

REVA
**Strategic
Trends
2024**

Editors
**Vijay Sakhuja
and
Zheer Ahmed**

REVA Strategic Trends 2024

REVA Strategic Trends 2024

Editors

Vijay Sakhuja and Zheer Ahmed

Copyright @2025 REVA University

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without first obtaining permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN 978-81-982904-4-1

Published by

REVA University

Rukmini Knowledge Park,

Yelahanka, Kattigenahalli, Bengaluru,

Karnataka 560064

Website: <https://www.reva.edu.in/>

Printed and bound in India

The content of this book is the sole expression and opinion of its authors and not of the publisher. The publisher in no manner is liable for any opinion or views expressed by the authors. While best efforts have been made in preparing the book, the publisher makes no representations or warranties of any kind and assumes no liabilities of any kind with respect to accuracy or completeness of the content and specifically disclaim an implied warranties of merchantability or fitness of use of a particular purpose.

The publisher believes that the content of this book do not violate any existing copyright/intellectual property of others in any manner whatsoever. However, in case any source has not been duly attributed, the publisher may be notified in writing for necessary action.

Contents

Introduction	1-2
---------------------	------------

Part I Eurasia

Fear of US Sanctions preclude India to partake Russian gas through Iran	4-5
Dr. Vijay Sakhuja	

Russia does not need Iranian missiles	6-7
Dr. Vijay Sakhuja	

Russia China Drills worry Japan	8-9
Dr. Vijay Sakhuja	

Trump 2.0, Ukraine -Russia and the possibility of Third World War	10-11
Dr. Devender Kumar	

Russian Grey Zone Operations Could Trigger NATO Mutual Defence Clause	12-13
Dr. Vijay Sakhuja	

NATO and G7 Defence Ministers' underscore Indo-Pacific Security	14-15
Dr. Vijay Sakhuja	

COP29: Climate finance is still a dream of future	16-17
Dr. Zheer Ahmed	

Part II Indo-Pacific

Quad, China, and security in the Indo-Pacific	19-20
Dr. Devender Kumar	

US Pushes for New Military Hardware production Programmes with Indo-Pacific Countries	21-22
Dr. Vijay Sakhuja	

Georgia at crossroads: The Geopolitical implications of its political crisis	23-24
Dr. Zheer Ahmed	
Bangladesh in the crosshair of Big Powers contestation	25-26
Dr. Vijay Sakhuja	
Trump Presidency 2.0 and India	27-28
Dr. Devender Kumar	
India's 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' could be tested under Trump 2.0	29-30
Dr. Vijay Sakhuja	
ASEAN Countries seek BRICS membership	31-32
Dr. Devender Kumar	

Part III West Asia

Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah Conflict & implications on West Asian geopolitics	34-35
Dr. Devender Kumar	
Türkiye's Quest for BRICS membership	36-37
Dr. Devender Kumar	
Kuwait in India's Strategic Discourse: Cooperation commitment and assertiveness	38-39
Dr. Devender Kumar	
Towards a ceasefire: Geopolitical implications of an emerging Israel-Hamas deal	40-42
Dr. Zheer Ahmed	

Part IV North East Asia

The curious case of Shigeru Ishiba 44-45

Dr. Anudeep Gujjeti

Chinese Coast Guard prepares for Taiwan blockade 46-47

Dr. Vijay Sakhuja

Yoon's December gamble: Martial Law, impeachment, & geopolitical effects 48-50

Dr. Anudeep Gujjeti

East Asia in 2024: Political turmoil and security challenges 51-53

Dr. Anudeep Gujjeti

North Korea's soldier supply chain 54-55

Dr. Vijay Sakhuja

Part V Military-Technology

Hypersonic Missiles and repercussion on global security 57-58

Dr. Devender Kumar

Geopolitics of Space: ASAT and Nuclear Test 59-60

Dr. Devender Kumar

About the Contributors

Dr. Vijay Sakhuja is Professor and Head at the Center of Excellence for Geopolitics and International Studies (CEGIS), REVA University, and former Director of the National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi. A retired navy officer, he earned his M.Phil. and Ph.D. from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has been a faculty member at prominent institutions in India and abroad, including ISEAS Singapore, CICP Cambodia, CAPS, ORF, and IDSA. Dr. Sakhuja has authored over 50 books and monographs on geopolitics, technology, climate change, and maritime history.

Dr. Zheer Ahmed Assistant Professor at the Centre of Excellence for Geopolitics and International Studies, REVA University, Bangalore, holds a Ph.D. in International Studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. His research focuses on non-traditional security threats, including water scarcity, Geopolitics, Israel's national security and regional interactions. A recipient of the National Research Fellowship, Dr. Ahmed has published extensively in reputed journals, serves on editorial boards, and explores geopolitics, environmental security, and West Asian politics.

Dr Anudeep Gujjeti is an Assistant Professor at the Center of Excellence for Geopolitics and International Studies (CEGIS), REVA University. He is a Young Leader at the Pacific Forum, Honolulu, USA. Dr Anudeep is also a member of the Indo-Pacific Circle, a curated network of early and mid-career scholars shaping the emergent narratives of the region, hosted by the Council for Strategic and Defence Research (CSDR) and the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), New Delhi.

Dr. Devender Kumar is an Assistant Professor at the Center of Excellence for Geopolitics and International Studies (CEGIS), REVA University. He is a Visiting Faculty at (SIF) and a member of the Indian Political Science Association. He worked as an assistant professor of International Relations and Security Studies at the Rashtriya Raksha University under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. He holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Introduction

The current global order is in an unprecedented geopolitical flux marked by shifting sands of alliances, partnerships, rivalries and axes. The ongoing Russia Ukraine war and Israel Hamas conflict underscore the fragile equilibrium that governs international system. Further, the power dynamics among states has profound implications for global security.

This inaugural volume of 'REVA Strategic Trends, 2024' explores a tapestry of pivotal issues, capturing the essence of the complex world order, where old certainties dissolve and new paradigms emerge. It delves into the critical developments in the Indo Pacific region, Eurasia, and West Asia and offers a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing global stability and security. The volume is divided into five sections based on the above geographical areas, and the last section delves into military issues and technology.

The first section highlights the contemporary geopolitical landscape wherein United States, Russia and China are engaged in great power competition. The US hegemony is being challenged by Russia's military power and China's economic influence. There are fears that US sanctions are compelling nations to cautiously navigate ties with Russia and Iran. Meanwhile, NATO's mutual defense clause is being tested. These developments highlight a fracturing world order where traditional alliances are strained and strategic autonomy is increasingly sought after.

The second section focuses on the Indo-Pacific region, the Quad, comprising India, Japan, Australia, and the United States who grapple with countering China's assertive maneuvers. The US continues to push for new military hardware production programme with Indo-Pacific countries, signaling a deepening commitment to the region's security architecture. Also, ASEAN's aspiration for BRICS membership reflects the bloc's strategic balancing act amidst intensifying US-China competition.

In section three, the volatility in the West Asian region is discussed. The region remains in a flux marked by geopolitical contestations and shifting allegiances. The Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah conflict reverberates across the region with far-reaching implications for the broader geopolitical landscape. Emerging ceasefire deals and their potential to reshape alliances and rivalries warrant close examination. Turkey's quest for BRICS membership further illustrates the region's complex interactions with global power blocs. These dynamics underscore the interplay between local conflicts and global ambitions, painting a picture of a region perpetually in flux.

In section four, the intricate web of security challenges in Northeast Asia are highlighted. The Chinese Coast Guard's preparations for a potential Taiwan blockade signify an escalation that could have catastrophic implications. Meanwhile, Japan grapples with the implications of Russia-China drills, raising questions about its security posture. The domestic politics of Korea and Japan impact the region's geopolitics, emphasizing the challenges of dealing with unpredictable factors.

In section five, it is argued that technology and environmental crises are increasingly shaping the geopolitical discourse. Hypersonic missiles are a destabilizing factor in global security, raising concerns about arms races and strategic miscalculations. The geopolitics of space, with anti-satellite (ASAT) and nuclear tests, underscores the weaponization of new frontiers, challenging the norms of peaceful exploration. At another level, climate change looms as a pressing issue. COP29 illustrates the ongoing struggle to finance climate adaptation and mitigation, with climate finance remaining a distant dream. The intersection of environmental and geopolitical challenges demands a coordinated global response, yet such unity remains elusive.

As we navigate through 2024, the interplay of geopolitical rivalries, technological advancements, and environmental challenges underscore the complexity of the global strategic landscape. It is our hope that the compendium will provide readers with an in-depth understanding of the multifaceted issues at play, offering insights into the evolving dynamics that will shape geopolitics in the years to come.

Vijay Sakhuja

Zheer Ahmed

Eurasia

Commentary 1

Fear of US Sanctions preclude India to partake Russian gas through Iran

Dr. Vijay Sakhuja

India's quest for overseas investments in energy resources continues. The latest initiative is in the Caspian Sea wherein the ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL), the overseas investment arm of the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), a state-owned enterprise, has signed a "definitive sale purchase agreement (SPA) for directly acquiring 0.615 per cent participating interest (PI) in offshore Azeri Chirag Gunashli (ACG) oil field in Azerbaijan from the Norwegian company Equinor. The agreement also includes acquiring 0.737 per cent shares of the Baku Tbilisi Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline company through its wholly-owned subsidiary ONGC BTC Limited,"

The current investment adds to the earlier assets of the OVL in 2013 when it acquired 2.31 percent stake in the ACG oil field and 2.36 per cent in the BTC pipeline company. It merits mention that the OVL produces nearly 2,00,000 barrels of oil and oil equivalent natural gas per day from 32 oil and gas projects in 15 countries across geographies.

The hydrocarbons potential of the Caspian Sea is high and its littorals i.e. Azerbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran have rich hydrocarbon deposits in their respective offshore areas. These countries are attracting investments in energy sector and in 2023, excluding Iran, they "collectively produced over 1.2 million barrels per day of oil and 50 billion cubic meters per year of gas from these fields".

While the energy potential of the Caspian Sea is noteworthy, it is mired in geopolitics. Russia, the largest gas producer in the world, is under US sanctions (invasion of Ukraine in 2022) and is unable to supply to its customers, particularly in Europe, and therefore facing an oversupply of natural gas. Iran is constrained to produce hydrocarbons in the Caspian Sea due to "significant technical and financial hurdles for exploration and development". The situation is further exasperated due to the US sanctions which preclude foreign investment and technical expertise.

Russia and Iran recently signed a major agreement for the supply of gas; under a MoU, Gazprom of Russia will supply to the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) natural gas through pipeline with a capacity of up to 300 MMcm/d (around 110 bcm/annum). It will be built under a thirty-year gas sales agreement. According to Dr Mohammad Mokhber, the acting President of Iran, his country will “become a regional gas hub and a new chapter will be established in the region”.

The MoU will allow Iran to export gas to Iraq, Türkiye, and Pakistan at a higher price. However, Türkiye and Iraq are reported to be inconsistent customers; “Turkey, is constantly altering the quantities that it imports and trying to push prices downwards, arguing that Russia offers lower rates” and “Iraq imports only limited volumes of natural gas and is a late payer”.

Pakistan is hesitant to import gas from Iran due to threat of sanctions by the US. In April 2024 the US Department of State explicitly warned that “anyone considering business deals with Iran to be aware of the potential risk of sanctions.” Notwithstanding its rejoinder to the US that India was also trading with Russia and Iran, Pakistan has apparently stepped back. It is also worried about the Iranian warning that Tehran would wait till September 2024 i.e. six months, before it would “demand an \$18 billion penalty from Pakistan if the case goes to arbitration”.

Islamabad faces a dilemma and has also chosen to put on hold the construction of the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline despite the fact that over 48% of its primary energy is in the form of natural gas. It has maintained that US sanctions preclude work on the project.

The Gazprom-NIGC natural gas MoU should be seen through the strategic prism of Russia-Iran bilateral relations. Mohammad Mokhber boldly stated that the agreement would have a “serious message for the world, and the path of gas cooperation started between the two countries will lead to bigger agreements and agreements” apparently referring to the fact that between Russia and Iran, they own more than 60% of global gas reserves. The Iranian Oil Minister Javad Oji is optimistic that the MoU would raise Iran’s share in international trade and “will act as a revolution in the energy and industry scene of the region,”

India’s energy needs are growing, and natural gas consumption in the country is expected to increase by more than 7% during 2024. The natural gas reserves in the Caspian Sea can potentially contribute to satisfy the growing demand; but New Delhi does not appear to be inclined to confront the US over getting gas from Russia through Iran given that the US has so far avoided announcing sweeping sanctions against India.

Commentary 2

Russia does not need Iranian missiles

Dr. Vijay Sakhuja

Media is abuzz with news that Russia may have received 200 short-range Fateh-360 ballistic missiles (range of 120 kilometers) from Iran. According to sources, the consignment was carried on board a Russian vessel that sailed from an Iranian port in the Caspian Sea to an unspecified Russian port. Also, Iran will send its technical specialist to train Russian military personnel on the missile control system at a test site near Ashaluk in Astrakhan region.

The issue of transfer of Iranian missiles to Russia has been around for a while now. Since the beginning of the year there were several reports that Iran was planning to supply Fateh-110 and Zolfaghar short-range ballistic missiles. So far there has been no evidence of use of Iranian military hardware by Russia other than the drones. This is unlike the North Korean case in which short-range Hwasong-11A missiles (700 kilometers range) were used by Russia to hit targets in Ukraine. The use of North Korean arsenal came to light after Ukrainian weapons inspectors examined the debris of the missile in the city of Kharkiv which was clearly a “violation of Council resolution 1718 (2006) which prohibits Pyongyang from exporting such items”.

Meanwhile Ukraine’s Foreign Ministry warned that the “deepening military-technical cooperation between Russia and Iran poses a serious security threat not only to Ukraine but also to the whole of Europe, the Middle East, and the world,” Besides, it will have “devastating consequences for Ukrainian-Iranian bilateral relations”.

Iran, on its part has dismissed Ukrainian accusations as “groundless and misleading”; Amir Saied Irvani, Iran’s ambassador to the UN made known his country’s position with regard to Ukraine Russia conflict that “military support to any party involved in the conflict, which results in increased casualties, destruction of infrastructure, and a setback in ceasefire negotiations, is deemed inhumane by Iran,” Iran also labeled these accusations as a “disinformation campaign” to undermine the government.

Be that as it may, the moot question is why Russia needs to import relatively low quality missiles (in terms of accuracy and sophistication) from North Korea or Iran.

