



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



POLICY BRIEF

The Global Scene: A World in Turmoil

Author

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ABOUT US

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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.

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.

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Cover Photographs:

US President Donald Trump holding talks with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his 2020 state visit to India, at Hyderabad House, New Delhi, on February 24, 2020. Source: [Prime Minister of India](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi holding a bilateral summit with the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, in Moscow, on July 9, 2024. Source: [Prime Minister of India](#)

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping on the margins of the BRICS Summit held in Kazan, Russia, on October 23, 2024. Source: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs – The People's Republic of China](#)

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The Global Scene: A World in Turmoil

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Overview

After another tumultuous year, global order stands precariously poised and trending towards fragmentation. Great power confrontations have escalated, with the rest of the international community bearing the consequences. Adherence to the UN Charter and respect for international law has further weakened.

From Europe to the Middle East and Africa, brutal conflicts of expansion and suppression raged uncontrolled in 2024, wreaking death, destruction and human suffering that the world has not witnessed for decades.

The year also saw major upheavals in the political landscape of democracies, both developed and developing. Authoritarian powers of the Eurasian landmass drew closer to each other strategically and economically, but their individual fortunes fluctuated.

The pushback against the inequities and imbalances of globalisation continued, as nations turned to bolster economic security and resilience. Despite headwinds, the global economy continued to power ahead, led mainly by the US, China, India and South East Asia.

As the new year dawns, it is not clear whether 2024 was a watershed year that will usher in better times ahead, or if even more intense great power contention and regional conflicts lie ahead. Despite self-serving narratives declaring winners (Western democracies and Israel) and losers (authoritarian powers, despots and Iran), the underlying trends of future global balances remain uncertain.

A marginalised and unreformed UN system remained a bystander on vital issues of global peace, security and development. Cooperation on global issues, including climate change, weakened. In the midst of growing multipolarity, there was weaker multilateralism. The imperative of reformed multilateralism gathered momentum, but democratic legitimacy in international politics remains a distant goal. Emerging powers and nations of the Global South will need to step up efforts to secure their rightful place as stakeholders and decision makers in world order.

Great Power Equations

The West remains predominant in terms of economic, technological and military power, but is increasingly struggling to maintain its unquestioned primacy and dominance over the world order. Alienation and scepticism is growing across the vast majority of developing nations and emerging powers as the West's double standards - and even blatant disregard for global norms - are becoming commonplace.

Unsurprisingly, the search for alternatives is gathering momentum, with dozens of countries vying for membership of the expanding BRICS forum, attracted by its promise of respecting the sovereign equality of nations, cooperation for mutual benefit, and the prospect of accessing wider options for national progress. BRICS + Partners now comprise 23 nations from all continents.

Russia continued to pay a heavy price in prestige, blood and treasure for its invasion of Ukraine (despite making some territorial gains), but the US-led Western alliance also expended its strength on massive financial resources and supplies of war materiel to Ukraine, with marginal outcomes.

Meanwhile, China conserved and consolidated its power, and continued to steadily increase its global influence, from Asia to Africa and Latin America. Even as its economy faced structural setbacks and lower growth, China reduced its external dependence in critical technology sectors, while seeking to increase global dependence on China as the world's factory for everything. With China's industrial and manufacturing overcapacity largely driving its export-led growth, the impetus for trade protectionism, diversification and decoupling surged in industrialised and developing countries alike.

Breakdown of World Order

With the collapse of conventional deterrence in Europe and the Middle East, violations of the UN Charter and international humanitarian law multiplied unchecked, as entire societies were indiscriminately ravaged by violent conflict, acts of terror and of retribution, and targeted assassinations, while civilian infrastructure was destroyed both on land and sea. Violations of sovereignty and territorial integrity grew, nations were invaded with impunity, and cross-border attacks were launched by aircraft and missiles against targets of adversaries. The consequences of these unprecedented actions for world order will be considerable and long lasting.

Meanwhile, the world will also have to deal with the prospect of more nation states falling apart or descending into violent disorder as a result of external interventions, internal divisions, economic and humanitarian distress, and unsustainable debt. Tragically, the humanitarian disaster of famine and internal displacement unfolding in civil war-torn Sudan drew scant attention from the international community.

Regional Conflicts and Tensions

US President-elect Donald Trump stood out among Western leaders in calling for an end to ongoing conflicts, but the path to stability and peace in Europe and elsewhere will not be simple.

Russia's demand for legally binding guarantees for preserving its core security interests in Ukraine appeared unlikely to be met by Western powers seeking to weaken Russia strategically and geopolitically; maintaining hostility and tensions with Russia is becoming a necessity for NATO's cohesion and even survival. As the threat of conflict escalation loomed large and Ukraine fatigue grew, Europe remained divided over issues of continuing the war or searching for peace. The US and Russia will need to take the lead in the drive for peace if it is to materialise. That in turn will require a moderation of the Washington establishment's perpetual hostility towards Russia.

NATO's mission creep in the Indo-Pacific raised the question whether this Western alliance is merely a defensive instrument for collective security, or is itself a latent source of belligerence undermining regional and global stability. Western arguments about the indivisibility of European and Asian security persisted, but it was increasingly clear that this refrain implies the strategic suppression of Asia by the West as it pursues dominance at both ends of the Eurasian continent.

There were growing tensions in the Indo-Pacific maritime. To the west, and even after a year of US-led naval operations, the sea lanes of the Red Sea remained vulnerable to Houthi attacks. In the east, there was no effective check on China's coercive maritime assertions in the East and South China Seas. Both trends were indicative of the limits of US and Western power.

