



CISS MONTHLY PERSPECTIVE



CISS Monthly Perspective: February 2026

Patron-in-Chief

Ambassador Ali Sarwar Naqvi, Executive Director, CISS

Supervised and approved by

Dr Bilal Zubair, Director Research, CISS

Reviewed by

Syed Ali Abbas, Research Officer, CISS

Compiled by

Zahra Sadiq, Media Assistant, CISS

The Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS) Islamabad conducts original policy research, analyses, and strategic outreach, and aims to highlight evolving regional and global strategic issues to promote peace and stability. The monthly perspective contains articles published by our researchers during the period.

@ CISS 2026

All rights reserved.

www.ciiss.org.pk



Contents

India’s Shattering Democratic and Secular Values under the BJP	9
Dr Muhammadi	9
From NSS to NDS 2026: Middle Eastern Security	5
<i>Shahwana Binte Sohail</i>	5
India’s Rudra Brigades and the New Logic of Warfighting.....	9
<i>Syed Ali Abbas</i>	12
Why Iran–US Talks in Oman Matter for Global Nuclear Security.....	19
<i>Anam Murad Khan</i>	19
Can Diplomacy Prevent a US War Against Iran?	23
<i>Shahwana Binte Sohail</i>	23
Quantum Technologies: Transforming Battlefield Surveillance and Targeting.....	27
<i>Saad Riaz and Sibra Waseem</i>	27
India’s Deep Strategic Culture Beyond the Skies	28
<i>Areesha Manzoor</i>	28
Pakistan’s Space Diplomacy Takes Flight	31
<i>Areesha Manzoor</i>	31
Nuclear Weapons without Limits: Expiry of New START and the New Nuclear Arms Race	34
<i>Nawal Nawaz</i>	34

From NSS to NDS 2026: Middle Eastern Security

Shahwana Binte Sohail

The National Security Strategy (NSS) 2025 of the United States of America signals a decisive shift towards a national interest-driven policy. In the Middle East, it favours restraint, deterrence, and shared responsibility over deep involvement. The strategy sees Middle Eastern security as a tool to protect U.S. interests, prevent regional crises, and check rivals, rather than committing to long-term involvement. In contrast, the 2026 National Defence Strategy (NDS) adopts a narrow, Iran-centric and militarised approach to Middle Eastern security. This analysis compares the 2026 NDS and 2025 NSS with the 2022 NSS of the Biden administration and the 2017 NSS of the Trump administration. The article evaluates whether the recent shift marks a transformation in US Middle East policy or maintains continuity in the strategic frameworks.

United States National Security Strategy 2025

The latest US NSS 2025, issued under President Trump's administration, marks the Middle East as a region that no longer requires the same level of priority as before. The document explains that the two key factors of engagement for the US in the Middle East, energy dependence and superpower rivalry, have greatly decreased. Since the US is a net energy exporter and international competition is shifting to other regions, the strategy asserts that the Middle East is no longer the focus of American foreign policy. However, this realignment does not mean the US is withdrawing.

The US and Israel see Iran as the region's main source of instability. For the US, Israel security remains non-negotiable, and the extension of the Abraham Accords is presented as a main pillar of regional stability. The 2025 NSS favours pragmatic partnerships over promotion of democracy and nation-building, especially in the Gulf. This strategy prioritises pragmatic engagement with existing regimes. The region is framed as a space for technological cooperation, economic investment, and selective security engagement instead of crisis intervention.

United States National Security Strategy 2022

The US NSS 2022, issued under the Biden administration, differed in tone while maintaining continuity in its strategic priorities. The strategy criticised the past US dependence on military intervention and regime change, acknowledging that such approaches have produced instability and diverted attention from globally important strategic concerns. The Middle East was framed as a region in which stability must be managed through partnerships, long-term resilience, and gradual reform rather than enforcement alone. In response to these strategies, the Biden administration aimed to develop a framework centred on diplomacy, de-escalation, and regional integration, whilst sustaining deterrence through collaboration and a sustainable military structure. In that strategy, protecting navigational freedom in strategic chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab al Mandab remained essential. It highlighted alliance coordination, integrated air and maritime defence, and diplomatic conflict management. In contrast to the 2025 NSS, the 2022 NSS places human rights, humanitarian support, and the commitment to the UN Charter at the centre of US engagement. It also insisted on a two-state solution for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and followed a dual track strategy towards Iran. Through diplomatic engagement, it aimed to restrain nuclear proliferation, while retaining the option of military action if needed.

United States National Security Strategy 2017

The US NSS 2017, which was issued under President Trump's administration, showed a far more threat-driven view of the Middle East. The region was represented as a centre of Iranian expansionism, jihadist terrorism, socio-economic stagnation and state collapse. Terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda and ISIS dominated the security narrative of the region. At that moment, Iran is labelled as the world's leading state that supports terrorism and exploits regional instability by missile development, proxies and cyber activities. The 2017 NSS rejected both disengagement and large-scale democracy promotion and emphasised a realistic approach that prioritise counter terrorism operations and power equilibrium. The argument reflects a broader change in how regional dynamics are understood, framing the Palestinian Israeli conflict as a main source of instability. It emphasises emerging alignments between Arab states and Israel in response to shared security threats, especially Iran and militant groups. Political stability and economic reform are strengthened as a primary tool to counter extremist recruitment, rather than to achieve normative goals.

US National Defence Strategy 2026

As regards the US National Defence Strategy 2026, it adopts a distinctly military-first approach to Middle Eastern security. It frames the region almost entirely through Iran as the primary threat. The strategy prioritises direct kinetic action, the degradation of Iran's nuclear and proxy capabilities, and greater reliance on Israel and Gulf partners to carry the regional defence burden. Whereas the 2025 NSS integrates deterrence, diplomacy, and burden-sharing, the 2026 NDS Strategy focuses narrowly on Iran, with limited attention to regional political stabilization. While the 2022 Biden NSS focused on de-escalation and diplomacy with Iran, the 2026 NDS reflects a more force-driven and deterrence-oriented strategy. The 2026 NDS continues the 2017 Trump NSS threat assessment but applies it more aggressively. Overall, the 2026 NDS aligns with earlier NSS goals on Iran but shifts toward a more militarised and alliance-driven approach.

