

PSIR & GS-2

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The New security dynamic in west Asia

The New Security Dynamic in West Asia

Amb Anil Trigunayat, Distinguished Fellow, VIF

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As Iran was mourning the assassination or martyrdom of their Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamanej, depending on from which ever lens one looks at, it chose July 4 as the date for his funeral when USA was celebrating its iconic 250th birthday, under a mercurial President Trump. It was not a coincidence. It was defiance to the hilt against the sole super power of this century at least until now. It also proves that miscalculations and lack of strategy and planning especially the exit strategy in a war can lead to decimation of capability and prestige of the mightiest power, Tehran often took solace in the fact that it was able to stand up to the regional; and global nuclear powers combined assault with dignity and defiance by using its 'Mosaic Defence' and 'Scorched Earth' strategies to counter the onslaught while targeting US and Israeli assets, bases and friends in the region quite effectively. Since survival both of the regime and the Islamic Republic were the ends in themselves, Tehran did not factor the damage their attacks on the GCC countries will do to the fledging trust and accommodation that was being built in

Author



Amb Anil Trigunayat, Distinguished Fellow, VIF

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The New Security Dynamic in West Asia

As Iran was mourning the assassination or martyrdom of their Supr

Military Transformation:

Context

US-Iran war has shattered US's standing as the sole security provider of West Asia and left India in the uncomfortable position.

Facts

Strait of Hormuz carries nearly 25% of global energy supplies, while India receives half of its energy imports through it.

India's regional approach is based on SD Policy- Dialogue, Diplomacy, De-escalation, De-hyphenation & Diversification.

Saudi Arabia signed a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SDMA) with Pakistan, signalling Pakistan's renewed strategic relevance in West Asia.

Analytical Crux

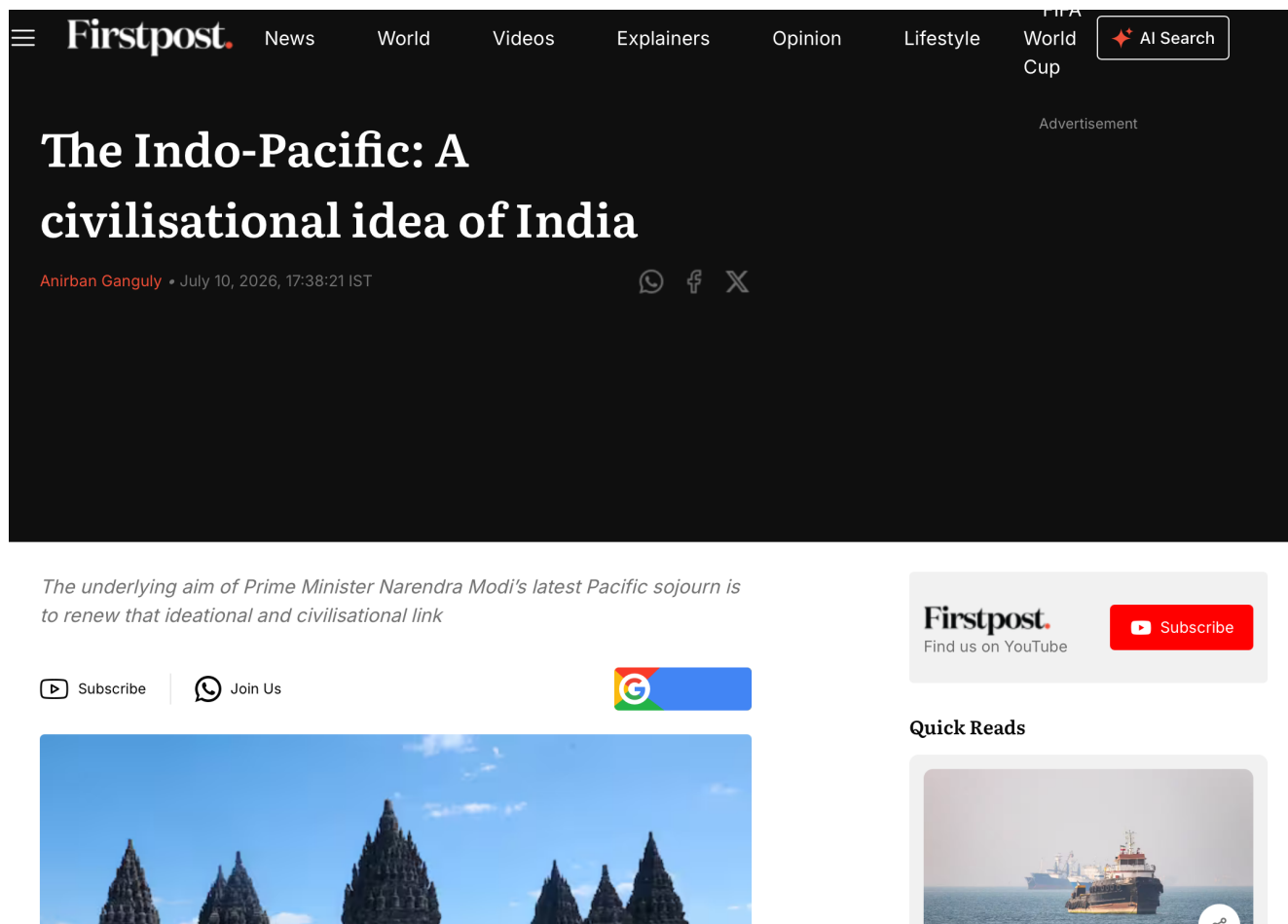
The biggest outcome of the Iran-Israel conflict is not military destruction but the erosion of US's credibility as West Asia's principal security guarantor. Regional powers are increasingly hedging through flexible security partnerships & minilateral arrangements rather than depending on a single external power. For India, strategic autonomy alone may no longer be sufficient. New Delhi must complement its economic and diplomatic engagement with stronger security partnerships, maritime capabilities and institutional mechanisms to safeguard its long-term interests in an increasingly fragmented regional order.

