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Author
Dr Pravesh Kumar Gupta,
Associate Fellow, VIF
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Introduction Central Asia is transforming rapidly. Today, this

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Time to Reset India's Engagement with Central Asia

Context Central Asia has changed sharply in recent years, but India has not adjusted fast enough. New Delhi needs an urgent & practical reset in its regional policy.

Facts

- Intra regional trade reached USD 11 billion in 2024, double the 2017 level.
- India's trade with the region remains low at \$ 1.5 - 2.5 billion in 2025.
- Central Asia's regional format expanded from C5 to C6 in November 2025 with Azerbaijan's inclusion.

Analytical Crux

Central Asia is no longer a passive post-Soviet periphery; it now has agency, regional confidence and bargaining power. China, U.S., Russia and EU have adjusted their policies to new reality with money, corridors, minerals & institutions. **India**, despite early goodwill & cultural depth, allowed its engagement to be slow, rhetorical and under-delivering. The need is not symbolic outreach but a hard reset based on connectivity alternatives, digital presence and sustained high-level political attention. **India's** challenge is either re-enter the region seriously, or accept long-term marginalisation.

Verbatim Quotes

“Central Asia, once viewed as a fragile, externally dependent entity, has evolved into an assertive and confident player actively shaping Eurasian geopolitics and geo-economics.”

– Dr. Pravesh Kumar Gupta

Article - 2: Decline or Resurgence? China Debates the Future of US Power

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Decline or Resurgence? China Debates the Future of US Power

AUTHOR : ANTARA GHOSAL SINGH

Expert Speak Raisina Debates
Published on Apr 10, 2026

A series of global flashpoints has triggered a reassessment in Beijing of whether American power is eroding or entering a new phase of assertive resurgence



Author



Antara Ghosal Singh
Antara Ghosal Singh is a Fellow at the Strategic Studies Programme at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. Her area of research includes China-India relations, China-India-US ...
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Context Chinese strategic circles are divided over whether the US is weakening or recovering and what that debate means for future US-China rivalry.

Facts

China's faced setbacks in Hamburg, Nexperia, Darwin port and Panama port operations.

Chinese scholars Chen Wenling & Yan Xuetong - marks shift toward harder strategic thinking in Beijing.

Analytical Crux

The real issue is not whether U.S. is declining or rising, but how American power is being reworked under great-power competition. Chinese confidence after the trade war shaken by the U.S. military reach, financial attraction and coercive leverage over global supply chains. Chinese thinkers are moving from easy talk of American decline to harder discussions about power transition, retrenchment, deterrence and strategic preparedness. For India, this contest has entered a more volatile phase and needs close watching.

Verbatim Quotes

“Washington's hardline and overbearing stance does not reflect a resurgence of strength; it is an attempt to compensate for declining economic competitiveness vis-a-vis China.”

- Antara Ghosal Singh

Dear Babasaheb, those who sing paeans to you inflict wounds on your Constitution

DEAR BABASAHEB, your life and thinking were deeply invested in larger ideas of equality, fraternity and a just society. But one must routinely go back to your contribution to the making of the Constitution, because, won't these goals remain distant and vague if we were to isolate them from the distortions of the Constitution that you shaped?

But your Constitution has become unrecognisable if not almost irrelevant amid bad practices and clever distortions. You were prescient when you warned that the Constitution would fail, not because it was not well crafted but because the people entrusted to work on it choose to make it a failure. This is not a lament about the document or a legal edifice, this is an immediate concern for the larger project you envisaged. Emancipation — and politics for emancipation — cannot be possible without the minimum of formal democracy. In undermining the Constitution, India's rulers are pushing back against the impulse of emancipation. In the wounds inflicted on the Constitution, there is a story foretold: The basics of political emancipation are denied, delegitimised, and the idea of democratic resistance criminalised.

Three specific instances that make this story of urgent concern may be cited as these are directly connected to the Constitution. These instances are happening when formality will demand that those who inflict wounds on your Constitution also sing paeans to your greatness.

