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Peninsula Journal of Strategy and Policy

Aim and Scope

PJSP is committed to promoting critical analysis on a wide array of themes, addressing both international and domestic issues. The journal embraces the diversity inherent in the study of strategy and policy, aiming to produce research that has a global impact and fosters a deeper understanding of the world around us. At its core, PJSP seeks to challenge conventional thinking, encourage new perspectives, and provide a space for interdisciplinary dialogue that transcends traditional boundaries. Our mission is to support research that is not only academically rigorous but also relevant to real-world policy-making. We aim to bridge the gap between theoretical inquiry and practical application, ensuring that the strategic policies we explore are well-informed, balanced, and in the best interest of society.

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About TPF

The Peninsula Foundation (TPF) is a policy research think-tank headquartered in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Established with the aim of contributing to informed policy-making and fostering intellectual discourse on critical issues, TPF engages in rigorous research, analysis, and advocacy. TPF focuses on a wide range of policy areas including but not limited to economics, governance, social development, environmental sustainability, and technology. Through its research initiatives, publications, seminars, and consultations, TPF strives to generate evidence-based insights that can inform public discourse and influence policy decisions at various levels of government and society.

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Editor's Note

It is with great pride and a sense of profound responsibility that I present the first issue of the Peninsula Journal of Strategy and Policy. We release this edition at a moment of extraordinary global flux — a time when the certainties of yesterday are being upended by geopolitical rivalries, economic disruption, and crises that expose the limitations of outdated frameworks of global governance.

The world has witnessed a series of developments few could have imagined just a few years ago. The return of Donald Trump to the White House for a second term has already unsettled fragile alliances and tested the resilience of multilateral institutions. The Russia-Ukraine war grinds on relentlessly, hardening divisions and eroding faith in the very mechanisms created to prevent such conflicts. In our own neighbourhood, India's short but decisive conflict with Pakistan marks a significant shift in its strategic posture — signalling the emergence of an assertive India ready to use calibrated force when its security is threatened, and when diplomacy alone proves insufficient.

Meanwhile, the Middle East/West Asia remains engulfed in cycles of violence and human tragedy — from the genocide in Gaza to the grinding devastation in Syria and the recent twelve-day war between Israel and Iran, which has raised new fears of wider conflagration and instability. These conflicts unfold alongside an increasingly fragile global economy, where supply chains remain vulnerable, food and energy insecurity deepen, and hopes for fair and sustainable growth face headwinds from rising protectionism and fractured cooperation.

In this uncertain context, critical thinking and fearless debate are more essential than ever. This issue presents timely, thought-provoking research that addresses these complex challenges. Our contributors analyse how platforms like BRICS are giving the Global South a more assertive voice, pushing the world towards greater multipolarity and fairer multilateralism. Other essays turn our attention inward — examining how climate change and growing monsoonal variability imperil India's ecological and economic stability, demanding urgent policy responses rooted in science and local realities.

Equally significant is a powerful philosophical essay that calls for a civilisational ethic of mutual recognition — rejecting the narrowness of Eurocentric universalism and the shallowness of uncritical cultural relativism. It argues that the survival of humankind hinges on recognising and respecting the plurality of civilisational perspectives — a message of enduring relevance in an increasingly fractured world.

Through these diverse strands — geopolitics, global governance, climate, national security, and civilisational dialogue — the Peninsula Journal of Strategy and Policy reaffirms its commitment to serve as a bridge between rigorous scholarship and real-world policy.

I remain deeply grateful to our editorial team, contributors, reviewers, and you — our readers. Your engagement makes this endeavour meaningful and keeps alive the conviction that ideas, courageously shared and constructively debated, remain our best hope for a better world.

I invite you to read, reflect, and respond. May this issue inspire you to think critically, question deeply, and act wisely.

Warm regards,
Air Marshal M Matheswaran AVSM VM PhD (Veteran)
Editor-in-Chief
Peninsula Journal of Strategy and Policy

About the Journal

The Peninsula Journal of Strategy and Policy (PJSP) is the independent peer-reviewed flagship biannual journal of The Peninsula Foundation (TPF). The PJSP is a publisher of research articles, book reviews and commentaries and aims to serve as a trusted repository of publications and research materials on the analysis of strategy and policy in the context of domestic and global governance. By providing a forum for researchers and academicians to create and publish their original manuscripts, the journal seeks to identify and encourage scholarship that engages with significant theoretical, and empirical subjects and methods. Promoting critical and objective analysis on themes concerning both international and domestic issues including the truly interdisciplinary is at the core of PJSP. Above all the journal aims to embrace the diversity inherent in this discipline, produce scholarship that is globally impactful and foster an understanding and holistic awareness of the world around us.

Our mission is to provide unbiased research analysis that questions the conventional norms that are western centric and transcends prevailing narratives. We are committed to maintaining a neutral stance, emphasising scientific research to ensure that policies are implemented consistently. Our goal is not only to keep the people informed, but also challenge our readers to think critically and be open to new perspectives, ultimately contributing to the shaping of India's future. We believe that these principles can meaningfully contribute to the development of strategic policies that are effective, fair, and beneficial for the nation as a whole.

Our Focus Area

PJSP's focus areas include, but are **not limited to**:

- **Democracy and Governance:** Detailed study and analysis of the practice and effectiveness of democracy and governance.
- **Science, Technology and Security:** Research various aspects of science and technology developments that impact on national development and India's comprehensive security.
- **International and Transnational Affairs:** Research in international relations, geopolitics, and geo-economics that impact India, Indo-Pacific, and the world.
- **Transformational Paradigms:** Explore and identify innovative ideas, technologies, and practices in the context of transformational paradigms.

Research Articles

The Significance of the Russian Federation in the Emergence of BRICS as a Multilateral Institution

Prasanta Kumar Sahu

Abstract

This article focuses on the role of Russia in the emergence of BRICS as a power bloc in global society. It also highlights the changing dynamics of global politics with reference to the global South, the power decline of the United States and European Union, and Russia's role in this context. The paper has dealt with the economic rise of the BRICS countries in the global economy. It also speaks of the asymmetry between the affluent countries and the BRICS countries in the established financial institutions. It also argues that it was the inadequacies of the global financial institutions that led to the creation of the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA). Finally, it discusses the differences among the BRICS-led New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement and the Western world-led World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This paper explains the evolution of BRICS as a global flora in dealing with the emerging new trends in world politics with reference to the role of Russia. It also touches upon the securitization of BRICS.

Introduction

Russia entered the twenty-first century with mixed feelings as an autonomous international player deemed to be a member of the West but neither as an integrated member of Western security institutions such as NATO nor as part of the core of an Eastern empire (Trenin 2004). During this period, Putin emerged as an unrivalled personality in Russian politics. And, it was due to his masterful and astute strategies that Russia brought back its lost clout as an international player, unlike Boris Yeltsin's regime, which had its own sui generis memories. Political and foreign policy objectives in Russia had undergone dramatic changes during this period as the country became more active and aggressive in furthering its interests in the international arena, unlike the I990s. To emerge as a power, Russia had to withstand umpteen

[1]obstacles in its way, as reflected in its war with Georgia[1] and Chechnya[2], and also on the question of democracy and violation of human rights. With the US advocacy of the "global war on terror" during the early years of the twenty-first century, Putin, while wholeheartedly supporting the stance of the Bush regime, argued that terror should not be tolerated anywhere worldwide (Thorun 2004: 115). The global war on terror has once again drawn the Asian continent into the vortex of international politics. In this regard, Bajrectarevic (2011) argues that factors like mushrooming trade and production, impressive economic growth, and an independent position on foreign currency have made many international scholars re-examine the role of the Asian continent in the light of its last decade's experience of globalization. There have been several factors responsible for the emergence of this region as a focal point in the evolving new global political order. For instance, the emergence of China and India as great economic powers, the turbulence in Central Asian Republics, the nuclear imbroglio of North Korea, the age-old peninsular crisis between the two Koreas, and the emergence of ASEAN as a powerful regional economic grouping have virtually drawn the attention of the North towards Asia again. Further, the emergence of China and India as global players and their growing multilateral relations with the Russian Federation on several global political and economic issues have also engendered North's interest in the region. Russia's Asia's tilt started with the appointment of Primakov as Foreign Minister for the period 1996-1998 whose orientalist inclination (Mankoff 2007) emphasised the significance of 'Near Abroad' and other Asian countries. Next it was Putin, who gave immense importance to the Third World countries in his foreign and economic policies; it was due to the rejection of Western domination in global affairs. It was the revival period in new Russian Federation history. The Russian strategic elite wanted to make Russia a global power, owing to that, they brought immense changes in domestic and foreign policies to make people realise the aspiration for their superpower status and got support from other party leaders too. In this connection, a quote from Zyuganov (The Chairman of Russian Communist Party) is important –

[1] The Five-day war of 2008 was between Georgia and the self-proclaimed republics of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Russia on the side of the unrecognized states. This war is also called as peace enforcement operation.

[2] The Chechen wars can be interpreted as an example of a civil war in Russia with involvement of foreign terrorists on the side of separatists' fighters.

[2]"New Russian Federation is the heir to the old Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. The disintegration of the Soviet Union, is criminal and unacceptable; Russia must strive intently but with tranquillity to overturn the historical past. It should be, according to international law and its full agreement with those former republics and territories of the Soviet Union ready for the restoration of the fraternal union with Russia in the framework of a unified statehood" (Zyuganov 2006).

This shows that Russian nationalism is linked to its enhanced international role and how Russians were eager to rise again in a rapid manner. It is not only Russian politicians but also common citizens who are supporting the mainstream nationalist aspirations. A well-known Russian research centre carried out this survey to show how Russian citizens support great power ambitions.

According to a survey, conducted in 2011, shows 40% of the people of Russia have support for making it a great power state again. 38% of them support this aim in an ancillary manner, but overall, it is somewhere around 78%. That means 78% of Russians want to make Russia as great a power as it was in the past. This provides a great fillip to Putin's aspirations to make the Eurasian region the Eurasian Union and Russia's assertiveness in international politics (Putin 2011). With such popular support, it is an opportunity for the Kremlin's foreign policy that the world is moving towards a multipolar world order with the rise of 'emerging powers'[3] (Kadakin 2012), which is a suitable condition that's what Russian foreign policymakers want, in fact, they emphasised it in their foreign policy agenda too. The concept of multipolarity was incorporated into Russian foreign policy in 2008; it tenaciously talked about the democratic distribution of power by mentioning the 'emerging powers' (Foreign Policy Concept 2008). Recently, the United States' National Intelligence Service released a research document, "Global Trends: A Transformed World till 2025" (2013), in which they talked about the emergence of China and India and how Russia and China question Western hegemony in world affairs with alliances with the emerging countries. It described 'a multipolar world is emerging with the rise of China, India, Brazil, South Africa, and other new economies'. The document stated that, by 2025, the unipolar international system would be replaced with the newly emerging countries. This could be a great asset for Russia to tackle Western hegemonic power (National Intelligence Service of United States 2013). That

[3] The concept of emerging powers came with the rising of third world countries in international relations, especially with China, India, South Africa and Brazil.

clearly states that Russia's stake in international relations would be augmented rapidly shortly. Hence, there is a reason for Russia to orient its foreign policy with the rising nations' groups like BRICS, G20, and others.

Evolution of BRICS

Ikenberry (2004) analysed that 'one of the most prominent and structural changes in the second half of twentieth century of international politics was the evolution of world order based on the institutional and multilateral structure after the end of the Second World War. The institutional structure is based on the foundation of the United Nations, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (later the World Trade Organisation) and international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank Though there were some conflicts with the USSR, the other superpower till the 1990's, largely it was an era of the United States, no doubt in that case. It lasted till the end of the twentieth century, but, after the emergence of some 'Third World' (what) as major powers, the international unipolar world order is gradually shifting towards a multipolar world with more emphasis on aforementioned countries (Kadakin 2012). (which Countries in specific?) The emergence of China, India, Brazil, ASEAN, and others has completely changed the power structure in the present world politics. Many observers of contemporary international politics are using a variety of terms to define the current structure of global politics. They emphasise detente, dependence, or the development of a multipolar world. And compared to the nineteenth-century politics, which were mostly based on the nation-state concept, Twenty century politics is mainly ideology-based (Holsti 1980). However, the current structure is completely different, probably this is the first time that the world is moving with different trajectories and causes. Please rewrite to make it simple and easy to understand.

The BRICS group's cooperation started first at the level of deputy ministers and heads of the government affiliated agencies. In the beginning, the foreign ministers of four countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) met in New York in 2006. Since then, the BRICS evolved as a multilateral group while attempting to influence changes in the existing world order through incremental steps (Akulov 2012). The BRICS, comprising Brazil, Russia, China, India, and South Africa, are not comfortable with the Western dominance (Schirm 2010). Most of the global Southern world started realising their importance in global affairs, forming regional, inter-regional, and cooperative groups amongst them. The major groups of the

[3]present international order is BRICS, IBSA[4], SC0[5,] and G20. All these groups have the capacity to play a major role in contemporary international relations. Russia and China are members of all three groups, and both are members of the United Nation Security Council (UNSC). The importance of the Security Council in shaping world politics cannot be discounted. The other prominent members are India, Brazil, and South Africa, deemed to be the fastest developing economies at present.

The Third World was in wanton need of leadership as world politics were constantly changing as ever before. These countries see an enhanced role in international affairs, which was not the case in earlier times. Kadakin (2012), who was once a Russian ambassador to India, says during the New Delhi summit,

'The emergence of BRICS as a global entity has given the vision of a multipolar world in the international system with more emphasis on emerging economics. And it would act as a global stability factor as well'.

This trend appears to challenge the West. The United States politics of 'with us or against us' that George Bush spoke about is no longer the only case. Its trusty ally, the European Union is also in a predicament. The Third World voice was gaining strength in many global affairs Global politics is becoming ever more scattered with emphasis on economic, trade environmental, and climate issues. Thus, the world is rapidly moving towards a multipolar multidimensional world order (Grazini 2012).

In this scenario, Russia started sliding towards emerging powers and has considered the importance of the global South (Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2008). In fact, Russia started moving towards the global South during the Primakov period, when he was the second foreign minister of the new Russia. His anti-West temperament led him to move towards the southern part of the world by emphasising on developing nations. He placed more emphasis on Russia's great power ambition on global affairs. It is clear that these policies challenged the West and the United States throughout the 1990's of the global affairs.

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[4] IBSA is an international dialogue forum amongst India, Brazil and South Africa. Established in 2003, basically, they strive for the 'south-south cooperation.

[5] Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was established in 2001 with Shanghai as the headquarters. The official members of this group are China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

This was evident in the way Russia and China reacted to Yugoslavia, NATO's East-ward expansion. The United States - NATO's push towards Ukraine and Georgia has given a huge blow to Russia's broader territorial contiguity (Kanet 2007: 205). The disappointment over the West's ignorance of Russian foreign policy reached a pinnacle when Putin became President of Russia. Russia's disappointment came out in the second half of the 1990's, when Yeltsin expressed displeasure with Western world intervention in Yugoslavian internal affairs.

Within one year after his election as Prime Minister in 1999, Putin became President in 2000. Since then, through his pragmatic and assertive foreign policy, Putin has extended his network of allies with the like-minded states to contain the United States from assuming a dominant global position (Kanet 2007: 209). For example, the multipolar concept is mentioned in every Indo-Russian strategic partnership document. Putin regularly reminded Russia and the world that the collapse of the Soviet Union is the greatest blow to the international geopolitical structure because during the bipolar international system, the Third World countries had a choice of joining either of the two alliances or staying neutral. This choice came to an end with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 2007, at Munich, during the International Security Conference, Putin's attack on Western hegemony and unilateral decisions on many global affairs clearly reflected his nationalistic and revisionist foreign policy goals (Putin at Munich Security Conference 2007).

Since then, Mankoff argues that Putin's foreign policy started focusing on, and making a form of international relations in which large states are an alternative custodian of the global order, it is the place where any state can carry their nationalistic approach were deemed fit, respecting the sovereignty of each other as important within the location of influence and maintaining a general balance of power among themselves (Mankoff 2008: 12). Putin recognised the importance of the Third World since the beginning of his second presidency, and extended greater cooperation at the multilateral level. That led to the establishment of BRICS and SCO. Thus, he promoted the importance of India, China, Brazil, and South Africa as and it is largely Putin, who initiated and promoted the creation of BRICS as a larger entity in global politics. The new foreign policy concept of Russia clearly stated about BRICS that- "The establishment of BRICS reflects an objective trend in the global development, the one towards the formation of a polycentric system of international relations, which is increasingly characterised by the use of non-institutionalised mechanisms of global governance and network-based diplomacy, and the growing economic interdependence of states" (Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2013).

Thus, even though the acronym of BRIC was first used by Jim O'Neil in 2001, of Goldman Sachs, in his publication 'Building Better Global Economic BRICS it is Russia who took over and steered the concept. An important question to seek an answer to is why these countries are considered emerging? In what terms are they emerging? Will they have the capacity to play the global power? There are some other countries, like Indonesia, Turkey, Iran, Bangladesh, Egypt, etc., that are also considered the emerging nations (Neill 2006: 159-164), but these countries (BRICS) possess a range of economic, military, and political power resources. They have the resources to contribute to the creation of a new international order, maybe regionally or globally, and they have some degree of internal cohesion and capacity for effective state action. They are the fastest emerging nations at the present juncture, and of course, there are some that are heading towards greater economic, political, and military entities (Grazini 2012). Hurrell (2006) analysed their relations by highlighting four reasons he gave for their pivotal role. They are as below:

- They are heading at a faster rate of growth in terms of their economic, political, and military resources, and they can manage to create a new international order globally with their immense economic, military, and political resources and clout. They have become a manufacturing and service hub for the global economy.
- BRICS has greater advantage due to their regional location and natural resources. And the most important aspect of all these countries is their greater aspiration to become influential players in global affairs.
- The third reason is that their regional and inter-regional cooperation is mushrooming rapidly, for instance, SCO, BRICS, and IBSA, and also the bilateral relations were reached at a well acclaimed pace.
- And, these countries have sorted out several of their differences in many ways compared to the other emerging states in terms of their goals, aspirations, and well placed political and economic stability. All of them have the aspiration to become global powers.

Some of the Notable aspects of BRICS

The term BRIC was first used by Jim 0'Neill, a Goldman Sachs Executive, in 2001 by projecting their growth rate in the next fifty years of the international system. But this was mostly the macroeconomic aspects of these countries. Like Gross Domestic Product growth rate, availability of natural resources, and demography (Grazini 2021).

In 2006, Putin offered greater collaboration amongst these emerging countries. The discontent between the West and Russia forced Putin to go for such a kind of change in his foreign policy. According to the United States National Investigative Agency research, (2013) if the current growth rate of BRICS countries grows in the same manner, it would overtake G7 nations' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2040-2050. China will become more powerful amongst all these countries in terms of economy and military, and India's growth rate will remain more or less the same, and both would strive for a multipolar world order. Russia has the potential to become more powerful and rich if it diversifies its economy and integrates with the global economy. The BRICS countries are growing so fast that their combined economic growth would mirror the present richest countries of the world by 2050, consisting of more than a quarter of the whole· world land area. These five countries have 40% of the world population and 35% of global foreign exchange reserves. It is true that since the last 10 years BRICS combined contributed over a third of the world's population increase and growth from I/6 to quarter in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms (Akulov 2012). So, by any means it is going to dominate international relations very soon. The Goldman Sachs report also stated that (2003), BRICS countries' growth would reach current G7 countries (the US, Japan, UK, France, Germany and Italy) GDP by 2020, and would overtake it by 2040.

Systemic analysis of BRICS

This paper highlighted the BRICS summit, the first summit was held in Yekaterinburg, June 16, Russia. (DATE?) Some of the important outcomes of this summit are given below.

- Commitment to reform in the international economic institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), these changes should mirror the changes in the world economy. The emerging nations or developing countries should have a greater voice and larger representation in the aforementioned institutions. Their heads and executives must be elected through an open, transparent,

and a merit-based selection process. And the BRICS also strive to build a stable, strong, predictable and diversified international monetary system.

- There must be democratic and transparent decision-making, and their effective implementation as soon as possible, and it should have legal basis in global financial institutions.
- The BRICS understand the importance of foreign direct investment and international trade to address the recent economic recession, so, in this connection, the BRICS call upon all the international actors to strive hard to overcome the gloomy environment in international economy, and the BRICS argue that states should keep international trade stable, remove protectionism, and also fight for progressive outcomes in the WTO's Doha Development agenda.
- Effective and proper implementation of 'Sustainable Development' agenda with a focus on environmental security, especially the Rio Declaration and other multilateral arrangements for mitigating climate change.
- The BRICS enhanced greater cooperation among themselves in societal problem areas, and strengthened humanitarian assistance programs and for the reduction of natural disaster risks and also campaigned for global food security.
- BRICS countries are committed to create a multipolar world order with the democratic decision-making process on the basis of international law principles, and it would be stressed for collective representation, mutual cooperation, and collective decision-making of emerging nations, and it also reiterates the peaceful resolution of all international disputes.
- International diplomacy should be based on the multilateral level, with the United Nations playing the central role for eliminating global challenges and threats alongside reforming the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to meet the interests of emerging nations.
- Finally, the BRICS stated that these ensure our relations with emerging nations would be based on the pragmatic, mutual trust, open, and transparent way to enhance greater cooperation in economics and trade to carry long-lasting peace and tranquillity in the world.

The hopes and aspirations were accordingly to change the structure of the present international relations. After the first summit, in the second and third, there were no drastic changes except offering invitations for South Africa (2011). The colossal change in the BRICS summit came in the New Delhi declaration in India, 2011. In this summit, these five countries contemplated establishing the BRICS Development Bank to meet the interests of emerging nations and take over Dollar ($) domination from international trade. It was stated under the theme of "BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Security, and Prosperity" (Akulov 2012). Some of the important features of the New Delhi summit are listed below:

- The BRICS entity is a place for conducting dialogue and cooperation amongst their member states, which contributes 43% of the global population for promoting international peace and security in a multipolar world, which is intrinsic, in a highly interdependent globalising world. Because of inter-regional membership from Asia, Europe, Latin America, and Africa have been contributing for its greater significance in world politics.
- The reform process of international monetary institutions is very slow; hence, it should be implemented urgently. The allocation of quota systems should be very transparent to represent developing nations' interests.
- Brazil, India, and South Africa were looking forward to the G20 convention because it would be held in Russia in 2013 so that they could surface their voice to the developed society through the Russian presidency.
- They said they were still committed to reforming global institutions like the United Nations, especially the Security Council to make them more representative, effective and efficient so that they meet the emerging global challenges and threats.
- BRICS reaffirms that accelerating growth, food, and energy security were the most prominent challenges facing the modern world; hence, we have to address economic development, combat hunger and malnutrition, and eradicate poverty from developing nations. And also, we should strive for creating job opportunities, improving people's living standards, and sustainable growth to meet our prosperous aspirations (Ministry of External Affairs India 2012).

The seeds of the BRICS Development Bank have been planted in this summit only, it created immense debate in Western society, and it would have larger implications in upcoming international relations.

The Durban summit (also called the eThekwini Declaration) officially declared the establishment of the BRICS-led New Development Bank. On declaring this, BRICS leaders said, it would be to appropriately use global financial resources for infrastructure and sustainable development in BRICS nations and other emerging nations (BRICS Official Website 2013). The key aspect of this summit would be musing about establishing a New Development Bank, which was mooted in the New Delhi summit. Emerging markets (Developing Countries) analysts believe that a New Development Bank, repeated, could help to create jobs in South Africa and promote greater trade on the African continent by funding new infrastructure. And also, it would create greater enthusiasm in emerging countries (All Africa Global Media, March 14, 2013). The basic theme of this conference was "BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Development, Integration, and Industrialisation". Some of the important aspects of this summit are given below:

- Our basic theme is to come under the same umbrella in the form of BRICS to promote international law principles, multilateralism, and the United Nations principles effectively. And to reinforce commitment towards global peace, stability, development, and cooperation.
- They declared that they would engage and cooperate with non-BRICS countries, especially emerging markets and developing countries, and other regional organisations. And also, it goes with the African leaders under the theme of "Unlocking Africa's Potential; BRICS and African Cooperation on Infrastructure". It also affirms African continent integration.
- The summit said they would support the G20 development agenda as a prominent cause for global economic stability, long-term sustainable growth, and job creation.
- The leaders are deeply concerned with the situation prevailing in Syria, and the Middle East, and they strongly argue with the international community to sort out the Iran nuclear issue by negotiations.

BRICS – Is it a Myth or a Threat?

The reasons behind the emergence of the Third World countries, due to the changing structure of the international political and economic system that politics does not make any difference in today's postmodern world, if they take collective action in economic and trade diplomacy, this collective action brings huge changes in matters related to domestic and international relations. No state can act alone in an integrated global economy but depend on other nations in many aspects. It can be seen how better relations have impacted erstwhile rivals like India-China, France-Germany, and UK-France-Germany. Modern state politics are largely driven by effective diplomacy with an immense economy, trade, and commercial dependence and interdependence.

The reality is that the Southern countries' problems are diversified and magnified; it is the most volatile region of the world, and many parts are very war-prone. The South also faces many other concerns like terrorism, separatism, extremism, and external intervention in internal matters. So, though it had emerged as a cooperative economic group, the BRICS should expand from the economic cooperative group to a political and economic entity, and also look at security concerns.

The Asian continent is lacking a security organisation that represents the whole Southern world. If they go for establishing one powerful security organisation, they can deal with Asian continent and Southern security aspects, focusing on threats and risks of the region to make it safe, as the Western world has NATO. But there isn't a separate security organisation to protect their security interests as the major advanced countries of the region. Bajrectarevic (2011) said that, there is an absence of any particular multilateral security organization in the Asian continent, even though they have several bilateral security cooperation agreements. He said that the Asian continent is advancing just like Europe was when they were in the phase of progress. Collective security organisations can reduce the number of wars amongst them. And there were indeed no wars as such after the establishment of NATO. What about Russia & Ukraine? Isreal & Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, UAE & Yemen. It is an axiom that the Asian continent is one of the volatile regions in the world despite the fastest growing and aspiring countries like China, India, and Russia.

Recently, the American National Intelligence Council released one document, named "Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World," in which they said (2013) that the multipolar world was emerging with the rise of the Third World countries like India, China, Brazil, and other

countries. With this trend, the non-state actors, such as Multinational Corporation (MNCs), ethnic groups, religious organisations and even criminal networks, etc., will mushroom rapidly (Global Trend-2025, 2013: 8). Zakaria (2008), in his book, "The Post-American World," stated that the rise of the rest is inevitable, the existing system is going to replace in the very near future, will be more on the Southern world only. Nye (1990), who talked about the importance of 'Soft Power' in the present world, stated that soft power has a greater role in shaping global relations in coming years. If at all, war takes place through the greater role of soft power.

On considering the mayhem around the region of these three countries (which 3?) and throughout the Southern region of the world, it would be logical if the South evolved an effective global security organisation like NATO to tackle their inter-regional security problems. And, to overcome all these hurdles, to tackle western hegemonic domination on international relations, and to make it a safer path, they should contemplate establishing a powerful security organization sooner than before with the coordination of the Third World countries. The evils of the world at present are terrorism, environmental disorder, separatism, humanitarian intervention, and the threat of cyber war.

A fundamental question is, when BRICS are willing to go for economic and financial cooperation by contemplating establishing a BRICS Development Bank at a global level, should they at some stage go for security cooperation at a multilateral level? And BRICS leaders clearly stated many times that this group is not a threat to any other group or the Western World as it is for mere economic cooperation only. During the New Delhi summit, a Chinese foreign ministry-affiliated think tank said that BRICS is an ad-hoc political club, not anti-West or the United States (Ross 2011). And also, Putin (2013) recently before the inaugural function of the Durban summit, stated that, "The BRICS mechanism that will enable to seek joint solutions for key issues in the world politics," and, "We are not viewing BRICS as a geopolitical competitor to the Western countries and their organisations and on the contrary, we are open to discussions with all interested parties within the framework of multipolar peace model" (Strategic Culture Foundation, March 22, 2013). So as of now, the evolution of Southern countries is not at all a threat to any other international organization, and region. Kadakin (2012), who was the Russian Ambassador to India, during lead-up to the New Delhi summit, said that the BRICS entity is not a military, political, or ideological bloc. That shows how committed to their vision.??

The Institutionalisation of BRICS

The BRICS grouping shares a common perception that the existing global governance structure which was set up soon after the Second World War, has become anachronistic. After the creation of the global institutions, namely the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, the world witnessed several significant shifts in the international political economy. However, the corresponding changes that occurred in international politics are not reflected in this global governance structure. Particularly with the end of the Cold War, the world ushered in a United States-led unipolar world in which the United States has become the sole superpower. The post-Cold War period witnessed unprecedented changes, the end of the bipolar world order, the rise of Asian countries like China and India, and other emerging economies like Brazil, in the global governance structure. As a result, rising economies like Russia and China were integrated into the global economic system.

However, it is the firm belief of the BRICS countries that the post-Cold War era was dominated by unilateralism led by the United States, with the coalition of its allies. The United States' pre-eminence began in the mid-twentieth century by establishing the global governance structure largely based on the Bretton Woods System, and the United Nations. Thus, the BRICS countries argue that the United States-led unilateralism either manipulates the global institutions or sides with them to fulfil their economic interests. The economic interests of the United States with its "Washington Consensus" based development model resulted in a series of economic crises in developing countries like Brazil, Russia, and the Asian financial crisis.

In addition to it, the developing countries witnessed a lot of political turmoil in the post-Cold War period; particularly, the political chaos was widespread in the African continent and subsequently in the Middle Eastern countries. The BRICS countries perceived the unrest, both politically and economically, across the world because of the neoliberal policies of the Bretton Woods System and also the ineffectiveness of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in establishing peace in these countries. The grouping also sees that the United States with its military and economic might, unilaterally intervened in the domestic affairs of the sovereign states in the last decade of the twentieth Century.

Concurrently, non-Western countries like India, China, Brazil, and Russia are reviving their glory, and are emerging in international relations. These countries' growing economic weight

and political clout are not adequately addressed by the existing global institutions. Thus, the countries have been demanding their due share in these institutions in order to make it more democratic and representative. It is the strong belief of the five countries that their contribution to global governance is far higher than some of the developed countries, like Canada, Germany and Italy etc., but their representation and voice are nominal in the global governance structure. Thus, the five countries came together to address the outstanding issues in international global governance, which consists of the Bretton Woods System and the United Nations.

The creation of the BRICS-led New Development Bank (NDB) is a significant step towards the beginning of the institutionalisation process of the BRICS grouping. The New Development Bank alters the fundamental characteristics of the grouping, which have been confined to non-binding and informal consultations thus far. The New Development Bank aims at "mobilising resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries" (Agrawal 2015). As historical evidence shows that infrastructure is crucial for economic growth and development, the already existing regional multilateral development banks like the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the CAF have focused on infrastructural development in Europe and the Latin American regions, respectively.

Jones (2014) examines the existing regional and multilateral development banks (LIKE?) that initially invested in the infrastructure development projects to bridge the gap between the rich and poorer areas of Europe. He says that the increasing divergence between the rich and poorer areas becomes an obstacle for economic growth and trade liberalisation. He cites examples like the European Investment Bank and the World Bank that exclusively focused on the reconstruction of the war-ravaged infrastructure in Europe. Abundant empirical evidence evinces that the investment in the infrastructural sectors accelerates economic growth and reduces inequalities in countries. Similarly, the New Development Bank solely focuses on the needs of infrastructural development in the emerging and developing countries to foster economic growth and to reduce inequalities (DeConning 2015).

The Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) is to tackle future economic crises in the world, particularly in providing financial aid to developing and emerging economies whenever they face balance of payments and short-term liquidity pressures. The creation of the CRA is an encouraging step towards filling the gap in the Southern financial funding architecture. The

Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) provides not only financial aid to developmental activities in the developing countries but also bolsters confidence among investors to invest in the developing countries even during times of crisis (Jones 2014). In other words, the New Development Bank (NDB) and Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) play a similar, if not the same, role to that of the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), respectively.

The creation of the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) is a relatively recent idea compared to the New Development Bank (NDB), as it was discussed in Los Cabos in 2012 by the BRICS leaders prior to the G20 summit. At that time, the global economy was in flux owing to the Euro-zone crisis. Thus, the leaders agreed to cooperate and also to increase their available reserves with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to solve the crisis. Then, the BRICS leaders realised the necessity of a multilateral institution to enhance confidence among investors. Therefore, the creation of a new reserve pool is not necessarily contrary to the existing International Monetary Fund (IMF); rather, it is a burden-sharing and additional line of defence of further crisis times (Duggan 2015). That is how the leaders asked their finance and central bank governors to find out the possibilities of creating a Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) in the existing global financial system in accordance with the internal legal framework.

The creation of the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) is seen as a challenge to the existing financial architecture. The lending process of the Contingent Reserve Arrangement is not attached with conditionality as conditionality is a prerequisite of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) lending process. The BRICS shares the strong perception that the conditionality not only undermines the democracy and self-determination of the countries but also becomes a tool for the dominant countries to dominate the poor countries (Ivanov 2013). Thus, the BRICS countries promote the principle of the “sovereignty” of the recipient country as otherwise the conditionality can be seen as an interference in the internal affairs of the sovereign states.

The creation of the New Development Bank (NDB) and Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) is seen as the growing weight of the BRICS countries in the global financial system. Prior to the BRICS formation, the five countries had been demanding their due share in the international financial institutions, but their demands have been largely ignored by the developed countries. Although the developed countries invited the BRICS countries to attend

G8 meetings with the "outreach" concept to integrate their economies into the global economic system, they, on the one hand, are inviting the developing economies to the G8 meetings while categorically stating that mere invitations do not assure a membership status in global financial forums like the G-8 on the other. Thus, the BRICS countries felt that invitations were merely symbolic, as they did not bring any substantial changes to global economic governance.

Conclusion

It is true that global politics is changing drastically with the evolution of BRICS. Most of the time in the history of global politics, the change (replacement of the existing system or world order) has come only after a hundred or more years least the existing system lasted fifty years. There have been reasons for the change in International Relations, which he classified as the global society should fathom in terms of power and management of legal and moral norms. It is said that the international society can be lucidly narrated through historical and sociological depth. The state system might not come into being without a degree of cultural unity amongst all their members.

The current international system is challenging the United States hegemony in world politics. The United States' decline was reflected in their subprime economic crisis, which led to the economic recession. (When?) Throughout the world, many of the world markets plunged into a deep crisis. It violated many important aspects of global treaties, conventions, and agreements, for instance, the United States placed their missiles in Poland and Czechoslovakia, France and Germany have not supported their involvement in Afghanistan, and Iraq, besides Libya. And their (WHOOSE) unnecessary involvement in many global affairs led to the evolution of a new world in international relations. It is in these circumstances that the G7 has grown to the G20, and BRICS has diversified. The Russian Federation's foreign policy correctly predicted this development. Russia helped in the construction of BRICS and has been its biggest supporter. Inconclusive.

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BRICS and the Quest for a Global Cybersecurity Framework: Implications for Defence Strategies in the Indo-Pacific

Shivangi Shrivastava

Abstract

This study explores the contributions of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and the Quad (United States, India, Japan, Australia) in shaping the global cybersecurity framework, with a specific emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region. As the Indo-Pacific becomes increasingly vital for global trade and technological progress, it is also facing rising cybersecurity threats, such as state-sponsored cyberattacks, espionage, and attacks on critical infrastructure. Both BRICS and the Quad contribute to the development of global cybersecurity norms, but their approaches often differ. BRICS advocates for a multipolar, decentralised model that emphasises digital sovereignty, while the Quad supports a liberal, rules-based order. This research explores how these differing perspectives influence regional cybersecurity and defence strategies, with particular attention to India's unique role in bridging both groups. It also identifies potential areas for collaboration, such as joint capacity building and tackling cybercrime, alongside competitive issues, especially between China and the US. The study considers the implications of these dynamics for Indo-Pacific defence, emphasising the need for cooperation between BRICS and the Quad to strengthen regional cyber resilience and stability. Recommendations include the creation of a BRICS-Quad cybersecurity forum and the promotion of transparent cyber norms to foster trust and develop effective defence strategies.

Keywords: BRICS, QUAD, Indo-Pacific, Cybersecurity, Defense

Introduction

By 2040, the Indo-Pacific region, comprising around 40 economies, is expected to contribute more than 50 percent of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The combined economic output of nations such as China, Japan, India, South Korea, and Australia has already surpassed that of the entire European Union (EU). In recent years, this diverse and rapidly expanding region has drawn significant attention from countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia, all of which have formulated their own strategies for engagement. A notable example of this is the AUKUS partnership, a trilateral security pact designed to bolster military cooperation and advance a range of sophisticated capabilities, particularly in areas such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence (AI), quantum technologies, and other emerging fields. This collaborative initiative aims to enhance military coordination and ensure preparedness for future challenges.

