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PSIR OPTIONAL BY
Amit Pratap Singh
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SOURCES SCANNED TODAY



ARTICLE

01

**The Hormuz war-
Trumpian misadventure :
VIF India**

ARTICLE

02

**Preparing India for
China's missile
challenge : The Hindu**

ARTICLE

03

**Next UN chief's job- keep
conversations alive :
Indian Express**

The Hormuz war-Trumpian misadventure



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Home > The Hormuz War: Trumpian Misadventure that Made Iran a Regional Superpower



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The Hormuz War: Trumpian Misadventure that Made Iran a Regional Superpower

Context

Iran forced US into a humiliating climb-down by shutting the Strait of Hormuz and turning the threat of de-dollarisation into a weapon.

Facts

- China's CIPS payment system cleared 175 trillion yuan in 2024.
- The US dollar's share of global forex reserves fell from 71% (1999) to 57% (2026).
- India was left holding \$7 billion of Iranian money it could not transfer because of US interference.

Analytical Crux

The real lesson of the Hormuz War is that power in world politics is not only about who can destroy more, but about who can endure more and impose unbearable costs. Iran lost almost every military exchange yet won the war because it changed the rules - turning one chokepoint, the threat of payment in yuan and crypto and a looming food & fertiliser shock into leverage that force could not break. It exposes the the limit of regime-change strategies built on a population that ends up trusting neither side.

Verbatim Quotes

"It was not a military success but a success of strategic thinking over impulsive and opportunistic decision-making."

"Iran understood its limitations and instead of denying their existence fashioned a defence plan that would rely on political nerve and popular will."

Preparing India for China's missile challenge

Preparing India for China's missile challenge

Missiles are reshaping warfare, making conflicts faster, cheaper, and more political. A limited volley of conventional missiles can paralyse a country, disrupt critical infrastructure, and complicate decision-making. With China having deployed more than 200 conventional missile launchers opposite India, the key question is how this missile superiority could shape a future conflict.

China's arsenal

While India views conventional missiles primarily as deterrents, China sees them as instruments of both political coercion and war-fighting. The threat of missile strikes alone may achieve strategic objectives without triggering a full-scale war. A barrage targeting critical infrastructure deep inside India could force New Delhi to fight on two fronts: a border conflict and a missile campaign against its hinterland.

The two missile bases located at Korla and Kunming can fire a range of conventional missiles (DF-15B, DF-16, DF-21C and DF-26). DF-15B, DF-16 and DF-21C are most suited to hit military targets along the borders; whereas the DF-26 can hit high-value targets in depth. Further, their hypersonic missiles (DF-100 and CJ-1000) can hit deeper, with no launch warning. This becomes a major vulnerability, as India has no reliable defence against it.

Consequently, China's inventory reduces the salience of the Himalayas to provide strategic depth. The DF-26, being dual-role, raises the risk of escalation. While China shoots down from the Tibetan Plateau, India has to shoot over the Himalayas. This impacts missile detection timings. Moreover, India's missile inventory is still evolving, with limitations in both range and diversity. Its long-range systems – including Agni, the Long-Range Land Attack Cruise Missile (LR-LACM) – Nirbhay, and BrahMos – and their variants are yet to be fully integrated. India also lacks robust real-time targeting capabilities, has



Harinder Singh
Retired Lieutenant General and an independent analyst

India needs to build a rocket force before China's missile advantage grows further

finite missile stockpiles, and is still developing its hypersonic technology. Importantly, its rocket force remains a conceptual construct, with significant policy and organisational issues yet to be resolved.

Without a rocket force, India would have little choice but to absorb a Chinese missile strike. On the contrary, if India has one, both get hurt to varying degrees. That is when the missile math kicks in – in terms of mutual vulnerability. If China launches 100 missiles, India must be able to inflict significant damage – not necessarily through equal numbers, but through comparable effects. India should therefore aim to build a credible conventional missile inventory; otherwise, it risks being forced into a stalemate even before the border war begins.

Ideally, India's rocket force should deliver three effects. First, it should be able to hold the PLA's Western Theatre Command (WTC) at risk by having the threat to target deep inside Tibet and Xinjiang. Second, it should be capable of degrading the PLA's road and rail infrastructure, airbases, and logistics installations along the border. Third, it must enable field commanders to strike PLA camps, gun positions, and ammunition dumps in the tactical battle area. In essence, India needs a rocket force capable of engaging strategic, operational, and tactical military and economic targets from a single command authority.

Three aspects are important. First, at the doctrinal level, India must adopt counter-value strikes as part of its conventional missile strategy. This would require rethinking the scope and scale of its counter-force doctrine and developing a unified target list. Service- or agency-specific target lists have little place in time-sensitive missile warfare. The rocket force must also have the authority to execute pre-designated precautionary strikes in the opening hours of a conflict. Without pre-delegated launch authority, India would risk defeat at the outset.

