



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



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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.

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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:

The fourth meeting of the 'Coalition of the Willing', aiming to support Ukraine, was held in Paris, on March 27, 2025.

Source: [European Commission](#)

President of the Republic of Mauritius Dharambeer Gokhool conferred the Grand Commander of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean (G.C.S.K) award, the highest civilian award of Mauritius, on India's Prime Minister Modi, on March 12, 2025.

Source: [X/@narendramodi](#)

In response to the devastating earthquake in Myanmar, India dispatched its first tranche of urgent humanitarian aid on March 29, 2025.

Source: [X/@DrSJaishankar](#)

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by

Nalin Surie

US President Donald Trump continued to dominate international headlines during the month with his explicit and implicit actions that, depending on how a particular country is located, led to anxiety, frustration, anger and a relook and rethink on long held alliances, arrangements and institutions. Multipolarity is now no longer a bad word, even in the Western lexicon of foreign and security policy. Trust has been the major casualty, and uncertainty the dominant factor in planning for the future. This is true in the geopolitical, international economic and global security spheres. Conventional wisdom in these critical dimensions for international peace, security and development now has few takers since the import of the regular stream of announcements on new policies emerging out of Washington is so unsettling and unpredictable. At the same time, senior US officials, including Secretary of State Rubio, have made a brave effort to underline that there remains a continued US commitment to US led policies and institutions, including democracy, NATO, the G7, Quad, the Indo-Pacific, the China challenge and US leadership.

President Trump's pronouncements would suggest that while the objective continues to be to ensure that the US remains the most dominant power in the world, he is no longer willing any more for the US to shoulder the preponderant economic, security, trade, assistance and normative responsibility for that purpose. The rest of the world, he believes, needs to contribute more explicitly to restoring US domination, which has been undermined over the years, the latter partly also on account of an excessive leaning to the liberal left.

The Trump approach appears to be to set out the negotiating parameters on critical issues such as tariffs, the war in Ukraine, security in Europe, Palestine etc. in an extreme manner and then extract concessions. This may well be an approach that can work in a short term business scenario, but is not necessarily credible in matters of international peace, security, trade and development where trust and credibility are critical, minimal requirements. Allies and partners may well bend in the immediate term, but will at the very least hedge, and at the same time search for credible and long term alternative arrangements. Besides, to suggest that the distinction between the developed and developing world does not require differential treatment is neither credible, nor just, and certainly not based on historical reality.

The above approach was for instance reflected, notwithstanding the carnage that followed in US and international stock markets, in Trump's wide spread (virtually no major country but Russia was spared) and huge tariff hikes announced on April 02, a day he described as "Liberation Day" for the US economy, and which have raised fears of an economic recession in the US and world economy, given the anticipated negative knock-on effect on growth and the existing dependencies. Countries like Canada and China (which recently held its annual National Peoples Congress in March) announced, as expected, matching retaliatory tariffs, while reportedly more than fifty countries have sought negotiations to arrive at some arrangement. The EU, a critical player, is ready with retaliatory tariffs, if an agreement cannot be worked out. The final outcomes aside, the blow to the existing international trade regime may end up being fatal.

In effect, we are possibly at the cusp of a brave new world whose parameters are not clear. It remains to be seen whether the US can follow up on threats it has held out if, for instance, it does not have its way on ending the war in Ukraine, the real estate approach to Gaza, ensuring peace in the Taiwan Strait, the neutralisation of Iran and DPRK, and domination of the Indo-Pacific. Credibility and strength have often to be demonstrated through concrete actions, and this can give rise to interminable liabilities. Besides, growing domestic opposition to policies, and the impact and responses of allies/friends/opponents, cannot be wished away.

In such an environment, for countries like India, it means that it is necessary to keep communications and partnerships open and evolving with all concerned to ensure its sovereignty, territorial integrity, sustained development and strategic independence. This appears to be happening, but will need to be sustained, especially since India lives in a difficult neighbourhood coveted by others.

