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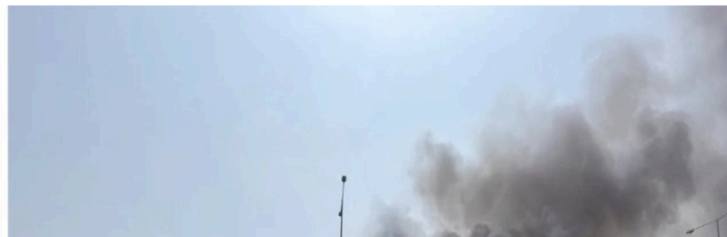
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Avoiding the Next Gulf War

How America's Allies in the Region Can Get Out of the Cross Hairs

NEIL QUILLIAM AND SANAM VAKIL

April 6, 2026



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Context Gulf Arab states, after suffering the direct costs of the Iran war, must reduce excessive dependence on the U.S. and build a more balanced and region-led security strategy.

Facts

- Gulf states remain heavily dependent on the U.S. for security through Patriot, THAAD, logistics, intelligence & military bases.
- Saudi Vision 2030 & UAE's diversification strategy depend on stability, secure trade routes & foreign investment.
- Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar & Saudi are all U.S. major Non-NATO allies but still have limited control over policies that affect them.
- Gulf is trying to diversify security ties, as UAE-India defence relationship and Saudi Arabia's defence pact with Pakistan.

Analytical Crux

The real argument of the article is that the Gulf states are discovering the limits of outsourced security. They depend heavily on the U.S. but they are the ones absorbing the military and economic shocks of regional war. So, the old model of relying on Washington while quietly balancing Iran and Israel is no longer enough. The authors suggest a new path: stronger Gulf coordination, issue based multilateral partnerships and active diplomacy to manage rivalry rather than let it explode into war.

In crux, the Gulf states now have to become active shapers of regional balance, not passive victims of great-power decisions.

Verbatim Quotes

Managed hedging: "They will have to move beyond their earlier strategy of managed hedging - or relying on the U.S. while selectively engaging with Iran & Israel - and instead create a new regional equilibrium."

"The era in which Gulf states could rely on external powers to manage regional security is coming to an end." **Neil Quilliam & Sanam Vakil**

Article - 2 : Refining the partnership: the India-US dynamic

The screenshot shows the ORF (Observer Research Foundation) website. The article title is "Refining the Partnership: Elbridge Colby's Pragmatism and the US-India Dynamic" by Harsh V. Pant. It was published on April 04, 2026. The article text begins with "Colby's visit underscores a growing comfort in New Delhi with its recalibrated partnership with the US. India is no longer approaching the US with the hesitations that once defined its engagement. Nor is it seeking validation through alignment". There is a photo of Elbridge Colby and a portrait of the author, Harsh V. Pant.

Context Elbridge Colby's New Delhi visit shows India-US relations moving into a more mature phase where partnership is based more on hard interests, defence cooperation and Indo-Pacific strategy than on idealistic language.

Facts

- Colby visited New Delhi focused on commitments flowing from Trump-Modi joint statement.
- The visit also built on October 2025 defence framework signed by Pete Hegseth & Rajnath Singh.
- Colby is identified as principal architect of 2018 Defence Strategy.
- He describes his approach as "flexible realism."
- He drew a parallel between "America First" and India's emphasis on national primacy.

Analytical Crux

India-US ties are becoming stronger because the relationship is becoming clearer and more practical. The U.S. now seems more willing to work with India on the basis of India's strategic autonomy rather than trying to fit India into a value-based liberal model. This makes defence cooperation deeper & more durable, especially in the Indo-Pacific and in relation to China, even if differences on Russia, Iran and trade continue. This article suggests that a narrower but realistic partnership can be more stable than a broad but vague partnership. But for the relationship to reach its full potential, the economic pillar will also have to grow along with the security pillar.

Theoretical Lens

"What he described as flexible realism, a framework that privileges interests, capabilities & incentives over ideology."

Verbatim Quotes

"The relationship is transactional - grounded in mutual benefit rather than ideological affinity."

"A more compartmentalised approach produce greater overall coherence."

Article - 3 : The World Trade Organisation is failing

The World Trade Organization is flailing

Trade multilateralism is facing its biggest stress test since the Second World War. The United States' coercive unilateralism and attempts to dilute foundational rules such as the most-favoured nation (MFN) treatment threaten to hollow out the entire system. At such a critical juncture in history, the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s fourteenth Ministerial Conference (MC14), which recently concluded in Yaoundé, Cameroon (March 2026), was expected to reassure the global community about the importance of a rules-based global trading order, which limits hegemonic tendencies.

Regrettably, the MC14 failed to meet this challenge. While no one expected the MC14 to turn up trumps, the fact that the 166-member WTO failed to reach consensus on even issuing a ministerial declaration outlining future work is disconcerting. To paper over the cracks, the WTO's Director General declared that the MC14 had produced a Yaoundé package comprising certain draft decisions, that is, decisions yet to be finalised, which will be discussed at Geneva in the months ahead.