According to Ukrainian sources, Russia may have fired nearly 200 short- and medium-range missiles on Ukraine every month since the beginning of this year; yet it has not run out of stocks despite a Western official stating that “Russia’s domestic ammunition production capabilities are currently insufficient for meeting the needs of the Ukraine conflict,”

They also emphasised on the impact of sanctions “hitting the Russian military industrial complex hard, causing severe delays and increasing costs” and lack of “access [to] Western components is severely undermining Russia’s production of new systems and repairs of old systems, with long-term consequences for the quality of weapons produced,”

There are at least two plausible reasons that prompt Russia to use North Korean and obtain Iranian missiles. First, North Korea may have requested to test its missile in actual combat and Russia obliged or even transacted given that it needs large quantities of ammunitions for the ongoing war. It may be noted that the quality of North Korean missiles is low. According to Yuriy Belousov, head of the War Crimes Department of Ukraine’s Office of the Prosecutor General “around 80 percent of the North Korean missiles failed to hit their target, with half of them exploding in mid-air”. Similarly, Iran could benefit from any modifications to its missiles by Russian military before these are put to operational use.

Second, Russia wants to keep its stockpile of sophisticated missile arsenal intact given that these are specially designed for confronting the NATO Member States. In particular, Russia is concerned about the US who announced that a new mission-ready US air defence base is coming up in northern Poland to detect and intercept ballistic missile attacks as part of a broader NATO missile shield. Furthermore, US and Germany have agreed to deploy long-range missiles such as SM-6 surface to air missiles, Tomahawk cruise missiles and hypersonic weapons in Germany from 2026.

In response, Putin has observed that “important Russian administrative and military sites” would fall within the range of such missiles” and declared that if the US goes ahead with these plans, his country will assume that it is “liberated from the unilateral moratorium previously adopted on the deployment of medium- and short-range strike capabilities,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov even proclaimed “We are taking steady steps towards the Cold War. All the attributes of the Cold War with the direct confrontation are returning,”

Russia, according to Defense Intelligence Deputy Chief Vadym Skibitsky, already produces “67 missiles per month, including 35 Kh-101s cruise missiles, 25 Kalibr cruise missiles, five M723 ballistic missiles for the Iskander-M system, and two Kinzhal hypersonic ballistic missiles” It is fair to argue that acquisition of either North Korean or Iranian missiles by Russia does not add much value to Russia other than as cheap expendable munition.

Commentary 3

Russia China Drills worry Japan

Dr. Vijay Sakhuja

Russia has upped the ante against the US by conducting large scale military drills codenamed Exercise "Ocean-24". It is perhaps the largest in three decades involving over 400 naval vessels, more than 120 aircrafts and over 90,000 troops. The footprint of the drills can be seen in both hemispheres at different geographies - Pacific and Arctic Oceans, and the Mediterranean, Caspian and Baltic Seas.

A strongly worded statement by President Putin accused the US and its allies of "openly declaring their plans to deploy medium - and shorter-range missiles in the so-called forward zones." Furthermore, "Under the pretext of countering the allegedly existing Russian threat and containing the People's Republic of China, the United States and its satellites are increasing their military presence near Russia's western borders, in the Arctic, and in the Asia-Pacific region,"

China has joined Russia in these military drills and designated it Northern/Interaction-2024 to "deepen strategic cooperation between the two sides and strengthen their ability to respond to security threats". The PLA Navy has deployed four vessels and 15 aircraft for the joint exercises and are programmed to operate with the Russian forces in waters and airspace of the Sea of Japan and the Sea of Okhotsk in the Pacific Ocean. The Japanese Self Defence Forces undertook "monitoring and intelligence gathering" of the movement of these forces.

Unlike Russia, the Chinese Ministry of Defence has down played these exercises as an "annual feature" with "mutual consensus". Earlier, the two sides had carried out aerial patrol over the Chukchi and Bering Seas and the northern Pacific Ocean wherein Russian air force Tu-95MS strategic missile carriers and the Chinese air force's Xian H-6 strategic bombers. According to media reports, China spent \$15 billion on military exercises in the Western Pacific in 2023.

It is to be noted that Russia and China have not signed any military alliance, but have declared "no limits" partnership announced in 2022 by Presidents Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. In May 2024 they agreed to deepen their "comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation" for a new era.

These exercises should also be seen as a joint push against the NATO particularly the IP4 or "Indo Pacific 4" i.e. Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand, who joined the Alliance in July 2024.

The IP4 cooperate with the NATO under the 2021 Individually Tailored Partnership Programme (ITPP), an “overarching framework for NATO’s cooperation with individual partner countries” and their warships regularly visit the IP4 countries. There is strong evidence of NATO and IP4 building mutually-reinforced deterrence mechanism through naval and air deployments and joint exercises in the western Pacific. Besides, under the ITPP, several areas of cooperation have been identified.

Japan is visibly concerned about the growing strategic cooperation between Russia and China and its annual defense white paper released in July 2024 notes that “repeated joint activities” in waters near Japan are “clearly intended for demonstration of force against Japan and are a grave concern from the perspective of the national security of Japan,”

Likewise, China and Russia are also concerned about deployment of US missiles in Japan. According to Japan Times report, the US is keen to deploy the Multi-Domain Task Force which includes the mid-range Capability Typhon missile system. US Secretary of the Army Christine Warmuth said the US would be “very interested in seeing a multi-domain task force operating from Japan. We have made it clear to the Japanese Self-Defense Forces that we are interested in this. The deployment will proceed at the pace of the Japanese government”. This powerful system is capable of firing Tomahawk cruise missiles (1,600 kilometers) and SM-6 missiles. The system was deployed for the first time in the Indo Pacific region in the northern Philippines during joint military exercises earlier this year.

China has opposed the proposed missile deployment stating that a powerful weapon such as the Typhon on its “doorstep” would “increase the risk of misjudgment and miscalculation.” Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova too warned that both Russia and China will “react to the emergence of additional and very significant missile threats, and their reaction will be far from being political, which has also been repeatedly confirmed by the two countries,”

The ongoing tensions between Russia-China vis a vis the US and its Allies and partners is a perfect recipe for an unstable western Pacific. The region already has its fair share of problems between China and South China Sea claimants, particularly the Philippines, which is putting a brave front, ostensibly with the US encouragement, against the Chinese coercion.

It also merits mention that Russia and China are yet to develop high-end interoperability that the US and its allies and partners enjoy; however frequent joint exercises by the Russian and the Chinese military are an indicator of growing operational convergence between the two militaries.

Commentary 4

Trump 2.0, Ukraine -Russia and the possibility of Third World War

Dr. Devender Kumar

Global geopolitics has taken a sharp turn in the backdrop of Donald Trump's victory in the recent American elections-- he is to assume office in January 2025. The son of the president-elect has alleged that the incumbent US president (Joe Biden) wants to start a "Third World War" before his father (Donald Trump) assumes office.

The incumbent American president (Joe Biden) seems to have loosened the leash in the ongoing Ukraine-Russia War, as both sides are now using heavy weapons against each other. President Zelensky (Ukraine) has sent "Army Tactical Missile Systems" (ATACMS) long range missile to Russia which it received from the US, and Russia responded by launching "intermediate-range ballistic missile" (ICBM) and "hypersonic intermediate-range ballistic missile" (IRBM) against Ukraine, which has made it the first country in the world to use both against a country.

The ironic part is that these missiles can carry nuclear weapons and the possibility of a nuclear war is created by the outgoing American president (Biden). The US is supplying weapons to Ukraine before the new president (Trump) takes over, which were deliberately kept on hold for long. Biden also wants to provide \$9 billion in security assistance to Ukraine for the war to get going as the newly elected president Donald Trump has vowed in the elections to end the Ukraine -Russia war in "one day."

Despite Western support to Ukraine, this war has managed to reach the 1000th day and has raised fears of nuclear war.

There is a higher probability for this war to become global due to the following reasons.

First, it is the first time that a country has used ICBM and IRBM against a sovereign country. Russia has already given signals for nuclear usage and North Korea directly threatens the US with nuclear weapons and is increasing its arsenal with help from Russia.

Second, Russia has recently revised its nuclear doctrine with a new decree that permits Russia to attack a non-nuclear state that optimizes aggression against Russia with the help of a nuclear state. With this Putin has directly threatened Ukraine as well as its partners NATO including US and UK.

Third, the Ukraine-Russia war is expanding as allies have joined and are now being protected by the allies. North Korea has sent nearly 10,000 soldiers to Russia to fight against Ukraine and South Korea is willing to supply weapons to Ukraine. The US, UK, Germany, EU, NATO, and South Korea support Ukraine. While China, Iran, Belarus, and North Korea are supporting Russia.

Fourth, the Ukraine-Russia war has potential to spread in regions. For instance, Korean Peninsula is divided on this war and both North Korea and South Korea have chosen their sides. In East Asia, Japan is supporting Ukraine, along with the G7 and the US, and has imposed “economic sanctions” on Russia. But China is backing Russia and is part of the anti-American axis along with Russia. China has supplied weapons to Russia and nearly 60% of weapons parts found on the battlefield are from China. President Zelenskyy during the “Shangri-La Security Dialogue 2024” admitted China is “blocking” peace and “being used as a tool by Russia” to undermine the initiative to end the war.

Fifth, it is no longer a war between Ukraine and Russia but between the anti-American Axis comprising Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea on one side and the US and its allies on the other. Russia has received help from axis which unites against the hegemonic control of the US. Iran is the major supplier to Russia for drones and has launched over 8000 Shahed Drones against Ukraine. North Korean soldiers are entering Ukraine and China is providing tech support to Russia. The US and the UK are backing Ukraine.

Ukraine and Russia are now sending payloads at each other, but will there be a collective response from either side or will it be just like Israel-Iran with no conventional war but rhetorics despite the Iranian claim that it can make a nuclear bomb in one day. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian state has alleged that a “Third World War has begun,” and any major military spark in contemporary global politics can take the world to a possible nuclear war and give rise to a Third World War.

Such realities have assured that there is no big war as of now, but surely a Cold War-like situation has emerged in global geopolitics as countries are choosing sides and global players (the US and Russia) are backing their allies in different regions. Some even claim that Cold War 2.0 has made the beginning.

Commentary 5

Russian Grey Zone Operations could trigger NATO Mutual Defence Clause

Dr. Vijay Sakhuja

Earlier this month, NATO foreign ministers met in Brussels and underlined the “global nature of the threats” that the Alliance faces. In particular, they flagged the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War, turmoil in the Middle East, Israel-Palestine (Hamas) crisis, developments in Syria, the nexus between Russia and Iran. It was also highlighted that China along with Russia were attempting to “destabilize” through “sabotage, cyber-attacks, and energy blackmail”.

The Secretary-General Mark Rutte observed that NATO “will work closely together with the EU on these issues”. The configuration between China, Russia, Iran and North Korea (CRINK) was of consequences to the NATO members particularly the deployment of North Korean troops in the Kursk region at the behest of Russia, is worrying the NATO.

In particular, the NATO member states are concerned that Russia is blatantly waging “hybrid war of aggression”. The German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock has said that President Vladimir Putin has launched an aggressive “hybrid war of aggression” which is affecting “European peace” and is attempting to “shake our democratic societies”. Meanwhile, Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky revealed that in 2024 nearly 20 percent of the 500 suspicious incidents in Europe were attributable to Russia.

These Russian non-kinetic hybrid attacks against the NATO members fall under the category of ‘grey zone’. This form of warfare is understood as an unconventional military response to achieve strategic aims albeit without a military conflict. The aggressor pursues “ambiguous, belligerent, and coercive actions” that do not adhere to the “traditional black-or-white dichotomy of war and peace; instead, they fall somewhere in the undefined middle.” It employs regular and irregular forces, platforms, weapons, cyber threats, damaging or severing submarine cables, etc., to maximize impact. Furthermore, Grey Zone operations, in most cases are sanctioned by the State (either out of choice or inevitability) therefore are part of the statecraft.

The most recent incident was in November 2024 when two submarine telecommunications cables linking Finland, Germany, Lithuania, and Sweden. This led many NATO members to believe that it was “hybrid warfare” by Russia. However American intelligence officials assessed that the cable was “not cut deliberately” by Yi Peng 3, a Chinese flagged merchant ship owned by Ningbo Yipeng Shipping Co. Ltd., a Chinese company. The vessel’s last port of call was Ust-Luga in the Baltic Sea and was bound for Cairo in Egypt.

It had transited through the area where the cables were found cut. The vessel was intercepted at sea by the navies and law enforcement agencies from European countries. Apparently the Chinese government instructed the Company to “co-operate with the investigation”. It has now been confirmed that the Chinese ship did not “deliberately damage” the cable and the Superintendent of the Swedish police clarified that although the “current classification of the crime is sabotage” and this “may change”, “because it cannot be ruled out that the cables were deliberately damaged,”

In the past too there have been incidents when submarine cables were cut causing major digital disruptions in European countries. In 2022, an underwater cable connecting mainland Norway with Svalbard Island was cut and the investigations concluded that it was due to “human activity”. In 2023, Baltic Connector pipeline between Finland and Estonia along with two underwater cables were damaged when a Chinese flagged vessel dragged its anchor through them. Earlier in 2022, the Nordstream attacks involving two gas pipelines connecting Russia with Germany were damaged due to “mysterious underwater explosions”.

Russia is also accused of Spoofing passenger planes and merchant vessels. According to media, between December 2023 and June 2024 as many as 350 commercial flights per day came under Russian jamming and affected over 50,000 flights in the Baltic Sea air space.

At sea, many reports of automatic identification system (AIS) blackouts and spoofing have been linked to the shadow fleet used by Russia to ship its oil and gas to interested countries. This operation involves ‘going dark’ by switching off the AIS transponder thus making such vessels undetectable by satellites or shore-based tracking systems. The Russian-flagged vessels are reported to go dark when conducting ship-to-ship (STS) transfers or when entering or transiting sea areas under high surveillance. It is estimated that nearly 600 tankers of various sizes are part of the Russian shadow fleet and during January to August 2024, at least three shadow tankers departed Russian ports every day accounting for “around 800 voyages”. The European Union member states have called for additional sanctions against Russia’s shadow fleet through surveillance and tighter shipping controls including transit through EU waters particularly in the Baltic Sea.

Russian Grey Zone operations have caused anxiety among NATO members about the potency of this type of warfare. Should the frequency and effectiveness of ‘below the level of direct contact operations’ increase to unacceptable levels, it could attract NATO mutual defense clause by the member states.