Beyond economic, defence, and geopolitical considerations, the Indo-Pacific has also become a critical battleground for technological competition. Key areas of contention include semiconductor production in Taiwan, the intensifying rivalry between the United States and China, and growing concerns regarding cyber activities linked to the Chinese government. Moreover, policymakers must navigate the complex task of balancing cybersecurity with content regulation and moderation, all while countering the increasing cyber threats posed by both state-sponsored and independent actors.

In response, regional organisations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) have sought to address these challenges by prioritising the enhancement of cyber capabilities, safeguarding critical infrastructure, and fostering resilience across the region. However, cyberspace has largely mirrored the broader geopolitical conflicts unfolding in the Indo-Pacific. Earlier this year, a leak from a Chinese company revealed that China had been engaging in cyber espionage against several governments in the region, including targeting telecom companies in Pakistan, Mongolia, and Malaysia, as well as specific sectors of the Indian government.

India has responded by strengthening its cyber capabilities, establishing the National Cyber Agency in 2018, and conducting its own advanced persistent threat (APT) operations.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has been expanding its cyber capabilities, with groups such as APT36 allegedly targeting Indian organisations. In Southeast Asia, the APT32 group, linked to Vietnam, has carried out cyber-attacks against human rights activists in Vietnam and targeted organisations in the Philippines and Laos. The growing prevalence of these cyber operations highlights the close relationship between digital landscapes and geopolitical tensions in the region. (Hurel, et.al., 2024).

A report from cybersecurity firm Sophos in 2021 revealed that 78 percent of businesses in India had fallen victim to ransomware attacks, highlighting the growing frequency of such cybercrimes. This trend is not confined to India; it has progressively affected countries across the Indo-Pacific region, many of which have been among the most frequent targets of ransomware attacks in recent years. Even more concerning is that these attacks are no longer limited to private companies; they are increasingly targeting critical infrastructure and key organisations that are vital to national security. This shift underscores the fact that the digital realm has become a battleground, posing significant risks to even the most secure and essential entities.

In November 2022, a wave of cyberattacks hit Vanuatu, a small island nation in the Pacific, severely disrupting its government networks and crippling vital services. This incident serves as a stark example of how ransomware can cause substantial damage, not only financially but also in terms of widespread chaos. A similar event occurred in 2020 when the Colonial Pipeline cyberattack led to significant fuel shortages on the East Coast of the United States, further illustrating the vulnerability of essential infrastructure.

Ransomware attacks are not merely about financial gain. They reveal the complex nature of the digital landscape, where such attacks can be driven by a combination of economic, political, and even military motives. As these threats continue to escalate, ransomware is increasingly being recognised as a major national security concern, with far-reaching impacts on both governments and businesses alike (Tiwari, 2023)

BRICS and the QUAD: Impact on Global Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity is increasingly becoming a major concern, not only for BRICS nations but for countries across the globe. As both governments and businesses become ever more reliant on interconnected infrastructures, commonly referred to as "smart" systems, these networks are emerging as prime targets for cyberattacks, particularly when essential services are at

risk. Regardless of the size of an organisation, whether it is a small business or a large corporation, the threats are substantial, as cybercriminals can disrupt operations or gain access to confidential information.

With the growing use of connected devices and online services, individuals are becoming more vulnerable to cyber risks, often without a clear understanding of the potential dangers. Many people remain unaware of how their personal data is collected and utilised, frequently without their explicit consent or knowledge, leaving them exposed to various forms of cybercrime and digital threats. As our lives become increasingly intertwined with the online world, these risks continue to escalate, affecting everyone from private individuals to major global organisations. (Belli et al., (n.d) Pg. no. 22-23)

The BRICS nations are Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—are becoming increasingly influential in both economic and political spheres. As their reliance on technology and the internet continues to grow, they are facing escalating cybersecurity threats, particularly those targeting critical infrastructure. These countries encounter similar challenges in cyberspace, including the malicious use of artificial intelligence, underscoring the need for greater collaboration in cybersecurity.

One successful approach adopted in other areas is the Information Sharing and Analysis Centre, which collects and disseminates intelligence on cybersecurity threats and vulnerabilities to help safeguard against attacks. In recent years, there has been growing interest in establishing a BRICS Information Sharing and Analysis Centre to strengthen cooperation in cybersecurity. However, the formation of such a group presents its own set of challenges. These include the complexities of coordinating efforts among member nations, securing adequate funding, building trust, overcoming language barriers, and navigating differing legal and regulatory frameworks.

Certain researchers, such as Belli, have explored the need for updated legislation on cyber defence and cyber warfare within BRICS nations. Others, including Wanglai, have emphasised the importance of forming a dedicated working group within BRICS to facilitate information exchange and best practices, as well as creating coordination points in each member country to tackle cybercrime. Despite these initiatives, there is still no single entity overseeing comprehensive cybersecurity collaboration among the BRICS nations (Malatji & Matli, (2023) pg. no. 116-117)

The Indo-Pacific region holds differing levels of significance for various nations, shaped by

their distinct interests and perspectives. Nevertheless, the four Quad nations India, Japan, Australia, and the United States share a common understanding of the region's importance in both geopolitical and economic terms. During the two thousand and tens, while each of these nations faced a range of cyber challenges, they collectively recognised China's growing assertiveness in cyberspace as a significant cybersecurity threat.

Until the year two thousand and fifteen, the United States sought to address China's expanding cyber capabilities by encouraging it to operate within a framework of global rules and standards. This approach was formalised with the United States-China Cyber Agreement, signed by Presidents Obama and Xi Jinping. Despite revelations that Chinese hackers had been monitoring India for more than a decade, the United States remained hopeful that it could curb China's ambitions in cyber espionage. However, in the years that followed, cybersecurity tensions between China and the Quad nations became increasingly pronounced.

In Japan, Chinese cyber-attacks on industrial and governmental sectors intensified political and economic mistrust. In the year two thousand and sixteen, it was revealed that a Chinese hacking group known as Bronze Butler had infiltrated Japanese companies for several years, exacerbating Japan's security concerns. Australia's anxieties regarding cybersecurity also deepened. The Foreign Policy White Paper of the year two thousand and seventeen not only addressed industrial espionage but also stressed the necessity of protecting critical infrastructure and countering misinformation. In the year two thousand and twenty, Prime Minister Scott Morrison publicly warned of the escalating threat posed by state-sponsored cyber-attacks against national institutions.

India's concerns over Chinese cyber threats grew significantly following the border clashes in the Galwan Valley in the year two thousand and twenty. In the months that followed, India experienced power outages, with investigations revealing that cyber-attacks were responsible for the disruptions, particularly in Mumbai, where a major attack occurred in October. Meanwhile, the United States remained the only Quad member with an official mechanism for publicly attributing responsibility for cyber-attacks. Since the establishment of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency in the year two thousand and seventeen, the United States has routinely identified Chinese threat actors as being responsible for various cyber-attacks, including espionage and assaults on critical infrastructure.

Ultimately, China's increasing assertiveness in cyberspace became the primary concern that unified the Quad nations. Their shared apprehensions drove them to strengthen their cooperation and prioritise cybersecurity when they reinforced their partnership in the year two thousand and twenty (Scholz, 2023).

Diverging Cybersecurity Approaches: BRICS vs. QUAD

Over the past ten years, digital security has become a key priority for BRICS nations, with a particular focus on cybersecurity. This journey began in the year two thousand and thirteen during the BRICS Summit in Durban, South Africa, where leaders acknowledged the growing importance of a secure and accessible cyberspace. The eThekwini Declaration underscored the need for globally recognised cybersecurity norms, standards, and practices. A significant turning point came with Edward Snowden's revelations, which strengthened collaboration on digital policies among BRICS nations. Each country began developing its own cybersecurity strategy, introducing laws, policies, and regulations tailored to its specific priorities. In the year two thousand and fifteen, the BRICS Ufa Declaration formally solidified this partnership, leading to the establishment of a Working Group on Security in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies. This group was tasked with identifying effective solutions to common cybersecurity challenges and encouraging the exchange of information regarding information and communication technology policies and initiatives.

That same year, BRICS ICT ministers formally signed a Memorandum of Understanding to promote cooperation in science, technology, and innovation, further reinforcing their collaborative efforts. This agreement paved the way for various initiatives, including the BRICS Digital Partnership, the BRICS Partnership for a New Industrial Revolution, the Innovation BRICS Network, and the BRICS Institute of Future Networks. These initiatives have fostered a comprehensive approach to collaboration, integrating policy-making, technological advancement, and research.

Although BRICS nations initially held differing perspectives on cybersecurity, their views have increasingly aligned in recent years on key digital policy matters. Issues such as data protection, data security, the regulation of online content, and cybercrime have emerged as shared priorities, reflecting a collective commitment to shaping the digital future in a way that balances security, innovation, and national sovereignty (Manager, 2022).

During the Quad Leaders' Meeting on the twenty-fourth of May, two thousand and twenty-two, a commitment to strengthening cybersecurity and safeguarding digital ecosystems was reaffirmed. To enhance the security of software services and products, steps are being taken to establish common security practices among the Quad governments. Standard cybersecurity protocols for critical infrastructure are being developed, and the Quad Cyber Challenge is being introduced an initiative aimed at raising public awareness and encouraging better cybersecurity practices.

The Quad Cybersecurity Partnership is dedicated to bolstering capabilities and sharing vital information throughout the Indo-Pacific to enhance regional security. Since September two thousand and twenty-one, an extensive review of existing policies and guidelines has been undertaken to identify the most effective security measures for software services and critical infrastructure. While each Quad nation has its own distinct priorities and strategies, they share a unified goal: to strengthen cybersecurity. By implementing these strategies, significant progress can be made in securing digital environments.

Beyond national efforts, regional partners are being supported through the promotion of best practices, the improvement of product security, and the reinforcement of defences against cyber threats. Another key priority is ensuring that telecommunications infrastructure is built upon reliable and trustworthy vendors. In today's interconnected world, the importance of secure and resilient networks cannot be overstated. Efforts are being made to explore open and interoperable solutions that function seamlessly across all Quad nations.

These initiatives reflect a shared commitment to advancing cybersecurity, enhancing regional capabilities, and ensuring that the Indo-Pacific region is equipped with secure, transparent, and dependable digital infrastructure (Quad Senior Cyber Group Joint Cybersecurity Statement the American Presidency Project, n.d.)

India: The Bridge Between BRICS and the Quad

India's participation in the Quad forum alongside the United States, Japan, and Australia as well as its active role in the BRICS summit, highlights the country's evolving approach to 'multi-alignment'. However, viewing Indian foreign policy purely through the lens of 'alignment' tends to obscure the significant distinctions in India's relationships with major global powers (Mohan, 2022).

Within the Quad, India collaborates with fellow democratic nations the United States, Japan,

and Australia to address key security concerns, particularly in relation to maritime security and countering China's expanding influence in the Indo-Pacific region. These partnerships are centred on maintaining regional stability and upholding the balance of power.

Simultaneously, within BRICS, India works alongside other emerging economies, including China, to tackle pressing global challenges such as economic development and the creation of more inclusive frameworks for global governance. The emphasis here is on advocating for a multipolar world order, ensuring that nations from the Global South have a more substantial voice in shaping international affairs.

India's distinct significance lies in its ability to bridge these two spheres, acting as a link between the Global North, represented by the Quad, and the Global South, represented by BRICS. By leveraging its position in both alliances, India skilfully balances its security priorities with its commitment to economic cooperation and global equity, all while navigating complex geopolitical dynamics. This delicate equilibrium enables India to maintain strategic flexibility and exert considerable influence in shaping the future course of international relations (Kumar, 2024)

However, India's official stance on cyber governance has been somewhat ambiguous. While the country's position has evolved in its expression, the underlying sentiment reveals discomfort with the current internet governance framework, which is largely shaped by Western nations. This is particularly relevant as Western countries advocate for their commercial interests, viewing the internet as a free trade zone, whereas nations like India are still grappling with issues related to access and inclusion. As a result, India is keen to support a government-led system over a market-driven one. In a speech delivered by an Indian official at Netmundial in April 2014, the term "equinet" was used to describe the characteristics associated with the internet's original purpose.

These differing perspectives, while aimed at keeping the internet "free" and promoting it as a "global common good," have often placed India at odds with the United States, Europe, and other countries during international discussions on internet governance. It is reasonable to infer that the BRICS members share a similar viewpoint to India's, as they do not fully support the multi-stakeholder internet governance models championed by Western nations. Interestingly, despite the varied opinions on internet governance within the BRICS countries, some members of civil society remain optimistic that BRICS could offer a fresh perspective on global internet governance (Observer Research Foundation n.d.)

India's cyber policy aims to create a more robust and secure digital landscape within the country. It focuses on establishing a comprehensive regulatory framework, which includes the appointment of a Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) within organisations. The CISO would be responsible for overseeing cybersecurity concerns and ensuring that organisations allocate a designated budget for cybersecurity initiatives. Additionally, the policy has led to the establishment of a National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) to manage and address emergencies relating to critical information infrastructure. The policy also mandates periodic audits to assess the effectiveness of existing security systems.

In contrast, the Quad Cybersecurity Partnership follows a different approach. Rather than being a regulatory framework, it is primarily a collaborative initiative aimed at enhancing cybersecurity cooperation across the Indo-Pacific region. A key component of the Quad's efforts is the Quad Cybersecurity Day campaign, which seeks to raise awareness of cybersecurity issues and provide guidance and support to vulnerable communities. This initiative is being launched in partnership with businesses, non-profit organisations, educational institutions, and local communities to ensure a wide-reaching impact. The Quad is also placing a strong emphasis on safeguarding telecommunications technology, particularly in light of the expansion of 5G and other advanced technologies, to ensure a secure and open digital landscape among its member nations (Bhattacharya, (2022) pg. no. 3-4)

India's stance on the Quad and BRICS ought to be informed by a realistic appraisal of its national interests. The Quad constitutes a vital platform for responding to China's assertive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific, whilst BRICS offers a unique opportunity to engage with a diverse group of emerging economies and shape the global agenda. India's success in navigating this complex landscape will depend on its ability to leverage its distinctive position as a bridge between these two competing blocs. By fostering dialogue and cooperation, India can contribute to the creation of a more stable and equitable global order (Garnayak, 2024).

Rising Cybersecurity Threats in the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific region, home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies, is rapidly advancing its digital infrastructure. As these markets expand, the influence of multinational

technology companies referred to as "cyber kingmakers" is becoming increasingly evident. These companies, wielding power akin to that of nation-states in the digital sphere, are poised to have a significant impact on which entities succeed in shaping the region's online environment.

At the same time, nations in South and Southeast Asia are aligning more closely with the United States, while China is establishing itself as a prominent contender in the global power struggle. These countries are leveraging their strategic importance to safeguard their interests, and may compel multinational corporations to recognise their "digital sovereignty," particularly in sectors such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence, digital currencies, and governance.

As elections face growing threats from cyberattacks, technology companies that manage critical digital infrastructure are playing an increasingly vital role in protecting democratic systems. Election interference, ranging from disinformation campaigns to direct attacks on electoral systems, poses a significant threat not only to the integrity of elections but also to the stability of governments and societies (SentinelOne, 2024). In Cambodia's 2018 election, a Chinese organisation known as TEMP. Periscope allegedly gained access to the National Election Commission. Targeting both governmental bodies and pro-democracy supporters, they employed spear-phishing and surveillance techniques, raising serious concerns about foreign interference in domestic elections. In 2021, New Zealand's intelligence agencies attributed a cyberattack on parliamentary entities to Advanced Persistent Threat 40 (APT40), a group linked to China. This incident marked a significant escalation in Chinese cyber intrusions into Western political institutions. That same year, Chinese cyber groups particularly APT31 were reported to have accessed email accounts within the UK Parliament. During the same period, hackers connected to China breached the UK Electoral Commission, underlining Beijing's interest in Britain's democratic infrastructure. Between May and October 2021, Chinese hackers infiltrated Indian government offices, extracting more than 5.49GB of data underscoring China's intent to gather intelligence on the internal affairs of other nations (India Today, 2024).

Japan has revealed that over 200 cyberattacks in the past five years, targeting the nation's national security and advanced technology information, have been linked to the Chinese hacking group MirrorFace. The National Police Agency's investigation into these attacks, which took place between 2019 and 2024, uncovered that they were part of a coordinated

effort by China to acquire confidential data. The cyberattacks affected a range of targets, including Japan's Foreign and Defence ministries, its space agency, and individuals such as politicians, journalists, and private companies involved in cutting-edge technology. Japan is now urging government agencies and businesses to bolster their cybersecurity measures (Yamaguchi, 2025).

North Korea has become an increasing cybersecurity threat in the Indo-Pacific region, largely due to its growing cyber capabilities, which it uses to support its military and nuclear ambitions. In 2023, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) identified the Lazarus Group, a hacking organisation linked to the North Korean government, as responsible for stealing $100 million in cryptocurrency from Harmony Horizon, a cross-chain bridge for Ethereum. The same group was also behind the theft of $41 million in cryptocurrency from Stake, an online casino platform. In July 2023, Jenny Jun, a Research Fellow at Georgetown University's Center for Security and Emerging Technologies, testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on the Indo-Pacific. She emphasised that North Korea regularly utilises its cyber capabilities for a variety of national objectives, including stealing cryptocurrency to fund its nuclear and missile programmes and conducting espionage on organisations researching COVID-19 (Wiley, 2024).

Strengthening Regional Cyber Resilience: The Role of BRICS and the QUAD

The recent BRICS summit underscored the growing significance of technological cooperation, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI), as a driving force for digital economies. China, as a leader in AI development, has spurred growing interest among other BRICS nations to bolster their capabilities in this area. The UAE, recognised for its focus on AI and high readiness in the field, has contributed further expertise to enhance the group's technological strength. AI-powered innovations present BRICS with the potential to strengthen its competitive edge in offering digital solutions, particularly within the Indo-Pacific region. In response, the Quad nations may need to accelerate their own AI strategies to match BRICS' advancements, as AI rapidly becomes a cornerstone of the global digital economy.

The focus on AI also intersects with discussions on cybersecurity, with Russia and China advocating for state-controlled cyberspaces. The summit highlighted the importance of cybersecurity standards and digital sovereignty. These initiatives could challenge the efforts

led by the Quad, positioning BRICS as a serious competitor in the global cybersecurity arena. Notably, the summit also addressed the need for safeguards to protect national data systems, which will directly influence the security of digital networks across the Indo-Pacific region. In turn, the Quad may need to strengthen its collaborative cybersecurity initiatives to counter the increasingly sophisticated strategies being devised by BRICS.

BRICS reaffirmed its commitment to advancing digital economies through initiatives such as the New Development Bank's (NDB) digital transformation programmes, which aim to improve digital infrastructure across emerging economies. The NDB, also known as the BRICS Development Bank, plays a key role in financing infrastructure and sustainable development. The summit also highlighted cooperation in blockchain and fintech, signalling BRICS' growing influence in shaping the digital economy of the Indo-Pacific. As BRICS continues to expand, its impact in sectors such as digital payment technologies and secure 5G networks is expected to increase, posing a direct challenge to the Quad's position. Companies like Huawei are at the forefront of 5G development within BRICS, while Quad nations must prioritise the enhancement of security and transparency in their own 5G networks to maintain competitiveness.

The Quad's model of digital openness also faces challenges. To retain its influence in the Indo-Pacific region, the Quad may need to develop more definitive policies that strike a balance between digital sovereignty and openness (Sabzal, 2024). By harmonising regulations and implementing standard practices, the Quad nations can establish a more unified and efficient approach to managing cyber incidents, reduce administrative burdens, and achieve improved security outcomes at lower costs. Aligning regulations can strengthen global collaboration, contributing to a more resilient and secure digital environment that protects critical infrastructure and enables a swift and coordinated response to cyber incidents. Standards play a vital role in this process, as they provide a consistent and widely recognised foundation for cybersecurity practices, foster interoperability, and enhance cooperation among nations (Patil, 2025).

In contrast, BRICS has been working to assert national control over cyberspace, with initiatives aimed at reducing dependence on US-led technological systems. With an expanding membership and a growing focus on AI and cybersecurity, BRICS is crafting a multifaceted strategy that could rival the Quad's influence in the region. This evolving landscape highlights the need for a deeper understanding of how digitalisation is reshaping

geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific.

Both BRICS and the Quad are leveraging technology as a tool for geopolitical leverage, though in differing ways. BRICS, with its commitment to a multipolar world, seeks to promote dialogue between civilisations and improve digital access in underserved regions, particularly in Africa. In contrast, the Quad aims to strengthen its position in the Indo-Pacific and counterbalance China's growing influence. In this competition, BRICS agreements tend to be more binding due to the multilateral relationships among its members, while Quad agreements are generally more flexible.

China's central role within BRICS shapes the group's agenda, often positioning itself against Western influence. The Quad, in turn, seeks to counter China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific, with India playing a key role in maintaining a balance between competition and collaboration within both alliances (Kumar, 2024). From a practical perspective, both alliances have their own unique principles, strategies, and goals. Each member of the QUAD and BRICS has joined the coalition based on their national interests, with India being the only country that is a member of both groups. India's ambitions are challenging to decipher because of its ambiguous approach in its interactions with both alliances (Sabzal, 2024).

Looking ahead, the impact of emerging technologies, such as post-quantum computing and widespread AI, will further shape the geopolitical landscape. While opportunities for collaboration between BRICS and the Quad may arise, it is more likely that the two factions will increasingly find themselves at odds, each advancing its own digital initiatives. This competition is expected to significantly influence the future of digital geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific region. (Kumar, 2024).

Recommendations for Advancing Cybersecurity Governance in the Indo-Pacific

Safeguarding Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) remains a key priority across the regions examined. This is typically achieved either by revising existing cybersecurity standards or by broadening them to cover sectors beyond the essential CNI to better protect supply chains. As these requirements evolve, international companies and cybersecurity professionals must navigate the varying and often inconsistent regulations across different regions. Further research is needed to explore the different definitions of CNI and the specific cybersecurity needs associated with each sector.

A widespread shortage of cybersecurity experts and the urgent need for improved skills training is a shared issue in all the regions studied. In response, several regions have introduced various initiatives, many of which share common goals such as attracting talent, diversifying the workforce, and fostering international collaboration. For example, frameworks such as the NICE Cybersecurity Workforce Framework in the United States or the European Cybersecurity Skills Framework (ECSF) have been implemented to standardise the terminology used to describe cybersecurity roles. However, there is insufficient data on the effectiveness of these initiatives in significantly reducing the cybersecurity workforce gap in measurable terms. Further investigation is necessary to determine which approaches are most successful in addressing this issue (Global Approaches to Cyber Policy, Legislation and Regulation, n.d.).

Although countries may adopt different strategies, there is a shared recognition that cyberspace is a critical domain for both national security and international relations. Events such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, concerns about foreign surveillance, and the growing demand for regime security highlight the shifting dynamics of global cybersecurity. These changes suggest that nations are pursuing various approaches to develop and leverage their cyber capabilities. While not all countries disclose the motives behind their efforts to advance their cyber capabilities, their actions indicate that current global guidelines for responsible state conduct in cyberspace are insufficient to ensure compliance.

To effectively counter cyber threats posed by state actors, it is vital to invest in cyber capabilities. It is perhaps understandable that there is a reliance on cyber capabilities to uphold international laws and standards, especially given that military power is essential for enforcing these frameworks.

For cyber capabilities to genuinely serve as effective diplomatic tools, it is crucial for countries to clarify their intentions. Similar to military strength, building cyber capabilities without transparency can create uncertainty, often resulting in a lack of trust. While no nation is required to disclose every detail of its cybersecurity systems, it is essential for countries to demonstrate their commitment to the United Nations' global framework for responsible state conduct in cyberspace. This can be achieved by clearly defining their cyber policies, implementing strong oversight, and fostering open communication with both international and domestic partners. These initiatives not only enhance the operational effectiveness of cybersecurity measures but also contribute to the broader stability and

security of the global cyber landscape. As nations strengthen their cyber strategies, building trust through confidence-building measures becomes a crucial element (Cyber Capabilities in the Indo-Pacific: Shared Ambitions, Different Means? n.d.)

Navigating the Future of Cybersecurity Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Monash University has teamed up with the Oceania Cyber Security Centre (OCSC) to launch a programme designed to strengthen cybersecurity across the Indo-Pacific region. The Post-Quantum Cryptography in the Indo-Pacific Programme (PQCIP) aims to equip organisations and government bodies in 11 nations with the essential skills required to protect against future cyber threats from quantum computers. The initiative will focus on countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and others in the region, offering free training on advanced cryptography techniques.

Associate Professor Ron Steinfeld, the Project Director at Monash University's Faculty of Information Technology, emphasised the critical role of encryption in protecting data from breaches. As quantum computers evolve, they may have the potential to undermine existing encryption methods. "We're seeing a concerning rise in cyberattacks and data breaches," Steinfeld said, stressing the need for Indo-Pacific nations to address current cyber threats while also preparing for the challenges presented by future developments in quantum technology.

The PQCIP will adopt a comprehensive approach, providing tailored education, thorough assessments of existing cybersecurity frameworks, and expert guidance to help these countries bolster their defences against both current and future threats. This initiative reflects the region's growing recognition of the importance of cybersecurity in an increasingly digital world (Apdr, 2022).

Tackling disinformation requires a collaborative, multinational approach. Working closely with partner nations is vital not only for amplifying the effectiveness of these efforts but also for presenting a united front against harmful activities. Local knowledge, trusted by the communities it serves, is essential for enhancing the impact of these initiatives. As technology and global geopolitical dynamics evolve, future strategies for information warfare must be adaptable, cooperative, and innovative. This means staying alert, responding swiftly to threats, and fostering global collaboration to tackle emerging challenges. Countries can only effectively combat the growing issue of disinformation and

protect the integrity of information worldwide by working together (Hanson et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The evolving cyber landscape in the Indo-Pacific region has underscored the urgent need for robust cybersecurity measures and international cooperation. Both BRICS and the Quad have emerged as key players in the development of global cybersecurity norms, but their approaches reflect differing geopolitical and ideological priorities. BRICS seeks to create independent cybersecurity initiatives that align with its broader strategic objectives, focusing on digital sovereignty and multipolar governance. In contrast, the Quad advocates for a liberal, rules-based digital framework, promoting open and interoperable cybersecurity standards to enhance regional resilience.

India's role as a bridge between these two groups underscores its strategic importance in fostering cybersecurity cooperation. With its dual membership, India has the opportunity to mediate between differing perspectives, encouraging collaboration to address cyber threats such as state-sponsored attacks, ransomware, and disinformation campaigns. However, managing its relationships with both BRICS and the Quad requires careful diplomacy to navigate complex geopolitical tensions.

The rising frequency of cyber threats targeting critical infrastructure, elections, and private enterprises highlights the need for stronger regional cybersecurity measures. The proposal to establish a BRICS-Quad cybersecurity forum offers a promising opportunity to promote transparency, build trust, and develop joint defence strategies in the digital domain. Furthermore, investments in strengthening cyber capabilities, developing skills, and embracing emerging technologies such as AI and quantum cryptography will be essential for enhancing cyber resilience across the Indo-Pacific.

Ultimately, the future of cybersecurity governance in the Indo-Pacific will be shaped by the shifting power dynamics between BRICS and the Quad. While competition between these alliances is inevitable, areas of common interest, such as combating cybercrime and securing critical digital infrastructure, offer opportunities for cooperation. By adopting a collaborative and forward-thinking approach, regional actors can strengthen cybersecurity resilience and ensure a secure and open digital future.

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BRICS+: A Balancer to Shape the New World Order

Dr. Devender Kumar

Abstract

The BRICS grouping has highlighted a new chapter for the organisation in the recent meeting in Kazan, Russia. The grouping has the potential to change the current world order in the rapidly shifting global politics. This meeting showed the organisational strength, structure, and goals of the organization, with major powers such as India, China, and Russia coming on one platform, keeping aside the Ukraine War and border skirmishes between India and China. These countries are in search of a new alternative, such as BRICS+, against Western dominance in the international economic order to trade in local currencies. BRICS+ intends to create a new international economic order, free from Western dominance, to achieve de-dollarization of global trade. It has also made the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) and the New Development Bank (NDB) for loans and support to nations against the balance of payment crisis. This new order is based on cooperation and mutual growth to become an effective platform for promoting trade in local currencies. The rising strength of BRICS with new members can play an important role in establishing a new international economic order and play a significant role in the United Nations, as a major political force. The proposed study uses an empirical and qualitative approach to study BRICS+ and how it can challenge the existing dollar-led international economic order to strengthen its position. BRICS+ presents a substantial challenge to Western dominance in global affairs. Consequently, the future of the international order—whether it remains multipolar—will, to a large extent, be influenced by BRICS+ and how it contributes to shaping this emerging order. This paper aims to critically examine the position and role of BRICS+ within the broader context of contemporary global politics.

Key Words: BRICS+, Global Politics, New International Economic Order, China, India, Russia, and the World Order.

Introduction

This study offers a critical examination of Western responses to the rise of BRICS+ and exposes the underlying double standards often present in global politics, where actions deemed acceptable for the West are discouraged or penalized when undertaken by the Global South. The use of sanctions, tariffs, and political pressure reflects a broader pattern of asymmetrical power dynamics. The study argues that emerging economies within the Global South should be empowered to pursue their developmental goals independently, without yielding to external pressures from Western powers. The establishment of a cohesive

institutional framework within BRICS+ may take time but the pursuit of a just and equitable global order remains both necessary and justified.

The West has historically positioned itself as the standard-bearer of global norms and principles, expecting the Global South to conform to these frameworks, often under the threat of punitive measures in cases of deviation. This dynamic raises an important question: why must the Global South be compelled to follow the dictates of the West? For instance, President Donald Trump has issued tariff threats against BRICS+, should the grouping move toward adopting a common currency or shifting away from the U.S. dollar (Reuters, 2025). Despite having launched a cryptocurrency under his own name, "Official Donald Trump" (The Indian Express, 2025). If such an initiative is permissible for an individual, why is it discouraged when pursued by a coalition of sovereign states? However, the study highlights, despite establishing a new international economic order, how the grouping is being viewed by the countries in the West, and why the BRICS journey started and where it will go in the coming years.

BRICS+ is a result of the ideological reaction (West and non-West) to have a separate international economic order away from Western control and influence. The Major organizations, mainly Western ones, have emerged out of the fixed policy to pursue their interest, i.e., the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) etc. But organizations in the Global South are the result of a common goal, aspirations, and ideology. The best example of this is the Decolonization Movement and Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), one was enforced after the Second World War, and the other became a doctrine in 1961 after the Belgrade Conference. Both were focused on separate space in global politics, politically, not economically.

Although the Global South countries take time to react due to distinct national interests and positioning, and often try to manage good ties with the Western states for concessions and favour on ideological, political, and economic lines. It took nearly 5 decades after the Second World War for these countries to realise that they do not have a rightful place in the international economic order. Jim O'Neill's 2003 prediction served as a wake-up call for the countries of the Global South, highlighting their potential to emerge as major economic players in the years ahead by stating that "BRIC economies have the potential to post higher growth than the developed world" and "will surpass G6 economies in the next 40 years" (Cherry, 2015).

This recognition sparked a broader discourse on the need for these nations to claim their rightful place in the international economic order, one that had long been shaped by Western dominance. In response, the idea of establishing a new international economic order, founded on principles of mutual growth and cooperation, began to take shape, distinct and independent from prevailing Western influence. The foundation for BRICS was laid in the post-2000 era. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS emerged as non-Western international organizations. The participation of major powers like China and Russia in these groupings has positioned the SCO, in particular, as a potential alternative to Western-led institutions (The Indian Express, 2024).

While the BRICS can emerge as a potential "counterbalance" to Western influence, especially in opposing the dollar-centric global trade system (Patrick, 2025). Nonetheless, the group has not yet outlined a detailed policy framework for this purpose and has chosen instead to concentrate on the overarching goal of creating an alternative international economic order.

In this direction, the foreign ministers of the BRICS states have concluded 16 sixteen summits starting with the first summit in 2009. The joining of South Africa in 2010 opened the possibility for other states to join, and the grouping became BRICS (Sharma, 2018). It created a New Development Bank in 2014 and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement for the sustainable development, infrastructure, and to fight balance of payment crises.

BRICS has made significant progress, but institutional challenges and internal issues remain a fundamental challenge to the rise of the grouping. The BRICS organization, with the entry of new players, has potentially impacted the contemporary world order. As the group highlights the sizable strength, which has ramifications for the contemporary world order, as BRICS+. China, Russia, and Iran are also forming a strategic alliance under the 'Regional Comprehensive Strategic Agreement' (Reuter, 2025a).

The BRICS+ diplomacy impacts the unipolarity of the US. But the organization also faces a challenge from within on the institutional arrangements and bilateral issues between China and India. The rise in activities such as China-Pakistan Economic Partnership (CPEC), border issues, and minerals exploration in Gilgit-Baltistan by China in the Indian territory under the occupation of Pakistan (Kumar, 2025) endangers future cooperation and is likely to disrupt cohesion within BRICS.

BRICS in the Contemporary Global Politics

BRICS in the contemporary era has witnessed growth as new members have joined the grouping. It comprises the world's 8th, 11th, 5th, 2nd, and 7th main economies. It collectively represents "35 percent of the international GDP" and "45 percent of the global population" (Patrick, 2025). The 16th BRICS meeting in Kazan, Russia, on 22-24 October 2024, highlighted the understanding amid China and India, the two main countries in BRICS, stressing they have major agendas to fulfil. Therefore, they must have a common understanding despite internal issues as the membership of the grouping rises with new members such as UAE, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, and Egypt. While other states, i.e., Laos, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand in the Indo-Pacific and Türkiye from West Asia, expressed interest in joining the grouping as a counter-weight to the US-led order (Bloomberg, 2024). The Indo-Pacific nations and India have problems with China, but the Western-led dominance in the World Bank (WB), World Trade Organisation (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and dollar-induced commerce breaks the backbone of Global South countries.

The BRICS grouping, with the rise of membership, is transforming into a major bloc with countries from different regions that do not wish to be part of Western dictates, therefore joining BRICS for mutual growth. This rising strength is also viewed as a major political power in contemporary global politics, which can potentially shape and reshape the contemporary global order as well as situate itself as a major player.

The 16th BRICS showed key aspects of BRICS+ bonding under the rubric of "Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security" by showcasing three major powers, such as China, India, and Russia, on one platform (Ministry of External Affairs, 2024). The BRICS organisation focuses on cooperation on 'political and security' to establish a "fairer international order" (MEA, 2024). The organisation has also embarked on an expansion, i.e., "BRICS Plus," to have countries from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Europe (MEA, 2024). It is seeking a world order that is fair to all and helps in reforming the multilateral system for sustainable development and inclusive growth.

The Western world did not appreciate such reflection, especially the G7 countries. The Western media refused to acknowledge the changes in the contemporary world order and the potential challenges to Western hegemony, but did disdain BRICS, unlike the over-glorification of G7 meetings (Mahbubani, 2024).

The West tried to enhance sanctions against Russia and gathered support for Ukraine to isolate Russia. Despite that, President Vladimir Putin hosted the 16th BRICS Summit and demonstrated Russia's defiance and resilience on the global stage. The summit was notable for bringing together several major world economies, underscoring the significance of BRICS as a platform for alternative global engagement (Sharma, 2024). The major highlight was India and China on one platform, as both faced contention on their borders recently. But joined one platform to project the political and economic power of the grouping. This is also visible in the membership drive, as many states from the Indo-Pacific (Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Laos), Latin America (Argentina), Africa (Uganda), Central Asia (Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan), and West Asia (Türkiye) wished to become part of the grouping, and many attained the title or partner country (Xinhua, 2025 & Kumar, 2024 & Kumar, 2024).

BRICS+ together represent the economic and demographic strength of the world—nearly 45% of the global population is represented by the grouping (The Business Today, 2024). It is pursuing approaches aimed at securing its developmental interests. Developed countries' forums, such as the G7, only represent the interests of developed countries and do not include emerging economies like India, Brazil, and China. The rise of BRICS+ has generated concern in the West. The Financial Express report calls it a "growing sense of unease" (The Financial Express, 2024). BRICS has identified an opportunity to challenge the structural imbalances within the international economic governance framework and called for comprehensive reform of multilateral institutions.

BRICS+ countries seek to break the Western hegemony and dominance in global institutions, practiced by denials, sanctions, and dollar-led trades. The strategy opted for by them is 'multilateralism' under the principle of participation and development of all partnered countries, as reiterated in the recent 'Kazan Declaration 2024'—which focuses on 'mutual cooperation,' 'spirit,' 'solidarity,' and voices for the susceptible change in the international system as it is heavily influenced by the US-led West (MEA,2024).

The declaration came in the backdrop of the ongoing Ukraine-Russia War and Moscow's impetus to align with the world to showcase its strength against the US-dominated order to highlight the receding affection for US dollar-led trade among the BRICS+ countries (Paul & Villegas, 2024).

