



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



GLOBAL HORIZONS

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Author

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Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

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Cover Images:

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam in Varanasi, in Uttar Pradesh on September 11, 2025. Source: [Prime Minister of India](#)

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted the Prime Minister of Singapore, Lawrence Wong, at Hyderabad House, in New Delhi, on September 04, 2025. Source: [Prime Minister of India](#)

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, Kaja Kallas and European Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security, and Commissioner for Interinstitutional Relations and Transparency, Maroš Šefčovič, gave a press conference on the new Strategic EU-India Agenda, on September 17, 2025. Source: [European Commission](#)

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by

Nalin Surie

September was an eventful month.

Developments at the UN General Assembly's annual high-level segment during the month, ironically, reminded the international community (especially the United States) regarding the potential of the UN to further multilateral engagement and contribute to international peace and security, if indeed that is still the objective and the UN is allowed to do so. However, the long winded and often intemperate speech by President Trump to the UNGA on September 23 suggested that while recognising the potential of the United Nations, the United States has finally tired of the organisation. He also used the occasion to clearly spell out his world view and ideology in stark terms.

While the UNGA speeches were an interesting sideshow, the fact is that there was little progress on the major conflicts currently plaguing Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

The war in Ukraine got bloodier and Russian attacks and Ukraine counter attacks remained the norm. There were perfunctory warnings by President Trump to President Putin, but these had little impact. Sanctions were threatened, but in a manner that they could not be implemented since they required Europe to take steps against China and India in return. However, the European Union is working on a fresh package of sanctions against Russia, including the use of Russian Central bank assets frozen in Europe. The latter intent is at the very least controversial, and not in accordance with international law. It remains to be seen if the EU will in fact go ahead with this particular proposal made by the EU Commission President. It would have serious ramifications for the international financial system, besides prejudging the manner in which the war in Ukraine may end.

The United States seems to have made it clear that ending the war in Ukraine will essentially be a task for the Europeans. The United States would continue to provide appropriate weapons for which the Europeans would pay. This approach has left unclear what the role of NATO will be. And, the latter has come into focus in a major way by the alleged fact of Russian drones over flying NATO countries like Poland and the Baltic states. There have also been reports of Russian fighter aircraft intruding on

NATO airspace and unidentified drones over Danish airports. The EU is in the process of finalising a comprehensive anti-drone strategy.

President Trump continued to give a long rope to President Putin with one or two riders thrown in from time to time, threatening sanctions.

The situation in Europe is most disturbing and dangerous. There is manifest need for urgent restraint by both Russia and Ukraine.

In Gaza city, Israeli military action continued unabated, and scores of civilians including children lost their lives. Charges of genocide were brushed off by Israel. The government of Israel remained unrelenting in its determination to annihilate Hamas and on September 09 conducted an airstrike in the Leqtaifiya district of Qatar's capital Doha in an effort to kill the Hamas leadership that was expected to be studying a ceasefire proposal made by the US. The Qatari reaction and that of other Arab countries was understandably one of anger and incredulity, especially since Qatar has long been the intermediary between Israel and Hamas and is a major US partner that hosts the largest US military base in the region. Interestingly, President Trump claimed that he did not have advance notice of the attack and that by the time he was told and the US could speak to the Qataris, the attack had already taken place. There is also silence on how the Israeli aircraft flew all the way to Doha without the knowledge of the countries en route.

The Israeli attack was reportedly not successful and Hamas's senior leadership survived. It seems they were not where the bombing occurred. The Iran experience may have made them expect such perfidy.

The rulers of Qatar and the other Gulf countries will undoubtedly be wondering whether the United States can continue to be a reliable ally going forward. There was almost universal condemnation of the Israeli attack on Doha, including at the UN. The churn has begun.

It will also have implications for the US desire to build on the Abraham Accords and proposals such as IMEC and I2U2. India is involved with the latter two. The US objective, though, remains control over this vital region.

To take back control over the narrative, President Trump used the occasion of a visit by Israeli PM Netanyahu to the White House on September 29 to call the PM of Qatar and make Netanyahu apologise in public for the attack on Doha on September 09. Netanyahu went on to "assure you (Qatar PM) that Israel has no plan to violate your sovereignty again in the future and I have made that commitment to the (US) President". [Netanyahu's official X account.]

Equally significant, President Trump used the occasion of Netanyahu's visit to the White House on September 29 to announce his 20 point proposal to end the war in Gaza, after getting the Israeli PM (reluctantly) on board. Hamas was given 3-4 days to accept the proposal and are reportedly studying it. If they do not accept the plan, according to Trump, they will "pay in hell". Asked if there may be room for negotiations on the peace plan, Trump told reporters on September 30, "Not much". The intermediaries with Hamas reportedly include Egypt, Turkey, Qatar and other neighbours.