President Trump's willingness to give Russia a long rope continues. The latter was excluded from the imposition of fresh tariffs in the April 02 announcement. More importantly, the US is so far going along with the delays in arriving at bilateral arrangements by Russia on the reported understandings on Ukraine, reached on March 18 between Presidents Trump and Putin, on a ceasefire/ refraining on strikes on energy infrastructure/safety of navigation in the Black Sea etc. The effort to reach "a settlement in Ukraine bilaterally" (Kremlin view) evidently continues. In the meantime, Russian bombardment of civilian targets in Ukraine continues and casualties mount.

In the above context, European efforts to build their own security arrangements, while not giving up on NATO, have continued. The EU Commission produced three documents on March 19, March 26 and April 01, respectively, on European Defense and the ReArm Europe Plan, EU Preparedness Union Strategy containing 30 key actions, and Protect EU - a new European Internal Security Strategy.

The Commission's Joint White Paper of March 19 acknowledges, inter alia, that the post WW2 and post Cold War eras are not coming back; that Russia poses a major strategic threat on the battlefield; the future of Ukraine is fundamental to the future of Europe as a whole; authoritarian states like China increasingly seek to assert their authority and control in the EU economy and society; that traditional allies and partners such as the US are, as anticipated, changing their focus away from Europe; the rest of the world is engaged in an intensifying race towards military modernisation and technological and economic advantage; and Europe has yet to carve out a fully coherent response. The moment has thus come for Europe to rearm. It is argued that "Europe must make bold choices and build a Defence Union that ensures peace on our continent through unity and strength".

The plan is to create the conditions to massively front load investment in defense infrastructure, provide necessary predictability in industry, reduce red tape and achieve full readiness in 2030.

Given Europe's economic and technological resources and track record, the proposed plan is workable, especially since spoilers can be kept at bay. A meeting of Finance Ministers is scheduled to be held in Warsaw in April for a new European Defence Mechanism to enable fast common purchase of military equipment. This fund will also be open to non EU members (UK, Canada etc.) and will not be subject to veto by any EU member state.

In addition to the above, a summit of the France/UK-led Coalition of the Willing to defend Ukraine was held in France on March 27, and a follow up meeting is scheduled for April 10 at NATO HQ. Outcomes will obviously depend on the contours of an actual ceasefire or peace agreement.

The US desire to buy over/woo Greenland by the US continues. Canada continues to be a target for incorporation, but Canadian opposition to any such move, including on the part of the new Prime Minister Mark Carney, remains harsh and unchanging.

Israel took full advantage of the signals from Washington and pursued military actions in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon at very substantial civilian human

cost. The second phase of the cease fire agreement was nowhere in sight. The objective is clearly to neutralise Hamas and Hezbollah to the extent feasible. The question remains whether an ideology rooted in fighting oppression be defeated through military means?

The US, too, took military action against the Houthis on March 16, reportedly in defence of international shipping.

On March 14, the G7 Foreign Ministers issued an important and detailed 18 paragraph Declaration on Maritime Security and Prosperity. Over 80% of global trade is transported by sea and 97% of global data flows through submarine cables. The importance of maritime routes for international food security, critical minerals, energy security, global supply chains and economic stability was highlighted.

The Declaration focuses on addressing emerging threats to safe seas; freedom of navigation and overflight; safe shipping and supply chain security; sustainable stewardship of maritime resources; and partnerships with non-G7 states including in building a free, open, prosperous and secure Indo-Pacific region.

The situation in Syria took a turn for the worse, with reportedly over 1000 supporters of former president Assad massacred on March 06 in the coastal provinces by members of the current Syrian regime. Yet, the EU convened its 9th international conference in support of Syria on March 17, while noting that the situation there remains fragile. The intention was to support a Syrian owned inclusive transition. The EU and member states have since 2011 reportedly mobilised more than €37 billion in humanitarian, and stabilisation assistance for Syrians in and across the region. At the conference, the EU committed €2.5 billion for 2025 and 2026 to Syria for a variety of purposes, including within Syria and in host communities across Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey. The UK pledged £160 million to support Syria' recovery and stability in the post Assad era.

US negotiations with the new regime in Syria continued. Its position on Syria is at variance with that of the EU. US has now, though, allowed for transactions meant to help stabilise Syria. The US supported Kurdish led militia alliance, Syrian Democratic Forces, agreed to integrate into the Syrian state on March 10. The interim government reportedly recognised the Kurdish minority as an integral part of the Syrian state and guaranteed the right of all Syrians to representation and participation in the political process.

