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GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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'Full spectrum of peace agreement, strategic resolution unlikely'



EXPERT EXPLAINS
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LESS THAN 24 hours after the US-Iran ceasefire was greeted with relief, the agreement is tottering, with Israel bombing Lebanon and seemingly no consensus between Tehran and Washington. Both sides, however, are still headed to Islamabad to continue negotiations. In modern conflicts, a ceasefire is more like a pause button and rarely the end point. The current truce is more due to the constraints of both sides rather than any convergence of political objectives. Just like the war demonstrated both sides' differing capabilities and methods, the negotiations are likely to be far from linear.

The divergence

While the US and Israel, with a much

more conventionally powerful military, sought to overwhelm Iran with a rapid, high-intensity bombing campaign and killing of its top leaders, Iran's strategy of asymmetric warfare entailed redundancy, decentralised control and dispersal to engage in a protracted war. By establishing control over the Strait of Hormuz, it gained a major negotiating advantage. Its proxies — Hezbollah in South Lebanon, Houthis in Yemen and fringe 'façade' Shia elements in Iraq — established a perilous escalatory vector, opening multiple fronts and providing Iran strategic depth. Given the asymmetry, the ceasefire is going to be inherently fragile.

What now in ceasefire talks

For Washington, the pause is more tactical in nature, while Tehran seeks to make it into a structural settlement. As of now, Israel is not even a party to the ceasefire. The immediate focus will be on holding the ceasefire, maintaining its sanctity and expanding the scope to the proxies as well. Limited 'Confidence Building Measures' could also be instituted through the intermediaries.

The negotiations following the ceasefire are likely to proceed in a graduated, step-by-step manner, involving tough bargaining marked by deep distrust.

The USA's 15 points and Iran's 10-point proposals will set the framework for the ne-

The divide

- For Washington, the pause is more tactical in nature, while Tehran seeks to make it into a structural settlement

- At best, there could be an interim deal encompassing capping of uranium enrichment, gradual sanctions relief, and a mechanism to restrain proxies

gotiations process to start. The key issues would be Iran's nuclear programme, sanctions relief and regional de-escalations. It's going to be a long-drawn affair. While the US will be insisting on Iran's nuclear roll back and limit its missile capability, Tehran on the other hand will be pushing for security guarantees, besides complete lifting of sanctions.

At best, there could be an interim deal encompassing capping of uranium enrichment, IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) enhanced monitoring, graduated sanctions relief, and an informal mechanism to restrain the proxies.

Geopolitical ramifications

The Iran War has deep geopolitical implications — both regional and global. The ceasefire itself underscores the emergence of a new architecture, driven by middle powers like Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey and Gulf states, instead of the traditional Western-dominated conflict resolution model.

With declining trust in the US as a security guarantor, Gulf states might enter 'minilateral coalitions' with increased defence spending. The Saudi-Pakistan 'Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement' could potentially expand to include Türkiye and Egypt.

China has expanded its diplomatic and technological footprint, offering digital infrastructure as an alternative to the West-

ern system. Hence, US alliance structures in West Asia will come under serious scrutiny. The great Hormuz shock and the fragility of energy hubs like Qatar's Ras Laffan are bound to lead to the development of alternative supply routes to obviate vulnerabilities. In this transition process, India has substantial stakes, beyond energy security, diaspora interests and maritime trade. In fact, India needs to revisit its West Asia engagement strategy and position itself as a proactive voice, particularly as the representative of the global South. Islamabad's central role as an interlocutor, though possibly limited, signals a subtle shift in regional power dynamics — something Delhi cannot ignore.

The way ahead

The current ceasefire provides space for diplomacy, dialogue and de-escalation. The danger lies not in its failure but in overpitching the expectations. The process of negotiations remains vulnerable to risks from spoilers, like the proxies, domestic political pressures and the Israeli security calculus.

A full spectrum of a peace agreement and strategic resolution of the conflict is unlikely even in the distant future. The probable end state may be that of "managed rivalry and confrontation" — reconciliation being a delusion.

GS 3: CLIMATE CHANGE

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● CLIMATE

Global concerns vs national interest: Why India lost interest in hosting COP33

Amitabh Sinha
New Delhi, April 10

IT WAS in December 2023, during COP28 in Dubai, that Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered to host the 2028 edition of the annual climate summit in India.

