INDIA AT SCO

At the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SC) meeting in Bishkek, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's speech must have cleared a lot of cobwebs about India targeting selected Pakistani places during the Operation Sindoor. Singh vehemently said India doesn't believe any religion is behind terrorism or a single religion is to be blamed for terrorism. He said this while explaining how the trend of state-sponsored terrorism was detrimental to peace and jeopardized the lives of citizens. On his target was Pakistan which got a taste of India's intolerance of terrorism emanating from its soil with the full backing of the state. Singh said India opposes all forms of oppression by a powerful entity against a less powerful one and feels the most for those who helplessly become victims of proxy wars and state sponsored terrorism. Indi hit Pakistan to give justice to the people who became victims of terror sponsored by it. India called for a global consensus against state sponsored terrorism and proxy wars. Though all wars bring misery to humankind but at least in a conventional war, the enemy is identifiable and accountable to the world bodies and its people for its actions. In proxy wars the real enemy is the state which props up agents and mercenaries to fight it out with its enemy through acts of terrorism. The latter is more lethal and difficult to handle and the nation states must unite against such tactics.

He made it clear that attacking terror breeding seminaries and schools and recruitment centers of terrorism inside Pakistan under Operation Sindoor a year ago, was aimed at nipped the bud. India simply wanted to eliminate the source of terrorism and send a signal to Islamabad that it has to face serious repercussions for proxy war it has waged against India for over three decades. Interestingly, the SCO was setup as a anti-terrorism body in which the nation states would share concerns of cross border and other forms of terrorism and intelligence.

Tehran was never the point & the map that still burns

Waiel Awwad

In moments of heightened crisis, great powers often fall prey to a familiar illusion: the belief that force can impose order on complexity. Today, as tensions between the United States and Iran continue to simmer, that illusion is once again shaping strategic thinking in ways that risk destabilising not only the Middle East, but the international system itself. Regardless of intention, the elimination of Iranian state capacity produces consequences that align with long-standing US strategic interests-BRI disruption, INSTC collapse, dollar hegemony reinforcement, Russia-China exposure. These consequences are real whether Washington planned them or not. What we are witnessing is not the calculated aggression of a collapsing empire, nor a coherent grand strategy aimed at reshaping the global order through a single decisive war. It is something more unsettling: a world in transition, where power is diffuse, rivalries overlap, and traditional instruments of control are increasingly ill-suited to the complexity they seek to manage. The United States remains, by any meaningful measure, the world's most formidable military and financial power. Its global reach is unmatched; its alliances extensive. Yet power today no longer guarantees control. The post-Cold War moment of unchallenged primacy has given way to a far more contested landscape.

China has emerged as a systemic economic and technological competitor, while Russia continues to assert itself as a disruptive geopolitical force. In such an environment, the temptation to act decisively is understandable. But here lies the paradox: the ability to strike is not the same as the ability to shape outcomes. The capacity to destroy does not confer the power to rebuild-or to control what follows. Iran embodies this paradox. It is not a conventional great power, yet it is far from weak. Its strength lies in networks, alliances, and asymmetric strategies that defy traditional military calculations. To imagine that it can be "obliterated" as a strategic actor is to misunderstand both the nature of the Iranian state and the dynamics of the region it inhabits. The Middle East is not a vacuum. It is a dense web of political, sectarian, and strategic relationships, where the collapse of one node reverberates across many others. It would radiate outwards-into Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Gulf-activating a complex ecosystem of state and non-state actors whose interests are deeply intertwined with Tehran's. The economic shock would be immediate. The Strait of Hormuz, through which a significant share of global energy flows, would become a flashpoint. Even the perception of risk in this narrow corridor would send shockwaves through global markets, driving up energy prices, disrupting supply chains, and amplifying inflationary pressures worldwide. For much of the developing world, the consequences would be severe and immediate. Rising fuel costs would strain already fragile economies, while disruptions in fertiliser and food supply chains could undermine agricultural stability. These are not abstract risks-they translate into real human hardship. Yet the most profound consequences may be strategic.