Commentary 6

NATO and G7 Defence Ministers' underscore Indo Pacific Security

Dr. Vijay Sakhuja

Two recent meetings involving the Defence Ministers of Western and select Asian countries merits attention. First, the NATO Defence Ministers along with those from partner countries (Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea) and the European Union met in Brussels, Belgium. The consultations included the necessity to “boost cyber defences, defence production and innovation; counter disinformation; and harness new technologies, including artificial intelligence” clearly exhibiting the need for “deepening cooperation in the face of shared challenges”. At the strategic level, it was agreed to “deliver on their financial pledge” of Euro 40 billion in security assistance to Ukraine (Euro 20.9 billion has been provided for in the first half of 2024), and boost deterrence and defence.

Secretary General Mark Rutte, the new incumbent, expressed concern that the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine had led to “instability in Europe” with “far reaching consequences across the world”. He also observed that the European security cuts across continents and identified Iran, China and North Korea as “security spoilers”. This necessitated that the Alliance accord high priority to “strengthening deterrence and defence” so that nearly “one billion people of the Member States are safe”.

Second, the Defence Ministers of the Group of Seven or G7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America) recently held a meeting in Naples, Italy. It is noteworthy that this was the first such dedicated meeting in Defence Ministers format. They were joined by NATO Secretary General and the agenda included ways to “further increase support to Ukraine, ramp up defence industrial production” as also appraise that the NATO was building partnerships not just in Indo Pacific but also in NATO's southern neighbourhood.

The ensuing Joint Declaration, among other issues, “reiterated unwavering support for Ukraine”, condemned/expressed concern over Hamas terrorist attack on Israel, Houthis against maritime shipping, and Iran's direct military attack against Israel. As far as the Indo Pacific is concerned, China's support to Russia and North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs including growing defence cooperation with Russia have featured in the Declaration.

The South China Sea also finds prominent reference in the statement with Member States conveying “serious concern about the situation in the South and East China Seas”. Furthermore, they expressed “strong opposition to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion”. The Declaration questions Chinese maritime claims in the South China Sea, militarization of disputed features, freedom of navigation and coercive and intimidating maneuvers by the Coast Guard and maritime militia vessels in the South China Sea.

The recent Chinese military drills around Taiwan also came up for discussion – “We are concerned about provocative actions, particularly the recent [Chinese] People’s Liberation Army military drills around Taiwan... We call for a peaceful resolution of cross strait issues,” – and the Declaration reaffirmed the necessity of “maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is indispensable to international security and prosperity”.

Similarly, the Declaration emphasised that “There is no legal basis for China’s expansive maritime claims in the South China Sea, and we are strongly opposed to China’s repeated obstruction of freedom of navigation, militarization of disputed features, and coercive and intimidating activities, as well as the dangerous use of coast guard and maritime militia vessels in the South China Sea”.

According to the NHK, Japanese Defense Minister Nakatani Gen informed the grouping about the intrusion by the Chinese and Russian into his country’s airspace and explained the growing collaboration between China, Russia and North Korea. Russia was increasing its collaboration with China and North Korea.

Although the G7 members are concerned about the growing Chinese assertiveness against Taiwan, they appeared careful in their articulations to prevent sharp reactions, particularly from China. It was noted that “there is no change in the basic positions of the G7 members on Taiwan, including stated one China policies. We call for a peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues”.

A recent Global Times commentary has dismissed the G7 as “club of wealthy nations” and notes that the grouping “need to stop sending erroneous signals to ‘Taiwan independence’ forces, rather than pointing fingers at Beijing”. It is quite obvious that the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has welcomed the G7 Declaration which “support for maintaining the peaceful status quo across the Taiwan Strait”.

Meanwhile, the US announced sale of US\$ 2 billion arms to Taiwan including the “advanced air defense missile system battle-tested in Ukraine” to enhance security resilience and deterrence capabilities of the island state. Notably, this is the 17th arms sale package to Taiwan under US President Joe Biden administration.

Commentary 7

COP29: Climate finance is still a dream of future

Dr. Zheer Ahmed

The Conference of Parties (COP) 29th annual United Nations Climate Change Conference was held in Azerbaijan's capital Baku on November 11, 2024. Approximately 80,000 participants from nearly 200 countries, including governmental officials, academics, and activists, assembled in Baku over two weeks to address climate financing and other challenges related to global warming. The conference primarily aim was to obtain US \$100 billion each year to tackle climate-related issues mostly in developing countries.

During the opening remarks, COP29 President and Azerbaijan's ecology minister, Mukhtar Babayev, stated that the results of COP29 will depend on actions rather than rhetoric. Moreover, he stated, 'the newly defined efforts must result in more effective outcomes'. He also urged global leaders to collaborate for tackling climate change issues, in which one of the most pressing issue is climate financing.

Azerbaijan, a significant fossil fuel producer and a contentious selection as the host of the climate conference, COP29, presents both an opportunity and a potential concern. The Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev aimed to host the conference to enhance his country's standing worldwide. In this regard, COP29 garnered significant publicity for Azerbaijan, albeit of a negative nature.

Aliyev's administration faced criticism for implementing a comprehensive crackdown aimed at suppressing all forms of internal dissent prior to the conference. Prominent Western media, criticized Azerbaijan's climate action record, leading Aliyev to denounce a 'smear' campaign against Baku. However, he compromised his own climate statements in September by pledging to increase oil and gas output.

The likelihood that COP29 provides the anticipated outcomes and financial commitments was uncertain as many prominent world leader stayed away from the summit. Chinese leader Xi Jinping was one of them. Notable attendees in the summit include UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, President of the European Council Charles Michel, Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko, and renowned Indian spiritual guru Sadhguru. The United States sent a group headed by White House senior adviser John Podesta. Donald Trump's electoral victory raises issues about whether the United States would make any contribution toward the COP29 financial objective as Trump has already threatened to withdraw the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement.

COP29 represents an essential turning point in the international climate discourse as it was focused on climate financing, which is a crucial enabler for realizing the objectives of the Paris Climate Agreement. Despite advancements in reduction and adaptation techniques, equitable climate finance commitments continue to pose an important challenge, especially for developing nations disproportionately affected by climate impacts.

Developed countries have a responsibility to increase financial and technological resources to assist developing countries in combating climate change. In 2009, developed countries proposed to generate US \$100 billion annually starting in 2020, a goal they assert was met in 2022. Developing nations challenged this assertion. The 2015 Paris Agreement stipulated the necessity of establishing a new financial objective, referred to as the 'New Cumulative Quantitative Goal' (NCQG), prior to the year 2025. The NCQG lacks clarity regarding the specific year from which the new amount is to be mobilized. After conducting several evaluations of their needs, the developing countries have requested that the NCQG be set at 1.3 trillion dollars annually. The primary focus of COP29 was to finalize the NCQG.

However, COP29 failed to address the demands of developing countries for the mobilization of US \$1.3 trillion annually in climate finance. However, the developed nations successfully negotiated an agreement, committing to allocate \$300 billion annually, starting in 2035. India categorically dismissed the proposal, describing the amount as 'abysmally poor' and 'paltry'. New Delhi expressed concerns regarding the process of adopting the agreement, characterizing it as 'stage-managed'. In conjunction with India, a number of developing, least developed countries, and island states expressed their disapproval of the proposal. Curiously, China, the largest and most powerful developing country, remained silent all through, giving its tacit approval to the US \$300 billion figure.

The developed countries also dismissed the additional requests from the developing countries for the funding to be primarily sourced from public funds and allocated predominantly as grants or concessional loans. The concluding agreement stated that the \$300 billion would be generated from a range of sources, both public and private, as well as bilateral and multilateral, incorporating alternative sources as well. The certainty regarding the disbursement of funds as grants or concessional loans is lacking. However, developed countries looked at COP29 as a success. European Union climate commissioner Wopke Hoekstra supported the idea of US \$300 billion for climate financing and called that the deal in itself is truly an exceptional development to address the effect of climate change as COP29 initiated a beginning of new era for climate finance. Nevertheless, the \$300 billion does not address the problem of climate financing for developing countries and thus, though COP29 has reached an agreement, yet it has failed to satisfy any of the country demanding for a fair deal of climate finance.

Indo-Pacific

Commentary 8

Quad, China and Security in the Indo-Pacific

Dr. Devender Kumar

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a grouping consisting of Australia, India, Japan, and the US, faces a dilemma after a suggestion made by Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba for becoming an 'Asian Version of NATO'. He stated that "the absence of a collective self-defence system like NATO in Asia means that wars are likely to break out because there is no obligation for mutual defence". The Japanese Foreign Minister said "An Asian NATO is an idea for the future" and should be 'considered in the mid-to-long-term'.

Since its beginning, Quad has faced the question of security in the Indo-Pacific. However, after 4 in-person meetings, 6 summits, and 8 foreign ministers meetings, the grouping has refrained from directly mentioning China in the "Quad Leaders Joint Statement" of 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024. But it did make indirect references to its actions to ensure the commitment to a 'free and open Indo-Pacific'.

China has aggressively pursued its ambitions in East and South China Sea. Recently Philippines claimed that the Chinese ship intentionally collided with the Philippines Ship, following which it asked China to "cease all provocative and dangerous actions" in the region. Japan on the other hand witnessed attempts by China "to unilaterally change the status quo in the East Asia region".

More recently China attacked Vietnam's ships and fishermen in the South China Sea. The countries facing attack from China like the Philippines and Vietnam are now signing agreements with each other for cooperation in the maritime domain and security in the South China Sea. They want to be partners in confronting China, as it has claimed the Spratly and Paracel Islands in the South China Sea.

The 2024 Quad Summit Wilmington Declaration also showed Quad's conviction' on 'security and stability in maritime domain' and proposed to uphold 'respect to maritime claim' and 'freedom of navigation" against the situations and concerns in the South and East China Sea. According to a report the countries even joined to "send a strong message to China" due to intimidation by Beijing in the region and decided to launch a 'coast guard mission' in 2025 for security in the region.

The grouping has also launched new initiatives such as the 'Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI)' for capacity building and regional security in the maritime domain. It also planned to launch a 'Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission' in 2025 to collaborate with Indian, Japanese, Australian, and US Coast Guards for maritime safety and interoperability.

There are four main reasons why Quad must openly address the China question to address the security of Indo-Pacific states.

First, countries in the Indo-Pacific are seeking security cooperation. Philippines has sought security engagement with the US and started having a military presence of the US in the country. It also signed security cooperation agreement with Vietnam and sought security and defense ties with Indonesia and regional powers i.e. Japan, South Korea, Australia, and India. These rising security cooperation agreement and Japan's new 'Asian NATO' vision pose ideological dilemmas for countries such as India.

Second, Australia has joined AUKUS to 'counterbalance China' and limit its rising influence in the Indo-Pacific to ensure regional stability. The partners have enhanced engagement, increased presence, and opted for technological advancement to create deterrence and defense in the Indo-Pacific.

Third, nearly 90 percent of the Japanese consider China a security threat, and Beijing has been aggressive toward Japan. Both have dispute over the Senkaku Island in the East China Sea, and Japan has objected to armed Chinese vessel patrols near this island. Japan considers China a 'serious concern' and sought to enhance its military ties with the US and have 'US-Japan alliance deterrence' in the region.

Fourth, the security apprehensions in Indo-Pacific are causing a policy dilemma for countries such as India. It pursues the policy of multi-alignment in the heavily polarized global politics to rebalance among the conflicting scenarios i.e. Ukraine-Russia, Iran-Saudi rivalry, Israel-Iran rivalry, US-Russia rivalry, the China-US rivalry. It sought to defend its national interest and refuted the Japanese PM's views. However, the demand for the 'Asian NATO' outlook makes India rethink its policy.

The recent Chinese activities have forced ASEAN states to think on defense cooperation. Quad states have found many key areas for cooperation such as maritime, health, disaster, humanitarian assistance, cyber, space, connectivity, undersea cable network, digital future, technology, radio access network, climate, solar, and terrorism but still shies away from mentioning China in the official statement.

In essence, the countries in the Indo-Pacific are seeking 'regional deterrence' and 'mutual defence' against China. Quad now must openly address the security concerns of small states in the Indo-Pacific.

Commentary 9

US Pushes for New Military Hardware Production Programmes with Indo-Pacific Countries

Dr. Vijay Sakhuja

Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG), a US led “coalition of the willing” initiative to blunt the Yemeni missiles and drones attacks against Israeli-linked merchant shipping transiting through the Bab al-Mandab Strait has proven successful. Only two ships could be sunk which is a very encouraging report card keeping in mind that this Iran backed group has targeted over hundred merchant vessel; but four sailors lost lives due to Houthi attacks.

The cost of counter measures against the incoming barrages of missiles and swarms of drones is however very high; for instance, a Standard Missile-2 (SM-2) missile costs \$2.1 million; a 5-inch air burst artillery shell is valued at \$2,500 per shot; and the 20mm rounds cost about \$30 per shell. Similarly, anti-missile and counter-drone operations resulted in high use of ordnance leading to rapid depletion of onboard stocks of munitions. The French frigate Alsace had to return home after 71-day deployment due to depleted onboard stocks in the armoury. This weakness erodes the qualitative edge of a military platform at sea and they also runs the risk of being defenseless against enemy attacks such as those by the Houthis.

Perforce, the navies have to necessarily ensure sustainability and resilience of ordnance supply chains by either loading ammunition at sea which is a highly complex operation particularly with missiles which require high levels of stability to adjust for roll-pitch-yaw experienced by any ship that is afloat. Pre-provisioned armaments depots in friendly countries can fill shortfall of stocks if their militaries are using similar weapons.

The United States is now encouraging its alliance partners and friendly countries in the Indo Pacific region to acquire or co-produce military hardware including munitions and support each other through standardization of military equipment as well as resilient supply chain agreement that would also withstand the pressures of domestic politics.

In the above context, the US has conceptualized the Partnership for Indo-Pacific Industrial Resilience (PIPIR) which aims to “enhance defense industrial resilience”, “reduce production barriers” as well as address “supply chain issues”. U.S. undersecretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment William LaPlante has stated that the PIPIR will help strengthen our collective ability to produce and sustain war fighting capability in the Indo-Pacific”.

This 13 member grouping met in Singapore soon after the Shangri-La Security Dialogue in June 2024 and agreed to a broad set of principles to guide the new defense industrial initiative. In fact the PIPIR is quite similar to the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (UDCG) comprising of over 40 countries that have committed to “capability deliveries to Ukraine” except that it is primarily meant to enhance its war fighting capacity through the support of its alliance members and other partners.

The four “work streams” or the pillars of the PIPIR are “Sustainment, Production, Supply Chain Resilience, and Policy and Optimization” and involve the US alliance partners in the Indo-Pacific region. Majority of these are bilateral in nature except the AUKUS which is between Australia, UK and the US.