A public and explicit offer to host a COP meeting, five years in advance, and that too from a head of state, was extremely rare. It was a clear indication that India was looking to play a more active and leading role in international climate affairs. The offer had come just a few months after a successful G20 meeting in New Delhi whose final outcome had important decisions on climate.

But events of the last few years, on the climate front and elsewhere, prompted a rethink. India soon realised that the objectives it had in mind while offering to host the event could not be achieved in this changed situation. India's own positions on climate issues evolved significantly during this time. It became increasingly evident that as host and president of a COP meeting, it would have to champion causes that

could come in conflict with its own stated positions and national interest.

As a result, India has decided to drop this matter and not bid for COP33 when the process begins this year to pick the 2028 host.

India's sharpening positions

India has not spelt out the reasons for this change of mind, but its predicament is not difficult to comprehend. In the last few years, India has been taking unusually strong positions on climate-related matters.

This was prompted by the evolution of global climate negotiations well as a recalibration of India's own perspective. There has been a growing acknowledgment of the fact that the international climate framework, represented by the Paris Agreement, remains heavily stacked against developing countries — particularly a country like India which has a large emission footprint but a compelling need for more carbon space to ensure prosperity to its people. Consequently, in matters of climate and energy, there has been a clear attempt by India in the last few years to prioritise long-term na-

tional interest over global climate concerns.

India even began questioning the very foundations of Paris pact, arguing that pursuing arbitrarily-defined temperature goals (1.5 or 2 degrees Celsius targets) was probably not the best way, and certainly not the only way, to deal with climate change. India has been arguing that rapid development was probably the best insurance against climate change as that would bring in greater resilience to withstand climate impacts.

This approach is at variance with the mainstream, "progressive" position that frames climate change as an existential threat, and wants every country, regardless of their level of development, to prioritise climate action. India, on the other hand, had begun to argue for a development-first approach, hoping to get on a trajectory similar to that of China, which in the last three decades prioritised growth to reach a position from where it can make meaningful contributions on climate without hampering its interests. There is a reason why China, and for that matter US, has never shown any interest in hosting climate meetings.

In the last few years, India has been vocal in articulating its recalibrated positions. It had reacted with uncharacteristic anger at the disappointing outcome on climate finance negotiations at COP29 in 2024. It has been pressing for the full implementation of Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement, a largely overlooked provision that says developed nations "shall provide", not just "mobilise", financial resources for developing countries. On India's insistence, COP30 in Brazil last year was forced to establish a two-year work programme to discuss all pending matters on climate finance, including Article 9.1.

A difficult position

Having taken these positions, it would have been extremely difficult for India to steer the negotiations at COP33. The host and president of the COP meetings is expected to champion the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement, not question its foundations. It is supposed to ensure that COP discussions lead to outcomes that will speed up the rate of emission cuts, not raise doubts over their

usefulness. India feared that taking on that role for COP33 would have required it to prioritise global climate concerns over its own national interests.

This predicament would have been pronounced in COP23 because that meeting is due to carry out the second Global Stocktake (GST) to assess the progress being made on Paris Agreement targets. GST is an important exercise under the Paris Agreement, to be carried out at five-year intervals, to ensure that the world does not lose sight of its goal and adjust the ambition of its climate action to achieve these. Considering that the world is currently nowhere close to the pathway that will achieve the Paris targets, COP33 would need to deliver an outcome that would result in substantial increase in climate ambition, an unlikely scenario.

The IPCC AR7 angle

The under-preparation seventh assessment report (AR7) of the intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) worsened India's predicament. Work on AR7 began last year and it is due to be published

in 2029. But there are demands from some countries to expedite the publication of the report by 2028 itself so that it can feed into the GST process. The assessment reports are the most comprehensive scientific view of the state of global climate and have served as the scientific basis for international climate negotiations from the start.

AR7 is likely to present a grim picture of the state of global climate, and, if published ahead of the GST exercise, could lead to renewed calls for raising of climate ambition. India, along with countries including China, has been opposing the early publication, arguing that many developing countries would have less time to review it.

As host and president of the COP supervising the GST process, it would be difficult for India to oppose the early publication.

Stepping aside would also be a missed opportunity for India to push forward the cause of Global South. But weighed against the prospect of getting boxed in, India thought it prudent to opt out.