A large-scale confrontation with Iran would unfold within a broader geopolitical contest. For China and Russia, such a conflict would present both opportunity and narrative: an opportunity to expand influence in a distracted global environment, and a narrative reinforcing perceptions of Western unilateralism and instability. Far from restoring American primacy, such a scenario could accelerate its erosion. This does not mean the world is on the brink of a third world war. Structural realities still act as a brake on direct great-power confrontation. Neither China nor Russia has an interest in entering a full-scale war with the United States over Iran. The costs would be prohibitive; the outcomes uncertain. But the absence of global war does not imply stability. What is emerging instead is the normalisation of what might be called "dirty wars" — prolonged, ambiguous conflicts fought through proxies, economic pressure, cyber operations, and information warfare. These conflicts blur the line between war and peace, erode norms, and create conditions for incremental escalation without clear thresholds. The Middle East has become a central arena for such dynamics. The wars in Iraq and Syria have already demonstrated the limits of military intervention in producing stable outcomes.

To repeat this pattern on a larger scale would not signal strength. It would reveal strategic stagnation. This brings us to a critical question: is the United States still acting as though it is the sole superpower? In rhetoric, perhaps. In reality, increasingly less so. The constraints it faces-economic, political, and strategic-are real. Recognising them is not a sign of weakness, but of adaptation. The era in which dominance could be imposed through force alone has passed. What is required now is a recalibration-one that prioritises stability over spectacle, and long-term outcomes over short-term demonstrations of power. For Iran, this means acknowledging that its own strategies of influence and asymmetry carry risks not only for its adversaries, but for the region as a whole.

For the United States, it means recognising that the pursuit of absolute dominance in a multipolar world is not only unrealistic, but counterproductive. The alternative is not victory. It is entanglement. History offers a sobering lesson: great powers rarely collapse through decisive defeat. More often, they erode through overextension-trapped in conflicts that drain resources without delivering resolution. The real danger, therefore, is not a single catastrophic war, but a series of prolonged engagements that cumulatively weaken strategic position. We are entering an era defined not by decisive victories, but by persistent instability-where crises are continuous, resolutions elusive, and the line between competition and conflict increasingly blurred. Avoiding this trajectory requires restraint, diplomacy, and strategic clarity. It requires acknowledging a fundamental truth: The destruction of a civilisation is not a strategy. It is a failure of imagination. Iran, with its deep historical roots and complex societal fabric, cannot be reduced to a target. Nor can the Middle East be reshaped through force without consequence. The belief that such actions could pave the way for confronting other global powers is not only flawed-it is dangerously detached from the realities of interdependence that define today's world. The war on Iran is a structural intervention-whether consciously Mackinderian or not-whose intended consequence is the disruption of the Eurasian connectivity architecture, and whose unintended consequence is the acceleration of the very axis consolidation it sought to prevent. It is not the opening move in a planned confrontation with China and Russia. It is the opening of a window of maximum vulnerability during which that confrontation becomes more likely-initiated not by Washington, but by Beijing. And that choice, like the currents that pass through the Strait of Hormuz, cannot be deferred indefinitely.

{The writer is Senior International Journalist and a West Asia Strategist; Views presented are personal.}

WHAT HAS GOD PLANNED FOR US?

Ajit Kumar Bishnoi

These are the basic facts. There is one God; there has been one, and there will continue to be one God eternally. The same is true about us souls-there are many of us. We are small, which was necessary for co-existence. Another necessity was to be given free will; otherwise, we would not have individuality. However, this free will has been limited to desire and decision.

Souls can only desire whatever they choose, but physical acts are required to be given shape by either God or material nature. The example is of wanting to eat a certain fruit; one has to obtain it. This is provided by material nature. In the case of God, He simply makes it happen like a miracle through His 'ichcha shakti' (divine willpower).

A soul has the freedom to choose either of them. Most people, knowingly or unknowingly, choose material nature alone, with its limitations. For example, a person desires a house to live in, but material nature will provide it only if he is deserving of owning it. To understand this phenomenon, we must refer to the 'karmaphala principle', which states: "What you sow is what you reap." I am referring to what we deserve based on acts done earlier, mostly in past lives. Present acts mostly contribute to future lives. This may appear quite unjust, because present acts should not take so long as the next life to bear fruit. There is a way out: choose God as the 'karta' (doer) in your life. Perfect! He can perform miracles.

Then why do most people not take this option? They do not, for many reasons; the most common is material consciousness-assuming oneself to be a material body. Due to this identification, the mind takes control, and this faculty given to us to connect with God is constantly trying to satisfy the senses.

And the senses are never satisfied; such is their nature. The free will given to us is misunderstood as complete freedom, which it was never intended to be. Wise persons see through all this and take shelter in God in baby steps.

