



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



GLOBAL HORIZONS

AUGUST 2025

Author

Nalin Surie

Volume III, Issue 8



Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

www.delhipolicygroup.org



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

Global Horizons

Vol. III, Issue 8

August 2025

ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

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.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

Author

Ambassador Nalin Surie, I.F.S. (Retd.), Distinguished Fellow for Diplomacy, Delhi Policy Group

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.

Cover Images:

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi meeting Japanese Prime Minister, Shigeru Ishiba for the 15th India-Japan Annual Summit, in Tokyo, on August 29, 2025. Source: [Prime Minister of India](#)

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the 25th Heads of State Council meeting during the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Tianjin Summit on September 1, 2025. Source: [Narendra Modi](#)

President of China, Xi Jinping addresses the Commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of the Victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, on September 3, 2025. Source: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs People's Republic of China](#)

© 2025 by the Delhi Policy Group

Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor,

India Habitat Centre,

Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003.

www.delhipolicygroup.org

Global Horizons

August 2025

by

Nalin Surie

The continued focus of the Western world on the Ukraine war has almost completely blindsided what is happening in Gaza. Israel announced the complete take over of Gaza City and began military operations for that purpose. Killings of innocent civilians, women and children continued as collateral damage and was simply shrugged aside. Charges of genocide against Israel were given short shrift. Israel itself appears to have downgraded the need to release hostages still held by Hamas. The intent now, notwithstanding domestic opposition, appears to be the complete destruction of Hamas as a political force and the incorporation, to start with, of Gaza City de facto into Israel. The forced move of Gaza residents into a narrow corridor to the south could lead to a further humanitarian catastrophe.

That the actions of the Israeli government have the explicit support of the US administration is quite evident. European concerns and opposition do not seem to count. Europe is presently more preoccupied with the ending of the war in Ukraine and what it sees as the looming long term threat from Russia. And, sustaining the US security umbrella.

Notwithstanding the much anticipated and hyped summit in Alaska on August 15 between Presidents Trump and Putin, there was no ceasefire and no clear sign of the way forward to end the war in Ukraine. There were perhaps some understandings arrived at between the two Presidents, but these so far remain under wraps.

At their joint press conference on August 16, Putin described the talks as “substantive and productive”. He reiterated that developments in Ukraine present “fundamental threats to Russia’s national security” and that for the “conflict resolution in Ukraine to be long term and lasting, all the root causes of the crisis must be eliminated; all of Russia’s legitimate concerns must be taken into account; and a fair security balance must be restored in Europe and the rest of the world”.

For his part, Trump said that many points were agreed on but “a couple of big ones that we have not quite gotten there but we have made some headway. So there is no deal till there is a deal”. But, “we really made some progress today”. He said he would now brief NATO and Zelenskyy about the meeting and “it is ultimately upto them”.

President Putin returned to Moscow, confident and determined to pursue his objectives in Ukraine. Russian attacks on Ukrainian cities and Ukrainian attacks on Russian targets including oil supplies continue.

A flurry of meetings were held by the European powers and President Zelenskyy with the US. It would appear that the US would be willing to provide some security guarantees to Ukraine to back up European efforts. The Coalition of the Willing met under President Macron's chairmanship on September 05, at which time it was announced that 26 countries would provide troops to keep the peace in Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire. The Russian response was quick in coming. All such troops would be legitimate targets.

The present US administration is clearly willing to give Russia a longish rope on Ukraine, although it is not particularly pleased with Russia, and with India's seeming and evolving proximity to China. In his tweet of September 05 following the SCO Summit in Tianjin, President Trump, on seeing the ostensible bonhomie between Modi, Putin and Xi, said "looks like we've lost India and Russia to deepest, darkest, China. May they have a long and prosperous future together!". Needless to say, no responsibility was taken for why this may be happening.

The Trump administration's policies have by now further upended the structures of international relations set in place since WW II, and modified after the end of the Cold War. Arguably, the process had begun earlier and was reinforced by steps taken by the Biden Administration following the Ukraine war.

The rise of China and its challenge to US primacy looms large. And it is to China that the present US administration is making concessions.

