



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

GLOBAL HORIZONS

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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:

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) meeting in New Delhi on April 23, 2025.

Source: [Narendra Modi](#)

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in the 6th BIMSTEC Summit with the leaders of member countries in

Bangkok, Thailand, on April 4, 2025. Source: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand](#)

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was welcomed by His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, at the Royal Court at Al-Salam Palace in Jeddah, on April 22, 2025.

Source: [SPA](#)

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by

Nalin Surie

April was a consequential and critical month for India. The Pakistan- supported Lashkar-e-Taiba unleashed a horrendous terrorist attack in Pahalgam in India's Jammu & Kashmir on April 22. Twenty five Hindu men, tourists from all across India, were singled out and shot in cold blood in front of their families. One local pony handler was also killed. The intent to ethnically cleanse and destroy the growing normalcy and development in the state since the revocation of Article 370 in August 2019 was writ large. What was equally manifest was Pakistan's growing frustration at its increasing international irrelevance, domestic economic and political instability, inability to control the Baluch insurgency and the growing threat from Afghanistan. This stood out in stark contrast with India's steadily growing international salience.

India reacted with political unanimity, social unity and public outrage. The government received fulsome support from all opposition parties, with agreement that Pakistan would have to pay for its brutal misadventure. PM Narendra Modi cut short his official visit to Saudi Arabia and on April 23, given the cross-border linkages, the Cabinet Committee on Security announced a series of five wide ranging measures against Pakistan. These included holding the Indus Water Treaty of 1960 in abeyance with immediate effect, until Pakistan "credibly and irrevocably abjured its support for cross border terrorism". Other measures pertained to reducing the size of the respective High Commissions, withdrawal of defense attaches, and cancellation of visas. Subsequently, Indian airspace has been closed for all Pakistani flights, further visa restrictions have been announced, and several Pakistan YouTube channels/ Instagram accounts banned. Trade sanctions have followed.

Pakistan's reaction was on familiar and expected lines. Repeated denials and allegations that India had itself planned the massacre; that Pakistan was the biggest victim of terrorism; that holding the IWT in abeyance was for water stressed Pakistan an act of war; that a military attack on Pakistan by India was imminent and Pakistan was ready for that; that an impartial investigation should be held etc. Pakistan has exercised the right to hold all bilateral agreements, including but not limited to the Simla Agreement of 1972, in abeyance "till India desisted from its manifested behaviour of fomenting terrorism inside Pakistan; transnational killings; and non-adherence to

international law and UN resolutions on Kashmir". It has closed its airspace for Indian airlines, and suspended "all trade with India, including to and from any third country through Pakistan".

In the meantime, India's armed forces have been given a free hand by the government to plan appropriate responses. India will now also, irrespective, undoubtedly undertake the necessary infrastructure investments in the next few years to ensure that it can fully utilise the waters available to it under the IWT, instead of letting them flow into Pakistan. This should have been done over the past decades, but brooks no further delay.

The international reaction was also on expected lines. Essentially, initial lip sympathy for India followed by concern that a fresh war between India and Pakistan, both nuclear weapon states, could go out of hand and further complicate international relations. This was a reminder that Pakistan has not yet lost all its usefulness for its international partners.

The UNSC only issued a cliched and bland press statement condemning the Pahalgam terrorist attack and condoling the families of the victims. No responsibility for the attack was attributed to any organisation, no country named for supporting the terrorists, and no cognisance taken of the ethnic and sectarian aspect of the attack. It was the kind of statement Pakistan, currently a non permanent member of the UNSC, can easily live with as it claims to be the biggest victim of terrorism. It has further claimed of late that the terrorist activities it has been part of were on behalf of the US and others in the West whose dirty work it had done.

China was quick to offer support to Pakistan. Speaking to his Pakistani counterpart, FM Wang Yi conveyed on April 27 that "China always supports Pakistan's resolute implementation of counter-terrorism actions", "fully understands Pakistan's legitimate security concerns and supports Pakistan in safeguarding its sovereignty and security interests. China supports an international investigation as soon as possible".

US Secretary of State Rubio spoke to India's EAM Jaishankar on April 30 and "also encouraged India to work with Pakistan to deescalate tensions and maintain peace and security in South Asia". Rubio spoke to Pakistan PM Shahbaz Sharif the same day and "spoke of the need to condemn the terror attack on April 22 in Pahalgam". He also, reportedly, "urged Pakistani officials' cooperation in investigating this unconscionable attack. He also encouraged Pakistan to work with India to de-escalate tensions, re-establish direct communications, and maintain peace and security in South Asia".