As a reaction to this, Donald Trump, President of the US, used his hegemonic tone to threaten these states via tariffs and denied the possibility of this organization replacing the dollar as a

global currency. Therefore, BRICS member states are steering away from the idea of a common currency, instead focusing on facilitating international payments in local currencies and reducing dependence on the dollar (Reuters, 2025). It is also examining technologies such as blockchain and integrating payment systems to minimize transaction costs, under the standards set by multilateral institutions, including the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) (Reuters, 2025b).

IMF, WB, WTO, and Global South

The West from the Westphalian era has dominated global politics and dictated terms, while the multipolar world demands greater cooperation in the globalised world, therefore, the WTO, WB, and IMF played a significant role in the contemporary international economic framework. As they are to (a) facilitate economic cooperation, (b) provide regular consultations, (c) mutual cooperation, and establish a mechanism for 'greater coherence' in international policymaking (WTO, 2025). All these institutions claim to 'express' these approaches in policies, i.e., the 1996 agreement that calls for economic cooperation. "Marrakesh Agreement," on the other hand, established the WTO for raising the standard of living by trade and commerce and focused on (a) 'optimal use of world resources' and (b) "securing a share in the growth in international trade" for developing states (WTO, 2025).

The WB started in 1946, but all these institutions ended up fulfilling the Western agenda, funding colonial projects, and becoming institutions to counter Cold War rivalry via economic finance, etc. The WB supported colonial projects of Belgium, France, UK and transferred the loans to the newly independent states once the colonial state became independent, i.e., Mauritania and Congo (Toussaint, 2024).

The institutions under Western control have nearly completed 80 years and gave rise to a new economic colonialism by imposing "austerity policies" in the face of loan repayments (Toussaint, 2024). The US-led West has used these institutions since their inception against US rivals. The loans granted by the WB were mainly for industrialised states and were designed in a way to extract the Global South's exports to the Global North to fulfil the demands of these states (CAID, 2024).

Nevertheless, these institutions laid conditions for Africa and Asia to avail loans. And believed that these countries must create conditions for the development of democracy and

have more economic and social development (Daniela and Nagar, 2016). The WB is not keen to provide big projects to support the domestic needs of developing countries. Which would decrease the imports to states in the Global North. While transferring the main funds to industrialised states of Europe, it also uses 'great caution' for granting loans to Global South countries (Toussaint, 2024). The US has enjoyed its position in these institutions and has been the most influential member with sizable shareholdings to use 'multilateral institutions to enhance international engagement' (Milner and Tingley 2011).

Even if the loans are given to developing states, the rates of interest are too high and largely come at the market rates, while the duration provided for repayments is short. The money lent by the WB, on the other hand, has to be spent essentially in industrialised countries "to meet the needs of Northern countries and enrich a handful of transnational companies in the relevant sectors" (CAID, 2024). The IMF, on the other hand, was built to have an American imprint on the international banks. The head of the WB has always been from the US, and it also has veto power in the WB (Bach, 2019).

Meanwhile, the terms for the loans to Global South countries are influenced by the US, as the policies for loans are set with intermediation from Washington DC, in businesses and banks, based on its political goals worldwide. The objectives enshrined by these institutions are subordinated to the strategic and political considerations of the US (Toussaint, 2024).

On the other hand, the dollar-induced trade adds an extra burden on the countries of the BRICS as it is getting stronger day by day, and nearly 54% of the global trade happens in dollars. It is also used in the management of foreign exchange. Nearly 59% of the global foreign reserves are in dollars, followed by the euro, which has a share of 20% (Boocker and Wessel, 2024). Governments around the world 'borrow' dollars to maintain exchange rates to ensure credit, and nearly 58% of payments globally happen in dollars and that had made it a symbol of US power in the global financial market. The dollar is showcased as a haven for foreign investors (Boocker and Wessel, 2024).

The US dollar has been so deeply internalised in global trade and transactions, and it firmly plays a significant role in international commerce as a major conductor of trade in terms of exchange, which helps the US to exercise its power to punish countries not in line with the policies of the US. It also dominates the "Clearing House Interbank Payments System" (CHIPS) and "Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication" (SWIFT) and economic order (Boocker and Wessel, 2024). This had severe consequences for Russia and

Iran whenever they faced sanctions. Both were removed from SWIFT (international payment system), and as a result, ordinary citizens from these countries suffered as they failed to send money to their relatives in different countries (The US Department of Treasury, 2022).

Nevertheless, earlier the grouping was hoping to have certain reforms in the economic institutions like WB, IMF, and WTO instead of building new institutions but now is looking in the direction of establishing a platform to facilitate trade within the member state under a win-win formula as the grouping has become powerful with the oil-producing states such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and UAE joining the grouping— which comprises the major chunk of the OPEC (Gard, 2024).

Argentina was also to join the grouping, but it withdrew its application. The rising membership of BRICS makes it have more members than the G7 and leads to its projection as a rival to the Western order. This will also alter the US and its allies, as they depend on the Gulf for energy, subsequently making BRICS a primary balancer not only against the US-led West but also in the energy market (Mooradian, 2024).

New Economic Order: Free from Western Dominance and De-dollarization

The BRICS countries have faced the economic and political control of the US-led West in the global institution, and as the world becomes more and more divided and fragmented along the proxies, alliances, competition, confrontations, and clubs under the multilateral settings. It raises questions on the contemporary state of the world order— is it multipolar, bio-polar, or unipolar under the Trump 2.0 administration?

The West formed the G7 and EU for cooperation on economic and political matters, but the Global South was not allowed in these groups, as these countries maintained a monopoly in the financial institutions. BRICS formed its group to facilitate trade among themselves, free from Western influence and control. It has also made the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) and New Development Bank (NDB) for loans and helped countries (Batista, 2023). BRICS seeks to move away from Western dominance and dollar-centric global trade by promoting a new economic order founded on cooperation and mutual growth. The NDB is to provide nearly $5 billion in loans, and many countries in the world are seeking to avail themselves of this facility (Reuters, 2024).

While the CRA facility can be utilised to fight the balance of payment crisis, BRICS facilitates financial safety without conditions and high rates for repayments. Many countries worldwide have also identified common areas such as energy security, supply-chain connectivity, promotion of local currencies, technology, food security, trade, investment, and digital transactions to connect with BRICS (Kumar, 2024).

In the recent BRICS summit, the member states tried to advance the 'BRICS Pay initiative,' which can challenge the global payment network of the US-led West, i.e., SWIFT, which facilitates international bank transactions in US dollars. As BRICS is the representative of 35% of the world's GDP and nearly 45% of the global population, it is evident that it has the substantial power to impact the control exercised by the US-led West on the economic order (Crowe, 2025).

The contemporary system is under the domination of the US dollar, which captures nearly 90% of the global currency trade. Previously, 100% of the total trade of oil was conducted in dollars, but US sanctions on Russia and Iran made these countries opt for a non-dollar mechanism for payment; hence, a fifth of global oil trade in 2023 was conducted in non-dollar currencies (Slav, 2023). This makes countries have new reserve currencies, as it would majorly impact the dollar and decrease demand, eventually leading to de-dollarization. But Trump 2.0 is likely to enforce dollar-induced trade and pressure the BRICS countries to pursue new strategies to avoid the dollar as an accepted denomination for trade at least among the member states (Pistilli, 2025).

The de-dollarization also promotes regional and bilateral cooperation to secure interests against the risky geopolitical situation and non-US economic order. It reduces the dependence on the dollar for trade in bilateral trade, oil purchases, other commodities, and foreign exchange reserves that place the US in the dominant position in the global system (Pistilli, 2025). There is a higher chance that BRICS countries may come up with their own currency or opt for cryptocurrency as a currency for trade payments.

Such economic manoeuvring highlights that the BRICS has the potential to change the current world order, as balancing has been opted for by countries against the members of the same grouping. Recently, Türkiye, despite being a NATO member, tried for BRICS membership and demanded S400 from Russia— at the same time, it held its fellow NATO ally, US, responsible for the economic downfall (Kumar, 2024a).

The grouping has become an option against the G7, marking a significant challenge to Western dominance. As its NATO allies, i.e., Türkiye, is trying to have a closer partnership with Russia and focusing on an 'axis shift' strategy after it failed to attain EU membership (Kumar, 2024a). Many countries, especially the ASEAN states, are not happy with the stance of the US and the West on the Israel-Palestine conflict and the killing of many Palestinians. Countries such as Malaysia have criticised the US and praised South Africa, especially for the genocide case against Israel, which highlights the anti-US sentiments in Malaysia (Prime Minister's Office Malaysia, 2024). The ASEAN countries are looking towards an 'inclusive world order' to cooperate on common areas for having inclusive economic growth outside the scope of Western intervention in the economic framework (Kumar, 2024).

Power Asymmetries Within BRICS (Particularly China's Dominance)

BRICS was formed primarily as an economic initiative to reflect the shift in the Western dominance of the global economic order to emerging economies. It later evolved into one of the rather significant geopolitical groupings. The BRICS grouping is majorly dominated by China because of its huge economy, five times that of India-and also because of its aggressive foreign policy (East Asia Forum, 2025).

The trade between the BRICS+ countries, excluding China, is very low and hence further underscores the dominant role of China. This dominance is also reflected in the positions that the members of BRICS+ often take with China in the United Nations. Recently, Ethiopia and Egypt have joined the grouping, but they come under Africa, which is a significant region for China and Indian. Whereas China's key role and the varied composition of BRICS+ allow it to increase influence, which also poses a challenge to internal unity and balance (EAF, 2025).

Bilateral Tensions (India-China Border Disputes) Affect Multilateral Cooperation

The most fundamental block to the growth of BRICS is how to establish a strategic peace between India and China on the border issues. The longer sustenance and growth of this organization depend on the resolution of the India-China border dispute (Singh, 2023). Beijing has not adhered to the border agreement that it signed with India since the 1990s (Singh, 2025). India has strongly opposed maps issued by China that illegally occupy Indian territory (Rahman, 2023). India has not accepted the "illegal Chinese occupation of Indian

territory," and China has enhanced infrastructure development in the Aksai Chin region while it continues to develop border infrastructure (NDTV, 2025).

Both countries fought a war in 1962 over the border dispute, and recently clashed on the Galwan Valley, which was "fought with sticks and clubs" (BBC, 2022). Both sides have signed the "disengagement" of soldiers at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) agreement (NDTV, 2025). Both countries have a distrust of each other, and China does not recognize India as a regional power. India does not have any rivalry, unlike China, for a global power status. China's rise is also seen with suspicion, and it must critically assess whether the global and strategic dimensions of its relationship with India have weakened to the extent that bilateral disputes are increasingly taking precedence. Concurrently, the policy adjustments are required from both sides to respond to the shifting contours of international geopolitics. Neither of the nations would achieve anything from conflict, and they are engaged in economic activities, upholding legitimacy and managing ethnic issues (Singh, 2023).

India currently pursues the policy of "Equi-distance" and "Equi-closeness", marking the close cooperation with all. Therefore, the partnership is visible on the BRICS+ platform, but India may choose a realist course to secure its sovereignty, which will harm the internal cooperation within the BRICS+ organization due to Chinese action on the Indian territories, especially in the North East, and the Pakistan-occupied Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh (PoJK). India might switch back to the earlier policy of "Equi-distance"- "to be away from major powers" (First India, 2025).

Contradictions between BRICS' Stated Goals and Members' National Interests

The 2008 financial crisis has provided an opportunity for the consideration of non-Western alternatives to the economic order. The SCO and BRICS work as a 'counterbalance to the Western order. The grouping has its own issues as internal issues that impede the organizational structure and decision-making; a.) Both India and China have good ties with the US; b.) China backs Pakistan on Kashmir c.) member states of BRICS have different political system that serves as a barrier; d.) American perception of BRICS (Singh, 2023). Also, International monetary institutions must reform and adhere to the demands of developing countries. BRICS can become a platform for cooperation, as for example ASEAN, despite having bilateral or border issues, but it still serves as an example of cooperation.

BRICS, meanwhile, works on the principle of shared values and beliefs. The major agenda of the grouping is to navigate through the Western-dominated order of neo-colonialism in the financial institutions and establish a new economic order against the US-led order. Predictions were made by Jim O'Neil, a banker at Goldman Sachs, that "Brazil, Russia, India, and China" will drive the world order and economic growth (O'Neill, 2018). The grouping has indeed witnessed growth at the economic level and is now becoming another bloc in the divided and fragmented world order.

BRICS came as an organisation, but has made a significant change in the world order with several shuffles. And also played the role of a balancer to stabilise changes and become a platform for discussion and debate. While making provisions for representing the organisational strengths (Ferragamo, 2024). BRICS, in the same way, is an organisation that represents its organisational strengths as a group internally divided on various bilateral issues and has a position on the world economic order. Each member of BRICS is trying to work towards navigating through the Western-led global economic order, which provides more benefits to the Western states than to the Global South. Moreover, many member states hold different viewpoints and want to keep the grouping for economic advantage, navigate through the high rates and difficult loans, and achieve economic sustainability to establish a new financial order (Patrick, 2024).

BRICS: World Order and Multipolarity

The grouping questions the existing global economic order. BRICS largely is in the direction of establishing a 'new international economic order' as these theories outline the economic exploitation of the Periphery (Global South) by the Core, that is the West. It represents the modernisation theory phenomenon of progress and 'change from A to B, B to C' (Chirot & Hall, 1982: 82). And marking the progress in international politics to navigate through alliances to secure the best for the citizens is also outlined in the BRICS agenda to be an option against the West-led economic order.

The world has become a competing bloc of the Global North and Global South as developing states have started to ask for their rightful place in the contemporary world order. There is a growing sense of resentment toward the United States and its affluent allies, specifically the G7, G8, and the European Union, who are seen as having impeded effective international cooperation within the multilateral framework. BRICS, on the other hand, shows the strength

of 'like-minded' countries to challenge the hegemony of the Global North and advanced markets that control the world order (Patrick, 2024).

For centuries the West has ruled over world order and neglected the strengths of the Global South, especially Africa and Asia. The former European colonies—have risen to challenge the global hegemony via the BRICS. Throughout history, the world order has changed whether after the First World War (the rise of the League of Nations as a group) or the Second World War (the United Nations) both events substantially altered the world order and established the West-led world order. But the post-Covid-19 era embarks on the changes to world order as major powers compete for their rightful place in the international system. The world order is manufactured to serve the Western agenda and provides fewer privileges to global South countries (Bordachev, 2022).

The institutions came after major events in global history: the First and the Second World Wars helped the Western states in the contemporary political and economic order. After the Cold War, the Global North's attempts to consolidate the world order gave rise to a 'crisis' in the international economic order and the 'welfare state'. It made it difficult for the Global South to rely on the international economic order made by the West for economic stability. Therefore, there is a desire among the middle and major powers countries in the world to increase cooperation among the Global South countries. Mainly to have a coalition of states, different from the Cold War bloc, but to provide diplomatic flexibility within the multilateral setups, including G20, to make a new international financial order (Patrick, 2024).

BRICS desires to be the 'global representative' of the countries in the Global South. In the recent meeting in Kazan, almost 40 countries showed a willingness to join BRICS, namely, Vietnam Malaysia, Thailand, and Laos, —made requests to the grouping for membership. All the organizations utilized different platforms to communicate with BRICS states, i.e., Russia's "Eastern Economic Forum" (EEF) and "BRICS Dialogue with Developing Countries," and attended various BRICS summits as an observer and developed interests in the grouping (Kumar, 2024). These countries understand that the world is changing and multipolarity is shaping the contemporary world order, and BRICS focuses on multipolarity for integration on economic and political issues.

The grouping has embarked on economic growth, and according to a report, the GDP of BRICS (37.4%) has surpassed G7 (29.3%) and stands at more than $60 trillion (The Doordarshan News, 2024). It is to play a major role in the global economy, and the gap in

GDP will increase in the future— as new countries will join the grouping. The volume of exports will also grow as it is nearly 25% of the global exports —at the same time, BRICS states are major markets for food, energy, spices workforce, and metals essential for sustaining financial growth (TDN, 2024).

However, the US and the West see the growing membership and influence of BRICS as a challenge to G7 and Western domination in the world order. In response, they have sought to counter this rise by reinforcing alliances among Western partners and employing measures such as sanctions, tariffs, and regulatory restrictions targeting BRICS member states and their influence.

Conclusion

BRICS+ tends to give rise to a grouping of middle and major-power countries with overlapping interests under the multilateral order to counter the influence of the US-led West in the international institution and establish a new economic order—free from Western influence and practices. And wants to provide the countries of the Global South bargaining chip against the Western-dominated order with the option to choose BRICS and its economic order if countries of the Global South are denied— equal treatment by the major institution. Moreover, The primary challenges BRICS faces, which also constitute broader concerns for the West, include internal divisions among member states, the imposition of tariffs by the United States, and institutional limitations such as the absence of a formal structure, clear decision-making processes, and reliance on consensus. Additionally, the growing influence of China—particularly in the absence of a defined framework—raises apprehensions, as it may place new BRICS members at a disadvantage, especially under initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

While decreasing reliance on the Western world's financial system via the usage of local currencies, BRICS was initially created to bolster trade and economic relations between member states. Now, it is slowly posturing itself for a potential political assertiveness on the world stage. Political activity on the international arena and the growing activity of the bloc being the expansion of its membership and the increase of its significance in international relations enhances that trajectory. Despite the increased alignment towards global issues, the internal splits and geopolitical tensions between member states continue to be the greatest challenge towards achieving full cohesion and operational efficiency.

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THE PENINSULA FOUNDATION

UN Reforms in the 21st Century: Bridging the Gap Between Cyber Threats and Global Governance

Kruti Hudka, Harshil Khokhar & Prasann Barot

Abstract

The rapid growth of network technology in the 21st century introduces various new challenges for global governance especially when it comes to cybersecurity. Cybersecurity has been a major concern for United Nation and other international organisations which leads to the demand for the reforms in United Nation regulations. United Nation's rigid framework inspired by Western philosophy and Anglo-Saxon ideology of national interest and non-interference faces hinderance in collaboration at global level. The dynamic nature of growth in Cybersecurity makes it more difficult for United Nation to shift its rigid laws to flexible ones. The increasing intersection between international cooperation, national sovereignty and human rights within cyberspace calls for reforms in international framework according to the nature of cybersecurity. This paper finds the gap in today's international framework while suggesting the idea of international co-operation to avoid cyberattacks with better future dynamics of cybersecurity and digital space.

Keywords: Cybersecurity, Global Governance, UN Regulations Reforms, International Cooperation, National Sovereignty, Digital Space, Anglo-Saxon Ideology

Introduction

1. Background on Network Technology in the 21st Century

The advancement of Internet technology in the 21st century has transformed the way people are connected globally and information is shared, forming the backbone of modern prosperity (Ronchi, 2020). Economic innovation in terms of economic growth is supported by telecommunications and energy projects, while biological factors influence natural ecosystems (UNIDIR & Kavanagh, 2017). However, this complexity has brought to light inefficiencies that need to be reformed through policy (Tikk et al., 2010). Network

technology has transformed strategies in military systems through the tools of Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems (Buckland, Schreier, & Winkler, n.d.). It enhances the efficiency of operations and situational awareness. Though Network Centric Warfare has provided the benefits of improved coordination, challenges of complexity and interoperability continue to exist (Mason, 2021). The performance and reliability of a network architecture depend on the topology models applied, including client-server and cloud-based systems (Humayun et al., 2020). As reliance on the Internet increases, robust security measures are called for, using firewalls, encryption, and multi-factor authentication in order to establish trust (Johnson et al., 2016). Overall, the integration of technology in the civilian and military spheres underlines its importance today (Li & Liu, 2021).

2. Cybersecurity as a Global Governance Challenge

Global Internet governance has transcended state control, incorporating diverse actors like governments, civil society, academia, international bodies, and private entities to tackle issues like cybersecurity and privacy through collaboration and dialogue (UNODC et al., 2013). This decentralised approach is particularly vital in cybersecurity, evolving through varying stages with regional and local actors (ITU et al., 2021).

The evolution of digital governance started with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which originally dealt with telecommunications and pioneered internet governance (ITU et al., 2021). It eventually transitioned to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which took on oversight for domain names and other crucial elements of the internet (UNIDIR & Kavanagh, 2017). The U.S. government had significant influence during the formative years of ICANN, but its creation marked a crossroad toward a more multinational governance system and emphasized the need for international collaboration, especially in the digital context (Nye et al., 2014).

Based on existing initiatives, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2003 urged the creation of a more diverse governance structure that includes various stakeholders and promoted integrative policy efforts (ITU et al., 2021). The Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) later proposed the multistakeholder model to balance governmental policy influence with civil society and private sector expertise (UNIDIR & Kavanagh, 2017). While these efforts represent significant strides, gaps remain—particularly in cybersecurity

governance, which lacks centralized oversight (Li & Liu, 2021). China and Russia advocate for cyber-sovereignty, asserting that states should have full control over digital activities within their borders (Ronchi, 2020), while the U.S. supports a multi-actor model that emphasizes open internet access, privacy, transparency, and democratic freedoms (Baham, 2020). This ideological divide between sovereignty and open governance creates persistent conflicts in efforts to regulate cyberspace globally (Tran Dai et al., 2017).

Therefore, effective global cybersecurity governance requires flexible and collaborative frameworks that balance international cooperation, state sovereignty, and individual human rights. Establishing resilient, transparent, open, secure, and inclusive policies for cyberspace is essential (UNODC et al., 2013).

3. Role of International Organisations in Cybersecurity

International organizations establish themselves in international relations with the intent of strengthening cyber resilience by creating laws, fostering collaboration, and developing technical skills. The frameworks advanced by the United Nations (UN), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are responsible for guiding and encouraging both state and non-state actors to demonstrate responsible conduct in cyberspace (ITU et al., 2021; UNIDIR & Kavanagh, 2017).

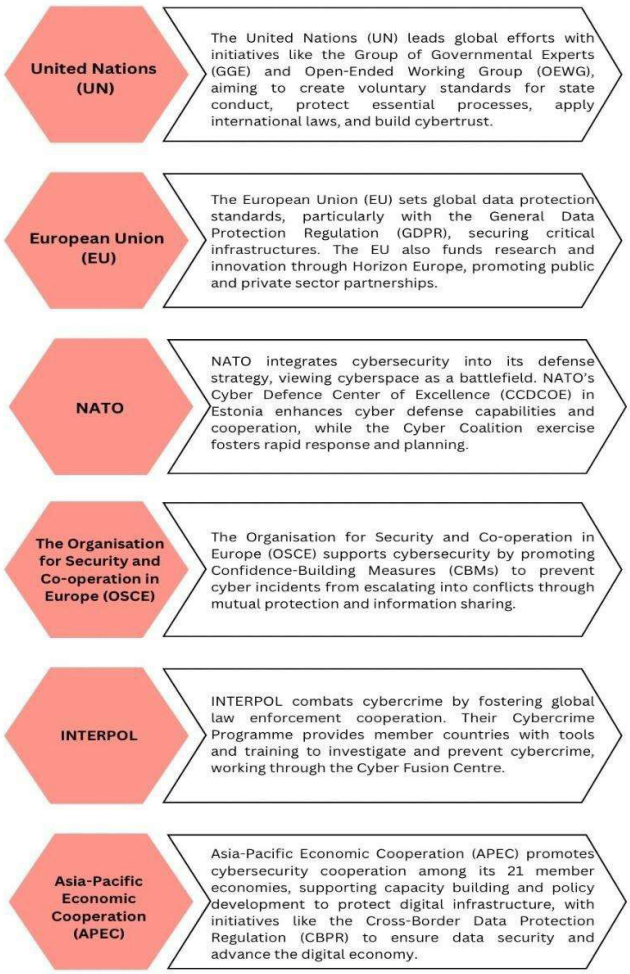


Figure 1: Role of International Organisations

Threats emerging from the use of the internet are international in nature, and therefore, organizations like the G7, G20, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are crucial for fostering dialogue and building trust toward the harmonization of cybersecurity policies (Tran Dai et al., 2017). Capacity-building programs by the World Bank, INTERPOL, and the Global Forum on Cyber Expertise help developing countries strengthen their cyber defenses and address threats that could impact global security (ITU et al., 2021). Cybersecurity necessitates collaboration from industry, civil society, and international bodies

like the ITU, especially under multi-stakeholder strategies such as those employed by the Internet Governance Forum (UNODC et al., 2013). Additionally, the EUROPOL Cybercrime Centre coordinates responses among countries to serious cybercrime incidents (CSIS, 2024). However, persistent challenges remain, such as conflicting state interests and the rapid pace of technological advancement (Li & Liu, 2021).

4. Objectives and Scope of the Study

Cyber threats, which include cyberattacks and information warfare, pose an evolving challenge for international governance and raise questions about the UN framework's ability to address them effectively (UNODC et al., 2013). This study examines the intersection between state governance, international cooperation, and human rights in cyberspace, highlighting the need for flexible and efficient policies that can adapt to the rapidly changing digital landscape (UNIDIR & Kavanagh, 2017). It also assesses existing UN laws and frameworks, analyzing their strengths and weaknesses in dealing with cybersecurity challenges (Tikk et al., 2010). Additionally, the paper advocates for the establishment of open, secure, inclusive, adaptive, and resilient policies that would be effective in enforcing cybersecurity regulations and countering evolving cyber threats (Li & Liu, 2021).

Conceptual Framework: Cyber Threats, Global Governance, and Human Rights

2.1 Defining Cyber Threats: Scope and Types

With the massive use of cyberspace for business activities, banking, shopping, and communication, there has been a corresponding increase in cybercriminal activities. This trend is largely due to the high dependency on web applications, which are often rife with design flaws that criminals exploit for unauthorized access. As a result, cybersecurity has become a critical concern for researchers and professionals (NIST, 2016).

Cybersecurity is defined as the prevention of damage to, unauthorized use of, exploitation of, and, if needed, the restoration of electronic information and communications systems and the information they contain, in order to strengthen the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of these systems (NIST, 2016).

Rosenau (1992) defines global governance as "a system without any centralized authority but able to enforce decision at the global level."

Human rights are defined as rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to work and education, among others. Everyone is entitled to these rights without discrimination (UN, 2013).

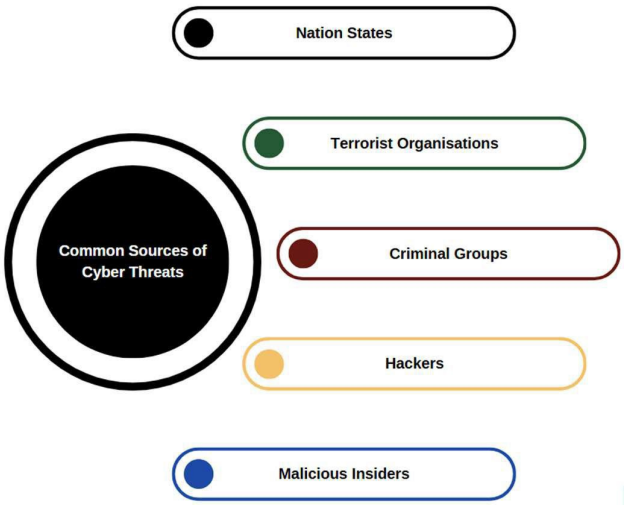


Figure 2: Common Sources of Cyber Threats

Nation States

Nation-state actors like China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran utilize Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) groups for espionage, economic disruption, and political interference. These actors are responsible for some of the most damaging cyberattacks, with costs exceeding $1.6 million per incident (CSIS, 2024). Over 90% of organizations have faced or suspect they will face nation-state-backed cyberattacks (Masas, 2023).

Terrorist Organisations

Terrorist groups aim to destroy critical infrastructure, spread fear, and disrupt economies. While their cyber activities are less frequent, they pose significant risks to national security. Data on specific groups is limited, but their impact is closely monitored by global agencies (UNODC et al., 2013).

Criminal Groups

Organized cybercriminal groups exploit tools like phishing, ransomware, and malware for financial gain. Cybercrime costs the global economy over $1 trillion annually (Hemsley & Fisher, 2018). These groups often operate from regions with weak enforcement against cybercrime (Masas, 2023).

Hackers

Individual hackers seek personal or financial gains and often evolve their techniques to stay ahead. Their motivations range from showcasing skills to gaining reputation within the hacker community (Zetter & Crown Publishing Group, n.d.).

Malicious Insiders

Insiders, such as employees or contractors, abuse their access to steal information or harm systems. Outsiders compromising insider accounts can also act as this threat, making it challenging to detect (Buckland et al., n.d.).

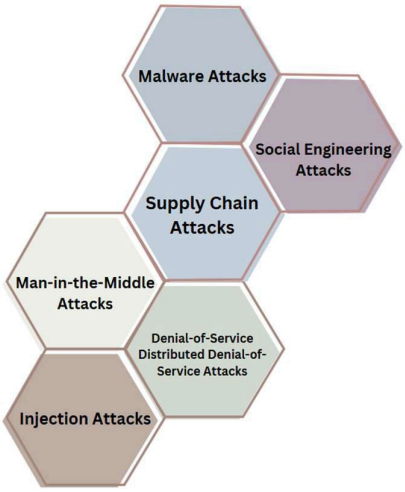


Figure 3: Types of cyber security Threats

Attack Type	Cause	Method	Impact	Data/Example	Reference
Malware Attacks	Exploitation of vulnerabilities; user-triggered	Viruses, worms, trojans, ransomware, spyware,	Data theft, disruption, remote control	**WannaCry ransomware** (2017) infected 230,000+ computers in 150	[Europol (2017), Malwarebytes Labs (2020)]

	actions	fileless malware, rootkits		countries, $4 billion in damages. **Fileless malware** grew by 265% in 2019 alone.	
Social Engineering Attacks	Human psychology exploitation (trust, fear, urgency)	Baiting, pretexting, phishing, vishing, smishing, piggybacking, tailgating	Unauthorized access, data theft	**Verizon DBIR 2022**: 82% of breaches involved human element. Phishing responsible for over 36% of breaches.	[Verizon DBIR (2022)]
Supply Chain Attacks	Trust in vendors and software updates	Compromised software/code signed with legitimate certificates	Stealth access, massive compromise	**SolarWinds Attack (2020)** compromised 18,000+ companies/government bodies; cost estimates over $90 million.	[CISA SolarWinds Report (2021)]
Man-in-the-Middle (MitM) Attacks	Weak encryption, insecure networks	Wi-Fi sniffing, DNS spoofing, HTTPS hijacking, email hijacking	Data theft, session hijack, impersonation	**Firesheep tool (2010)** exposed millions to Wi-Fi hijacking vulnerabilities; **HTTPS Spoofing** exploited in past LinkedIn attacks.	[EFF (Electronic Frontier Foundation)]
Denial-of-Service (DoS/DDoS) Attacks	Lack of anti-DDoS systems, network	SYN flood, HTTP flood, UDP flood, NTP	Website/service outages, financial loss	**Mirai Botnet (2016)** led to a 1.2 Tbps DDoS attack affecting Dyn,	[Krebs on Security (2016), Cloudflare

	flaws	amplification		Twitter, Netflix, Reddit.	Analysis]
Injection Attacks	Poor input validation in applications	SQL injection, OS command injection, LDAP injection, XXE, XSS	Data breaches, session hijacking, remote control	**Sony PSN Hack (2011)** used SQLi; 77 million accounts breached; ~$171 million in losses.	[OWASP, BBC News (2011)]

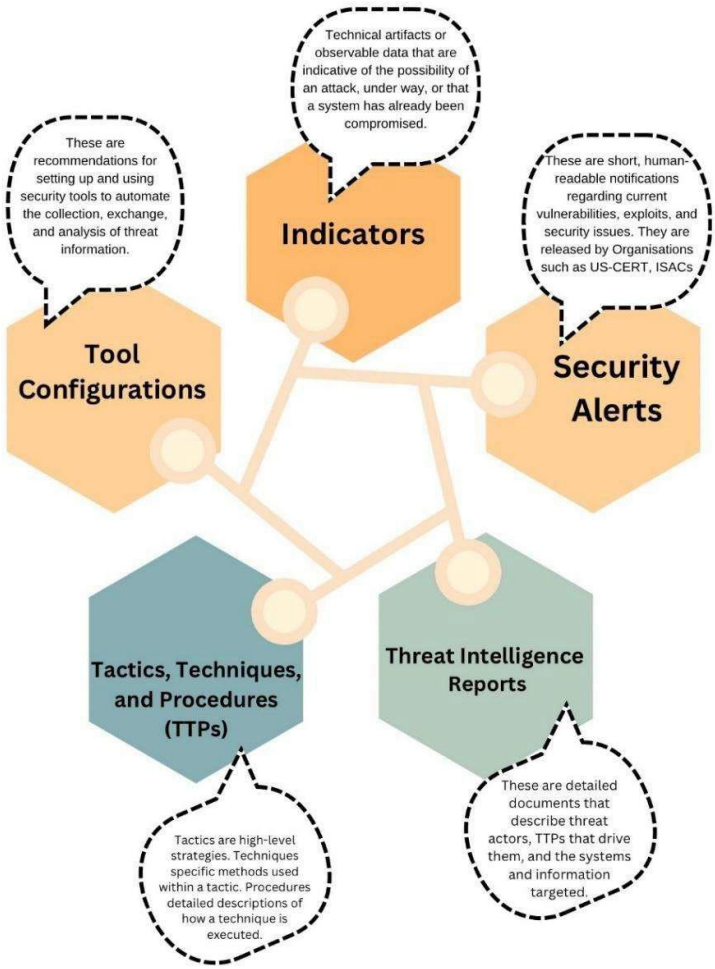


Figure 4: Threat Information Types

2.2 Timeline of Major Cyber Incidents

Date	Event	Details	Impact
27 August 2012	RasGas Attack	Malware spread across networks, using command-and-control communications.	ICS/SCADA unaffected, but caused operational disruption.
October 2018	Global Cyber Incidents	Iran neutralized a Stuxnet variant; U.S. indicted Chinese hackers; linked a Saudi attack to Russian institutes; targeted Russian election operatives; China, Russia spying on Trump's calls; DHS election cyber warnings; Ukraine accused Russia; U.S. charged GRU officers.	Global spread of cyber activities, exposing vulnerabilities across sectors.
May 2021	Ransomware and Cyberattacks	LineStar and Colonial Pipeline ransomware attacks; North Korea hacked South Korea's KAERI; REvil attacked JBS; Fujitsu hacked; Irish health services hit by Conti ransomware; Avaddon ransomware spread worldwide.	Highlighted ransomware and cyber espionage threats to critical sectors globally.
March 2022	Global Cyberattacks	Greenland parliament hacked; China accused U.S. of cyberattacks; Chinese actors exploited Microsoft vulnerabilities; Russian sites hacked for protests; NRC Canada breached; U.S. networks accessed via Log4j exploit.	Demonstrated cyber vulnerabilities in government and financial sectors.
June 2023	Cyber Events	Illinois hospital closed due to 2021 ransomware; Pro-Russian DDoS on Swiss sites; North Korea stole $3 billion for missiles; Ukrainian hackers targeted Russian telecom; Russia accused Apple of aiding U.S. hacking.	Financial and political impacts; escalation of cyber warfare accusations.
March	Recent	Iranian hackers breached Israeli nuclear	Rising cyber

2024	Cyberattacks	site network; Russian phishing attacks on German political parties; Indian government sectors targeted; U.S. indicted Chinese hackers for EU and Italian MP spying; Canada's FINTRAC attacked.	conflicts among nation-states; critical government sectors targeted.

Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). (2024). Significant cyber incidents since 2006

2.3 Trends in Cyber Attacks, Cyber Crimes, and Information Warfare

Trend/Statistic	**Details**	**Source**
Cyber Attacks	50 percent of UK businesses experienced cyberattacks in 2023, with SMEs being major targets.	Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency [CISA], 2023
Phishing	323,972 internet users fell victim to phishing in 2021, accounting for half of all data breaches.	Verizon. (2022). 2022 Data breach investigations report
Ransomware Attacks	236.1 million ransomware attacks reported globally in the first half of 2022, with double extortion tactics becoming common.	Cybersecurity Ventures. (2022). Global ransomware statistics report
Cost of Data Breaches	Average cost of a data breach in 2024 is $4.88 million. Industries like healthcare, finance, and retail are most affected.	IBM. (2024). Cost of data breaches: 2024 report
Cybercrime Financial Impact	Global cost of cybercrime expected to reach $24 trillion by 2027. The average cost of a	Cybersecurity Ventures. (2022). Global ransomware statistics report

	ransomware attack is $1.85 million.	
SMBs Vulnerability	46 percent of cyberattacks worldwide affect SMBs. 50 percent of SMBs lack a cybersecurity plan.	Accenture. (2023). Cybersecurity vulnerability in SMBs
Cybersecurity Workforce Growth	9 percent growth in cybersecurity employment in 2023, projected to grow by 32 percent by 2032.	U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023). Cybersecurity employment growth.
Regional Cybercrime Insights	U.S. accounts for 59 percent of all ransomware attacks. Poland has the highest cybersecurity preparedness (NCSI score: 90.83).	McAfee. (2022). Cybercrime and regional insights, National Cyber Security Centre. (2023). Cybersecurity preparedness by country
Increase in Cybercrime	Cybercrime victim count increased by 1517 percent from 2001 to 2021. Hourly loss from data breaches: $787,671 in 2021.	Verizon. (2021). 2021 Data breach investigations report
Geopolitical Cyberattacks	Russian-backed hackers targeted U.S. election systems and infrastructure, including the Democratic National Committee in 2016.	U.S. Department of Justice. (2020). Russian-backed cyberattacks on U.S. election systems.
COVID-19 Impact	Malware attacks increased by 358 percent from 2019 to 2020, highlighting new vulnerabilities created by remote work.	McAfee. (2021). COVID-19 and the surge in cybercrime

This table summarises key trends and statistics related to cyberattacks, cybercrime, and information warfare, along with their sources

2.4 Global Socio-Economic and Political Impacts of Cyber Threats

Cyber threats have profound implications for global socio-economic systems and political structures. The interdependence of modern societies amplifies the risks of cyberattacks, cybercrime, and information warfare, leading to wide-ranging impacts across various sectors. These threats challenge the resilience of national and international institutions, disrupt economies, and shape geopolitical dynamics, thus requiring robust global responses (The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research & Kavanagh, 2017).

