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The Transatlantic Alliance Can't Survive Without Trust

Washington Dismisses NATO's Value at Its Own Peril

WOLFGANG ISCHINGER

July 6, 2026



WOLFGANG ISCHINGER is Chairman of the Munich Security Conference. He previously served as State Secretary of the German Foreign Office and German Ambassador to the United States.

[More by Wolfgang Ischinger](#) →

Context Trump administration's unilateralism has opened a crisis of trust inside NATO that could push a newly capable Europe away from Washington.

Facts

■ All NATO members: met 2% of GDP defence target by 2025.

■ European allies & Canada: account for 40% of NATO's total defence spending.

■ European NATO members sourced: 51% of their military equipment from the US between 2022 and 2024.

Analytical Crux

The 30 years Washington pushed Europe to carry more of NATO's weight but the threat to the alliance comes from US unpredictability rather than European weakness. Trust, not troop numbers, has become the scarce commodity. Sidelining Europe on Ukraine & Iran, threatening Greenland & announcing troop cuts as punishment have turned a dependent ally into a wary one. The alliances rest on credible commitment and shared decision making. The moment a security guarantor looks transactional, allies begin to hedge towards autonomy or towards Beijing and Moscow.

Verbatim Quotes

"For decades, US complained the Europe was not doing enough. Now that Europe is finally doing more, the question is whether American leaders recognize this."

From the Iran conflict, 4 geopolitical shifts India cannot afford to miss

From the Iran conflict, four geopolitical shifts India cannot afford to miss



OVER THE BARREL
BY VIKRAM S MEHTA

THE FOG of conflict in the Middle East has lifted somewhat, and one can now discern the geo-economic and geopolitical changes it has wrought. Whether these changes dissolve over time and conditions revert to the status quo ante February 28, the day American bombers took out the leadership of Iran, or calcify into an invariant structural shift remains to be seen. Irrespective, petroleum-import-dependent countries like India should factor these changes into their discussions on energy and national security.

In this article, I identify four such changes.

First, diminishing confidence in America as a guarantor of security. Other than the most hardened MAGA acolyte, everyone agrees that America was worsted by Iran in this conflict. It failed to achieve any of its stated objectives (regime change, elimination/dilution of Iran's cache of weapons-grade uranium and degradation of Iran as a regional power) despite, according to its Central Command, American bombers flying 10,000 sorties, hitting 1,30,000 targets inside Iran, destroying 85 per cent of Iran's missile manufacturing capabilities and 70 per cent of its missile launch infrastructure and sinking most of its navy between February 28 and April 8, the date of the first ceasefire.

Moreover, America failed to protect its Gulf allies from Iranian missiles and drones. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait all suffered physical and economic damage during the conflict. These countries had permitted America to establish military bases in their territory in exchange for the assurance of such protection. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio recently toured the region to smooth ruffled feathers, but more than anything he may have said, I suspect it was the words of his predecessor, Henry Kissinger, that resonated with the Middle East leaders: "It may be dangerous to be America's enemy, but to be America's friend is fatal". This dent in confidence opens up space for non-Western countries to deepen their security relationships in the region and, in particular, creates an opportunity for India's defence-related manufacturing and technology companies to explore mutually beneficial opportunities.

Second, the emergence of "choke points" as a lever of power. The Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 per cent of global oil supplies flow, has long been recognised as a potential source of market disruption, but essentially only in analysis. Conventional wisdom has held that Iran does not have the capability to enforce a shipping blockade. Indeed, the one time it sought to do so in 1988, the US 5th Fleet blew up two Iranian frigates, demolished oil platforms and cleared the sub-sea mines within days. Oil tankers were barely impeded. This wisdom has now been upended. Through a combination of missile threats, attacks by small but fast speed boats and adroit social messaging, Iran did halt shipping traffic. The economic and political impact was a

sharp rise in oil prices—it peaked at \$126 per barrel in April, up from \$75 per barrel before the commencement of bombing—imposition of demand-reduction measures across Asia, the drawdown of strategic reserves and a political backlash. One reason President Donald Trump sought peace was concern that the rise in gasoline prices at the US retail forecourt would hurt his party's electoral prospects in the November mid-term elections and render him a lame duck president for the balance of his tenure.