Under the Sustainment pillar, the US has signed agreements for ship repair (India and South Korea) and aircraft maintenance (Australia). The Production pillar involves jointly producing missiles with Japan and the US-Australia coproduction involves Infantry Fighting Vehicles and munitions. Similarly, the Supply Chain Resilience pillar involves US and India and is focused on “reciprocal priority support for goods and services”. The Policy and Optimization pillar envisages intelligence sharing agreements with Japan, Australia (combined intelligence center), New Zealand US National Technology and Industrial Base (NTIB) and the AUKUS related License-Free Defense Trade.

The US is also looking for new partners for “co-development, coproduction [or] co-sustainment” of weapons. For example the “joint hypersonic missile killer program” involves Japan, the “trilateral submarine pact” is built around UK and Australia, and “new coproduction and sustainment” with South Korea.

It has been observed that the Sustainment pillar has made “least amount of progress” and could be the Achilles heel of the US Navy. A Congressional Research Service (CRS) report notes that “about a third of the U.S. attack submarine fleet is currently out of service, either undergoing maintenance or awaiting repairs”, “the Navy is 20 years behind in maintenance work and less than 40% of the Navy’s scheduled ship repairs are completed on time” and “key shipbuilding projects are also running years behind schedule”. The US is lagging behind the Chinese “shipbuilding capacity” which is over 200 times that of the United States”.

There is a visible urgency in the US to build military dominance against the emerging axis involving China-Russia-Iran-North Korea. Washington has also realized that it must build resilient military supply chains through “co-development, coproduction [or] co-sustainment” of weapons and maintain not only ascendancy, but must overcome tyranny of geography.

Commentary 10

Georgia at crossroads: The geopolitical implications of its political crisis

Dr. Zheer Ahmed

Political unrest in Georgia has escalated due to a conflict between the government led by the Georgian Dream party and President Salome Zourabichvili. Following the October 26 parliamentary elections, the Georgian Dream party secured over 54% of the votes. However, the opposition rejected the results, alleging electoral fraud and Russian interference in the election. President Zourabichvili criticized the government for obstructing Georgia's European integration.

Tensions peaked on November 28 when Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced the postponement of European Union (EU) accession talks until 2028, accusing Brussels of undue pressure on Georgia. He also rejected EU's financial aid, historically vital for reforms in Georgia's public and judicial sectors. This move, however, violates Article 78 of Georgia's constitution, which mandates the pursuit of Georgia European integration.

The Georgian people's strong pro-European sentiments have fueled extensive protests following the government's controversial decision to postpone EU accession talks. Demonstrators have taken to the streets in large numbers, waving EU and Georgian flags and demanding the reversal of the decision and new elections. Rustaveli Street in Tbilisi has become the epicenter of these rallies, symbolizing the public's commitment to safeguarding Georgia's sovereignty and democratic ideals.

However, these protests have faced severe repression. Law enforcement agencies have employed tear gas and water cannons to disperse protesters, leading to allegations of excessive force. Independent media outlets have broadcast footage of police violence against demonstrators and journalists, intensifying public outrage. The government's strict response has drawn widespread international condemnation. Prominent voices like Council of Europe Secretary General Alain Berset and the US Helsinki Commission have expressed deep concern, underscoring fears about the erosion of democratic freedoms in Georgia.

The enmity between Russia and Georgia is rooted in Georgia's struggle to maintain sovereignty against Russian domination. In 1921, Soviet forces invaded Georgia after a brief period of independence, ushering in decades of political and cultural repression. This legacy of subjugation persisted until the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991. However, Georgia's independence brought instability, including the Abkhazian War (1992–1993), where Russian-backed separatists carried out ethnic cleansing against Georgians. In 2008, Russia invaded Georgia, solidifying control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two separatist regions. These events have driven Georgia's aspiration to align with the West, seeking EU and NATO membership as a bulwark against Russian aggression.

However, under the leadership of the Georgian Dream party, founded by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, Georgia has faced growing accusations of shifting toward Russia. The party's anti-Western rhetoric, including attacks on NGOs and allegations of interference in its domestic affairs by the EU and the US has alienated Western allies. Observers argue this rhetoric undermines Georgia's EU's aspirations, aligning the nation more closely with Moscow's geopolitical interests.

The international community has expressed concerns over Georgia's political trajectory. The US has introduced the MEGOBARI Act, which aims to bolster Georgia's democracy, human rights, and rule of law while countering Russian influence. This initiative underscores the US commitment to support Georgia's EU integration and ensuring that it remains resilient against Russian Influence. However, the effectiveness of such measures depends on sustained international engagement and pressure on the Georgian government to uphold democratic principles.

The political crisis in Georgia has far-reaching consequences for both regional stability and global geopolitics. Located at the nexus of Europe and Asia, Georgia serves as a critical linchpin in the West's strategy to counter Russian influence in the Caucasus, a region of significant geopolitical importance. Its strategic location makes it a vital corridor for transporting energy resources from the Caspian Sea to European markets. These transit routes are central to efforts aimed at reducing Europe's dependency on Russian energy, thereby curbing Moscow's leverage over the continent.

A pro-Russian shift in Georgia would dramatically alter the regional balance of power, granting Moscow greater control over the Caucasus. Such a development would not only consolidate Russia's influence, but also undermine the West's geopolitical standing in the region. This realignment could disrupt energy supply chains, heightening Europe's vulnerability to energy coercion. Moreover, it would embolden Russia's aspirations for regional hegemony, complicating Western efforts to maintain stability in Eastern Europe and beyond.

Finally, it is argued that Georgia's current crisis is more than a domestic political struggle. It is a pivotal moment in the country's quest for sovereignty, democracy, and Western integration. The government's decision to suspend EU negotiations has triggered a public outcry, symbolizing the population's resistance against a pro-Russian turn.

The outcome of this crisis will shape not only Georgia's future but also the broader geopolitical landscape. If the West fails to act decisively, Georgia risks falling into a geopolitical limbo, jeopardizing its democratic aspirations and regional stability. Conversely, sustained domestic and international efforts could help Georgia reaffirm its commitment to a European future, serving as a beacon of hope for democracy in the post-Soviet space.

Commentary 11

Bangladesh in the crosshair of Big Powers contestation

Dr. Vijay Sakhuja

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has accused the US of interference in domestic affairs of Bangladesh. She also alleged Washington's role in her ouster from the country: "I could have remained in power if I had left St Martin's and the Bay of Bengal to America". The US has dismissed the insinuations as "simply false", and through a press briefing, the White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre clarified "We believe that the Bangladeshi people should determine the future of the Bangladeshi government and that's where we stand," This is not the first time that St. Martin Island has figured in the US-Bangladesh relationship discourse; in fact in 2023, Hasina declared that Bangladesh's sovereignty is paramount and "I don't want to return to power by leasing out St Martin's Island".

St. Martin Island, also known as "Narikel Zinzira" or the "Coconut Island", is coral reef feature measuring just 3 square kilometers with about 3,800 residents, majority being fishermen. It is strategically located nine kilometers south of the tip of the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf peninsula, in northern Bay of Bengal.

Northern Bay of Bengal waters have been quite calm, and India, Bangladesh and Myanmar have maintained good relations. These countries successfully navigated the overlapping maritime territorial disputes through the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) (Bangladesh vs Myanmar, 2012)) and arbitration (Bangladesh vs India, 2014) under Arbitral Tribunal constituted under Annex VII of the 1982 UNCLOS. However, there have been strategic tensions between Bangladesh and Myanmar over the Rohingya migrant issue since 2017.

Along with the other littorals of the Bay of Bengal i.e. Thailand and Sri Lanka , these countries have invested politico-diplomatic-strategic capital in addressing non-traditional security threats such as piracy, drug running, illegal migration, and challenges arising from climate change, natural disasters, ocean acidification, etc. In fact the regional grouping i.e. BIMSTEC has been facilitating the process of State led regionalism. However, there have been undercurrents of geopolitical contestations in the Bay of Bengal.

China is perhaps the leader in the pack with geopolitical ambitions in Bay of Bengal. It has undertaken strategic asset building in the region under the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) through funds, technology, and technical expertise. In Bangladesh, during the last 10 years, China has initiated 35 projects (roads, rail, port, airport, expressway, water, coal and solar energy projects, etc.) valued at US\$ 4.45 billion. It has also supported military modernisation and capacity building of Myanmar and Bangladesh including supply of submarines to Thailand and Bangladesh (two vessels).

In the case of the latter, there are reports that a submarine base—BNS Sheikh Hasina- is being built with Chinese assistance at Pekua in Cox's Bazar.

Russia, too has been making a beeline for Myanmar and Bangladesh. In 2023, Russia's State Atomic Energy Corporation (Rosatom) assisted Myanmar to open its first ever nuclear technology information center in Yangon, and in June 2024 it was announced that the Russian government had approved a draft agreement to build a plant with a capacity of at least 110 megawatts using Russian pressurized water reactors. Russian warships have made port calls in Myanmar and the first ever Russia-Myanmar naval exercise (MARUMEX) was held in the Andaman Sea in November 2023.

Interestingly, Russia, which was earlier a supplier of arms to Myanmar, has been sourcing weapons from Myanmar to support its war effort against Ukraine. For instance, Russian technicians are reported to be assisting in the manufacture of 120 mm mortar rounds in Myanmar and these are being sold to Russia. At another level, Russian arms sales to Myanmar (38%) exceed that of China (26%) and India (18%).

Bangladesh too has received civilian nuclear technology from Russia under a US\$ 11.38 billion loan. The Rooppur 1 nuclear power plant is behind schedule due to Covid pandemic, and US sanctions on Russia prompted Bangladesh making payment in Yuan. China is the largest supplier of military hardware to Bangladesh (72 %) followed by Russia (12 %) and 16 per cent from the rest of the world. Russia is the primary supplier for the Bangladesh Air Force with Mig-29 and SU-30. Russian warships too have visited the Chittagong Port in 2023.

The US has attempted to make strategic inroads into Bangladesh. The bilateral defence cooperation discussions have focused on General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) for intelligence sharing, and the Acquisition Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) for logistic support, supplies, and services; however, "Bangladesh is hesitant to agree to these proposed bi-lateral agreements".

Bangladesh, under the new political dispensation, will have to navigate the complexities of great power engagements with immense dexterity. The ties with its immediate neighbours will be extremely important to reverse the adverse impact on regional security.

Just before Sheikh Hasina fled her country in August 2024, in June the 'India-Bangladesh Shared Vision for Future' document stated: "... we will explore defence industrial cooperation for modernisation of the Armed Forces of Bangladesh, to strengthen their capability for defence" including "multifaceted military engagements of exercises, training and capability development." This will need to be followed up by the new government in Dhaka.

Commentary 12

Trump Presidency 2.0 and India

Dr. Devender Kumar

Donald J. Trump won the “60th quadrennial presidential elections” in November 2024 and will take office on 20 January 2025 as per the ‘20th Amendment’. Surprisingly, Trump has attained a heavy mandate from US citizens on his promises and secured ‘312 electoral’ college votes—more than required to form the government. Trump in his presidency 2.0 has chosen to take tough measures with the zero-tolerance approach.

Many of his promises are controversial and will impact India-US ties in areas such as (a) economic; (b) citizenship and Indian origin (c) H1B visas; (d) tech and education; and (e) environment. There are six major areas in which India’s diplomatic skills and balancing will be tested vis-a-vis the US.

The first is economic; Trump has called India a “Tariff King” during his first tenure and imposed several restrictions by removing India’s “Generalized System of Preferences” (GSP) status in June 2019 and imposed tariffs on Indian steel and aluminum by 10-25 % through national security rules. Such steps marked a decline in Indian exports to the US as zero-tariff items came under heavy tariffs. Similarly, during the election campaign for Trump 2.0, he called India a ‘trade abuser’ and “biggest charger of tariffs” and promised to charge a “reciprocal tax” by opting “tit-for-tat” approach. He wants to apply a “100 % percent tariff” on Indian goods. This attitude may ignite a “trade war” between India and the US.

Second, is the anti-immigration stand of the newly elected US president? Trump has promised to change the citizenship rules for the US under the 14th amendment which provides citizenship based on the birth in US territories known as Jus Soli. According to US National Bureau of Census 53% of US citizens are naturalized citizens most are from Mexico, India, Dominic Republic, Cuba, and the Philippines while 47.9% are identified as not citizens. 10 million US citizens are of Mexican origin, the second largest is the Indians (nearly 2.8 million) and 2,90,000 are eligible for the naturalization. The Pew Research Center report suggests that the number of Indians in the US has become 4.8 million (2022) therefore, if the US pursues an expulsion policy under Trump 2.0, it will have significant repercussions on India-US ties.

Third, is the question of H1B Visas for Indians to work in the US? This visa is an opening gate for Indian professionals in the US with the opportunity to work but Trump presidency 2.0 is likely to take a tough stand by implementing more restrictions.

“Stephen Miller” is chosen as the new ‘Deputy Chief of Policy’, and he is known for his strong stand on immigration which perhaps would hamper the entry of Indian professionals as 75% of Indian professionals depend on H1B visas to enter the US.

Fourth is the tech and education sector in which India is a major partner in the US-India educational and tech partnership. Nearly 124,000 Indian students visited the US in 2023 and around a million are waiting for an employment-based green card. Trump is likely to opt for a transactional partnership approach which will impact Indian and US techies as nearly 15% of the H1B visa quota for the US is consumed by this sector

Fifth, Trump has vowed to reduce US debt and has decided to create the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) an agency to ‘maximize governance’ and ‘minimize government’. He has chosen businessman Elon Musk to restructure government departments and finances, mainly to start the ‘Save America’ campaign with the target of reducing bureaucracy and unnecessary expenditure. Such a move is likely to reduce jobs in the US and impact the Indian origin living in the country.

Sixth, India is committed to climate change and is working to address the issue. During the recent COP29 conference this year, India tried to introduce an ‘accountability’ mechanism for the developed nations to ensure ‘climate finance’ in achieving climate goals for the developing states. But the rise of Trump 2.0 raised questions on the future of climate actions as Trump is skeptical of climate concerns and he earlier withdrew from the Paris Agreement’. He may again withdraw from this and stop US funding for the same. Trump also backed out from the ‘Joint Comprehensive Plan of Actions’ (JCPOA) with Iran and imposed sanctions on Iran but India secured a concession. Nevertheless, this time, the world faces different geopolitical realities.

US under Trump 2.0 may follow an isolationist approach with the aim to reduce extra expenditure on the government. It remains to be seen how India would balance the Trump 2.0 presidency and access the US market despite objections from the president-elect. This will surely test India’s diplomatic skills and bargaining power.