The Trump plan has understandably received support from the Gulf and other Muslim states, EU, China, India, Russia etc. Netanyahu has threatened that if Hamas does not accept the plan, Israel will finish the job on its own.

The Trump plan has many loose ends. If Hamas does accept it, it remains to be seen whether it will pass muster in the UN Security Council. At this point in time, though, the intention does not seem to be to take it there so that control can remain with Washington.

As announced by them in advance, and to the chagrin of Israel and the US, Australia, Canada, France, and UK declared recognition of Palestine at the ongoing UNGA session. With this, fourteen of the nineteen G20 countries have done so. That leaves out Germany, Italy, Japan, ROK and the US for the present.

In what is conceivably linked to the developments in Gaza, the UK, France and Germany, in collaboration with the US, invoked on September 28 the snap back provisions to reimpose sanctions on Iran that had been suspended with the entry into force of the JCPOA in 2015. Iran was accused of continued nuclear escalation and lack of cooperation with the IAEA. This followed Iran suspending inspection of its nuclear facilities after the US/Israel attacks on its nuclear installations. Iran described the sanctions as "unfair, unjust and illegal". The demands being placed on it to lift sanctions appear excessive. Iran insists it has no intention of producing nuclear weapons and its President, according to a BBC report, seeks assurances that its nuclear facilities would not be attacked by Israel. Only then would it be able to normalise its nuclear enrichment program.

As the squeeze on Iran by the West continues, there is no wonder that it looks to Russia and China for support.

While the US was busy belittling the UN at its General Assembly, its principal contender for global influence, China, was busy demonstrating its commitment to the

UN where it is unquestionably the second most significant power. This year, Premier Li Qiang addressed the High Level Segment at the UNGA on September 26.

China's desire to sustain, strengthen and mould the UN in a manner that serves its interests, and as the centre point for its preferred form of multilateralism, derives from its permanent membership of the UNSC; a privilege it zealously guards. And, which is inconsistent with its contention that true multilateralism is practised only when all countries big or small are treated as equal. (Premier Li Qiang at the 80th UNGA on September 26.) Li also addressed the China inspired high level meeting on the Global Development Initiative in New York on September 23.

The basic Chinese message was that in today's new period of turbulence and transformation, and where the once effective international system is constantly disrupted, China through Xi Jinping's GDI, GSI, GCI and now especially the Global Governance Initiative can share its "wisdom and solution for navigating global transformations and overcoming pressing challenges". (Li Quiang)

In effect, China's view of upholding the ideals of the UN requires carrying forward the 'spirit' of multilateralism and actively implementing Xi Jinping's four global initiatives. And, it is actively pursuing these initiatives at the bilateral, sub-regional, regional and UN levels. The objective is quite clearly to control/influence norm setting in multilateral institutions. Interestingly, in this context, multipolarity seems not to find mention.

In an effort to show its commitment to fighting climate change, and in stark contrast to the position of the Trump administration, Chinese President Xi addressed the UN Climate Summit on September 25 by video link. In his address, Xi announced China's new NDCs. By 2035, economy wide net greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced by 7 to 10% from peak levels; the share of non-fossil fuels in total energy consumption will exceed 30%; expand installed capacity of wind and solar by over six times the 2020 level (strive to reach 3,600 gigawatts); make NEVs the mainstream in the sales of new vehicles; scale up the total forest stock volume to over 24 billion cubic metres etc.

It bears recalling that China is the world's most polluting country in the world (CO₂-wise) by a big margin. Over twice when compared to the second biggest polluter, USA and more than four times India, the third largest.

US efforts to arrange a meeting between President Trump and President Xi continued. Trump appears to be particularly keen to have such a meeting, but the Chinese continue to focus on negotiating an appropriate trade agreement/understanding before agreeing to this. US-China trade talks were held in mid September, as a result

of which an agreement on the future of TikTok in the US appears to have been settled. This opened the way for a telephonic conversation between the two Presidents on September 19 after which President Trump announced that he had had a very productive call with Xi and they had made progress on many very important issues; that they had agreed to meet at the APEC Summit in ROK; that he would go to China in early 2026 and that President Xi would come to the United States at an appropriate time.

The Chinese readout of the conversation specifies that the two presidents had a candid and in-depth exchange of views on the current state of China- US relations and other issues of mutual interest. The conversation was reportedly pragmatic, positive and constructive. Xi stressed the vital importance of China-US relations and that both countries were fully capable of helping each other succeed and prosper together for the good of their two countries and of the world. For this to happen, there must, however, be mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation. Negotiations between them must reflect equality, respect and mutual benefit. The United States should refrain from imposing unilateral trade restrictions. and needs to provide an open, fair and non-discriminatory environment for Chinese investors.