Old Wine in a New Bottle

These strategies show a clear pattern of strategic continuity beyond rhetorical change. Across all three NSS documents, the US efforts are to prevent a hostile regional hegemon and to guarantee Israel's security. It also prioritises freedom of navigation in strategic waterways, countering terrorism and limiting Iran's nuclear and regional influence. These objectives remain central to the Middle East security policy across different administrations. The change lies in the preferred methods and rationale used to pursue these objectives. The 2017 strategy prioritises military dominance and the containment of threats. The 2022 approach strikes a balance between deterrence, diplomacy, and humanitarian engagement. The 2025 NSS narrows US involvement through selective engagement, strategic retrenchment and economic pragmatism. The 2026 National Defence Strategy, by contrast, concentrates on Iran, emphasising direct military operations and strengthened alliances over regional stabilization. The US policy toward Middle East security reflects continuity in substance despite shifts in form. While these strategies differ in tone and emphasis, they maintain a continuity in U.S. priorities like protection of Israel, containment and providing direct action against the Iranian regime and protecting the sea lanes for the import of oil. NSS 2025, which shows a move to reduce the Middle East's prominence in US foreign policy, yet they avoid completely withdrawing. Instead of withdrawing, Washington manages the region through deterrence, cooperation, and selective intervention while safeguarding enduring strategic interests. This

approach does not signal a strategic transformation, but rather an adjustment in emphasis, with continuity remaining the defining feature of U.S. Middle East security policy. By contrast, the 2026 National Defence Strategy adopts a more operational and military-centric approach, focusing narrowly on Iran and emphasizing direct action and alliance enablement to manage regional threats.

Author: The author is research assistant at CISS, Islamabad

Link: <https://stratheia.com/from-nss-to-nds-2026-middle-eastern-security/>

Shattering of Democratic and Secular Values under the BJP

Dr Muhammadi

South Asia has been experiencing increasing instability since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in India, under PM Modi since 2024. Modi's third term as Prime Minister of India has revived the debates over democratic values and secularism in its domestic and foreign policy. India's proclaimed secular framework faces growing challenges since Modi and his BJP ascended to power. Indian identity, which was long celebrated for its diversity and inclusivity, is shifting to a shattering vision of societal identity.

The atmosphere has further deteriorated, followed by the Pahalgam attack, as India's war mongering behavior, baseless allegations, violations of Pakistan's territorial integrity, and targeting of the civilian population, stressed the already tense situation in the region. Furthermore, India unilaterally suspended the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), which has endured since 1960 despite enduring multiple wars throughout history. Pakistan rightly views this as an act of war with severe consequences, not only for bilateral relations but also for millions of people who depend on the shared water resources.

The BJP's decision-making is heavily influenced by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The expansion and dominance of RSS and Hindutva ideology in India's domestic, foreign and security policies increased significantly, as evidenced by India's 2024 elections in which the BJP came to power.

The rise of Hindutva and RSS ideology under the leadership of the BJP has triggered intense debate over India's secularism. Because India is regarded as predominantly Hindu country, Hindutva has been criticized for marginalizing minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians. During the previous tenure of the Modi government, policies and rhetoric as critics maintain associated with this ideology and are endangering India's secular principles, as protected in its constitution.

The activities by the BJP that raise queries regarding India's assertions as a secular state include the fundamental human rights violations and the killing of minorities, especially Sikhs, Muslims, and Christians. The killings and unrest in Manipur and the revocation of articles 370

and 35A of the Indian constitution regarding the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJ&K), which induced the partial autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, and divided the territory into two parts.

The BJP government will implement the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which provides citizenship of India to all minorities, except Muslims, who migrated to India from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, before December 31, 2014. Furthermore, the planned National Register of Citizens (NRC) has raised questions regarding religious marginalization and led to an environment of terror and insecurity among various minorities.

A religion-based citizenship law, which the UN has called “fundamentally discriminatory in nature”, was passed in 2019. It was implemented ahead of the elections to galvanize support in India's heartland. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said the action violated India's international human rights obligations.

Prime Minister Modi and other BJP leaders promised during the election campaign to eliminate all historical Muslim influence in India. BJP is constantly looking for issues that resonate with voters. The Ram temple, which was opened on the ruins of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya a few months ago, has become a shining example of his growing communal politics. The Supreme Court of India in 2019 legalized the destruction of the 15th-century mosque in 1992 .

PM Modi is working to make India a sectarian state, with the BJP government actively suppressing critical voices and weakening constitutional principles. The aim is to create a Hindutva state under the leadership of an all-powerful and bigoted political party. Secular and democratic values are under threat as the BJP uses hyper-nationalism and ultra-religious slogans as part of its political manifesto and electoral strategy, disproportionately targeting Muslims. Therefore, the government is advised to recognize that diversity, multiculturalism, and pluralism are essential for maintaining a united and diverse Indian state.

Cases of religious extremism and violence against Muslims show the erosion of secular values in Modi's India. According to the Indian Hate Lab, in 2023, there were 668 incidents of religious violence against Muslims. In one case, a police officer attacked Muslims during prayers in Delhi. Moreover, hate speeches against religious minorities, especially Muslims, are on the rise in India. In the state of Uttar Pradesh, many properties of Muslims were destroyed,

and during the India Day parade, the state government displayed bulldozers, with a symbol of state terrorism, to malign the image of Muslims. Political leaders who incite hatred are rewarded with positions of influence. Meanwhile, the BJP crushes the opposition by suppressing media independence, news channels act as mouthpieces of the government, and newspapers remain silent on government scandals and atrocities.

India's inclination toward the erosion of its secular and democratic values under the BJP is obvious in its domestic and foreign policies. The systemic persecution of minority groups, the abrogation of articles 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution regarding the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJ&K), the undermining of major agreement such as IWT, extraterritorial killings, the spread of extremist Hindutva ideology demonstrate how India's pluralist values are declining. These developments violate its core constitutional principles, which endanger both regional stability and international peace.

The author is an associate director at CISS, Islamabad.

Link: <https://strategicforecast.cissajk.org.pk/?p=23179>

India's Rudra Brigades and the New Logic of Warfighting

Syed Ali Abbas

Abstract: This article examines how Rudra Brigades operationalise India's evolving Dynamic Response Strategy by integrating speed, precision, and jointness at the brigade level. It situates these formations within India's broader theatreisation and force-restructuring agenda, as validated through recent exercises and operations. The analysis highlights how this shift compresses warning times, expands conventional response options, and alters crisis dynamics in South Asia. For Pakistan, the emergence of such high-readiness formations underscores the need to adapt deterrence, force posture, and crisis-management mechanisms to a changing regional security environment.

Bottom-line-up-front: India's Rudra Brigades reflect a shift toward faster, modular, multi-domain conventional options that compress crisis timelines and lower the practical threshold for limited military action in South Asia.

Problem statement: How is India's transition from mobilisation-dependent forces to ready, terrain-tailored formations reshaping the logic of limited war?

So what? Pakistan must improve conventional deterrence, invest in counter-multi-domain capabilities, and push for bilateral crisis-management mechanisms to adapt to India's evolving force posture and prevent rapid escalation.

