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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS



MAY 1

1. Abu Dhabi exits OPEC for an ascent of 'peak oil' (THE HINDU)
2. War against British colonialism began long before 1857 (HINDUSTAN TIMES)
3. Why small is beautiful in the Himalayan landscape (HINDUSTAN TIMES)
4. Iran war leaves India with few good choices (BUSINESS STANDARD)



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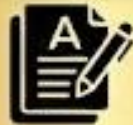
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Abu Dhabi exits OPEC for an ascent of 'peak oil'

Although in recent years the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has frequently threatened to leave the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), its actual announcement, on April 28, took observers by surprise. It was also conspicuous in its context. It provided only three days' notice for exit from OPEC and OPEC+ on May 1, just five days before the next OPEC meeting. The decision was also counterintuitive to the ongoing double blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, staunching oil exports of the UAE and other Gulf states.

A subsequent Emirati official statement was elaborate but elliptical. It sought to both rationalise the decision aimed at pursuing national interest and reassure the stakeholders of its continued intention "to contribute to stability (of the oil market) in a measured and responsible manner", promising "to bring additional production to market in a gradual and measured manner".

These anodyne references prompt the analysts to look deeper to fathom the real reasons for the Emirati step and assess its impact on the global market.

The UAE's grouse

The UAE's oil and gas reserves, estimated at 113 billion barrels, are the world's sixth largest. These are almost exclusively in the Abu Dhabi emirate. The UAE has a \$150 billion investment plan (2023-27) to raise its oil production capacity to five million barrels per day (mbpd). However, its OPEC production quota is limited to 3.45 mbpd, leaving it with nearly 1.5 mbpd unutilised spare capacity. This has been a source of the UAE's grouse against OPEC, which is perceived to operate under Saudi hegemony. Riyadh, as OPEC's 'swing producer', often trims its oil



Mahesh Sachdev

Retired Indian
Ambassador with an
interest in West Asia
and oil matters

The UAE's exit
marks a
potential turning
point for global
oil governance

production to absorb the global oil glut; it resists Abu Dhabi's pressure for a larger OPEC quota. The UAE's ambitious plans for a post-oil advanced technologies-based economy require mega-investments in Artificial Intelligence, and data centres, ironically, requiring higher oil revenues.

War's impact

Over the long run, Emirati strategists believe that global oil demand is approaching a "Peak Oil" moment after which crude requirement and unit value would begin their decline. Consequently, they wish to sell as much oil as possible before the "Peak Oil". They contend that the Iran war brings "Peak Oil" even closer by causing an unsustainable surge in oil prices, destroying the demand and accelerating the shift towards alternative fuels. In the short run, the UAE wishes to take advantage of the current higher oil prices. With the 1.5 mbpd Abu Dhabi (Habshan)-Fujairah oil pipeline already operational outside the Strait of Hormuz, the UAE is well placed to do so. By quitting OPEC, Abu Dhabi has unfettered itself from any quota restrictions in anticipation of a scramble among the Gulf exporters for greater market share once the two blockades on the Strait of Hormuz are lifted.

The Emirati statement conspicuously omits the Gulf geopolitics, the 640-pound gorilla in the room. Iran hurled over 2,200 drones and missiles at the UAE during the war as retribution for its strategic ties with Israel. Separately, during the past decade, the barely concealed political and economic rivalry between Saudi Arabia and the UAE has reached a crescendo. It is hardly coincidental that the UAE's OPEC exit announcement was timed with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Consultative Summit,

in Jeddah, on the Iran war, where the UAE was under-represented by its Foreign Minister. The move was widely interpreted as Abu Dhabi flaunting its regional autonomy of action to the GCC states and Iran. By ditching OPEC, the UAE, apparently, aims to steal a march over Iran and Saudi Arabia, both OPEC members, for Asia's very large and thirsty crude markets. The move may also favour U.S. President Donald Trump, who desperately needs lower oil prices before the mid-term Congressional elections. At a wider ambit, this may be the opening overture of the UAE openly pursuing a more nationalistic foreign policy. Most observers believe that the exit of the UAE, OPEC's third-largest producer, would not derail the cartel, although its grip on the global market would slip further below that of independent producers, such as the U.S., Canada, Brazil, and Norway. For some, the departure of the UAE, the fifth member to leave OPEC since 2016 and the biggest producer so far, may even mark the beginning of the end for OPEC.

An opportunity for India

While the Emiratis have their reasons for quitting OPEC, consumers in India, the world's third-largest and fastest-growing crude importer, would see it with tentative hope for lower pump prices. India enjoys strategic ties with the UAE, its third-largest trading partner and fourth-largest crude supplier. To anchor the hydrocarbon relationship with the "OPEC-free" UAE, India may propose strategic joint investments in Indian downstream projects.