During the month, US-India relations on the other hand took a nose dive on account of factors listed in the July issue of this monthly, and a fresh spate of false narratives and charges from senior functionaries of the US administration. India was accused, inter-alia, of financing Russia's war in Ukraine. It was demanded that it leave BRICS and work for US interests etc. That India, politely but firmly, stood its ground added fuel to the fire of these motivated US accusations, and impacted the US assessment of the outcome of the SCO Summit as reflected in President Trump's tweet referred to above. More on the SCO Summit follows later in this narrative.

The Trump Administration's approach to prioritise security and domestic capacity building at all costs and to force concessions out of allies and partners is a short term remedy that will have deleterious long term consequences. Destruction of trust will take long to restore if that effort is continued. The policy of MAGA is consistent with

the destruction of alliances/partnerships and friendships. The latter would axiomatically strengthen the rise of alternative plurilateral structures.

The US Administration's policy of forcing allies and partners to make concessions is short sighted at best. This reality was clearly and publicly enunciated by the President of the European Council, Costa on September 01 at the Bled Strategic Forum. Recalling the trade agreement the EU was forced to sign in July with the US, he acknowledged the frustration felt by many Europeans who believe the EU as having been too passive in the matter. He suggested that the trade agreement had become necessary since "stabilising transatlantic relations and ensuring US engagement in Ukraine's security has been a top priority". The EU found that its powerful single market and rules based approach was not sufficient. Hence, "we must become more autonomous, more resilient, and more prepared to act. More sovereign. We cannot rely just on our allies when facing threats. We must take greater responsibility for our own destiny".

The messaging from Japan and ROK too is on similar lines. For other countries in the Indo-Pacific as well, the need to hedge and reduce reliance on the US is also evident. This applies also to the countries of the Global South, especially the bigger ones such as Brazil, South Africa and Venezuela. In the latter case, like for India, there appear to be elements of personal vindictiveness in the application of the present US administration's policies. These in their totality are ironically strengthening the forces of multipolarity in international relations which the US dislikes. The US thus dislikes plurilateral arrangements such as BRICS and the growing recourse among countries of the South and China to use their own currencies in settlement of trade and other international transactions.

Israel continued to keep a careful watch on the happenings in Syria to ensure its security is not vitiated. Early in August, Syria signed 12 investment deals worth USD 14 billion. Interestingly, on August 25, the US Treasury Department removed Syria from its sanctions list. However, it appears that the Caesar Act remains in effect, which means waiver certification will be required by US firms for doing business with that country. The new leadership of Syria seems to be cleverly utilising the preoccupation of the West with other problems to entrench itself.

The peace agreement between DRC and Rwanda ran into heavy weather over withdrawal of M-23 forces from areas they held in the DRC. August saw a resurgence of localised fighting, especially in North Kivu. The meeting on September 03 in Washington of the Second Joint Oversight Committee for the peace agreement between DRC and Rwanda acknowledged slowness in implementation of some elements of the agreement and focused on addressing recent challenges, including violence in eastern DRC. Steps were identified to ensure compliance. For peace to

return, the facilitators will have to stay focused on persuading all parties to adhere to the terms of the agreement.

The landslide that killed several hundreds in Tarseen village in the Marra Mountains in western Sudan's Darfur region on August 31, further compounded the humanitarian disaster in Sudan on account of the ongoing civil war in that country. With the attention of the international community diverted elsewhere, it seems unlikely that adequate succour would be provided to Sudan and the civil war brought to an end. The signs so far are not propitious.

August was an important month for Indian foreign policy.

The PM of Fiji, Sitiveni Rabuka paid an official visit to India, August 24-26. The importance of the visit has to be seen in the background of the long standing historical contacts between the two, the role of girmitiyas in the development and politics of Fiji, and the latter's standing in the Pacific Islands Forum.

A detailed joint statement was issued and a series of grassroots initiatives/projects agreed to. Overall, the focus of cooperation going forward will be on defence, health, agriculture, agro-processing, trade and investment, SMEs, education and skill development. A declaration of intent on migration and mobility is intended to facilitate movement of professionals and students. Fiji has joined the India sponsored Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative which seeks to manage, conserve and sustain the maritime domain.