Socio-Economic Impacts

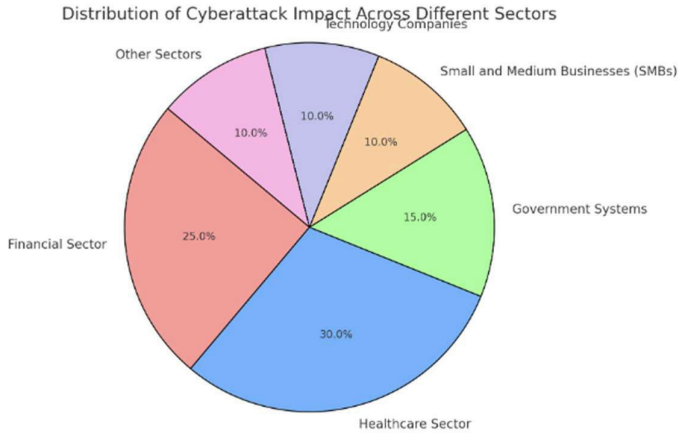
Cyber threats against international financial systems and key infrastructure are growing, representing substantial socio-economic risk. The WannaCry ransomware attack of 2017 that disabled healthcare networks around the world and the Bangladesh central bank cyberheist in 2016 identify weaknesses capable of triggering comprehensive financial insecurity. Cybercrime has been estimated to cost the worldwide economy $10.5 trillion each year by 2025, and the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMBs) are specifically exposed (UNODC et al., 2013).

In Canada, cyber election interference, such as efforts by foreign powers like China to influence the political process, is another economic threat. These threats are politically destabilizing, causing market disruption and investor confidence. Examples in the past, such as the 2016 U.S. election interference, demonstrate how disinformation campaigns can destabilize the financial system (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020). In order to counteract these risks, companies need to actively track political events, employ political analysts, establish government contacts, and invest in lobbying, financial hedging, and political risk insurance.

The escalating digital evolution of the financial system, hastened by the COVID-19 crisis, enhances exposure to cyber threats. These attacks, usually state-sponsored or criminal, are directed at the integrity of financial data, which jeopardizes public confidence and financial stability (McAfee, 2021). The global financial community is confronted with an uneven response to these threats, with ill-defined roles and responsibilities.

To solve these problems, authorities propose tighter coordination among governments,

banking institutions, and technology firms, along with international cooperation. Bolstering cybersecurity, raising workforce capability, and enhancing regulatory systems are key moves in protecting the world economy from future cyberattacks. Joint, well-coordinated action is required to reduce the escalating cyber threat to financial stability (ITU et al., 2021).



Political Impact

Cyber threats increasingly redefine global power dynamics, ushering in new conflict areas and reallocating influence. High-visibility attacks like the 2020 SolarWinds attack against U.S. government institutions exemplify the mounting ability of state-sponsored cyber-attacks to compromise national security (CISA, 2020; Hemsley & Fisher, 2018). At the political level, cyber campaigns have profoundly affected democratic processes; in the 2016 United States presidential election, Russian attempts at interference in the form of leaked emails and disinformation campaigns undermined public trust in institutions and exposed weaknesses in electoral systems (COLOMINA et al., 2021; UNODC et al., 2013).

Canada's experience confirms this trend as well. Though its democratic processes are lower-priority targets than the U.S., events like the recent confirmation of Chinese interference attempts during the 2019 federal election demonstrate that even stable democracies are not exempt (Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, 2015; UNIDIR & Kavanagh, 2017). Even though paper ballots protect the fundamental act of voting, digital components—like voter registers and political campaign management—continue to be vulnerable to manipulation, compromising the integrity and reliability of democratic institutions.

As digital activities increasingly become part of the political processes globally, cyber threats are turning into instruments of data warfare, narrative manipulation, and obdurescence of

dissent, particularly from the hands of players like China and Russia as they attempt to push back against Western hegemony in cyberspace (Ronchi, 2020; CSIS, 2024; Li & Liu, 2021). This new development calls for quick global governance changes. Improving global standards, strengthening interagency coordination, and establishing human capital resilience through strategic training are important steps toward defending democratic processes against cyber threats, reaffirming the United Nations' role in closing governance gaps in cyberspace (UNIDIR & Kavanagh, 2017; ITU et al., 2021; Nye et al., 2014).

Cyber Threats and International Relations

3.1 Diplomacy: Opportunities and Challenges

The incorporation of digital instruments into diplomatic practice has made it more susceptible to cyberattacks, such as espionage, disinformation, and data theft, as seen in the case of the 2016 Democratic National Committee (DNC) email hack (COLOMINA et al., 2021). This highlights the vital shortfall of the international system as it is now: the lack of shared norms and legally binding mechanisms for regulating state conduct in cyberspace (Tikk et al., 2010). As new technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and big data analytics are rapidly developing, the effects of these technologies on diplomatic processes become increasingly complicated and uncertain (Li & Liu, 2021). It demands a rebalancing of international governance systems, with emphasis laid on the development of global cyber norms, strengthened cybersecurity collaboration, and substantial capacity-development for the developing states (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research & Kavanagh, 2017). Unless these steps are taken, the digital divide will grow, disenfranchising major segments of the global South and compromising the legitimacy and inclusivity of global governance (International Telecommunication Union et al., 2021). Therefore, digital diplomacy has to be addressed not as a convenience tool but as a sensitive space needing strong regulation, moral stewardship, and fair access so that it contributes to the common good of the international community (Nye, 2011).

3.2 National Sovereignty in the Digital Era

The digital era has dramatically reconfigured the concept of national sovereignty, especially in the field of diplomacy. Digital technologies like Twitter, Facebook, and video conferencing have completely transformed diplomatic practice by facilitating immediate communication and more representative global discourse (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). These media were a key enabler during the COVID-19 pandemic, facilitating fast coordination and

information exchange between states and global institutions (Nye, 2011). While these developments have increased transparency and extended participation in global governance, they also bring diplomatic processes under unprecedented risks. Cyber espionage, disinformation campaigns, and electronic surveillance have emerged as core challenges, compromising the confidentiality and integrity of diplomatic communication (COLOMINA et al., 2021). The hack of the DNC emails in 2016 illustrates how cyberattacks can interfere with democratic processes and undermine confidence in international relations (Tikk et al., 2010).

More seriously, these threats are compounded by the lack of universally accepted norms governing state behavior in cyberspace. The international legal framework currently is not well suited to deal with the novel challenges presented by cyber operations, so digital sovereignty is fragmented and frequently disputed (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research & Kavanagh, 2017). With increasingly rapid progress being made in new technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and big data analytics, the complexity of these challenges rises exponentially (Li & Liu, 2021). These technologies not only extend state and non-state actors' possibilities but also mix national and transnational spheres of influence (International Telecommunication Union et al., 2021).

Here, the protection of national sovereignty in the digital age requires a radical redefinition of classical governance models. States need to focus on building strong cybersecurity measures and ensure the formulation of enforceable international norms governing conduct in cyberspace (Tikk et al., 2010). Equally crucial is the imperative for inclusive multilateral cooperation that bridges the digital divide. It is critical to support the developing nations, which may not possess the technical base and regulatory institutions, through focused capacity-building programs and public-private partnerships (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research & Kavanagh, 2017). This will not only facilitate their effective involvement in digital diplomacy but also assure that essential issues like data privacy, digital rights, and disinformation are tackled fairly. Ultimately, national sovereignty in the age of the Internet cannot be safeguarded alone—it demands a cooperative, concerted, and visionary global action that strikes a balance between innovation and accountability (Nye, 2011).

3.3 Cyber Threats and International Power Dynamics

The emergence of cyber threats has profoundly changed the international power balance, turning cyberspace into the focal battleground of contemporary national art. Unlike other

conventional military tools, cyber activities enable states to shape strategic objectives like espionage, obstruction, and operational effects without having to contend with evident physical struggles (Tikk, Kaska, & Vihul, 2010). The first of these examples is the Stuxnet attack in 2010 on the Iranian nuclear program. This is claimed to have been coordinated by Israel and the US, and provides an example of how cyber weapons can be applied to inflict very significant damage yet still have a plausible degree of denial (Zetter, 2014). It will turn cyberspace into an affordable and highly effective conduit through which states can manipulate, chase geopolitical ambitions and transform the character of contemporary conflict (Carr, 2011).

The charges of hacking the 2016 US presidential election and the suspected hack of China's US personnel management in 2015 demonstrate the manner in which cyber intrusion discredits national security, undermines democratic institutions, and probes the integrity of global norms (Rid, 2020). Beyond state actors, the cyber space facilitated small states and non-state actors, hindering traditional hierarchies of power. The case of North Korea covered in the WannaCry Ransomware Attack 2017 illustrates how conventionally weak actors can utilize cyber technology to cause global barriers and pursue economic or political gains (Greenberg, 2019). This diffusion of cyberskills blurs the power advantage within the international system (Valeriano & Maness, 2015).

The United Nations addresses the development of government expert groups (GGE) and open-ended working groups (OEWGs), but these are only attempts with non-binding principles (UNODA, 2021). The absence of bonds in global law leaves cyberspace open to manipulation and escalation. With great powers making the digital world more militarized, there is a growing risk of miscalculation and unintended wars (Maurer, 2018). With cooperation and shared responsibility, the world desires stability, sovereignty, and confidence in the virtual world (UNIDIR & Kavanagh, 2017).

3.4 Case Studies: High-Profile Cybersecurity Incidents Impacting International Relations

Cyber threats significantly shape international power dynamics, transforming social relations, shifting power balances, and determining future global security (Hathaway & Levitz, 2018). Greater international cooperation is essential to combat evolving cyber threats (Lewis, 2018).

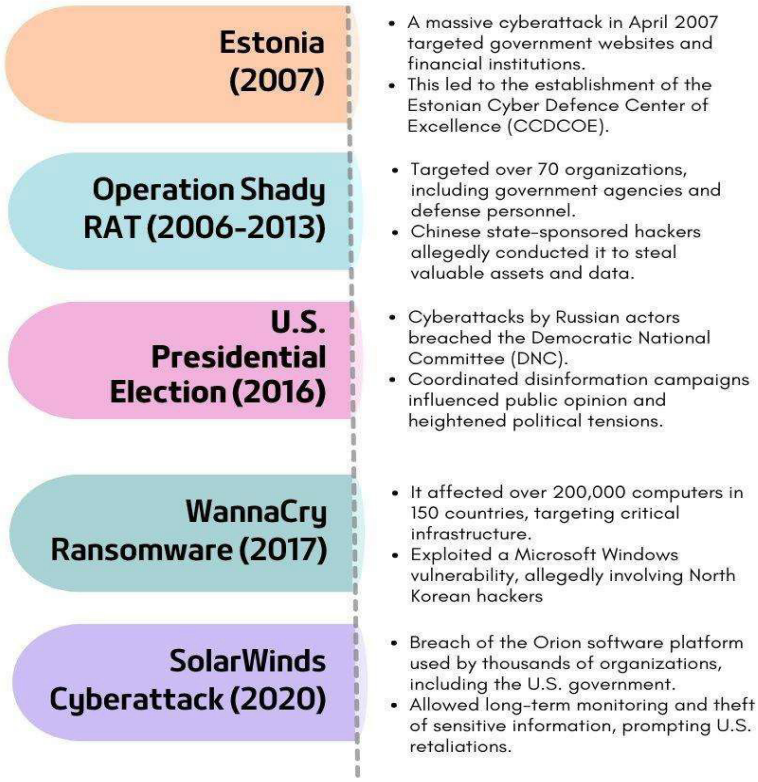


Figure 5: Case Studies

These case studies reflect the seriousness of high-profile cybersecurity breaches towards international relations and governance, underscoring that urgent global cooperation and robust frameworks are needed to grapple with this challenge (Masas, 2023).

The United Nations and Cybersecurity

4.1 Overview of the UN's Traditional Governance Structures

There is significant decentralisation in the traditional governance structures offered by the United Nations on cybersecurity. These are characterised by the different frameworks within which the separate entities operate based on their mandate, operational environment, and priority. Thus, there is a significant variation of preparedness, resources, and technology applied across the UN system since each entity manages its cybersecurity risks. This has resulted in fragmented models of cybersecurity maturity whose differences range from data types, the priorities of the leadership in terms of cybersecurity, historical ICT investment, and access to financial and technical resources (Masas, 2023).

The approach of the UN is primarily vertical, focusing on internal resilience within each

organisation. Such efforts cover endpoint device management, vulnerability remediation in legacy systems, secure adoption of cloud computing, and risk mitigation in shadow IT. Even distribution of best practice implementation and a different technological advancement level across entities are prohibitive factors for such efforts. Legacy systems are the most difficult to manage as they may not support the latest security measures, making organisations susceptible to state-of-the-art cyberattacks.

Horizontal governance or interagency coordination, cooperation, and information sharing is important in such an integrated setting as the United Nations system; however, after some progress here, a lack of system-wide cybersecurity strategy also exists, thus underpinning current constraints to successful cooperation. Probably few coordination mechanisms have been underutilised or less adopted, among them shared threat intelligence platforms and collective security solutions, which present one of the biggest pain areas of cohesive cybersecurity governance within a loosely coupled system.

COVID-19 highly unveiled vulnerabilities and accelerated transformations in UN entities' cybersecurity. Widespread work-from-home arrangements made urgent improvements to remote-access security necessary, pushing a number of ICT projects and necessitating further efficiencies within security management frameworks. It also showed how innovation could bring long-standing problems with poorly coordinated approaches and outdated governance models more broadly into prominence (Masas, 2023).

4.2 The UN's Role in Cybersecurity: Past and Present

The UN has played a crucial role in building the global cybersecurity landscape through norms, frameworks, and cooperation to combat surging cyber threats. Such a role has transformed from what it used to be centuries ago up to this date because of changes in the nature of cyber threats and the geopolitical climate. Following is a more detailed analysis of the efforts exerted by the UN in the past and the current initiatives, including achievements, challenges, and future directions.

The first engagement of the UN was in the establishment of the International Telecommunication Union in 1865, which it used to advance international cooperation in telecommunications. Later, it provided a platform for cybersecurity discussions through this organisation. Some of the critical steps taken were the World Summit on the Information

Society in 2003 and 2005, where it set focus on the significance of a secure information society and capacity building for developing nations. The General Assembly of the UN also passed several resolutions since 1998 that gave way to the development of cooperation globally in cybercrime.

During recent years, the UN has made several efforts to mitigate increasing cybersecurity problems. The office for disarmament affairs of the UN has made major contributions by bringing together world forums on information and communication technologies and international security. The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) provides support to Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) and Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) that advance norms, rules, and principles for responsible state behaviour in cyberspace. The above groups highlight the importance of international cooperation in avoiding cyber conflicts as well as putting in place responsible actions in the cyber world.

The UN Conference on Trade and Development deals with cybersecurity in e-commerce and the digital economy. The organisation acknowledges the demand for security and trust and has been offering analysis and technical assistance to developing countries to strengthen their cybersecurity capabilities and improve their engagement in the global digital marketplace. The Cyber Peace Institute, though not the offspring of the UN, collaborates with it and many other international bodies to strengthen global cybersecurity. The concentration areas of the institute are support for vulnerable communities, cyber threat analysis, and advocacy for accountability in cyberspace, each of which aligns with the UN's focus areas of building digital peace and security.

4.3 Influence of Western and Anglo-Saxon Philosophies on the UN Framework

The UN framework since its inception in 1945 was constructed in the image of Western and Anglo-Saxon philosophies. Most work in formulating its Charter involved the United States, the United Kingdom, and their allies, who played a central role in shaping the international organisation around principles of state sovereignty, individual rights, rule of law, and liberal democracy that form the core of Western political thought.

The principle of state sovereignty and non-intervention, therefore, is an Anglo-Saxon contribution to philosophy. It appears in Article 2(7) of the UN Charter. That provision forbids interference by the organisation in member states' internal affairs. Derived from the

Treaty of Westphalia (1648), thinkers such as John Locke, and Hugo Grotius, this principle was essentially to prevent interference with national independence. However, it has been attacked in its viewpoint of having limited the response of the UN to human rights violations and cyber threats in a globally interconnected world. Emphasis on liberal democracy and human rights is also one of the defining features, influenced by the ideologies of Enlightenment thinkers, including Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill. These principles reflect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which are the basis of many UN undertakings and agencies, such as the Human Rights Council and the International Court of Justice. However, some non-Western nations are critical of it for imposing the norms of the West on diversified cultural and political contexts, thus creating conflicts within the organisation.

Western philosophies also inspired the economic and security aspects of the UN. The Bretton Woods institutions, formed alongside the UN, were based on free-market principles and Western economic models. The UN Security Council (UNSC), dominated by its Permanent Five members (the U.S., U.K., France, Russia, and China), reflects post-World War II power dynamics favouring Western allies. The veto power granted to the P5 is often seen as perpetuating Western dominance and hindering equitable representation of emerging powers in global decision-making. In terms of cybersecurity, open internet governance, free information, and privacy rights in Western philosophies contrast with state sovereignty and the control of virtual spaces by the state in authoritarian regimes. These ideological conflicts are reflected in the debates taking place within the UN, GGE, and OEWG on issues of cybersecurity, with Western nations trying to promote the norms of openness and accountability and others advocating state-centric approaches.

Critics often argue that in some instances, this Western influence fails to incorporate the diverse needs of non-Western countries, and most developing nations have the view that UN liberal values and market-oriented solutions forget their own socio-economic plight. Reforming calls for the UN mostly address such imbalances to make the system more inclusive.

On the other hand, despite such criticisms, Western and Anglo-Saxon philosophies have also facilitated the UN in projecting universal principles of peace, justice, and cooperation. The challenge in the 21st century is to find a balance between foundational values and changing priorities in a multipolar, digitally interconnected world.

4.4. Challenges of Consensus-Based Decision-Making in Cyberspace

It is difficult to reach consensus on decisions in cyberspace because of the complexity of the digital environment. Agreement on one matter by multiple stakeholders with differing priorities can cause delay and impede a timely response to cyber threats. A Forbes article highlights the need for structured decision-making frameworks when navigating differences in viewpoints (Forbes, 2025).

The consensus principle may be very demanding on international organisations such as ASEAN. According to a report on cyber norms in ASEAN, it is found that consensus-based decision-making has hindered the development of collective expectations as member states would have to reach an agreement; this may often be undermined by national interests and levels of cyber capability, thereby being only superficial adherence and not a real commitment, as the latter may do just to ensure the consensus is met rather than agreeing on a value for the norms. This fast-evolving nature of cyber threats calls for quick responses that consensus-based approaches might find hard to provide. The need for unanimity might delay decision-making and put systems at risk. According to an article published in War on the Rocks, delays are leveraged by the adversary through deceptions and espionage in the course of manipulating the process of decision-making and compromise on security (War on the Rocks, 2025).

Besides that, the nonexistence of one reference framework has made it harder to evaluate and compare the level of maturity across organisations in their cybersecurity. Lacking standardisation may result in less consistent security and defence gaps between organisations, just as discussed during the management convergence on cyber risk management.

4.5. Limitations of Current UN Mechanisms for Cyber Threat Management

The United Nations has significant limitations in managing cyber threats due to differences in the maturity and coordination of cybersecurity measures within its organisations. While organisations that handle politically sensitive data, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), are placing a high priority on cybersecurity, others have been less proactive, making the readiness not uniform (United Nations, 2025).

An important weakness is an integrated framework to assess and manage cybersecurity risks. Self-evaluations showed that there are differences in cybersecurity maturity from "average" to "weak" across the areas of identification, protection, detection, response, and recovery. The lack of integrated benchmarks makes it difficult to compare and measure strategies against one another, further affecting unified security implementations..

Decentralised investments in IT systems aggravate this issue. Most organisations have outdated or incompatible infrastructure that hinders an effective response to cyber threats. Differences in priorities and availability of resources among leadership further widen the gaps in cybersecurity measures. UN organisations are interdependent, with shared infrastructure and data centers; therefore, poor security in one entity can easily compromise others. The system is only as strong as its weakest link, making this a dangerous risk. Despite this, collective mechanisms for mitigating threats are underdeveloped.

Human-related vulnerabilities include configuration errors and inadequate training. Phishing and malware are so common that current mechanisms do not adequately address the need for widespread user education and awareness (United Nations, 2025).

Key Challenges in International Cooperation on Cybersecurity

5.1 Political and Ideological Barriers to Collaboration

Political and ideological barriers to international cooperation on cybersecurity have many political biases and influences. States are often interested in their special benefits and control over security issues. Regional competition between the U.S., China, and Russia plays a huge role in this area. The United States and its allies promote an open, free internet operating on privacy and personal freedom principles. Meanwhile, China and Russia explain their national sovereignty in cyberspace as "cyber sovereignty," pursuing increased control over events and activity within their borders (Bort, 2021).

Competing treaties include the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Convention on Cyber Security. Countries generally distrust cybersecurity initiatives, viewing them through a national security lens, and fear that international agreements could be used to curtail their cyber capabilities. The U.S. has withdrawn from some UN discussions, citing concerns over surveillance and abuses. To Western countries, the cyber sovereignty proposition China is taking can be likened to trying

to legitimise censorship and control. Escalating tensions of late include charges that Russia staged the 2020 SolarWinds cyberattack blamed on them as well as hacking into U.S. electoral machinery in the 2016 U.S. elections, hence damaging international relationships and cooperation (Sanger, 2020).

Cyber capabilities for national security may be used to commit terrorism. The 2020 SolarWinds attack
that exploited software vulnerabilities affected many countries and organisations worldwide, showing the potential of state-led cyber strategies to compromise global security. Richer countries with strong internet systems overshadow international conferences; thus, little representation is observed for developing countries. This fact deters engaging participation, spreading the digital gap, and makes collective security relatively weak. Hesitance to divulge threats or vulnerabilities undermines mutual trust and coordinated response. Thus, national and international security considerations need to strike a balance so that cooperation toward cybersecurity is effective (UNCTAD, 2021).

Current governance models are severely tested in dealing with the complexities of modern cybersecurity issues. Traditional models, such as the UN-led one, are centred on state sovereignty, consensus-based decision-making, and non-intervention but fail in the face of borderless cyber threats. A significant limitation is the lack of a global standard legal framework for cybersecurity. Agreements such as the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime have limited participation, and thus, the approaches are fragmented. For example, the EU's General Data Protection Regulation focuses on privacy, while other countries focus on offense and surveillance. International decision-making is slow and bureaucratic, which hinders the response to rapidly evolving cyber threats. Incidents like the SolarWinds breach and the WannaCry ransomware attack highlight the need for swift, coordinated action. However, consensus-based approaches can enable single nations to block progress, leading to delays (Naylor, 2020).

Major powers dominate the governance of cybersecurity, and frameworks from organisations such as NATO and the European Union are perceived as biased toward Western interests, thereby creating mistrust among non-Western nations who advocate for state-centric approaches, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Economic and technological disparities also represent barriers because many developing countries have

insufficient resources for robust participation in global efforts. The initiatives that the International Telecommunication Union initiates are faced with funding and alignment challenges, among others. Non-state actors, such as cybercriminals, hacktivists, and private corporations, complicate governance further, especially because the present models of governance are primarily founded on state behaviour (Paganini, 2020).

5.2 Case Studies: Successes and Failures in International Cyber Cooperation

International cooperation on cybersecurity has had both successes and failures, reflecting the complexities of addressing transnational cyber threats in a fragmented global landscape.

Successes:

1. **Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (2001):** The first binding treaty to combat cybercrime, fostering legal standards and international cooperation. However, its Western-centric approach limits global adoption, with key nations like Russia, China, and India refusing to join (Baker, 2020).
2. **NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence:** Founded after Estonia was attacked by cyberattacks in 2007, this center enhances cyber defense research and training and published the Tallinn Manual on cyber warfare law. However, its exclusivity alienates non-NATO states, especially those in the Global South. The center has played a crucial role in fostering cooperation and advancing knowledge of international law in cyberspace (Smith, 2021).
3. **EU Cyber Policies:** General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the NIS Directive have been some of the initiatives that have strengthened cybersecurity and inspired global policies, though uneven implementation remains a challenge (O'Reilly, 2021).

Failures:

1. **UN Cyber Norms:** The effort by the UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) and Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) to create binding norms about state cyber behavior has failed primarily because of rivalries in geopolitics and disagreements in cyber sovereignty. For example, the disagreement among Western democracies and authoritarian states, including Russia and China, on the regulatory body of cyber sovereignty and internet governance hinders meaningful efforts (Cohen, 2020).
2. **WannaCry Attack (2017):** Global cybersecurity vulnerabilities were thrown into the limelight, but fragmented responses and a lack of universal legal frameworks hindered accountability. Affecting over 150 countries, crippling institutions such as the UK's

National Health Service, the attack threw the vulnerabilities in global cybersecurity infrastructure into sharp relief (Jones, 2018).

3. **Russian Interference in the U.S. Election (2016):** Russia's alleged hacking and disinformation campaigns revealed challenges in attributing state-sponsored cyberattacks and enforcing norms, straining international relations. Despite broad recognition of the threat, lack of consensus on attributing state-sponsored cyberattacks and the absence of enforceable norms have impeded collective responses (Turner, 2017).

Hence, the case studies mentioned above highlight the substantial progress in international cooperation on cybersecurity, but the geopolitical tensions and ideological differences on cyber sovereignty continue to hinder global efforts. The successful cooperation highlights the capabilities of regional and alliance-based counter efforts for cybersecurity. At the same time, failures speak about the necessity for change, such as transparency, inclusivity, and practicality of the frameworks.

Recommendations for Reform

The rapidly changing landscape of cybersecurity presents significant challenges to global governance as the current legal and regulatory frameworks are no longer able to cope with the increasingly complex and scaled cyber threats. These range from state-sponsored cyberattacks to cybercrime, and are becoming increasingly more frequent and sophisticated, making robust and adaptive measures in cybersecurity imperative (Johnson, 2021). International organisations, including the UN, the European Union (EU), among others, have evolved to fill in part some of these gaps. However, important ones are still there. These include, among others, different types of jurisdictional arrangements, processes of collecting cross-border evidence, and mechanisms of cooperation amongst various nations. Diversities in legal structures, political concerns, and technology amongst different nations usually discredit partnerships towards successful collaboration on global efforts towards cybersecurity (Smith & Lee, 2020).

There must be a coordinated and flexible policy response to these challenges. Policymakers need to balance concerns for security against the protection of fundamental rights like privacy and freedom of expression (Chavez, 2020). Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) shall be essential sources to tap private sector expertise, especially for companies in the high-tech sector who play a leading role in cyber threat detection and response (Baker & Johnson,

2021). The Global Forum on Cyber Expertise (GFCE) and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) are collaborative initiatives that foster dialogue and trust among stakeholders, thus enhancing collective resilience against cyber threats (Rosen, 2021).

Adaptive policymaking is also important in keeping up with the rapid changes happening in technology, from artificial intelligence, blockchain, and quantum computing. The GDPR by the EU reflects how the rules are adapted to balance between privacy and security (O'Reilly, 2021). Governments should invest in real-time threat intelligence sharing and rapid response strategies, such as the collaboration between the U.S. government and private enterprise following the SolarWinds attack in 2020 (Turner, 2021). Estonia is a country that demonstrates resilience through frequent policy updates and robust cybersecurity infrastructures (Vik, 2021).

International legal frameworks should be strengthened in the face of cybercrime and digital threats. Agreements have been established between the international world through conventions, for example, the Convention on Cybercrime by the Council of Europe and the Convention on Cybersecurity and Protection of Personal Data of the African Union. Nevertheless, these conventions still fail at times in their cooperation towards the responding of state-sponsored cyberattacks, cyber espionage, and protection of critical infrastructure (Blake, 2020). Institutions in the sectors such as the International Atomic Energy Agency and NATO contribute a lot to the diminishment of cyber threats in their subdomains (Lynch, 2021). International agreements should be harmonised in terms of implementation across each country, reducing disagreement in jurisdictions and having better global cybersecurity (Klein, 2021).

Ensuring fair participation in the global governance of cybersecurity requires building capacity, especially for developing nations (Ghosh, 2020). Cyber diplomacy efforts are effective in facilitating cooperation and filling the technological gaps. Moreover, it is also essential to ensure that the views of civil society organisations, nongovernmental organisations, and academic institutions within the practice of cybersecurity are met to promote ethics and transparency and to determine the rights of human beings (Miller & Jones, 2020).

In conclusion, dealing with increasingly complex cyber threats calls for a collaborative,

inclusive, and flexible global governance framework. Enhancing international standards, raising the level of information sharing, and promoting cooperation between governments, the private sector, and civil society will bring the global community closer to a digital future that is secure and resilient (Harvey, 2021).

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The Nexus of Trafficking, Cybercrime, and Conflict

Gnana Divya and M. Matheswaran

Abstract

The nexus between trafficking, cybercrime, and conflict is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive understanding of the underlying socioeconomic, political, and technological factors. This study examines the causes perpetuating the exploitation of people due to social constructs, systemic inequalities, and policy gaps, while also analysing the legal gaps in definitions and systemic exclusions that facilitate vulnerability in trafficking. The digital economy has significantly impacted the landscape of cybercrime and human trafficking, creating a bidirectional relationship where cyberspace is utilised to generate trafficking victims, and trafficked individuals are coerced into participating in cyber-scams. This study highlights the evolving nature of these criminal activities, their adaptability to new technologies, and their potential to fuel armed conflicts. Comparative GDP analysis between conflict-prone and stable countries identifies the economic and social vulnerabilities that contribute to human trafficking. This study also examines the case of Laos and the rising cases of human trafficking and cyber slavery, emphasising the need for bilateral cooperation and proactive measures to dismantle trafficking networks. While demonstrating intent, existing legal frameworks in India have limitations in enforcement, necessitating an integrated approach to law enforcement. The study underscores the importance of rethinking development strategies to address the systemic roots of vulnerability and prioritise equity, intersectionality, and systemic change. Addressing human trafficking requires a paradigm shift that recognises the diversity of victims' experiences and addresses systemic policy gaps through comprehensive reforms and collaborative efforts at the national and international levels.

Introduction

The intersection of trafficking, cybercrime, and conflict is complex and multifaceted, with each strand influencing and exacerbating the others. Unstable societies after the armed conflicts often result in amplifying existing drug cultivation and trafficking, while the narcotics industry strengthens insurgent movements and weakens state capacity (Cornell, 2007). This crime-rebellion nexus can create vested interests in the continuation of armed conflict, as criminal involvement may generate an economic function of war for insurgent groups (Cornell, 2005). Cybercrime has introduced new dimensions to trafficking with no geographical boundaries that make tracing much harder. Cyberspace is being utilised to trap potential trafficking victims, and trafficked individuals are being coerced into participating in cyber scams on behalf of the actual traffickers whose identity is hidden. This bidirectional relationship between cybercrime and human trafficking represents a crucial part of the evolution in organised crime (Sarkar & Shukla, 2024). As human traffickers have moved beyond traditional methods of human trafficking with no geographical limitations to include educated individuals, particularly men, highlights the flexibility of traffickers in leveraging new skill sets (Sarkar & Shukla, 2024). While cybercrime requires our immediate attention to act, research suggests that a relatively smaller number of countries host the major cybercriminal threats (Bruce et al., 2024). The interconnectedness of trafficking, cybercrime, and conflict exhibits significant challenges for law enforcement, social workers who are rescuing the victims, and policymakers. The evolving nature of these transnational organised crime activities, their willingness to adapt to new technologies and situations, and their potential to be fuelled by armed conflicts necessitate a comprehensive and collaborative approach to address this nexus effectively.

This research paper aims to examine the causes that prolong the exploitation of vulnerable populations due to socially constructed norms, system inequalities, and policy gaps. We also evaluate the legal gaps in definitions and systemic exclusions that open the door for vulnerability in trafficking. A nuanced understanding of the problem at hand can be understood by analysing the social, economic, and gendered dimensions of trafficking that enable us to build a comprehensive policy to address systemic vulnerabilities that enable exploitation.

Trafficking and Technology

Trafficking has become a more complex problem to tackle with multiple layers, with technological development, exploitation of vulnerable populations, economic inequality, and transnational criminal ecosystems intersect. Technological advancement has improved our lives for the better and has also created a fertile ground for cyber-enabled crimes. The digital infrastructure of trafficking has evolved to a different stage where wrongdoers are protected by anonymity on the internet through a marketplace like "Silk Road," through which they have access to data that they could use to their advantage (Phelps and Watt, 2014). The following figure presents the top categories that are available on Silk Road:

Top 20 categories of items available worldwide on Silk Road.[a]

Category	#. Items	Pct.
Weed	3338	13.7%
Drugs	2207	9.0%
Prescription	1784	7.3%
Benzos	1193	4.9%
Books	955	3.9%
Cannabis	880	3.6%
Hash	821	3.4%
Cocaine	633	2.6%
Pills	473	1.9%
Blotter	441	1.8%
Money	406	1.7%
MDMA (ecstasy)	393	1.6%
Erotica	385	1.6%
Steroids, PEDs	376	1.5%
Seeds	375	1.5%
Heroin	370	1.5%
Opioids	344	1.4%
DMT	343	1.4%
Stimulants	292	1.2%
Digital goods	261	1.1%

[a] This table is being displayed with the permission of its author, Nicolas Christin.

Source: PHELPS and WATT, 2014

Traffickers make use of these tools to exploit vulnerable sections of society, evade law enforcement, and expand their operations beyond the country's borders. Cybercrime enables trafficking by providing a platform for recruitment, coordination, and financial transactions, with no geographical limitations. Unlike the visible web, where social networks are freely accessed by the general public, major illegal dealings are executed on deep web platforms that provide a marketplace where it is easy to make business deals in cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin, that enable untraceable transactions. Due to its porous borders with other Asian

countries, such as the India-Myanmar border, and its location near the Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos) and the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran), India is prone to drug trafficking and human trafficking. More vulnerable populations, such as refugees from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, are in a precarious position where they are easily caught in this trap.

The Digital Economy and Cybercrime in Trafficking

The digital economy has significantly impacted the landscape of human trafficking, creating a complex and bidirectional relationship between these illegal activities. Cybercrime and human trafficking have become increasingly interlinked in the digital era. Cyberspace is being utilised to identify and generate victims of trafficking, while trafficked individuals are being coerced into participating in cyber scams (Sarkar & Shukla, 2024). This bidirectional relationship represents an evolved version of organised crime, where technology facilitates human trafficking, and conversely, trafficking becomes a means to execute cybercriminal activities. The complex convergence of these two domains has led to a notable increase in victims of both cybercrime and trafficking (Sarkar & Shukla, 2024). Interestingly, the digital market economy has also influenced the evolution of cybercrime markets. These markets have transformed from unruly, scam-ridden platforms to mature, regulated mechanisms that greatly favour trade efficiency, mimicking legitimate online marketplaces like eBay (Allodi et al., 2016). The digital platform provides a suitable environment for criminals to exploit vulnerabilities in systems for their own benefit by being anonymous (Sabillon et al., 2016).

The increasing number of cybercrimes, facilitated by new technologies, applications, and networks, including the Deep Web, has contributed to the expansion of illegal activities in cyberspace (Sabillon et al., 2016). Interestingly, the Internet and related communication technologies have empowered individuals relative to traditional organised crime groups like gangs or mafias (Goldsmith & Brewer, 2014). This shift allows criminals to commit crimes more autonomously through self-instruction and limit their involvement in particular networks, a concept referred to as "digital drift" (Goldsmith & Brewer, 2014; Holt et al., 2018). Many well-educated individuals are becoming victims of this, blinded by their dream to lead a better life abroad, underscoring the vulnerability of the victims and the seamless execution of traffickers in reeling them in (Sarkar & Shukla, 2024).