The Turkey factor, though, remains in play.

The Presidents of DRC and Rwanda met under Qatar's auspices on March 18 on the issue of Rwandan support for the M23 rebels in east DRC. Both agreed on "an immediate and unconditional ceasefire". It is reported that the first ever direct talks will be held between the rebels and the DRC in Qatar on April 09. Time will tell whether this persisting and debilitating conflict can be genuinely resolved to the mutual benefit of the DRC and Rwanda.

The illness and hospitalisation of Pope Francis in February-March caused understandable concern in the Catholic world. His recovery and return to the Vatican on March 23 was greeted with relief and gratitude all across the world. He is to recuperate for at least two months. He has been the Pope since 2013. The search for a possible successor has perhaps begun.

On March 28, a massive earthquake hit Myanmar in the Mandalay region and also impacted Thailand, leading to heavy loss of life and property. India, an immediate neighbour, was as expected, amongst the first responders. Operation Brahma was launched to provide necessary assistance and medical support.

On their part, the Quad partners issued a joint statement on April 04 on the response to the Myanmar earthquake. The intention was to "ensure that our response effectively distributes assistance and meets the needs of the communities affected". Quad is also collaborating with others, including the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management.

Prime Minister Modi paid a state visit to Mauritius March 11-12. This was a significant landmark in the already special and unique relationship between the two Indian Ocean countries. He was the Chief Guest at the national day of Mauritius, and was the first Indian to be conferred the Grand Commander of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean.

The bilateral partnership was elevated to an "Enhanced Strategic Partnership" and defence cooperation and maritime security are to be key pillars of this partnership with a free, open, secure and safe Indian Ocean a common priority.

A detailed Joint Vision for an Enhanced Strategic Partnership was issued. The PM of Mauritius "underscored India's role as a time tested and trusted partner of Mauritius in its socio-economic development since the time of its independence" and that "India has steadfastly supported Mauritius at all times". This commitment of India was reaffirmed. Several agreements were signed, including on the use of local currencies for cross border transactions.

PM Modi emphasised that Mauritius remains “a critical partner for realising Vision SAGAR”.

The Vision Statement covers political exchanges, development partnership, HRD and capacity building, space and climate change, health and education cooperation, economic and trade cooperation, digital cooperation, defence and maritime security cooperation, regional and multilateral cooperation and cultural and p2p ties. India reiterated its firm support to Mauritius on the Chagos issue.

Ten years ago during his visit to Mauritius, PM Modi had enunciated the SAGAR vision. On this occasion he advanced his Vision MAHASAGAR, Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions. The latter is expected to guide India’s engagements with countries in the Global South in the coming years and will, inter alia, cover trade for development, capacity building for sustainable growth, mutual security, technology sharing, project specific concessional finance including grants, and a global compact for development.

In his briefing on the visit, Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri summed it up by saying that “this has been an extremely substantive and productive visit”.

The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Christopher Luxon, paid an official visit to India from March 16-20. He was also the chief guest at the 10th edition of the MEA sponsored Raisina Dialogue on March 17.

A joint statement was issued and covers cooperation in trade, investment and financial matters; political, defence and security cooperation; cooperation in s&t and disaster management; education, sports, mobility and p2p ties; and cooperation in regional and multilateral fora. FTA negotiations have been launched. An MOU was signed on Defence Cooperation. New Zealand is interested in joining the IPOI (Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative), and this was welcomed. So too its joining the CDRI (Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure).

New Zealand endorsed India’s candidature for permanent membership on an expanded UNSC and acknowledged the value of India joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Both countries also reiterated their absolute condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and the use of terrorist proxies in cross border terrorism.

In short, a successful progression in the development of relations with a small but important partner with which we do not only share a passion for cricket.

The months ahead promise to be uncertain and complex as the import of policies of the Trump administration play out and the situation in India's immediate neighbourhood continues to be the subject of interest to others. The Indian foreign and security policy establishments and economic ministries will continue to be challenged in a significant manner.



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