In the Middle East, Israel's military onslaughts, sustained by the flow of US weapon supplies, pulverised Hamas and Hezbollah and decapitated their leaderships. Iran's "axis of resistance" was largely dismantled. Israel successfully targeted Iranian air defence and missile infrastructure, withstood Iranian missile attacks with the support of US military assets, and turned its attention to the Houthis. With the sudden collapse of the Assad regime in Syria

at year end, the strategic setback for Iran across the region was complete. Russia's prospects in Syria dimmed. The influence of Türkiye over Syria grew, while Israel occupied adjacent Syrian territories to expand its security perimeter. What these developments will imply for regional stability and how this radically changed Middle East scenario will unfold in 2025 remained an open question.

Political Developments and Change

Turning to political developments in Western democracies, the event of the year was the remarkable comeback victory of Donald Trump and his distinctive brand of "America First" conservative populism in the US presidential election, which appeared to have ended an era of progressive politics. The election also witnessed a decisive shift of public opinion from the prevailing elitist-liberal priorities of climate change and identity politics, to concerns about the economy and immigration, as well as an endorsement of policies oriented towards national rather than international pursuits. Trump's mandate could thus be seen as disruptive change in domestic governance and the promise of peace and stability abroad. Traditional establishments in both Republican and Democratic parties were left struggling to adjust to Trump's widening appeal across broad segments of the US population, nationwide.

The turn away from traditional parties of the left and right to anti-establishment nationalist-populist parties was ascendant in Europe as well, with the National Rally making gains in France, the AfD rising in Germany, and the Brothers of Italy running a popular government in Italy. In Germany, the centre-left governing coalition is on its way out, and the conservative CDU as well as the hard-right insurgent populists of the AfD appear set to emerge on top in the forthcoming elections. The issues of stagnating economies and immigration are centre stage in the major countries of Europe, which will also impact their foreign policy orientation in the coming year.

In Asia, there was leadership change in Japan, which also saw the ruling parties losing their majority in the Diet, heralding a return to domestic political instability and dimming prospects of decisive leadership by PM Shigeru Ishiba. After a few bold pronouncements on foreign and security policy issues which included a call for a more equal US-Japan alliance, Ishiba settled back into more traditional approaches, while moving early to improve relations with China. South Korea witnessed even more dramatic developments, which included a brief declaration of martial law and impeachments of the President and interim President. This political turmoil could eventually impact the US-ROK-Japan

trilateral partnership which was carefully put together by the Biden administration.

The nations of South East Asia pursued ambivalent policies in coping with US-China competition, hedging their bets while working to ensure that a stable balance is maintained.

US Posture under Trump

Trump will begin his second term with substantial public support and optimism about his campaign promises to lead the world's pre-eminent power to even greater national prosperity and global standing.

In terms of conventional wisdom, Trump can be expected to scale back on liberal internationalism and foreign entanglements. However, despite his well-known proclivity towards disconcerting rhetoric, unpredictability and transactional deal making, the Trump we are likely to see in his second term will perhaps be more engaged with building a legacy of expanding America's global power, influence and interests. He will certainly resort to unconventional approaches to assert US dominance, drive even harder bargains, and react more decisively if US power is challenged.

Under the Biden administration, the Euro-Atlantic alliance has been re-energised as the principal instrument of the West's global domination. Decisions on global security and economy have been centred around the exclusive Western institutions of NATO and G7. Trump can benefit from this existing framework, while also strengthening the credibility of US deterrence against rivals and adversaries and pushing allies and partners to assume greater responsibilities.

Economic warfare as an integral component of geopolitical strategy has been extensively practiced under Biden, which Trump can use to shape the behaviour of friends and foes alike. He has already made it clear that the threat of tariffs will be used as a tool for negotiation and coercive pressure, for both political and economic ends.

The European Union will need to be particularly mindful of proactively managing tensions with the US over its trade surplus, something that the President of the European Commission has already acknowledged.

In the Indo-Pacific, the US under Biden has lifted the profile of the Quad as a stabilising force for good. The Quad is also an important platform for the US to engage India, a non-allied strategic partner, on regional security issues of the

Indo-Pacific. It is likely that the Quad initiative will continue to progress under Trump.

Outlook for India

The outlook for India-US relations under the Trump presidency is moderately positive, but new terms of mutually beneficial engagement will need to be set, particularly in the areas of trade, economic relations and immigration. Key ongoing bilateral initiatives like iCET, that strategically bind the high technology ecosystems in the two countries for mutual benefit, will also need to be ring-fenced. Trump's choice of nominees for Secretary of State and National Security Adviser augur well for continuity in bilateral ties.

The Quad summit to be hosted by India will provide an early opportunity for renewing the Modi-Trump equation. It will also likely signal the nature of US commitments in the Indo-Pacific.

The US has emerged as India's most consequential partner, whereas China is its most consequential challenge.

It is significant that the past year saw the reaffirmation of India's time-tested relations with Russia through summit and high-level meetings.

Diplomatic perseverance and military deterrence also delivered progress on stabilising the situation on the India-China LAC in Ladakh, which led to the first Modi-Xi meeting in five years and the resumption of other high-level dialogues to further normalise bilateral relations and seek a resolution to the boundary issue. This is likely to be a long drawn out process, as rebuilding trust will take time and depend on China's actions to uphold commitments and solemn agreements.

Finally, in India's immediate neighbourhood, its relations with the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan are on the upswing, while there is serious concern about developments in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Pakistan. With Afghanistan, a modus vivendi has been worked out with the Taliban. India will have to continue to address neighbourhood challenges as a matter of priority.

As the world traverses an uncertain period and volatility prevails, India's longstanding policies of realist and independent decision making based on its sovereign interests, and prioritising recourse to dialogue and diplomacy, will continue to serve it well. A sharper focus on aggregating comprehensive national power will provide the backdrop for India's external engagements and partnerships in the year ahead.



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