



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

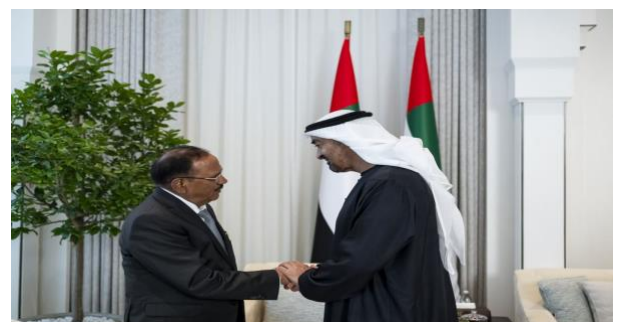


GLOBAL HORIZONS

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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 an independently funded 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.

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Cover Images:

1. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi meeting with the President of the Republic of Korea (ROK), Lee Jae Myung, at Hyderabad House, New Delhi, on April 20, 2026. Source: [Prime Minister of India](#)
2. Indian Vice-President C. P. Radhakrishnan was welcomed by the President of Sri Lanka, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, in Colombo on April 19, 2026. Source: [X/@anuradisanayake](#)
3. Indian NSA Ajit Doval called on President HH Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed during the former's official visit to the UAE, on April 26, 2026. Source: [X/@IndembAbuDhabi](#)

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by

Nalin Surie

The US fiddled while fires, stoked by its and Israeli attacks on Iran, burnt across different parts of the world causing serious economic damage. The US-Israel inability to bring Iran to heel by means of wanton destruction was writ large. Iran demonstrated that in spite of the massive damage done to its leadership, to its military, to its infrastructure etc., it still had both the means and capabilities to use the cards that it holds to serious advantage and force the United States to enter into negotiations to end the war. The most potent weapon was the Iranian blockage of the Strait of Hormuz. The US in turn blocked the Strait from the outside to ensure Iran cannot benefit from control of ships exiting the Strait. Attacks on US bases and energy infrastructure in the region had also demonstrated that the Iranian forces were potent enough to cause unacceptable damage.

It was abundantly clear that the US lacked support from even its closest allies in its illegal war against Iran. Domestic support was not really forthcoming. The impact of energy and other supply disruptions was being felt the world across and at home in the US. Regional equations in the Gulf began to change. At the same time, it will take considerable time to build back supplies of munitions and equipment that had already been hugely expended in the war so far. Iran, too, will need time to set its domestic house in order and settle or reduce differences between the different segments of the leadership, including the IRGC.

An uneasy ceasefire was in place between the two sides while negotiations towards some sort of settlement continued through the mediation of countries like Pakistan, Turkey, Qatar, and Egypt. The Strait of Hormuz remained effectively blocked. Both sides have exchanged proposals and President Trump's response to the latest Iranian proposal was that Iran had not yet paid enough of a price. The threat to resume massive attacks on Iran was repeated several times during the month.

As a result, problems for countries like India, for which the Gulf region is a critical multi-dimensional partner, continue to mount. The future of that region and the role it will play post the end of hostilities will have a vital bearing on India's overall security (including the threat of terrorism), energy security, trade, investment, connectivity, financial relations, diaspora matters and civilisational relations,

among others. Indian leaders, including the NSA, have been in touch with their Gulf and Iranian counterparts on a regular basis with a view to ensuring Indian interests and encouraging a return to diplomacy and dialogue. India is also in touch with other affected partners in Asia. PM Modi will visit the UAE in May. India's presidency of BRICS provides it a forum to be helpful but with Iran, Saudi Arabia and UAE all being members, it will not be easy to thread that needle.

President Trump's game plan to end the war is not clear. What is clear, however, is that he has multiple objectives in mind and believes he has both time and power on his side to bend the world to his will. For instance, of late it is being speculated in analytical writings that China is among the implicit targets of the war in Iran and its dragging out. Trump is expected to visit China in mid-May.

President Trump seems unfazed by the fact that his actions since coming back to power have effectively upended international institutions, organisations and security arrangements put in place largely at US instance post WWII. The US seems to rest assured in its nuclear and military power, its technological and scientific capacities, its productive capability, its resource and energy availability and market size, among other positive attributes. And, it sees the present juncture as the appropriate opportunity to establish its clear domination in critical geographies of interest to it.

