



# The Yerevan Primer

A World in Transition

Kabir Taneja • Natalie Boyse

Editors

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# Introduction

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Kabir Taneja and Natalie Boyse

**T**he post-Second World War global order is unravelling. While the system had been on shaky ground for years, the COVID-19 pandemic pushed many assumptions resting on this 80-year-old architecture over the edge. Today, calls for change reverberate louder, a new era of great-power competition has set in, frustration with the current system of global governance has grown, and globalisation and multilateralism are facing stronger headwinds.

Amid these shifts, new geographies, actors, and polities are looking to exert and build influence. They are challenging the notions that states small in geography or population are destined to be weak. Novel concepts such as 'minilateralism' are infusing lifesaving breath to the idea of regionalism

as a better conduit for goals such as economic integration and even conflict resolution.

The spokes of the global order wheel are disengaging and looking to build their own ecosystems that feed into strengthening their own core interests. As the international community appears to be failing in finding plausible resolutions to conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, demands are heightening to institute institutional changes within the United Nations (UN), and more specifically, the UN Security Council.

This compendium of essays examines these shifts, complementing many of the themes driving the inaugural edition of the Yerevan Dialogue. Our contributors cover nearly every geography in the world, showing their unique perspectives on a diverse range of topics, from healthcare and digital societies to connectivity, multipolarity, and security. As geoeconomics takes centre stage in international relations, the Caucuses, and more specifically Armenia, stand at the precipice of gaining significantly given their geographic boons.

*Victor Kipiani* opens the volume with an exploration of how cross-regional connectivity can benefit the region. Victor looks at Georgia and how small economies can place themselves as key incubators of larger geoeconomics by prioritising and adjusting their domestic and regional policies. In the second piece, *Marianna Albuquerque* takes a broader view of some of the challenges facing the multilateral order and how concepts such as minilateralism and microlateralism are being proposed, and in some cases mobilised, to circumvent the blockages facing international institutions today. Running on a similar theme, *Erin Watson and Ratu Bintang Assyifa Arweys* then delve into a critical facet of modern multilateralism—i.e., digitalisation—and how technologies are integrating into both the opportunities and challenges that face societies.

Pivoting once again to a more regional outlook, *Vali Golmohammadi* examines the interests of Iran and how its ports, such as Chabahar in the country's south, connect the Caucuses not only regionally, but large sections of the trading world as well. *Sarah Bressan* follows with a piece that looks more deeply at some of the external and internal security challenges confronting Europe. *Jonathan Fulton* then highlights the potential of the Gulf's economic opportunities in Central Asia: As Gulf states become premier global financial centres, their position as major investors in the new era of geoeconomics has become difficult to ignore.

Next, *Raj Shukla* unpacks the impact of technology on modern warfare. For her part, *Wanjiru Munene* asks what lessons our societies have learned from the experience of the pandemic, and whether we are prepared to tackle another such global health emergency. *Karuna Kumar* closes the loop on this theme with an exposition of how female participation in global politics is changing the landscape, and whether it is succeeding in building a more just system for the future.

The last section starts with *Rouben Azizian* discussing maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, a geography that may be far from the Caucasus but is relevant in shaping future understandings of conflict, cooperation, and connectivity. Lastly, *Reena Pandey's* piece could have either opened or closed this volume—a sort of an ode to the fast gaining bilateral relationship between India and Armenia.

The varied topics and authors carried in this compendium are framed by a globalist agenda. The essays build on the spirit of the Yerevan Dialogue, which is bringing the world's debates to Armenia in hopes of exploring innovative ideas to create a brighter tomorrow for all.

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# Emerging Economic Challenges and Georgia's Response

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Victor Kipiani

**T**he end of the Cold War not only heralded an idyll in international relations but also promised maximum access to the accumulated economic benefits worldwide through various alliances, pacts, or initiatives. Accordingly, economic globalisation became prioritised. The only exception in the mainstream was the creation of large trading blocs, which contributed to the global economic texture. In some places, this process took on the character of de-globalisation; however, in practice, its end result was a global universalisation of the world economy. Eventually, a sort of “forced reversal” came into action.

In the past couple of decades, the world economy has suffered a number of blows, with the most systemically transformative of them being the



financial crisis of 2008-2009, the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic recovery, and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. The war posed a challenge to Europe, which had to respond to two issues fundamental to it, such as importing cheap energy from Russia and exporting advanced technology to China. Military operations in the Middle East are also developing, although it may be too early to draw definite conclusions. Notably, along with exogenous developments, the larger economic picture is influenced by political changes within specific national systems.

In the given situation, and in response to cascading shocks, the most natural reaction would be a greater diversification of economic linkages, even if this leads to additional costs or complex logistical solutions. Ultimately, it is clear that the universalisation of economic relations predicted for an indefinite period after the end of the Cold War has not stood the test of time. This failure has manifested itself in the following:

- increasing economic inequalities within countries
- deepening inequalities between the economic capacities of different countries or regions
- transforming economic means into an instrument of pressure, i.e., the phenomenon of weaponisation

As a result, the harmonisation of common rules of behaviour is hampered and the national economic systems of various countries are entering a “defensive” mode, while global actors justify basic policy decisions in the economy that are driven by considerations of national interest. Additionally, and alongside growing global challenges, a number of countries—such as the United States, France, Germany, and Italy—have openly declared economic policies that are heavily dictated by national security considerations.

The fact that the new industrial policy is determined by economic actors of high calibre is concerning. These actors are expected to participate in the world economy responsibly and consistently to maintain the necessary balance between developed and developing countries and create fair and equal conditions for development driven by global order and stability. Contrarily, there has been a deepening of trends that seek to artificially stimulate the domestic market through overt protectionism to reduce the coordination necessary to manage existing global threats and to disintegrate the standards of interconnectedness



and interdependence that are necessary to tame the primary ally of extremism and radicalism—poverty.

The promotion of coercive economic policies and the indiscriminate use of sanctions as an immediate response have undermined the foundations of meaningful economic policy. For their part, excessive and ill-considered punitive practices and setting up new patterns of economic conduct are tilted towards favouring “me” over “we” and consequently reducing economic resilience in the face of growing global challenges.

## **The ‘Crash’ Case for Georgia**

The small size of the Georgian economy is likely one of the obstacles to its rapid growth. However, in the modern world, “smallness” does not indicate exclusion and isolation. Moreover, the interconnectedness of global economic channels and the wide spillover of global shocks have made the division of “big” and “small” economies more conditional. Therefore, in determining Georgia’s economic policy, it is necessary to constantly monitor and assess processes to determine the actions that need to be implemented while being guided by rationality.

To promote the stability and self-sufficiency of Georgia’s economic system, its competitiveness, and real growth, the following considerations need to be made:

- Wider integration with developed economies: This will aid qualitative improvements in trade and financial flows as well as for the transfer and adoption of advanced technologies and knowledge.
- Expansion and diversification of the export market: Holding on to a particular market is economically vulnerable and risky from the perspective of national security. Accordingly, the more sources of expenditure and income there are, the more space and freedom there is for nation-state development. All this is connected with free trade agreements and trade associations.

With the rise of economic nationalism in the world, Georgia should also think of the following:

- The qualitative side of investment. Given the current global and regional threats, there is a need to differentiate between and choose investments. Therefore, it is advisable to review investments and introduce a mechanism

for their screening at the legislative level. Several developed economic systems already use this method.

- Timely channelling of necessary resources into the country's intellect. Without ensuring intellectual self-sufficiency, Georgia is bound to witness the outflow of valuable human resources and thus exhaust the country's competitiveness and growth potential in the near future.

In addition to the above, the following practical measures should be considered:

- Economic security needs to be given increasing importance in the national security doctrine of Georgia. This attention needs to be dictated by the modern and multifaceted understanding of "security" mentioned in this article. National security requires a unified set of economic measures because few act as honourable partners with the weak, the poor, and those seeking help.
- Economic security in the format of the National Security Council should be strengthened. The creation of a separate Economic Security Council or its institutionalisation within the system of the National Security Council is also a possibility. In terms of the structural approach, establishing the position of the Minister of Economic Security in the Government of Georgia, with corresponding supervisory scope and functions, must also be considered.
- Whether under the auspices of the Economic Security Council or the Minister of Economic Security, one of the main tasks should be to continuously monitor and analyse the risks and threats to Georgia's economic security. This process should be objectively reflected in a periodic document on economic threats (similar to the current practice in the European Union). Among other necessary issues, the document will assess short-, medium-, and long-term risks to the country's economic security, as well as recommended measures to minimise and manage them.
- The appropriateness of legislation towards ensuring economic security (e.g., Georgia's Act on Economic Security) needs to be discussed. In working on such legislation, special attention should be paid to, inter alia:

- the coordination of government agencies in times of crisis
- rapidly realigning global or regional delivery and supply from one system to another to reduce overdependence on one system
- promoting modern innovation in critical sectors

From global practices, Georgia needs to learn that, apart from the interconnectedness of economics and politics, it is practically impossible to achieve political stability and societal cohesion without sound, fair, and equal economic opportunities. Within the new and challenging realities of a new order, the competitiveness of the Georgian state needs to manifest in a “project state” whose sole focus is not governance but transforming the society and guiding it on the way to a meaningful development agenda.