Commentary 13

India's 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' could be tested under Trump 2.0

Dr. Vijay Sakhuja

Indian political leaders and policymakers often cite “strategic autonomy” and “multi-alignment” as New Delhi’s foreign policy choices. These are now being referred to by the US military leadership also. During a recent interaction at the Brookings Institution, Admiral Samuel Paparo, Commander of US Indo-Pacific Command, among many other issues including China, highlighted the India-US military partnership, which according to him is “growing year by year”; this is notwithstanding “its [India] history in the non-aligned movement”. Furthermore, India is diversifying its sources of arms wherein among the others (particularly Russia), the US is an important supplier. Admiral Paparo is confident that “those [Russia] partnerships will likely fade over time” as Washington and New Delhi pursue the goal of identifying strategic convergences.

Samuel Paparo is quite right. According to “Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2023” published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, India is among the top importers of military hardware in the world and Russia has been a major supplier; however, in recent times, Russian share in the Indian arm imports has witnessed slight decline i.e. from 76 percent between 2009 and 2013; 58 percent in 2014 to 2028; and 36 percent in 2019 to 2023.

A part of this decline has been filled in by its own military industrial complex which is now being prepared for indigenous production. Defence Industrial Corridors have been established in Uttar Pradesh in north India and Tamil Nadu in the south. In fact India’s new acquisitions of weapons strictly adhere to the 2020 Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy which mandates boosting the indigenous military complex and lessens import substitution. The DPEPP envisages indigenous production of military hardware in the order of INR 1.75 lakh crore (US\$ 25 billion) by 2025.

Admiral Samuel Paparo also noted that there are several convergences and “many mutual interests” between the two countries which necessitates keeping “our foot on the accelerator.” After the successes with the four agreements i.e. the 2002 General Security of Military Information Agreement; the 2016 Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement; the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement; and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Intelligence, the two militaries are now ready for further expanding and advancing their strategic partnership.

Encouraged by the successes of the above four agreements, and convinced that the India-US relations will define the 21st century, Republican Senator Marco Rubio introduced a bill short titled “United States-India Defense Cooperation Act of 2024”.

The bill emphasizes that “it is in the interest of peace and stability for the Republic of India to have the capabilities needed to deter threats against its sovereignty.” The bill also makes reference to Pakistan and calls upon the US Secretary of State to file a report regarding the “offensive uses of force” against India by Pakistan and its proxies. In the event of such an eventuality, the US should cease “security assistance under this Act” to Pakistan.

During their meeting in September 2024, Prime Minister Modi and President Biden acknowledged the progress made in the bilateral defence cooperation and emphasised that both countries are committed to global peace and security. Also, both militaries are benefiting from their bilateral engagements such as exercises, operational practices, sharing of information and military innovation.

It is notable that the India-US Defence Industrial Cooperation Roadmap has showcased steady progress and priority is being accorded to joint development and production of military platforms and related equipment. The Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA) envisages supply of military related goods and services. There are several other similar initiatives which add to the robustness of the bilateral defence partnership including the 2023 India-U.S. Defense Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) initiative, collaboration under Memorandum of Understanding between the Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) and Defense Innovation Unit (DIU) and the INDUSWERX consortium which enables the “defense and dual-use companies in the INDUS-X network” to use test ranges in India and the US.

Another important facet of the defence industry cooperation between the two countries is the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) which has steadily made impressive headway. Under the MRO, the US warships have docked in Indian dockyards for repairs. Similarly, under aerospace cooperation, Lockheed Martin and Tata Advanced Systems Limited are setting up MRO facility in India to support maintenance of C-130 Super Hercules aircraft.

The impetus accorded to bilateral India-US defence cooperation under the Biden Administration is notable and merits accolades for both President Biden and Prime Minister Modi. However, it is difficult at this moment to determine its future trajectory under President Trump who returns back to the helm in January 2025. Indian analysts are optimistic about India-US bilateral defence cooperation but remain skeptical of the Trump Administration about military sales to India. A possible modus vivendi would have to be found. It is here that India’s ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ would be tested.

Commentary 14

ASEAN Countries seek BRICS membership

Dr. Devender Kumar

Among nearly 40 countries that have shown interest in the BRICS, four are ASEAN member states. Thailand, Malaysia, Laos, and Vietnam are keen to join the grouping. In May 2024 the Thai Cabinet officially “approved the plan to join BRICS” and in June 2024 Foreign Ministry of Thailand officially confirmed this and said we have “submitted a formal request to join BRICS”. It became the first ASEAN member state to apply for the grouping.

Similarly, on 29 July 2024, Malaysia applied for membership and formally became the second ASEAN member to apply for BRICS. At the “Eastern Economic Forum” (EEF) meeting in Russia, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim stated that “Malaysia is seeking to join BRICS for strengthening cooperation with its member countries and promoting fair global trade”. Malaysia sees the membership as an opportunity to enhance its “trade” and “prevent financial monopolies”. Also, Laos People’s Democratic Republic (PDR) and Vietnam attended the “BRICS Dialogue with Developing Countries” on 11 June 2024 in Russia.

The Minister of Lao highlighted his country’s interest in BRICS and said “Laos is interested in joining BRICS and will work on the requirements to attain the membership”. The Minister of Planning and Development stated “because of positive developments in BRICS” his country wishes to join the BRICS grouping. The Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister of Laos attended the “BRICS Dialogue with Developing Countries” in Russia and shared countries interest in “strengthening the framework of BRICS partnership” in areas such as ‘energy and mining’, ‘politics and security’, ‘culture and tourism’, ‘railway and transport’ and ‘information and security’. Both sides also discussed ‘ASEAN-Russia cooperation’ during this meeting.

On 9 May 2024, Vietnam hinted at BRICS membership and the foreign ministry announced that “Vietnam is committed to engage and contribute positively to global and regional multilateral forums”. The country had already attended the 15th BRICS summit in South Africa last year and in June 2024 it signed a “cooperation agreement with TV BRICS International Media Network” to receive the latest information related to the “developments in BRICS”. The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs attended the “BRICS Dialogue with Developing Countries” in Russia. In his speech, he highlighted “three key” issues for the focus of developing economies; (a) trust for peaceful resolution of conflicts with multilateral cooperation with the central role of UN; (b) “improving the role of developing countries in governance”; (c) capacity, resilience and adaptability of emerging economies in addressing global challenges.

There are at least four reasons why ASEAN countries wish to join the BRICS. First, BRICS is an opportunity for the ASEAN countries to integrate with multilateral institutions. The ASEAN countries have acknowledged that the world is changing and the importance of multilateralism is increasing and BRICS lays strong emphasis on multilateralism, and economic, political, and cultural integration. It has welcomed 5 new countries at the beginning of 2024. Therefore, ASEAN countries are looking outside of the grouping for multilateral cooperation to create self-reliance. While the GDP of ASEAN is \$3.6 trillion and the combined GDP of BRICS is \$25.85 trillion- the grouping can provide good economic opportunities. BRICS is increasing its 'foreign investment' and economic engagement. It has created two multilateral institutions i.e. New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) that help fund development and infrastructure projects. Through NDB, BRICS aims to give \$5 billion in loans and ASEAN states can avail loans for development. And in case of a balance of payment crisis, the CRA can be utilized for 'financial safety'.

Second, ASEAN countries have identified several areas of cooperation with BRICS and attended the 'BRICS Dialogue of Developing Economies' in Russia. Nearly 22 ministers from different countries attended this dialogue and identified areas of cooperation such as food security, energy security, trade, technology sharing, investment, cross-border digital transactions, supply-chain connectivity, and promotion of local currencies.

Third, ASEAN member Malaysia is unhappy with the US position on the Israel-Hamas conflict. It has strong anti-US sentiments domestically. Malaysians appreciated the efforts of South Africa and China to resolve the ongoing Gaza War and welcomed South Africa's Genocide Case against Israel. ASEAN states are in favour of a fair and just global order. The anti-US sentiments are so strong in Malaysia that the Malaysian PM has not visited the US despite assuming office in 2022. He visited China twice and in his book, *The Asian Renaissance* he talked about inclusive global order.

Fourth, ASEAN countries want to enhance cooperation with China and India. PM of Malaysia visited India in August 2024 to have a "multi-sectoral cooperation" on defense and security. China is already their biggest trading partner. ASEAN states see the partnership with BRICS as a win-win- as it would provide access to Indian and Chinese markets and benefit them by providing new partners for semiconductors, cybersecurity, and tourism.

ASEAN states are looking to BRICS to establish cooperation, enhance political and economic profile, and economic integration with emerging economies of the Global South. Moreover, seeking BRICS membership will not harm the centrality of ASEAN as it highlights their collective strength.

West Asia

Commentary 15

Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah conflict and implications on West Asian geopolitics

Dr. Devender Kumar

The Israel and Hamas conflict is in its second year, but truce still eludes the conflicting parties. Iran joined the conflict and launched nearly 200 missiles at Israel to avenge the death of Hezbollah Chief Hassan Nasrallah on 3 October 2024. This was in response to Israeli assassination of the Chief of Hamas Ismail Haniyeh and the Commander of Hezbollah Fuad Shukr in July 2024. The Israeli retaliation to destroy Hamas and its associates following the 7 October 2023 attack killed nearly 40,000 people in Gaza. This conflict is becoming more murky as Shia proxies i.e. Hezbollah in Lebanon, Houthis in Yemen, and Badr, Kataib, Harakat al Nujaba, and Asaib Ahl al-Haq fractions in Iraq and Syria joined.

Israel has pursued an offensive strategy to counter the 'terror outfit' and attacked Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon for 'total victory'. It wants to 'destroy Hamas's military and governing capability. The Israeli Secret Service (Mossad) has targeted operatives of Hezbollah by weaponizing communication devices such as walkie-talkies, pagers, televisions, motorcycles, car stereos, etc.

However, in May 2024, the US had proposed a three-stage peace deal to end this conflict. The plan tried for a 'ceasefire', 'Israeli withdrawal', 'release of hostages', and 'end hostilities'. The UNSC on the other hand passed resolutions such as 2728 and 2735 for 'immediate ceasefire' and 'without delay' respectively under the US proposed plan. Ironically, the US and Russia simultaneously abstained from these resolutions while both resolutions attained the nod of the other 14 members with 0 against.

The Israeli PM rejected the US plan and shelved the possibility of a two-state solution between Israel and Hamas. Israeli conditions to end this conflict are (a) Hamas must be completely destroyed; and (b) the return of all hostages, to reach a peace agreement with Israel. When Israeli forces entered deep inside Gaza Hamas also rejected the US plan.

The tensions between Israel, Hamas, and Iranian proxies can escalate regional tensions into a big war between Israel on one side and the Islamic world on the other. There are four possible geopolitical implications of this conflict on West Asia.

First, the offensive defence strategy of Israel can create regional fallout. Israel believes the best defence is a good offense therefore it is using a tit-for-tat approach and engaging in counterstrikes. According to a report, 101 hostages are still under Hamas's captivity and many of them are citizens of the US. The main reason for such escalations is the belief that if someone rises to kill you, kill him first. Such an approach is likely to create more security situations for Israel than peace and will create chaos in the region.

Second, the recent assassinations, missile strikes, and retaliations may give rise to a full-scale war between Iran and Israel. The Iranian supreme leader outlined the October 7 attack as a “correct and legitimate move” and assured that “resistance will not back down” against Israel by its regional proxies. Khomeini also said that he is ready to “repeat the missile strikes if needed”. Iranian Ambassador to India stated that “Iran is not the Iran of 1981 when Iraq invaded”. Israel considers the missile strikes by Iran a “huge mistake” and the Israeli PM said that “Iran would pay for it”. Israel plans to ‘strike Iran hard’ and this may intensify the ongoing situation between the two.

Third, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran is producing ‘9 kilograms of uranium’ and has enriched 60% of uranium which can be “enriched to weapons-grade”. This enrichment and violation of IAEA made the US withdraw from the nuclear deal the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018. However, US sources confirmed recently that Iran can produce one bomb in 12 days. The former Israeli PM Naftali Bennett has alleged that the country must “destroy Iran’s nuclear program” after the missile attack. The current escalation between Israel and Iran may bring the question of nuclear weapons and deterrence to security considerations in West Asia.

Fourth, the situation between Israel, Gaza, and Iran can be utilized by the Islamist forces i.e. Hezbollah (Party of God) and Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement) in the region to create a sizable ideological base for themselves based on the happenings in the Fertile Crescent region. They believe in Jihad (holy war) to attain goals which can increase radicalization and increase extremism in the region and may give rise to terrorism in the future.

Despite the conflicting situation, to resolve the issue the region must find leaders like Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat who preferred peace at the expense of their lives for future generations and established long-term peace between Egypt and Israel by sidelining hostilities and opting for peace. Until this is achieved, escalation will continue and peace will remain expensive to the people of the region.

Commentary 16

Türkiye's quest for BRICS membership

Dr. Devender Kumar

BRICS, the grouping of developing economies- Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa- is to hold its 16th meeting in October 2024 under the chairmanship of Russia. The meeting aims to “strengthen multilateralism for just global development and security” and the focus is on security, economy, politics, culture, and humanitarian contacts.

BRICS is a dynamic partner in global order and represents 41% of the world population, 37.3% of global GDP, 16% of world trade, and 29.3% land surface of the world.

The membership of the group is expanding. On 1 January 2024 Saudi Arabia, Iran, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, and Ethiopia joined BRICS. The grouping now has 10 members, and according to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 30 more countries are keen to join the BRICS multidimensional agenda.

Interestingly, Türkiye, a NATO member has formally applied to join the group. Türkiye aspires to become a member and this has been confirmed by the Russian sources “Türkiye has submitted an application for full membership”. Russia has “welcomed” the Turkish interest in the grouping. President Putin said Russia “will support this desire to be together with countries to solve common problems”.

Azerbaijan and Malaysia are other countries in the queue for BRICS membership. Among the 30 others likely to consider to join BRICS, Türkiye is unique given that it is a NATO member. There are four main reasons why Türkiye has chosen to join BRICS.

First, the Turkish interest in the BRICS is a result of confrontation with the USA. Washington DC imposed ‘Section 231’ of the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) on Türkiye for buying Russian missile defense system “worth \$2.5 billion”. It prohibits procurement, import-export, loan, and banking transactions with the adversary.

Also, the US devalued the Turkish currency Lira following “refusal to extradite a US preacher”. It hit the Turkish ‘Central Bank’ and caused turmoil in the market. President Erdogan warned the US about the depreciation of the Lira and stated that “We are together in NATO and then you seek to stab your strategic partner in the back”. Türkiye also held the US responsible for the ‘2016 failed Coup’ and the Interior Minister had openly “accused the US” of overthrowing President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Second, Türkiye wants to build closer ties with Russia. It purchased S400 missile defense system from Moscow despite opposition from the US. In 2022 it tried to mediate in the Russia-Ukraine War and held high-level negotiations.