Introduction

India's shift from heavy, mobilisation-dependent formations to ready-in-place, modular multi-domain brigades is introducing a new risk for the region. This shift began to crystallize after the mid-2010s, and subsequently gained urgency after back-to-back crises with Pakistan in 2019 and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 2020, and has taken practical form since 2022 through the conversion and testing of new integrated formations such as the Rudra Brigade. The rise of Rudra Brigades sits at the centre of this transition.[1] These new formations are designed to move fast, integrate multiple combat arms, and deliver calibrated force under India's Dynamic Response Strategy (DRS).[2] India's Exercise Trishul conducted, so soon

after Operation Sindhoor was “paused,” signals that New Delhi is not walking away from large-scale conventional options.[3] Instead, it is refining them into more agile, politically viable tools. For Pakistan, this reorganisation not only compresses warning times but also broadens the range of conventional options India can employ to complicate crisis management under the nuclear overhang.

What Are Rudra Brigades?

Rudra Brigades represent the most significant structural change in the Indian Army since the idea of the Integrated Battle Group entered official debate.[4] The Indian reports describe them as all-arms formations that permanently integrate infantry, armour, artillery, engineers, air defence, electronic warfare elements, drones and logistics under a single brigade-level command.[5] Unlike traditional brigades that rely on attachments during wartime, these formations are constructed as self-contained units in peacetime. The plan is to convert the Indian Army’s some 250 single-arm brigades to ensure that India has combat groups that are already organised, trained and equipped to conduct swift, tech-enabled, flexible operations without assembling additional troops.[6]

These brigades are likely to be configured to match the terrain in which they are expected to deploy and fight.[7] This tailoring reflects a shift toward limited-war concepts that emphasise theatre-bound offensive action by forward-deployed, terrain-optimised forces rather than general-purpose manoeuvre formations. In Ladakh, Rudra Brigades would be infantry-dominant, supported by high-altitude mobility, light artillery, and persistent drone-based surveillance to secure ridgelines and retain the ability to launch shallow, limited offensives across the Line of Actual Control. In Sikkim, where operations are constrained by narrow valleys and steep gradients, these formations would prioritise infantry and artillery capable of manoeuvring and delivering precision fires across broken terrain, combining forward defence with the option of limited cross-border action into Tibet to disrupt adversary deployments. In Jammu and Kashmir, by contrast, Rudra Brigades would be structured for faster concentration and offensive manoeuvre, defending in place during routine tension while remaining postured to conduct calibrated attacks across the Line of Control or International Border.

Along the western plains and desert areas, these concepts would translate into armour-heavy groupings built for space-centric operations, utilising mechanised infantry and self-propelled

artillery to achieve sharp, swift spatial gains. Conversely, along the Line of Control, the focus is shifting toward techno-centric warfare, where infantry and Special Forces leverage sophisticated ISR and space-based surveillance to execute precision punitive responses within the increasingly complex Grey Zone of the border. This theatre peculiarity is a deliberate move away from traditional brigades toward combat modules tailored to a specific operational environment. The reported presence of Rudra Brigades in Ladakh, Sikkim and Rajasthan show that the Indian Army is applying this concept on the full front, signifying a desire to institutionalise rather than experiment with the model in areas likely to face crises.[8]

The integration and customisation outlined above indicate a shift in the Indian military's thinking. The conceptual shift from the previously used Cold Start Doctrine to an agile, probing Cold Strike posture is explicitly anchored in the Rudra model. The Cold Start Doctrine emerged in the mid-2000s as India's attempt to create space for swift, limited conventional military operations against Pakistan under the assumption that such actions could be conducted below Pakistan's nuclear thresholds. It envisaged the swift mobilisation of integrated strike formations to conduct limited, shallow offensives within a compressed timeframe. Cold Strike is seeking a different paradigm, where Cold Start relied on the mobilisation of massive strike units, a process that proved far too slow to achieve any strategic advantage. Cold Strike seeks to capitalise on small, high-readiness, multi-domain formations that can conduct precision operations without necessarily mobilising division-sized groups. It integrates air power, precision strikes, and high-readiness ground units to generate rapid effects. The deployment of the Rudra Brigades realises this conceptual change. They integrate all relevant arms under a single command, enabling India to project a calibrated force from the first hours of a crisis. The shift is from "mobilise then strike" to "strike while mobilising," which is the essence of India's new operational logic. Exercises such as Akhand Prahar have demonstrated this clearly, where a Rudra Brigade used drone-assisted targeting, coordinated manoeuvre and integrated fires in real time.[9]

Rudra Brigades and India's Theatre Command Vision

India's theatre command reforms remain sensitive and formally incomplete.[10] Yet, at the organisational level, the Armed Forces are already assembling key building blocks, including Rudra Brigades, emerging Bhairav battalions, the rollout of Ashni drone platoons, and stronger joint command-and-control links for ISR, air support, and electronic warfare.

They operate alongside two other types of formations that have appeared in recent years. One is the Bhairav battalions, which are light, terrain-familiar commando-infantry units raised for rapid border action and raiding tasks.[11] Similarly, Ashini drone platoons are being rolled out across infantry battalions, providing organic surveillance and loitering munition strike capacity. Rudra provides the manoeuvre and combined-arms punch. Bhairav gives a light, fast, raiding edge.[12] Ashni saturates the local airspace with cheap, persistent sensing and strike options along with improved accuracy and situational awareness. Together, Rudra, Bhairav and Ashni, though still in early stages, would form a modular force package that can be worked into any future theatre command.

Exercise Trishul offered a preview of how this architecture may work in practice. The exercise brought together tri-service elements across Rajasthan, Gujarat and the Northern Arabian Sea. Within it, the Akhand Prahar sub-drill saw XII Corps validate its Rudra Brigade and Bhairav Battalion in a drone-dense, electronic warfare-heavy scenario with close air support and heli-borne operations.[13] The way these units were employed reflected not only a desire for tri-service synergy but also an attempt to rehearse the command relationships and effects-based planning that a Western Theatre Command would need.