The balancing continues and double standards continue to stare India in the face, in its longstanding fight against Pakistan-sponsored and supported terror. India will have to essentially continue to struggle alone in this war, but also begin to use the instrumentalities available to it more effectively and ruthlessly, while drawing as much support as it can from its international partners. The government faces a severe test on its responses to the Pahalgam pogrom.

In Europe, the war in Ukraine showed no signs of ending. Direct talks between President Trump's envoy and President Putin continued, but so did Russian prevarication. Russia is clearly seeking more concessions. At the same time, the US has kept threatening to walk off to show some signs of unhappiness at the Kremlin stringing it along.

Reuters news agency published details of US proposals to end the war as also the European-Ukrainian counter. These are being discussed. The US proposals clearly favour Russia on issues of territory and sovereignty over Crimea, with lack of clarity on security guarantees for Ukraine. The European proposals are more in favour of the Ukraine position, but it is unclear whether without adequate security guarantees these could work. Either way, Ukraine faces the prospect of being divided. This does not bode well for European security going forward.

Any deal on peace in Ukraine which does not seriously involve Ukraine and Europe will suffer from inherent disabilities going forward.

The US and Ukraine finally signed an agreement on reconstruction and US exploitation of rare earths in Ukraine on April 30. Whether this will help in obtaining security guarantees for Ukraine remains to be seen. Just the fact of US investment and personnel being present in Ukraine may not be enough of a deterrent for Moscow. Whether this will mean Washington taking a tougher line with Russia on ending the war in Ukraine is also not certain at this point in time. In the meantime, Russian attacks on targets in Ukraine continued during the month, with substantial civilian casualties.

President Trump marked his first hundred days in office on April 29 with a major rally in Warren, Michigan and reportedly with the lowest poll ratings of any president for the first hundred days since the beginning of this century. His handling of the economy and immigration are being questioned. The US growth rate in the first quarter of 2025 declined by 0.3%, though not necessarily because of his policies. However, he was at his aggressive best and termed his policies over the last fourteen weeks as "a revolution of common sense". To underscore his plan to re-industrialise the US, he said that "instead of putting China first, I'm putting Michigan first, I'm putting America first". He argued that

"we're ushering in the Golden Age of America" and respect for the US has gone up all over the world and that is why leaders from India, Spain and France are visiting him. (India seems to be high on the list of countries from which Trump in public seeks concessions.) China will too, he said because they want to make a deal.

There is no doubt that the flurry of far reaching policy changes announced by President Trump during this period and the frequent chop and change approach have not only upended domestic US politics but also thrown into further disrepair the established international economic, political and security paradigms. The impact was for instance directly felt on Canadian politics, where the Liberals were expected to loose badly. However, because of the threat of the US under Trump wanting to make Canada the "51st state", the Liberals under their new leader Mark Carney stormed back into power. Similarly, the incumbent Australian PM Albanese of the Labour Party retained power in elections on May 03, partly because his principal opponent was seen to be "Trump-lite" in his policy prescriptions.

Similarly, the international trade and monetary systems breathlessly wait to see what picture will emerge after all the massive and unilateral US tariff announcements and ongoing bilateral trade negotiations are settled during the ninety day window that ends in early July 2025. Does the US have the capacity to negotiate all these? The signs are not clear, but the market reaction is not good. Price increases are anticipated.

With the EU, a trade deal seems feasible. Bargaining positions are more balanced.

Canada and Mexico are sui generis.

With smaller trade partners, pressure may work. India seems on the priority list for a trade agreement and favourable noises are emerging from both sides. India will need to make haste with caution though, since any agreement with the US will impact its almost concurrent negotiations with the EU for a FTA.

With China, though, the issues involved are much bigger, and the Chinese show no real sign of give and are playing the matching game on tariff increases and trade restrictions. President Trump insists talks are happening with China and that he has spoken to President Xi. The Chinese have not confirmed nor denied this. Trump said in Michigan that "with our China tariffs we're ending the greatest job theft in history" for China has taken more jobs from the US than anyone else. But, he added, "that doesn't mean we're not going to get along". China for its part is feverishly building sentiment internationally, including at

the highest levels, against US bullying and hegemony on trade, technology, financial and security matters.

The withdrawal, if any, of US and other sanctions on Russia and Iran will also have an impact on international trade, energy and financial issues.

