that are not under the dominion of Western institutions.

India remains to the Russians as the most reliable non-Western ally on account of a variety of reasons. India has refused to sanction in a Western fashion, augmented imports of energy, and proceeded to maintain a high degree of political contacts, and has been pressured to diminish relations. India was able to offer Moscow a ground of equality, confidence, and goodwill in the past, as compared to China, which usually bargains based on economic superiority. The diplomatic dance and the kind words of Putin were supposed to acknowledge this friendliness and convey a message that Russia still values the friendship of India.

Nonetheless, ultimately, the Putin-Modi conference showed that the Indian-Russian relationship is in a different phase that is not full of bombastic declarations but one of slow, slow reorganisation. The emphasis of defence relations can no longer be considered among the priorities of the partners, but the economic, demographic, and connectivity aspects are becoming more important. As the world's geopolitics rapidly transforms, the two countries are continuing to establish a stronger and diversified relationship, which can survive external shocks.

This article was first published at Times of Bangladesh, Bangladesh, December 9, 2025, <https://tob.news/why-india-remains-russias-most-reliable-strategic-partner/>.

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RCAS Commentary

Trump's Security Strategy and The Fragile Global Order

Sujit Kumar Datta, Dec. 18, 2025

The National Security Strategy (NSS) of the Trump administration is a drastic departure from the current foreign policy paradigm of Washington. The new NSS does not even speak the term strategic rivalry in comparison to the first Trump administration and the Biden administration that openly discusses massive power rivalry with China and Russia. Instead, it is not that aggressive and more amenable to the established players in America. Geopolitical competition, financial destruction, and the decay of norms and the effect of this type of rhetoric and conceptual change are already weakening the world order, and the impact of the latter is catastrophic.



▲ Photo: Collected

The previous formulations positioned China and Russia as revisionist states that sought to foster values and interests that were contrary to those of the U.S. China was a pacing threat in the long run. Russia, in its turn, was a serious menace, offensive and subversive. It was a tactical reason

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that this form of framing had firmly established blocs and polarised them further. Comparatively, the top power rivalry is not referred to at least once in the new NSS. It does not refer to the regulation of European relations with Russia, and to the renewal of economic contacts between America and China.

It is understandable that such a rhetorical transformation may be reasonable. More and more commentators have warned that great-power rivalry has been overestimated and that its existence can create the self-fulfilling prophecy of states being caught in an escalatory spiral where states are allied with limited space in their actions. It is the redrawing of power and position of the new United States in the world that is more radical than the way the new NSS proposes it.

According to the document, the imperialist domination of the larger, wealthier, and more powerful countries is an ancient reality of world relations. It is upon this that it is not in agreement with the so-called unfortunate idea of global domination, but a proclamation of global and regional balance of power. It is a hideous transformation of allies and other states who have been relying on the American pledges on norms and institutions.

This theoretical movement will be able to give the answer to the question of how the NSS became so preoccupied with domestic affairs. The plan focuses on the Western Hemisphere, trade, and migration as well as the economic power of the country rather than an unnatural interest in the self-esteem of civilisation in Europe. This case does not show that security is in distant theatres and ideologies, but in cash and possession of your locality. This means that the flashpoint in Taiwan and NATO continues in the long-term and not in the short-term. Pledges are not particularly set aside. Not so firm, but still, does the greater strategic reason of those commitments.

It is fascinating, particularly taking into view the Western Hemisphere orientation. Not only does it resemble the Monroe Doctrine, but the NSS also presents what critics say is a Trump Corollary to it: a neo-imperialist assertion in America. The United States has already been predicted to hold special privileges and burden in this region, and that was not repentant for what it did in the past. This can be given out to the domestic audience who would desire a more contested assertion of sovereignty and authority. At the foreign level, though, it will be kindling up ancient enmity. The

U.S interventionist history in Latin America has been traumatising, and any move to exert overt power will be a disgrace to the image of the soft power known as Washington in its backyard.

There are risks, however, with the economic-first approach of security. To minimise the stabilising functions of institutions, alliances, and similar norms, the United States can decline the national interest by renegotiating the national interest to focus on the balances in trade and domestic economic benefits. Economics is not only inadequate to support the world order, but it is also founded on predictability, trust, and collective regulation. A transactional type of relationship that is based on the premise of instant economic compensation would dangerously eradicate the relationships in the long term and encourage hedging amongst the allies.

It also raises doubts about the fact that the NSS is not that harsh on Russia. The challenge itself is presented as based on the European relations with Russia, which suggests that it is willing to address Moscow as a regional power with justifiable interests and not a systemic intruder. This language may be pushed to its extremes as well in the conformity in the ears of certain European nations, the eastern side of NATO primarily. Despite being a decent concept, de-escalation may also add to the ambivalence of the will to decide according to the U.S., or demand that the regional powers receive an assurance of their safety beyond the U.S. borders.

The Trump administration's approach to security, collectively, has the effect of sounding like a more frankly realist approach, less apprehensive of power relations, less concerned with internal relations of inequality, and less anxious about general norms. It is too new in the history of the American nation and a severe contradiction of the post-cold war orientation of the liberal order and the head of the world. It is not only the content of the strategy that is taken on board; the content of the strategy is also dangerous, as it does not explicitly discuss the great power rivalry. Loss of structural reality that characterises the modern international system poses a threat to the NSS. It does not use the same name without addressing it as such since it no longer is the competition.

Lastly, the Trump security policy does not reflect the United States looking after the world in mourning and reasserting control of the home front and recapturing the economic advantage in material terms in other countries. Whether such a course of action will result in any stability or

quicker disintegration remains to be seen. What is clear is that the already tense international system will be left with no option but to change in order to incorporate an America that will no longer be interested in spearheading the global system in the same manner.

This article was first published at Times of Bangladesh, Bangladesh, December 16, 2025, <https://tob.news/trumps-security-strategy-and-the-fragile-global-order/>.

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