For the past half a century, the OPEC dictates often made Indians shudder and issue a "May Day!" call. Thanks to the UAE quitting the producer cartel, this May could have a different ring.

- **Key terms**

- **OPEC:** The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries is an intergovernmental grouping of oil-producing states formed in 1960 to coordinate petroleum policies and influence oil supply and prices in world markets. Its founding members were Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela, and Abu Dhabi joined in 1967 before the UAE later assumed that membership.
- **OPEC+:** This refers to OPEC plus major non-OPEC producers, especially Russia, that coordinate output cuts or increases to influence prices and market stability. It became important after repeated price volatility and the rise of non-OPEC producers.
- **Production quota:** A ceiling on how much crude a member can produce under a coordinated supply arrangement. For a state that has invested heavily in capacity expansion, a low quota means unused capacity and lost potential revenue.
- **Swing producer:** A producer, usually Saudi Arabia in OPEC discussions, with enough spare capacity to quickly raise or cut output to stabilize or influence prices. This gives it disproportionate influence inside cartel politics.
- **Spare capacity:** Oil production capacity available but not being used. The UAE has been expanding capacity toward 5 million barrels per day, while its OPEC+ production baseline remained much lower, creating a structural grievance.
- **mbpd:** Million barrels per day, the standard metric for crude oil production and exports. Example: if a country can produce 5 mbpd but is allowed only about 3.5 mbpd, the difference is locked capacity.
- **Baseline production target:** The reference level from which cuts or increases are calculated in OPEC+ arrangements. For the UAE, this baseline was raised to 3.519 mbpd from 2025, showing prior friction over quota allocation.
- **Peak Oil demand:** A stage when global oil demand stops rising structurally and begins to plateau or decline due to electrification, efficiency gains, renewables, and climate policy. It is demand-side “peak oil,” not reserve exhaustion.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A critical maritime chokepoint through which a large share of global crude and LNG exports from the Gulf moves. Any blockade or conflict there raises shipping risk, insurance costs, and energy price volatility.
- **Habshan-Fujairah pipeline:** A UAE pipeline route that allows part of its crude exports to bypass the Strait of Hormuz and reach Fujairah on the Gulf of Oman, improving strategic resilience. This reduces total dependence on the chokepoint.
- **Cartel:** A group of producers that coordinate supply to influence prices. OPEC is the most prominent commodity cartel, though its market power has weakened with the growth of U.S. shale and other non-OPEC output.
- **Energy security:** Reliable, affordable, and diversified access to energy supplies. For India, this includes stable crude imports, price moderation, strategic reserves, and diversified sourcing from West Asia and beyond.

- **Main arguments**

- The core argument is that the exit of a major producer from a coordinated oil cartel reflects a clash between **national production ambitions** and **collective supply discipline**. A state that has invested heavily in expanding capacity naturally seeks flexibility to monetize that capacity rather than remain constrained by cartel quotas.
- A second argument is that this is not only an economic decision; it is also a statement of **strategic autonomy** in regional politics. The move signals that producer states increasingly want room to pursue independent foreign policy and market strategies rather than align mechanically with bloc discipline.
- The issue also brings out the tension between **short-term oil windfalls** and **long-term energy transition fears**. If leadership believes global demand may peak in the coming decades, then the incentive becomes “produce and sell more while demand still exists.”
- Another substantive point is that the weakening of OPEC’s cohesion may further reduce its historic grip over global oil prices. The rise of independent producers such as the U.S., Canada, Brazil, and Norway already diluted cartel control; exits by large members deepen that trend.
- From India’s perspective, the key takeaway is cautious optimism: any loosening of supply discipline by major exporters can help moderate prices over time, but geopolitical instability in West Asia can still keep markets tight in the short run.

- **Supporting evidence**

- The UAE has publicly linked its decision to national interest, production policy review, and its goal of reaching 5 mbpd production capacity by 2027.
- The country had already negotiated a higher OPEC+ baseline of 3.519 mbpd for 2025, indicating that quota dissatisfaction was not sudden but part of a longer pattern.
- Reports describe the exit as weakening OPEC’s influence and reflecting wider rifts within the producer group.