Iran's success in leveraging its geographic position for military advantage has focussed attention on "choke points" as a source of asymmetric technological, competitive and strategic power. The former UK PM, Rishi Sunak, has in an article advised countries/corporates not to seek control over the entirety of an integrated technology value chain but to create a niche position that can give them an "unassailable edge". He cites Arm Holdings, whose chips are in 99 per cent of all smartphones, TSMC, the Taiwanese company that makes 70 per cent of all advanced semiconductor chips, and ASML, the Dutch manufacturer of extreme ultraviolet lithography machines, as successful examples of this approach. He could have added China's dominance of rare earths to this list.

Clearly, not every country/corporate can create such a choke point. Those who cannot must find ways of reducing their vulnerability. The Gulf countries are expanding/building overland pipelines as an alternative export route to the choke point of Hormuz. India can reduce its exposure by expanding the storage capacity for strategic petroleum reserves from the current roughly eight days to at least 30 days, or better still, 60 days.

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Third, OPEC is now a spent cartel. The UAE has left it; several other countries are reportedly on the verge of leaving, and Iran is at military loggerheads with the Arab members. Had anyone asked experts to forecast the price of oil in the event of closure of the Strait of Hormuz, they would have indicated a range between \$150 and \$200 per barrel. In fact, other than the one-day peak of \$126/bbl, prices ranged in the \$90s. The reason for this relatively moderate trajectory was the reduction of imports by China from 11.4 mbd in February to 6.4 mbd in May, the drawdown of strategic reserves by the IFA and increased production from non-OPEC producers. Together, these factors illustrated the cartel's weakening influence.

Finally, the reemergence of Iran as a "responsible" state actor. I am no expert on Iranian politics, but from what I have read, the balance of power in the country is shifting towards leaders who, whilst Islamic, are not radical, nor ideologically driven to defend the principles of the 1979 revolution (notwithstanding the week-long funeral planned for Ayatollah Khamenei). They are technocratic, pragmatic and nationalist. They recognise public discontent cannot be indefinitely contained, and policy focus must now be on economic growth.

India has civilisational connections with Iran. Before the US sanctions, New Delhi received oil supplies from Tehran on superior credit terms. It should support Iran's developmental efforts with technical, manpower and financial assistance. This will not only strengthen ties but also enhance the probability of preferential access to energy.

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Context Reading the Iran conflict, a dented US security umbrella, the rise of "chokepoints" as a lever of power, the decline of oil cartel — India must act on them to protect its energy security.

Facts

■ The Strait of Hormuz : 20% of global oil supplies.

■ OPEC is fracturing : UAE has left, others on the verge and Iran is at military loggerheads with Arab members.

■ Gulf states facing physical and economic damage : Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait.

Analytical Crux

The power in West Asia is moving from raw military presence to control over geography and value chains. Iran lost the war but by threatening one chokepoint, moved oil markets and shaped a US president's calculations. The US umbrella over the Gulf looks conditional, which opens space for Indian defence and technology partnerships. The argument is that a country either builds a chokepoint of its own, as Taiwan did with chips, or deliberately cuts its exposure through larger reserves & diversified routes. New Delhi has an opportunity to turn the crisis into preferential energy access if it moves with technical & financial support rather than waiting on events.

Verbatim Quotes

"Iran's success in leveraging its geographic position for military advantage has focused attention on 'choke points' as a source of asymmetric technological, competitive and strategic power."