In Gaza, Israel continued to act with virtually complete immunity. The ceasefire talks went nowhere and Israel's determination to weed out both Hamas and Hezbollah forces showed no sign of waning. In fact, Israeli operations continued also in southern Syria in late April, both in support of the Druze minority that had come under attack reportedly by supporters of the new regime, and in opposition to troop deployments to the south of Damascus by the new regime in Syria. The intention to ensure depth in defence vis-à-vis Syria is clear. Turkey is understandably unhappy with Israeli actions against the new regime in Syria.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza got much worse. According to UNRWA, since the night between March 17-18 when the ceasefire ended and for over a month, "the Israeli Forces have escalated bombardments from air, land and sea across the Gaza Strip and expanded ground operations, resulting in thousands of casualties, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and large-scale displacement".

In his remarks to the Security Council on 29 April, the UNSG spoke about the "unrelenting conflict and devastation in Gaza", and the "utterly inhumane conditions of life imposed on its people who are repeatedly coming under attack, confined to smaller and smaller spaces, and deprived of lifesaving relief." He added that "This is not a time for ritualistically expressing support, ticking a box, and moving on. We are past the stage of ticking boxes – the clock is ticking."

But, no one seems to be listening as the tragedy of Palestine continues to unfold.

US military operations against the Houthis in Yemen continued, in a clear signal to Iran and Hamas/Hezbollah and in support of freedom of navigation in the region.

The UNSC discussed the situation in Syria on April 25, following the fall of the Assad regime. The interim regime in Syria is attempting to form a broader, diverse cabinet and an interim People's Assembly. According to the UN Special Envoy, "the challenges are huge, and the situation extremely fragile". The new leadership, according to him, needs to broaden political participation, address deep seated grievances of the minorities (Alawites and others) and food

security issues. The humanitarian situation, according to the UN, “remains dire”. Funding is a very serious problem.

There are many important external players such as Israel, Turkey, US, France, UK, Russia, Iran and the Arab world that have their fingers in the Syrian pie. China wants in too. Getting them together to restore normalcy, peace and stability in Syria promises to be an uphill task.

Sudan continued to burn. The loss of Khartoum by the RSF to the SAF meant that the former shifted focus to seeking control over the Darfur region, which in turn resulted in more casualties. However, in areas recaptured by the SAF, displaced migrants have begun to return, but it remains to be seen whether this process can be sustained.

On April 15, the UK hosted a conference on Sudan to address its two-year-old conflict. Unlike the Paris conference on Sudan last year, this one did not seek donor pledges (although the UK and the EU, a co-host, did announce new aid packages for Sudan). However, the conference has been mainly seen as a failure as it was unable to establish a contact group to facilitate ceasefire talks, since the Arab states refused to sign a joint communique. In the absence of a joint communique, the UK foreign secretary and his counterparts from France, Germany, the African Union and the EU issued a joint co-chairs’ statement pledging to support “efforts to find a peaceful solution and reject all activities, including external interference, that heighten tensions or that prolong or enable fighting”.

On April 15, the G7 too had issued a statement at the Foreign Ministers’ level marking two years since the beginning of the devastating war in Sudan. The intention was to demonstrate their commitment to bring about an end to the “world’s largest humanitarian crisis and secure an end to the conflict, including through the London Sudan conference”. The G7 stressed that “the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Sudan are paramount”.

It is clear that to resolve the crisis in Sudan, the international backers of the two factions will have to move beyond words, rein in their clients and enforce a settlement. The signs for this happening at this point in time are not propitious.

There was movement in the efforts to broker peace in eastern DRC. On April 25, the Foreign Ministers of the Democratic Republic of Congo and of Rwanda signed a Declaration of Principles for peace in eastern DRC in Washington in the presence of US Secretary of State Marco Rubio. The Declaration is intended to establish a fundamental understanding on regional governance, security, economic framework to bring about an end to the

fighting. The Declaration commits the parties to mutual recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity, facilitating the return of displaced persons and drafting a peace agreement. The initial draft peace plan needs to be presented by May 2.

In his remarks, Rubio made it clear that an objective behind having a peace plan is also to enable US firms to bring in good governance and "ensure responsible, reliable supply chains for things like critical minerals that benefit regional governments and our partners and allies as well". The US battle with China over resources is in effect to be actively pursued.