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# The Role of Minilateralism in the Future of Global Governance and Security

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Marianna Albuquerque

**M**ultilateralism, according to Keohane's classic definition,<sup>1</sup> is the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states. Although important as a bedrock for subsequent discussions on cooperation among units, looking at multilateralism only by the number of participants does not fully grasp the qualitative meaning embedded in the concept. Defining multilateralism in such a manner hides the fact that arrangements of three or more members can function, in practice, as unilateral or bilateral.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, in addition to the number of stakeholders involved, there are principles that frame the practice of multilateralism. These include indivisibility—which means that the agreements approved apply to all

the states involved—and reciprocity.<sup>3</sup> Multilateralism is thus an institutional and historical construct that minimises transactional costs, encourages cooperation and peer-to-peer learning, makes the decision-making process more transparent and democratic, and establishes values and norms that are essential for the legitimacy of the international system.<sup>4</sup>

If these principles are observed, multilateralism, at least on paper, is supposed to overcome non-representative decision-making in the international system. However, the practice has historically failed to fully meet the theory. In empirical occasions, the purposes of multilateralism have been distorted, and decisions have been made unilaterally or by restricted groups, to the detriment of collective action. The most tangible example is perhaps the asymmetries and power politics among the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council; there is also the *de facto* veto power that the United States has within the Bretton Woods institutions.

In parallel to the misrepresentation of multilateral values, the current crisis of multilateralism is also partly due to a context in which international challenges demand increasingly rapid solutions and, in turn, multilateral institutions have shown a relative inability to provide results in the short term. Many multilateral institutions have a top-bottom and centralised process to reform and amend their constitutive document, which renders including necessary updates a lengthy and politically costly process. The solution to circumvent these constraints has been the development of informal groups with reduced membership, which operate outside institutional spaces or create their own institutionality. To describe this phenomenon, analysts have proposed various concepts, including ‘oligarchic international system’, ‘collusion diplomacy’, ‘club diplomacy’, ‘like-minded groups’, ‘microlateralism’, and ‘minilateralism’.<sup>5</sup>

The search for negotiating dynamism through flexible grouping could generate the institutional weakening of multilateralism, with impacts such as the transfer of debates from quasi-universal forums to small groups. As a result, it can lead to a simultaneously *exclusive* and *excluding* decision-making space. If one mirrors historical examples, there is a potential risk that limiting the participants could exclude Global South countries from the equation, with the G7 being an illustrative case. If not properly framed, minilateral groups can unleash a spiral of mismatches: developed countries and great powers agree on policies that have an impact beyond their own national circumscriptions; then, Global South countries are directly or indirectly affected by an exogenous

ruling. As those policies were designed from an outside perspective that does not necessarily fit the situation “on the ground”, Global South countries face more and more obstacles to overcome structural limitations and guarantee a seat at the high table.

Yet, one could also argue that group dynamism can be an ally to surmount institutional rigidity and, therefore, support multilateralism in being effective in solving global problems. For those who advocate for this thesis, negotiations should start at the smallest possible number of states that have the greatest possible impact on solving a specific problem, moving away from multilateralism towards minilateralism.<sup>6</sup> The rationale is that collective deadlocks could be minimised by creating core groups for initial debates, with the subsequent multilateralisation of agreements.<sup>7</sup> It can become an even more well-suited strategy if one departs from the smallest possible number *while* ensuring representativeness. The G20 is a successful example in that regard, by combining the powers of the past and the ones that are already shaping the future of power.

Regardless of which perspective is taken, the renewed call for multilateral politics should not simply be a return to the practices of the past. It must bring into play new principles, issues, players, and narratives, moving beyond structures that were created in the 1940s. The world undoubtedly faces a new geopolitical scenario that must be considered by both multilateral and minilateral structures.

Even if the “what” is settled, the “how” remains a challenge. A first topic that needs to be equalised is that the transfer of economic power from the West to Asia is unveiling a myriad of new political realities. Asia has different perspectives on regionalism, institutionalism, and sovereignty that tend to progressively be an influent part of international politics. A second issue that must be in the spotlight is that while global multilateral negotiations have been failing, agreements have advanced at the regional level, particularly in Asia. We are witnessing a shift from UN-led politics to regional politics, which has an unequivocal effect on multilateralism.<sup>8</sup> A third process that must be taken into account is the re-emergence of nationalism, which deeply affects the relationship between national sovereignty and regulation at the global level. It has an important effect on multilateralism as it reinforces the dilemma between forfeiting a level of sovereignty, the need to develop as close to self-sufficient value chains as possible, and upholding multilateral commitments.<sup>9</sup>

To conclude, the interaction between minilateral and multilateral arrangements can only be maximised if they consider embracing and accommodating the diversity of political and economic regimes as a core value. The current multipolar world is much broader than Western like-minded perspectives. Some of the most contentious stalemates in multilateral organisations, be it the United Nations or the World Trade Organization, are related to the resistance and maintaining-the-status-quo stance by some of the great powers of the past and its hegemonic power alliances.

Historically, multilateral cooperation has been based on the concerns and interests of Western countries which are portrayed as “universal”. We are facing a vault in which there is no longer an agreement on what constitutes universal multilateral values; and even, to begin with, if multilateralism should be value-oriented. The reality is that today there is a stark contrast—as never before—between the current distribution of power landlocked in international institutions and the reality of an evolving multipolar world.

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# All at Once: Multilateralism Amid a Polycrisis

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Erin Watson and Ratu Bintang Assyifa Arweys

In the 2022 critically acclaimed Hollywood film, *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, the affable Waymond owns a laundromat with his wife, Evelyn. What would typically be a rather mundane existence is turned on its head when Evelyn discovers that she has the ability to access a multiverse of alternate, parallel realities. In a pivotal moment of the film, Waymond says, “In another life, I would have really liked just doing laundry and taxes with you.”

*Everything Everywhere All At Once* could be an allegory representing the polycrisis that humankind is currently experiencing—a web of interconnected crises that make the ordinary seem distant and unattainable. The high cost of living, natural disasters, geoeconomic confrontations, large-scale

forced displacement, and widespread cybercrime and cyber insecurity are just some of the risks contributing to the current global complexities.<sup>1</sup>

Much of the conversation on the situation is hinged on the notion that the current polycrisis is a failure of multilateralism. Protectionism, nationalism, and unilateral decisions of global powers, which undermine international cooperation, have contributed to a decline in the world order and are to blame for the scenario we find ourselves in.<sup>2</sup>

In today's global landscape, however, this argument is trite. The more interesting and valuable conversation is about how multilateralism adapts and transforms to respond to these crises.<sup>3</sup> An even more relevant conversation point is where and how multilateral organisations can coalesce on an issue and drive systemic change that can make a genuine impact on people's lives.

One example of such multilateral cooperation is digital public infrastructure (DPI). Much like Evelyn's multiverse, multiple things can be true simultaneously. While digitisation can be one of humankind's greatest threats, DPI has increased the economic prosperity of billions. Consider India's example, where 'India Stack', which enables fast and free payments, has helped over 800 million people, primarily from rural areas, out of poverty.<sup>4</sup>

Digitalisation as a multilateral agenda item emerged as a sideline topic around a decade ago.<sup>5</sup> Since then, DPI has emerged as a vital tool for economic development through the digital economy. DPIs are open-source application programming interfaces, the "digital railroads" laid down by governments, and are used by different service providers (the private sector) and users (citizens). They can encompass digital identity, payments, and data storage and sharing.<sup>6</sup> With success stories such as India's implementation of DPI, a number of multilateral institutions and initiatives have emerged to cooperate and build DPIs.

The G20 is a key example of this. First emerging in the grouping as the 'internet economy' in 2015 during the G20 Antalya Summit, global leaders included the substantial challenges and opportunities it would bring to the global economy.<sup>7</sup> Fast forward to 2024, and digitalisation is now an enduring pillar of successive G20 presidencies. The Global Digital Public Infrastructure Repository was launched under India's G20 presidency in 2023. Of the countries with DPIs listed in this repository, 11 are members of the G20: Argentina,

Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, EU, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mauritius, Nigeria, Oman, Republic of Korea, Russia, and Singapore. This demonstrates how the G20 has played a significant role in promoting DPIs across its broad and inclusive membership.

The United Nations (UN) is also a bright spot in multilateral cooperation for DPIs. The DPI Safeguards Working Group initiated by the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology and the UN Development Programme is a Track 1.5 programme that brings together government and non-government stakeholders to focus on ensuring and bridging the digital divide, including on risks concerning human rights, state surveillance, and discrimination. Its consultative group brings together crucial multilateral institutions, including the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.<sup>8</sup> While the UN is more generally criticised for its inability to function as a multilateral organisation established to prevent and resolve a crisis, the work that is not related to the Security Council remains important to unify countries and institutions on thematic issues, particularly on civil society concerns.<sup>9</sup>

Multilateral implementation programmes now accompany these policy and regulatory approaches. Consider, for instance, the 50-in-5 country-led advocacy campaign launched in 2023 to help 50 countries design, launch, and scale DPI components by 2028. Eleven diverse economies joined the initiative as first movers: Bangladesh, Estonia, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Moldova, Norway, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Togo.<sup>10</sup> Although the campaign has yet to yield results, it notably transcends the usual multilateral groupings.

These examples, albeit not exhaustive, give pause to thought about critical players in multilateralism. The G20 has an inclusive membership, with the African Union joining the grouping in 2023, and the DPI Safeguards Working Group and 50-in-5 initiative have balanced representations from the Global South and Global North. This shows that multilateralism, particularly in DPI, is no longer driven by only the Global North countries; the Global South is becoming a champion in multilateral cooperation to build DPIs.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the trend of the Global South taking a leadership role in DPI development is best demonstrated by India. India has agreements with countries such as Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and France<sup>12</sup> to implement its Unified Payments Interface, enabling cheap and easy cross-border payments

and facilitating the movement of people and money. Perhaps more impressive is that upper-middle-income countries like Armenia are actively seeking India's implementation of population-wide digital transformation; Armenia signed a memorandum of understanding with India in 2023 to drive this change, drawing on India Stack.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, high-income countries like Australia struggle to adopt economy-wide digital identification systems that India is renowned for. Digital ID legislation has been passed, providing the basis for national, state and territory governments to authenticate identification when citizens access or apply for government services without having to do it using physical documents.<sup>14</sup> However, it will take another two years for the private sector to opt into this system, if at all. Developments like these are politically challenged in Australia, with an emerging movement against the universal digital ID over freedom, privacy, and surveillance concerns.<sup>15</sup>

What does this then mean for the future of multilateralism, especially amid a polycrisis?