The differences in the publicly announced outcomes by the two sides are quite clear. China continues to take its long-stated positions on matters that it believes impinge upon its sovereignty, right to development and market access. There is still much for the two sides to negotiate before the two Presidents meet in Seoul, including the issue of Chinese imports of Russian oil and gas to which Trump has objected on several occasions.

As part of its drive to strengthen old partnerships with democratic countries in the context of their evolving and complex relations with the US and China, the EU and India are working to give greater substance to their Strategic Partnership. For this purpose, the EU Commission adopted a new EU-India strategy on September 17. It has been stated by the EU's High Representative on Foreign Policy that closer India-EU Relations are vital for strengthening economic security and diversifying supply chains. Cooperation will be enhanced in the trade, technology, security & defence, and climate sectors. A free trade agreement, an investment protection agreement and a comprehensive air transport agreement could be pillars of this partnership. Cooperation will be enhanced in maritime security, counter terrorism, cyber defence. An agreement is to be negotiated on exchange of classified information and deepening ties between defence industries. The Commission's approach will be negotiated with India to be able to adopt a joint roadmap at the India-EU summit in early 2026. Nonetheless, India's purchase of Russian oil and India's participation in Russia's military exercises were identified as standing in the way of closer ties! The most

charitable explanation for the latter is hypocrisy, incorrect information and lack of understanding of Indian foreign policy.

Syria, under its new President Ahmad al-Sharaa (who has an Islamist-extremist past), spoke at the UNGA on September 24. This was after a gap of over 60 years. He called for a complete lifting of sanctions on his country and spoke of a new era in Syria of diplomacy, reconstruction and institutional reform. (New) Syria's pivot to the West signals a potential geopolitical asset for them. Israel does not, however, trust the new regime and Netanyahu has conditioned any deal with Syria on a security pact on demilitarising south- west Syria and protection of the Druze majority. In addition, Syria's institutions remain weak and differences among different groups could reemerge and undermine Western engagement and lead to regime instability. Al-Sharaa will no doubt have his hands full.

On September 12, Egypt, UAE, USA and Saudi Arabia announced a comprehensive peace roadmap for Sudan which calls for a three-month humanitarian truce followed by a nine-month transition to civil led governance. Ironically, foreign military involvement was condemned even though some of the plan's creators themselves support different factions in the conflict!

The situation on the ground in Sudan remains catastrophic. Fighting between the SAF and RSF intensified in Darfur and Kordofan. RSF drones killed 70 civilians in El-Fasher on September 19 alone. The humanitarian catastrophe continues to worsen and there appears to be only little light at the end of the tunnel. The hypocrisy is mind boggling.

The situation in east DRC remained very troubling. In her report to the UNSC on September 30, the head of MONUSCO conveyed that "there are discrepancies between the progress we see on paper and the reality which continues to be marred with violence". The AFC/M23 have continued to pursue a logic of territorial expansion and consolidation. Killings continue. Formal institutions are being replaced with alternative structures. She also reported that the humanitarian response plan for DRC is just over 15% funded to date compared to 41% last year at the same time. Hence, food insecurity is also growing and the humanitarian situation remains among the most severe globally. The question is whether anybody is listening? Those with the power and influence are either unable or unwilling to expend more energy and resources to resolve this festering crisis inspite of the mineral wealth of the region.

Indian foreign policy was confronted with a significant challenge, following the rioting and political developments in Nepal that ensued after the Nepal government banned social media platforms in early September. The so-called GenZ protested

against this starting Sep 8, and the events that followed led to violence and arson; the Parliament building, the Supreme Court and houses of prominent politicians were set on fire. Corruption and lack of job opportunities were added to the list of grievances of the protesters. Over 70 people were killed and over 2000 injured during the week long protest. Prime Minister Oli was forced to resign. The Army seems to have essentially brought back normalcy. Parliament has been dissolved and former Chief Justice Sushila Karki took over as head of an interim government. Elections are to be held on March 5, 2026.

Prime Minister Modi spoke to Prime Minister Karki on September 18 and while conveying heartfelt condolences for the tragic loss of life, also assured her that India is ready to continue working closely with Nepal to further strengthen the special ties between the two countries. He also offered India's full support to Nepal in his effort towards restoring peace and stability and for the progress of the people of Nepal. Earlier, on September 12, India had welcomed the formation of the new interim government. It was also clarified that as a close neighbour, a fellow democracy and a long-term development partner, India will continue to work closely with Nepal for the well-being and prosperity of both countries and peoples.