Closer to home, China moved aggressively in its regional integration space to counter the negative impact of US policies against China over tariffs, technology denials, supply chain restructuring etc. This was clearly manifest in successful visits by President Xi Jinping to Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia from April 14-18. He called upon his interlocutors to jointly oppose unilateral, bullying acts, uphold the global free trade system and keeping global industrial and supply chains stable. These are all countries that have benefitted from reshoring by Western and Chinese companies in recent years. China looms large over the ASEAN region, which would rather not get caught up in the struggle between its two biggest partners, and has so far leveraged both to their advantage. They would rather not choose sides and yet continue to benefit from both US and Chinese blandishments and investments. The problem would, however, become acute if the security and territorial integrity aspects come into play, as is happening in the Philippines' relations with China.

In the above context, the G7 Foreign Ministers statements of April 06 on China's large scale military drills around Taiwan and the earlier one of March 08 on preserving peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait are pertinent. The April statement expressed deep concern about China's provocative actions and notes that "these increasingly frequent and destabilising activities are raising cross-Strait tensions and put at risk global security and prosperity." It added that the G7 "oppose any unilateral actions to threaten such peace and security, including by force or coercion".

China also announced during the month, after a meeting of the Politburo, economic measures to bolster employment and the economy amid increasing global uncertainties. This was acknowledgement of the slowing down of the Chinese economy and also of the negative impact of US policies on it. The objective is to enhance domestic consumption and consolidate recovery of the real estate sector. The policies are intended to also support employment, keep foreign trade stable, expand effective investment, foster a sound environment

for development (i.e., allow greater rein to the private sector) and ensure ample liquidity.

The Politburo called for preparing for worst case scenarios and dealing with the uncertainty of drastic changes in the external environment while maintaining the focus on high quality development.

China's preparations for economic hard times ahead and negotiations with the US on tariffs etc. are being put in place.

Pope Francis breathed his last on April 21. President Droupadi Murmu represented India at his funeral. The process of electing a new Pope will begin on May 07. Given the current state of play in international relations, the domestic political churn in many countries and the theological direction taken by the new Pope, this could be a watershed moment for the Catholic world.

On April 17, the Russian Supreme Court suspended the ban on the Taliban, which was earlier designated as terrorist under Russian law. This will enable restoration of Russia's relations with Afghanistan under Taliban rule.

The return to power of the Liberal Party under Mark Carney in Canada and the defeat and loss of official party status in Parliament of the Sikh separatist NDP, that had partly fomented former Liberal Party PM Trudeau (who was dependent on them) in his diatribe against India, holds out the opportunity for the return to civility if not normalcy in India's relations with Canada. (The NDP lost its share of the popular vote by 12%.) It would be to mutual benefit if normalcy were restored.

The terrorist outrage in Pahalgam understandably overshadowed earlier developments in Indian diplomacy and outreach during the month. This included PM Modi's visits to Thailand, both bilateral and for the BIMSTEC summit, Sri Lanka (April 03-06) and Saudi Arabia (April 22-23). And the visit of US Vice President J.D. Vance to India (April 21-24). These were all substantive interactions with meaningful outcomes.

In Bangkok, in the bilateral segment on April 03, the two Prime Ministers agreed to upgrade the bilateral relationship to the level of a strategic partnership. A Joint Declaration was issued, detailing the pillars of such an enhanced partnership ranging from partnerships in political matters, defence and security, trade and investment, connectivity, education, socio-cultural development, p2p exchanges etc. India and Thailand reaffirmed their shared interest in a free, open, transparent, rules based, inclusive, prosperous and resilient Indo-Pacific region.

The upgradation of the relationship with Thailand has been due for a while now. There is much work necessary by both sides to fully utilise the opportunities for fruitful cooperation.

On April 04, PM Modi addressed the 6th BIMSTEC Summit, also in Bangkok. The Summit adopted the Bangkok Vision 2030 reflecting, according to PM Modi, "the collective commitment to building a prosperous, secure, and inclusive Bay of Bengal region". He highlighted that for India, "BIMSTEC is a model for inclusive development and collective security."

[BIMSTEC is the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation. Its members are Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and India.]

At the summit, PM Modi announced a 21 point action plan that includes a feasibility study on the possibilities of trade in local currency in the BIMSTEC region, connectivity between UPI and payment systems in the BIMSTEC region, a BIMSTEC Centre of Excellence for Disaster Management in India, cooperation in space, India hosting the first meeting of the Home Ministers' Mechanism to enable cooperation in the fight against cyber crime/cyber security threats/terrorism/drug and human trafficking, and achieving electric grid interconnection across the region.