First, multilateralism is transforming rather than failing. The multilateral system has bright spots where it is rising to unify and meet challenges such as digitisation through frameworks and approaches with more flexibility than existing systems like the UN General Assembly. Second, new players and power dynamics are driving this new form of multilateralism. Consequently, Global South leadership in multilateral institutions and campaigns is increasing. The demand and need for digitisation have also driven innovations in countries like India, which has leapfrogged many of the wealthier countries' approaches to the digital world. Third, there are several ways and means for multilateralism to tackle the problems of the polycrisis. Multilateralism can take the form of significant institutions such as the G20, or they can be smaller and diverse concerts of countries working together to approach shared challenges where interests align.

As we navigate a new and more complex multilateral system, it is necessary to hold space for the multiverse of realities in that system. Much like Waymond sought to navigate the complexities of Evelyn's multiverses, we must recognise there will be multiple truths, multiple players, and, potentially, multiple endings.

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# Iran in the Era of Central Eurasian Connectivity

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Vali Golmohammadi

Iran's geostrategic location at the crossroads of Central Eurasia gives it a pivotal role in fostering trans-regional connectivity and economic integration: it bridges Europe and Asia, connecting India and Russia in the North-South corridor; connects Asia and Europe in the East-West corridor; connects Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Western Europe in the TRACECA Corridor; connects Southeast Asia to northwestern Europe in the South Asian Corridor; and connects Central Asian countries to the Persian Gulf in the Ashgabat agreement.<sup>1</sup> Iran's increasing role in various Eurasian transit initiatives further underscores its importance in fostering regional connectivity and facilitating dialogue among diverse stakeholders, contributing to a more interconnected and prosperous Eurasian landscape.

In doing so, Iran seeks to leverage its geographic advantages to propose the Iran-Rah initiative and affirm its role as a transit hub in the development of Central Eurasian connectivity.

## **Iran and the Emerging Eurasian Context**

Central Eurasia, a landlocked region historically dominated by Russia, has experienced significant shifts in communication dynamics since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Previously reliant on Moscow for connectivity, the emergence of new republics has prompted efforts to establish alternative routes for engagement with the global community. In recent years, particularly following the eruption of the Ukraine conflict, Western powers have intensified competition to curtail the influence of Eastern powers in transportation and communication corridors—notably, China’s Belt and Road Initiative and the Northern Corridor. Instead, the Middle Corridor, which links Southeast Asia and China to Europe via the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, and the Southern Corridor connecting South Asia to the Mediterranean, have been developed to counterbalance the Northern Corridor and enhance regional connectivity.<sup>2</sup>

Iran has historically been viewed as a Middle Eastern power caught in a regional security dilemma—a perspective rooted in the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century dynamics that emphasised a unipolar world dominated by the United States (US). As Europe and Asia forge closer ties and economic exchanges intensify, it is imperative to reassess this characterisation. The evolution of Iran’s foreign policy is increasingly influenced by “Eurasian” factors, reflecting a complex interplay of emerging economic trends and the political realities of a multipolar global landscape.<sup>3</sup> The emerging Eurasian vector in Iran’s foreign policy offers an opportunity to adopt an active regionalism for nurturing connectivity and strengthening multilateralism.

Central Eurasia possesses profound historical, cultural, and civilisational significance for the Islamic Republic of Iran through extensive geographical and demographic connections. Despite these ties, Iran’s practical engagement in the region’s economic, political, and cultural domains remains constrained. This limitation underscores the need for a more proactive approach to enhance Iran’s influence and deepen regional collaboration.<sup>4</sup> Recent developments have provoked optimism for enhanced cooperation between Iran and Central Eurasian countries. Notable among these is the preferential trade agreement established

between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union in 2019, complemented by a free trade agreement signed in 2023.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, Iran's accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2022, along with the new government's "neighborhood and Look East" policies initiated in 2021, further underscore a commitment to strengthened regional ties.

The ongoing Ukraine war, along with Western sanctions on Russia, have altered Eurasian trade dynamics, highlighting Iran's newfound strategic importance as a transit and transport hub. This development positions Iran as a critical connector of China and Central Asia to Europe, as well as facilitating trade between Russia and India via the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). Over the past three decades, following the independence of its neighbouring countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, Iran has actively pursued both bilateral and multilateral collaborations to leverage its geographical advantage, bridging the Caspian Sea and Central Asia with the Persian Gulf.

Concerned by Türkiye's promotion of transit routes like the Trans-Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor, Iran has advanced the INSTC through Armenian territory. The INSTC, a multimodal network connecting the Persian Gulf and Indian ports with Russia via ship, rail, and road, also aims to provide Moscow with alternative routes amidst the Ukraine war. Despite collaboration between Iran, Russia, India, and recently Armenia, to operationalise the INSTC, challenges remain in fully implementing the project.<sup>6</sup>

In 2022, the North-South Corridor commenced its operational phase. On 18 June 2022, the inaugural freight train transporting Kazakhstan's sulfur cargo arrived in Iran via Incheh Borun at the Iran-Turkmenistan border. The following day, in Tehran, then President Ebrahim Raisi and visiting Kazakh President Kassym Jomart Tokayev inaugurated the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran (KTI) transit corridor, also known as the Southern Caspian Sea Corridor to Europe through Türkiye. Prior to this, Turkmen President Serdar Berdimuhamedow's visit to Tehran facilitated the signing of bilateral agreements aimed at enhancing economic cooperation, particularly in transit, transportation, and the oil and natural gas sectors.<sup>7</sup> As connecting with Iran is increasingly tempting for Central Asian countries, Tehran also proposed linking to the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway in 2022 and addressed the possibility of a transit corridor with Tashkent and Ashgabat in October 2023.<sup>8</sup>

## The Iran-Rah Initiative

In light of extensive US sanctions impacting oil exports, energy infrastructure, and financial transactions, Iran has sought to mitigate regional and international isolation by enhancing its role in regional transit. By strategically leveraging its geographical position, Iran aims to establish robust and stable income streams despite prevailing challenges. Through this endeavour, Iran aspires to maximise its geostrategic potential as a central hub for Eurasian connectivity routes, facilitating economic resilience and integration. In this context, on 4 July 2023, Iranian Roads Minister unveiled a multifaceted transit initiative aimed at enhancing its infrastructure, encompassing transportation routes, ports, digital connectivity, and energy lines.<sup>9</sup> Central to this initiative is the promotion of “road diplomacy” in its foreign policy.<sup>10</sup> The activation of international multimodal transport corridors has been pivotal to Iran’s road diplomacy. Notable initiatives include the launch of the KTI Railway Corridor, the facilitation of the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran (KTAI) transport corridor, and the trial testing of the Persian Gulf-Black Sea Corridor. These developments underscore Iran’s strategic commitment to enhancing regional connectivity.

At the 26th St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, during a trilateral meeting among Iran, Russia, and India focusing on the INSTC, Iranian Roads Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash proposed the Iran-Rah Initiative.<sup>11</sup> The initiative emphasises eight fundamental principles including multilateralism, a neighbourhood-oriented transit approach, and technological advancements aimed at enhancing logistics and transportation across the wider Eurasia.<sup>12</sup> According to the Iran-Rah Initiative, Iran is actively pursuing the development of alternative land routes to enhance transit connectivity from East and Southeast Asia, including China and India, to Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Europe, thereby reducing reliance on the maritime route through the Suez Canal.

The Iran-Rah initiative reflects Iran’s strategic vision to enhance its role in global transit and logistics by leveraging its geographical advantages. By positioning itself as both a “path” and a “solution”, Iran aims to create a network that not only facilitates trade and transport but also builds regional economic integration. Notably, Iran considers India and Russia to be key partners in the north-south corridors, while Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan are regarded as vital allies within the east-west corridors, underscoring Iran’s strategic intent to strengthen regional connectivity and collaboration.<sup>13</sup>

Through the Iran-Rah initiative, Iran aims to establish secure and efficient connectivity that promotes economic benefits for all participating nations. This strategic approach fosters constructive competition and collaborative partnerships among stakeholders—including governments, businesses, and logistics companies—while framing countries along its transit corridors as partners rather than mere neighbours.

The Iran-Rah initiative encompasses a number of key infrastructure projects aimed at enhancing trans-regional connectivity that include the expansion and modernisation of road and rail networks; investment in key ports, such as the Shahid Rajaei Port in Bandar Abbas, the Chabahar port, and other ports along the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf; the establishment of logistics parks and freight terminals to streamline cargo handling and improve supply chain efficiency; upgrading telecommunication infrastructures to support better connectivity and digital trade; and enhancing energy infrastructure, including oil and gas pipelines, to connect with neighbouring countries and ensure energy security.<sup>14</sup> These projects align with Iran's vision of becoming a transit hub in the shifting geo-economics in Eurasia.

## **The Way Forward**

Iran faces an enormous challenge in navigating the evolving geopolitical landscape of Eurasia, particularly as various great powers—i.e., China, Russia, the US, India—and rival regional stakeholders like Türkiye pursue ambitious connectivity and integration initiatives. It is of paramount necessity for Iran to adapt to these shifting dynamics, as its strategic positioning can either facilitate or hinder its participation in regional projects. Balancing national interests with the competing agendas of these influential actors will be crucial for Iran to enhance its geopolitical relevance and develop its connectivity with the region. The Iran-Rah initiative holds the potential to transform Iran's economic landscape while reshaping its geopolitical relationships and positioning it as a regional hub for trade and connectivity in Central Eurasia.