Verbatim Quotes

"West Asia is too important to be ignored or treated like any other relationship."

— Anil Trigunayat

The Indo - Pacific : A civilisational idea of India



Context Indo-Pacific is not merely a contemporary geopolitical construct but a historical civilisational space shaped by India's centuries-old maritime, cultural & intellectual interactions with Southeast Asia & the Pacific.

Facts

Kalidas Nag was among the first Indian scholars to use the term "Indo-Pacific Domain" in the modern context.

Great Nicobar Island lies only 150 Km from Indonesia's Aceh, highlighting India's natural maritime proximity.

Rabindranath Tagore's 1927 visit to Java, Sumatra and Bali reflected India's long-standing civilisational engagement with Southeast Asia.

Analytical Crux

The article reframes the Indo-Pacific as India's historical maritime sphere rather than a recent geopolitical concept driven by great power competition. This perspective enriches India's diplomatic narrative by highlighting centuries of cultural connectivity across the Indian Ocean. However, civilisational legitimacy alone cannot secure contemporary strategic interests. India's historical links must be supported by stronger naval capabilities, regional connectivity initiatives, maritime partnerships, SAGAR, IMEC & the development of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands to translate historical influence into present-day strategic capacity.

Verbatim Quotes

"What India brought as her real & abiding contribution to the nations of the Pacific, were not the conquering armies or the ruling dynasties long forgotten, but a veritable fertilising influence in the domain of spiritual, intellectual and artistic creations."

—Anirban Ganguly

Next leap will come from bringing AI and DPI together

Next leap will come from bringing AI and digital public infrastructure together



MANISH SABHARWAL
AND RAVI BAPNA

THE FAILURE of multiple visits by the Japanese government to 111-year-old Sogen Kato's house to honour him — he was never home — had a simple explanation. He had been dead for 30 years while his family collected his pension. This triggered a national investigation that identified 3 lakh people who were assumed to be "living" but were dead. India's Aadhaar programme has reduced such pension scandals, improved the efficiency of government spending (up 117 times since 1991), and catalysed digital payments (42 per cent of the world's transactions). The next orbit for digital public infrastructure (DPI) lies in AI integration — it will raise state capacity and empower the new tone from the top on Jan Vishwas.

The last few years have been tough for Indian tech. We don't have a credible horse in the AI generation race. DeepSeek came out of China, and automated code generation has blunted the employment outlook for software services. But a recent conference at the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) suggested optimism about this digital revolution of AI for three reasons. India is the world's largest natural data laboratory. Integrating DPI with AI could be the biggest reimagination of the

Indian state since 1947. And AI deployment may be more employment-generative than AI generation. Let's look at all three in detail.

First, India has gone from data poor to data rich in just 10 years because of three bold acts of entrepreneurship in 2016: Jio, UPI, and GST. For decades, India's economic policy relied on periodic surveys and delayed, uneven and incomplete administrative data. But now, DPI's digital exhaust makes us the world's largest natural data laboratory for financial inclusion, welfare targeting, enterprise formalisation, platform economics and digital governance. UPI's monthly 23 billion transactions create one of the world's largest behavioural datasets. GST's 20 crore payments create real-time visibility into supply chains, invoicing, production and consumption. FASTag's 4.5 billion payment transactions create mobility and logistics datasets at scale. And more than 27 billion annual Aadhaar authentications enabled a 16-fold expansion in direct benefit transfer beneficiaries. For the first time, a developing country is using population-scale digital data to accelerate development rather than waiting for conventional statistical systems to catch up. The job is hardly done — rigorous academic research, well-funded think tanks to bridge theory and practice, and open public data commons are just emerging — but the future seems very different from the past.