This is a partnership that will need to be consciously and systematically strengthened.

PM Modi paid an important landmark visit to Japan, on August 29-30; a visit that will hopefully genuinely convert potential into broad based and rapid development of bilateral relations. The visit has to be seen in the context of the major ongoing changes in international relations, referred in part in the earlier and later sections of this paper.

In his remarks at the joint press conference with Japanese PM Ishiba, Modi stated that "we have laid a strong foundation for a new and golden chapter in our Special Strategic and Global Partnership. We have set a roadmap for the next decade. Our vision focuses on investment, innovation, economic security, environment, technology, health, mobility, p2p ties and state-prefecture cooperation". It has further been agreed to "strengthen our cooperation in the fields of defence industry and innovation", according to Modi.

PM Ishiba stated that "Japan and India, which share fundamental values and strategic interests, bear great responsibility for peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region

and international society” and that he wishes to fulfil this responsibility together with PM Modi.

At the end of the visit, a comprehensive set of documents was entered into that included a Fact Sheet on India-Japan Economic Security Cooperation, Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, India-Japan Vision for the Next Decade (8 directions), Action Plan for HR exchanges and cooperation, and Joint Statement on Partnership for Security and Prosperity of our next generation. In addition, there are detailed outcomes on a joint crediting mechanism, digital partnership, cooperation in mineral resources, cooperation between space organisations, clean hydrogen and ammonia, a private investment target of 10 trillion Japan Yen from Japan to India in the next decade, and the launch of a next generation mobility partnership.

In his briefing on the visit, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri stated that the “objective and ambition of this visit has been to infuse much higher levels of aspiration and momentum into our Special Strategic and Global Partnership”. This has happened, but the proof of the pudding will lie in the eating. The fact that PM Ishiba resigned as PM on September 07 will hopefully not stand in the way of implementation of agreements arrived at, which are clearly to mutual benefit particularly in today’s fast changing international environment.

From Japan, Modi went on to Tianjin to attend the SCO Summit hosted by China on August 31 and September 01. The dates for this were settled well in advance and were unrelated to developments in international relations during the month. However, the demonstration of the chemistry, in particular, between Presidents Xi and Putin and PM Modi, normal in such summit environments, seems to have upset many in the US leadership and some Western countries. President Trump’s tweet on 05 September referred to earlier is pertinent in this context.

It also gave rise to some commentary in the West that a possible China-India-Russia triangle could pose a serious challenge to the West and corrective steps may be needed to restore the status quo ante. It was also pointed out that there were too many problems among the three and that such an arrangement may not last. But, the cat had been set among the pigeons and the thought may not go away easily.

In so far as the summit itself is concerned, in his address to the Summit, Modi highlighted that India’s vision and policy towards the SCO are built on the three pillars of Security, Connectivity and Opportunity. He firmly condemned terrorism; underlined that efforts towards connectivity must uphold the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity that are enshrined as core principles of the SCO Charter; and the need to expand cooperation and reform. In the latter context, he

proposed the creation of a Civilisational Dialogue Forum under the SCO. He called on the SCO to increase cooperation for reforms of global institutions, including UN reform, promote multilateralism, and an inclusive world order.

On the sidelines of the SCO Summit, PM Modi had structured bilateral meetings with Presidents Xi and Putin and senior Myanmar leader Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, in addition to a series of pull asides.

As expected, the meeting with President Xi on August 31 and Politburo Standing Committee member Cai Qi were particularly significant. The ground had been prepared in talks in Delhi earlier in the month, during Foreign Minister Wang Yi's meetings with India's EAM and NSA.

MEA issued a detailed press release and the Foreign Secretary also covered this in his briefing. The Chinese also issued their version. While both sides have stuck to their core positions, they have found it useful and necessary to try and break the stalemate in bilateral relations. The coming weeks and months will show whether a new momentum can be achieved, including on trade issues. A warming of relations between China and the US in the coming weeks can potentially impede the normalisation of Sino-Indian relations.