It is the only NATO country that comes under the friendly and neutral countries list of Russia and has not appeared in the unfriendly countries list.

Türkiye wants to follow an independent foreign policy and extend influence in the region. It is focusing on 'Axis-Shift'. Türkiye failed to convince the EU for its membership to the Union due to Cyprus (EU member), and questions were raised on the nature of Turkish democracy.

Third, is its entry into the BRICS which offers an opportunity for balancing the US-led West global order, free trade, and de-dollarisation. It came as a counter-reaction to the US-led West hegemony over the global order and tried to establish a fair world order to initiate a movement of reforms mainly in institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the United Nations.

Fourth, Türkiye wants to build relations with China. It is its biggest economic partner in Asia and bilateral trade crossed \$48 billion in 2023. Relations have gone beyond the 'question of Uighurs'. Foreign Minister of Türkiye Hakan Fidan visited China in June 2024 and met Politburo and CCP members to cooperate on trade, energy, tourism, and civil aviation. Many outlined this visit as an initiative to be "remembered for BRICS+ Headlines". Moreover, both coordinate initiatives for the Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Corridor (connects China and Europe) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China.

Furthermore, under the Russian leadership, Türkiye is hopeful of a positive response and willing to explore opportunities under BRICS for Türkiye's economy. The grouping offers opportunities for cooperation in different sectors such as science, technology, innovation, research, space, and development programs. BRICS also has multiple forums such as (a) Parliamentary Forum; (b) People Forum; (c) Young Scientist; (d) Academic Forum; (e) Scientific Union, (f) Civil Forum, (g) Media Forum, etc and Türkiye wants to take benefit of each of these forums and platforms.

There is a trust issue between China and Türkiye; Ankara also has issues with India but during the 2023 earthquake, India helped Türkiye under Operation Dost. India believes in multilateral order therefore Türkiye must better its political relations with India to achieve membership in BRICS as India is the founding member and has a good say in the grouping.

Commentary 17

Kuwait in India's Strategic Discourse: Cooperation, commitment & assertiveness

Dr. Devender Kumar

Prime Minister Modi's recent visit to Kuwait is historic and marks a change in India's West Asia policy. Kuwait has assumed the presidency of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), dialogue partner status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and participation in the Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), it earmarks that ties are not centered on the UAE or any one state but on the entire Gulf.

Kuwait has extensive coastlines and is a significant energy supplier to India, providing nearly 3 percent of its energy, with total trade amounting to \$184.46 billion alongside other GCC states. The country has also established a 'strategic partnership' focusing on coastal defence and maritime safety cooperation. Notably, around 1 million Indians are living in Kuwait, making up 30 percent of the Kuwaiti workforce and 21 percent of the total population.

India has gained momentum in Gulf West Asia at a time when the region is going through tumultuous phase with Israel-Hamas, Israel-Iran, Houthis, Syrian Debacle, and the possibility of a major war due to counter-strikes by Israel and Iran on each other.

New Delhi has increased cooperation with nearly all GCC states with four conferring the highest award to the Indian Prime Minister Kuwait recently conferred "the Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer" and signed the agreement on 'training', 'military exercises', 'intelligence sharing', 'defence production', science, and technology. Both sides have also joined hands in fighting terrorism and dismantling their finance network.

India can play a pivotal role in West Asian geopolitics due to the goodwill and trust India has attained in the region. Therefore, Prime Minister's visit is unique as it has come after 43 years and India has gained momentum in the defence, technology, and security sectors.

However, there are six major strategic areas for India-Kuwait for considerations.

First, Kuwait is a big country blessed with oil and is home to major ports such as Mubarak Al Kabeer, Doha, Shuwaikh, and Shuaiba with shipping facilities. These ports connect Kuwait to three major waterways i.e. Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Gulf of Oman while Chabahar port also fall on the route of these strategic line hence India must connect its Kandla and Jawaharlal Nehru Port as they can receive ships from the Kuwaiti ports.

Second, India has signed a strategic partnership with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and UAE and it is the fourth GCC state to confer the highest award to the Indian Prime Minister Narendra after Saudi Arabia (2016), UAE (2019), and Bahrain (2019). Such gesture are signs of goodwill and trust India enjoys with the GCC. Therefore, it must opt for the leadership role in West Asia despite turmoil in the region which is the enduring feature of West Asia. New Delhi has successfully maintained good ties with Israel, Iran, and GCC therefore it can influence peace and advise for global good in the conflicting geopolitical situations in West Asia.

Third, during the recent joint ministerial meeting of Inda-GCC, Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar outlined that India considers GCC a “collective entity”. Hence it can be used to have cooperation in different areas via ‘collaborative initiatives’ to ‘Extended Neighbourhoods’ through policy arrangements for an ‘Extended Neighbourhood Plus Partnership’ which accommodates Caucasians States in India’s strategic calculus.

Fourth, Kuwait can also become a partner state in the “India-Middle East-Europe Corridor” IMEC, as it has a long coastal line and plays a major role in the import and export of global trade. Prime Minister also highlighted during this visit by stating that India and Kuwait “share same sea, affection and sensibilities”. It can play a significant role in connecting India with the Caucasian countries (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Russia) via land and sea routes. India also imports oil from Iraq and opened a consulate in Erbil (Kurdistan) therefore strategic importance of ports in these areas will remain important to India in meeting energy needs.

Fifth, India must utilize the Council and its influence in countering Pakistan and its sponsored terrorism against India. It must obtain support of all GCC states in alienating Pakistan in all big platforms in the Muslim world to isolate Pakistan. India must highlight that it is home to the largest Muslim population in the world and attain full support from GCC for its Security Council membership.

Sixth, India must counter Chinese influence in the West Asian region as it recently mediated between Iran and Saudi Arabia. India has good ties with both Israel and other parties therefore prime minister must opt global leadership role in mediation as he is seen as a global leader and harbinger of peace. India’s cultural and civilizational ties will help in such efforts, unlike China which advances self-serving initiatives to secure smooth supply to China’s energy market, rather than resolving West Asian crises. India can play an honest mediator role in the global conflicts.

Apart from this enhanced cooperation, it is yet to be seen how much these countries will be successful in eradicating terrorism and sea piracy from the region as non-state actors (Houthis) gain ground and support from regional players.

Commentary 18

Towards a ceasefire: Geopolitical implications of an emerging Israel-Hamas deal

Dr. Zheer Ahmed

The recent developments in the Israel-Hamas conflict indicate possible shifts in the precarious dynamics of West Asia, with considerable ramifications for regional stability and international diplomacy. Should it come to fruition, the provisional agreement currently under discussion may signify a crucial turning point in the 14-month conflict, potentially ushering in new regional dynamics and amplifying global engagement.

There are three key parties to negotiate an armistice agreement between Israel and Hamas. They are the United States, Qatar, and Egypt. The larger geopolitical interests are reflected in their mediation. For example, Qatar positioned itself as an important mediator due to its hosting of indirect conversations and historical ties with Hamas. Qatar's participation demonstrates its desire to continue having a say in resolving regional disputes. On the other hand, Egypt's stakes are kept high due to its proximity to Gaza and shared security concerns, especially with regard to the dynamics of the border and the movement of displaced Palestinians. The United States' involvement demonstrates its dual goals of stabilizing a vital ally in Israel and obtaining the release of American captives. The strong involvement played by the Biden administration may also represent an effort to leave a record of successful diplomacy in the region before political shifts could change the goals of U.S. foreign policy.

The ceasefire development is a complex dynamic between Hamas and Israel, characterized by strategic calculations and conflicting goals. For Hamas, the agreement represents an opportunity to negotiate, which will strengthen its position. The release of hostages serves as a bargaining tool, allowing Hamas to pursue broader objectives, including securing the release of Palestinian detainees and mitigating the effects of the longstanding blockade on Gaza. These aims align with Hamas's overarching strategy to enhance its legitimacy and political leverage, both domestically and internationally.

Conversely, Israel remains resolute in its objective to neutralize Hamas's military capabilities. Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz's statement about maintaining security oversight in Gaza highlights Israel's intention to prevent future threats and ensure long-term stability. This strategic outlook reflects Israel's determination to safeguard its national security, while avoiding a resurgence of violence. However, this stance poses significant challenges for negotiations, as Hamas and its supporters are likely to reject any framework perceived as perpetuating conditions resembling occupation. Such arrangements could undermine any potential for sustainable agreements by exacerbating existing grievances among Palestinians.

The interplay between the two parties reveals a deeply entrenched conflict, where each side's objectives are at odds. Hamas's prioritization of immediate gains through concessions clashes with Israel's focus on long-term security measures. This divergence complicates the prospects for reaching a lasting resolution. Furthermore, the broader geopolitical context, including international mediators and regional stakeholders adds another layer of complexity to the negotiations.

Ultimately, while temporary agreements may offer reprieve and address immediate concerns, the fundamental issues driving the conflict remain unresolved. The challenge lies in bridging these divergent goals to create a pathway toward long-lasting peace, a task fraught with significant obstacles given the current dynamics and entrenched mistrust between Israel and Hamas.

The ceasefire agreement in Gaza carries profound implications for regional stability. Humanitarian relief would be a critical outcome, providing vital aid to Gaza's embattled population. However, the extensive destruction demands sustained international support beyond the cessation of hostilities, with long-term efforts required to rebuild infrastructure and restore livelihoods.

Iran's role as a supporter of Hamas underscores broader power dynamics in the region. The conflict's resolution may either bolster Iran's influence through its proxies or diminish its strategic position, depending on the outcome, thereby reshaping regional alliances. The normalization of Arab-Israeli relations exemplified by the Abraham Accords faces new challenges. The conflict has tested these alignments, and a ceasefire could create opportunities for Arab states to recalibrate their diplomatic strategies with Israel. Persistent instability, however, risks fueling extremism in neighboring Lebanon, Syria, and the Sinai Peninsula, drawing more actors into the conflict. Additionally, Israeli governance in Gaza could deepen divisions, heighten resistance, and complicate diplomatic relations, undermining efforts for a two-state solution and broader peacebuilding in the West Asia.

The agreement will resonate far beyond West Asia, influencing global political dynamics and international relations. The European Union and the United Nations have consistently emphasized on the violation of human rights, including accountability for civilian casualties. Their positions are likely to shape post-conflict reconstruction efforts, with aid and support potentially contingent upon adherence to international humanitarian standards. This focus on accountability may face challenges in navigating the political sensitivities surrounding the conflict while addressing the urgent needs of affected populations.

Meanwhile, the involvement of global powers like Russia and China adds complexity to the geopolitical landscape. Both nations have been expanding their influence in West Asia and may seek to leverage the conflict's resolution to counterbalance US-led initiatives in the region. Their actions could challenge traditional Western dominance in shaping peace processes and influence future alignments. In this regard, Donald Trump's return to political prominence after his electoral success creates a degree of unpredictability. His call to finalize a ceasefire before his inauguration signals a potentially firm stance favoring Israeli security priorities. This approach could risk sidelining Palestinian concessions and strain US relations with international stakeholders advocating for a balanced resolution. Together, these factors underscore the far-reaching consequences of the Gaza conflict on global stability and diplomacy.

Finally, it is argued that the provisional Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement has the capacity to substantially transform the geopolitical landscape of West Asia. The agreement may mitigate immediate humanitarian crisis, but its execution and consequences will challenge the robustness of regional and global diplomacy. The equilibrium of influence between local parties and foreign actors will ascertain whether the ceasefire efforts lead to stability or simply reestablishes conditions for impending conflict.

North East Asia

Commentary 19

The curious case of Shigeru Ishiba

Dr. Anudeep Gujjeti

Japan has a unique political culture where securing public trust matters greatly, even for a serving Prime Minister, not just to get re-elected but also for governments to continue functioning effectively. This has led to a “revolving door” polity in Japan, where Prime Ministers have rarely lasted for more than three years. Until Shinzo Abe took office in 2013, the average tenure of a Japanese Prime Minister was just 382 days.

Following Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone’s departure from office in 1987, Japan experienced a succession of ten Prime Ministers until 2001. In 2001, Junichiro Koizumi was elected as Prime Minister and completed a five-year term. After Koizumi’s exit in 2006, Japan saw six Prime Ministers in the next six years until Shinzo Abe assumed office in 2013. After Abe’s resignation in 2020, Japan had three Prime Ministers in a span of four years.

The latest addition to this list of Prime Ministers is Shigeru Ishiba. Unfortunately, Ishiba did not secure the required majority in the lower house and is running a minority government, reigniting concerns of a return to the “revolving door” polity. Shigeru Ishiba assumed office after winning the leadership race for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). His predecessor, Japan’s eighth-longest-serving post-war Prime Minister, Fumio Kishida, decided to step down due to a loss of public trust.

Interestingly, Ishiba, who once parted ways with the LDP in the 1990s, joined the Shinshintō (New Frontier Party), an opposition group that played a key role in the coalition government. However, after returning to the LDP, Ishiba’s political career gained momentum when Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (2001–2006) appointed him as the director general of the Defense Agency, which later became the Ministry of Defense. Ishiba previously tried four times to become the leader of the LDP (2008, 2012, 2018, and 2021) but he could succeed only in fifth and last attempt to become the leader of the LDP.

During his campaign for the leadership of the LDP, Shigeru Ishiba outlined several key policy priorities. He suggested the creation of a regional collective security structure like Asian NATO, referencing the escalating tensions between China and Taiwan and paralleling them with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Ishiba underscored the significance of a robust Japan-United States (US) alliance and articulated his intention to reassess the agreement regulating the Japan-U.S. Status of Force Agreement (SOFA) in Japan to foster a more equitable collaboration. Furthermore, he advocated the revision of Japan’s pacifist Constitution to openly acknowledge the Self-defence Forces (SDF).

This corresponds with the LDP's longstanding objective of resolving discussions on the constitutional legitimacy of Japan's military capability. In a way he took a more hawkish stance with respect to the security situation of the region. Most importantly he argued for reforming the scandal ridden LDP party.

Eventually, Ishiba triumphed in the LDP leadership election on September 27, overcoming Sanae Takaichi in a tightly contested battle. He was formally designated as Japan's 102nd Prime Minister on October 1. This leadership campaign was significant for being the largest in the party's history, featuring nine contenders. Remarkably, even before he was officially nominated in the National Assembly, Ishiba hinted at dissolving the Lower House to call for a snap election for the country.

In the general elections for the House of Representatives on October 27, 2024, Japan's ruling LDP-Komeito coalition encountered a significant defeat. The election marked a historic moment as the LDP lost its majority in the lower house for only the third time in its seven-decade history of dominance. The party's seat total plummeted from 259 in the 2021 elections to merely 191 in 2024, resulting in a loss of 69 seats. Komeito, the LDP's enduring coalition partner, experienced a decrease in its performance, with its seats diminishing from 32 in 2021 to 24 in 2024, resulting in a loss of 8 seats.

