

PSIR & GS-2 Daily Brief

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Amit Pratap
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Article - 1

How America lost command of the commons: Foreign affairs

Article - 2

India's road through Myanmar is one of engagement: The Hindu

Article - 3

Why are voters attracted to political outsiders : Scroll

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Article - 1 : How America lost command of the commons

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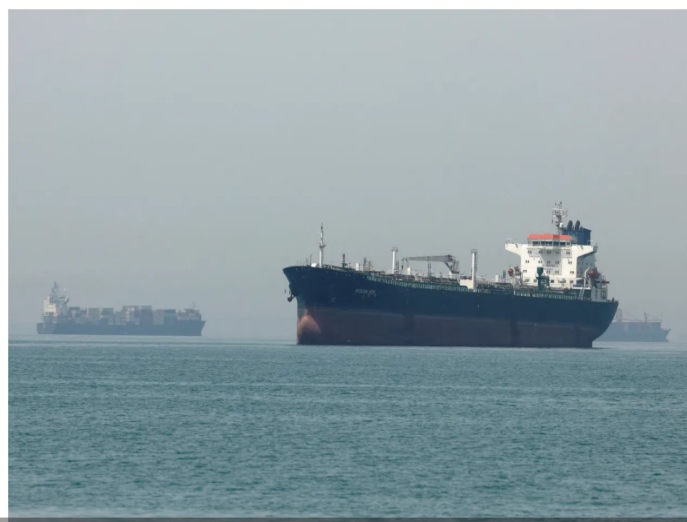
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How America Lost Command of the Commons

And Why the Open Seas May Soon Be Tolled

ISAAC KARDON

June 9, 2026



ISAAC KARDON is Senior Fellow in the Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the author of *China's Law of the Sea: The New Rules of Maritime Order*.

[More by Isaac Kardon →](#)

Context Long post war era of free and open seas, once held up by overwhelming American naval power is breaking down because cheap drones, long-range missiles and China's industrial and economic weight.

Facts

- Commercial maritime trade - 80% of all global trade.
- Ukraine's drones reduced Russia's Black Sea Fleet despite no navy.
- Geneva Conventions 1958 and UNCLOS III (1982) - fixed a sovereign territorial sea of 12 nautical miles.

Analytical Crux

The issue is that "freedom of the seas" was never a settled legal right. It held because one navy could afford to enforce it and the enforcement is now expensive to sustain. Power at sea has shifted from the ability to control the ocean to the ability to deny it. China builds over half the world's commercial vessels and runs the largest port network. The American way of war is mismatched with the contemporary world's strategic and economic geography. Today the sea passage is not guaranteed by law but it is negotiated and paid for.

Verbatim Quotes

"The future is not "closed seas" but "gated seas". Gated seas, in which free passage is negotiated and purchased in a geopolitical marketplace rather than assured by legal right."

- Isaac Kardon

Article - 2 : India's road through Myanmar is one of engagement

India's road through Myanmar is one of engagement

When Myanmar's President U Min Aung Hlaing landed in Bodhi Gaya, Bihar, on May 30, 2026, the symbolism was hard to miss. Before travelling to New Delhi for talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Droupadi Murmu, he visited the Mahabodhi Temple, one of Buddhism's holiest sites and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The stopover underscored a broader message: India was welcoming Myanmar's leader not only through the language of diplomacy but through shared civilisational ties.

This is a major diplomatic engagement, the first visit to India (May 30- June 3, 2026) by Min Aung Hlaing in his capacity as President, reflecting the growing importance of India-Myanmar relations in a shifting geopolitical environment of South and Southeast Asia. For New Delhi, the timing and tone are equally significant.

Why now

The world's democracies have largely turned away from Naypyidaw since the February 2021 coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government. Western nations imposed sanctions and sought to isolate the military regime. But Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri told reporters that India's policy is "not intended to be a commentary on the internal political arrangements" in Myanmar, and that New Delhi believes engagement is the best way forward.

This is realpolitik disguised as pragmatism. Myanmar is India's gateway to Southeast Asia and a cornerstone of its Act East and Neighbourhood First policies. Sharing a 1,643-km border with four northeastern States, Myanmar's instability poses a direct threat to India's security interests in the region.

Then there is the China factor. Beijing has aggressively cultivated Naypyidaw since the coup, filling the vacuum left by western withdrawal with infrastructure financing, arms supplies, and



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Connectivity,
security, and
China shape
India's outreach
to Myanmar

diplomatic cover. For India to cede Myanmar's strategic space entirely to China would be a self-inflicted wound in its own backyard.

The infrastructure stakes

Few indicators better reflect the depth of India's strategic investment in Myanmar than the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway – two connectivity corridors that dominated the Modi-Hlaing agenda.

The Kaladan project connects Kolkata to Sittwe by sea, then follows the Kaladan River inland to Paletwa, before linking by road to Zorinpui in Mizoram. The sea and river components are operational, with the first cargo shipment reaching Sittwe in May 2023. But the critical 109-km Paletwa-Zorinpui Road running through mountainous, flood-prone terrain in Chin State remains incomplete. India's Shipping Minister told Parliament in 2025 that full operationalisation is targeted for 2027.

The Trilateral Highway carries an even grander ambition: linking Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot in Thailand through Myanmar over roughly 1,360 km, with planned extensions to Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam. Once completed, it could transform India's landlocked northeast into a gateway to Southeast Asia. It was supposed to be finished by 2019. It still is not.