Second, India's political reimagination since 1947 has created the world's largest democracy on the infertile soil of the world's most hierarchical society. But why didn't we create the world's largest economy? Besides the delusional 1956 Second Five-Year Plan, weak state capacity

is another suspect in our failed transition from farm to non-farm jobs. Historically, governments increased state capacity through more administrative structures and personnel (government spending has increased 53,000 times since the 1947 budget of Rs 198 crore). DPI enables better resource allocation, improved service delivery, earlier fraud detection, and quicker responses. But a reimagined citizen interface has been blunted by a lack of interoperability (digital silos are stronger than physical silos), the government's internal technology capacity, and a mentality that seems to be satisfied with PDFs, when the aim should be for APIs. AI's capacity to use unstructured data will help us leapfrog data integration and the interoperability challenges within our strong consent architecture and the recently articulated principles of Jan Vishwas Siddhant. Multiple language interfaces will open up labour and education markets, and AI will improve public health expenditure. India will be the first large country to integrate AI into population-scale DPI — America built AI on private-sector data ecosystems, and China built AI on platform-centric digital ecosystems. DPI without AI is infrastructure, and AI without DPI is intelligence. AI plus DPI is enhanced state capacity.

Finally, India's angst about AI's impact on jobs is understandable if it ends up with the winner-take-all characteristics of search or the fiery nationalism that halts access to frontier models — the recently-revoked restrictions on frontier AI models such as Claude 5, for instance. But deploying AI in the daily lives of citizens and companies requires more ingenuity, organisational savviness, and

human capital than AI generation itself does. You don't have to build a car to drive it; let's build the roads (AI applications) that get people to extract economic and social value. The deployment of AI in DPI could make India the use-case capital of the world, not unlike the American state that used defence spending during the Cold War to catalyse Silicon Valley. India's enterprise DPI, currently under implementation (universal enterprise number, entity digilocker, API Setu, single source of truth for regulation), could potentially combine with a Universal Lifetime Social Security Account for every citizen (Aadhaar *punji*) to unleash a revolution in formalisation similar to what NPCI did in payments (private innovation on a non-profit layer). This would reduce information asymmetry, lower transaction costs, improve credit allocation and worker-job matching, enhance supply chain and logistics efficiency, and accelerate the creation of high-wage, private, non-farm jobs.

The *Arthashastra* suggests that strategy is most powerful when choices in strength, timing, and place are mutually reinforcing. Combining our strengths in DPI with the new tone from the top about Jan Vishwas (NCAER research suggests 66 per cent of connected Indians use the internet for entertainment but only 11 per cent for online government services), could deliver our new trust with destiny: Higher state capacity, citizen satisfaction, and mass prosperity. And this is an appointment we shall keep.

Sabharwal is co-founder of TeamLease Services and co-author of Made in India. Bapna is Curtis I. Carlson Chair Professor in Business Analytics and Information Systems at University of Minnesota

Context India's next governance transformation will emerge by integrating AI with DPI thereby improving state capacity & evidence based policymaking instead of focusing on developing frontier AI models.

Facts

India accounts for nearly 42% of global digital transactions, primarily by UPI.

UPI processes about 23 billion transactions every month; world's largest system.

India's DPI ecosystem includes Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, API Setu and FASTag, providing a strong foundation for AI-enabled governance.

Analytical Crux

India's mature Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) can enable AI to improve welfare targeting, reduce leakages, enhance fraud detection and strengthen public service delivery. However, greater state capacity also increases the state's ability to collect and process citizen data, raising concerns regarding privacy, surveillance, algorithmic bias and accountability. Therefore, AI-driven governance must evolve alongside robust data protection, consent architecture, interoperability and transparent institutional safeguards to ensure that efficiency does not come at the cost of individual rights.

Verbatim Quotes

"DPI without AI is infrastructure, and AI without DPI is intelligence. AI plus DPI is enhanced state capacity."

- Manish Sabharwal & Ravi Bapna

2025 GS Paper 15 marks: "Energy security constitutes the dominant kingpin of India's foreign policy, and is linked with India's overarching influence in Middle Eastern countries." How would you integrate energy security with India's foreign policy trajectories in the coming years?

2025 PSIR Paper II, 10 marks : For India, a multipolar world order would also mean a multipolar Asia. Comment.

2025 PSIR Paper II : India maintains strong ties with countries that will assure a free and open Indo-Pacific and guarantee greater connectivity with rest of the world. Analyze.

2024 GS Paper 2, 15 marks : Discuss the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of Maldives for India, with a focus on global trade and energy flows. Further, also discuss how this relationship affects India's maritime security and regional stability amidst international competition?

2025 GS Paper 2, 10 marks : E-governance projects have a built-in bias towards technology and back-end integration than user-centric designs. Examine.

2025 GS Paper 2, 10 marks : India-Africa digital partnership is achieving mutual respect, co-development and long-term institutional partnerships. Elaborate.

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