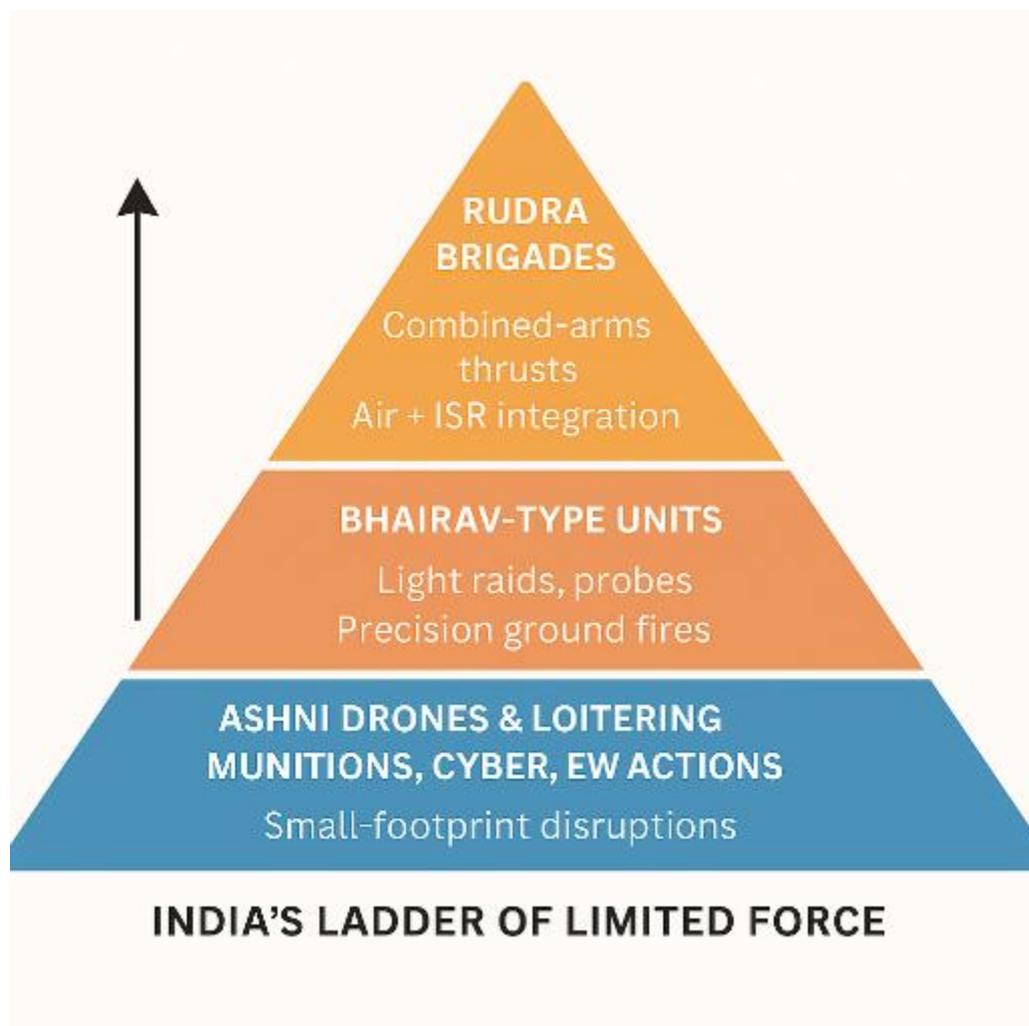
Rudra Brigades are also the organisational instrument through which India can give practical form to its Dynamic Response Strategy (DRS). It seeks to provide the political leadership with a graded ladder of conventional responses. These range from drone strikes and limited artillery punishment to battalion-sized raids and brigade-level thrusts. None of this is new in conceptual terms. What is new is the attempt to embed this ladder in pre-integrated, high-readiness formations. Thus, the Rudra Brigades make DRS executable.

Implications and Way Forward for Pakistan

For Pakistan, the emergence of Rudra Brigades and the broader ecosystem around them raises at least four serious concerns. First, warning time is reduced. When combined-arms units with organic enablers are integrated and exercised together in peacetime, they can transition from political authorisation to execution with minimal additional force assembly. This compresses the decision-to-action cycle by reducing reliance on visible mobilisation, last-minute inter-service coordination, and large logistics movements that traditionally generate warning.

Pakistan’s military and diplomatic responses must therefore operate within a shorter window, limiting opportunities for signalling, dispersal, and third-party mediation before action unfolds.

Second, the bandwidth of Indian conventional options expands. The recent May 2025 crisis quickly climbed the escalation ladder, but this will give India more rungs to climb. At the lower end, there are Ashni-enabled drone and loitering-munition strikes, cyber and electronic operations, and limited cross-border actions by Bhairav-type units. At the higher end, Rudra Brigades can deliver short, sharp combined-arms blows under air cover and ISR support. Together, these capabilities make it easier for New Delhi to believe that it can “do something” militarily without breaching Pakistan’s nuclear threshold.[14]



Third, nuclear-conventional entanglement deepens. Multi-domain operations seek to generate converged effects across domains, often by contesting an adversary’s sensing, communications, and decision-making processes, rather than relying solely on physical destruction of forces. Many of these are dual-use or intertwined with assets that also play roles in nuclear command and control. In a crisis, India’s attempts to blind or disrupt Pakistan’s conventional systems

could be misread as preparatory steps for counterforce operations. This increases the risk of worst-case threat perceptions and inadvertent escalation.

Fourth, crisis management becomes more difficult in an environment where Operation Sindoor is paused but not formally terminated, leaving India's Armed Forces in a semi-mobilised posture. The presence of high-readiness, modular formations like Rudra means that military options will appear more usable and more tempting inside the Indian system. This is especially dangerous in the aftermath of terrorist incidents or political shocks, when public pressure to respond is high and decision time is short.

Way Forward

The main problem for Pakistan does not lie in the existence of such brigades, but in the logic they represent within a system-wide approach. By reducing mobilisation requirements and embedding key enablers within peacetime formations, Rudra Brigades increase the practical usability of conventional force. Military studies consistently show that when force structures are designed for rapid, modular employment, political leaders have a wider range of actionable options. The repeated validation of such formations in exercises like Trishul suggests that India is seeking confidence in conducting short, theatre-bound operations rather than relying solely on infrequent, large-scale campaigns. For Pakistan, this does not imply the inevitability of conflict, but it does indicate a higher risk of crises emerging more quickly, evolving along multiple escalatory pathways, and offering fewer clear exit points.

Pakistan has to respond to this trend by further enhancing its multi-pronged strategy that includes, but is not limited to, the deployment of high-tech counter-unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), electronic warfare, enhancing the integration of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), air defence and corps-level firepower, and development of its own agile and technology-enabled response formations. In this regard, recent developments, such as the establishment of the Pakistan Army Rocket Force Command and changes in the military structure, are in the right direction.

There is also the need to invest in effective crisis-communication channels. With respect to Pakistan, New Delhi should seriously consider steps to reduce the risk of misperceptions and miscalculations. It is important to realise that India is moving to a different posture for

warfighting.[15] With New Delhi embracing the concepts of modular, ready-to-fight, and multi-domain units, built to operate in specific terrain and integrated into a cohesive theatre concept, South Asian crisis dynamics will change. Pakistan's preparedness will depend on understanding this shift early and adapting its own posture accordingly.