Several other digital platforms, such as The Onion Router and crypto trading markets, allow the sale of illegal goods without being identified. As everything is done online, bitcoins pave the way for anonymous transactions, making it tough to trace the financial flows linked to trafficking. The evolving nature of this system has made monitoring, identification, and intervention significantly harder, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The digital platform acts as a double-edged sword that can be used fraudulently by anyone; this demands a balance between privacy rights and public safety. Facebook, a social media app, has a policy that allows data tracking through cookies for marketing when we log in as a user, often unnoticed by Facebook users. These data can be accessed by anyone and misused through the black market without our knowledge. Economic vulnerability is one of the root causes of trafficking in young populations, as it changes the perception of seeing the foreign job opportunities (Barner et al., 2014). Populations from developing countries in South Asia are targeted with the promise of a better lifestyle abroad through a well-planned and implemented process of reeling them outside the country. Many youths, predominantly from rural areas in Southern Indian states such as Tamil Nadu and Northern Indian states such as Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Bihar, are becoming victims of trafficking (Trafficking in Persons Report, 2024).

Unlike traditional narratives of falling into the trap as victims due to poverty, migration status, and well-educated individuals lured for better employment opportunities, new avenues for traffickers to target victims have emerged irrespective of socioeconomic status. Individuals who have a lack of understanding of digital dangers fall prey in digital interactions. The same technology that enables human trafficking can be leveraged to prevent, detect, and respond to trafficking. From the usage of AI-powered monitoring mechanisms to blockchain technology for transparency, technology can be used to stop trafficking before it occurs. With the help of blockchain technology, especially in the recruitment stage, fake recruitment of educated people and other deceptions can be prevented, as transparent records of the whole procedure enable us to track the movements of individuals. This prevents the exploitation of workers in global supply chains by disrupting traffickers' access to legitimate markets. To disable trafficking networks, existing measures need to shift from reactive to proactive, technology-driven approaches. The cycle will continue until trafficking routes are identified in great detail with the help of technology to catch perpetrators. However, the use of technology must hold some ethical considerations.

Tackling jurisdictional issues and legal hurdles is one of the major challenges in combating cybercrime (Holt, 2018), which could potentially make it difficult for law enforcement to address trafficking activities conducted through digital means. In order to effectively combat human trafficking, there is a need for collaboration between legal and technological sectors to establish standardised norms and processes for digital evidence collection and processing (Rakha, 2024). Additionally, the development of robust legal frameworks and digital forensics in criminal investigations is crucial in addressing these evolving challenges (Ombu, 2023; Rakha, 2024; Ukwen & Karabatak, 2021).

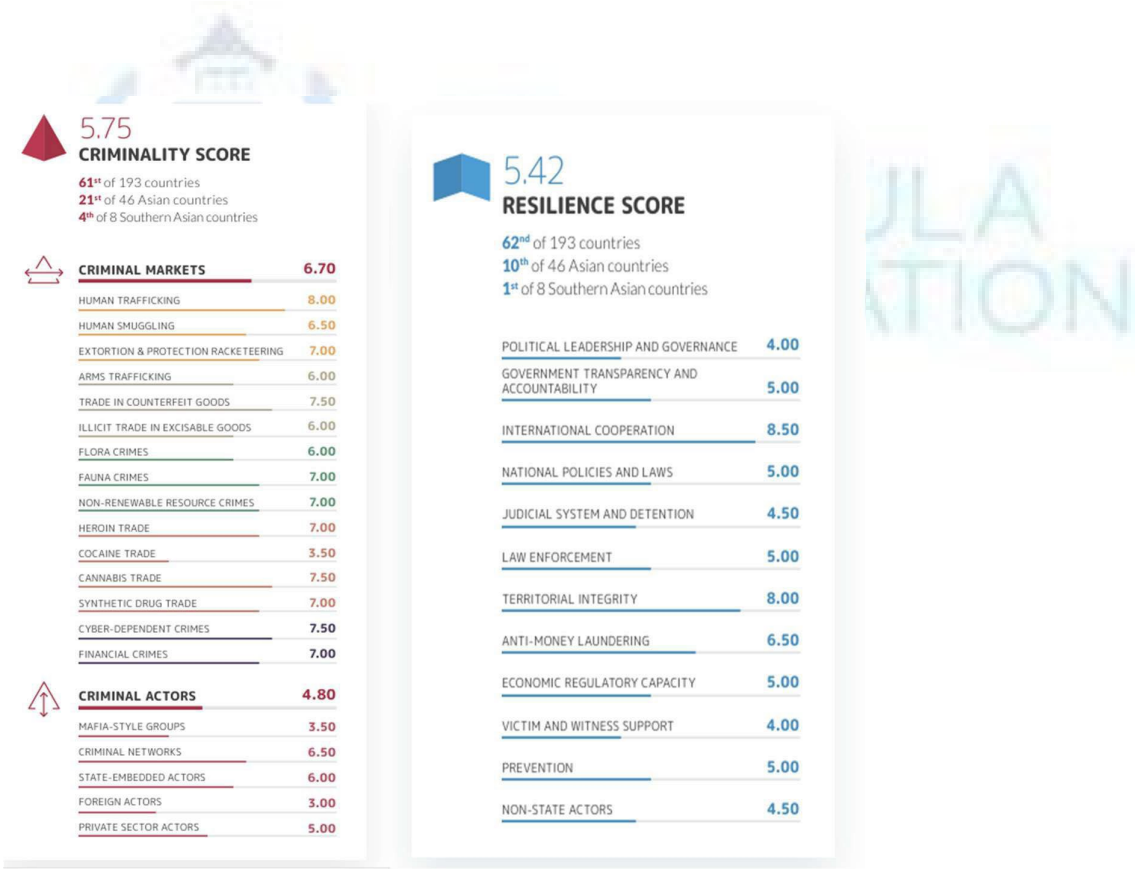
Transnational Crimes in India: The Drug and Human Trafficking Crisis

Transnational trafficking crimes in India have emerged as significant challenges with far-reaching implications. India has evolved into a major hub for human trafficking, serving as both a source and destination country for victims (Joffres et al., 2008). Annually, around 800,000 women and children are being trafficked across international borders, with 80% ending up in forced prostitution. India is both a supplier of trafficked individuals to Gulf States and Southeast Asia and also receives victims from Nepal and Bangladesh (Joffres et al., 2008). While human trafficking is often framed as an organised crime issue with multiple stakeholders involved, this perspective may overshadow its human rights implications for the victims. The criminalisation of human trafficking has become a global phenomenon, partly due to its framing as an organised crime problem rather than a human rights violation of human beings on a large scale stuck inside a system that is larger to trace (Simmons et al., 2018).

Approximately 40% of the world's opiate users are in South Asia, according to the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). As India is located between the largest opium-cultivated regions, India has become a transit country for drug trade (Banerjee, 2024b). In 2023, Myanmar became the world's top opium producer, with illegitimate crop cultivation expanding from 99,000 acres to 116,000 acres. India is also a point of disembarkation for cocaine trafficking, but the cocaine market is smaller than that of other drug markets. Since trading is done through the deep web, anyone with the Internet has the probability of being engulfed. The top destinations for cocaine on the domestic front are the upper-class and urban areas in New Delhi and Mumbai. While metropolitan areas have become major consumers, it

is highly likely that as the Internet has penetrated even rural areas, they could also be exploited easily.

India holds the 61st rank out of 193 countries, with a Criminality Score of 5.75, indicating a sufficiently high prevalence of criminal activities, according to the Global Organised Crime Index (OCI, 2023). As you can see from the data below, India ranks 21st among Asian nations and 4th in South Asia, highlighting its regional vulnerabilities and challenges. The dangerous criminal markets score high rates of human trafficking (8.00), cannabis trade (7.50), and synthetic drug trade (7.00). Organised crime in India is multifaceted, and there has been an increase in international traffickers working through the domestic population. Anonymity with technology, clubbed with large networks working around the world, poses a severe threat to the citizens of all countries. Every nation must be committed to direct intervention in dismantling the trafficking networks, as not addressing the issue effectively puts the other person in another country at risk.



Source: Global Organised Crime Index 2023

India's Resilience Score of 5.42, ranking it 62nd globally, suggests a moderate institutional capacity to counteract criminal activities. High market demand in drug trafficking demands tackling factors that fuel these activities, such as socioeconomic inequality and unemployment. Drug trafficking does not limit itself to that alone; it also results in increasing incidents of narco-terrorism. As mentioned in the INCB Report 2023, Monika Ashish Batra, Deputy Director General of India's Narcotics Control Bureau, said, "Investigations indicate that proceeds of drug trafficking are increasingly being used to fund terrorism and to support armed groups." By breaching a country's borders, these illegal activities raise concerns about the state's ability to control borders and protect its citizens from external threats.

Structural Violence and Dependency Theory

Human trafficking is to be seen as an outcome of systemic global inequalities in society and the international system rather than a separate criminal act, which it's not; it involves multiple stakeholders working on different levels to lure people in to be exploited (Barner et al., 2014). In order to understand how the system perpetuates the vulnerabilities exploited by traffickers, we can premise the issue through the lens of dependency theory and structural theory. Dependency theory emphasises that the "core" nations (developed countries) exploit the "peripheral" nations (developing countries) for cheap labour and rich resources; this creates a never-ending cycle of economic dependence and underdevelopment for the developing countries in the global south. Owing to fragile global markets, peripheral countries face structural inequality that aggravates poverty and instability. These factors make individuals, particularly women and children, vulnerable to traffickers who exploit their desperation.

A Norwegian political scientist, Johan Galtung, who coined the term 'structural violence,' describes how systemic inequalities have an impact on individuals by denying them access to basic needs. When an individual is systematically affected by economic and political structures that deprive certain segments of society of their basic needs, it is structural violence (Christie, 1997). In terms of human trafficking, this manifests as economic deprivation and the denial of well-being and self-determination. These factors create vulnerabilities for common people that traffickers exploit, pushing them into circumstances where they become susceptible to trafficking. For instance, the socioeconomic elements that act as enabling factors of trafficking are often overlooked in legal responses, which tend to

focus on prosecution and protection rather than addressing the daily reality of socioeconomic inequality that is driving human trafficking (Chuang, 2006). Understanding the concept of structural violence is essential in recognising the root cause of trafficking in building preventive measures instead of focusing on what to do about it once the harm is done to individuals. Trafficking is a violence at a slow pace (Schwarz, 2022). Acknowledging these frameworks offers a better understanding of conceptualising trafficking as a gradual accumulation of systemic oppression rather than a single event that happens out of nowhere.

For instance, women who are doing unpaid work domestically, over-represented in low-wage and uncertain employment, are disproportionately targeted due to the feminisation of poverty. Practices that are built over a period of time into cultural norms and patriarchal systems lead to vulnerabilities that persist in society (Gacinya, 2020). Gendered power structures within families, communities, and economies limit women's access to high-value education and employment opportunities, enabling them to become perfect targets for exploitation by traffickers (Peters, 2023; Pimentel, 2024). Exploitation is deeply embedded in gendered societal structures and institutions, creating a system of dependency that traffickers have enough people to exploit in this system. The intersection of structures with micro and macro interactions either reinforces the structural and institutional impacts on potential victims.

Women are disproportionately affected, where 70% of detected trafficking victims are women, with one-third of cases involving children, as per the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2020). These intersecting oppressions are magnified by class hierarchies, rebellions, political strife, military regimes, civil wars, and short-lived governments, which are indicative of social inequality (Belen Villegas Pla, 2023). The United Nations have come up with six critical dimensions of social inequality: income distribution, asset distribution, employment opportunities, access to knowledge, political representation, and access to medical services. These elements create suitable grounds for human trafficking, converting it from a localised issue to an international-level exploitation crisis. As Weatherburn (2015) noted, human trafficking originates from gender inequality, characterised by limited employment opportunities, educational discrimination, and cultural submissions. Trafficking is complex, with a convergence of the overlapping identities of individual and external factors that intensify vulnerabilities. Policies addressing trafficking often fail to account for these complexities, oversimplifying victim narratives as stories of threats and rescue.

These theories enhance our perspectives and emphasise the need to target underlying environments that lead people from developing countries to accept dangerous labour migration assignments (Chuang, 2006), bring awareness to the issue, and proactively advocate for addressing basic economic, social, and cultural rights to combat trafficking. By recognising the comprehensive system involved (Cockbain et al., 2024), policymakers and legal practitioners can work towards more comprehensive and sustainable solutions to human trafficking.

Laos and the Rising Cases of Human Trafficking and Cyber Slavery

548 Indian nationals have been victims of human trafficking through cyber scam platforms in the Golden Triangle SEZ, and they have been rescued as of August 2024. By January 2025, the number of victims rose to 924, with 857 repatriated to India (Rajya Sabha, August 2024; India Today, 27 Jan 2025). The Laos government has been very helpful and has collaborated with the Indian Embassy in Laos in actively rescuing human trafficking victims. The involvement of Cambodia in this trafficking nexus is not ruled out. By unofficial estimates, there are nearly 30,000 Indians trapped as slaves in this cyber trafficking network from Laos. Unlike the conventional way of making the victims work on low-paying physical jobs, Indian nationals in Laos were coerced into running dating app scams and convincing Europeans and Americans to trade in cryptocurrency for their benefit (Ghazali, 2024). It has been identified that the involvement of Chinese international networks was there, highlighting the complexity of the cross-border threat for India. Despite the efforts of Indian officials, the problem persists, indicating weakness in the current approach. A victim recently rescued by NIA from a cyber-scam centre stated, “After some time, they would convince the target to invest in cryptocurrency trading. Many were duped in India this way.”

As India and Laos have had good diplomatic ties over the years, exhibited through various bilateral agreements focused on trade, education, and counter-drug trafficking cooperation. Yet, the number of trafficked Indians in Laos is huge, revealing a critical gap in bilateral cooperation. The existing agreements, such as the 2002 pact on drug demand reductions and prevention of illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs, showcase that both nations have the capacity to collaborate on transnational crimes. The absence of a specialised agreement on human trafficking limits the scope of coordinated action in executing large-scale operations. A formal agreement between India and Los will institutionalise collaboration, enabling

proactive measures such as intelligence sharing, a joint task force, and a coordinated attack on the trafficking networks. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has actively rescued victims by engaging directly with the Lao leaders to bring attention to the matter (Indian Express, 28 July 2024; INN, Aug 2024). However, diplomatic interventions that are effective in the short-term rescue efforts do not provide a solution, especially when the number of Indians stuck in Laos is unknown.

Can India Deploy Security Forces for Direct Action?

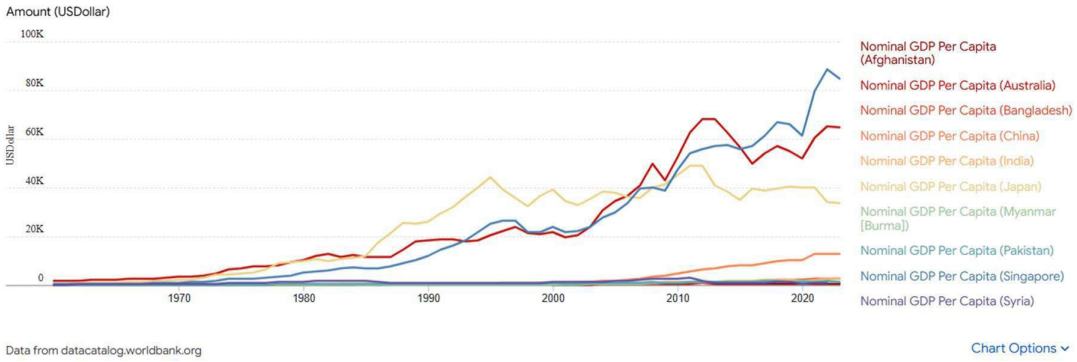
As radical as it may seem, deploying security forces and intelligence agencies from India might be a plausible solution to collaborate with Laos government officials to dismantle these trafficking networks. Previously, India has been successful in conducting small-scale operations with the help of the Laos government, but executing a large-scale operation is possible with diplomatic negotiations and cooperation. For this operation to happen, India would require approval from the Laos government to execute investigations, ensuring that Indian officials operate within an agreed legal framework without posing any threat to their sovereignty. Trust between both the countries and their dedication to combatting exploitation of vulnerable populations plays a crucial role in this being accomplished.

If both parties formally come to terms with each other, a specialised combined unit from both countries can be formed to track and neutralise traffickers by rescuing the victims and arresting the traffickers. Both countries can leverage technologies, such as cyber forensics, to trace recruitment sources in India and disrupt trafficking chains at their origin through shared intelligence. A one-time small rescue mission might not resolve the crisis; a long-term deterrent strategy needs to be developed, focusing on bilateral agreements, digital surveillance, rehabilitation for victims, and diplomatic pressure on Thailand and Myanmar to strengthen border security measures.

Economic Vulnerabilities: Comparative GDP Analysis

In order to identify the economic and social vulnerabilities that can contribute to human trafficking, a comparative GDP analysis between conflict-prone countries and stable countries could help us in understanding it better. For example, Afghanistan has a nominal GDP per capita of $416, while Myanmar (Burma) and Pakistan rank with $1,230 and $1,370,

respectively. Compared to other countries, India and Bangladesh seem to do better, with $2,480 and $2,550, respectively, but still remain below global averages. Conversely, in contrast to volatile countries, stable economies show much higher levels of wealth generation and distribution. Singapore has $84,700 GDP per capita, followed by Australia at $64,800.



Source: World Bank

Conflict, political instability, and lack of economic opportunities in nations such as Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Pakistan enable individuals more susceptible to exploitation and trafficking. Such economic disparities build vulnerable ecosystems that traffickers exploit. This imbalance in economic status and opportunity fuels global human trafficking. Addressing this necessitates policies and interventions that target the structural inequalities driving vulnerable populations towards exploitation, not giving more focus to victim rehabilitation after the damage is done. Investments in skill development, economic opportunity, social services, and conflict resolution in disadvantaged regions can mitigate the desperation that renders individuals, particularly women and children, vulnerable to traffickers.

In the context of political instability and inadequate law enforcement, Myanmar has emerged as a focal point for human trafficking, with scam operations proliferating in border regions such as Myawaddy. A notable instance is the case of Wang Xing, a 22-year-old Chinese actor, who was deceived into travelling to Thailand under the guise of a film opportunity. The "Star Homecoming" initiative, a grassroots-level intervention, identified approximately 1,800 Chinese nationals trafficked to Myanmar, with 93% being males aged 15 to 45. The majority of trafficking victims are driven by economic hardships, including indebtedness and

unemployment. According to the United Nations, hundreds of thousands of individuals have been trafficked into scam centres in Southeast Asia since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Only a small proportion of families were able to file missing person reports due to legal constraints surrounding trafficking, as Chinese legislation does not recognise men as potential trafficking victims (Liao et al., 22 Jan 2025). This legislative oversight has resulted in traffickers specifically targeting Chinese men. Exclusion based on gender, in this case, male, from trafficking victim categories has impeded effective intervention efforts. In this case, 93% of Chinese victims were male; there is a clear distinction with traditional trafficking narratives that predominantly focused on women and children, highlighting the necessity for gender-inclusive policies. There is a necessity for China to make legal reforms to broaden the definitions of human trafficking victims. This case study illustrates how trafficking thrives in policy gaps and underscores the urgent need for an immediate complaint mechanism to be formed for effective grassroots-level interventions to address systemic vulnerabilities.

Policy Innovations and Legal Frameworks

India's legal frameworks have implemented necessary modifications to address the evolving nature of cybercrime by targeting human and drug trafficking. Although these laws demonstrate the intent and capacity to address these issues, certain gaps in enforcement limit their efficacy. Under India's Bharatiya Nayaya Sanhita, which replaced the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Section 370 provides a comprehensive definition of trafficking, encompassing acts such as recruitment, transport, and exploitation through coercion, fraud, and abuse of power (ET Online, 2 Jul 2024). Addressing specific aspects of trafficking from the exploitation of trafficked victims to protecting the trading of minors for prostitution is covered under provisions such as Sections 370A, 372, and 373. Several other laws that specifically focus on the exploitation of minors and commercial sexual exploitation and are applicable to the exploitation of children and sexual offences are as follows: the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1986 (ITPA). Despite these many legal protections that are available to the public, there are many underreported cases due to societal stigma attached to it, mistrust towards officials, and insufficient awareness of legal mechanisms.

In India, some aspects of the tools used by traffickers, like recruitment through online platforms and the dissemination of illicit content, are currently addressed by the Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act). Cases where traffickers who had been collaborating with international stakeholders to illegally transport Indian youth from Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam to the Laos Special Economic Zone (SEZ) under the false pretence of employment opportunities in call centres were apprehended by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on 13 May, 2024 (ANI, 10 December 2024). As per the investigations, the trafficked individuals were coerced into engaging in cyber fraud activities, including "credit card fraud, investments in cryptocurrency using fraudulent applications, and honey trapping." Individuals were forced to participate in cyber fraud facilitated through trafficking in order to conceal the identities of the perpetrators and evade detection.

Once the victim is being rescued, measures that facilitate the process to gain legal aid are lacking in the absence of systemic victim assistance programs that could help in accessing legal proceedings, travel support, and more, according to the Trafficking in Persons Report (2024). As for the foreign victims, repatriation procedures in India are complex; this often results in prolonged periods spent in shelters before repatriation.

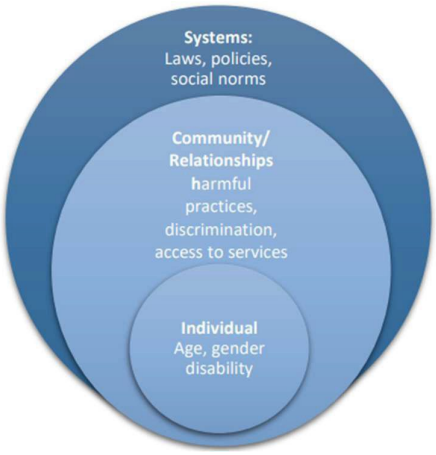
The advancement of technology has made the tracing of criminal activities increasingly challenging, necessitating the implementation of technological intervention strategies. This situation not only requires policy initiatives from India but also regional cooperation among South Asian and Southeast Asian nations. Such international cybercrime coordination provides a comprehensive approach to address the transnational nature of cybercrime in human trafficking and drug trafficking. Significant emphasis should be placed on enhancing cross-border digital forensics, advanced cryptocurrency flow tracking, and victim rehabilitation programs.

Rethinking Development Strategies

There are several anti-trafficking initiatives focused on catching traffickers and rescuing victims; a more nuanced approach must acknowledge how systemic inequalities shape individual experiences of trafficking. Interventions that are carried out do not address the fundamental economic or social factors that are contributing to trafficking. Instead, they result in re-traumatising survivors and disregard the systemic barriers they face. To effectively combat trafficking, strategies must transition from intervention to prevention.

Alternative models should strengthen an individual's economic and social status to ensure that they lead a sustainable livelihood; this addresses the root causes of vulnerability. This includes investing in education, secure internet space, access to affordable housing and healthcare, and targeted initiatives to reduce gender inequality. This approach will dismantle the power structure that sustains all kinds of trafficking. There are also oversimplified victim narratives in policy responses that reduce complex realities into victim and saviour dichotomies.

According to the Gender Policy Report (2023), current policies on human trafficking often prioritise intervention; they offer a fragmented approach that fails to address the systemic root causes of trafficking. To address this, we should focus on the following levels: individual, community, and systemic. The aim is to build a preventive measure to avoid creating environments that facilitate any kind of trafficking. Policies and community-level strategies focusing on this socio-ecological framework have the potential to address the complex web of factors contributing to this global issue.



Source: ICAT

The possibility of someone becoming a target of human trafficking is determined by age and gender. Unlike traditional perceptions that women and children are the primary targets, recent developments indicate that individuals of any gender and age may become victims of trafficking. In addition to the economic factors, cybercriminals exploit individuals lacking cybersecurity awareness, regardless of their educational background. In a society, discriminatory norms and restricted access to stable livelihoods render certain communities more vulnerable. Vulnerable populations, such as refugees in India, are easy targets for traffickers due to their precarious status. Such populations lack freedom of movement, asset

ownership, access to quality education, and limited employment opportunities. Leading a life from birth in refugee camps for generations with limited opportunities increases their desperation for a better life, making them susceptible to trafficking schemes. Refugees residing in India are not protected by any national law; India is neither a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol, leaving them legally unprotected. This leads to limited government intervention for the protection of refugees. A Legal vacuum of this kind creates opportunities for exploitation due to their lack of documentation and inability to seek legal recourse.

Conclusion

The nexus of human trafficking and conflict facilitated by technological development and socio-economic disparities is a complex phenomenon. Very little progress had been made in this regard considering the size of the issue, due to lack of political will and inadequate legal support. Effective interventions need to follow a globalised, multidimensional approach involving various stakeholders that make use of technological innovation, targeted preventive measures, and economic development strategies. By comprehending and addressing the systemic roots of vulnerability, more effective and humane approaches to disrupt these networks can be developed. Trafficking has transcended national borders. Crimes operating in a globalised ecosystem require equally globalised and multidimensional responses at the regional level through bilateral engagements. India's engagement with Laos must evolve beyond reactive rescue missions. Depending on the readiness of both parties, a formalised agreement on human trafficking and cybercrime, followed by active implementation, is essential to prevent Indian nationals from falling victim to trafficking syndicates. As stated by Mr. Jaishankar, India’s minister for external affairs, "Appreciate the ongoing cooperation of the Laos PDR government in rescue and relief for our citizens. But cooperation must translate into long-term solutions (Indian Express, 28 July 2024);" temporary measures are satisfactory in the short term, but now it is imperative for India and Laos to commit to a comprehensive anti-human trafficking strategy with a long-term goal.

All forms of trafficking are deeply intrinsic in global structures of inequality and exploitation. Addressing trafficking requires a paradigm shift that prioritises equity, intersectionality, and systemic change globally, along with a community-level approach. The case of trafficked Chinese men highlights the limitations of gendered narratives that dominate global anti-

trafficking policies and interventions. China's legal framework that failed to recognise men as victims of trafficking has not only hindered effective rescue and rehabilitation but also enabled traffickers to operate with impunity. Systemic failures at the government level occur when legal and policy approaches are overly narrow, do not account for the diversity of victims' experiences, and do not allow for the willingness to change the policies as need arises. In order to address these gaps, policies and implementation processes need to recognise all trafficking victims irrespective of gender, citizenship status, and other socially constructed norms. A case study of China's experience with human trafficking presents a valuable lesson for global anti-trafficking efforts, particularly for broadening the understanding of victimhood and addressing systemic policy gaps. In conclusion, it is vital that trafficking be addressed through a globalised and multidimensional framework that resolves the drivers of social and economic inequality, and that an enhanced understanding of victimhood could improve overall policymaking.

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Navigating Economic Diplomacy in Indo-Maldivian Relations

Ambika Subramaniam

Abstract

The electoral victory of President Mohamed Muizzu in Maldives marks a critical juncture in the nation's foreign policy, with drastic effects on its bilateral relations with India. This paper looks at the economic realignment of the Maldives under Muizzu's administration, shifting from a pro-India position to a more balanced approach that seems to favour closer ties with China and then back to a pro-India stance when required. The analysis starts with an overview of historical India-Maldives relations, stressing their deep-rooted connections in security, economic cooperation, and cultural ties. His election in September 2023, led to the swift withdrawal of Indian military personnel stationed in the Maldives-an action which resonated with nationalist sentiment against perceived foreign influence. It reflects a more general tendency within Maldivian politics: growing concerns of sovereignty and national security dictate an increasing extent of foreign policy decisions. Besides this, economic diplomacy is shown to play a crucial role in bilateral relationships. India has provided and continues to commit large financial assistance and infrastructural investment for the Maldives economy, which becomes a barricade for the debt- ridden island nation's economy. Still, engaging with China deeper, as is the case with Maldives through its joint developmental activities, has to balance the economic relationship not to over- rely on a single partner.

The following study further explores implications that Muizzu's foreign policy entails on India- Maldives relationships specifically in terms of economic partnerships. A natural consequence of the internationalisation strategy of the Maldives - it is diversifying relationships around itself, including closer co-operations with China through joint programmes, especially the Belt and Road Initiative, BRI - should affect India's role as its traditional ally. It concludes by examining the prospective trajectory of India-Maldives relations within these changes. Positive concerns prompt the necessity of adaptive strategies for both countries to face this changing geopolitical landscape.

Keywords: Indo-Maldivian Relations; Bilateral Relations; Economic Diplomacy; Trade Co-operations

Introduction

Indo Maldivian relationship is a classic of two countries in South Asia, with inseparable histories and shared destinies. The bilateral relation has been in place for a long time and has been supported by cultural proximity, shared economic interests, and cooperative strategic interests that have transformed the Maldives into an indispensable partner for India in the Indian Ocean. Aside from the bilateral aspect, the significance of this relationship can be seen influencing regional stability, maritime security, and larger geopolitical dynamics. India's policy in the Maldives has always placed the principles of neighborhood first and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) at their highest priority. This not only consolidated Indian influence on the Maldives' development path, but made India a reliable friend on the Maldives' development path. The Maldivian politics, however, have been anything but static. Alternation of governments every now and then has created swings in policy that have always been guided by internal political scripts and the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean.

The election of President Mohamed Muizzu in 2023 marks the latest phase in this evolving dynamic. With a campaign focused on asserting sovereignty and recalibrating foreign alliances, Muizzu's victory gestures a potential pivot in the Maldives' foreign policy trajectory. Recent political developments underscore the urgency of recalibrating economic diplomacy. President Mohamed Muizzu, elected in 2023 on a platform emphasizing national sovereignty and "India Out" rhetoric, has signaled a reorientation of Maldivian foreign policy. In his inaugural address and subsequent remarks, Muizzu explicitly stated that foreign troops, including Indian personnel, must be withdrawn to "protect the sovereignty of the Maldives" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Maldives, 2023). While this may be seen as symbolic positioning, it reflects broader concerns over external dependencies and shifts in the Maldives' strategic calculus.

Simultaneously, the Maldives' engagement with non-traditional partners like Turkey and the UAE has gained traction. Turkey has deepened its role in infrastructure development and defense cooperation, while the UAE has expanded its footprint in trade and renewable energy sectors. These multilateral relationships complicate the once-straightforward narrative of a tug-of-war between India and China and necessitate a more nuanced understanding of Male's foreign policy architecture.

In a time characterized by increasing competition for power in key regions, the Maldives is a miniature model of the wider competition between historic friends and ascending powers. Understanding the dynamic is not an intellectual nicety; it is essential to policymakers, strategists, and scholars struggling to interpret 21st-century geopolitics.

Historical Context of Indo-Maldivian Relations

Since the Maldives' independence from British colonial authority in 1965, a complex interaction of historical, cultural, and geopolitical variables has defined their relationship with India. Significant occurrences like India's participation during the 1988 coup attempt and continued economic cooperation have shaped this friendship over the years. However, this bilateral relationship now has new dynamics as a result of recent geopolitical changes, especially the expansion of Chinese power in the Indian Ocean.

Following the Maldives' independence on July 26, 1965, India was one of the first nations to acknowledge the country. On November 1st of that year, diplomatic relations were formally established, setting the foundation for a friendship that has withstood many hardships over the years. In terms of regional peace and security, the Maldives is an essential partner for India due to its advantageous location in the Indian Ocean, directly south of India. Signed in 1976, the Maritime Boundary Agreement was one of the most important accords between India and the Maldives. It reaffirmed respect for each other's sovereignty while defining territorial seas. This deal demonstrated India's dedication to preserving the Maldives' independence in addition to resolving any disagreements.

A pivotal moment in India-Maldives relations occurred during Operation Cactus in November 1988. This military operation was launched in response to an attempted coup by mercenaries supported by Tamil militants from Sri Lanka. The swift intervention of Indian forces successfully thwarted the coup and restored President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom to power. This event underscored India's role as a guarantor of stability in the region and solidified its position as a key ally for the Maldives. The operation received international endorsement and highlighted India's capability to project power in its immediate neighborhood. It also fostered a sense of security among Maldivians regarding their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Over the years, India has extended substantial financial assistance to the Maldives, contributing to various developmental projects. Notable among these is the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP), aimed at enhancing infrastructure through improved connectivity between Malé and surrounding islands. Such initiatives have not only bolstered economic ties but also reinforced India's image as a reliable partner committed to Maldives' development trajectory. India's aid has extended beyond infrastructure; it includes humanitarian assistance during crises such as the 2004 tsunami and more recent water shortages in Malé. In December 2018, during a state visit by Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, India announced a comprehensive financial assistance package worth approximately USD 1.4 billion. This package included USD 50 million as budgetary support, as well as funding for various infrastructure projects such as housing, health care, and education. The commitment to provide this level of assistance highlighted India's strategic interest in maintaining stability in the Maldives and ensuring that it remained aligned with Indian interests.These interventions have fostered goodwill and strengthened people-to-people connections between both nations.

In recent years, however, China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean has posed challenges to traditional India-Maldives relations. Under former President Abdulla Yameen, who held a pro-China stance, the Maldives engaged more deeply with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This engagement led to significant investments but also resulted in increased debt for the Maldivian government. The strategic partnership with China raised concerns in New Delhi about losing influence over its southern neighbor. Yameen's administration pursued various infrastructural projects funded by China, which some analysts viewed as an attempt to shift allegiance away from India. This shift created a perception of vulnerability within India regarding its strategic interests in the Indian Ocean region.

The election of Ibrahim Solih in 2018 marked a significant pivot back towards an 'India First' policy. Solih's administration sought to restore strategic partnerships with India while expelling nationalist rhetoric that had characterized Yameen's tenure. Solih emphasized cooperation with India on security issues and reaffirmed commitments to previous agreements, signaling a renewed focus on bilateral ties.

Solih’s government actively worked to mend relations with India through diplomatic engagements and joint projects aimed at enhancing security cooperation. This included defense collaborations such as joint military exercises and intelligence sharing.

Despite Solih's efforts to reinforce ties with India, political dynamics remain fluid. The recent election of President Mohamed Muizzu has introduced uncertainties into this relationship. Initially characterized by an 'India Out' campaign rhetoric aimed at reducing Indian military presence in the Maldives, Muizzu's administration has faced pressures to balance relations with both India and China. Muizzu's visit to China before engaging with Indian officials raised eyebrows in New Delhi but also highlighted his administration's attempt to navigate complex geopolitical realities.

In his meetings with Chinese officials, Muizzu emphasized the importance of mutual respect and sovereignty, stating, “We may be small, but that doesn’t give you the license to bully us.” These remarks were interpreted as a direct reference to India’s historical influence in the Maldives. The visit underscored Muizzu's intent to strengthen ties with China while navigating the delicate balance of regional geopolitics.

Following this visit, Muizzu met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on January 10, 2025, reinforcing the commitment to deepen bilateral cooperation. Both leaders expressed their intention to further solidify their partnership and explore avenues for collaboration in international and regional affairs. Nevertheless, high-level discussions between Muizzu and Indian leaders are crucial for mending ties and ensuring continued cooperation on economic fronts.

Policy Shifts under President Mohamed Muizzu

The Maldives under President Mohamed Muizzu has undergone significant shifts in its foreign policy, particularly regarding its relationship with India. This transformation is rooted in a complex interplay of domestic politics, economic realities, and regional dynamics. Initially propelled by a strong anti-India sentiment during his campaign, Muizzu's administration has moved towards a more pragmatic approach, reflecting the necessity to balance national interests with regional diplomacy.

Upon taking office in November 2023, Muizzu quickly acted on his campaign promises, which included the withdrawal of Indian military personnel stationed in the Maldives. These forces had been primarily involved in operating helicopters and a Dornier aircraft for search and rescue operations. This decision was interpreted as a clear indication of the new government’s intent to assert Maldivian sovereignty and reduce reliance on India.

Furthermore, Muizzu's administration sought to strengthen ties with other regional powers such as Turkey and China, raising concerns in New Delhi about the shifting allegiances of the Maldives.

The opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), which had previously criticized Muizzu's stance toward India, welcomed what they termed a "sudden recalibration" of the Maldives-India policy. However, they condemned earlier actions taken by Muizzu's administration that they believed had damaged the Maldives' foreign and economic outlook. The MDP called for a public apology regarding the "India Out" campaign; however, Muizzu rebuffed these calls, insisting that there had been no fundamental shift in his government's policy. Instead, he framed recent developments as a continuation of his commitment to maintaining strong relationships with any country that respects Maldivian sovereignty.

The economic realities facing the Maldives have played a crucial role in shaping Muizzu's foreign policy. The nation is grappling with significant economic challenges, including high debt levels and a need for infrastructure development. In this context, strengthening ties with China has become a priority for Muizzu's administration. Following his party's sweeping victory in parliamentary elections, which secured more than 70 seats in the 93-member assembly, there is an expectation that Muizzu will accelerate efforts to deepen strategic ties with Beijing and revive Chinese-funded infrastructure projects that had been stalled under the previous administration.