Myanmar's internal conflict lies behind both delays. Armed groups control large stretches of territory along the two corridors, making construction difficult and unpredictable. President Hlaing assured Mr. Modi that Myanmar would do "everything" to complete the projects, while Mr. Misri reiterated that they remain a "major priority" despite security challenges. At the Myanmar-India Trade and Investment Conclave, Mr. Aung Hlaing described them as vital to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-India economic corridor. The real question is whether these assurances will

translate into progress on the ground. Beyond infrastructure, the summit covered significant ground. Bilateral trade stood at \$1.95 billion in 2025-26, and both sides agreed to increase it through a rupee-kyat settlement mechanism, with additional discussions on critical minerals and rare-earth cooperation.

On security, Mr. Aung Hlaing reiterated Myanmar's assurance that its territory would not be used against India's interests – a significant pledge given the long presence of Indian insurgent groups and cybercrime networks in Myanmar's border regions. More than 2,400 Indian nationals have been rescued from scam centres through bilateral cooperation over the past 18 months, though many remain trapped. On education, India announced an increase in Mekong-Ganga ICCR scholarships for Myanmar students from 36 to 100 annually from 2026.

The larger reckoning

By receiving Mr. Aung Hlaing as Myanmar's President, India has signalled a degree of acceptance of the country's evolving political reality. This does not necessarily amount to endorsement of the military-backed government. Still, it suggests a recognition that meaningful engagement with Myanmar requires working with those currently in power. For Myanmar, the visit is equally consequential. Mr. Aung Hlaing last visited India in 2019 as Myanmar's military chief. His return to New Delhi as head of state – and his choice of India for his first major bilateral visit abroad – signals a deliberate engagement with a neighbour that can provide a diplomatic and economic counterweight to overwhelming Chinese dependence. For India, the calculus is rooted in geography, security and the recognition that disengagement rarely produces better outcomes. The message is clear: pragmatic engagement, however uncomfortable, may increasingly shape regional approaches to Myanmar in the years ahead.

Context

while the west has tried to isolate Myanmar's military regime, India has chosen pragmatic engagement due to its geography, security and connectivity.

Facts

India shares a 1643 Km border with Myanmar – central to Act east and neighbourhood first policy.

Crucial projects : Kaladan Multi-modal Transit transport project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway.

Bilateral trade – \$1.95 billion in 2025-26.

Analytical Crux

India is choosing interests over ideology. where the west sees a regime to isolate, India sees a neighbour it cannot afford to lose. Myanmar is the land bridge to Southeast Asia and crucial for the North-east's security. However, China is becoming a major challenge because of its usage of money, arms and diplomatic cover. The way forward for India is a pragmatic engagement which will shape regional approaches to Myanmar in the years ahead.

Verbatim Quotes

“ Myanmar is India's gateway to Southeast Asia and a cornerstone of its Act East and Neighbourhood First policies. For India to cede Myanmar's strategic space entirely to China would be a self-inflicted wound in its own backyard.”

— Harsh V. Pant & Sreeparna Banerjee

Article - 3 : Why are voters attracted to political outsiders

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TALKING DEMOCRACY

'Curing diseased democracy': Why are voters attracted to political outsiders?

They claim that they want to repair rather than overturn or escape the existing political system.

Srirupa Roy
May 05, 2026 · 12:00 pm

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Context

Populism is read not as a sudden eruption of anger but as a long-running project of "curative democracy" i.e. to diagnose, cure and restore a diseased democracy.

Facts

- Features of Curative democracy: diagnosis of disease and cure, call to immediate action, a political outsider as authorised curative agent and emphasis on extra-electoral forms of representation.

Analytical Crux

The core of populist political appeal is the call to cure, revive, renew or restore a presently flawed or diseased democracy. The method is to hand the cure to a virtuous "outsider". It can be a person or an institution: a charismatic leader, media, courts or an anti-corruption ombudsman, all drawing authority from being outside the political class. The aim is to repair the system and not overthrow it. The curative democracy can look reformist and even pro-democratic while devaluing rights and routine politics.

Verbatim Quotes

"Populism is a project of democratic reform fueled by an imagination of democracy's repairable lapses. It is about going outside electoral politics in order to cure it."

- Srirupa Roy

- 1. 2025, GS Paper II - "With the waning of globalization, post-Cold War world is becoming a site of sovereign nationalism." Elucidate.**
- 2. 2025, GS Paper III - What are the major challenges to internal security and peace process in the North-Eastern States ? Map the various peace accords and agreements initiated by the government in the past decade.**
- 3. 2025, PSIR Paper II - India continues to invoke its time-tested policy of strategic autonomy vis-à-vis both the United States of America and Russia by rejecting US' offer of mediation on Kashmir issue and by refusing to criticize Russia in its ongoing war against Ukraine. Comment.**
- 4. 2024, PSIR Paper II- Discuss the implications of the scrapping of the Free Movement Regime with Myanmar by the Indian Government on the complex ethno-political dynamics of the north-eastern region.**
- 5. 2023, PSIR Paper II - Discuss the various constraints on American hegemony today. Which of these are likely to become more prominent in the future?**
- 6. 2023, PSIR Paper I - Success of contemporary democracies lies in the State limiting its own power. Explain.**

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