Author: The author is research officer at CISS, Islamabad

Link: <https://tdhj.org/blog/post/rudra-india-pakistan/>

Why Iran–US Talks in Oman Matter for Global Nuclear Security

Anam Murad Khan

The resumption of Iran–US nuclear negotiations in Oman represents a pivotal moment for global nuclear safety. The airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities in Natanz, Fordow, and Isfahan in June 2025 showed the vulnerability of global nuclear infrastructure. It is the need of the hour that the diplomacy goes beyond uranium enrichment limits and verification measures and includes enforceable legal, technical, and operational protections. The central question is whether the Oman negotiations can create a framework that ensures nuclear security, prevents coercive military action, and preserves the credibility of the global nonproliferation regime.

The Oman talks mark the significant diplomatic contact between Tehran and Washington since efforts to revive the JCPOA collapsed. Iran and the United States resumed nuclear negotiations in Muscat, mediated by the Omani government, after months without direct engagement following the 2025 strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities. Oman serves as a neutral intermediary with a long history of hosting quiet diplomatic contact between Tehran and Western powers, and Muscat has been chosen by both sides to keep the agenda focused on nuclear issues. The 2026 talks include senior diplomats and security officials from both countries, reflecting how closely nuclear diplomacy now connects with broader regional military tensions. Earlier rounds focused mainly on enrichment limits and sanctions relief.

Past agreements such as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) addressed technical limits on Iran’s nuclear program but failed to guarantee physical security. The JCPOA set a cap of 3.67 percent U-235 enrichment, reduced installed centrifuges from approximately 19,000 to 6,104, and limited enriched uranium stockpiles to 300 kilograms. It extended Iran’s breakout time from months to nearly a year and allowed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to monitor declared sites and facilities. Yet, the agreement did not provide legal or operational safeguards against unilateral military strikes. The June 2025 airstrikes, conducted by Israeli and US forces, reportedly destroyed Iran’s key centrifuges and enrichment infrastructure. It gave the message that verification of enrichment alone cannot guarantee nuclear safety. Iran’s nuclear program is technologically sophisticated, with facilities containing sensitive materials that could cause widespread radiological harm if attacked. If strikes on safeguarded facilities become normalized, other states could also justify similar

actions under a preventive doctrine. Hence, it is about time that negotiators embed explicit legal and operational protections for safeguarded nuclear facilities within a future framework to prevent the erosion of established nonproliferation norms. Oman negotiators need to embed facility protection into any future framework, and make nuclear safety a non-negotiable component alongside compliance and verification.

The 2025 Israeli strikes also underscore the urgency of integrating nuclear security measures into diplomacy as provided by international law. The United Nations Charter explicitly prohibits the use of force against a sovereign state without Security Council authorization, or a clear, imminent threat under Article 51 of UN charter. Preemptive strikes on nuclear facilities in the absence of an imminent armed attack are generally considered unlawful under international law. Under Article 51, self-defense is permitted only in response to an actual armed attack, provided that measures taken are reported to the Council immediately. The June 2025 strikes did not meet this criteria, and international law does not allow preventive or anticipatory self-defense based on hypothetical threats. The IAEA, and Iran's UN envoy, as well as many legal scholars, condemned the strikes as violating Article 2(4) of the UN Charter and norms protecting nuclear installations. Pentagon and Israeli claims that the attacks "obliterated" Iran's nuclear program are disputed, with evidence suggesting that significant components survived and enrichment could resume within months. The Geneva Conventions, including Additional Protocol I, prohibit targeting "installations containing dangerous forces" such as nuclear facilities when attacks risk severe civilian harm. Israel's attacks reportedly killed nuclear scientists and civilians, striking residential areas and violating the principle of non-use of force.

The suspension of Iranian cooperation with the IAEA following the strikes further limited oversight. Attacking safeguarded facilities risks radiological releases, undermines verification regimes, and highlights the disproportionate use of force under the guise of preemption. These circumstances show the need for binding legal and operational safeguards. The Oman negotiations should explore mechanisms such as confidence-building measures, notification regimes, and reaffirming protections under international humanitarian law to strengthen nuclear safety and compliance.

Global nonproliferation relies on the principle that restraint and compliance provide security. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty rests on a three-part bargain. Among them, the NPT-

recognized non-nuclear weapon (NNWS) states agree not to develop weapons, and nuclear weapon states (NWS) commit to disarmament, while all states retain the right to peaceful nuclear energy under verification. This framework is under strain. The INF Treaty ended in 2019, Open Skies collapsed with U.S. and Russian withdrawals, New START expired in February 2026 without replacement, and the CTBT remains unenforced. Yet the problem is not regime decay alone, but the perception of selective enforcement and unequal application of nonproliferation norms. Under these circumstances, attacks on Iran's nuclear infrastructure risk sending the message that compliance with non-nuclear commitments does not guarantee protection from coercion or military action. Iran's case reinforces the view that some states are penalized despite remaining within the NPT framework, while others outside it face limited consequences. The Oman talks must produce robust agreements linking compliance with safety, guaranteeing that peaceful nuclear activities cannot be disrupted by force. This is necessary for Iran and for preserving the integrity of the global nonproliferation regime.

The inclusion of military leadership in the 2026 Oman talks reflects the intertwined nature of coercion and diplomacy in modern nuclear negotiations. The presence of the US Central Command (CENTCOM) commander alongside diplomatic envoys, and the deployment of a carrier strike group in the region, demonstrates Washington's intent to combine deterrence with negotiation. Despite that this integrated approach increases pressure on Iran, it cannot replace structural safeguards for nuclear facilities. If unilateral military action were normalized as a tool to enforce compliance, the risk of escalation would increase, and not only threaten Iran's nuclear program but also the wider region. Physical attacks on nuclear sites could provoke retaliation, interrupt verification, and trigger broader conflicts with transnational consequences. Therefore, Oman negotiations must incorporate technical, legal, and operational protections into a single framework that ensures that compliance is inseparable from security and risk reduction.

US and Israeli military assessments claim that the 2025 strikes degraded Iran's nuclear program by one to two years, but satellite imagery and IAEA reports indicate that critical components survived, including uranium stockpiles which were perhaps displaced to underground locations. The strikes destroyed facilities under constant IAEA surveillance, and left the program in partial darkness by complicating international oversight. This reinforces the need for a negotiated framework that guarantees nuclear facility protection alongside verification, and ensures that compliance cannot be rendered meaningless by military intervention. The

Oman talks are about far more than uranium enrichment levels or sanctions relief. They test whether diplomacy can effectively protect nuclear facilities, reduce the risk of conflict, and preserve the credibility of the global nonproliferation framework. The JCPOA's failure to provide physical safeguards allowed attacks that endangered people and regional stability. The June 2025 strikes demonstrated that technical compliance is insufficient without legal, operational, and diplomatic guarantees. Negotiators in Oman have a unique opportunity to create a framework that ensures nuclear safety, enforces verification, and integrates facility protection into global security norms.