US relations with Europe continued to sink further. The leaders of the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Italy and HH The Pope, among others, found themselves targeted. In response to the German Chancellors' critical remarks on the US war in Iran, the US announced that it will withdraw more than 5000 of its troops based in Germany. It is pertinent to recall that Germany hosts the largest US military base in Europe. The UK also remained a focus of attack, with the US hinting that it may not support UK sovereignty over the Falklands.

There was one shining exception though and that was the state visit of the UK King Charles to the US, from April 27-30, 2026 to mark 250 years of US Independence. President Trump and his Administration were at best behaviour and the visit went off very successfully. Charles was able to put across the very difficult messages bedeviling the relationship with a sophistication that elicited no negative response. Whether the visit will restore a semblance of normalcy to bilateral relations, only time will tell.

The Trump Presidency's actions have compelled its closest allies and friends to look for fresh security and economic partnerships among themselves and with

others including in the Global South, be they in defence, security, trade, investment, technology etc. This is true of the EU nations, Japan, ROK, Australia, Canada and Mexico. This also opens up avenues for the Global South. China will want to fish in these waters, but it does have credibility issues and hegemonic designs in the Indo-Pacific.

During the month, the ongoing war in Ukraine felt more like an afterthought. The world had turned its attention to the new war unleashed this time by the US and Israel against Iran. Death and destruction, though, continued and Russian targeting of Ukrainian infrastructure and cities saw little respite. Russia, too, faced serious Ukrainian attacks on its energy infrastructure and other targets.

From the US perspective, it seemed to have become the forgotten war. Trump will probably judge how Putin acts over Iran before focusing back on the Ukraine dossier. The ban on sale of Russian oil was lifted by the US for another month, handing Russia additional succour.

However, European support for Ukraine remained firm and the defeat of Hungarian PM Orban in that country's election meant that the Hungarian hold on the special EU loan package of €90 billion for Ukraine was lifted on April 22. Interestingly, Orban had his way in defeat, because the flow of Russian oil, which Ukraine had blocked to Hungary from the Druzhba pipeline, resumed on April 22-23, that is before Orban is to hand over power in early May. Orban had alleged that Ukraine had deliberately blocked the pipeline falsely claiming technical reasons, and had hence been blocking the loan.

An important outcome of the war in Ukraine has been the re-emergence of Ukraine as a developer and manufacturer of innovative game changing weapons such as drones of several types, robotic warriors and cyber warfare capacities. This has happened both as a necessity but also because it was denied offensive long-range weapons and other capabilities by the US, both under Biden and Trump. Ukraine also had to meet the challenge of Iranian supplied drones to Russia and Chinese inspired equipment. In effect, as a result of fighting Russia for over four years, the Ukrainian armed forces have emerged as a potent force in Europe and could play an important role in European security structures going forward. Russia was reportedly unable to make serious territorial inroads into Ukraine during the month.

The pause in the war in Iran did not mean that Israel lost focus on Hezbollah. On April 8, Israel struck 150 plus targets in Lebanon. More than 350 people were killed.

The US enforced direct talks between Israel and Lebanon and brokered a ceasefire, though violations continued. Over 2000 were killed in Lebanon before the ceasefire and more than 1.2 million displaced. Israeli impunity remains virtually unbounded.

In Gaza too, Israeli attacks continued. Since the ceasefire of October 2025, deaths have exceeded 800; aid delivery remains restricted and the activities of the Board of Peace essentially remain on paper. At the same time, in early April, Israel approved 34 new settlements in the West Bank.

The fate of the Palestinians remains in limbo.

The civil war in Sudan entered the fourth year. It remains the world's worst humanitarian and displacement crisis (12 million) and the country is effectively partitioned between the SAF (east and central part) and the RSF (Darfur and Kordofan sections). There is famine in el-Fasher and Kadugli, both under RSF control. It remains to be seen if support for the factions will be affected by any fallout between Saudi Arabia and the UAE over the war in Iran. The WHO has declared that peace is long overdue for Sudan, but it does not seem that anyone is listening.

The decision by the UAE to quit OPEC and OPEC+ with effect from May 01 was a decision that can have far reaching strategic implications for its national economy and future, for the region, for the international economy, and for regional security and connectivity. In effect, the UAE is not willing to play second fiddle anymore in the region. This opens up fresh opportunities for India, but also throws up fresh challenges.