China established its presence in the Maldives over a decade ago under a pro-Beijing government that joined China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, this influence waned during the presidency of Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who prioritized relations with India and raised concerns about the Maldives'

growing debt to China. Analysts suggest that while Muizzu campaigned on an "India Out" platform, he may moderate his anti-India stance given the Maldives' reliance on India for essential goods such as food and healthcare. The patterns of China's international behavior also reflect a willingness to assert its influence in regions traditionally dominated by other powers, such as India in South Asia. By fostering closer ties with the Maldives, China aims to expand its presence in the Indian Ocean, which is strategically important for maritime trade routes. This expansion could lead to increased competition between India and China for influence over Maldivian resources and political alignment.

Despite initial moves to distance from India, recent developments indicate a cautious thawing of relations. For instance, New Delhi allowed limited exports of commodities like sugar, wheat, rice, and onions to the Maldives despite imposing curbs on these exports domestically. This gesture underscores India's continued commitment to supporting the Maldivian economy during challenging times.

Muizzu's administration must navigate domestic pressures while managing foreign relations effectively. His ability to balance ties with both India and China will be critical in ensuring that the Maldives can leverage its strategic position in the Indian Ocean without compromising its sovereignty or economic stability. The Maldivian government has also expressed interest in continuing cooperation with India on defense matters while asserting its independence regarding military affairs.

In November 2024, President Muizzu made a significant visit to India that highlighted this evolving relationship. During this visit, discussions centered around defense agreements and economic partnerships aimed at bolstering bilateral ties. The Maldivian government emphasized its commitment to safeguarding national interests while engaging with international partners.

The recent parliamentary elections have provided Muizzu's government with a mandate to pursue its foreign policy objectives more aggressively. With a supermajority in parliament, there is potential for significant changes in how the Maldives engages with global powers. This shift may include reviving stalled infrastructure projects funded by China while maintaining essential economic ties with India.

As part of this recalibration of foreign policy, Muizzu has also made it clear that he intends to prioritize domestic concerns alongside international partnerships. His administration has committed to addressing pressing issues such as housing insecurity and infrastructure deficits through strategic collaborations with both Indian and Chinese entities.

The shift towards China is not without risks; analysts warn that increased reliance on Chinese investments could exacerbate existing debt issues for the Maldives. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has already cautioned about high risks of debt distress for the island nation due to its previous borrowing patterns. Therefore, while pursuing closer ties with China may offer immediate economic benefits through infrastructure development, it could also lead to long-term financial challenges if not managed prudently.

In summary, President Mohamed Muizzu's foreign policy reflects a nuanced approach aimed at balancing domestic priorities with international relations. While initially characterized by an anti-India sentiment during his campaign, his administration is now navigating complex geopolitical realities that necessitate collaboration with multiple partners. The evolving relationship between the Maldives and India will remain critical as both nations seek to address their respective economic challenges while ensuring regional stability in an increasingly competitive geopolitical landscape.

As President Muizzu continues to assert his "Maldives First" policy framework, he faces the challenge of aligning domestic expectations with international realities. His ability to maintain constructive relationships with both India and China will be pivotal for the Maldives' future trajectory as it seeks sustainable development amid shifting global dynamics. The implications of these policy shifts will not only affect bilateral relations but also shape regional security considerations within the broader Indian Ocean context.

Economic Diplomacy and Bilateral Relationships

Economic diplomacy plays a crucial role in shaping bilateral relationships, particularly in the context of India and the Maldives. The evolving dynamics between these two nations reflect how economic cooperation can serve as a foundation for broader political and strategic ties. As both countries navigate their respective challenges, economic diplomacy has emerged as a key instrument for fostering mutual benefits, enhancing stability, and addressing pressing issues such as debt management and infrastructure development.

The relationship between India and the Maldives has historically been characterized by close economic ties, which have been further solidified through various agreements and initiatives. Since the early 2000s, India has provided extensive economic assistance to the Maldives, including financial aid, infrastructure development projects, and support for various sectors such as health, education, and tourism. This assistance has not only contributed to the Maldives' economic growth but has also reinforced India's position as a key partner in the region.

In recent years, the Maldives has faced significant economic challenges, exacerbated by rising debt levels and the impact of global economic shifts. The COVID-19 pandemic further strained the Maldivian economy, leading to a decline in tourism—a critical sector for the

country. In this context, India's role as a reliable partner has become increasingly important. The Indian government has extended substantial financial support to help stabilize the Maldivian economy, including a $400 million currency swap agreement and a commitment of INR 30 billion in budgetary support. These measures are aimed at addressing immediate financial challenges while laying the groundwork for long-term economic resilience.

The recent bilateral visit by President Mohamed Muizzu to India marked a significant step in resetting ties that had become strained under previous administrations. During this visit, both leaders announced a vision for a "Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership," which encompasses various aspects of cooperation aimed at enhancing bilateral trade and investment. This partnership reflects a recognition of the mutual benefits that can be derived from closer economic ties.

One of the key outcomes of this partnership is the initiation of discussions on a Bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The FTA aims to facilitate trade in goods and services between India and the Maldives, thereby harnessing the full economic potential of both countries. By reducing trade barriers and promoting investment opportunities, the FTA is expected to bolster economic interdependence and create new avenues for growth.

Additionally, both countries have agreed to operationalize trade transactions in local currencies. This move is designed to reduce dependency on foreign currencies and enhance trade linkages between India and the Maldives. By facilitating transactions in local currencies, both nations can mitigate exchange rate risks and streamline trade processes. This initiative aligns with broader efforts to enhance regional economic integration and promote sustainable development.

India's commitment to supporting infrastructure development in the Maldives remains a cornerstone of their bilateral relationship. Projects such as the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP) exemplify India's role in enhancing connectivity within the Maldives. The GMCP is designed to improve transportation links between Malé and neighboring islands, thereby facilitating economic activities and improving access to essential services for local communities. Such projects not only contribute to immediate infrastructure needs but also have long-term implications for economic growth and regional stability.

Moreover, India's involvement in sectors such as fisheries, tourism, and agriculture underscores its commitment to diversifying economic cooperation with the Maldives. Both countries have expressed interest in collaborating on fisheries management and tuna

processing—key components of the Maldivian economy. By leveraging India's expertise in these areas, the Maldives can enhance its capacity for sustainable resource management while creating new opportunities for trade.

The digital economy also presents significant opportunities for collaboration between India and the Maldives. The launch of initiatives such as the RuPay card in the Maldives aims to enhance payment systems for Indian tourists visiting the islands. This move not only simplifies transactions but also promotes greater tourism flows between both countries—an essential driver of economic growth for the Maldives.

In addition to these initiatives, India has played a pivotal role in supporting social development projects within the Maldives. The establishment of healthcare facilities such as the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Malé highlights India's commitment to improving health outcomes for Maldivians. Furthermore, educational scholarships offered by India have enabled numerous Maldivian students to pursue higher education opportunities in India, fostering people-to-people connections that strengthen bilateral ties.

Despite these positive developments, challenges remain that could impact economic diplomacy between India and the Maldives. The rise of Chinese influence in the region poses strategic concerns for India as it seeks to maintain its position as a primary partner for Maldivian development. Under previous administrations, particularly during President Abdulla Yameen's tenure, there was a notable shift towards China that resulted in increased debt levels for the Maldives due to extensive Chinese investments.

As President Muizzu navigates these complexities, his administration faces pressure to balance relations with both India and China while addressing domestic economic challenges. The need for sustainable debt management will be critical as Muizzu seeks to revitalize infrastructure projects that had stalled under previous leaderships due to concerns over excessive borrowing from China.

Strategic Diversification and Realignments

In the evolving landscape of geoeconomic competition, strategic diversification and realignments are imperative for the Maldives. Guided by Baldwin’s theory of economic statecraft and Okano-Heijmans’s economic diplomacy model, the nation’s current efforts reflect a dual imperative: reducing vulnerability from economic overdependence on tourism

and recalibrating its foreign alignments in light of shifting regional power dynamics. These initiatives, particularly under President Mohamed Muizzu, seek to position the Maldives as a resilient, multipolar, and forward-looking economy. Tourism has long been the economic mainstay of the Maldives, contributing directly over 20% to its GDP and indirectly up to 79% by 2022. However, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of this mono-sector dependence. In response, the Maldivian government has launched a comprehensive diversification strategy that targets sectors like fisheries, agriculture, renewable energy, digital technology, construction, and financial services.

A key strategic focus is the revitalization of the fisheries sector, which once anchored the Maldivian economy. The recent decline in skipjack tuna yields has prompted efforts to implement better regulatory frameworks and sustainable practices. Through initiatives in aquaculture and export-driven value addition, the government aims to improve food security and expand foreign exchange earnings. Agriculture, although historically marginal, is now being repositioned through modernized farming and agribusiness development. This not only reduces import dependency—an acute issue for a geographically fragmented nation—but also fosters rural employment. Renewable energy is another critical pillar. With its abundant sun, wind, and ocean resources, the Maldives is exploring a green energy transition. Investments in solar and ocean thermal energy systems will not only reduce fossil fuel imports but also align the country with global climate commitments and sustainable development goals.

In line with the Okano-Heijmans model emphasizing commercial diplomacy and digital competitiveness, the Maldivian government is promoting the digital economy through initiatives in e-commerce, IT services, and digital upskilling. These efforts are designed to attract investment and enable local businesses to thrive in the international marketplace. The financial sector is also undergoing transformation. To attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and promote financial inclusion, the government is streamlining banking regulations and fostering digital payment ecosystems. Economic diplomacy tools, such as currency swap agreements and fintech integration, echo India's RuPay rollout model and offer new vectors of influence. Importantly, the Maldives' diversification strategy is embedded within broader international cooperation frameworks. Partnerships with the Islamic Development Bank

(IsDB) through the Member Country Partnership Strategy (MCPS) support inclusive development and climate resilience, aligning with the Maldives' Strategic Action Plan (SAP) 2019–2023 and the National Resilience and Recovery Plan (NRR) 2020–2022.

Strategic realignments in foreign policy complement economic restructuring. While India remains a vital partner—particularly via flagship projects like the Greater Malé Connectivity Project (GMCP), backed by a $100 million grant and a $400 million LoC—Muizzu's administration is actively cultivating ties beyond the India–China binary.

Turkey and the UAE have emerged as influential partners. Turkey's engagement spans tourism, infrastructure, and soft power initiatives, while the UAE's role in logistics, energy, and investment is expanding rapidly. These multilateral ties not only diversify economic dependencies but also reflect the Maldives' broader aspiration to reposition itself as a non-aligned yet strategically agile actor in the Indo-Pacific. While earlier administrations leaned heavily towards either India or China, Muizzu's approach signals a calibrated pragmatism. Amid rising concerns over debt distress—with PPG debt ranging between 110–121% of GDP as per the IMF's 2024 Article IV report—the administration appears focused on balancing development finance with long-term sovereignty protection. Sustainable development is the unifying theme across all these sectors. Eco-tourism initiatives, climate-resilient infrastructure, and urban planning reforms are being rolled out to ensure that growth is inclusive, environmentally sound, and locally beneficial.

Looking ahead, the success of this diversification and realignment strategy will depend on the government's ability to harmonize stakeholder interests, ensure transparency, and integrate theoretical models of diplomacy and economic strategy into practical governance. If implemented effectively, the Maldives may not only mitigate current vulnerabilities but also emerge as a resilient, multipolar island economy in the Indian Ocean.

Implications for India

The implications of the evolving relationship between India and the Maldives are profound, especially in the context of strategic diversification and realignments. As the Maldives navigates its geopolitical landscape, the dynamics of its relationship with India will significantly impact both nations' security, economic stability, and regional influence. This analysis will delve into the key aspects of this relationship, focusing on economic cooperation, security concerns, and the broader implications for India as it seeks to maintain its influence in the Indian Ocean region.

Economic diplomacy has emerged as a cornerstone of India-Maldives relations. The Maldives faces significant economic challenges, including high debt levels and declining foreign exchange reserves. In this context, India's role as a major economic partner is crucial. In 2023, India became the largest trade partner for the Maldives, with bilateral trade reaching nearly $1 billion. This trade relationship is vital for both nations, as it not only supports Maldivian economic stability but also enhances India's influence in the region.

India's financial assistance to the Maldives has been substantial. Recent agreements include a currency swap agreement aimed at helping the Maldives manage its foreign exchange reserves and address

immediate financial challenges. Additionally, India has committed to significant investments in infrastructure projects such as the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP) and various community development initiatives. These investments are essential for improving connectivity within the Maldives and enhancing overall economic resilience. The introduction of initiatives such as operationalizing trade transactions in local currencies is another significant development. This move aims to reduce dependency on foreign currencies and streamline trade processes between both nations. By facilitating transactions in local currencies, India can help stabilize the Maldivian economy while strengthening bilateral ties.

The geopolitical landscape in which India and the Maldives operate is increasingly complex due to China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean region. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has led to increased investments in Maldivian infrastructure, raising concerns for India about losing strategic ground in its immediate neighborhood. The Muizzu administration's initial anti-India rhetoric was perceived as a tilt towards China, which could potentially undermine India's long-standing influence.

However, recent developments indicate that Muizzu recognizes the need for a balanced approach that accommodates both Indian and Chinese interests. The Maldives' reliance on Indian support—particularly in terms of finance and technical expertise—has become increasingly apparent as economic pressures mount. The need to restore ties with India is driven by pragmatic considerations rather than ideological ones. The security dimension of India-Maldives relations cannot be overlooked. The Maldives serves as a critical first line of defense against threats such as terrorism and piracy in the Indian Ocean. A strong partnership with the Maldives enhances India's ability to safeguard its maritime interests and counter potential threats from non-state actors operating in these waters.

Moreover, India's strategic presence in the Maldives acts as a counterbalance to China's growing footprint in the region. Strengthening defense cooperation through joint exercises, training programs, and intelligence sharing will be essential for ensuring regional stability. The recent commitment to refit and repair Maldivian Coast Guard vessels gifted by India exemplifies this focus on enhancing maritime security collaboration. It also has broader implications for regional stability in South Asia and beyond. As both nations work towards establishing a "Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership," they are not only addressing bilateral concerns but also contributing to collective security efforts within the Indian Ocean region.

India's proactive engagement with the Maldives serves to reinforce its Neighbourhood First policy while aligning with its broader strategy of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR). By fostering strong relationships with neighboring countries like the Maldives, India can enhance its influence and ensure that it remains a key player in regional geopolitics.

Despite these positive developments, challenges remain that could impact bilateral relations between India and the Maldives. The rise of Chinese influence continues to pose strategic concerns for New Delhi. As China expands its presence through infrastructure investments under initiatives like BRI, there is potential for increased competition between India and China for influence over Maldivian resources.

Additionally, domestic political dynamics within the Maldives could complicate relations with India. While Muizzu's government may seek to balance relations with both countries, shifts in public sentiment

or political leadership could lead to fluctuations in foreign policy priorities. Maintaining public support for strong relations with India will be essential for ensuring long-term stability.

Conclusion

In summary, the implications of India's evolving relationship with the Maldives are multifaceted, encompassing economic cooperation, security considerations, and regional stability dynamics. As both nations navigate their respective challenges amidst shifting geopolitical landscapes, their partnership will play a crucial role in shaping future developments within South Asia.

India's commitment to supporting Maldivian economic recovery through substantial financial aid and infrastructure investments underscores its strategic importance as a partner. Simultaneously, addressing security concerns related to terrorism and piracy will remain paramount for safeguarding India's maritime interests. Ultimately, fostering strong ties with the Maldives is essential for India's broader objectives within the Indian Ocean region. By navigating these complexities effectively—balancing engagement with China while reinforcing partnerships with neighboring countries—India can enhance its position as a key player committed to promoting stability and prosperity across South Asia.

As both nations continue to explore new avenues for collaboration across various sectors—ranging from trade agreements to infrastructure development—their ability to adapt to changing circumstances will ultimately determine their partnership's trajectory moving forward.

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Impact of Climate Change on Monsoonal Variability in Tamil Nadu and Kerala: A Case Study of Floods and Landslides

Kalyani S K and M Matheswaran

Abstract

Climate change has significantly impacted monsoonal variability in the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, leading to increased vulnerability to extreme weather events. This study investigates the effects of climate change on monsoon patterns, precipitation, and the occurrence of floods and landslides in these regions. The analysis of historical data and recent case studies, including the Chennai floods of 2015 and 2023 and the Wayanad landslides of 2024, reveals the complex interplay between climate change, anthropogenic factors, and regional vulnerabilities. Tamil Nadu, primarily dependent on the northeast monsoon, has experienced erratic rainfall patterns, with short-duration, high-intensity storms resulting in urban flooding. The 2015 Chennai floods exemplify the consequences of extreme rainfall combined with inadequate urban planning and drainage systems. Similarly, the 2023 floods triggered by Cyclone Michaung demonstrate the increasing intensity of tropical cyclones owing to rising sea surface temperatures. Kerala, relying on the southwest monsoon, has faced an increased frequency of rainfall-induced landslides, as evident in the 2024 Wayanad disaster. Anthropogenic activities, such as deforestation, unregulated urbanisation, and land-use changes, have exacerbated the impacts of extreme weather

Introduction

Monsoons in the Indian subcontinent, a multifaceted and dynamic climatic phenomenon, are vital for South Asia's agricultural, hydrological, and socioeconomic stability. In South India, Tamil Nadu and Kerala depend heavily on seasonal rainfall. Kerala primarily benefits from the southwest monsoon (June-September), whilst Tamil Nadu relies significantly on the northeast monsoon (October-December). Periodic rainfall plays an essential role in supporting agriculture, restoring water resources, enhancing biodiversity, and preserving the hydrological balance of the region. However, climate change has started to change the traditional rainfall patterns, revealing significant vulnerabilities in both states. This research

explores the impact of climate change on monsoon variability in Tamil Nadu and Kerala by analysing changes in precipitation trends, the frequency of extreme weather events, and the growing risks of natural disasters. It also examines two significant climate-driven disasters as case studies: the 2015 and 2023 Chennai floods and the 2024 Wayanad landslides. The study assessed disaster mitigation, policy interventions, and sustainable adaptation measures to enhance climate resilience in the two states. Addressing these changing climate challenges demands enhanced regional climate modelling, ecosystem-based adaptation approaches, and anticipatory disaster management practices to ensure long-term environmental and socioeconomic stability in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

India's mean temperature rose by approximately 0.7°C between 1901 and 2018, primarily due to greenhouse gas (GHG)-induced warming. This warming trend has been partially offset by anthropogenic aerosols and changes in land use and land cover (LULCC). Forecasts suggest that by the end of the century, India's average temperature could increase by about 4.4°C compared to the recent historical baseline. The global warming that has been experienced since the mid-20th century has resulted in pronounced alterations in the global climate and weather. Some of these changes include increased heat waves, droughts, extreme rainfall events, and intense cyclones. Further, changes in precipitation and wind patterns have also been observed, as well as the disruption of the global monsoon systems. The global warming that has been experienced since the mid-20th century has resulted in pronounced alterations in the global climate and weather. Some of these changes include increased heat waves, droughts, extreme rainfall events, and intense cyclones. Further, changes in precipitation and wind patterns have also been observed, as well as the disruption of the global monsoon systems. Ocean warming has also resulted in acidification, melting of ice, sea level rise, and drastic changes in marine and terrestrial ecosystems. These trends highlight the imperative need for improved knowledge of regional and global climate processes to develop targeted adaptation and mitigation measures. This paper examines how climate change and shifting monsoon patterns are affecting the lives and livelihoods of people in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, considering both past experiences and future challenges. These changes in monsoon patterns have significant implications for agriculture, water resource management, and disaster preparedness.

Changes in Rainfall and Regional Climate Dynamics

It is now clear that global warming, triggered primarily by increased GHG emissions and anthropogenic activities in recent decades, is leading to unpredictable changes in monsoon patterns, extreme rainfall, floods, landslides, heatwaves, and droughts. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), global warming will continue to increase in the near term (2021-2040) mainly due to increased cumulative CO2 emissions (IPCC-AR6, 2023). The 2024 Global Water Monitor Report from Australian National University (ANU) observed that 'climate extremes in 2024 wreaked havoc on the global water cycle leading to severe floods and crippling droughts (India Today, 7 Jan 2025). 2024 is the hottest year on record, overtaking 2023. Based on the report, an estimated 4 billion individuals from 111 countries have seen their hottest year so far, highlighting the universal effect of climate change. This increased heat has caused intensified sea surface temperature (SST) that strengthened tropical cyclones. In just 2024 alone, disasters caused by water took more than 8700 lives, affected about 40 million people, and caused economic damage worth over $ 500 billion. Highest monthly rainfall amounts were recorded 27 per cent more often than they did in the early 2000s, and daily rainfall rose by 52 per cent. On the other hand, record low rainfall was observed more often.

The Indian subcontinent's climate exhibited great variability over the last century due to natural and anthropogenic causes. Summer monsoon rainfall (June to September), vital for India's agricultural economy, fell by about 6% from 1951 to 2015, particularly in the Indo-Gangetic Plains and Western Ghats. Observations and climate models indicate that anthropogenic aerosol forcing over the Northern Hemisphere has largely counteracted the anticipated increase in precipitation due to GHG-induced warming, leading to the observed decrease. Since the mid-20th century, India's regional climate has experienced rising temperatures, reduced monsoon precipitation, frequent and intense extreme weather events, heightened droughts, rising sea levels, and intensified cyclonic activity. Since the Southwest Monsoon covers most of the country, it has been the focus of the majority of research studies. However, for Tamil Nadu it is the Northeast monsoon that is of more importance, although research on the Northeast monsoon is far less and scant from a climate change perspective. This is now beginning to change given the significant variations observed over the last decade and a half.

The monsoon system over South India is predominantly tending to higher intensity and shorter duration precipitation events mainly because of global warming. Research has indicated large-scale changes in the characteristics of the monsoon rainfall. Singh et al. (2014) indicate statistically significant enhancements in the variability of daily precipitation, number of dry spells, and intensity of wet spells between 1951-2011, concurrent with heavy downpours during brief spells. The changes are confirmed by enhanced convective available potential energy, low-level convergence of moisture, and changes in large-scale atmospheric circulation (Singh et al., 2014). While the intensity of wet periods has increased, that of dry periods has decreased (Singh et al., 2014), indicating a more spasmodic and localized trend of precipitation. Greater climate change has caused even more spasmodic and intense monsoons, with more frequent but lesser rainfall. This trend can be seen in the higher rate of extreme weather conditions witnessed over India in 235 out of the 273 days of the first nine months of 2023. The count has gone up to 255 days of extreme weather against 274 days in the first nine months of 2024 in India. This has caused 2716 fatalities and significant damage/loss to assets and properties. Additional climate records have been broken. January 2024 was the driest January since 1901. February 2024 recorded the second-highest minimum temperature in 123 years. July, August, and September recorded the highest minimum temperatures. East and northeast India experienced the 12th driest July in 123 years. Warm nights were 4.5 degrees to 6.4 degrees Celsius higher than usual, affecting human health considerably. Rao et al. (2020) predict increased intensity and frequency of precipitation extremes in the majority of South peninsular India during the northeast monsoon period under future climatic conditions.

The southern Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala have faced a decade and a half of extreme weather fluctuations, marked by intense rainfall and flooding alternating with severe droughts. The years 2015 and 2023 stand out as particularly significant, highlighting the escalating impacts of climate change and monsoon variability in the region. In 2015, Tamil Nadu experienced devastating floods, especially in Chennai, resulting in a significant loss of life and property (World Weather Attribution, December 2015). Similarly, Kerala faced its worst floods in nearly a century in 2018, underscoring the vulnerability of these states to extreme weather events (World Weather Attribution 2018).

The northeast monsoon, which is crucial for Tamil Nadu, has been particularly unpredictable, contributing to both floods and droughts (Laasya Shekar, 2024). In Kerala, climate change has been linked to more intense monsoon downpours, such as those seen in recent years (Tandon, Ayesha and Chandrashekar, Aruna., 2024). The shift towards more intense rainfall

events in shorter periods increases the risk of floods and landslides while potentially reducing the overall effectiveness of rainfall for agriculture due to increased runoff (Singh et al., 2014). Understanding and adapting to these changing monsoon characteristics is crucial for mitigating the impacts of climate change in South India.

Although climate change is prevalent on a global scale, its impacts are not uniform across the planet. For example, temperatures in the Arctic are increasing at much higher rates compared to the global average, while sea level rise displays high spatial variability. Likewise, climate change at the regional scale, for example, over South Asia, is controlled by specific physical and meteorological processes. Despite these regional differences, it is a challenge to comprehend them due to sparse observational data and knowledge deficits regarding region-specific climate processes. However, understanding current and future regional climate changes is essential for risk mitigation, disaster planning, and developing effective, locally applicable adaptation plans. Policymakers and stakeholders need reliable and accurate regional climate models and data to manage the socioeconomic and environmental issues caused by climate variability and protect vulnerable people and ecosystems (Burkett et al., 2014).

Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu, the southernmost part of the Indian subcontinent, has a varied landscape that is conventionally divided into five broad physical divisions: the Kurinji (hilly region), Mullai (forest region), Marudham (agricultural plains), Neidhal (coastal region), and Palai (desert region). Each division is marked by distinctive geographical features and distinct climatic conditions, which are responsible for the state's high biodiversity. This natural richness is protected by a system of five National Parks, seventeen Wildlife Sanctuaries, and three Biosphere Reserves.

The state receives an average annual rainfall of approximately 997 mm, which is notably lower than the national average of 1,138.8 mm and accounts for only 2.5% of India’s total water resources (IMD Rainfall Report, MoES., 2022). Tamil Nadu has shown impressive economic growth and considerable human development improvements in recent times. The state is the most urbanised state in India, with 48.45% of its population living in urban areas. Yet, rapid urbanisation comes with considerable environmental problems. Climate change will enhance the frequency and intensity of natural hazards and hence increase the risk of climate-related disasters in all Indian states. Though there has been progress in community

awareness, Tamil Nadu remains highly sensitive and vulnerable to climate change impacts due to the lack of integrated regional climate models and vulnerability studies.

Tamil Nadu depends heavily on monsoon rainfall to replenish its water supplies; when the monsoon fails, severe water shortages and droughts frequently occur. The northeast monsoon supplied 48% and the southwest monsoon contributed 35% of the state's average annual rainfall of about 898 mm between 1989 and 2018. However, in recent decades, there have been instances of exceptionally heavy rainfall resulting in excess precipitation. Temperatures in Tamil Nadu typically range from 18°C during winter to 45°C in summer (Tamil Nadu Climate Change Mission Document, n.d.).

Despite economic growth and urbanisation, Tamil Nadu faces significant environmental challenges. Tamil Nadu, compared to all the states in India, is most susceptible to extreme weather conditions such as cyclones and frequent droughts. Predictions for future climate show increased possibility of extreme temperature events with temperatures projected to increase by 3.30°C during the day and 3.55°C at night by the turn of the century. These projections also suggest a 3.24% decrease in annual rainfall, although extreme rainfall events are expected to intensify. The probability of short-duration, high-intensity rainfall events, such as 1-day rainfall, is projected to surpass longer-duration events, such as 5-day rainfall. This indicates that shorter but more severe storms will increase the risk of flash floods and storm-related disasters by the 2080s (Tamil Nadu Climate Change Mission Document, n.d.). Climate change is expected to heighten the occurrence of natural hazards and raise the risk of climate-related disasters. Over the last few decades, heavy rainfall has caused catastrophic flooding and over precipitation. For example, in the 2015 Chennai floods, a day experienced 500 mm of rainfall, which caused extensive damage and economic loss of over $3 billion (van Oldenborgh et al., 2017). These trends call for the imperative need for successful climate adaptation and mitigation measures to safeguard the state's population and infrastructure.

Case Study 1: Chennai Floods (2015 & 2023)

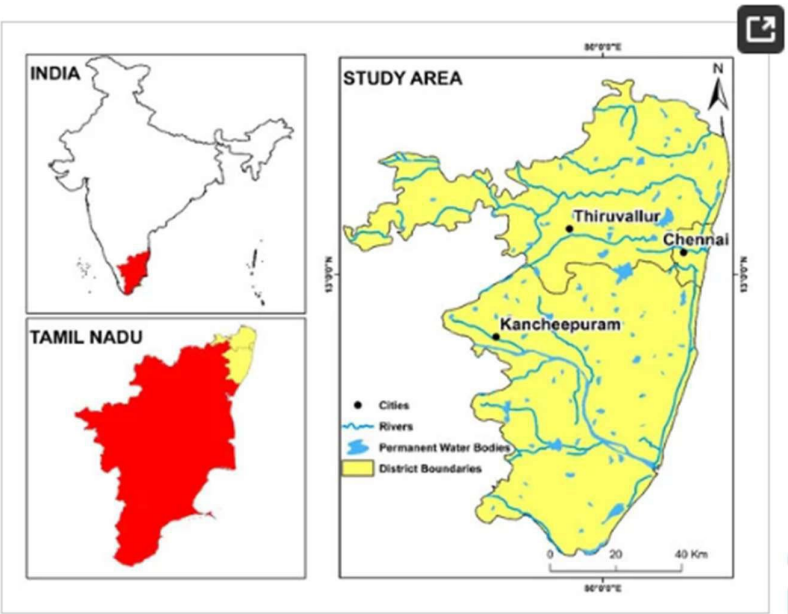


Figure 1: Map of Chennai, Kanchipuram, and Tiruvallur Districts of Tamil Nadu, India

Chennai, the capital city of Tamil Nadu, is the fourth largest metropolis in India and one of the fastest-growing urban centres. Situated on the east coast at 13°N, 80°E, the city faces the Bay of Bengal, which makes it naturally vulnerable to tropical cyclones. The city's topography is mostly flat, with only a few isolated hillocks to the southwest near St. Thomas Mount, Pallavaram, and Tambaram. The average elevation of the city is approximately 6.7 meters (20 feet). The city experiences minimal seasonal temperature variation. The weather stays humid and hot for most of the year. Known locally as Kathiri Veyyil, the hottest months are late May and early June, when temperatures can reach 38–42°C (100–107°F). December through February is the coolest time of year, with minimum temperatures typically averaging between 19 and 20°C (66 and 68°F) (Sundarmoorthy et al., n.d.). Chennai receives monsoon rains between October and January when the cooler dry NE monsoon winds from the Himalayas and Indo-Gangetic Plain draw water vapour from the Bay of Bengal and then pour it over India (mainly in Tamil Nadu and northeast India) and parts of Sri Lanka (Alam et al., 2003).

The city, prone to inundation, has been the subject of numerous studies examining its flood vulnerability. Research conducted in 2007, which evaluated flood risk exposure and created flood risk maps, revealed that flooding is a common occurrence in the metropolis. The investigation documented 26 flood events between 1943 and 2006, noting a significant increase in their frequency from the 1970s onwards. Nevertheless, before linking this increase directly to climate change, the study highlighted that meteorological data spanning back to 1813 showed no apparent rise in the city's yearly rainfall. Notably, the floods of 1996 and 2005 were primarily triggered by extreme precipitation events, with anthropogenic factors further intensifying the impact of flooding.

Chennai Floods 2015: Impact of Extreme Rainfall and Reservoir Dynamics

Over the past few years, the city of Chennai and its adjacent districts, Kancheepuram and Tiruvallur, have been subjected to substantial inundations. These events have shed light on the intricate relationships among climate patterns, water-related processes, and urban adaptability. Notably, the flooding incidents in 2015 and 2023 have underscored the area's susceptibility to severe weather events. The 2015 floods were associated with the 2014–16 El Niño event, which contributed to unusually heavy rainfall during the northeast monsoon in November and December (Akilan et al., 2017). Chennai received record rainfall, with over 494 mm on December 1, 2015, causing widespread flooding and significant damages. The floods resulted in more than 500 deaths, displaced over 1.8 million people, and caused extensive economic losses estimated between ₹200 billion and ₹1 trillion (van Oldenborg, G.J et al. 2016). The area's water management capabilities are further influenced by its intricate system of water bodies, including Chembarambakkam and Poondi reservoirs, which play a crucial role in handling excess rainfall and water inflow. Urban development has substantially transformed the physical landscapes of Chennai, Kancheepuram, and neighbouring cities, thereby intensifying the difficulties faced by these urban centres.

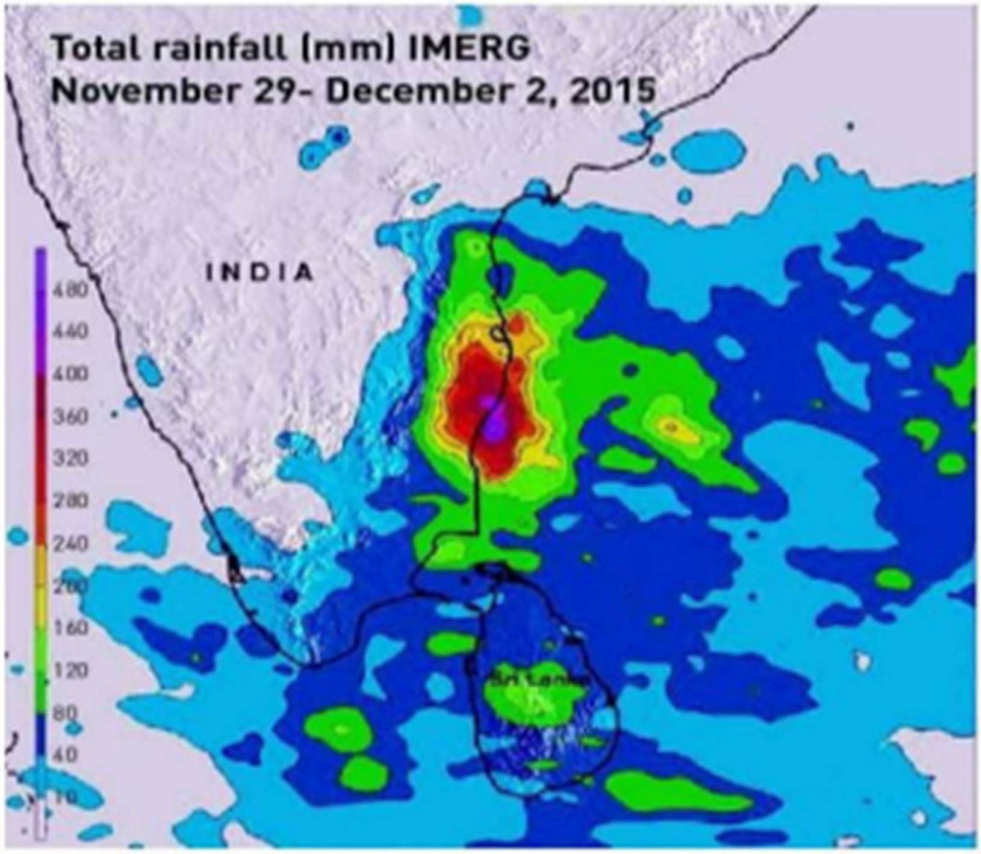


Figure 2: Total rainfall between November 29 and December 2, 2015, over Chennai and its neighbourhood, measured by NASA's GPM satellites
Source: Interdisciplinary Centre for Water Research (ICWaR), IISC, Bangalore

The 2015 monsoon period coincided with an exceptionally robust El Niño, unprecedented global surface warmth, and heightened Indian Ocean temperatures. This El Niño episode, ranked among the most potent on record, began to develop in 2014. El Niño phenomena are known to influence the Northeast Monsoon, often leading to a modest amplification of its strength (Zubair & Ropelewski, 2006). A plausible hypothesis posits that the strong El Niño phenomenon contributed to a robust easterly flow during November-December 2015, which likely facilitated increased moisture transport to Chennai's eastern coast, resulting in intensified rainfall.

Another potential contributing factor could be the warming of the Bay of Bengal (BoB), which facilitated the transport of substantial moisture from the BoB and resulted in heavy precipitation over the southeast coast of India (Narasimhan et al., 2016). The Bay of Bengal exhibited sea surface temperatures (SSTs) that, whilst exceeding the observed trend, were lower than other Indian Ocean areas during the 2015 rainy season. In the past 35 years, the

northern and western Bay of Bengal have demonstrated minimal SST increases compared to global warming trends. This phenomenon is thought to be caused by increased air pollution in the region, particularly the 'brown cloud' that hinders solar radiation. This counteracts the widespread warming induced by greenhouse gases, especially in pre-monsoon maximum temperature, a process termed the 'aerosol effect'. Although the Bay of Bengal generally had cooler temperatures than other Indian Ocean regions, a localised warm water area was identified just off Chennai's coast on 1 December (Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society Vol. 97, No. 12 December 2016). The 2015 floods in Chennai and the surrounding Tamil Nadu areas underscored the importance of developing a scientific understanding of urban flooding to improve engineering, administrative, and societal resilience (Narasimhan et al., 2016).