BIMSTEC offers a wide array of opportunities for members to enmesh this region to common benefit, but has so far not lived upto expectations. The challenge before the next chair, Bangladesh, will be to concretise cooperative endeavours agreed at the Bangkok summit. Dhaka also hosts the BIMSTEC secretariat.

On the sidelines of the BIMSTEC summit, PM Modi held bilateral meetings with several of his counterparts, including the leader of the Myanmar junta Senior General Aung Hlaing. In this meeting, PM Modi, according to Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, also "underlined the importance of early restoration of the democratic process in Myanmar, including through credible and inclusive elections". He promised India's continued support for advancing a Myanmar owned and lead transition towards a stable peaceful and democratic future. This is of importance for India.

PM Modi's visit to Sri Lanka on April 05 was short but meaningful and built upon the successful visit of the new Sri Lankan President's to India in December 2024. Foreign Secretary Misri described it "as a very substantive one, and rich in outcomes"; a demonstration of the rather special and unique nature of this bilateral partnership.

Seven important MOUs were signed, including on Defence cooperation and a trilateral with UAE for development of Trincomalee as an Energy hub. Five infrastructure projects were inaugurated/launched, and announcements made regarding comprehensive capacity building for Sri Lankans in India, conclusion of bilateral amendatory agreements on debt restructuring and development of temples etc. in Trincomalee, Nuwara Eliya and Anuradhapura. Grant assistance is also to be provided to undertake socio-economic projects in the eastern province at a cost of Sri Lankan Rs. 2.37 billion.

PM Modi was conferred the highest Sri Lankan honour for a HOS/HOG of friendly governments, viz., the Sri Lanka Mitra Vibhushana award established in 2008 by then President Mahinda Rajapaksa. He is the first Indian to be so honoured.

In his briefing, Foreign Secretary Misri also highlighted that there is public recognition at the leadership levels that the security interests of India and Sri Lanka are interlinked. Sri Lanka will not allow its land nor the oceans around it to be used in any manner inimical to India's security.

US Vice President J.D. Vance, accompanied by his family, paid an official visit to India from April 21-24. PM Modi and Vance reviewed developments in bilateral relations since the former's successful visit to Washington in February and welcomed "the significant progress" in the negotiations for a bilateral trade agreement. They also reviewed regional and global issues.

In Jaipur, Vance delivered a thought provoking address at the Rajasthan International Centre on April 22 on "The US and India's shared economic priorities". He highlighted three critical areas for bilateral cooperation viz., defense, economic partnership especially in energy & natural resource exploitation and innovation. He conveyed the belief that "the future of the 21st century is going to be determined by the strength of the US-India partnership". He also conveyed that if our two countries fail to work together successfully, "the 21st century could be a very dark time for all of humanity".

PM Modi's visit to Saudi Arabia on April 22 had to be cut short on account of the Pahalgam pogrom but nevertheless resulted in meaningful outcomes. There was strong condemnation of the Pahalgam terrorist attack, but without attributing who was responsible.

PM Modi and Crown Prince MBS co-chaired the second meeting of the India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council and reviewed with satisfaction the work of the two ministerial committees on Politics, Security etc., and Economy & Investment. Two new committees were set up on Defence Cooperation and

Tourism & Cultural Cooperation with a view to deepening the strategic partnership.

Four MOUs were signed on cooperation in space, health, postal issues and anti-doping. It was agreed to pursue long term agreements for security of supply in respect of food and fertilisers. The mutual commitment to realise the vision of connectivity, trade etc. in IMEC was reiterated. The crisis in Yemen and the importance of ensuring the security and safety of waterways and freedom of navigation in accordance with UNCLOS was agreed upon.

The agreement to collaborate on establishing two refineries was noted in the context of the ongoing discussions on encouraging investment flows. The desire to complete negotiations on a Bilateral Investment Treaty was affirmed. The two sides agreed also to work to enhance the stability of global oil markets and to balance global energy market dynamics and emphasised the need to ensure security of supply for all energy sources in global markets.

Notwithstanding the terrorist tragedy that occurred during the visit, the outcomes would suggest that the bilateral partnership is developing steadily and both deepening and widening. Saudi Arabia is a critical partner for India not only in the region but in the context of India's development and growing outreach, including in the Indian Ocean region.

The challenges facing Indian foreign and security policies in the coming weeks and months will grow manifold following the Pahalgam pogrom and will have to be met with calmness, strength, perseverance and unity. The wherewithal and mindset for that is in place.



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