Second, at the structural level, whatever blueprint is adopted for the rocket force, it must be placed under the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). Keeping it service-specific would undermine operational effectiveness. India must also expand its medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missile (MRBM/IRBM) inventory, including Agni variants, to hold targets such as Korla and Kunming at reciprocal risk. This would raise the costs of any Chinese use of the DF-26. Fast-tracking the development of hypersonic missiles is vital, especially since the DF-100 is already part of the PLA Rocket Force's order of battle (ORBAT).

Third, at the technological level, India's missile industry faces significant challenges. Private sector participation must expand to complement the efforts of the DRDO. Major missile programmes have suffered from cost overruns and delays, while critical gaps in advanced air propulsion systems, semiconductors, and high-grade materials continue to hamper self-reliance. Dependence on foreign suppliers for high-end components remains a strategic vulnerability. Greater investment in R&D and end-to-end private-sector manufacturing will be essential.

Interim steps

Since a rocket force will take time to become operational, India must adopt interim measures. First, disperse IAF assets and harden airbases to reduce vulnerability and force an adversary to expend more missiles. Second, optimise air-defence deployment to compel the PLA Rocket Force to target the air-defences rather than critical infrastructure. Third, strengthen long-range conventional strike capabilities to hold targets in Tibet and Xinjiang at risk, creating reciprocal vulnerability. Finally, expand satellite surveillance to detect mobile launchers, particularly DF-26 systems, improving the chances of early neutralisation.

Context The article argues that China treats conventional missiles as tools of coercion and war-fighting and that India must build a unified, tri-service rocket force under the CDS.

Facts

China's hypersonics can strike deeper with no launch warning and India has no reliable defence against them.

India's missile programmes face cost overruns & delays, with gaps in advanced air-propulsion, semiconductors & high-grade materials.

Analytical Crux

China can hold India's heartland at risk with conventional missiles, while India can barely reach across the Himalayas. The fix is not just more missiles but a doctrinal shift, from pure deterrence to credible mutual vulnerability, carried by one tri-service rocket force under the CDS that can strike deep into Tibet and Xinjiang. Geography drives the technology because India fires "over" the Himalayas and China fires "down" from the plateau, warning time collapses, which is why hypersonics and real time targeting are the true gaps.

Verbatim Quotes

"While India views conventional missiles primarily as deterrents, China sees them as instruments of both political coercion and war-fighting."

- Harinder Singh

Next UN chief's job- keep conversations alive

Next UN chief's job: Keep conversations alive when others stop talking

DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD, the United Nations' second secretary-general, once offered what remains perhaps the clearest statement of the organisation's purpose. The UN, he said, "was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell". The remark reflected the hard lessons of the first half of the 20th century, when two world wars, genocide, imperial conquest and the horrors of the Holocaust and Hiroshima devastated much of the globe. The UN was never intended to create a perfect international order; it was designed to prevent the recurrence of such catastrophes. Eighty years after its founding, that mission looks increasingly precarious.

Armed conflicts are multiplying. Nuclear risks have returned to strategic calculations. International law is under pressure, while the Security Council, the world's principal instrument of collective security, is frequently paralysed by the rival interests of its permanent members. When cooperation is most needed, faith in multilateralism is ebbing as great-power rivalry thrives. Against this backdrop, the race to succeed António Guterres, whose term ends in December 2026, has assumed unusual significance. The next secretary-general will inherit what has often been described as the "most impossible job" on Earth. Yet there are moments when impossible jobs matter most.

The next UN chief will take office as the restraints that have helped contain international rivalry since 1945 visibly weaken. For all its shortcomings, the post-war order achieved something remarkable: It prevented World War III. Proxy wars, regional conflicts and repeated crises occurred, but direct military confrontation between the major powers was avoided. Colonial empires disappeared, dozens of new nations emerged, and institutions of international

cooperation often prevented local conflicts from becoming global disasters. Today, those achievements are under strain. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the devastation in Gaza, widening conflicts across West Asia, tensions in the South China Sea and the erosion of arms-control agreements all point to a world more willing to rely on force and coercion. Many smaller countries feel like mere spectators rather than participants in shaping the international order.

It is in moments such as these that the secretary-general's role assumes particular importance. The office's most successful occupants understood that preserving peace required more than administrative competence. Hammarskjöld helped navigate the Suez crisis and transformed peace-keeping into a practical instrument of conflict management. U Thant quietly created diplomatic space during the Cuban missile crisis, while Javier Pérez de Cuéllar helped broker settlements from Afghanistan to Central America and contributed to the Cold War's peaceful conclusion. Kofi Annan became a moral voice for peace and humanity and was widely described as the "secular Pope". Their influence rested not on formal authority but on credibility, discretion and the ability to help governments change course without appearing to surrender. That tradition has faded.