The moment one has such an intention, God is interested. Is He not the whole, and we but parts? (The Bhagavad Gita 15.7) God has praised four types of devotees-those who take His shelter. God is also ready to take our responsibility if we remain in His shelter, having begun on this path.

He helps to control the mind by providing spiritual intelligence (10.10). God, and only God, has the power to change our fate and, most importantly, our nature, which is the cause of most of our present woes. God does not stop there; He grants supreme peace (18.62), which we all crave but never achieve on our own.

I can go on about God's 'kripa' (grace); He even liberates (18.66) us from the painful cycle of birth and death in material bodies. Thankfully, I have begun this journey, and I am enjoying the experience.

The writer is a spiritual teacher and a popular columnist; Views presented are personal.

India's space race heats up: New venture from Hyderabad signals next big leap

Sayan Chatterjee

India's space economy is moving into a decisive phase—defined by scale, speed, and growing global ambition. Over the years, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has launched more than 430 foreign satellites, steadily building a reputation for cost-efficient and reliable missions. What began as a largely scientific pursuit is now evolving into a commercially competitive space programme, at a time when the global space economy is projected to cross the $1 trillion mark by 2040.

This shift is unfolding against a rapidly changing global backdrop. The rise of reusable launch technologies, led by SpaceX, has dramatically lowered costs and turnaround times, forcing spacefaring nations to rethink their strategies. India, however, appears to be keeping pace. High-profile missions such as Chandrayaan, along with record-setting multi-satellite launches and a steadily growing private ecosystem, point to a clear strategic pivot—one that aims to capture a larger share of the global launch and satellite services market.

Demand is surging across sectors, from broadband connectivity and earth observation to defence-linked space infrastructure. In this environment, India's combination of affordability, reliability, and a more open policy framework is increasingly positioning it as a serious contender on the global stage.

At this crucial juncture, defence-linked sources suggest that India could soon witness another milestone. By May 2026, the country may see the rollout of its first full-stack private aerospace venture by the name of Astramile Aerospace. The proposed venture brings together a diverse founding team—an Indian Army veteran, former scientists from the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) & ISRO and Hyderabad-based entrepreneur Neetu Malhotra. If realised as planned, the company could mark a significant step forward in India's private participation in the space sector.

Astramile Aerospace is expected to position itself alongside existing players like Skyroot Aerospace and Agnikul Cosmos, while seeking to distinguish itself through a fully integrated, end-to-end aerospace model. Unlike many startups that focus on a single segment, the company is reportedly aiming to combine launch capabilities with satellite manufacturing under one umbrella.

According to sources familiar with the plans, the venture is working on both nano and micro satellite platforms. Nano satellites in the 10–50 kg range and micro satellites between 100–500 kg are expected to serve a wide spectrum of applications, including earth observation, telecommunications, agriculture, and defence.

To support this, the company is setting up a state-of-the-art cleanroom facility for precision manufacturing, alongside advanced vibration and thermal vacuum testing systems required for space-grade qualification. The broader manufacturing ecosystem is being designed to handle the entire lifecycle—from assembly and calibration to final flight readiness—effectively creating a vertically integrated operation across both payloads and launch systems.

On the propulsion front, Astramile is planning near-term testing of a reusable semi-cryogenic engine-based launch vehicle to insert small satellites weighing between 800 to 1000 kilograms into the Lower Earth Orbit (LEO). This platform is expected to eventually support deep-space missions. Notably, around 80% of the venture's components are expected to be indigenously sourced, aligning closely with India's push for self-reliance under Hon PM's initiative of Atma Nirbhar Bharat and Make in India.

Headquartered in Hyderabad, the company is also planning a 100-acre integrated aerospace campus in Andhra Pradesh. The facility is expected to house design, R&D, and manufacturing operations, with a strong emphasis on sustainability—ranging from renewable solar energy use to zero liquid discharge systems and closed-loop water management.

Currently self-funded, Astramile Aerospace is in the process of raising seed or Series A round. Its roadmap outlines a phased investment strategy leading up to its first launch, tentatively in 2029. In the longer term, the company is targeting over 10 orbital launches annually, scaling satellite production to as many as 25–30 units per year, and expanding into global markets.

Going by the current plans, Astramile Aerospace is likely to become a key player in India's evolving space ecosystem—at a time when the country is not just participating in the global space race, but steadily working to shape it. *(The author is a Delhi-based independent contributor to print and online publications; Views presented are personal.)*