Prime Minister Ishiba's decision to call a sudden election has proven detrimental. His objective of fortifying the LDP's foundation and stabilising his administration has proven unsuccessful, since the ruling coalition has lost its majority, thereby further undermining party support. Ishiba, formerly regarded as a progressive inside the LDP, pledged to restructure the party, enhance openness, and tackle finance concerns. Upon assuming the roles of party leader and prime minister, he realigned with conventional LDP views, resulting in disappointment and feelings of betrayal among many of his followers.

The Democratic Party for the People (DPP) has become a prominent player in the political landscape following its significant success in the October 27 election. The party expanded its presence in the Lower House fourfold, securing 28 seats. With no party holding a majority, the DPP is now poised to play a pivotal role in upcoming negotiations with LDP on policy basis, domestically, instead of joining LDP in forming a coalition thereby giving Ishiba a hard time to successfully run the government.

Furthermore, Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential election may provide an additional degree of complexity. Although Trump may be amenable to Ishiba's advocacy for enhanced equality in Japan-U.S. relations, he might get dismayed with Ishiba's tenuous standing domestically. In this context, it is crucial to closely monitor developments in Japan's domestic politics and Ishiba's policy strategies to gauge the direction of the country's domestic and foreign policy, especially given the volatile regional security environment.

Commentary 20

Chinese Coast Guard prepares for Taiwan blockade

Dr. Vijay Sakhuja

October is a politically sensitive month for People's Republic of China (PRC) and Republic of China (RoC). Both celebrate national days on 1st October and 10th October (75th and 113th anniversary in 2024) respectively as also recall their separation. While the PRC seeks reunification, the RoC remains committed to ensuring independence. It is not surprising that the respective leaders make emotionally charged statements to rev-up public sentiments.

In his National Day speech, Taiwanese President William Lai Ching-te called for "regional peace and stability" and urged PRC to "take up its international responsibilities and, along with Taiwan, contribute to the peace, security and prosperity of the region and the globe." This is quite a benign and routine statement; but an earlier speech at the National Day gala in Taipei, it was stated that "PRC could not be the motherland of the people of the ROC". Again in his speech on the National Day, he reiterated that RoC and PRC are not subordinate to other and the PRC "has no right to represent Taiwan." These statements may have irked Beijing.

Meanwhile, in a rare public appearance, Chinese President Xi Jinping showed up in Dongshan County, eastern Fujian Province just across the Taiwan Strait a day after the culmination of the PLA "Joint Sword-2024B". These drills had a distinct purpose to blockade key Taiwanese ports, and the sea and air combat manoeuvres by the PLA Navy and Air Force were meant to deter Taiwan declare independence.

The Joint Sword-2024B was a one-day military exercise under the PLA Eastern Theater Command that lasted just 13 hours. It was a "legitimate and necessary operation for safeguarding national sovereignty and national unity" observed the spokesperson of the Eastern Theater Command Senior Captain Li Xi.

The exercises involved 153 Chinese aircraft of which 111 crossed the Median Line and entered Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ). Besides 17 warships, multiple drones and unspecified number of submarines (it is fair to assume), encircled Taiwan and undertook "sea-air combat-readiness patrol, blockade on key ports and areas, assault on maritime and ground targets, as well as joint seizure of comprehensive superiority," The Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning was deployed at a strategic location to the east of Taiwan.

Apparently, this was the largest concentration of military forces close to the island as compared with September 2023 deployments when 103 Chinese military aircraft were detected operating around Taiwan in a 24-hour span.

However, according to Taiwan's Defense Ministry "none of China's naval vessels successfully entered Taiwan's contiguous zone, which is defined under international law as extending 24 nautical miles from a territory's shoreline."

The inclusion of Chinese Coast Guard in Joint Sword-2024B is notable. The 17 Coast Guard vessels in four task forces along with the 10,000 ton Haixun 09, also referred to as the "monster ship" and fitted with advanced technologies including BeiDou Navigation Satellite System, were deployed.

It is worth recalling that five months ago the Chinese Coast Guard vessels were deployed during Joint Sword-2024A; but their role was limited to "law enforcement exercises" only in the waters east of Taiwan. However, in the recent Joint Sword-2024B, the Chinese Coast Guard expanded "from a single area east of Taiwan to encircle the entire island".

At another level, Chinese Coast Guard deployment against Taiwan should also be seen from the perspective of the recent announcement by the Quad Member states to deploy "on a rotational basis" their respective coast guards personnel-ships in the Indo Pacific. The first such deployment will begin in 2025 and Coast Guard personnel from Australia, India and Japan will embark onboard a US vessel under the "Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission" to "improve interoperability and advance under which "maritime safety" in the Indo-Pacific.

The QUAD also announced the Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI) under which the partners in the Indo Pacific would "maximize tools provided through Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), a technology and training initiative that aims to increase maritime transparency and security in the Indo-Pacific region". The inaugural MAITRI workshop is planned for 2025. The IPMDA and other Quad partner initiatives are significant to "monitor and secure their waters, enforce their laws, and deter unlawful behavior". Furthermore, it is planned to launch a Quad maritime legal dialogue to support efforts to uphold the rules-based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific.

Another significant initiative by the Quad member states is the Quad Indo-Pacific Logistics Network. Under a pilot project, collective logistics strengths are planned to be mobilized to provide civilian airlift support to natural disasters across the Indo-Pacific region.

The Quad members are exploring new initiatives to put pressure on China as the Chinese Coast Guard-PLA Navy pursue aggressive posturing through coercion and compellence. The Joint Sword-2024B is a prelude to naval blockade of Taiwan in which the Chinese Coast Guard can be expected to contribute (prevent civilian merchant shipping calling at Taiwanese ports, intercepting Taiwanese merchant vessels, harassing the fishing fleet) to the PLA Navy's plans.

Commentary 21

Yoon's December gamble: Martial Law, impeachment and geopolitical effects

Dr. Anudeep Gujjeti

The recent political turmoil in South Korea, marked by President Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law and subsequent impeachment, has raised profound questions about the stability of the nation's democratic institutions and its geopolitical trajectory. This issue closely represents a correlation between domestic politics and the foreign policy decision making of leaders which in turn has the potential to throw regional security policies into disarray.

On December 3rd, President Yoon Suk Yeol declared a state of emergency and imposed martial law, citing what he described as "ant-state, pro-North Korean forces" attempting to undermine South Korea's liberal democratic institutions. The proclamation threatened the curtailing of civil liberties, banning political activities, demonstrations, and free speech while granting sweeping powers to law enforcement and military authorities. Yoon justified these measures by claiming the National Assembly's actions were equal to legislative dictatorship and treason, threatening to drive the nation into civil unrest. This unprecedented move, the first since 1980, shocked South Korean society and drew immediate backlash from across the political spectrum. Even members of Yoon's People's Power Party (PPP) expressed reservations about the drastic measure, while opposition parties and civil society groups labelled the declaration an assault on democracy.

The martial law declaration was met with swift and intense opposition. By early December 4th, the South Korean National Assembly convened an emergency session, during which 190 of its 300 members voted to demand the immediate revocation of martial law. This unanimous opposition, including dissenting voices from within Yoon's own party, forced the president to withdraw the declaration within hours. Public outrage, coupled with mass protests, further underscored the unpopularity of Yoon's decision, with many drawing parallels to the situation to South Korea's authoritarian past. The swift reversal did very little to assuage the calls for Yoon's resignation or impeachment. He was accused of undermining democratic norms and abusing his executive authority and eroding public trust in his leadership.

The political fallout from the martial law debacle culminated in impeachment proceedings against President Yoon. On December 14th, the National Assembly voted decisively to impeach him, with 204 lawmakers, including 12 from the PPP, supporting the motion. This marked only the second time in South Korea's history that a sitting president was impeached. Earlier to Yoon's impeachment, the former Defence Minister of South Korea was arrested. The vote immediately suspended Yoon from office, with Prime Minister Han Duck-soo assuming the role of acting president.

The impeachment now moved to the Constitutional Court which must decide whether to uphold the decision. Although the court has up to 180 days to rule, public pressure and the urgency of the situation might bring a quick resolution. Six of the nine justices must vote in favour for the impeachment to take its final course. Looking at the public outrage the court's decision will be heavily influenced by public sentiment, which has overwhelmingly turned against Yoon with his approval ratings plummeting to historic low.

If the Constitutional Court upholds Yoon's impeachment, South Korea must hold a presidential election within 60 days of the impeachment. The opposition Democratic Party (DP), led by Lee Jae-myung, is well positioned to capitalize on the crisis. Lee Jae, who narrowly lost to Yoon in the 2022 presidential election, has been a vocal critic of Yoon's policies, in general to his approach to foreign relations and domestic governance and in particular to Japan and United States (US).

The DP's leader emphasises greater autonomy in South Korea's foreign policy, advocating for a balanced approach to managing relations with both the US and China. Lee has also expressed scepticism toward Yoon's efforts to strengthen ties with Japan, criticizing agreements related to historical grievances, such as wartime forced labour, as "humiliating" considering the colonial rule of Japan over South Korea during 1910-1945.

Yoon's presidency has been marked by a concerted effort to pivot South Korea's foreign policy closer to the US and Japan. His administration worked to mend historical tensions with Japan, culminating in a summit with then-Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in 2023. This rapprochement, encouraged by Washington, aimed to bolster trilateral cooperation against shared security threats, including North Korea's nuclear ambitions and China's growing influence. The martial law crisis and Yoon's removal threaten to unravel these fragile diplomatic achievements. A new administration under Lee Jae-myung would likely take a more critical stance toward Japan, even revisiting the agreements made under Yoon. This could strain the fragile partnership between South Korea and Japan with broader implications for the US led regional security initiatives in the Northeast Asia as well as the Indo-Pacific.

Lee's calls for a less adversarial relationship with China which further complicates the issue. While maintaining the US-South Korea alliance remains a cornerstone of South Korea's foreign policy, a shift toward greater economic cooperation with China could introduce friction with the US. The US, which has long sought to strengthen the trilateral alliance with South Korea and Japan, may find itself navigating a more complex and uncertain dynamic. Ironically, the US is the only treaty ally of the South Korea and has around 28,500 US troops stationed South Korea, for which both the nations have agreed for a cost sharing model in October 2024.

An unstable South Korean administration especially coinciding with Trump taking over the US Presidency on January 20, who is very transactional in nature, even complicates the dynamics.

Domestically, Yoon's impeachment has reignited debates about the structure of South Korea's political system. Critics argue that the concentration of power in the presidency has made the office prone to abuse, as evidenced by the tumultuous tenures of recent leaders. Regionally, the upheaval raises concerns about the continuity of South Korea's foreign policy and its role in maintaining stability in Northeast Asia. The US and Japan, both of which have invested in closer ties with South Korea, especially after the "trilateral Camp David agreement", are closely monitoring the situation. Prime Minister of Japan Shigeru Ishiba and the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken have expressed hope for a peaceful resolution but acknowledged the potential for disruption.

The uncertainty surrounding South Korea's leadership comes at a critical juncture, with challenges such as North Korea's nuclear program, China's assertiveness, Trump 2.0 and the need for economic resilience demanding steady and effective governance. A prolonged political vacuum or a significant shift in policy direction would weaken South Korea's position in the region and undermine collective efforts to address regional security challenges.

Commentary 22

East Asia in 2024: Political turmoil and security challenges

Dr. Anudeep Gujjeti

East Asia in 2024 witnessed significant political and security developments especially in Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, all of which have profound implications for the evolving regional security dynamics. The aggressive posturing by China, the persistent threat from North Korea, and Russia's increasing engagement with both nations further complicated the situation. Additionally, the upcoming return of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency in 2025 added another layer of uncertainty to the region's strategic landscape. In this context it is important to take stock of how Taiwan, Japan and South Korea fared in 2024.

In Taiwan, the 2024 elections underscored the island's vibrant yet contentious democratic environment. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) emerged victorious, with Lai Ching-teh and Hsiao Bi-khim securing the presidency. However, the legislative results produced a fragmented parliament, with the Kuomintang (KMT) holding 52 seats, the DPP 51, and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) getting 8 seats. This divided legislature has created a political gridlock, complicating governance and policymaking for the DPP.

The post-election period was marked by the "Bluebird Movement," where thousands protested against the perceived undermining of democratic procedures by the KMT and TPP. These protests, fueled by dissatisfaction with parliamentary reforms and legislative transparency, highlighted Taiwan's vibrant civic society. However, the resulting tensions have strained executive-legislative relations, potentially weakening Taiwan's ability to address internal and external challenges. Externally, the DPP's victory signals continuity in Taiwan's pro-independence stance, likely exacerbating tensions with Beijing. China's aggressive manoeuvres in the Taiwan Strait, coupled with Russia's support, pose significant challenges to Taiwan's security. The political turmoil within Taiwan may hinder its ability to effectively respond to such threats, making regional stability more precarious.

On the other hand, Japan experienced its own political upheaval in 2024 with the election of Shigeru Ishiba as Prime Minister. Ishiba's decision to dissolve the lower house and call for snap elections backfired, leading to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) losing its majority for the third time in its history. The ruling coalition's defeat reflects growing public dissatisfaction with the LDP's governance and Ishiba's leadership, plunging Japan into a period of political uncertainty.

In the general elections for the House of Representatives on 27 October 2024, the LDP's seat count dropped sharply from 259 in 2021 to 191 in 2024, marking a loss of 69 seats. Komeito, the LDP's coalition partner, also suffered losses, with its seats decreasing from 32 in 2021 to 24 in 2024, a reduction of 8 seats. The Democratic Party for the People (DPP) emerged as a significant player, increasing its seats fourfold to 28. With no party holding a majority, Ishiba faces immense challenges in building a functional government.

Ishiba's campaign emphasised the need for constitutional reform, a stronger Japan-US alliance, and the creation of an "Asian NATO" to counter regional security threats. However, Ishiba's inability to secure a parliamentary majority undermines his capacity to implement these ambitious policies. The Democratic Party for the People (DPP), which gained significant traction in the elections, is poised to challenge Ishiba on key policy issues, further complicating his administration's agenda.

Japan's internal political instability occurs at a critical time, as the region faces escalating security challenges. North Korea's nuclear program, China's assertiveness, and the uncertainty surrounding Trump's impending presidency demand strong and consistent leadership. Ishiba's precarious position raises concerns about Japan's ability to maintain its strategic commitments, particularly within the framework of the US-led security architecture in East Asia.