Author: The author is research assistant at CISS, Islamabad

Link: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20260213-why-iran-us-talks-in-oman-matter-for-global-nuclear-security/>

Can Diplomacy Prevent a US War Against Iran?

Shahwana Binte Sohail

In the midst of an increasing risk of military conflict in the Middle East, renewed talks between the United States and Iran offer a small but important window to avoid escalation. On 6 February 2026, senior representatives of the United States and Iran were set to meet for diplomatic talks in Istanbul; however, the meeting was later relocated, and the two sides ultimately convened in Muscat. The discussions were aimed at restarting nuclear negotiations and reducing the risks of escalation.

The thin line between negotiations and confrontation represents the deep tensions in US-Iran relations. Both parties appear aware that armed conflict would carry severe consequences, yet each faces entrenched domestic and regional pressures that could easily undermine diplomatic efforts before they gain momentum.

From Nuclear Confrontation to Diplomatic Engagement

In the past few months, tensions have been brewing following the collapse of previous negotiations and a strike on Iran's nuclear facilities by US forces in June 2025. These actions heightened tensions and intensified mistrust on both sides. The central issue between Iran and the United States is Iran's nuclear programme, particularly its enriched uranium stockpile and its missile advancement programme. Washington wants Iran to limit uranium enrichment and be more transparent about its nuclear activities. Meanwhile, Tehran stresses its sovereign right to peaceful nuclear energy and calls for sanctions to be eased as provided under Article IV of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

President Donald Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian have both resorted to threats but have been amenable to diplomatic initiatives. Trump warned that failure in negotiations could lead to "bad things." But Iran has indicated its willingness to negotiate, emphasising the necessity of a threat-free environment. Furthermore, Tehran stresses that the primary focus must remain on nuclear policy and the management of its nuclear program.

The talks, between US envoy Steve Witkoff and Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, represent the strongest diplomatic effort in months. Regional powers like Pakistan, Türkiye, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt are trying to mediate between the US and Iran because a wider conflict would directly threaten their security, economies, trade routes, and energy supplies. They are pushing for de-escalation to protect their national interests and prevent instability from spreading across the region.

The renewed push for diplomacy reflects the interest of both the US and Iran to negotiate a solution. Washington wants to limit Tehran's nuclear progress and protect its regional allies, especially Israel while avoiding a direct war. At the same time, Iran's development of nuclear technology is a sovereign right under Article IV of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Washington pressures Tehran because it is the only regional power that can seriously challenge Israel. Washington has sent an aircraft carrier to the Gulf and imposed tougher sanctions on Tehran's nuclear, missile, and regional programs, despite Tehran's right to develop nuclear technology. However, these actions raise tensions and increase the risk of miscalculation in an already unstable region, making balanced dialogue more important than escalation.

The Iranian leadership is ready for constructive talks with the US and other countries, as long as negotiations are based on mutual respect, dignity, and real economic benefits, without threats or ultimatums. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has emphasized that Iran seeks serious and fair discussions while protecting its national interests. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has warned that any military action would have serious consequences for the region, highlighting that a cooperative and respectful approach is the best way to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East.

Regional Risks and Escalation Beyond Borders

The risk of escalation is tangible. Iran's military capabilities, including its ballistic missiles and alleged regional proxy networks, suggest that any confrontation with the United States could rapidly extend to multiple fronts. Iran has declared that any strike on its territory could prompt immediate retaliation against US bases, including both American forces and allied troops hosting them. However, during the June 2025 conflict, it held back and warned the US before striking a US base in Qatar, preventing the situation from getting out of control.

Regional states, especially those in the Gulf, are deeply concerned about the consequences of conflict. Members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and neighbouring countries, many of which host US military bases, have called for restraint. They fear that a war could destabilise fragile economies and disrupt global energy markets. The international energy market is already responding to the current diplomatic developments in the region. Earlier fears of conflict had pushed oil prices up, but they fell sharply after news of serious talks, showing that investors see a chance for tensions to ease.

Challenges to Sustainable Diplomacy

Although negotiations are in progress, achieving substantial progress remains challenging. The profound distrust between Tehran and Washington, developed over decades, cannot be resolved quickly. Iran holds longstanding grievances, notably the US withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear agreement (JCPOA) and the reimposition of sanctions that have severely damaged its economy. Meanwhile, the United States and its partners continue to question Tehran's intentions.

Significant structural constraints remain in US-Iran talks. Tehran has made clear that negotiations should be limited to nuclear matters, rejecting US attempts to link discussions to its missile programme, regional policies, or support for allies. By contrast, the US under Trump's approach has emphasised four key demands: stop Iran's nuclear programme, halt uranium enrichment, limit missile development, and end support for regional partners, while ignoring Tehran's sovereign rights and legitimate security concerns in the broader context.

What's Next?

Despite the challenges, the start of negotiations after months of tension and military posturing is inherently meaningful. Diplomacy may not ensure peace, but it establishes a framework for managing risk and identifying shared interests. For now, the world waits to see if Muscat, Oman, will mark significant progress or just a brief pause. A second round of talks are now selected to take place in Geneva. In a world where miscommunication and mistrust can trigger uncontrollable conflict, negotiation should be seen not as weakness but as a necessary tool. Both the US and Iran need to understand that even a limited agreement could prevent a huge

regional war that neither side wants. While the outcome of the diplomatic engagement is uncertain, it provides the only viable framework for stability against the threat of war.

Author: The author is research assistant at CISS, Islamabad

Link: <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/can-diplomacy-prevent-a-us-war-against-iran/>

Quantum Technologies: Transforming Battlefield Surveillance and Targeting

Saad Riaz and Sibra Waseem

Abstract

The battlefield in the coming years is poised to enter a new phase of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), potentially marking another transformative evolution. This is due to the ‘quantum ecosystems’ or simply quantum technology’s ability to supersede traditional technologies based on classical physics. The paper explores how quantum technology is poised to bring about changes in military affairs. Advancements in weapons, sensors, targeting capabilities, striking precision, and communications will significantly enhance military capabilities. The first half of the paper examines the elements of the RMA to assess whether they hold a comparable impact on warfare. The second section evaluates the potential influence of quantum technologies on future military affairs. The paper concludes that, although quantum technology is often portrayed as revolutionary, its current impact remains largely theoretical, as it has not yet been operationally deployed.