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, coupled with Western sanctions against Russia and the blockade of east-west transit corridors across Russian territory, are influencing the dynamics of key transit corridors in Central Eurasia. Notably, the Middle Corridor operates independently of Iran and Russia, while both Tehran and Moscow, along with India, actively engage in the INSTC.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Iran aspires to enhance its involvement in the Persian

Gulf–Black Sea International Transport and Transit Corridor by collaborating with Armenia, Georgia, Bulgaria, and Greece. Ultimately, Iran’s strategy aims to establish a transit balance within the Central Asia and Caucasus as part of its broader, balanced foreign policy strategy. The newly elected government of Masoud Pezeshkian is poised to prioritise connectivity diplomacy, raising hopes for accelerating existing connectivity initiatives in neighbouring regions.

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# Protecting Europe with Firepower and Democratic Resilience

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Sarah Bressan

**F**ive years ago, this author co-wrote a paper that projected a scenario of war and peace in Europe in 2030.<sup>1</sup> Like many others at a time of multiple seemingly frozen conflicts, the analysis focused on the grey zone between clearly defined 'war' and equally unambiguous 'peace'. Even without any large-scale war on the battlefield in Europe between 2020 and 2030, people still experienced insecurity and violence in the scenario, albeit below the threshold of 'war' as universally defined. If political leaders fail to address increasing societal divisions and violence against marginalised groups, that paper argued, Europeans could live in a ubiquitous state of injustice and insecurity.

Five years and a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine later, analysts of European security are starting to reckon with their focus on the grey zone and on the non-kinetic aspects of hybrid operations below the threshold of war. Ukrainians are confronted with a brutal land war in the trenches, in which they are fighting for the survival of a European democracy. People across Europe are feeling the ripple effects of this sea-change in the security landscape, unexpectedly having to reshuffle national budgets, diversify energy sources, ramp up defence industry production, and rethink their geopolitical strategies.

In what French President Emmanuel Macron called “the beginning of an illiberal moment,”<sup>2</sup> it seems tempting to argue that Europeans need to return to the basics of traditional geopolitics, relearning the language of ‘strongman’ leaders, and focus on hard power deterrence. However, failures to anticipate and counter the full extent of autocratic aggression have ultimately shown that the traditional state-centric view is misled and the biggest danger to peace remains unchecked political power. The only viable protection against this are strong democratic guardrails. This is why, going forward, Europe needs both firepower and democratic resilience at home and in its neighbourhood.

## ***Zeitenwende* Too Late?**

Russia’s full-scale invasion has required Europe’s security establishment to confront past failures. These include not listening to Russia’s direct neighbours, which have been exposed to harassment from Moscow and its allies for decades—from cyber-attacks to the weaponisation of migration—and have warned Western European partners to take the Kremlin’s threats more seriously.<sup>3</sup>

A case in point is Germany, which began changing course on its Russia policy after Chancellor Olaf Scholz described the situation as a *Zeitenwende*—an epochal break. Expertise in deciphering Moscow’s threats was not missing, but with enough economic interdependence and good will, it was possible to believe that it could stay on good terms with Russia.<sup>4</sup>

More active warnings before 2021 against the immediate threat posed by Russia’s military to Ukraine and the European security order could have helped mobilise defence spending, production, and cooperation earlier and deter Russian aggression. Those who warned that the European security

order following the fall of the Berlin Wall was incomplete, had a point: Putin's aggression indicates that one side was unhappy with the deal.<sup>5</sup>

However, traditional state-centric geopolitical analyses did not read the problem with Russia right. Instead, among the German chancellor candidates debating foreign policy before the 2020 federal elections, solely the Green Party candidate—current Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock—understood the threat of Russia's imperialist project, owing to her party's focus on the most marginalised and directly affected groups within society.<sup>6</sup> A focus on democracy and human security led her to criticise Germany's short-sighted energy deals with Russia at the expense of ordinary Ukrainians' security.<sup>7</sup> It is no coincidence that a party that believes in a feminist foreign policy sees the continuities between Putin's chauvinist ideology and his violent oppression of democratic freedom and equality in Ukraine.<sup>8</sup>

While the analytical and political failures of the time are yet to be seriously investigated, the only way forward is one which seriously accounts for the defence against both aspects of hybrid warfare—firepower and grey-zone foreign meddling—that exploit the injustices within democratic societies and weaken Europe's democracies and their security.

## **Firepower and Democratic Defences**

Undoubtedly, Europe needs to produce ammunition, deliver lethal weapons to Ukraine, and replenish its own stockpiles to help Ukraine win the war on the battlefield and in the trenches. Having mobilised over 6 billion euros under the European Peace Facility for Ukraine, the European Union has shown that it is fit to deliver on security.<sup>9</sup> Next steps include making the defence of Europe robust against a future in which the United States may either be ruled by a similar return to archaic times as Russia or constrained by power competition in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, Europe cannot neglect the risks that loom in the grey zone, including acts of sabotage and assassination within Europe.<sup>11</sup> Energy and communication flows in European countries need to be better protected towards a diversification of energy sources and strategies to mitigate critical dependencies.<sup>12</sup> Intelligence and security services across Europe will need to focus on detecting, exposing, and countering authoritarian interference.<sup>13</sup>

Strengthening and protecting European democracies against dangerous meddling from Russia and other authoritarian powers goes beyond physical infrastructure. European countries need to define the limits of legitimate and illegitimate foreign influence to expose and stop the strategies and narratives that authoritarian regimes are using to instigate societal conflict and discontent to delegitimise democratic defences. So far, the EU has a definition for foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), but—in contrast to, for example, Australia—no coherent definition for the broader concept of foreign interference.<sup>14</sup> Similar to strategic dependencies, foreign meddling will need to be better measured, analysed, and persecuted.

Democracy can be exploited when and where it is incomplete and contradicts itself. This is why its ground rules need to be reinvigorated, particularly in online information spaces—by regulating Big Tech companies—and in the peripheries of European countries, where many Europeans vote for anti-democratic parties because they feel the social and economic models that work for elites in big cities do not work for them. Progressive parties all over Europe will need to bridge this divide and provide narratives—or ideological frameworks—that resonate there.

Finally, Europe must also protect its interests by vocally supporting the protection of democracy and freedom elsewhere. This is most urgent in candidate countries for EU accession, from Ukraine to the Western Balkans.<sup>15</sup> Authoritarians have often weaponised the “foreign meddling” discourse against democrats. However, the “real democrats” are not those who abuse the foreign-agent label for laws that dismantle the rule of law, like in Georgia, or those who open Europe’s doors to its enemies, like Hungary’s Viktor Orbán; the real democrats are those who are ready to defend democratic values against chauvinist warmongers around the globe.<sup>16</sup>

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# Gulf States and Economic Opportunities in Central Asia

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Jonathan Fulton

**T**he Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)— have transitioned from regionally-focused actors with modest foreign policy goals to global economic actors with more ambitious agendas. Their energy export revenues, for one, have resulted in significant capital holdings, managed by sovereign wealth funds (SWFs) that collectively manage over US\$4.1 trillion in assets across global markets.<sup>1</sup> The same wealth has created opportunities for international firms and investors as each GCC state has embarked upon transformational development agendas. Economic statecraft therefore has become an increasingly important foreign policy tool.



That Asia is a focus of the GCC's engagement is well-established. Their primary export markets are China, India, Japan and South Korea; at the same time, companies from these countries have become significant players in Gulf economies. Two-way foreign direct investment (FDI) from the GCC to major Asian economies has seen dramatic growth over the past two decades, a trend that appears set to intensify. Labour flows from Asia to the Gulf are also significant, making remittances from the GCC to Asian countries an important factor as well. This economic engagement is facilitated by increased political cooperation, with a rise in strategic partnerships and economic partnership agreements at the bilateral level and, multilaterally, cooperation in international organisations, forums, and summits.

Less obvious is the growth in ties between the GCC and Central Asian countries—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The two groupings are outside of each other's traditional spheres of interest, with the GCC long oriented toward the larger Middle East–North Africa (MENA) and the Central Asian five (C5) toward the post-Soviet world. Add to this the fact that the C5 markets are relatively small compared with the GCC's key economic partners and the GCC's primary export—energy—is not in short supply for Central Asia.

However, there has been a recent growth in ties with indications of greater momentum. A combination of investment opportunity and strategic objectives explains why the GCC countries are motivated to pursue a larger role in Central Asia.

## **GCC Economic Outreach to Central Asia**

There have been steps toward closer GCC-C5 ties in recent years, facilitated through political mechanisms at the bilateral and multilateral level.

Bilaterally, there has been an increase in the visits of heads of state. In 2022, Uzbeki President Shavkat Mirziyoyev travelled to Jeddah to meet with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in Abu Dhabi with Emirati President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. In June 2023, Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani traveled to Kyrgyzstan to meet with his counterpart, Sadyr Japarov, making him the first Arab leader to visit there.

It is at the multilateral level that has seen a more interesting trend, however, with the establishment of two new forums. In September 2022 the first Central Asia–GCC Joint Ministerial Meeting on Strategic Dialogue was held in Riyadh and the second round was held in Tashkent in April 2024. The Ministerial Meetings were followed by a Central Asia–GCC Summit, with the participation of heads of state. The first was held in Jeddah in July 2023 and the next is scheduled for Samarkand in 2025. Another multilateral forum that offers opportunities for coordination is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Four of the C5–Turkmenistan is the exception—are founding members of the SCO, and all of the GCC members except Oman are dialogue partners.