South Korea's political landscape was upended by President Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law in December 2024, citing threats from pro-North Korean forces. This unprecedented move sparked widespread protests and led to Yoon's impeachment by the National Assembly. The subsequent transfer of power to Acting President Han Duck-Soo lasted less than two weeks, as he was impeached on September 27. The ongoing constitutional court proceedings have since plunged South Korea into political turmoil.

Yoon's presidency helped South Korea's foreign relations, particularly with Japan and the US. His efforts to strengthen trilateral ties were undermined by domestic opposition and his abrupt policy decisions. The prospect of a new administration under opposition leader Lee Jae-Myung, who advocates for a more balanced approach to relations with China and a critical stance toward Japan, further complicates the regional security dynamics.

The impeachment crisis has also reignited debates about the concentration of power in the presidency and the fragility of South Korea's democratic institutions. Domestically, the upheaval raises questions about the continuity of governance, while regionally, it risks undermining collective efforts to address shared security challenges. North Korea's continued provocations, including missile tests and cyberattacks, exacerbate these challenges, demanding a unified and effective response that South Korea may struggle to provide amid political instability.

The developments in Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea in 2024 have far reaching implications for East Asia's security environment. China's aggressive posture, including military exercises near Taiwan and its growing alignment with Russia and North Korea, underscores the need for robust regional cooperation. The return of Donald Trump to the US presidency adds another layer of uncertainty. Trump's transactional approach to foreign policy and potential disengagement from traditional alliances may weaken the US commitment to East Asia, emboldening adversaries like China and North Korea. Trump's administration's approach to burden sharing and alliance management will be closely watched, as it will significantly influence the region's strategic calculations.

East Asia in 2024 stands at a crossroads, with Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea grappling with internal political challenges that have significant implications for regional security. The interplay of domestic politics, external threats, and shifting alliances underscores the complexity of the security dynamics in the region. As these nations navigate respective crises, their ability to maintain stability and cooperation in various domains such as technology, military-industrial relations, and regional security will be crucial in shaping the future of East Asia's strategic landscape.

Commentary 23

North Korea's soldier supply chain

Dr. Vijay Sakhuja

It did not take very long for Russia and North Korea to ratify the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership signed in June 2024 during President Vladimir Putin visit to Pyongyang. In Moscow, the Russian lower house endorsed it followed by the upper house ratifying the treaty on 9 November 2024. Likewise, the KCNA news, an official North Korean agency announced that Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between North Korea and Russia “was ratified as a decree” on 12 November 2024 and will “take effect from the day when both sides exchanged the ratification instruments.”

Notwithstanding the time of the ratification of the Treaty by North Korea in November 2024, the country had already dispatched over 10,000 troops to Russia for training and onward deployment in the Kursk border region to fight alongside the Russian Army against Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has confirmed that “Eleven thousand North Korean soldiers or soldiers of the North Korean army are currently present on the territory of the Russian Federation in the border with Ukraine on the north of our country in the Kursk region.”

Zelensky also announced that North Korean soldiers had taken part in combat against the Ukrainian soldiers and that there had been losses among these soldiers. South Korean broadcaster KBS, Rustem Umerov too has claimed the presence of North Korean soldiers in Russia and that these soldiers were attired in Russian military outfits and receiving practical training.

According to media sources, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, in his telephonic conversation on 15 November 2024 with Russian President Vladimir Putin had expressed concern over the presence of North Korean troops at the frontlines against Ukraine and conveyed that it was a “grave escalation” of the ongoing war.

South Korea summoned Russian ambassador in Seoul to express alarm over the presence of North Korean troops at the Russia-Ukraine borders and sought their “immediate withdrawal”. Although South Korea has a policy of not supplying weapons to any country that is at war, President Yoon Suk-Yeol warned that his country could rethink and provide weapons to Ukraine based on the level of North Korean troop involvement in the war.

The Russian Army is losing men rapidly and its fighting strength is weakening every day. It is very difficult to determine the exact number of losses or casualties on both sides because Russian and Ukrainian authorities do not make public such figures. The estimates vary and these could be in the order of over thousand troops lost on a daily basis. The overall losses are estimated to be 712,610 men between 24 February 2022 and 15 November 2024.

For instance, the month of October 2024 was perhaps the most fatal. John Healey, the British defense minister told the Telegraph that the Russian military lost “an average of 1,354 Russian fighters killed or wounded per day” during the month. This totals up to 41,980 in one month. Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, the Chief of the Defence Staff of United Kingdom has observed that the Russian losses (killed or wounded) in the ongoing war could touch as high as 700,000.

Russia is facing major challenges to recruit its own people to fight the war. Under the circumstances, the North Korean soldiers are a morale booster for the Russians. The North Korean soldiers belong to the special operations forces of the 11th Corps. Their involvement in the war is an opportunity to hone skills for modern warfare. There is a belief that the first lot of 10,000 North Korean soldiers could be followed by another batch.

Ukraine is visibly alarmed by the possibility of more North Korean soldiers on its borders and Zelensky called on his countrymen to come forward and fight the Russian and North Korean forces. Ukraine too is facing shortage of troops and the government has decided to reduce the conscription age instead of passing a mobilisation law.

Experts strongly believe that there is a quid pro quo between Russia and North Korea and the deployment of North Korean soldiers could result in cash payments or supply of military hardware such as long range missiles, antitank weapons, RPGs, and personal weapons such as machine guns.

It is useful to point out that there are soldiers from many nationalities particularly from the Global South who have offered military services in their private capacities to Russia through recruiting agents. There are reports of these soldiers fleeing, abandoning positions, surrendering, wounded and even being killed in action.

Finally, the future supply of additional North Korean soldiers to Russia will depend on the combat performance of the existing soldiers in the battlefield, their ability to operate with Russian military, and successful command and control.

Military-Technology

Commentary 24

Hypersonic Missiles and repercussion on global security

Dr. Devender Kumar

New technologies are constantly shaping the future of warfare. Recently the US launched its first “Dark Eagle Hypersonic Missile”, which can be used from “sea, land, and submarines” and has a speed of ‘Mach 5+’ and a range of 1725 miles. This missile travels at a velocity five times that of the speed of sound. It has increased USA’s intervention capability and “restored American deterrence” since these missiles are difficult to intercept and can “dodge any defensive weapons”. Such development has marked the competition and risk of arms race in the world due to the strategic advantage of the hypersonic domain.

Currently, Russia, the USA, China, and India have hypersonic missiles while North Korea and the United Kingdom are developing hypersonic technologies. Due to Chinese military modernization and the North Korean threats, Japan is also developing cruise missile and radar systems and signed an agreement with the USA to develop a hypersonic missile by 2030. According to a report Japan conducted two hypersonic missile tests to achieve hypersonic technologies. Some reports have argued that Chinese advancement in the sector and tests by Japan have initiated an “arms race in the East Asia region”.

China and Russia on the other hand have already deployed hypersonic missiles that can carry nuclear warheads. The “AUKUS pact between Australia, the US, and the UK has made references to hypersonic technologies” due to specificities like altitude dynamics, maneuverability, and speed that challenge existing missiles and defence systems.

The USA has developed hypersonic missile technology to challenge Russia and ‘counter China’s anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) systems. Both states countered the USA’s military superiority in Ukraine and the South China Sea, Taiwan Strait, and the East China Sea via an anti-ship, anti-air counter-capability.

There are five reasons that these emerging technologies can threaten global peace and security.

First, the ballistic missile flies above the earth’s surface and is easier to track but a hypersonic missile can be beneath 60,000 feet making it difficult to track. Hypersonic missiles can maneuver defense systems and adjust course on route which makes it unstoppable. The hypersonic weapons have already challenged the current defense systems in the world i.e. the Iron Dome (Israel), THAAD (USA), David Sling (Israel-USA), Arrow 2 (Israel), Arrow 3 (Israel), Patriot MIM 104 (USA), S400 (Russia). None of these systems have been found productive in countering hypersonic missiles.

Second, Hypersonic weapons have potentially altered the balance of power in the world as there are no constructive countermeasures available to neutralize them. It is believed that “the THAAD defense system of the US could intercept” hypersonic missiles. Russia has already used a hypersonic missile (Kinzhal Missile) against Ukraine to undermine the military potential of Ukraine and its NATO allies. Russia also became the first country to use a hypersonic weapon in battle via the launch of “the Oreshnik hypersonic” missile against Ukraine smashing American supremacy. And brought the balance of power in its favor by highlighting that it has more powerful weapons than the USA and its NATO allies.

Third, these missiles have made the escalations more likely as countries with hypersonic are challenging each other. Recently Russian President Putin proposed a “missile duel” to challenge the military superiority of the USA and its allies in Ukraine by choosing tests to showcase the destructive capability of Russia by defeating the US defensive system via the Oreshnik hypersonic missile, which can carry nuclear weapons as well. President Putin remarked that “his country is ready for such experiments” his Ukrainian counterpart President Zelensky considers these tests as “crazy experiments” as “two global powers engage in the direct testing of their ammunition”. This risks the entire European continent’s security and makes it difficult for conflicting parties to come to the table for a ceasefire in the ongoing conflict.

Fourth, hypersonic missiles are difficult to track and can change their trajectory making it hard to predict their course. These missiles travel faster than the speed of sound and according to a report these missiles are ‘undetactable’ meaning “cannot be tracked by any satellite reconnaissance”. Therefore, the time for decision-making will be very short in future warfare.

Fifth, the global nuclear balance has been disturbed by the presence of hypersonic weapons. Nations are now challenging each other for tests as noticed in the recent statement by Russian President Putin for the Oreshnik missile to establish superiority over American deterrence. Such challenges mark the requirement for changes in the nuclear doctrine of countries throughout the world.

Worldwide there are trends to develop hypersonic weapons, leading to a global arms race. The Hollywood depiction of warfare is becoming a reality. The world is witnessing a technology-run, technology-driven, and technology-dominant era. This also makes the requirement of quick decision-making with responsible actions as future wars are going to be way faster and more dangerous. Rising global dependence on technology may pose a major risk to international security.

Commentary 25

Geopolitics of Space: ASAT and Nuclear Test

Dr. Devender Kumar

The geopolitical competition between states has now reached space. Recently Russia vetoed the joint UNSC resolution by US and Japan to maintain the ban on testing of WMD in space as outlined in the Outer Space Treaty 1967. The New York Times report notes that the Biden administration notified Congress and European partners about the 'Russian advances in space' and believed that Russia is designing a 'space-based nuclear weapon to threaten USA's extensive satellite network.' The US is anxious about Russia's possible usage of a nuclear anti-satellite weapon.

There are nearly 10,000 active satellites in the outer space and 77 space agencies are active worldwide. It is estimated that the number of satellites in orbit will grow in the future. USA, Russia, Europe, Canada, China, Japan and India have active programs and established space agencies and some have active space launch programs. The US acts as the sole power in the sector and has 3415 satellites in orbit followed by Russia with 170, China with 535, the UK 486, and India 59.

While the increase in number of satellites is good for humankind these platform attracts strategic competition for advantage in space. A majority of these launch countries are opting for Anti-Satellite (ASAT) technology which has increased the possibility of weaponization of space.

ASAT capability is any technology that destroys or harms a satellite in orbit thereby limit usage in space. The destruction can be done in two ways: (a) kinetic and (b) non-kinetic. In kinetic there is physical destruction of a satellite by an explosion near the satellite; non-kinetic method results in damaging the C3 (Command & Control Center) of satellites and make them collide with other satellites. However, lasers and cyber-attacks are also used to blind the satellite.

Countries use ASAT to destroy the space capability of other states for strategic advantage in military, economic, technical, and civilian areas. Military uses satellites for navigation, communication, intelligence, meteorology, surveillance and reconnaissance, and determine physical position. Big companies use satellites for banking transactions, data, and communication etc. The satellites also are used for environmental purposes to monitor Earth- to detect activities and assess the impact of global warming. In agriculture, satellites help to monitor crops and find potential threats to harvest. It helps the governments to take actions on natural disasters, coastal erosion, and wildfires. The civilian population has benefited most from satellite technology and depends on it for making calls, navigation, videoconferencing, and television services.

There are at least four countries that possess ASAT capabilities i.e. USA, Russia, China, and India. The US was the frontrunner in this technology and conducted its first test in 1959. In 1962 it also tested nuclear weapons in space under Operation 'Starfish Prime' which destroyed 8 out of the 24 satellites in orbit. This test created electromagnetic pulses and led to a street light blackout in Hawaii. In 1963 Soviets conducted ASAT test and during the Cuban Missile Crisis, it was agreed with the USA, 'not to use nuclear weapons above ground.'

The rivalry for ASAT was started by China in 2007 when it destroyed its own Fengyun -1C satellite and achieved anti-satellite capability. China's action has risked the potential arming of the space sector and the possibility of nuclear weapons tests at higher altitudes.

Russia, the USA, and China are parties to the 1967 Outer Space Treaty. They have violated several clauses of the Outer Space Treaty; such as Article 3 which states that exploration of space has to be by international law; Article 4 of the treaty on the other hand banned the testing of weapons of WMD; Article 6 of the treaty made international responsibility for the activities of countries for any damage caused by space programs; Article 9 prohibits any harmful interference in space from tests.

A recent report has articulated that Russia may use nuclear weapons in space to destroy American satellites. President Putin has denied such allegations and stated that 'Moscow has no intention of deploying nuclear weapons in space' and Russia wants to build capabilities in space 'similar to the US'.

While the weaponization attracts its own dangers, the problem of debris in space is a new realization. The recent Russian destruction of Cosmos 1408, a Soviet Era satellite created debris and posed a danger to the International Space Station (ISS). It had to start its thruster for five minutes to avoid debris.

Keeping space clean from debris is a major challenge for the international community as the number of satellites, missiles, and ASAT tests are increasing in orbit. Most of the tests are conducted at a higher altitude by these countries which creates debris that never falls back to Earth and makes debris float in space. It can potentially harm other satellites and the International Space Station.

India on the other hand was careful during its ASAT test in 2019 and made sure that whatever debris was created during the test fell on Earth and conducted the test in lower orbit. The active satellites, ASAT tests, and missile launches are creating space junk and aggravating the debris problem.

Safe and secure space cannot be ensured without the traffic regulations for space. It is fair to argue that this will pose serious challenges to space exploration, space tourism, space mining, satellites, and the International Space Station etc. Russia and China must refrain from arming space and opt non-military operations to ensure peace.



Ph: +9190211 90211 / +9180 4696 6966

Email: admissions@reva.edu.in

REVA University, Rukmini Knowledge
Park, Kattigenahalli, Yelahanka, Bengaluru - 560064.

 /revauniversity_official  /REVAUniversity  /revauniversity_official

 /@revauniversity_official  /REVA University

 reva.edu.in

 +91 90211 90211