Author: The author is research intern at CISS, Islamabad

Link: <https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/APFETVWZKRR8UV4CBFES/full>

India's Deep Strategic Culture Beyond the Skies

Areesha Manzoor

From the 1957 Sputnik-1 satellite to more contemporary explorations such as NASA's Artemis III program, space has become the high ground for state competition due to its multifaceted military and civilian applications. The behavior of states within the space domain mirrors the earthly quest for dominance to plant flags on the uncharted territories. Orbits have become the new playground for spacefaring nations. Now, states are developing a strategic culture beyond the skies and harnessing scientific curiosity to enhance sovereignty, power, and status.

In South Asia, India's expanding space program—featuring anti-satellite weapons (ASAT) to spy and surveillance satellites—is not motivated by technological ambitions but is instead a function of its deep strategic culture. Indian scholar Rajesh Basrur's concept of deep Indian strategic culture is an apt lens to study India's space politics. India's space odyssey reflects its quest for autonomy and prestige, the two essential components of its deep strategic culture.

Basrur identifies two levels of strategic culture: 'mutable strategic culture' that can shift over time and 'deep strategic culture' that is a set of core strategic preferences derived from historical experiences. According to Basrur's statement in his book chapter on Indian Strategic Culture, defining a deep strategic culture is "tricky, perhaps tautological since it is a recognition that is post facto (a long-term attribute is deep until it is not!)." Still, he defines deep strategic culture as "patterns that are sustained unchanged over a long period of time (in the present context, since independence), irrespective of changing circumstance." He further underscores the two most enduring pillars of Indian strategic culture as a persistent preference for strategic autonomy and a long-standing quest for status on the global stage.

India's space politics is thus a reflection of its deep-rooted desire to achieve strategic autonomy. India has heavily invested in dual-use technologies, such as navigation satellites (NavIC) and communication satellites (GSAT). India leverages these dual-use technologies as a strategic enabler that allows real-time monitoring and surveillance of the South Asian region and beyond. Moreover, the indigenous development of launch vehicles like the PSLV (Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle) and GSLV (Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle) is adaptable for military purposes.

The Mission Shakti ASAT Test is evidence of using an indigenous launch vehicle for the delivery of kinetic anti-satellite weapons. It underscores the operational autonomy in space

without reliance on external partners or even against them. The pattern of international space cooperation of India is also driven by its deep strategic culture. India engages with both the US and Russia as per its strategic needs. This multi-alignment strategy aims to get access to modern technology, expertise, and partnerships without committing to any one side.

Another deeply interwoven element of Indian strategic culture in its space politics is the pursuit of status. India leverages space as a key domain to achieve recognition as a technologically advanced and influential major power. India demonstrates its status through high-profile space missions, such as Chandrayaan, Mangalyaan, and the upcoming Gaganyaan mission. These missions garner international attention and enhance India's prestige, signaling to the international community that the country has ambitious space aims.

Furthermore, to enhance prestige and status, India participates in international space forums of exploration and governance like the Artemis Accords, the TRUST initiative, and the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET). India harnesses these platforms to advance its national interests by gaining greater visibility, access to dual-use technologies, and opportunities for space exploration. India also leverages these forums for high-accuracy real-time data that allows it to do regional surveillance and monitoring.

Indian space politics is not only about capability but also about demonstrating it in ways that enhance its international standing. All this is not occurring in isolation but in a region with a fragile balance of power maintained by nuclear deterrence. This translation of Indian strategic culture into astropolitics has regional and global implications. At the regional level, India's increasingly offensive space uses, such as surveillance, missile guidance, and precision strikes, are creating a security dilemma for its neighbors. This disrupts the regional balance of power and will motivate Pakistan to enter an arms race or to equip itself with non-military means to compete with India.

At the international level, India is actively involved in cooperation with both the U.S. and Russia; however, India's multi-alignment strategy is not working as per its expectations. There are structural constraints at the heart of the implementation of Indian astropolitics. India is dependent upon the U.S. for advanced space technologies, intelligence, and commercial space opportunities. It erodes the very basic tenet of Indian astropolitics, strategic autonomy. Moreover, India and Russia have a joint historical space and defence ecosystem, which has become politically sensitive amidst international sanctions on Russia. The dual-track or multi-alignment strategy of India increases strategic ambiguity. In a nutshell, Strategic autonomy

sounds sophisticated, but it is practically quite unlikely, as alliances and power blocs are the pivot of international relations. The contemporary strategic rift between the United States and India is evidence of the backfiring of multi-alignment as the U.S. criticizes India on its multi-alignment strategy and close ties with Russia. If this strategic split expands, it reduces India's technological options, putting serious constraints on its space program that is dependent upon both the US and Russia. Indian strategic ambiguity exposes it to structural pressures and embed regional security dilemma by reinforcing perceptions of India as a destabilizing actor in an already fragile strategic environment.

Author: The author is research assistant at CISS, Islamabad

Link: <https://globalsecurityreview.com/indias-deep-strategic-culture-beyond-the-skies/>

Pakistan's Space Diplomacy Takes Flight

Areesha Manzoor

Pakistan reached a new milestone in its scientific journey with its successful space venture. The Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO) completed the second phase of the selection of two astronauts for its human spaceflight program. After domestic shortlisting, the next step was rigorous medical, psychological, and aptitude assessments at the Astronaut Centre of China (ACC), in accordance with international spaceflight standards. After six months, the first Pakistani astronaut will board a Spaceflight to the Chinese Space Station (CSS) in late 2026. Pakistan's human spaceflight mission is a watershed event for its national space program.

The event marks the materialization of the bilateral Astronaut Cooperation Agreement, signed in February 2025 with China. Pakistan is the first international partner of the Chinese Spaceflight Mission, reflecting cooperation at multiple levels: technical, institutional, and diplomatic. Human Spaceflight mission is one of the most safety-sensitive and technically demanding areas of international cooperation. Internationally recognized medical standards, mission protocols, operational discipline, and long-term commitment are a prerequisite for the mission. The two countries demonstrated institutional policy coordination by completing the astronaut selection process within a year through structured training pathways.

Pakistan's space program is on the path of natural progression through commitment and cooperation. Pakistan's international space cooperation dates back to the inception of its space program. For decades, the primary focus of cooperation was development of satellites for peaceful uses (such as remote sensing, earth observation, and communication) and launch support. Human spaceflight mission illustrates a qualitative shift, from technical cooperation to deeper human and institutional integration. From agreement to execution, it signals SUPARCO's professional competence and reliability.