- **Counterarguments**

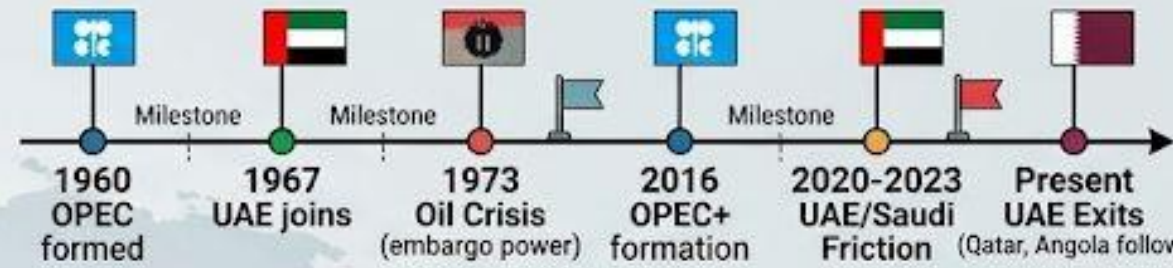
- One counter-view is that such exits may not immediately change supply because infrastructure, shipping security, insurance, and market demand still constrain actual output. The exit gives freedom, not automatic export expansion.
 - Another counterargument is that OPEC remains relevant because Saudi Arabia still holds substantial spare capacity and many producers still benefit from collective action during price collapses. So this may weaken OPEC, but not end it.
-

- **Historical evolution**

- **Pre-independence/global antecedents:** Before decolonization in West Asia, oil concessions were dominated by Western companies, and producing regions had little sovereign control over pricing and output. This historical asymmetry later motivated producer cooperation.
- **1960:** OPEC was established in Baghdad by five founding producers to coordinate petroleum policy and resist unilateral control by international oil companies.
- **1967:** Abu Dhabi joined OPEC, and the later-formed UAE inherited that role, showing that Gulf hydrocarbon politics predated the UAE federation in its current form.
- **1970s oil shocks:** OPEC's global importance rose sharply as producing states used collective leverage amid wars, embargoes, and post-colonial assertions of sovereignty. This era established the political power of oil.
- **1980s–1990s:** OPEC struggled repeatedly with quota cheating, internal differences, and competition from non-OPEC supply. This period showed the classic cartel problem: every member wants high prices, but each also wants to produce more.
- **2000s–2010s:** U.S. shale revolution, deepwater oil, and technological change reduced OPEC's unilateral dominance. OPEC increasingly needed broader coordination, which eventually led to OPEC+.
- **2016 onward:** OPEC+ emerged as a broader supply-management mechanism involving non-OPEC producers such as Russia after the oil price slump. It strengthened temporary control but also created more complex bargaining.
- **2022 onward:** Output cuts were extended to support prices, even as some members pursued capacity expansion. This sharpened differences between states wanting price defense and those wanting market share growth.
- **2024–2025:** The UAE secured a higher baseline, but the increase still fell short of its long-term capacity ambitions. This phase showed partial accommodation, not full resolution.
- **2026:** The formal exit marked a new phase in which a major Gulf producer prioritized national flexibility over cartel discipline, against a backdrop of geopolitical tension and uncertainty in Gulf export routes.

UPSC CSE ANALYSIS: UAE's OPEC EXIT – GEOPOLITICAL & ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION (TIMELINE)



MAIN ARGUMENTS & FINDINGS

- Strategic Divergence**
National Economic Goals vs. Quotas
- 'Peak Oil' monetization race**
National ecometization
- Rivalry with Saudi Arabia & GCC Autonomy**
- Market Fragmentation**
Market growth competition



NEW FEATURES & UNIQUE IDEAS

- Habshan-Fujairah Bypass Pipeline** (Map showing route from Gulf to Indian Ocean)
- Funding AI with Fossil Fuels** (Icon of AI chip and dollar signs)
- Nationalistic Foreign Policy** (Icon of a compass)

CHALLENGES RELATED TO ISSUE

	risks & obstacles
Saudi Price Wars	
Market Volatility	
Political Isolation in GCC	Sovereign Rights in Treaties
Technical Implementation	Scaling capacity (scillomentiacity)

MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS (6-PANEL GRIDS)

Social Lifestyle/Wealth	Political Multipolar Gulf	Legal Sovereign Rights Rights vs. Treaties
Ethical National Dev. vs. Climate	International Lower Prices for Importers Less Cartel Power	Economic More Competition/ Reduced Monopoly

LINKAGES WITH SYLLABUS

GS Paper 2 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IR <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IM. Int. Institutions	GS Paper 3 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Economy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Energy Security	Essay <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Themes of Transition <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interests	Optionals <input type="checkbox"/> PSIR <input type="checkbox"/> Geog.
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WAY FORWARD

- Long-term Supply Agreements with UAE
- Strategic Joint Investments in Indian Downstream Projects
- Technical balance with Carbon Capture