Chennai and Southern Tamilnadu Floods 2023: Cyclone Michaung and Urban Vulnerabilities

In December 2023, Chennai witnessed a disastrous urban flooding disaster triggered by the intense Cyclonic Storm Michaung. This cyclonic system was a moderate tropical cyclone that formed in the Bay of Bengal during the 2023 North Indian Ocean cyclone season. The storm's genesis can be traced to a low-pressure system in the Gulf of Thailand, which subsequently intensified into a deep depression upon entering the Bay of Bengal on 2 December. As the system continued to gain strength, it was designated Michaung, becoming the ninth depression and sixth storm of the season.The cyclone moved in a north-westward path, peaking at its landfall close to Bapatla, Andhra Pradesh, on 5 December with sustained winds of 110 km/h (70 mph). This powerful meteorological event caused extensive precipitation in northeastern Tamil Nadu, with Chennai being the worst-hit by the cyclone's rain (Dev L. K & Saravanan, 2024).

Between December 3rd and 4th, the city experienced unprecedented rainfall, with the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) recording nearly 500 mm of precipitation in Nungambakkam and Meenambakkam within 24 hours. Chennai's normal annual rainfall was surpassed by the actual rainfall in some northern regions, which topped 600mm. Widespread flooding resulted from inadequate drainage systems and an already saturated area from earlier rainfall. Chennai's metropolitan infrastructure, such as its stormwater management and drainage systems, was overloaded, underscoring the necessity for stronger flood prevention measures.

On December 17 and 18, 2023, southern Tamil Nadu, especially the districts of Tirunelveli

and Thoothukudi, faced extreme weather events marked by unprecedented rainfall and severe flooding (Sphere India, 19 Dec 2023). The downpour was extraordinary, with Kayalpattinam in Thoothukudi district receiving 94.6 cm (or 950 mm, according to some reports) within just 24 hours—nearly matching the district's average annual rainfall. Similarly, Tiruchendur recorded 679 mm, while Tirunelveli saw 363.6 mm of rainfall in a single day, which was an astonishing 5094 per cent higher than the usual rainfall for that day (New Indian Express, 29 December 2023).

Major rivers like the Thamirabarani overflowed as a result of the heavy rains, and low-lying areas were submerged. Many cities and villages were impacted by flooding, which seriously disrupted infrastructure and daily life. A slow-moving, low-altitude upper air circulation system over Sri Lanka was the main contributor to the heavy rainfall. Intense rainfall resulted from this system's enhanced moisture convergence over southern Tamil Nadu. This is not typically associated with such intense rainfall. This unpredictability highlights the changing nature of weather patterns owing to climate change. It is also linked to an active northeast monsoon fuelled by El Niño conditions (Laasya Shekar, 10 January 2024).

The Role of Climatic Events in Chennai's Flood Risk

Extremely heavy precipitation was the primary cause of flooding in 2015 and 2023. Stations that received higher amounts of rainfall were located near water bodies, such as lakes and rivers, suddenly causing tanks to fill with surplus floodwater (Radhakrishnan et al., 2024).

During the 2015 flood event, intense rainfall associated with the northeast monsoon (NEM) occurred in three distinct spells (Narasimhan et al. 2016). The heaviest rainfall on 9 November 2015 led to significant inflows into reservoirs, including Poondi Lake, by 12 November. However, the release of floodwaters from Poondi and Chembarambakkam lakes was delayed until 17 November 2015. Rainfall from 9 to 10 November exceeded 500 mm, filling the reservoirs and causing flooding in both urban and agricultural areas (National Disaster Management Authority, n.d.). As the reservoirs reached their limits, surplus water was discharged. Additional rainfall and reservoir releases on 1–2 December worsened flooding, particularly due to the third spell of intense rainfall, which triggered sudden floodwater releases.

In contrast, the 2023 flood event in Chennai was caused by Cyclone Michaung, which brought heavy rainfall that rapidly filled reservoirs, leading to large floodwater discharges. The Poondi Reservoir, influenced by the cyclone's precipitation, contributed significantly to

the flooding on 4 December 2023. The sustained rainfall and excess water from the reservoirs overwhelmed the drainage systems, causing prolonged water stagnation in urban areas. The cyclone's impact emphasized the connection between meteorological events and hydrological outcomes, exacerbating the flooding and resulting in severe inundation (Radhakrishnan et al., 2024).

The analysis of Chennai's 2015 and 2023 floods underscores the critical role of cyclones, climate change, and extreme precipitation in shaping flood risk maps. These factors, in conjunction with urban encroachments and inadequate drainage infrastructure, significantly exacerbate flood risk in urban areas, revealing the complex interplay that influences flood scenarios. In 2015, the flood event characterised by prolonged monsoonal rains resulted in exceptional precipitation that exceeded 2000 mm at most stations. During this period, the Poondi and Chembarambakkam reservoirs were instrumental in managing and discharging floodwaters, surpassing 35,000 cu. Secs. Conversely, the 2023 flood event precipitated by Cyclone Michaung followed a distinct trajectory. The discharge of floodwaters during intense rainfall exceeded 15,000 cusecs owing to the cyclone, which caused reservoirs to reach their maximum capacity. This altered dynamic transformed the flooding scenario into a more severe condition characterised by extensive inundation and prolonged water stagnation.

The comparison between the events of 2015 and 2023 elucidates the interplay of several climatic factors, with El Niño contributing to the 2015 flood and Cyclone Michaung playing a decisive role in 2023. The storm surge associated with Cyclone Michaung introduced additional complexity to the flood scenario, emphasising the importance of integrating meteorological data into flood management strategies. This meteorological phenomenon exemplifies the intricacies of tropical cyclone development, underscoring the dynamic nature of atmospheric systems and their potential impacts on coastal regions. Timely monitoring and analysis conducted by meteorological agencies play a crucial role in informing and preparing communities for the evolving conditions associated with such weather events.

Kerala

Kerala, located on India's southwestern coast, is nestled between the Arabian Sea to the west and the Western Ghats Mountain range to the east. It covers approximately 1.18% of India's total land area (Nair et al., 2014). Kerala experiences approximately 2,000 mm of seasonal rainfall with unique rainfall patterns due to the geographical features of the western ghats (Premlet, 2019). The state is geographically divided into three distinct climatic regions: the eastern highlands, characterised by rugged and cool mountainous terrain; the central midlands, featuring gently rolling hills; and the western lowlands, which consist of coastal plains. This diverse topography makes Kerala particularly susceptible to the impacts of climate change. Rainfall patterns across these regions vary significantly both spatially and temporally, with fluctuations observed on monthly and seasonal scales.

The southwestern state of Kerala plays a pivotal role in India's climatic patterns, earning it the moniker "Gateway of Summer Monsoon". Situated along the country's southwestern coastline, Kerala serves as the initial point of contact for moisture-laden southwest monsoon winds that traverse the Indian Ocean. The state's unique geographical configuration creates optimal conditions for monsoon inception. Upon encountering the Western Ghats, these winds undergo ascension, cooling, and condensation, culminating in copious rainfall over Kerala. This meteorological event signified the formal commencement of the monsoon season in India. Consequently, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) vigilantly observes Kerala's atmospheric conditions to officially announce the arrival of the monsoon.

Kerala's function as the monsoon gateway is not merely symbolic but profoundly practical. The state's diverse topography, comprising the eastern highlands, central midlands, and western lowlands, engenders a microclimate that amplifies the effects of monsoons, rendering it a natural indicator of monsoon activity. Historically, Kerala has been a focal point for monsoon studies because of its consistent and predictable patterns, and its traditional agricultural practices, such as paddy cultivation, are intricately linked to the monsoon cycle. In recent years, Kerala's significance as the monsoon gateway has become increasingly pronounced owing to the impacts of climate change. Irregularities in monsoon onset and intensity, such as delayed arrivals or excessive precipitation, are frequently first observed in Kerala, establishing it as a barometer for studying climate variability. Events such as the devastating floods of 2018 and 2019 have highlighted the state's vulnerability to extreme monsoon events. Man-made alterations to geographical and topographical features can significantly impact atmospheric circulation at different altitudes. This could be a

contributing factor to the recent uncertainties in monsoon variability and rainfall distribution over Kerala.

Landslides Vulnerability due to Climate Change Impact

Climate change has largely contributed to landslides frequency and intensity throughout monsoons in Kerala, including Wayanad. Evidence comes through some of the factors: heavy rainfalls have grown in frequency and cause many landslides. For example, between 1-19 August 2018, Kerala received 758.6 mm rainfall, 164% above average, causing 5191 landslides and 483 deaths (Tapas R Martha et al., 2019). Heavy rainfall also led to 13 of Kerala's 14 districts being affected by flooding. Likewise, during August 2019, unusual heavy monsoon rain precipitated landslips in Kavalappara and Puthumala with 400% of the normal average rainfall (Wadhawan et al., 2020). Seasonal rainfall patterns have been noticed to change, thus enhancing the chances of landslides.

A study of Kerala's rainfall extremes from 1954 to 2003 showed increasing trends in winter and autumn extreme rainfall, indicating a higher probability of flooding during these seasons. Conversely, extreme spring rainfall showed decreasing trends, suggesting an increased likelihood of water scarcity in the pre-monsoon period and a delayed monsoon onset (Pal & Al-Tabbaa, 2009).It's interesting to note that although climate change has increased the likelihood of landslides, recent disasters may not be primarily caused by short-term changes in land use (a study of Kerala's 2018 landslides revealed that 90% of landslide locations showed no noticeable change in major land use and land cover in the period 2010-2018 (Hao et al., 2022). Climate change has had a significant impact on the occurrence of landslides in Kerala, particularly through altered rainfall patterns, but other factors, such as geological settings, anthropogenic activities, and long-term land use changes, also play significant roles in landslide susceptibility (Ramasamy et al., 2020; Wadhawan et al., 2020).

Case Study 2 - Wayanad Landslides (2024)

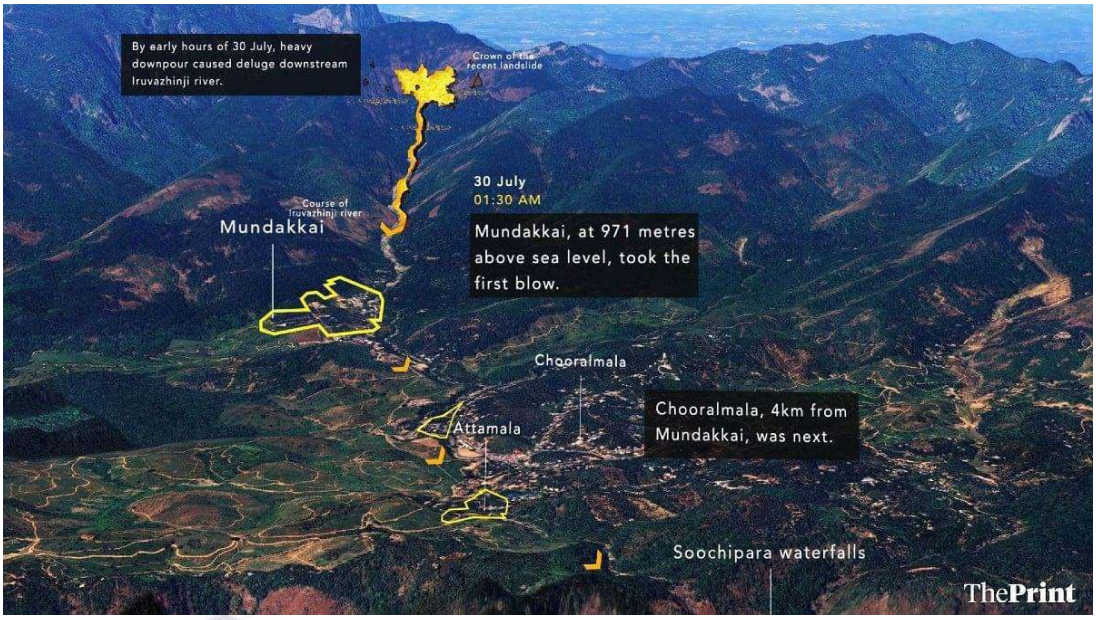


Figure 3: Visual representation of the devastating landslides in Wayanad, Kerala on July 30. The image highlights the impact of heavy rainfall along the Iruvazhinji River, affecting Mundakkai, Chooralmala, and surrounding regions

Source: The Print.

In the early hours of 30 July 2024, a series of catastrophic landslides occurred in the villages of Mundakkai and Chooralmala in Kerala's Wayanad district, precipitated by prolonged and intense precipitation. Located on the eastern flanks of the Vellarimala Hills and near a significant tributary of the Chaliyar River, these villages are situated in a geographically vulnerable area, which has played a crucial role in the disaster. The first landslide occurred in Mundakkai in the early hours, with three more following within three hours, impacting nearby areas, such as Chooralmala and Attamala. The consecutive nature of these incidents not only caused widespread devastation but also led to the destruction of the main bridge linking the affected area to the nearest town, hampering rescue and relief efforts. The World Weather Attribution (WWA) service's analysis revealed that the rainfall affecting Wayanad on 30 July was the third most intense in the region's history, even exceeding the heavy precipitation that caused the Kerala floods in 2018 (World Weather Attribution, 1 Aug 2024). In the two weeks preceding the event, the Kasargod, Kannur, Wayanad, Calicut, and Malappuram districts experienced persistent heavy precipitation due to the influence of an

active monsoon offshore trough over the Konkan region. This prolonged rainfall resulted in extensive soil saturation across these areas. The following Monday, the development of a deep mesoscale cloud system over the Arabian Sea led to intense precipitation across North Kerala, particularly affecting the districts of Wayanad, Calicut, Malappuram, and Kannur. This extreme rainfall is believed to have been a significant factor triggering landslides in the region (India Today, 2024). Notably, similar large-scale synoptic weather patterns were observed during extreme rainfall events that caused the devastating Kerala floods in 2018 (Kumar et al., 2020).

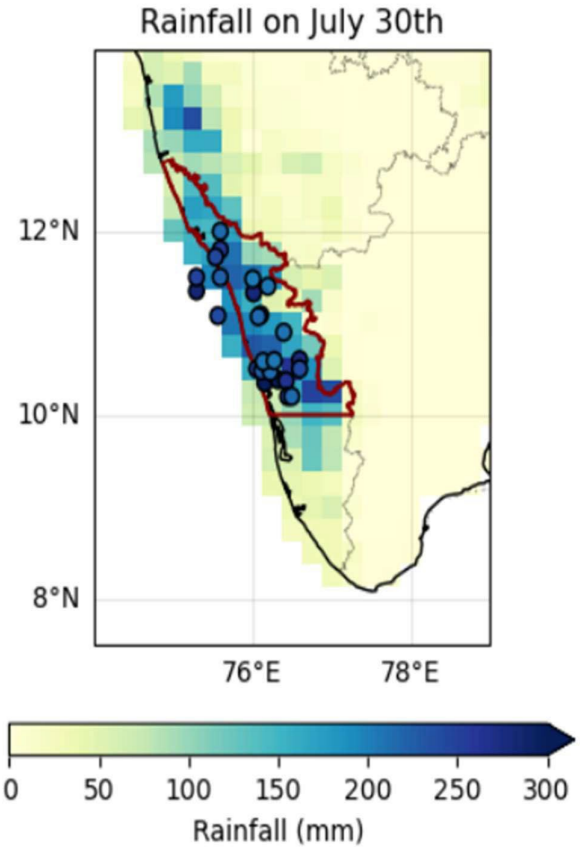


Figure 4: Rainfall on the 30th of August 2024 in IMD.

Source: National Weather Forecasting Centre, IMD, Ministry of Earth Sciences

Between 2015 and 2022, Kerala accounted for nearly 59% of the landslides recorded across India (Ramasamy et al., 2020). Among the state's districts, Wayanad is identified as one of the most vulnerable to this natural hazard (Sharma et al., 2024). The district's mountainous

topography, characterised by steep slopes and high elevations in conjunction with prolonged heavy precipitation and extensive land-use modifications, renders it highly susceptible to landslides (Arumugam et al., 2023). Kerala experienced recurrent landslide disasters, particularly in 2018, 2019, and 2020, resulting in widespread destruction, loss of life, and severe economic repercussions (Wadhawan et al., 2020). The increasing frequency and intensity of landslides underscore the urgent necessity for enhanced disaster preparedness, early warning systems, and sustainable land-use policies. The region's fragile ecology, further compromised by deforestation, unregulated construction, and infrastructure expansion, exacerbates the risks associated with extreme weather events.

Landslides are influenced by a variety of geophysical and anthropogenic factors. Slope angles, soil and rock composition, vegetation cover, drainage patterns, and land-use changes all contribute to the susceptibility of a region to landslides (Jones et al., 2021). Among these, heavy rainfall remains the most prevalent trigger, rapidly increasing soil saturation and reducing slope stability (Ajmal & Saud, 2021).

Steep gradients and weak geological formations render certain regions vulnerable to landslides, as unstable rock and soil strata succumb to water infiltration. Vegetation is instrumental in slope stabilisation, reinforcing soil structure, and mitigating excess moisture. However, deforestation and land-use modifications driven by urban expansion, agriculture, and infrastructure development heighten landslide risks. Anthropogenic activities, including road construction, quarrying, and large-scale projects, disrupt the natural slope equilibrium, elevating the likelihood of slope failure. In areas such as Wayanad, which is characterised by heavy monsoon precipitation, unplanned development compounds this risk.

Land Use and Land Cover (LULC) changes influence landslide susceptibility by altering slope stability and soil structure. LULC is a crucial conditioning factor in landslide susceptibility models. It encompasses land utilisation (urbanisation, agriculture, forestry, etc.) and physical characteristics of the Earth's surface (vegetation, water bodies, barren land, etc.). LULC modifications can mitigate or exacerbate landslide risks depending on their impact on the natural equilibrium of a terrain.

LULC Influence on Landslide Events in Wayanad

Empirical data indicate that 58% of landslides in Wayanad occurred in densely vegetated regions, suggesting that natural terrain and hydrological factors contribute significantly to slope instability. The remaining 42% were associated with modified landscapes—25% in forest plantations and built-up areas—highlighting the role of anthropogenic land-use

changes in exacerbating landslide risk. The 2018 Wayanad landslides were attributed to infrastructural expansion and stone quarrying, resulting in slope destabilisation. In 2019, unsustainable rubber plantation practices, particularly on steep slopes of up to 30°, were identified as a major factor. The extensive use of heavy earth moving equipment to dig rain pits in these plantations created artificial depressions that, when inundated by monsoon rainfall, triggered slope failure. Inadequate water drainage infrastructure and unregulated residential expansion also aggravated the situation (Wadhawan et al., 2020).

Deforestation has significantly altered the ecological stability of Wayanad. Between 1950 and 2018, the district saw a 62% reduction in natural forest cover. Concurrently, commercial tea plantations expanded by 1800%, replacing resilient forested landscapes with monocultures that lack deep root systems to anchor soil and prevent erosion. The transition from native forests to plantations diminishes the ability of slopes to withstand heavy rainfall and alters the region's hydrological balance. By 2012, Wayanad had undergone substantial LULC modifications, with plantations expanding from 913 km² to 1215 km² and forest cover shrinking from 888 km² to 672 km². The dominance of commercial plantations and urban settlements over natural vegetation exacerbates soil instability, alters drainage patterns, and amplifies the risks from extreme rainfall. The absence of adequate slope management in these modified landscapes further compounds landslide susceptibility.

Implications for Disaster Risk Management

The interplay between LULC changes and landslide susceptibility in Wayanad underscores the need for sustainable land-use planning and conservation strategies. Unregulated urban expansion, deforestation, and unsustainable agricultural practices must be addressed through policies focused on afforestation, slope stabilisation, and stricter land-use regulations. Incorporating geospatial technologies can enhance risk assessment and inform proactive mitigation strategies. Although natural factors remain critical drivers of landslides, human-induced LULC transformations in Wayanad have heightened the vulnerability of the region. An integrated approach that balances economic development with ecological resilience is essential for mitigating future landslide risks and safeguarding both human settlements and natural ecosystems.

Key Takeaways and Recommendations

One of the top priorities for Tamil Nadu and Kerala is to enhance climate-resilient infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events. For Tamil Nadu, sustainable urban development investment is crucial, including the development of stormwater drainage infrastructure and wetland restoration to effectively handle heavy rainfall. Kerala must

strengthen slope stabilisation, implement stricter land-use regulations, and promote afforestation in high-risk areas.

Strengthening disaster preparedness is critical for both states. The unpredictability of monsoonal rainfall necessitates improved early warning systems using AI and real-time meteorological data for precise forecasts. Tamil Nadu and Kerala should expand community-based disaster preparedness programs, particularly in vulnerable areas. Evacuation drills, emergency response teams, and disaster awareness campaigns can enhance public readiness and reduce casualties. Tamil Nadu should focus on restoring urban wetlands and expanding green spaces to reduce flood risks. In Kerala, reforestation in landslide-prone regions is essential for stabilising slopes and preventing soil erosion. Controlling the expansion of commercial plantations is necessary because monoculture farming weakens soil integrity and increases landslide vulnerability.

A shift toward sustainable development policies is imperative to mitigate climate-related disasters. In Tamil Nadu, zoning laws should restrict construction in flood-prone areas and ensure urban expansion does not encroach upon natural drainage systems. Kerala must regulate construction in ecologically fragile zones, where unregulated land use exacerbates landslides. Sustainable urban planning frameworks that integrate climate risk assessments can help both states minimise long-term damage from extreme weather events.

Expanding regional climate research will play a crucial role in the development of effective mitigation strategies. Both Tamil Nadu and Kerala require localised climate models that analyse historical and projected rainfall patterns, allowing policymakers to design tailored adaptation plans. Collaboration with global climate research institutions can enhance forecasting accuracy and provide insights into the evolving monsoon patterns affecting South India. By prioritising climate resilience, disaster preparedness, and environmental conservation, Tamil Nadu and Kerala can better safeguard their populations and infrastructure against climate change.

The Intersection of Climate Change, Monsoonal Variability, and Regional Vulnerability

The analysis of monsoonal variability in Tamil Nadu and Kerala highlights the mounting vulnerability of these states to extreme climatic events caused by global climate change. Changing rainfall patterns have intensified cyclonic activity, and rising temperatures have disrupted historical climate norms, posing significant risks to populations. The case studies of the 2015 and 2023 floods in Chennai and southern Tamil Nadu, along with the 2024 landslides in Wayanad, provide compelling evidence of these changes and highlight the pressing need for sustainable adaptation measures. The effects of climate change on monsoon

patterns in Tamil Nadu and Kerala are multifaceted. Tamil Nadu, which is largely reliant on the northeast monsoon, has experienced unpredictable rainfall, with high-intensity, short-duration storms resulting in urban flooding. The 2015 Chennai floods are a classic example of the impacts of heavy rainfall compounded by lack of proper urban planning and inadequate drainage. Similarly, in 2023, Michaung demonstrated that tropical cyclones, influenced by rising sea surface temperatures, exacerbate flooding risks in coastal cities. The extreme rainfall event in southern Tamil Nadu, resulting in unprecedented flooding, was caused by static upper air circulation, excess moisture incursion, and the El Niño Southern Oscillation effect, reflecting the unpredictability of climate change impacts on monsoon patterns. Kerala's dependence on the southwest monsoon makes it susceptible to extreme rainfall-induced landslides, as evidenced by the Wayanad disaster in 2024. The frequency of such events raises concerns about land use changes, deforestation, and unregulated urbanisation, which aggravate natural disaster risks.

Anthropogenic activities amplify climate risk. In Tamil Nadu, rapid urbanisation, land encroachment, and poorly maintained reservoirs have contributed to flood severity. In Kerala, commercial plantation expansion, deforestation, and unsustainable land use practices have increased landslide risk. The shift from native forests to monoculture plantations has disrupted soil stability, making steep slopes more vulnerable to extreme rainfall events.

Policy interventions, technological advancements, and community-driven initiatives are essential for mitigating the effects of climate change on monsoons. Urban flood management in Tamil Nadu must prioritise sustainable infrastructure, improved stormwater drainage, and flood-resilient urban planning. In Kerala, stricter land-use regulations, afforestation programs, and early warning systems for landslides are crucial for reducing disaster risks. Regional climate modeling and real-time data monitoring must be intensified to improve preparedness and response measures. The inclusion of climate resilience in policy platforms, supporting sustainable development, and the improvement of scientific research on monsoonal changes will be the solution to preventing these regions from future climate-related threats. The management of the climate-monsoon relationship is not just an environmental requirement but also a socio-economic concern to save millions of livelihoods and lives in South India.

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Research Essay

Between Western Eurocentric Universalism and Cultural Relativism: Mutual recognition of the Civilisations of the Earth as precondition for the Survival of Mankind

Dr. Andreas Herberg-Rothe

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was codified by the United Nations in 1948. But the academic debate on the universality of the norms on which it is based is far from over. The question remains whether there are universal values other than those of the West. Western values alone are often implicitly regarded as universal. But whether this is scientifically justifiable is more than debatable. At the same time, few participants in the debate seriously doubt the need for universal human dignity.

In the current debate, the binary positions of relativism and universalism are at a stalemate. A way out of this dichotomy would have to withstand the charge of ethnocentrism as well as particular relativism. Neither should dimensions of power and colonialism be ignored, nor should inhumane practices such as torture, humiliation and sexual violence be relativised by reference to another 'culture'. If a universal approach is to be found, it should not be implicitly Westernised. This is a criticism of existing approaches, particularly in postcolonial theory.

It is about the justifiability of universal norms on the one hand, and the inevitability of particular justifications of norms on the other. Historically, ethnocentrism, as a mere description of a state of affairs, has developed into a justification of 'cultural superiority' and, as a consequence, of oppression and exploitation. An initially unconscious preference for and belief in one's own (cultural) perspective, the unquestioned truth and correctness of one's own norms, values and patterns of behaviour, did not develop into 'live and let live'. This form of ethnocentrism rejects the acceptance of cultural difference and represents an attitude that legitimises the destruction of the foreigner as a legitimate consequence of one's own superiority. This, of course, refers mainly to the long-standing colonisation of supposedly 'inferior' peoples by European states and the associated cultural appropriation and cultural destruction or exploitation. These practices were morally legitimised on the basis of the

conviction that one's own way of life was superior to all other ways of life, not only militarily and politically, but also cognitively and morally. Ideologically, this argument is based on various elements, including the proselytising idea of the Christian message of salvation, the idea of the 'progress' of Western civilisation over other cultures and the idea of 'racial doctrine'.

In reaction to this unreflected, chauvinistic ethnocentrism, two main currents of contradiction developed: universalism and relativism. Universalism ‘assumes that it is possible to find standards of value that apply across cultural boundaries and are universally valid’, while the relativist position, in the absence of the possibility of an ‘extra-cultural’, objective judgement of a situation, all cultures, with everything that belongs to them, are ascribed the same value.

Universalism

The argumentative basis of Western universalism is the assumed fundamental equality of all human beings - both in their intellectual capacity (cognitive) and in their materiality (normative), which leads to a general insight into certain universal norms. The most obvious example of this is universal human rights, whose need for universality is clear from their very name.

The cognitive premise of this kind of universalism goes back to the Enlightenment and the idea that all human beings have, in principle, the same cognitive capacities, even if they differ in individual cases. Only on this basis can the premise of normative universalism in the Enlightenment be realised. But this leads to various problems, paradoxes and points of criticism, because this conception is based on a particular understanding of rationality that is rooted in the thinking of Western modernity. For example, it excludes any kind of holism, although this conceptualisation is by no means irrational, but represents a different kind of rationality.

One frequently pursued solution to the tension between universal norms, which nonetheless originate in only one culture, and different culturally determined norms has been to search for what is common to all cultures. This approach, which in itself goes further, was pursued above all in the project of the 'global ethic', which sought the common foundations of all religions. Western modern universalism had thus abandoned its claim to all-encompassing universality and limited itself to a kind of 'core norms'. Instead of questioning specific cultural practices, the focus is on the fundamental premises of human coexistence. In my view, this project was

doomed to failure after the initial euphoria, because the commonalities were based on an ever-increasing abstraction. This leads to two fundamental difficulties: the unresolved problem of drawing boundaries between different forms of norms, and the justification of particular norms on the basis of the universal assumption that all cultural norms are in principle equal. The apparent paradox of the uniqueness of each culture lies in the claim to universality that all cultures are of equal value. We can therefore speak neither of a universalism that is purely independent of culture, nor of a norm that can be attributed to only one culture.

Strong normative relativism represents a 'normative statement that all normative systems are fully justified in their diversity' - a paradox, since this is a statement with a claim to universal validity. In contrast, weak normative relativism is derived from the impossibility of universally valid normative statements, which merely means a 'non-evaluability' of normative systems. The demarcation between concrete social norms is, therefore, very difficult.

Because of the difficulty of justifying strongly normative positions, 'differentiated' theories of relativism argue from a 'weakened position', albeit at the expense of unambiguity due to the lack of demarcation. Culture is then understood as 'dynamic and hybrid', while 'normative overlaps' are recognised without doubting the fundamental relativity of all norms.

Paradoxical structure

Relativism does not provide a 'ground zero' from which to make generally valid statements - it rules out the possibility of relativism being universally valid in itself, as well as the possibility of relativism being regarded as a 'universal truth'. Relativism cannot therefore justify itself out of itself, which it has in common with other theoretical currents in the age of postmodern critique (Herberg-Rothe 2025). Moreover, it does not necessarily apply universally but can be limited in time or place: So, the undecidability of normative conflicts might appear to be a particularly obvious contemporary phenomenon, without it being true for all times and places that normative conflicts are fundamentally undecidable. This concept of decidable and undecidable questions is based on the position of Heinz von Foerster's radical constructivism. In his desperate attempt to leave behind all only apparent objectivity and the subjectivity of all norms he resorts to a binary opposition between objectivity (in mathematics) and subjectivity.

Due to the equivalence of all cultural standpoints and the lack of presupposed values, no well-founded criticism can take place, which makes relativism normatively arbitrary in relation to itself. Neither the persecution of minorities nor discrimination can be legitimately criticised if this is seen as a cultural particularity. The norm of 'absolute tolerance of cultural differences' is

both empirically untenable and logically inconsistent, since here too there is a claim to universal validity. However, this point of criticism already presupposes the premise of universalism that there are conditions that are worthy of criticism despite their culture-specific justification.

Relativism in its weakened form has moved away from normative statements. In the absence of a judgmental dimension, it no longer makes a statement about tolerance towards certain cultural practices. The observed norms and values appear to be specific responses to specific social problems but are in no way connected to the supposed 'essence' of a culture, as culture itself is perceived as hybrid, fluid and contradictory - instead of judging inhumane practices of ones own culture, it is about understanding. In this context, the post-colonial reality should also be mentioned, in which there are no longer any cultures without interference.

In order to be able to criticise on the basis of relativism inhuman practices despite all these objections, two possibilities need to be mentioned: 1. to establish 'qualified norms' without further justification in order to criticise on the basis of them, and 2. to practise a particular, culturally immanent criticism - of one's own cultural norms on the basis of other norms of one's own culture. For example, there are numerous culturalist justifications for gender equality, "general" human rights or democracy, which shows that a culturally immanent and particular critique of domination does not necessarily have to differ in content from a universalist critique (see for example Molla Sadra in Herberg-Rothe 2023). Both solutions are in no way ideal, because in the first attempt we encounter a hidden ethnocentrism, and in the latter the problem arises between contrasting norms within one culture.

Covert westernisation and reverse ethnocentrism

Relativism is also a theory of Western origin, which can be seen in the Western-influenced 'idea of tolerance' - but this point also applies mainly to a normatively strongly interpreted relativism. Inverse ethnocentrism, on the other hand, means 'labelling everything foreign as right'.

What underlies both universalism and relativism is the struggle for knowledge: which norms can be taken for granted? Or, more philosophically, what can we know? Both positions have argumentative shortcomings that are not easily remedied.

Knowledge is closely linked to power (the power to define, to enforce, to disseminate or to

withhold knowledge) and thus to domination and often to violence. This connection is expressed in social tensions between the legitimation of domination and the subversion of existing conditions.

Transnational encounters since the colonial era have steadily increased due to globalisation and require reassessment. The use of human rights to achieve social change raises the question of "whether this process is not itself, in terms of knowledge, a bureaucratic, almost classically ethnocentric process with an

imperial claim to universality' that spreads 'Western culture' and its models of action globally'. At the same time, this process opens up a dialogue beyond culturally determined borders, which we must be aware in order to transcend them.

How could this stalemate between ethno-Universalism and cultural relativism be overcome, at least in perspective?

A new approach to practical intercultural philosophy

Intercultural philosophy can play an important role in this process of mutual recognition among the civilizations of the earth. Since Karl Jaspers, the godfather of intercultural philosophy, acknowledged the existence of four different civilizations (Holenstein 2004, Jaspers 1949), immense progress has been made in understanding the different approaches. Nevertheless, all civilizations have asked themselves the same question but have found different answers. Cross-cultural philosophy is thus possible because we as human beings ask the same questions (Mall 2014). For example, in terms of being born, living and dying, between immanence and transcendence, between the individual and the community, between our limited capacities and the desire for eternity, the relationship between us as animals and the ethics that constitute us as human beings - our ethical beliefs may be different, but all civilizations have an ethical foundation. In fact, I would argue that it is ethics that distinguishes us from animals, not our intellect (Eiedat 2013 about Islamic ethics). We may realize the full implications of this proposition when we relate it to the development of artificial intelligence.

Detour via Clausewitz

An alternative solution to the problem raised by Lyotard suggests another dialectic, as implicitly developed by Carl von Clausewitz on the basis of his analysis of attack and defence. The approach of Clausewitz is insofar of para mount importance, because it presupposes neither a primacy of identity in relation to difference, contrast and conflict, nor to the reverse as in the conceptualizations of the post-structuralists (Herberg-Rothe 2007, Herberg-Rothe/Son 2018) or the adherents of a purified Western modernity in the concepts of Habermas and Giddens. In contrast to binary opposites, Clausewitz's model of the "true logical opposition and its identity," a structure-forming "field" (something like a magnetic field) allows us to think of manifold mediations as well as differences between opposites. If we formulate such an opposition in the framework of a two-valued logic (which formulates the opposition with the help of a negation or an adversarial opposition), there is a double contradiction on both sides of the opposition. From the assumption of the truth of one pole follows with necessity the truth of the other, although the other formulates the adversarial opposition of the first and vice versa. Hegel's crucial concepts such as being and nothingness, coming into being and passing away, quantity and quality, beginning and ending, matter and idea are such higher forms of opposition which, when determined within the framework of a two-valued logic, lead to logical contradictions. Without taking into account the irrevocable opposites and their unity, a "pure thinking of difference" leads either to "hyper-binary" systems (such as the relation of system and lifeworld, of constructivism and realism) or to unconscious absolutizations of new mythical identities (such as Lyotard's notion of plasma as well as Derrida’s Chora).

Clausewitz's "true logical opposition" and its identity enables the thinking of a model in which the opposites remain irrevocable, but at the same time, in contrast to binary opposites:

1. Both remain in principle equally determining; this model is therefore neither dualistic nor monistic, but cancels this opposition in itself, and sets it anew at a new level.
2. Structure a "field" of multiple unities and differences.
3. Enable a conceptualization, in which the opposites have a structure-forming effect, but do not exist as identities detached from one another.
4. and in which there are irrevocable boundaries between opposites and differences, which at the same time, however, are historically-socially distinct. The concrete drawing of boundaries is thus contingent, without the existence of a boundary as such being able to

be abolished (Herberg-Rothe 2007, 2019 and Herberg-Rothe/Son 2018). Clearly, in the, albeit limited, model of a magnet neither south nor north pole exists as identity, a (violent) separation between both even leads to a duplication of the model. At the same time, both poles are structure forming a magnetic field, without a priority of either side. And finally, Clausewitz's model of the true logical opposition goes beyond the one of polarity, because it additionally allows to think manifold forms of transitions from one pole to the other (Herberg-Rothe 2007, Herberg-Rothe/Son 2018).

This conception of an "other" dialectic is also the methodological precondition of a thinking "between" Lyotard and Hegel (Herberg-Rothe 2005). It treatises above all categories such as mostly asymmetrical transitions and reversals as well as the "interspace" (Arendt) between opposites. With such an understanding of dialectics, it is possible to understand the apparent contradiction between the rejection of a highest meta-meta-language and the fact that the language used in this critique, theory, is itself this actually excluded "highest" level of language, not as a logical contradiction, but as a performative one. Such performative contradictions between what a proposition, statement, etc., says and what it is are at the heart of Hegel's notion of dialectic. Of all things, Hegel's criticized and rejected form of dialectic makes it possible to conceive of these contradictions not as "logical" ones, but as ones that ground, but also force, further development as distinct from mythical ways out. This form of dialectic, however, contains at the same time the demonstration of a principle of development without conclusion and thus puts Hegel's "great logic" as "thoughts of God before the creation of the world" in its place (Hegel Preface to the Science of Logic, Wdl I, Werke 5). Nevertheless, these performative contradictions should also not been absolutised, they are just one aspect of a different dialectics.