— Vikram S. Mehta

The right to belong beyond official documentation

The right to belong beyond official documentation

On June 24, 2026, a member of India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) released a startling statement. The Indian passport, the person said, is a "travel document" and not a "citizenship document". The assertion set off a minor storm. The reasonable question that followed from many was if the passport would not do it, what document would?

Posed this way, the MEA's statement and the questions it raises become something of a red herring. A passport can only be issued to a non-citizen in exceptional circumstances, where the Government of India is of the opinion that it is necessary to do so in "public interest". Surely, therefore, barring those cases where this power is exercised, a passport must be seen as conclusive proof of a person's citizenship.

No doubt, it might be open for the government to establish under law that a person obtained the document by concealing the true status of his or her citizenship. But that does not mean a passport can be dismissed as merely a travel document.

Citizenship under scrutiny

The MEA's statement takes on an ominous heft when set against the milieu in which it was made. It arrives in the middle of the Election Commission of India (ECI)'s Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in various States.

It also comes in the wake of a pair of pronouncements by the Supreme Court of India, most recently on the validity of the SIR in Bihar and the ECI's power to scrutinise citizenship, and, before that, on the Assam Accord, in which the Court had much to say on how it conceives republican ideas of citizenship. Moreover, since an amendment to the Citizenship Act in 2019 (made operational in 2024), rules of naturalisation have been rewritten along religious lines. Taken together, all these developments must prompt us to ask an elementary question: what does it mean to be a citizen of India, who belongs, and on what terms?

The Constitution's answers to these questions, even if some find them indecisive, were reached with some amount of care and caution. Part II to the document, comprising Articles 5 to 11, settled the citizenship of those caught amidst the tragedies of Partition. Article 11 reserved to Parliament a seemingly plenary power to legislate and "make any provision with respect to the acquisition and termination of citizenship and all other matters relating to citizenship".

On a plain and literal reading, it might seem like the Union legislature was accorded unlimited authority to determine what factors can govern citizenship. Indeed, much of the contemporary defence of religiously founded citizenship laws



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has rested on such an interpretation. But a careful construal of the Constituent Assembly debates, as Gautam Bhatia has shown, suggests that the framers did not treat citizenship as a matter on which Parliament could do as it pleased.

The foundations of citizenship

Consider, for example, an amendment moved to the draft provisions of the Constitution by P.S. Deshmukh. He sought to include an express stipulation "that every person who is a Hindu or a Sikh by religion and is not a citizen of any other State, wherever he resides shall be entitled to be a citizen of India". The effort was met with sharp resistance. Among those opposing the move was Jawaharlal Nehru, who rejected the amendment outright, finding it "absurd on the face of it".

Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar provided the most forthright response to it. He argued that India was pledged to the principles of a secular state. Therefore, there was simply no question of making a distinction between one kind of person and another on any "racial or religious" ground. Ultimately, Deshmukh's proposal was defeated, and B.R. Ambedkar's neutral citizenship clause was affirmed.

Thus, freestanding as the words in Article 11 might be, they must be understood in the context of their wider framing. They have in them an implied limitation drawn from the Constitution's most cherished and foundational commitments to secularism, equality, and non-discrimination. Parliament can decide the modalities of citizenship, but it cannot make religion a condition for entry.

At its conception, India adopted the principle of *jus soli*, that is a form of citizenship predicated on residence and birth. The Citizenship Act, 1955, saw the principle as its primary governing creed. But over time, the legislature moved away from the theory. First, in 1985, Section 6A was introduced into the Act to give effect to the Assam Accord, suspending the conferment of citizenship based on the dates on which people of "Indian origin" had come into India. Second, in 2003, the statute was further amended to deny citizenship to persons born in India even when only one of the parents of such person was an "illegal migrant".

In upholding Section 6A, the Supreme Court in October 2024, appeared to fortify two principles. It effectively saw no implied limitation in Article 11 and instead viewed the grant of power to Parliament to be virtually unlimited. It also appeared to lend constitutional respectability to an idea first promulgated by it in *Sarbananda Sonowal vs Union Of India & Anr.* (2005), that migration into Assam constituted "external aggression" against the State.