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GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Bolstering deterrence through submarine dominance

In April 3, the word 'Aridhaman' found mention in Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's cryptic post on X. This prompted widespread speculation that it signalled the quiet commissioning of INS Aridhaman, the third submarine in the Indian Navy's SSBN (nuclear ballistic missile submarine) programme. Launched in 2009, the Indian Navy commissioned its first SSBN, INS Arihant, in 2016, followed by the second submarine, INS Arighat, in 2024. Speculation about the commissioning of INS Aridhaman assumed momentum since last year after Admiral Dinesh Tripathi, Chief of Naval Staff, confirmed that the submarine was in the final stages of its trials. The next submarine in this series, which is of the Arihant class as well, is likely to be commissioned next year.

Compared to its predecessors, INS Arihant and INS Arighat, INS Aridhaman has greater firing power and marks a gradual upgrade in the series of SSBNs commissioned by the Indian Navy. It is a larger 7000-tonne vessel, which can reportedly carry up to 24 K-15 Sagatika missiles, and up to eight nuclear-tipped K-4 or K-5 missiles. In contrast, the previous submarines in this series hold the capacity for carrying 12 K-15 Sagatika missiles and four K-4 missiles.

Through the commissioning of INS Aridhaman, India appears to have further emboldened its nuclear triad, which refers to New Delhi's capability to launch strategic nuclear delivery systems from land, sea, and air. Importantly, apart from India, the P5 countries - the U.S., Russia, China, France and the U.K. - possess the nuclear triad capabilities. In addition to this, the commissioning of the submarine further enhances India's deterrence capabilities in the maritime domain. Strengthening of



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Given the changing nature of warfare, it is essential to strengthen deterrence capabilities across land, air, and sea

sea-based deterrence is seen as especially critical, given that it has rapidly emerged as a key imperative in bolstering India's nuclear capabilities. To be sure, India's nuclear outlook is anchored on its 'no first use' policy. However, the strategic environment in the Indian Ocean is continually worsening, led by increasing Chinese presence in the region by way of research and survey vessels which possess dual-use technologies and run the risk of being deployed for the purpose of intelligence gathering. Sea-based deterrence is indeed critical to forestall adversarial manoeuvres by China and even Pakistan.

Notably, the Indian Ocean has for long remained dormant due to the lack of any significant maritime security conflict. However, in today's time, the changing nature of warfare, which possesses the possibility of swift transition from one domain to the other, makes it essential to strengthen deterrence capabilities across all domains - land, air, and sea. More recently, the evolving conflict in West Asia serves as a crucial reminder of how modern warfare is not limited to a single domain anymore. What started as American and Israeli air campaigns against Iran has quickly assumed a critical maritime character, whereby the Strait of Hormuz has now emerged as the epicentre shaping much of the future of this war. Furthermore, last year, Operation Sindoor, India's measured counter-terror response against Pakistan, too demonstrated that a naval dimension to the campaign could have indeed been a possibility. Wars in this era do not belong with different domains in silos but rather remain susceptible to spilling over to other domains as well. This complexity of modern warfare underlines why

possessing nuclear triad capabilities, especially boosting deterrence, will continue to remain a key priority for India's national security apparatus.

Furthermore, the SSBN project has significantly boosted India's defence establishment's quest for self-reliance in defence production. With active conflicts persisting in different strategic pockets of the world, a strain in defence supply chains appears to be on the horizon. For India, the prolonged Russia-Ukraine war has spurred momentum in strategies to work towards self-reliance in defence production given Moscow's importance for India as a traditional defence partner.

In addition to this, plans to soon induct a fourth vessel of the Arihant class is likely to guide India's SSBN programme going forward. Importantly, New Delhi also seeks to commission India's first fully indigenously designed nuclear attack submarine (SSN) by 2036, with the commissioning of the second in the programme in 2038. The rapid strides taken by the Indian Navy is building its nuclear-powered submarine programme signals that submarine dominance is fast emerging as a key component in scripting New Delhi's strategy to bolster deterrence.

Going forward, the key challenges confronting the Indian Navy in this domain are likely going to emanate from how efficiently New Delhi balances spending its resources on upgrading its submarines programme with how it inducts new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and autonomous systems in design and production of these vessels. At a time when the roster of the Indian Navy's assets is continually compared with that of China, it will be critical for New Delhi to keep pace with Beijing.