The developments in Nepal offer a tremendous opportunity to restore, over the next few years, the importance of India in Nepal's outlook and outreach.

There were two important incoming visits from India's island neighbours, Singapore (September 2-4) and Mauritius (September 9-16), both of which are important, economic, and strategic partners of India. Important agreements were signed with both countries and commitments made for future cooperation across identified sectors.

With Singapore, a roadmap for the comprehensive strategic partnership was issued. Eight priority areas have been identified and actions listed under each. These sectors are: economic cooperation, skills development, digitisation, sustainability, connectivity, healthcare & medicine, defence & security cooperation and P2P/cultural exchanges.

Bilateral trade with Singapore touched nearly \$35 billion in 2024-25 and Singapore became the largest source of FDI into India. In cumulative terms, the figure amounts to nearly USD 170 billion.

It has been agreed to institutionalise the India-Singapore ministerial roundtable as the foremost mechanism to annually monitor the progress in the implementation of the comprehensive strategic partnership.

The two sides reaffirmed their strong commitment to combat terrorism. Both countries are to strengthen cooperation to fight against global and regional terrorism and terror organisations including those proscribed by the UNSC 1267 sanctions committee and against terror financing through bilateral mechanisms, FATF and other multilateral fora. Singapore acknowledged with appreciation India's interest in the Malacca Straits Patrol.

The visit of Mauritius Prime Minister Ramgoolam was his first bilateral visit to any country after he took over as Prime Minister in November 2024. In his briefing on the visit, Foreign Secretary Misri, described the relationship with Mauritius as being "unique"; that Mauritius is an integral part of India's neighbourhood first policy and vision MAHASAGAR.

During the visit, a slew of agreements was entered into and India also announced a special economic package to Mauritius. The package, details of which are available online, includes the development of the port of Port Louis, development and assistance for surveillance of the Chagos marine protected area, provision of helicopters and a mix of loans and grants for major projects.

India is to continue to assist Mauritius in augmenting its maritime security and defence.

Budgetary assistance to Mauritius in the current financial year of USD 25 million will be provided.

In the space sector, it has been agreed to establish a telemetry, tracking and telecommunication station for satellite and launch vehicles. Other important agreements cover oceanography and hydrography.

PM Modi, while addressing the joint press meeting on September 11, stated that "India and Mauritius are two nations, but our dreams and destiny are one"; that "India and Mauritius are not just partners, but a family" and that "a free, open, secure, stable, and prosperous Indian Ocean is our shared priority".

The signing of the strategic mutual defence agreement between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, on September 17, has given rise to many questions and some concern in India. Signing of this agreement came hot on the heels of the Israeli bombing in Doha and it is being suggested that this was a Saudi initiative. (Saudi Arabia has a long-standing military relationship with Pakistan.) Some argue that this is Pakistan's way of protecting itself against another Indian military operation of the Sindoor variety. It is also being suggested that the agreement has been entered into after a green light from the Trump administration which in recent months has shown excessive warmth

towards Pakistan and its military leadership. The latter is actually a weird state of affairs but that seems to have become the norm.

The text of the agreement has not been released. Speculation over whether the terms would include use of Pakistani nuclear assets in support of Saudi Arabia is also a question that is doing the rounds. Nevertheless, there is certainly a signal here to Israel and Iran.

There could be many reasons why this pact has been entered into. India will no doubt factor this into its defence and security planning, and would undoubtedly receive appropriate assurances from the Saudi side with which India has excellent relations. Pakistan is taking every opportunity to hide its insecurities and difficult economic and social circumstances by offering its services to virtually any bidder. That is part of its established standard operating practice.

In so far as India-US relations are concerned, notwithstanding the social media messages exchanged between Trump and Modi on September 6 and 9, Trump's birthday call to Modi on September 17, and the scheduled trade talks, the prognosis for bilateral relations remained negative. The current US administration remains undecided whether India is a friend or not and whether India's ongoing growth and development as a great power is in US national interest. The outright positivity being shown towards Pakistan and its military leader is intended to rankle India. But India has been there before and will take it in stride.

The US needs to make up its mind on whether or not this present administration counts India as a genuine but independent long-term strategic partner. Continuing to vitiate the bilateral relationship could lead to irreparable damage to a partnership that has systematically been nurtured since the beginning of this century by the leadership of both countries. That would not be in the interest of the democratic world and peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

India in the meantime will work on its development with renewed focus, continue to develop its multipolar relationships, and seek reformed multilateralism.



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