Tale of two moratoriums

The MC14 will go down in history as the one that broke the long-standing consensus on moratoriums for two things. First, customs duties on electronic commerce transactions. Since 1998, WTO member-countries agreed not to impose customs duties on electronic commerce transactions to keep digital trade flows free. The moratorium has been extended every two years since its inception. However, at MC14, countries were unable to reach an agreement on extending the moratorium, which, thus, lapsed on March 31.

Today, countries are free to impose tariffs on digital trade flows, though it is expected that the WTO's General Council will deliberate on this issue again in the months ahead. While this may provide developing countries with an



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The WTO's fourteenth Ministerial Conference has showed up the cracks in the rules-based system

opportunity to augment their revenue, it will burden consumers and businesses. A significant development that accompanied the end of the e-commerce moratorium was the signing of an e-commerce agreement (ECA) by 66 WTO members, which prohibits customs duties on digital trade.

Although not yet part of the WTO rulebook and binding only for the signatories, this agreement will establish two separate legal frameworks: the WTO, which allows tariffs on digital trade, and the ECA, which does not.

The second moratorium, in force since 1995, barred non-violation complaints under the WTO's TRIPS Agreement. The WTO allows countries to file claims not only for legal violations but also when a country's measures nullify another country's anticipated benefits, even if those measures are legal.

This raises concerns for developing nations that their laws to promote public health could provoke complaints from developed countries alleging that they nullify the benefits of their intellectual property. Although such complaints are possible, history suggests they are unlikely to succeed, as evidenced by the failure of all 10 non-violation complaints related to trade in goods at the WTO.

Plurilateral innovation

A so-called low-hanging fruit at the MC14 was the incorporation of the plurilateral Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) agreement into Annex 4 of the WTO Agreement, with support from 129 of 166 countries. However, it did not materialise due to India's opposition. New Delhi opposed the IFD's inclusion for multiple reasons, including the absence of legal safeguards to incorporate plurilateral agreements into the WTO acquis.

Plurilateral agreements to be incorporated into the WTO should be open and inclusive rather

than exclusive. The failure to include the IFD Agreement has deepened the WTO's legislative crisis, as the organisation struggles to establish rules for 21st century challenges.

No road map for the future

The MC14 failed to provide a clear road map for WTO reforms. Critical issues such as reviving the stalled appellate function of the WTO's dispute settlement system have been postponed. Any attempts by the developed world, especially the U.S., to undermine key principles, such as MFN and the special and differential treatment, must be strongly resisted.

It is often said that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. The history of trade multilateralism demonstrates that whenever trade multilateralism slows, American unilateralism tends to rise. This occurred in the early 1970s when the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations floundered, leading to the enactment of strict measures such as Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974. This provision empowers the U.S. President to take unilateral action against perceived unfair trade practices. We are currently witnessing a similar situation, but this time without Congressional approval and with far greater vengeance. A setback at the MC14 will exacerbate these trends.

Additionally, the failure of the MC14 will accelerate the trend of countries creating new trade rules outside the WTO. To keep the WTO relevant, innovative solutions must be found, such as plurilateralising the WTO. India should take the lead in developing the legal guardrails needed for the development and adoption of plurilateral agreements within the WTO. Achieving this will require a novel approach and unflinching political commitment to trade multilateralism.

The views expressed are personal

Context WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference failed to defend the rules-based trading system at a time when U.S. unilateralism and weakening of core trade rules are putting global trade multilateralism under serious strain.

Facts

MC14 was held in Yaounde, Cameroon, but the 166-member WTO could not even agree on a ministerial declaration.

66 WTO members signed separate e-commerce agreement, creating two different legal tracks on digital trade.

The long-standing e-commerce moratorium, in place since 1998, lapsed on March 31 because members failed to renew it.

The IFD agreement had support from 129 of 166 countries, but its inclusion in WTO failed because of India's opposition.

Analytical Crux

WTO is not just facing a routine deadlock; it is facing a deeper crisis of relevance, authority and rule-making power. MC14 showed that the multilateral trading system is now becoming too weak to respond to new issues like digital trade, dispute settlement reform and plurilateral agreements. As the WTO weakens, U.S. unilateralism and rule-making outside the WTO are likely to grow stronger, which can further damage the global trading order. India should help design legal safeguards for a more workable plurilateral future inside the WTO. The real challenge is to save multilateralism by reforming it.

Verbatim Quotes

"Trade multilateralism is facing its biggest stress test since the Second World War."

"To keep the WTO relevant, innovative solutions must be found (plurilateralise WTO)."

"The U.S.'s coercive unilateralism and attempts to dilute foundational rules such as the MFN treatment threaten to hollow out the entire system."

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