This rationale carried into its judgment in *Association for Democratic Reforms vs Union of India*, delivered in May this year, where the Court upheld the SIR exercise in Bihar, holding that the ECI may enquire into a person's citizenship, for the "limited" purpose of deciding eligibility for the electoral roll. The Court described the distinction it drew as "principled", between an adjudication on citizenship and on the administrative satisfaction concerning the continuation of a person's name on the electoral roll. Where the ECI is not satisfied with a person's assertion of citizenship, it ought simply to refer the case to the "competent authority" under the Citizenship Act.

But we have been down this road before. In Assam, during an earlier revision, voters marked "doubtful" were despatched to foreigners' tribunals and consigned to an endless bureaucratic maze to establish their citizenship. Today, therefore, we have ourselves a machinery in which a person need not be declared as a foreigner to be stripped of their basic rights. Instead, they are placed in a vacuum, neither confirmed nor cleared, with their rights being held in indefinite suspension.

Against this backdrop the MEA's clarification appears menacing. Running through all these exercises to establish citizenship is a common thread over the burden of proof. Where a resident could once rely on the state to take their citizenship as given, the onus today has been quietly shifted onto them. Almost any document adduced is seen as inadequate evidence. The Aadhaar card, we are told, is proof only of residence; the voter ID, only of prior registration; and now the passport, only of a right to travel.

The primacy of personhood

Under the Constitution, many of our basic privileges are premised on personhood. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law to "any person", and Article 21 the right to life and personal liberty to all. Citizenship is built on this foundation. It allows one the freedoms guaranteed under Article 19, to speech and expression, to carry on any trade or business, and to assemble peacefully. And it is the status of citizenship that guarantees one the statutory right to vote, to choose one's lawmakers, and to decide how one ought to be governed. Therefore, to be cast out of the position is to forfeit what Hannah Arendt called the right to have rights.

In a constitutional order where personhood comes first, the rules that determine who qualifies as a citizen must rest on more than the accident of paperwork. They must be built on what the Constitution most cherishes, on the equal dignity of every person and the right of each to equal protection of the law.

Context

Citizenship is being redefined by shifting the burden of proof onto residents. Under a Constitution built on personhood no one's rights can rest on the accident of paperwork.

Facts

Article 11: Parliament's power over "the acquisition and termination of citizenship and all other matters relating to citizenship."

MEA declared: Indian passport is a travel document, not a citizenship document.

India started with *jus soli*, diluted by Section 6A (1985) and 2003 amendment.

Analytical Crux

The burden of proving belonging has shifted from the state onto the individual, no single paper suffices and a person can be left in limbo without being declared a foreigner. The Section 6A ruling, the Bihar SIR judgement, the CAA's religious criteria, the downgrading of the passport drifted away from jus soli towards a proof based exclusionary citizenship. Articles 14 and 21 protect "any person", so rights cannot hang on paperwork, and to lose one's status is, in Arendt's words, to lose "the right to have rights". This is the framing of the secularism-versus-religious-citizenship debate, and of citizenship as belonging rather than documentation.

PSIR Paper II, 2025: "'Trump's return to the White House is a jolt to push the European Union to invest in its own defence and economic and technological revival.' 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?"

PSIR Paper II, 2024: "Do you agree with the view that the USA uses NATO as a traditional tool of strategy to perpetuate its hegemony in the world?"

GS Paper II, 2024: "Discuss India as a secular state and compare it with the secular principles of the US Constitution."

PSIR Paper II, 2023: "Discuss the various constraints on American hegemony today. Which of these are likely to become more prominent in the future?"

GS Paper II, 2023: "'The expansion and strengthening of NATO and a stronger US-Europe strategic partnership works well in India.' What is your opinion about this statement? Give reasons and examples to support your answer."

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