This growth in diplomatic engagement is consistent with a broader trend for the C5. Since 2022, their leaders have held summits, virtual or in-person, with India, Russia, Türkiye, China, the United States, and the European Union. Such frequent summitry is unusual for the C5, a development one analyst links to a multi-vector foreign policy meant to maintain good relations with a wide range of powers whose interests in Central Asia do not consistently align.<sup>2</sup> Their outreach to the GCC seems driven more by economic considerations, however.

For the GCC countries, engagement with Central Asia also seems primarily animated by economic factors. Trade does not explain much at this stage; other than the UAE and Saudi Arabia, there is little in the way of trade between GCC and C5 countries. According to data from the International Monetary Fund, in 2023 the UAE was by far the largest GCC trade partner in Central Asia, with a relatively modest US\$1.26 billion, most of which was divided between Kazakhstan (US\$534 million) and Uzbekistan (US\$444 million). Saudi Arabia was a distant second, with a paltry US\$148 million, and the remaining countries' volume of trade was negligible.<sup>3</sup>

One sign of potential growth came from a visit to Qatar for President Tokayev in February 2024 in which a proposal was tabled that would increase Qatar–Kazakh trade to US\$500 million.<sup>4</sup> Trade promotion was emphasised at the 2024 Ministerial Meeting but it is clear that they will be working from a position of low expectations.

There is more positive momentum on investments, with renewable and traditional energy, mining, and food the most prominent or promising sectors. In this domain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar are the most active GCC states.

In terms of renewable energy, Saudi Arabia's ACWA Power and the UAE's Mubadala have been especially active in wind and solar projects in Uzbekistan, with nine major greenfield projects between the two of them since 2018. Emirati state-owned Masdar announced that as of early 2024, it had invested US\$4 billion in Uzbekistan. In late 2022 it signed a deal in Turkmenistan to build a 100-MW PV plant and has since signed an agreement for a PV plant in Kyrgyzstan and an exploratory agreement in Tajikistan to develop clean energy capacity. ACWA has been in talks with Kazakhstan to develop a wind farm. For C5 countries, greater renewable capacity allows them to use gas for higher value exports rather than domestic energy use.

Hydrocarbon and affiliated infrastructure development investment is also taking place, much of it from Qatar. In Kazakhstan, Qatari entities are involved in a gas processing plant and gas pipelines. Qatar also signed an economic and technical feasibility agreement to fund the trans-Afghan railway, which would link Uzbekistan to Pakistani ports. Saudi's Islamic Development Bank has invested \$250 million in Tajikistan's Rogun HPP hydroelectricity power station.<sup>5</sup> The UAE's Dragon Oil opened a regional office in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan in January 2024, with the goal of increasing investments in oil and gas fields.

Mining investment is also growing, linked to the Gulf's ambitions for renewable energy. Central Asia is endowed with many of the minerals and rare-earth elements required for the green energy transition, and Gulf countries, ambitious to shift from fossil-fuel-dominant economies to clean energy, are investing heavily in mining. Saudi Arabia, for example, has identified mining and minerals processing as its third industrial pillar after oil and gas and petrochemicals. Central Asia's significant holdings of manganese ore reserves, chromium, lead, zinc, titanium, aluminium, copper, cobalt, and molybdenum indicate a much larger role for mining in Gulf investment strategies in the C5.

Food security is another emerging sector of Gulf investment. GCC countries import between 70-90 percent of their food, and with supply issues with Ukrainian grain after the Russian invasion, the Gulf has had to diversify sources of imports, which creates another opportunity for GCC-C5 coordination. Qatar signed an investment agreement valued at US\$200 million for a food processing plant and another US\$300 million for a dairy and meat production complex, both in Kazakhstan.<sup>6</sup> Kazakhstan food imports have also been a focus of the UAE and Saudi Arabia. During President Tokayev's visit to Saudi Arabia for the 2023 summit, an investment for agricultural products agreement

was signed. The UAE, meanwhile, has been discussing with Kazakhstan about establishing a grain shipping route to the GCC via Iranian ports.

All of this demonstrates a significant synergy between the two groups of countries, but the geopolitical level also explains GCC interest in closer ties with C5. As mentioned earlier, Central Asia plays a key role in the SCO, an organisation that Iran joined as a full member in 2023, nearly 20 years after first applying. Iranian membership in a security-oriented organisation presents problems for the GCC, and the possibility of Tehran using its SCO membership to buttress its power and influence is a potential threat. Therefore, GCC engagement with SCO members as well as institutional membership as dialogue partners present opportunities to balance Iran. It is likely that increased economic engagement from the GCC to Central Asia will factor in geopolitical considerations.

## Conclusion

While GCC-Central Asia economic cooperation remains modest when measured against the bigger Asian economies, there is clearly synergy between the two groups of states and potential for growth.

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# The Changing Character of War

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Raj Shukla

**A**ccording to General Mark Milley, recently retired Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs, “we are witnessing some of the most fundamental and profound changes in the character of war, in recorded history.”<sup>1</sup> For instance, the Ukraine war has led to a nearly simultaneous unfolding of multi-generational combat capacities in cyber, space, missileery, Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, and trench warfare. Meanwhile, the squadron and company assaults, the hand breaching of minefields, and the artillery duels remain as salient as the technological sophistication of drone swarms, the Starlink-aided precision-targeting of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, missile strikes, and nuclear sabre-rattling.

Indeed, the complexity and sophistication of modern deterrence and warfighting can be described as staggering and unprecedented. In this context, the changing nature of deterrence and warfighting can be gauged through five metrics.

1. An elevated view suggests that national security and technology are driving geopolitics like never before. The world seems to be heading towards visible confrontation and conflicts, from Europe to the Western Pacific, and now to West Asia. It is also manifesting in myriad forms—grey-zone, hybrid, proxy, prolonged high-intensity combat, and nuclear sabre-rattling, all at once. Almost all elements of statecraft are being weaponised—economic, supply chain, technological, informational, and cultural.<sup>a</sup> Sethuraman Panchanathan, Director of the American Science Foundation, opines that the Foundation is the offensive arm of American defence and national security, the objective being to pursue the frontiers of science to acquire military capacities that allow the United States (US) to maintain its position of global military supremacy.<sup>2</sup> However, as the balance of comprehensive national power between the US and China narrows, the absence of a decisive edge and the resultant ambiguity enhances the probability of contestation, if not conflict. Nations are thus bracing for the new reality and re-evaluating the placement of their instruments of force in their strategic calculus. There has been an uptick in defence expenditures; China, for example, despite a slowing economy,<sup>3</sup> enhanced its defence spending by 7.2 percent this year.<sup>4</sup> The richest cohort in the world, the European Union (EU), for years viewed defence as a wasteful and unproductive endeavour; Angela Merkel believed she could buy peace by indenting Russian oil and gas. Consequently, NATO spent the bare minimum on defence until its defence capacities atrophied enough for it to earn the sobriquet of being “brain dead”.<sup>5</sup> This has changed following the Ukraine conflict; 18 of the NATO countries are now meeting their 2-percent-of-GDP obligation on defence,<sup>6</sup> with talk of raising the floor spending to 3 percent,<sup>7</sup> even as Trump seeks a higher allocation of 4 percent of GDP.<sup>8</sup> Poland has elevated its defence spending to 5 percent of GDP,<sup>9</sup> and Russia’s is now closer to 6 percent.<sup>10</sup> Japan’s project of re-armament is on the fast track, with a 1,000-strong long-range cruise missile force, and the facilitation of a new three-star US Command Headquarters to finesse joint operational planning. There is also the emergence of war economies and the widespread strengthening of conventional and nuclear postures.

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a The algorithmic manipulation of Western opinion by TikTok is a good example.

2. Driven by the exigencies of combat, the military applications of niche technologies like AI and robotics are growing rapidly in weekly and monthly evolutionary cycles. It is also clear that militaries that embrace AI and robotics with alacrity and skill will gain overwhelming advantage in combat prowess. Data is now a weapon system in the modern toolkit of all advanced militaries; in this domain, the attack surfaces are growing, the margins for error are shrinking, and decision cycles are shortening. Wise militaries are investing in the triad of data, algorithms, and compute by unlocking data, growing their compute power, training Large Language Models, as well as managing, securing, and leveraging data for superior operational affect. A massive technological swivel, particularly for niche technologies, is pervading deterrence and warfighting. Militaries will need a massive leap of faith to adjust and adapt to the new reality.
  
3. The attributes for the delivery of such technological edge to combat are an ethos of innovation, energy, and enterprise. These attributes, which once characterised the world of business and commerce alone, are now becoming just as salient on the battlefield. Startups and the private sector are powering this change with success. The most active partner of the US SPACECOM today is not NASA, Boeing, or Lockheed, but Elon Musk. Indian startups are powering capacity building in domains as diverse as drones and chips. In Ukraine, Space X has enabled both strategic communications and artillery targeting; AI major Helsing and 250 startups and private companies have impacted every metric of warfighting, from intelligence, surveillance, and firepower, to manoeuvre and logistics. Consequently, no artillery round is being fired without live sighting through a recce drone, legacy dumb bombs have been turned into precision glide bombs, enabling the return of Russian airpower to battle, and blood transfusion is being carried out in the trenches, enabling immediate and lifesaving resuscitation. While iron and steel will continue to be salient, cutting-edge capacities will be increasingly drawn from high-quality data, chips, and sophisticated Large Language Models.
  