Modi reiterated to Xi the importance of peace and tranquility in the border areas for continued development of bilateral relations. He underlined the need to proceed from a political and strategic direction to expand bilateral trade and investment ties and reduce the trade deficit. Modi noted that both countries pursue strategic autonomy and need to expand common ground on bilateral, regional and global issues; that they are partners rather than rivals; that differences should not be allowed to be turned into disputes.

For his part, President Xi stressed that "it should be the right choice for China and India to be good neighbourly friends and partners that help each other succeed, and have the dragon and the elephant dance together". He proposed a four point formula for the development of bilateral relations going forward viz., strengthen strategic communication and deepen mutual trust; focus on development and expand cooperation and exchanges to achieve mutual benefit and win-win; accommodate each others concerns and get along in peace and harmony, cherish Panchsheel and combine our strength to maintain peace and tranquility in the border regions and NOT allow the boundary question to define the overall bilateral relationship; and strengthen multilateral coordination to safeguard shared interests and make due contributions to peace and prosperity in Asia and the wider world.

The differences in focus and emphasis are quite clear. The path to normalisation of bilateral relations will require a special effort, particularly on the part of China.

The SCO Summit was followed on September 03 by a major show of force by President Xi Jinping and the PLA. The occasion was the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Chinese people's war of resistance against Japanese aggression and the World's anti-fascism war. The highlight was a massive military parade showcasing China's overall military might, advancements in military technologies and adoption of new forms of warfare.

The man of the moment was President Xi who was completely in command.

The message to the US and the West, and others, was intended to not simply deter but to highlight that the "rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is unstoppable". In his address at the parade, Xi underlined the major contribution of the Chinese people to the "salvation of human civilisation". Xi warned that today humanity was again faced with a choice of peace or war, dialogue or confrontation, and win-win outcomes or zero-sum games. Xi stressed that the Chinese people would firmly stand on the right side of history and on the side of human progress.

To prevent recurrence of tragedies, Xi specified that nations must treat each other as equals, live in harmony and mutually support one another. (Alas, it would be nice if China practiced what it preaches).

Xi made it clear that the PLA would provide strategic support for China's national rejuvenation and make greater contributions to world peace and development. The importance of the PLA and full control over it, in Xi's scheme of priorities, is quite clear.

The gauntlet has clearly been thrown before the US and its allies.

Significantly, the military parade was attended among others by the Presidents of Russia, DPRK, Myanmar (de facto), Iran, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Belarus, Vietnam, Maldives, Zimbabwe, Indonesia and Serbia and the PMs of Pakistan, Malaysia, Nepal and Slovakia.

The impact was not lost on the world, including the fact that the leaders of China, Russia and DPRK were meeting together for the first time and were given serious prominence in the coverage of the parade. President Trump tweeted, ostensibly to Xi, "please give my warmest regards to Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong UN as you conspire against the USA". He also reminded Xi of the heavy losses incurred by the US in the fight against Japan in China, which had not been explicitly acknowledged by Xi.

It remains to be seen how these developments will impact US-China relations going forward, including on tariff matters where China has till November 10, 2025 to come to an agreement with the US. There is also talk of a Xi-Trump meeting, perhaps at the time of the APEC Summit in ROK in late October.

A reference was made earlier in this paper that on account of US actions, India-US relations had taken a nosedive during the month. For reasons not clear but perhaps based on happenings referred to above, President Trump tweeted on September 06 that: "I will always be friends with Modi. He is great. I just don't like what he's doing at this particular moment. India and United States have a special relationship. There is nothing to worry about. We just have moments on occasion."

PM Modi response was swift and he said: "deeply appreciate, and fully reciprocate President Trump's sentiments and positive assessment of our ties. India and the US have a very positive and forward looking comprehensive and global strategic partnership."

It remains to be seen how this exchange of sentiments will play out and enable normalisation of relations. Trust is difficult to restore at the best of times. The international situation today is convoluted and complicated. It is, though, in mutual interest to restore normalcy in India-US ties. But, given the background, the US will need to be the first mover. Also, India cannot become a pawn in any wider US game plan.

Indian diplomacy will have its hands really full going forward and will need to be both nimble and strategic.



Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor,
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road
New Delhi - 110003
India

www.delhipolicygroup.org