The US-Israel war against Iran no doubt played a catalytic role in the UAE's decision. Withdrawing from OPEC will enable the UAE to fully monetize its oil production capacity and prepare better for a post oil world, including becoming a global hub for hydrogen, ammonia and renewable energy. It marks a break from the acceptance of Saudi Arabian domination of the oil economy and of the region, including economic, and its clash with Saudi Arabia in other parts of the Arab world. The impact on relations with Israel is not yet clear, nor with the Iran that may emerge post the US war on it. It also remains to be seen whether the UAE will look for fresh security arrangements in the region.

Saudi Arabia's reaction to the UAE decision has understandably been one of considered silence and to focus on OPEC and OPEC+ as entities that continue to

remain relevant. Time will tell how this plays out but it will no doubt hurt the Saudis, especially if the price of oil cannot be sustained at levels that they need to sustain their ambitious development, regional and religious ambitions.

During the month, the government in India continued with efforts to minimise the negative impact of developments in the Gulf, with some success. The results of the elections in the states of West Bengal, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry would suggest that the impact so far of the US war against Iran and the blockage of the Strait of Hormuz has not filtered into the domestic economy in any significant manner.

The Vice President of India, Shri C.P. Radhakrishnan, visited Sri Lanka on April 19-20. This was the first ever visit of an Indian Vice President to Sri Lanka, and filled an important void. He met the Sri Lankan President and Prime Minister for a detailed interaction on bilateral relations, and also met with the Leader of the Opposition. Interactions were also held with leaders of the Indian origin Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil political parties.

The visit of the Chancellor of Austria to India on April 26 marked a milestone in the development of a new partnership with an important EU state. This was the first visit by an Austrian Chancellor in 42 years. PM Modi had broken the ice when he visited Austria in July 2024. That visit had itself come after a gap of more than forty years.

Austria is home to niche technologies and competencies in aviation, in roads, railways, tunnelling, roadways etc. High technology cooperation has been identified as a central pillar of the enhanced bilateral partnership. Prime Minister Modi announced that the aim is to build reliable technology and supply chains for the world and deepen partnerships in defence, semiconductors, quantum technology and biotechnology. The new India-EU FTA would facilitate the development of bilateral relations in a fulsome manner with this important EU member state.

The state visit to India by the President of ROK, Lee Jae Myung, from April 19-21, the first in eight years, resulted in significant outcomes, including a Joint Strategic Vision for the Special Strategic Partnership, a comprehensive framework for partnership in ship building, shipping and marine logistics, and joint statements on cooperation in the field of sustainability and on energy resource security. Fifteen MOUs and frameworks were entered into and six important announcements made. These span cooperation in ports, industry, steel supply

chain, SMEs, maritime heritage, S&T, bilateral digital bridge, climate and environment, sports; resumption of negotiations to upgrade the bilateral CEPA; and the launch of an economic security dialogue.

PM Modi described the visit as being “of great significance”; that “we are set to transform this trusted partnership into a futuristic partnership. From chips to ships, from talent to technology, and from environment to energy”.

Bilateral trade is to grow from USD 27 billion to 50 billion by 2030. The partnership is to be further deepened in AI, semiconductors and IT. PM Modi noted that in this period of global tensions, India and ROK together convey a message of peace and stability.

President Lee reportedly described the two countries as “optimal partners in achieving their respective national visions”. He and Modi shared the view that in these times, Korea and India are well positioned to become ideal partners for comprehensive cooperation that fosters mutual growth and innovation. Therefore, it was agreed to advance economic cooperation while expanding collaboration in ship building, finance, AI, national defence, the defence industry, and other strategic areas while also strengthening cultural and P2P exchanges. In the light of recent developments in the Middle East, the two countries will continue to strengthen bilateral cooperation to ensure a stable supply of energy resources and key materials, including naphtha. He also announced that PM Modi would visit Korea by no later than next year.

The India-ROK partnership has been struggling in recent years to reach fruition, but recent changes in regional and international relations have opened up very serious opportunities to allow this to happen. The time is now opportune to swiftly implement the agreements arrived at during the Lee visit.

May 2026 will undoubtedly be another challenging month for Indian foreign and security policies. Indeed, for the whole world. A ceasefire and peace agreement between the US and Iran might calm the roiled waters if they are sustainable, but will probably not be able to stop the destructive churn in international relations and the uncertainty that has been set in motion by the policies of the present US administration. Bringing Iran under its control is not the only item on their agenda.



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