4. The quality, resilience, and sustainability of the military-industrial complex, manufacturing capacities, and cold military steel are critical to the war-winning effort. Neglect of what American President Franklin D. Roosevelt described as the “arsenal of democracy”<sup>11</sup> can be fatal. In 2004, China’s manufacturing capacities, value added, were half that of the US’s; today they are twice that of US.<sup>12</sup> China’s military-industrial complex, in consequence,



is five to six times more efficient than that of the US.<sup>13</sup> Even in the case of a prospective fight in Taiwan, the Americans lack seven days of precision missiles and munitions.<sup>14</sup> A week before the decision to surrender in Advika, an operational audit of two Ukrainian brigades revealed that one had a mere 15 artillery rounds left, the other had 42 mortar rounds.<sup>15</sup> The surrender was made not because Ukrainian soldiers had lost the will to fight, but because the West's military arsenal had begun to run dry.

5. Recent times have been witness to failing American deterrence: in Afghanistan, Ukraine, West Asia, and potentially in the Western Pacific. The most powerful military in the world—a 950-billion-dollar enterprise, with 11 aircraft carriers and 800 military bases worldwide—has proved to be a grand initiator of conflict but a poor finisher. The deterrence paradigm, therefore, needs a serious re-look and perhaps re-structuring. There is a need for nation-states to work towards a coordinated, credible deterrence architecture: deterrence does not happen by accident; the design, planning, and acquisition of credible combat capacities to deter competitors and adversaries is a *sine qua non* for peace.

The aforesaid metrics illustrate how recent transformations in the character of war may yet be the most fundamental and game-changing in recorded history. The challenge for militaries and their associated national security systems is to stay ahead or at least keep pace with the rate of change. It would be fair to surmise that militaries that demonstrate the agility and fleet-footedness to cope with the changing paradigm will drive and lead strategic–military futures. Those that do not do so will continue to react and respond, and therefore lag.

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# Is the World Ready for the Next Pandemic?

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Wanjiru Munene

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally reshaped the global landscape, exposing both the strengths and weaknesses of national and international systems. As the world began to recover, the crucial question remained: Are we prepared for the next pandemic? Using examples from both the Global North and Global South, this article explores the preparedness of the global community across multiple dimensions, including public health infrastructure, international cooperation, technological advancements, and societal resilience. It also examines the role of the Global South in paving its own path to resilience amid the dynamics of power disparities with the Global North, particularly in the context of vaccine inequity.

## Public Health Infrastructure

The foundation of pandemic preparedness lies in robust public health infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted gaps in healthcare systems worldwide, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Strengthening healthcare infrastructure is imperative to handle future pandemics effectively.

Investments in health systems need to focus on the following domains:

- 1. Surveillance Systems:** Enhanced surveillance systems are critical for early detection and response. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and Big Data analytics can improve the monitoring of disease outbreaks and the prediction of potential pandemics.<sup>1</sup> In South Korea, a robust surveillance and contact tracing system enabled rapid containment of COVID-19, while countries like India have been working to upgrade their Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) to better detect and respond to outbreaks.
- 2. Healthcare Workforce:** Training and retaining a skilled healthcare workforce is essential. Countries need to ensure that healthcare workers are adequately trained in infectious disease management and pandemic response.<sup>2</sup> In Rwanda, investment in community health workers has strengthened the healthcare delivery system, providing a model for other low-income countries to emulate.
- 3. Infrastructure and Supplies:** Ensuring the availability of necessary medical supplies, including personal protective equipment (PPE), ventilators, and medications, is vital. Building resilient supply chains that can withstand global disruptions is a key component of preparedness.<sup>3</sup> The United States, for example, faced significant challenges with PPE shortages early in the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the need for domestic production capabilities and diversified supply chains.

## International Cooperation

Global pandemics require a coordinated international response. COVID-19 demonstrated the importance of global cooperation and the consequences of its absence. International organisations like the World Health Organization (WHO) play a pivotal role in coordinating responses, sharing information, and providing guidance.

The following are key areas for improvement:

**Information Sharing:** Transparent and timely sharing of information about disease outbreaks is crucial. Countries must commit to rapid reporting and data sharing to enable a swift global response.<sup>4</sup> China's initial delays in reporting COVID-19 cases highlight the need for stronger international agreements and compliance mechanisms.

**Equitable Access to Resources:** Ensuring equitable access to vaccines, treatments, and other critical resources is essential for a fair and effective global response. Mechanisms like the COVAX facility aim to address this issue, but more robust frameworks are needed.<sup>5</sup> The stark contrast in vaccine access between wealthy nations and countries in Africa and South Asia underscores this urgent need.

**Joint Research and Development:** Collaborative research efforts can accelerate the development of diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines. International partnerships and funding mechanisms should be strengthened to support these initiatives.<sup>6</sup> The collaboration between Oxford University and AstraZeneca in developing a COVID-19 vaccine exemplifies the benefits of such partnerships.

## Technological Advancements

Technological innovations have the potential to revolutionise pandemic preparedness and response. The rapid development of COVID-19 vaccines showcased the power of modern biotechnology and collaboration.

Emerging technologies can enhance preparedness in a number of ways:

- 1. Vaccine Platforms:** Advances in vaccine technology, such as mRNA vaccines, have proven to be game-changers. Continued investment in these platforms can expedite the development of vaccines for future pandemics.<sup>7</sup> The success of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna's mRNA vaccines demonstrates the potential of these platforms.
- 2. Diagnostics and Surveillance:** Improved diagnostic tools, including point-of-care tests and genomic sequencing, can facilitate early detection and tracking of pathogens. Integrating these tools into public health systems

can enhance response capabilities.<sup>8</sup> The use of genomic sequencing in the United Kingdom to track and identify new COVID-19 variants has been instrumental in informing public health responses.

- 3. Telemedicine and Digital Health:** The pandemic accelerated the adoption of telemedicine and digital health solutions. These technologies can improve access to healthcare, especially in remote and underserved areas, and support ongoing care during outbreaks.<sup>9</sup> In Nigeria, digital health platforms have been crucial in continuing healthcare delivery during lockdowns.

## Societal Resilience

Building societal resilience is crucial for mitigating the impact of pandemics. This involves fostering community engagement, addressing social determinants of health, and promoting mental health and well-being.

Strategies to enhance societal resilience include:

- 1. Community Engagement:** Engaging communities in preparedness efforts can improve public trust and compliance with health measures. Community-based approaches can also help identify and address local needs and vulnerabilities.<sup>10</sup> In Senegal and other low- and middle-income countries across Africa and Asia, community health workers play a vital role in public health campaigns, enhancing community trust and cooperation.
- 2. Addressing Inequalities:** Pandemics disproportionately affect marginalised and vulnerable populations. Addressing social determinants of health, such as poverty, education, and housing, is essential for reducing health disparities and building resilience.<sup>11</sup> In the United States, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of colour highlights the need for addressing systemic inequalities.
- 3. Mental Health Support:** The psychological impact of pandemics can be profound. Providing mental health support and promoting psychosocial well-being are critical components of a comprehensive response.<sup>12</sup> Initiatives in countries like India and Brazil have shown the importance of integrating mental health services into primary healthcare.

## The Role of the Global South

The dynamics of global power disparities, particularly evident through vaccine inequity, highlight the need for the Global South to chart its own path

towards resilience. This involves leveraging local knowledge, fostering regional cooperation, and building self-reliance.

- 1. Leveraging Local Knowledge:** Countries in the Global South have unique insights and experiences that can inform effective strategies. For instance, the experience of West African countries with Ebola in the 2010s has provided valuable lessons in managing infectious diseases.<sup>13</sup>
- 2. Fostering Regional Cooperation:** Regional cooperation can enhance collective preparedness and response capabilities. The African Union's Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) is a prime example of regional efforts to improve health security.<sup>14</sup>
- 3. Building Self-Reliance:** Reducing dependency on the Global North by developing local manufacturing capabilities for medical supplies and pharmaceuticals is crucial. India's pharmaceutical industry and South Africa's initiatives to produce COVID-19 vaccines locally illustrate the importance of self-reliance.<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

The question is no longer if a next pandemic will happen, but when. While progress has been made in response to the consequences of COVID-19, much work remains to be done. By strengthening public health infrastructure, enhancing international cooperation, leveraging technological advancements, and building societal resilience, the world can be better prepared to face future pandemics. The Global South must also play a proactive role in charting its path to resilience, leveraging local strengths, and fostering regional cooperation. It is a collective responsibility that requires sustained commitment, investment, and collaboration at all levels.

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# The Cost of a Climate Transition on Women

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Karuna Kumar

**T**he relationship between women's economic empowerment and green growth is inextricable and tense. A growing concern in the climate transition agenda is its impact on women's employment and livelihood generation. Any transition towards green growth will reduce the share of women in employment, with employment gains made through such a transition benefiting mostly male-dominated industries such as renewable energy, manufacturing, and construction.<sup>1</sup> This is largely a result of women still being overrepresented in the lowest paid and informal jobs, and having limited access to social protection.<sup>2,3</sup> A climate transition will disproportionately affect women and their livelihoods, and the trade-offs need to be explicitly addressed to prevent women from falling

into poverty amid rising energy prices, the collapse of sectors they work in, and inaccessible new job opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

A gender-inclusive green growth economy will need to simultaneously target gender equality, environmental sustainability, and economic growth. In 2018, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) established a new benchmark to help countries assess their quality of growth and put into motion the ADB Inclusive Green Growth Index, which measures 28 indicators organised around three pillars: sustainability of economic growth, the economic participation in society of a broad range of people including women, and environmental impacts.<sup>5</sup> While the index focuses on the three pillars of green growth independently, their linkages are not clearly established.