Although I advocate the development of an intercultural philosophy as part of transnational governance and mutual recognition among the civilizations of the earth, I would like to highlight the main problem, at least from my point of view. Already Aristotle asked the crucial question, whether the whole is more than the sum of its parts? If I understand Islamic philosophy correctly, it starts from the assumption that the whole is indeed more than the sum of its parts - one could call this position a holistic approach (Baggini 2018). In contrast, Western thought is characterized by the approach of replacing the whole precisely by the sum of its parts. We might call this an atomistic approach - only the number of electrons, neutrons, distinguishes atoms etc. In terms of holism, I would argue that the task might be to distinguish the whole from mere hierarchies - in terms of the concept of harmony in Confucianism, I would

argue that true harmony is associated with a balance of hierarchical and symmetrical social and international relations. Instead of the false assumption in Western approaches that we could transform all hierarchical relationships into symmetrical ones, I think we need to strike a balance between the two. Harmony does not mean absolute equality in the meaning of sameness but implies a lot of tension. Harmony can be characterized by unity with difference and difference with unity, as already mentioned (Herberg-Rothe/Son 2018). I sometimes compare this perspective to a wave of water in a sea: if there are no waves, the sea dies; if the waves are tsunamis, they are destructive to society.

I start from the following fivefold distinction of thinking, based on the fundamental contrasts of life (while Baggini 2018 and Jaspers 1949, for example, reduce different ways of thinking largely to the development of functional differentiation).

1. Attraction and repulsion, closeness and distance, equality and freedom, love and hate,
2. Beginning and ending (birth and death, finiteness - infinity),
3. Happiness and suffering (in Greek and Indian philosophy
4. Part-whole (individual-community, immanence-transcendence, holism-hierarchies).
5. Knowledge (experience, positive sciences, extended sense impressions,

and method - mathematics and logic) versus feeling/the concept of intuition, believe.

The listed methodological approaches try to cope with unity and opposition. In my opinion, they are also necessary approaches and can be seen as differentiations within the idea of polarity.

Differentiations in thinking

1. Either - or systems, = Western modern thought, concentration on method (since Descartes and Kant, Vienna Circle, Tarski), democracy, individualism, in Islam Ibn Sina and Ibn Khaldun, in Chinese thought the tradition of Han Fei and Li Se; Yan 2011, Zhang 2012).

2. As well as - Daoism, early Confucianism, but also New Age approaches, Heißenberg's uncertainty principle, dialectics.

3. Neither-Nor enables the construction of "being-in-between"; Plato's metaxis plus Indian logic, the whole concept of diversity, difference thinking, de-constructivism, the post-

structuralism, post-colonialism.

4. system thinking, structuralism - here I struggle with the distinction between holism (in the Islamic worldview) and pure hierarchies (in Islam Al Ghazali); inherent logic of systems (Luhmann) and functional differentiation; in Eastern philosophies we find this approach mainly in highlighting spiritual approaches.

5. process thinking - in ethics this can be found e.g. in utilitarianism, stage theories (Piaget, Kohlberg; Hegel's world history as the progress of freedom consciousness), Hegel's becoming at the beginning of his "logic" as "surplus" of coming into being and passing away; cycle systems; enlightenment; Dharma religions, in China, Mohism.

While there are probably already worked out methods for points 1, 4 and 5, I lack such for 2 and 3, which are always in danger of expressing arbitrariness. This becomes especially clear in the mysticism of the New Age movement.

How can this fivefold distinction be derived from one model, which is not a totalizing approach (Mall 2014)? For this purpose, I use here again the simplified model of polarity. This method is elaborated in my Clausewitz interpretation on his wondrous trinity and the dialectic of attack and defence (Herberg-Rothe 2007 and 2019).

Differences in polarity as a unifying model

1. either-or systems: Each of the two poles is either a north or a south pole (= tertium non datur). We find those approaches in mathematics, logic, rationality and methods in general; such conceptualizations are also to be found in zero-sum games - what one side gains, the other loses (rationality, if then systems, in Cina Lli Si and Han Fei);

2. as well as (earlier Confucius, Daoism): the magnet as unity consists of the opposites of both poles and the magnet "is" both north pole and south pole. This is analysed in detail in my Clausewitz interpretation on the basis of war as unity and irrevocable opposition of attack and defence. We find this thinking especially in Chinese ideas of win-win solutions. Here, competition and conflict in one area do not exclude cooperation in another (Herberg-Rothe 2007, Chinese version 2020.)

3. neither north nor south pole exist as identities (Plato’s metaxis, Indian thought) - they are rather dynamic movements in between the opposites (see in detail again Clausewitz’s concept

of attack and defence; this understanding is the methodological basis of diversity; Herberg-Rothe 2007; see the French theorists of post-structuralism).

4. structure (system theories, Islamic holism): North pole and south pole "construct" a magnetic field outside and inside the materiality of the magnet, a non-material structure.

5. process thinking: Here the simplified example of the magnet finds its end - but can be understood beyond the physical analogy easily as movement from the south pole to the north pole and "always further" (sine curve on an ascending x-axis). In this sense, already Hegel had considered the discovery of polarity as of infinite importance, but criticized it because in this model the idea of transition from one pole to the other was missing (Herberg-Rothe 2000 and 2007). Molla Sadra (1571-1636), the most important philosopher of the School of Isfahan, elaborated this progressive circular movement particularly clearly. Although he is mainly regarded as an existential philosopher who denies any essence, he actually postulated a kind of progressive circle as the decisive essence (for an overview see Yousefi 2016, for more details see Rizvi 2021).

A unifying model – Virtues Concentric Circles

Starting from the premise that Western thinking is shaped by the billiard model of international relations and that of all other civilizations by concentric circles and cycles (Herberg-Rothe/Son 2018), the aim is to work out how extensively both models determine our thinking in the respective cultural sphere in order to develop a perspective that includes both sides. In doing so, I do not assume one-dimensional causes for violent action, but neither do I assume pure diversity without any explanation of causes. Instead, I work in perspective with virtuous and vicious circles - in these circles there are several causes, but they are not unconnected to each other but are integrated into a cycle. So far, this methodological approach has probably been applied mainly in the Sahel Syndrome. The methodological approach would involve trying to break vicious circles and transform them into virtuous circles - this is where I would locate the starting point of a new approach to intercultural philosophy.

Ideally, a virtuous circular perspective would look like this:

1. Understanding of discourses on how conflicts with cultural/religious differences are justified/articulated.

2. Attribution of these differences to different concepts of civilization.

3. Mutual recognition of the same issues in different ways of thinking.

4. Self-knowledge not only as religion or culture, but as a civilization.

5. the self-commitment to one's own civilizational standards, norms (Jaspers 1949 and Katzenstein 2009) etc., which can also contribute to the management of intra-societal and international conflicts.

At the infinite end of this process would be a kind of mutual recognition of the civilizations of the earth, accompanied by their self-commitment to their own civilizational norms. My colleague Peng Lu from Shanghai University has made the following suggestion: In the 19thth century, the Europeans conquered the whole world; in the twentieth century, the defeated nations and civilizations had to live with the victorious West; in the twenty-first century, the civilizations of the earth must finally learn to live together. This is in my view the task of the century. Solving the problem of ethno-universalism and cultural relativism has nothing to do with wishful thinking but is the precondition for the survival of humankind in the twenty-first, unless we want to repeat the catastrophes of the twentieth century on a larger scale.

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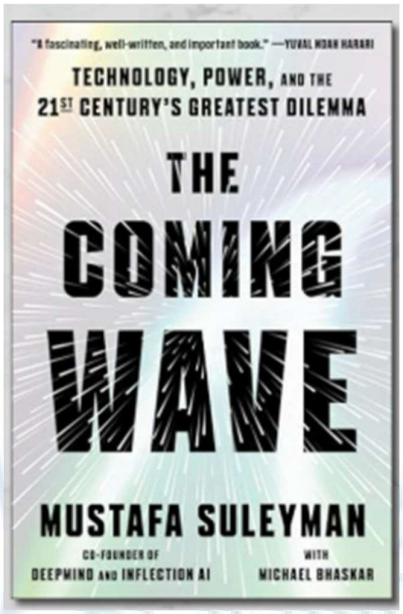


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Book Reviews

The Coming Wave: Technology, Power, and the Twenty-First Century's Greatest Dilemma

Author: Michael Bhaskar and Mustafa Suleyman



Reviewed by Lokesh Swami

In The Coming Wave: Technology, Power, and the Twenty-First Century's Greatest Dilemma, Mustafa Suleyman and Michael Bhaskar present a bold and urgent narrative about the dual-edged power of emerging technologies. Focused primarily on artificial intelligence (AI) and synthetic biology, the book examines how these innovations will shape the future, presenting both transformative opportunities and existential risks.

Suleyman, a co-founder of DeepMind, offers a unique insider perspective into the technology industry, complemented by Bhaskar's thoughtful narrative structure. Together, they argue that humanity stands at an unprecedented crossroads. As we unlock technologies with capabilities that rival "godlike powers," we also risk destabilizing the foundations of global governance, ethics, and security. The coming wave of technological change, the authors warn, demands our immediate attention and a deliberate approach to management and

containment.

A Historical Lens on Technological Waves

One of the book's most striking features is its historical framing of technological waves. Suleyman and Bhaskar take readers on a journey through humanity's past, exploring how each major technological revolution—from the discovery of fire to the industrial revolution—reshaped society in profound ways. These historical examples serve as a reminder of technology's transformative power, but they also underscore the unintended consequences that often accompany progress.

For instance, the industrial revolution brought remarkable economic growth and improved living standards but also led to environmental degradation and widespread inequality. Similarly, the advent of nuclear technology brought the promise of clean energy but also the threat of annihilation. Suleyman and Bhaskar argue that the current wave, driven by AI and synthetic biology, is even more consequential. Unlike past technologies, which were often limited to specific applications, these innovations are omni-use and can be applied across nearly every domain, from healthcare to warfare.

This historical perspective provides a compelling backdrop for understanding the scale and complexity of the challenges posed by the coming wave. It also reinforces the authors' central argument: while technological progress is inevitable, its trajectory is not, and we must act decisively to shape its impact.

The Containment Dilemma

At the heart of the book is the "containment problem," a term the authors use to describe the difficulty of regulating technologies that are inherently designed to proliferate. Containment, as defined by Suleyman and Bhaskar, refers to the ability to monitor, control, and potentially restrict the use of powerful technologies to prevent misuse or catastrophic outcomes. However, they argue that containment is becoming increasingly difficult due to several key factors.

First, the pace of innovation is outstripping the ability of regulatory frameworks to keep up. AI systems are evolving rapidly, with capabilities that were once the realm of science fiction now becoming commonplace. From deepfake videos to generative AI models capable of producing human-like text, the potential for misuse is vast. Synthetic biology presents similar challenges, with breakthroughs in gene editing and bioengineering enabling the creation of engineered organisms that could revolutionize medicine—or be weaponized.

Second, the democratization of access to these technologies exacerbates the containment problem. Unlike nuclear weapons, which require significant resources and state-level support, AI and synthetic biology tools are becoming increasingly accessible to individuals and small groups. This democratization raises the specter of "asymmetric proliferation," where rogue actors or non-state entities could use these technologies for malicious purposes.

Third, the economic and geopolitical incentives driving innovation often conflict with efforts to prioritize safety and ethics. Suleyman draws on his experiences at DeepMind to illustrate how competitive pressures in the tech industry frequently prioritize speed and profitability over long-term consequences. The same dynamic is evident in synthetic biology, where nations and corporations are racing to develop breakthroughs in areas like gene editing, often with little consideration for potential risks.

A Vision for Responsible Innovation

Despite the daunting challenges outlined in the book, Suleyman and Bhaskar offer a hopeful vision for how humanity can navigate the coming wave. They propose a ten-step framework for addressing the containment problem, which includes measures such as:

- Developing robust international treaties to govern the use of AI and synthetic biology.
- Promoting interdisciplinary collaboration between technologists, policymakers, and ethicists.
- Embedding ethical considerations into the design of new technologies.
- Raising public awareness about the risks and benefits of emerging innovations.

One of the most thought-provoking aspects of their framework is the emphasis on striking a balance between openness and control. The authors advocate for a "narrow path" approach, where technologies are neither entirely unrestricted nor overly regulated. This middle ground involves creating layered safeguards that operate at multiple levels—technical, societal, and legal—to mitigate risks without stifling innovation.

The Ethical Imperative

What sets The Coming Wave apart from other books on technology is its focus on the ethical dimensions of innovation. Suleyman and Bhaskar argue that technological progress must be accompanied by a democratization of responsibility. This means ensuring that the benefits of innovation are distributed equitably and that all stakeholders—including marginalized communities—have a voice in shaping the future.

The authors raise important questions about the societal implications of emerging

technologies. For instance, how can we ensure that AI and synthetic biology are used to address global challenges like climate change and poverty, rather than exacerbating existing inequalities? How do we balance the needs of innovation with the imperatives of justice and fairness? These questions are explored with depth and nuance, making the book a valuable resource for anyone grappling with the ethical implications of technological progress.

A Personal and Reflective Narrative

Suleyman's personal experiences add a layer of authenticity to the book. He shares candid anecdotes from his career, including moments when he struggled to persuade industry leaders about the risks of AI. These stories highlight the cultural and psychological barriers to addressing the containment problem, such as complacency and short-term thinking.

One particularly poignant moment is Suleyman's reflection on the "pessimism aversion" he encountered among his peers. This term describes the tendency to downplay risks and focus on the positive aspects of technology, even in the face of clear evidence to the contrary. By confronting this mindset, the book challenges readers to engage with uncomfortable truths about the coming wave.

Strengths and Limitations

The greatest strength of The Coming Wave is its clarity and accessibility. Despite tackling complex topics, the authors present their arguments in a way that is both intellectually rigorous and easy to understand. Historical analogies and real-world examples help ground abstract concepts, making the book relevant to a broad audience.

However, the book is not without its limitations. Some readers may find the emphasis on containment overly pessimistic, as it risks overshadowing the transformative potential of AI and synthetic biology. While the authors discuss the positive applications of these technologies, such as accelerating medical research and combating climate change, these sections are relatively brief compared to the extensive focus on risks.

Additionally, the proposed solutions, though well-intentioned, may seem idealistic given the fragmented nature of global politics. Achieving international consensus on technological governance is a formidable challenge, as evidenced by the slow progress on issues like climate change and data privacy.

Conclusion

The Coming Wave is a masterful exploration of the challenges and opportunities posed by emerging technologies. Suleyman and Bhaskar succeed in presenting a balanced and thought-provoking narrative that challenges readers to confront the dual nature of innovation.

By blending historical analysis, personal insights, and actionable recommendations, the authors craft a roadmap for navigating the complexities of the coming wave. Their call for proactive governance and ethical foresight resonates as a powerful reminder of what is at stake.

As humanity stands on the brink of a technological revolution, The Coming Wave offers a timely and necessary guide to steering the future toward progress while averting catastrophe. This book is not just a critique of technology but a clarion call for collective action. Suleyman and Bhaskar's insights will not only inform but also inspire readers to think critically about the role of technology in shaping our collective destiny.

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ABOUT THE REVIEWER

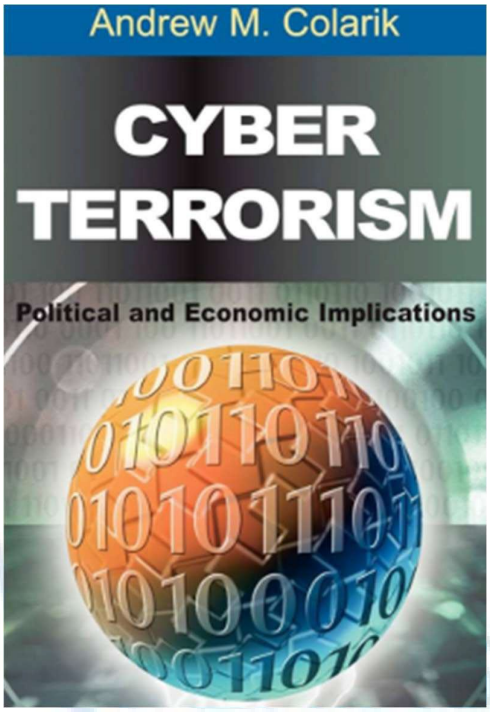


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Cyber Terrorism: Political and Economic Implications

Author: Andrew M. Colarik



Reviewed by: Marshall Anto

Andrew Michael Colarik's work, "Cyber Terrorism: Political and Economic Implications," offers a significant examination of the intricate relationship between cyberthreats and terrorism. The book is structured into several chapters that meticulously analyze the evolution of cyberterrorism, the vulnerabilities of the global information infrastructure, and the implications for various economic sectors. With over 25 years of experience in security and information systems, Colarik delivers a comprehensive analysis that is both alarming and informative. The book begins with an extensive overview of cyberterrorism, highlighting its distinction from other forms of cybercrime. Colarik underscores the potential for significant disruption due to our dependence on interconnected networks and argues that true cyberterrorism involves the incitement of violence rather than merely instilling fear. This foundational understanding is crucial as it sets the stage for subsequent chapters, which delve

into the mechanisms of cyberattacks, the vulnerabilities of critical infrastructure, and the motivations behind cyberterrorism.

A significant feature of the work is its comprehensive analysis of contemporary cyberattack methodologies. Colarik categorizes various attack vectors, including social engineering, exploitation of physical and wireless communication mediums, and infiltration from both internal and external sources. This detailed examination enables readers to gain a clear understanding of the strategies employed by cyber terrorists and the potential consequences of such attacks. Colarik also addresses the societal implications, particularly concerning privacy and public perceptions of cyberthreats. He contends that as cyberterrorism becomes more prevalent, public perception of these threats must evolve. The book suggests that a lack of awareness may lead to complacency, thereby increasing societal vulnerability to attacks.

To safeguard the global information infrastructure, Colarik emphasizes the importance of education and preventive measures, advocating for collective efforts to enhance security protocols across all sectors. While Colarik's analysis is largely accurate, certain valid concerns arise. Occasionally, the book references outdated examples that may not resonate with contemporary readers. Although the historical context is valuable, some scenarios discussed may appear less relevant due to the rapid advancement of technology. Furthermore, readers lacking a robust foundation in cybersecurity may find the text's technical complexity challenging to comprehend. Accessibility could be improved by offering specific instances where technical language might be simplified or made more comprehensible.

Upon examining Colarik's perspectives in this book in comparison to his more recent works, it is evident that, despite methodological changes, his primary focus has remained consistent. He has continued to emphasize the importance of safeguarding critical infrastructure and the necessity of a comprehensive understanding of cyberthreats in his research and publications since then. However, he has also begun to incorporate discussions on the ethical implications of cybersecurity, reflecting an increasing awareness of the societal impact of technological advancements. In his most recent publications, Colarik has addressed the issue of privacy in cybersecurity, acknowledging the tension between individual rights and security measures. This shift indicates an evolution in his perspective, recognizing that civil rights and public trust must be considered when discussing cyberterrorism. His more recent works reveal a nuanced perspective on balancing privacy and security, which is becoming increasingly significant in the current digital environment.

"Cyber Terrorism: Political and Economic Implications" is an essential study for those seeking to comprehend the intricate nature of cyberthreats in the modern world. Colarik's expertise imparts the necessary depth to the book, and his lucid language and comprehensive analysis render it accessible to a wide audience. While the book effectively addresses societal impacts, it would benefit from the inclusion of more recent examples and a more thorough exploration of ethical considerations. Despite this, Colarik's work remains a vital resource for understanding the impact of cyberterrorism on daily life, as he continues to adapt his perspectives in response to the evolving cybersecurity landscape. His contributions significantly enhance the ongoing discourse on cybersecurity, consistently addressing critical issues such as the importance of public awareness and the balance between security and privacy.

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ABOUT THE REVIEWER

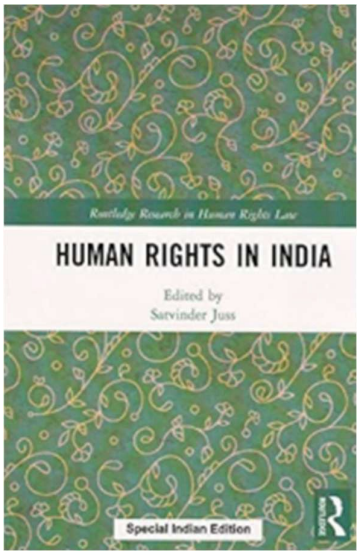


Marshall Anto holds both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Defence and Strategic Studies from the University of Madras. His primary academic and research interest lies in the study of terrorism and its extensive implications for global geopolitics, with a particular emphasis on maritime security. He is deeply engaged in exploring how terrorist activities influence national and international policy, affect regional stability, and reshape global power structures. Positioned at the crossroads of security studies, strategic affairs, and international relations, his work aims to foster informed dialogue and contribute to strategic thinking on the pressing security challenges of the time.

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Human Rights in India

Edited by Satvinder Juss



Reviewed by: Siddharth. S. N

Introduction:

The book - Human Rights in India, edited by Satvinder Juss is a timely collection that critically examines the contradictions that are inherently present in the country's human rights framework. The book sets out to examine the gap between the constitutional and legal commitments to human rights in India and the actual delivery of those rights in practice. Through twelve interdisciplinary chapters, it investigates diverse contexts, including freedom of speech, national security, gender violence and global governance. The book offers a multifaceted critique of India's legal, political, and social structures by revealing how human rights are both constitutionally guaranteed and institutionally denied. The book is targeted towards a varied audience including Researchers, Legal practitioners, Activists, Civil society Organisations and most importantly, students in the field of law and public policy

Content Outline:

As Karel Vasak (1997) proposed, human rights can be analysed as an evolution spanning through three generations. The book is structured into three parts containing four chapters each, written by various scholars, legal experts and activists. The structure of the three parts

resembles those of the three generations, where the first part highlights Human rights in a civil libertarian aspect, the second focusing on social rights and the third on the structural and global intersections of Human rights. The book highlighted various case studies and events to point out both the presence and categorical absence of Human rights in India.

Summary:

The opening chapters explore the legal and historical evolution of civil liberties and Judicial review, particularly through free speech cases and the rise of Public Interest Litigations (PIL). With the examination of landmark cases such as Romesh Thapar and Brij Bhushan, and how it culminated in the First Constitutional Amendment of 1951, which limited Article 19, the authors set the foundation for understanding the State's complex relationship with courts, rights and their dissent. These chapters also illustrate how early constitutional interpretations were shaped as much by political pressures as by legal reasoning, highlighting the fragile nature of rights in post-colonial India.

The subsequent chapters tackle issues such as national security laws, the judiciary's reluctance in defending rights in militarized contexts, with the analysis of cases of Nandini Sundar and EEVFAM. The focus gradually shifted to alternative justice mechanisms and how they undermine human rights norms, particularly for women and lower castes. The major focus was given to the abolition of the death penalty on both constitutional and ethical grounds, with the arbitrariness of the 'rarest of rare' doctrines.

The final chapters turn to structural and global dimensions of rights, examining forest rights of Adivasis, the human right to water, being part of Article 21 of the Constitution, as envisaged by the Supreme court and the role of international institution such as the World Bank in shaping policy frameworks that overlook local democratic accountability and social justice, critiquing how economic development, legal formalism, and global governance intersect with and often erode the practical realization of rights for marginalized populations.

Analysis:

Despite the diversity of the contributors and topics of the book, it maintains a structured editorial thread. The principal strength lies in this multidimensional approach, offering rich, contextualized insights towards both theory and practice of Human rights in India. The incorporation of landmark judgements are balanced by the analysis of grassroot protests, informal justice systems and corporate accountability, especially with regard to acid attack victims under gender-based violence. A few chapters are noteworthy for showing how law,

memory and dissent intersect with the State's narratives of security and nationalism. Furthermore, the inclusion of international dimensions within the context, by mentioning India's obligation to international treaties and conventions like CEDAW and the critical lens on the World Bank's development agenda, covering, in the words of Waltz (1959), all levels of analysis.

However, the book faces limitations in the aspect that some essays assume a greater level of legal or theoretical familiarity, which may limit the accessibility of the book for broader audiences or students who are new to this field of study. Another critical area that remains untouched in the work is the issue of caste-based discrimination or the situation of Kashmir, both having contemporary relevance. Additionally, the absence of a concluding chapter that ties together the book's rich insights and offers a clear path forward leaves the reader wanting a sense of closure and direction. After engaging with such a wide range of complex and urgent issues, a unifying reflection would have helped bring the chapters into sharper conversation with one another.

Overall Evaluation:

The book offers exceptional depth in examining the human rights landscape of India. The writing style however, varies across chapters, where many essays are clear, articulate and accessible, some delve into deeper legal and theoretical language that may challenge non-specialist readers or those new to the subject The variation reflects the diversity of academic backgrounds and methodological approaches among the contributors, but may also require selective reading depending on the reader's familiarity with the subject matter. Considering the value of the book, which is available in different formats, it is worth noting that the hardcover edition is priced at an academic premium. However, it delivers substantial educational and analytical value for institutions, libraries and individuals engaged in human rights work. The depth of analysis, real-world case references, and interdisciplinary insights make it a valuable addition to academic collections and human rights training programs alike. Human rights in India is highly recommended for Interns and staff of Human Rights Commision, Students of Law and legal researches, and Human rights defenders or activists working on gender, civil liberties, environment and indigenous rights. It can be used as a teaching tool or even a policy reference to bridge the gap between legal frameworks and practical realities, empowering readers to critique existing systems and envision more rights-based governance.

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ABOUT THE REVIEWER



Siddharth S N is currently pursuing his Master's degree in International Relations at Loyola College, Chennai. His academic interests include sustainable development, human rights, and global geopolitics. He has interned with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), contributing to a research project on manual scavenging. With additional experience in event documentation, international cultural exhibitions, and departmental financial management, Siddharth brings a well- rounded perspective to contemporary global issues. This review reflects his continued engagement with critical human rights discourse.

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Commentaries

Operation Sindoor: Early Lessons

Never since the end of World War II in 1945 has the world been turned asunder as much by regional and global disruptions as currently taking place. India, despite shorn of territorial ambitions and working for peace and harmony in its neighbourhood, too has not been spared of kinetic conflicts effecting its security and wellbeing. That after the grossly inhuman gunning down of 26 innocent and unarmed tourists in the picturesque meadows of Pahalgam in J&K by Pakistani terrorists on 22 April 2025 , India was left with no other option but to teach the Pakistani terrorist fraternity a lesson they would imbibe and desist from their decades long policy of fostering terrorism as an extension of their statecraft towards India. Thus, Operation Sindoor was conceived and executed with precision, effectiveness and yet a sense of balance and maturity.

"Sindoor", a turmeric based red powder has since the days of the ancient Harappan civilization in India, symbolizes the sanctity of the Hindu married woman and she wears it, above her forehead, till her husband is alive. That many of the Hindu women tourists accompanying their husbands saw their husbands being murdered in front of their eyes, meant some of them witnessing their sindoor being cruelly removed from their heads----- thus the operation to eliminate the terrorists who robbed the women of their right to wear the Sindoor was so named.

The operation, though an unqualified success, is as stated by the government, will be carrying on till the threat to India from these terrorists and their mentors is completely over. Thus, India remains in a state of high alert.

All operations, battle campaigns, kinetic/ non-kinetic conflicts of various types or insurgency counter measures throw up many useful lessons for various forces to study and suggest them to the powers -that -be to adapt. Since the last 6 months or so, with the ongoing Israel-Hamas, Russia-Ukraine, Israel- Lebanon, the conflict in Syria most nations with professional armies will be analysing the nuances of such conflicts in their respective contexts. Thus, after the 22 April 2025 Pahalgam massacre and India's launching of Op Sindoor from 7 June to 10 June 2025, many strategic, operational level and tactical lessons for India have emerged. Thus, it will be prudent to analyse them threadbare by all stakeholders in India for, as it appears, Pakistan's terror exports to India and other machinations, China's continuing assertiveness in

this region are likely to continue. With the US finding again its long-lost love in Pakistan, for inexplicable reasons, and the self-appointed Field Marshal Asim Munir, the Pakistani Army Chief, continuing with his ant-India tirades, the environment in the Indian subcontinent is indeed bound to worsen. To prove that his rise to the Field Marshal's chair was deserving Munir can go to any extent, including indulging in something kinetic or initiating a major terrorist act against India. in a speedy time frame. Thus, the first lesson India has to imbibe is that there has to be 24/7 eternal vigilance against Pakistan by the Indian security establishment. Thus, intelligence gathering and its analysis has to be of the highest order.

Operation Sindoor has brought forth a new paradigm in our security preparedness. We have unequivocally emphasised that the era of passive deterrence is over, and India's traditional strategic patience has given way to a strategy of punitive deterrence. India has courageously displayed that despite having a rogue nuclear neighbour, we can carry out operations under the nuclear threshold. India must continue with this new strategy and our future actions should be equally a carefully calibrated politico -military event. India has prudently declared that terror acts against India will not be merely treated as low-cost proxy wars but will be met with a full spectrum overwhelming response. During Op Sindoor, the Indian forces first struck at only the terrorist camps/ infrastructure and Pakistan was duly informed. However, when the Pak military retaliated engaging Indian military and civil targets, India too struck back strongly against military targets only causing major destruction to some of their airbases, runaways, command and control centres etc. The message was thus soundly delivered to Pakistan concerning India's ability and intentions to retaliate strongly. The lesson for India is to maintain some level of counterattack contingency measures ready to be delivered at a moment's notice if required. Even kinetic conflicts can emerge unexpectedly and without any notice. Accordingly, building up India's combat capability to successfully confront a two front war remains sine-qua-non.

A major lesson albeit on the geopolitical and diplomatic front is that since some years and across many other conflicts the world over, it is amply clear that in this multipolar world, each nation---no matter how powerful one is--- during the conduct of the kinetic conflicts--- one has to fend for itself. Nations may support you vocally or even with weapons and platforms but no nation, by and large, will support you with their boots on ground! Frankly, there is no rule -based international order and international agencies including from the UN and Security Council remain toothless in cessation of hostilities. After the Pahalgam massacre, some nations did condemn the terrorist attack on the innocent tourists but after India's retaliation on Pakistan's terror infrastructure and military targets, there was no nation who voiced support to

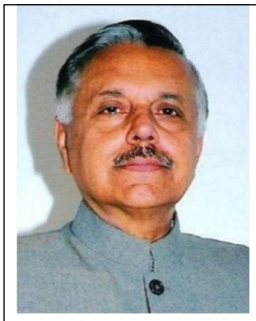
India to destroy Pakistan's terror havens. This thus points towards the question that were we isolated diplomatically during this period? Do we need to accordingly recalibrate our foreign policy? However, another aspect diplomatically which has irked most Indians is the fact, that the US has, after Op Sindoor, cleverly rehyphenated Pakistan with India when there is virtually nothing in common between the two nations. India must not allow this to further become a scar on Indo- US relations. India was never a geopolitical pawn and as we strive towards self-reliance for our defence needs. the same applies in our diplomatic standards.

It was indeed a prudent step by New Delhi to send seven multi-party parliamentary delegations to 32 different nations to explain India's stance during these days. Thus, India must imbibe expertise in Information Warfare thereby “shaping the narrative " during such confrontations with its adversaries and even during peacetime. Pakistan, despite the casualties and other losses it incurred had been indulging in a lot of disinformation and misinformation the Indian security establishment must take adequate cognisance of this shortcoming with us and take appropriate counter measures.

Owing to large scale damages to civil, private and at times even military property, ways and means must be found to invest in ambulances, hospitals, alternative civil structures to cater for all emergencies as well.

The events of the recent past have clearly highlighted the turmoil and the severe disruptions prevalent and, unfortunately, increasing by the day in the world. Thus, being prepared is the only answer if not the only deterrent. As a nation, without any extra-territorial ambitions and with a clear quest for peace, India still has to ensure, that its military preparedness caters for the collusive challenges emanating from its neighbourhood. Its newly pronounced policy of shedding Strategic Restraint to Punitive Deterrence will hopefully be more in keeping with the times.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lt General Kamal Davar retired from the Indian Army in 2004 after a most distinguished service spanning four decades. He has held coveted command, staff and instructional appointments both in India and abroad. A renowned operational soldier, the General has served in all theatres of operations in India and was also wounded in action in the 1965 operations. His last appointment at Army HQ, for which he was especially selected by the Government, was as the first Chief of The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and Deputy Chief of the Integrated Defense Staff.

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Changing Subcontinental Mindsets

By all accounts our military did a superlative job during Operation Sindoor, so much so, that Pakistan was either cajoled by the United States, or voluntarily approached us directly, to agree to a cessation of hostilities/ceasefire. The possibility that the invitation to Field Marshal Munir for lunch at the White House may well have been a reward for de-escalating the conflict, points to the former. May be the Israeli-American plan to attack Iran had already been set in motion and they could not afford the distraction of a conflict, between two nuclear neighbours in the immediate neighbourhood, at the same time.

If there is any truth to the speculation that Pakistan was pressured to terminate hostilities, we too must have been compelled to do so likewise, probably with the caveat that Pakistan publicly approaches us, so as to enable us to save face. Nothing else really explains the abruptness with which hostilities ceased, or for that matter, Mr. Modi's public display of petulance with President Trump's claims of having intervened. Clearly, our repeated insistence that operations are on pause is purely a matter of semantics, aimed at the domestic audience, especially because of the forthcoming Bihar elections. Moreover, any military, including ours, can only maintain a heightened state of alert for only so long, without routine administration, maintenance, unit turnovers and training being adversely impacted.

The passage of time has now allowed us to delve more deeply into all facets of Operation Sindoor. What emerges, is that neither the political nor the military aims, we supposedly set for ourselves, were achievable. Neither have we been able to bring to justice the perpetrators of that heinous attack in Pahalgam, nor have we been able to deter/dissuade the Pakistani state from indulging in such futile ventures in the future. To suggest that future incidents will be responded to with equal, if not more ferocity, is just plain bluster. Moreover, there is a dichotomy in the strategic narrative we have publicly expounded. If, Pakistan is a state sponsor of terror against us, as we claim, then why did we only attack terror infrastructure and not elements of the Pakistani State aiding and abetting that terror? Their top military and ISI leadership, for example, who undoubtedly played a crucial role. Obviously, we were worried about escalation, which implies Pakistan's use of nuclear blackmail still has some traction.

Similarly, in terms of our diplomatic initiative, we were forced to send parliamentary delegations abroad because our message against Pakistan just did not seem to be getting through. Also, while we may now have an opportunity to rework more favourable terms for ourselves with respect to the Indus Water Treaty, to believe we will garner international support if we unilaterally abrogate it and stop all water to Pakistan, is plainly fanciful and pernicious. Dangerous, too as well, as it would then pose an existential threat to Pakistan, forcing it to respond militarily.

Because of our lack of strategic clarity, there were two major downsides in our conduct of Operation Sindoor from the military point of view. Firstly, the loss of aircraft, that has been officially acknowledged, though we remain blissfully ignorant of the numbers and types lost. Obviously, this must be because of speculation that the political leadership has egg on its face for not having permitted the IAF to undertake suppressive operations prior to launch of its deep penetration attacks. Secondly, the delay in initiating the operation, obviously allowed Pakistan the time needed to put in place appropriate measures to ensure minimal loss of life would occur, as also gave the PAF an opportunity to plan and execute suitable counter measures successfully on the first day. If our capabilities are to improve, the defence budget needs to be hiked substantially.

What the Pakistani leadership had probably not envisaged was that the headquarters of the LeT and the JeM, at Muridke and Bhawalpur, respectively would also be targeted. While their leaders would have gone into hiding to avoid assassination bids, their cadres did suffer casualties at these two locations. Similarly, the PAF would not have anticipated the escalatory attacks that targeted their infrastructure, including command and control and other high value assets. However, despite our spectacular success, as evidenced by publicly available satellite photos, we were unable to fully exploit the impact of these attacks on the Pakistani population because we agreed to a ceasefire before we could press home the advantage.

This allowed Pakistan to claim victory as well, which may not be a bad thing in the long run, for obvious reasons. While continuation of the status quo may have political benefits for ruling elites on both sides, the overwhelming majority of our populations are held hostage to the ambitions of their rulers and continue to pay a heavy price. This needs to change now, and indeed if President Trump has actually been able to stop hostilities between Israel and Iran as well as halt the genocide in Palestine, as he claims, then his intervention here would be greatly

appreciated by the people, and maybe make him worthy of the Nobel Prize, for which Pakistan has nominated him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Brigadier Deepak Sinha (Retd) is a second-generation paratrooper with over three decades of service in the army. He has an M.A. and M.Phil. in Defence and Strategic Studies from the University of Madras. He has also attended the Armed Forces Certificate Course on Business Management from MDI, Gurgaon. During his service he has held various command, staff and instructional appointments in India and abroad. He has extensive experience in airborne special operations forces and counter- insurgency operations have served in and commanded a Parachute Battalion in counter insurgency operations in the North East and Jammu & Kashmir.



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