The implications of Pakistan's human spaceflight mission are multifaceted. Its value lies not only in the mission itself but in the auxiliary effects it can generate for scientific development, human capital formation, and international standing. The mission is significant in providing scientific and technological gains. Astronauts will be trained in microgravity adaptation, spacecraft operation and maintenance, scientific research tasks, and emergency procedures in space. Moreover, the Chinese space mission will grant a Pakistani astronaut, the access to a

fully functioning orbital laboratory designed for long-duration missions and scientific experimentation at the Chinese Space Station, Tiangong. Training and working in such a high-performance operational environment will equip astronauts with the knowledge that will strengthen the domestic ecosystem around aerospace engineering and space sciences. Exposure to specialized knowledge also enhances opportunities for Pakistan in emerging research sectors globally as well.

The space program will inspire national imagination. It shifts the perception from being at the receiving end of technology to a participatory role in the technological endeavor. It will foster a long-term commitment towards achieving development through technology. It will catalyze the government's interest and focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. Such efforts will break the psychological barrier for youth between aspirations and achievements in advanced fields. The scientific confidence gained through space missions will grab the attention of youth towards aerospace, aeronautical, and related fields.

Participation in the human space flight enhances Pakistan's international profile as a reliable technological partner. It signals that Pakistan is not limited to peripheral space engagement; it can operate in advanced scientific collaborations. Pakistan's adherence to high standards of training and operational discipline shows its commitment to international space norms. Pakistan does not see space as a competitive arena, but a pathway to sustainable development. This mission will serve as a long-term diplomatic capital to advance its peaceful space vision through meaningful international interactions around space governance, scientific cooperation, and future exploration frameworks.

Pakistan's human spaceflight mission comes at a very strategic time when outer space is becoming central to national development worldwide. To make the most out of this mission, Pakistan's future trajectory will be significant. This milestone shall be embedded as a catalyst for structural transformation in Pakistan's national space strategy. Pakistan needs to focus on enriching its space program through increasing funding and strong collaboration between SUPARCO and other universities. Moreover, Pakistan needs to incentivize public-private partnerships in the specialized research and development (R&D) programs. The most important driver of future success will be institutional continuity in planning, policymaking, integration, and implementation. To amplify the impact of this mission, the government needs to develop astronaut training pipelines, expand research grants in space medicine and materials science,

and integrate space technology into broader industrial policy. In a nutshell, Pakistan's upcoming astronaut mission is more than a symbolic achievement. It implies the country's commitment to advancing its space program. It is an apt example of the success of Pakistan's space diplomacy, which materialized into tangible technological progress. This milestone is achieved by gradual capacity-building, institutional strengthening, and long-term scientific ambition. It marks a new phase of Pakistan's space trajectory that will be written in laboratories, classrooms, research centers, and policy frameworks in the years that follow.

Author: The author is research assistant at CISS, Islamabad

Link: <https://strafasia.com/pakistans-space-diplomacy-takes-flight/>

Nuclear Weapons without Limits: Expiry of New START and the New Nuclear Arms Race

Nawal Nawaz

With the expiry of the New START treaty on February 5, 2026, the last legally binding constraint on nuclear arsenals between the United States and Russia has lapsed, potentially destabilizing the strategic balance between the two powers. New START that was signed in April 8, 2010 aimed to halt the development and fielding of new delivery system and the deployment of additional nuclear warheads to existing delivery systems. This Bilateral arms control agreement between the US and Russia has served as the cornerstone of global nuclear restraint for nearly two decades. Both the Washington and Moscow have combined 80 percent of worlds nuclear warheads. This arms control framework provided numerical ceiling, transparency, predictability and ensured verification mechanism between Washington and Moscow. While verification activities under New START were halted during the pandemic and compliance disputes later eroded its operational vitality, the treaty nonetheless constrained deployed strategic arsenals within agreed ceilings and sustained a framework for strategic dialogue. In absence of such transparency and numerical ceiling, the global nuclear order enters a period of uncertainty.

The loss of mutual visibility has become a great concern after the expiry of New START between US and Russia. In absence of such intrusive verification, strategic planners are compelled to operate under worst-case assumptions, breeding arms race. Both Washington and Moscow are already engaged in nuclear force modernization, making the time of expiry of New START a major concern for future of arms control. Emerging technologies that involve hypersonic delivery systems and space-based assets are already complicating deterrence equation. In an era increasingly driven by automation, Strategic stability depends less on numerical parity and more on avoiding mistakes, miscalculations and accidental escalations. Although certain transparency and confidence-building measures exist, emerging technological domains remain only partially integrated into formal arms control regimes, prompting debate within forums such as the Conference on Disarmament regarding the future viability of traditional arms control models.

The expiry of New START treaty has ramifications well beyond the US-Russia bilateral relations. The broader architecture of non-proliferation is weakened with the end of formal

arms control arrangement, understating global confidence in nuclear restraint. Major powers have not fulfilled their disarmament obligations, and this lack of adherence with disarmament obligations has been repeatedly questioned by the non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS).

Though, Moscow has extended a modest proposal in October 2025 to Washington to extend compliance with central quantitative limits set under the New START for a year; yet, the issue of resumption of data exchanges and inspections of the strategic systems between the two sides disrupted further negotiations on extension of New START. The expiry of New START clearly shows that Moscow and Washington have no appetite for a renewed bilateral framework. In such challenging times, world can consider more inclusive arrangements that could also consider additional nuclear stakeholders.

The erosion of bilateral strategic arms control constraints under New START is occurring alongside renewed uncertainty surrounding global nuclear testing norms. While New START imposed quantitative limits on deployed strategic warheads and delivery systems, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) sought to constrain qualitative advancements by prohibiting explosive nuclear testing. Although the United States, Russia, and China have observed testing moratoria since 1996, renewed debate in Washington about potential test resumption has raised concerns about reciprocal actions by Moscow and Beijing.

Furthermore, future of arms control must evolve beyond cold war concepts. The focal points of future arms control framework must stand on the responsible application of AI to nuclear command systems, greater transparency in hypersonic testing and the assurance of robust space-based early warning capabilities rather than mere counting of warheads. With the demise of the final and sole pillar of bilateral nuclear restraint between the United States and Russia, there are risks that number could exceed 1550 warhead limit set under the treaty, destabilizing mutual balance of terror between Russian and US strategic forces. For the first time in 35 years, the US and Russia are not constrained in deployment of strategic arsenals by uploading additional warheads on existing bombers and missiles, reversing decades of work to reduce the risk of nuclear war. Therefore, the Absence of bilateral strategic arms control framework such as New START, destabilizes today's multi-polar nuclear order, affecting threat perceptions and force postures in nuclear dyads beyond Europe and transatlantic space.

Author: The author is research assistant at CISS, Islamabad

Link: <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2026/02/24/nuclear-without-limits-the-new-arms-race/>