The Lima Work Programme on Gender and Gender Action Plan is the main instrument currently in place to achieve gender-responsive climate policy and action, and has been the main driver integrating gender equality ambitions into nationally determined contributions and national adaptation plans.<sup>6</sup> However, large gaps in evidence, discriminatory social norms, lack of financial support, weak capacity of government officials and stakeholders, and a lack of resources, persist.<sup>7</sup>

Multiple factors make a just climate transition for women challenging, including limited ownership of assets, constraints to livelihood generation, and strict gender norms. Land is the most important economic resource, particularly in low- and middle-income agriculture-based economies. While women play a critical role in agricultural operations, they have limited access to and control over land. When women do own land, the area of their plots is either smaller or the quality inferior than land owned by men.<sup>8,9</sup> Globally, the share of women agricultural landholders is less than 15 percent.<sup>10</sup> Without ownership of physical assets that can be used as collateral, women are less likely to own a bank account or have access to credit. Additional barriers such as lower level of digital access for mobile money payments further limit women's access to finance.<sup>11</sup>

In developing countries, 92 percent of women are informally employed, and in a majority of countries worldwide, the percentage of women workers in informal employment exceeds the percentage of men workers in those sector.<sup>12</sup> Informal jobs are lower paid and at greater risk during climate shocks as well as in the transition to 'net zero'. Women also earn less than men and are underrepresented in occupations and sectors in the green economy.<sup>13,14</sup>

Potential new jobs in the green sector will need highly skilled workers, and women currently hold the majority of low-paid and low-skilled jobs; therefore, they are less likely to be hired. Without policy interventions, the energy transition will create more employment opportunities for men than for women.<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, social norms that limit women's mobility, time, and voice isolate them into domestic roles, burden them with rising care responsibilities and declining food and water security, even as men increasingly migrate to places with better prospects.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, during climate shocks, as social controls and protections are disrupted, women and children face greater risk of experiencing gender-based violence.<sup>17</sup>

Continued inaction will worsen the impacts of climate change on women, leading to increased poverty, displacement, and loss of life and livelihoods.<sup>18</sup> At the 28<sup>th</sup> United Nations Climate Change Conference COP28, 68 countries signed a new Gender-Responsive Just Transitions and Climate Action Partnership to mobilise action around three core pillars: better quality data to support decision-making in transition planning; more effective finance flows to regions most impacted by climate change; and education, skills, and capacity building to support individual engagement in transitions.<sup>19</sup> While the partnership sets the direction and showcases intent, breaking the cycle of pre-existing inequalities would require urgent collective action from governments, businesses, and civil society.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UNFCC Gender Action Plan emphasise the relationship between green growth and women's economic empowerment, highlighting the need for macroeconomic frameworks supporting green growth to address the constraints to women's economic empowerment.<sup>20,21</sup> While the right approach to implementing gender-sensitive green growth strategies will depend on the economy and the gender context, there are varied economic risks and vulnerabilities that will need to be integrated into programming and policy formulation.<sup>22</sup>

Building inclusive tax systems and addressing gender biases in tax policies can influence women's decisions to engage in paid work, including in green sectors, which can reduce the reliance on informal working and break the gendered occupational segregation.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, gender-responsive climate investments can generate revenues and spread risk through diversified portfolios for investors, drive value addition, and amplify gender impact.<sup>24</sup>

Globally, only a negligible number of green bonds have gender as their priority objective.<sup>25</sup> Integrating a gender component in bond frameworks in the form of gender analyses, gender action plans, and mandatory reporting requirements would help improve the adoption and implementation of gender integration into climate investments.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, a debt-restructuring agenda that both addresses gender concerns and supports climate investments, especially among developing countries with unsustainable debt burdens, would be a step towards a just climate transition. This would include a greater focus on progressive taxation that facilitates spending on healthcare and education and helps ensure that women workers receive living wages that allow for universal access to food and nutrition. Promoting gender equality within rapidly growing carbon markets is also necessary.<sup>27</sup> As the demand for expensive higher-integrity carbon credits that meet robust environmental and social standards rises, there is an opportunity to integrate gender with clear guidance and examples for how project developers could label projects as ‘gender inclusive’.

Increasing training services to help upskill women workers and reskill them for a transition to green jobs while mobilising employment programmes that can connect women workers to jobs in emerging green sectors is also gaining momentum.<sup>28</sup>

Close attention must be drawn towards evidence that women’s leadership and participation improves climate action. A study of 159 global companies identified by the Climate Action 100+ initiative as the largest corporate greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters found that firms with more gender-diverse boards performed much better in eight out of nine climate indicators.<sup>29</sup> They were also seen twice as likely to develop a decarbonisation strategy and 25 percent more likely to have medium- and long-term GHG reduction targets, in addition to having greater potential for allocating future capital aligned to these targets. Despite this, between 2009 and 2021, the proportion of women delegates at COP meetings rose only from 30 percent to 38 percent, and the proportion of female Heads of Delegation only increased from 10 percent to 13 percent.<sup>30</sup>

The Global Green Skills Report 2023, a study undertaken by LinkedIn across 48 countries, reveals that the green talent pool is 66 percent male; nine in ten women lack any green skills; and the green skills gender gap has grown by 25 percent in the past seven years.<sup>31</sup> In the renewable energy industry,

women make up 34 percent of workers, while in other industries, this rises to 44 percent—a gap of 10 percentage points. To close the gap, women will need to join the talent pool at 2.5 times the current ratio.

As the gender-climate nexus continues to gain prominence in the areas of policy, programming, and climate finance, any meaningful progress will rely on enhancing women's leadership and participation in climate action and decision-making, increasing their access to green jobs and skills, providing adaptive social safety nets and livelihood diversification, investing in resilience and disaster risk reduction, and addressing social norms.

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# The Regional Security Architecture of the Asia-Pacific at the Crossroads

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Rouben Azizian

**T**he term ‘regional security architecture’ frequently appears in academic and official discourse, yet its meaning is often interpreted in different ways. Some view it narrowly, focusing on great-power relations, while others see it merely as a collection of multilateral organisations. Neither interpretation provides a full understanding of the complex nature and comprehensive purpose of the regional architecture. A more appropriate definition would describe it as a network of institutions, mechanisms, norms, and processes aimed at fostering regional security and stability.<sup>1</sup> The regional security architecture and its coherence reflect the state of security affairs in the region. At the same time, “a strong regional architecture can bring to bear incentives for cooperation and disincentives for provocation and problematic behaviors.”<sup>2</sup>



The development of regional security architecture in the Asia-Pacific is particularly significant due to the presence of several security hotspots. These include maritime disputes between states bordering the South China Sea and the East China Sea; the Taiwan conflict; and the India-China border dispute.<sup>3</sup> It is the growing maritime nature of the regional security environment and increased major-power rivalry that have led to the more frequent use of the term “Indo-Pacific”. This term, preferred by the United States and its Western partners, carries a stronger strategic connotation and has a somewhat divisive effect. While the expert community often uses “Asia-Pacific” and “Indo-Pacific” interchangeably, the official choice of terminology usually reflects a country’s position in the US-China rivalry and its associated rhetoric.

Following the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the Asia-Pacific security environment was marked by the emergence of a distinctive security architecture comprising both the extensive bilateral security alliances forged by the US to manage its containment policy in the Cold War, as well as a set of new multilateral mechanisms and institutions. These arrangements combined liberal and realist approaches to managing the region’s changing environment.<sup>4</sup> The primary focus of the region’s security architecture was on non-traditional and non-military security challenges, such as transnational crime, terrorism, natural disasters and economic and environmental security. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) gradually assumed the central role in building trust and enhancing dialogue in the region.

ASEAN’s greatest assets have been its institutions. The ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum), ASEAN Plus Three (APT), East Asian Summit (EAS), and economic frameworks such as ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) have served as pillars of regional security, stability, and prosperity. Despite their informal nature, these arrangements continue to build trust and confidence and enhance relations among regional states—the foundations of the ASEAN approach to regional peace and security.<sup>5</sup> In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Asia-Pacific’s security architecture demonstrated a promising coherence of multilateral and bilateral partnerships and adherence to ASEAN led normative trust-building and preventive diplomacy.

Although the notion of ASEAN centrality continues to be part of the lexicon of regionalism and multilateralism in the region, there are concerns about the ASEAN’s ability to maintain this status in a significantly different Indo-Pacific

region. These concerns arise from several factors: (1) heightened power competition between the US and China; (2) China's increasingly unilateral and somewhat aggressive behaviour in the South China; and (3) fraying unity within ASEAN members.<sup>6</sup>

In recent years, China has increasingly challenged US dominance in the region, including its role in the regional architecture. China is promoting a security architecture that is more exclusively "Asian," more attendant to its domestic security concerns, less liberal, and solidly rooted in Chinese economic power. China aims to establish a security architecture where the United States and other countries it considers "external" to the region have a limited role. It calls for a security architecture that explicitly rejects treaty alliances as a legitimate organizing structure. Finally, China is interested in a security architecture more closely integrated with the Asian economic order.<sup>7</sup> One of the ways in which China is pursuing this goal is by strengthening an alternative set of "Asian" institutions where the United States does not play a role. These include the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building in Asia (CICA), as well as two ASEAN-based mechanisms: the ASEAN+3 dialogue (ASEAN, China, Japan, South Korea) and the ASEAN-China (10+1) dialogue channel.<sup>8</sup>

Since former President Barack Obama's pivot to the Asia-Pacific and President former President Donald Trump's assertive response to China's rise, the United States has increased its focus on the region's security architecture. The US is countering China's exclusive "Asianist" approach to the regional security architecture with an effort to enhance the existing mechanisms and build new ones with "like-minded" partners who share democratic values and concerns about China's rise and regional behaviour. The US-led Five Eyes intelligence community has become unusually vocal about domestic issues in China, such as the treatment of Uyghur ethnic minority. The emergence of new minilaterals in the region between the United States and its allies and close partners, such as QUAD and AUKUS, is another feature and trend in the evolution of the regional architecture.