The secretary-general still commands a global platform unmatched by most political leaders. Yet the office has become increasingly cautious in using that authority. When governments hesitate to speak uncomfortable truths, excessive caution carries its own risks. The next secretary-general should not merely respond to crises but identify dangers before they erupt. Too often, the international community mobilises only after violence and humanitarian disasters have



SHASHI THAROOR



E D MATHIEW

The next UN secretary-general will take office as the restraints that have helped contain international rivalry since 1945 visibly weaken

escalated. The most immediate challenge is the widening gulf among the major powers. Relations between the US, China and Russia have deteriorated sharply. The office requires someone capable of combining public candour with private persuasion. Its greatest asset may be the ability to keep conversations alive when others stop talking.

Recent setbacks in negotiations on nuclear disarmament, pandemic preparedness and plastic pollution illustrate a broader problem. International negotiations now struggle to move beyond entrenched positions. Diplomatic breakthroughs rarely occur by accident. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Paris climate agreement emerged through painstaking negotiations that uncovered common ground despite profound differences. The UN should invest more in mediation, negotiation support and conflict-resolution capacity.

The organisation also faces a legitimacy crisis. Across much of the Global South, governments believe the international system applies its principles inconsistently. Frustration over Security Council reform has accumulated for decades, while institutions designed in 1945 continue to reflect a world that no longer exists. Whether the next secretary-general comes from Latin America or the Caribbean, whose turn it is under the informal regional rotation, geography alone will not solve that problem. What matters is whether the office becomes a persistent advocate for a more representative international order.

The UN must also adapt to a changing landscape in which cities, universities, philanthropic foundations, civil-society organisations and private-sector actors possess capabilities once associated almost exclusively with states. During periods of govern-

mental deadlock, these networks often remain capable of advancing cooperation. Perhaps the greatest challenge lies not within institutions but in political culture. The generation that experienced world war, genocide and nuclear brinkmanship required little persuasion about the consequences of international failure. Today's leaders are more distant from those experiences, even as many of the dangers that inspired the UN's creation have returned.

The next secretary-general cannot restore the UN's relevance alone. But the office can remind governments and the public that multilateralism is not idealism but a practical necessity. Climate change, pandemics, mass displacement, cyber insecurity and nuclear proliferation do not respect borders. As Kofi Annan observed, they are "problems without passports". The next secretary-general will inherit an organisation under financial pressure, confronting geopolitical fragmentation and facing widespread scepticism about its effectiveness. Yet the history of the UN offers a paradox. The organisation has seldom been most valuable when relations among states were harmonious. Its greatest contributions often came during periods of intense division, when channels of communication were scarce, and mistrust was abundant.

The secretary-general cannot end wars by decree or reshape international politics alone. What the office can do is create opportunities for diplomacy, preserve lines of communication and expand the political space in which compromise becomes feasible. The job remains impossible. The alternative, however, is a world in which nobody is left trying to save humanity from hell.

Tharoor, MP, served the UN from 1978 to 2007. He was India's candidate for secretary-general in 2006, and came second out of seven candidates. Mathew is a former UN spokesperson.

Context

As the race to succeed UN secretary-General heats up, the article argues that the world's "most impossible job" matters most precisely now.

Facts

Guterres's term ends December 2026: by regional rotation it is Latin America / Caribbean's turn.

The UN faces a legitimacy crisis, especially across the Global South, with frustration over UNSC reforms.

The post 1945 order's biggest success was preventing World War III.

Analytical Crux

The UN was never built to deliver a perfect world, only to prevent the worst and its quietest instrument is the Secretary General's ability to keep adversaries talking. The UN has been most valuable not in calm times but in periods of deep division, when communication is scarce and mistrust is high. Its slipping legitimacy is tied to two things - a frozen council still mirroring 1945, and a Global South that feels the rules are applied selectively. The office cannot end war by decree, but it can widen the space when compromise is still possible.

Verbatim Quotes

"The UN was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell."

- Dag Hammarskjöld

"The alternative however is a world in which nobody is left trying to save humanity."

- Shashi Tharoor & ED Mathew

PSIR PAPER II, 2025: 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.

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

GS PAPER III, 2025: What are the challenges before the Indian economy when the world is moving away from free trade and multilateralism to protectionism and bilateralism? How can these challenges be met?

GS PAPER III, 2025: India aims to become a semiconductor manufacturing hub. What are the challenges faced by the semiconductor industry in India? Mention the salient features of the India Semiconductor Mission

GS PAPER II, 2024: 'The West is fostering India as an alternative to reduce dependence on China's supply chain and as a strategic ally to counter China's political and economic dominance.' Explain this statement with examples

PSIR PAPER II, 2023: What diplomatic steps has India taken to articulate the interests of the Global South in International Politics?

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