Babasaheb, your followers associate the ambition of one person-one vote-one value with you and the Constitution. You were rightly concerned with expanding the ambit of democracy beyond the political; you warned that political democracy would be meaningless without social democracy. But we have managed to scuttle the basics themselves. If political democracy is constrained, legally and judicially reshaped to exclude, then the idea of social democracy will automatically become more distant and less relevant. The history of elections the world over is the history of expanding voting rights and the struggle for inclusion. We have made history by doing the opposite. Only a quarter of a century ago, India prided itself on the fact that its political parties and official election machinery strove to expand the net of inclusion. Today, we witness not merely the attrition of electoral rolls and allegations of systematic exclusion of minorities, we also witness judicial equivocation over this scandalous development.

As you would know, the betrayal is not confined to one institution. The Constitution envisaged a delicate balance of power that was supposed to be quite uncomfortable for the executive. The executive always wants power. But the Constitution expected institutions to function autonomously and countervail the power of the executive. Sometimes that really did happen — when, despite a parliamentary system, the legislature sought to ask tough questions; when, de-



SUHAS PALSHIKAR

spite appointment by the executive, the Election Commission made life miserable for not just the executive but for most political parties; and when, in spite of the ignominy of ADM Jabalpur (2017), many high courts and sometimes the Supreme Court assured us that arrests cannot be arbitrary, imprisonment cannot be unreasonable.

So, we went on quoting your statement that Article 32 is the heart and soul of the Constitution. Little did we know that sedition charges would overpower all other considerations and "bail, not jail" would become mere poetry. Nor did we know that writ petitions would be kept undecided indeterminately. Heart and soul, Babasaheb, means something so central that there is no compromise, no delay, no subterfuge over it. Article 32 was supposed to be a strong counterbalance to executive excess. But this understanding has now become purely fictional.

If the heart and soul of the Constitution can be robbed of its strength and starring role, we are not too far away from the time when nothing in the Constitution is treated as sacrosanct. If the heart and soul of the Constitution can be diminished, then most other limbs of the Constitution that make

Article 32 was supposed to be a strong counterbalance to executive excess. But this understanding has now become purely fictional

the animal called democracy stand upright can be chopped off. Over the past 75 years, the Constitution evolved into a solid framework against arbitrary changes by a majority. That was possible because of the introduction of Basic Structure as a theoretical protection against

executive and legislative takeover. But aren't we on the threshold of terminating that protection? We have already discarded it *de facto*; we now await a *de jure* denouement.

You may think these are exaggerated fears. But unfortunately, Babasaheb, this is not the case — only recently, we have witnessed a direct attack on you and your ideas about the Constitution. While there have been alleged disenfranchisement and alleged judicial abdications in matters of habeas corpus, the realm of ideas and theories, too, is being regularly cleansed of the democratic principles that once marked political and constitutional thinking. Your old-fashioned idea of constitutional morality is already being discarded as mere sentiment, a vague term.

Traditional political theory understood the importance of constitutionalism as the bulwark of constitutional democracy. Without it, the Constitution is a mere document that rulers and political players can distort. You gave that idea of constitutionalism a more elegant name — a normative basis that protects and enhances principles as something mandatory. When a government gives up on that normative anchor, the Constitution, however well written, becomes a convenient tool of obfuscation at best, and suppression at worst. And you will agree, Babasaheb, that when political democracy is compromised, we are one step away from denying democracy more generally.

The writer, based in Pune, taught Political Science

Context While Babasaheb Ambedkar is publicly praised, the Constitution he helped shape is being steadily weakened through institutional erosion and democratic distortion.

Facts

India witnessing erosion of electoral rolls & alleged exclusion of minorities weakens democratic inclusion.

Without constitutionalism, the Constitution can become a tool of distortion and suppression.

Analytical Crux

Constitutional decline is not just a legal problem ; it is a deeper political attack on democratic emancipation itself. Ambedkar's project linked social justice to a functioning constitutional democracy, but it weakens when elections become exclusionary, institutions become submissive and Article 32 loses force.

Symbolic praise of Ambedkar is meaningless if basic structure, constitutionalism and democratic resistance are undermined in practice. The real defence of Ambedkar lies not in celebration, but in protecting the constitutional framework that restrains power.

Verbatim Quotes

“ When a government gives up normative anchor, Constitution, however well written, becomes a convenient tool of obfuscation at best and suppression at worst.” — Suhas Palshikar

“ When political democracy is compromised, we are one step away from denying democracy more generally.” — Suhas Palshikar

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