As part of public diplomacy, the QUAD as well as other minilaterals often present themselves as groupings that are not directed against any country. However, the China factor is significant in their strategic calculations, and their primary goals are to deter China's unilateral actions in the region. The US-China rivalry has also had an impact on the regional economic architecture,

with China leading the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) while the US has come up with an alternative Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF).<sup>9</sup>

Given the declining mutual trust between major powers and the epidemic of nationalism in some countries, uncertainties in the development of the Asia-Pacific region are constantly increasing.<sup>10</sup> There is a possibility that these trends could signal the end of post-Cold War security multilateralism in Asia. The casting aside of the more inclusive forms of security cooperation, and the focus on exclusive mechanisms which are intended to shape great-power competition and not to prevent it, could lead to more confrontation in the region.<sup>11</sup>

There are, however, more optimistic views about the new trends in the regional security architecture. Some commentators believe that ASEAN, the QUAD and AUKUS are the pillars on which Indo-Pacific security will rest in the coming decades. ASEAN serves as a norm-builder, the QUAD functions as a problem-solver, and AUKUS acts as a deterrent to military conflict. ASEAN's annual meetings of leaders, foreign ministers, and defence chiefs are a foundation of inclusive diplomacy and cooperation. The informal QUAD dialogue among the United States, Japan, India and Australia would promote broader rules-based order while the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) pact promises leading-edge defensive technology necessary to maintain a military balance of power.<sup>12</sup>

Similar to the evolving QUAD Plus format, AUKUS could address the needs of the Indo-Pacific region by building a broader cohesive grouping of key regional actors like India, Japan, and South Korea through forums, dialogues, and bilateral or multilateral sharing of information. These "Plus" partnerships could supplement diplomatically the AUKUS' military focus.<sup>13</sup>

The solidification of the QUAD and the creation of AUKUS demonstrate both continuity and change in the regional order. These multilateral bodies are emblematic of Asia-Pacific's new security architecture, where minilateralism can either reinforce or undermine both bilateral relations and the multilateral institutions centred on ASEAN.<sup>14</sup> The evolution of the great-power rivalry in the region will be a significant factor in determining how this architecture unfolds. Middle and small powers that have perhaps a higher stake in preserving a coherent and complementary form of regionalism, could exercise

strategic assertiveness to facilitate such a scenario. One of the effective ways of aligning China-led and US-led multilaterals would be to enhance Central Asia's integration into the broader fabric of Asia-Pacific's regional architecture, in both of its security and economic components.

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# India-Armenia Partnership: Onward to the Next Phase

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Reena Pandey

India and Armenia share a rich history spanning over two millennia, comprising trade and cultural exchanges facilitated by the Silk Road. During this period, Armenian merchants established trading posts in India. Subsequently, Armenian settlements arose in different Indian cities, such as Kolkata, Chennai, Agra, and Surat. The enduring legacy of these connections is reflected in contemporary India-Armenia relations.

Armenia became an independent nation in 1991; in 2021, India and Armenia marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. This next phase of the Indo-Armenian partnership allows the opportunity to harness a shared history to foster greater economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and diplomatic collaboration to propel the partnership to new heights and ensure mutual prosperity and stability in the region.

The bilateral relations between the two countries are marked by mutual respect and support on international platforms. They share similar views on various global issues, including peace, security, and development. High-level visits and dialogues facilitate the exchange of views on international and regional issues, contributing to a stable and constructive relationship.

With Armenia's strategic location in the South Caucasus and India's growing influence in global affairs, there is potential for enhancing bilateral trade. Economic relations are growing, albeit at a modest pace. The growth in bilateral trade in the last five years has been encouraging. India exports pharmaceutical products, machinery, and textiles to Armenia and imports precious metals and minerals. There are also several agreements aimed at boosting bilateral trade and investment.<sup>1</sup> Indian investments in Armenia are estimated to be between US\$50 and US\$100 million.<sup>2</sup> Armenian-American investments, particularly in the IT sector, are growing in India, especially in cities such as Bengaluru and Delhi-NCR. The technological synergy of Armenia's hi-tech industry and India's established ICT sector could be jointly exploited in emerging domains like Artificial Intelligence (AI), blockchain technology, and the Internet of Things (IoT).

However, there are challenges to economic ties, including the lack of connectivity, existing geopolitical tensions, and regional instability. The geographical distance and the number of countries separating India and Armenia limit direct road connectivity. The main route would involve transit through Iran, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Overland connectivity could be increased by improving regional cooperation and agreements on transit routes.

Improving connectivity between India and Armenia requires multifaceted efforts and regional cooperation. The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)—a multimodal project involving India, Russia, and Iran—has the potential to increase connectivity. Maritime trade can be facilitated by ports in neighbouring countries such as Iran and Georgia. The Chabahar port in Iran, developed with Indian assistance, could provide a strategic gateway for Indian commodities to reach Armenia. There is also an Armenian proposal for an alternate Persian Gulf-Black Sea port corridor.<sup>3</sup>

Currently, there is no direct air connectivity between India and Armenia. Establishing direct links between Delhi and Yerevan could reduce travel time and promote tourism, business, and cultural exchanges. Talks are ongoing between the two sides, and there is hope of concrete action regarding air connectivity.

Tourism from India to Armenia has increased.<sup>4</sup> As of 2024, there are around 3,000 Indian students in Armenia, most of them studying medicine.<sup>5</sup> There is also the presence of a sizeable Indian migrant labour in Armenia.<sup>6</sup> Defence ties have increased since 2020, and Armenia is importing defence material from India.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, there has been an evolution of India-Armenia relations, and today they encompass cultural links and potential strategic collaboration. Strategic steps need to be taken in order to take this development further and build upon existing foundations to address mutual interests.

### **Defence and Security Cooperation**

Defence ties could be strengthened through joint military exercises, regular training programmes, tactical exchanges, intelligence sharing, strategic training, and collaboration on counterterrorism measures. At the same time, sharing of best practices will bolster preparedness and enhance operational coordination. The joint development of advanced military hardware could be a useful area for cooperation. India and Armenia could also work together in ensuring a safe and secure cyberspace.

### **Trade and Economic Cooperation**

Both countries should enter comprehensive trade agreements to reduce tariffs and trade barriers and facilitate easier and cost-effective exchange of goods and services. They should encourage investments through joint ventures and partnerships. The promotion of cultural and educational exchanges would help build stronger people-to-people ties, which can support business relationships. By engaging in regular high-level government dialogues and establishing joint committees to identify and resolve trade issues, a favourable business environment can be created. This would be mutually beneficial to provide financial training and resources to Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) in both countries to enable them to enter and work in each other's markets.

### **Pharmaceutical and Healthcare**

India is a global leader in generic drug manufacturing and can help set up local manufacturing units in Armenia. Technology-transfer agreements could help in upgrading Armenia's manufacturing capabilities. Industry on both sides



should work towards harmonising regulatory standards to make exports to Armenia easier. India's expertise in digital health and telemedicine could be further expanded in Armenia. This can improve healthcare access in Armenia, especially in remote areas.

### **Tourism**

In the past five years, there has been an increase in the number of Indian tourists to Armenia. Therefore, both sides need to focus on direct air connectivity, ease visa procedures, engage in collaborative marketing efforts, and participate in international travel fairs. They can hold joint road shows, advertising campaigns, digital engagement, and cultural and culinary events in their countries. The promotion of niche tourism opportunities like wellness and yoga retreats in India and adventure and wine tourism in Armenia can be attractive to specific interest groups. Armenia and India could also develop Armenian heritage trails in India. Films and media also play a large role in the flow of tourism. Media could be invited to visit the other country and publish pictures and articles.

### **Energy and Environment**

Armenia's climatic advantages and India's technological expertise could be harnessed for collaborations in renewable energy projects, including solar and wind energy. Joint efforts in improving energy efficiency, developing smart grids, and modernising hydropower infrastructure can enhance energy security. A focus on waste management, water conservation, investment in clean energy projects, trade in green technologies, and biodiversity protection could contribute to sustainable development.

### **Cooperation in Space Technology**

Through the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), India has developed a robust space programme that is known for its cost-effective and successful missions. Both countries could collaborate on setting up space research infrastructures like ground stations, R&D facilities, and data analysis centres in Armenia. Commercial opportunities in the global space market could be explored, with Armenia becoming a regional hub for space technology.

## Migration of Labour

There is a large Indian migrant labour population in Armenia, filling labour shortages in sectors such as agriculture, construction, and services.<sup>8</sup> Armenia's growing economy, demand for skilled labour, lower cost of living, and a declining population makes it an attractive option. Many Indian students in Yerevan find employment within the country and contribute to the skilled labour power. However, migration also poses challenges such as language, cultural differences, exploitation, and regulatory issues. Both governments should work on bilateral agreements to mitigate these challenges by managing labour migration effectively and ensuring mutual benefits and protection of workers.

## Diaspora

Both India and Armenia have a strong and influential diaspora presence in the United States. These links could be harnessed for mutual benefit and encourage Armenian-American investments in India. A joint India-Armenia venture fund could help set up joint startups, encourage knowledge transfer, and enable joint research and development projects in IT, AI, biotechnology, agriculture, healthcare, and renewable energy. Events like cultural festivals, business forums, and networking sessions could be carried out. Government support could be sought to create a conducive policy environment for diaspora movements.

## Conclusion

The next phase of India-Armenia relations looks promising and dynamic. Both countries stand to gain by continuing to strengthen diplomatic ties and exploring new avenues of collaboration. Interchanges at Yerevan Dialogue and Raisina Dialogue are bound to progressively assist the course of bilateral relations. This partnership will also contribute to regional stability and promote international cooperation.

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