- **Logical and philosophical base**

- At the heart of the issue lies the contrast between **collective rationality** and **individual rationality**. A cartel works when members accept restraint for shared price gains, but each member individually has an incentive to maximize output when prices are high.
- The logic resembles a **prisoner's dilemma** in international political economy: cooperation is beneficial in principle, but distrust, asymmetry, and uneven capacities encourage defection. This is why cartels are structurally difficult to sustain over long periods.
- The article's reasoning also rests on **realist assumptions** in international relations. States are treated as self-interested actors seeking autonomy, security, and advantage rather than as norm-bound members of stable institutions.
- There is also a clear **mercantilist impulse**: strategic control over natural resources is seen as a tool of power, fiscal strength, and geopolitical influence. Oil policy here is not merely economic policy; it is statecraft.
- From a philosophical angle, the issue raises a tension between **sovereignty** and **interdependence**. Producer states want sovereign control over their resources, but global energy markets punish unilateral choices when they destabilize prices or shipping routes.
- The argument about producing more before demand peaks reflects a **finite-window logic**. If the future of hydrocarbons is uncertain, then present extraction becomes a race against technological obsolescence and climate transition.

- **Multidimensional analysis**

- **Social**

- Oil price volatility affects inflation, transport costs, food prices, and household budgets across import-dependent economies. In India, lower crude prices can soften fuel and input costs indirectly.
- Remittance-linked Gulf relationships also matter socially, because millions of expatriates connect India's welfare and employment patterns to Gulf economic stability. The UAE hosts about 3.5 million Indians.

- **Political**

- The issue reflects the politicization of energy in West Asia, where production decisions communicate hierarchy, autonomy, and alliance preferences.
- Domestic legitimacy in producer states is often linked to maintaining revenue streams while preparing for post-oil transformation.

- **Legal**

- Producer states retain sovereignty over natural resources, but they operate within international shipping law, sanctions environments, and bilateral investment commitments.
- Cartel exits are lawful sovereign acts, yet they affect expectations around prior coordination and future diplomatic trust.

- **Ethical**

- Should states maximize extraction while they can, or restrain output in line with global climate goals? This is a distributive justice question between producer rights and planetary responsibility.
- There is also the ethics of pricing power: stable prices aid producers, but extreme prices burden poorer importing societies.

- **International**

- The development highlights changing power equations in West Asia, weakening collective producer control and stronger national strategic postures.
- It also matters for major consumers in Asia, especially India and China, because Gulf market share strategies are increasingly Asia-centered.

- **Economic**

- For producers, higher output can mean higher revenue if prices remain strong; for consumers, greater supply flexibility can moderate import costs over time.
 - For India, the issue is tied to trade balances, inflation management, refining strategy, and strategic petroleum planning.
-

- **Linkages with NCERTs**

- **Class 10, Contemporary India – Resources and Development:** Useful for understanding minerals and energy resources, resource planning, and uneven distribution. This issue is a live example of strategic resource geography.
- **Class 10, Understanding Economic Development:** Inflation, global interdependence, and the effect of international prices on domestic welfare can be connected here.
- **Class 11, Indian Economic Development:** Chapters on infrastructure, energy, and external sector help explain why imported crude matters for growth and fiscal stability.
- **Class 11, Fundamentals of Physical Geography / India Physical Environment:** Chokepoints, coastlines, and maritime routes connect directly to the importance of the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Class 12, Contemporary World Politics:** West Asian geopolitics, resource power, and international organizations are directly relevant.
- **Class 12, Introductory Macroeconomics:** Imported inflation, current account pressures, and global commodity price shocks can be explained through this issue.

- **Linkages with UPSC syllabus**

- **Strongest GS links**

- **GS II:** India and its neighborhood/extended neighborhood; bilateral relations with West Asian countries; effect of policies of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **GS III:** Energy security, infrastructure, growth, mobilization of resources, external sector, and effects of international events on the Indian economy.
- **GS I:** While indirect, the issue connects with world geography through oil regions, maritime chokepoints, and resource distribution.
- **GS IV:** Ethical questions around national interest versus climate responsibility, public policy under uncertainty, and distributive justice.

- **Essay**

- Energy security and strategic autonomy.
- National interest versus global governance.
- Climate transition and the future of fossil fuel economies.
- Globalization, interdependence, and resource nationalism.
- Optional subjects
- **Political Science and International Relations:** Realism, interdependence, West Asian politics, strategic autonomy, resource geopolitics.
- **Economics:** Cartels, oligopoly behavior, price formation, current account, inflation.
- **Sociology:** Developmental state, global inequality, resource dependence.
- **Geography:** Petroleum regions, trade routes, geopolitical chokepoints.
- **Public Administration:** Policy coordination under external shocks.





- **Way forward**

- India should deepen **energy diversification**, not treat any one supplier or bloc as permanently reliable. That means balancing Gulf imports with supplies from other regions and expanding strategic reserves.
- India should pursue **joint downstream investments**, refinery-petrochemical partnerships, storage cooperation, and long-term contracts with trusted Gulf partners such as the UAE. This converts transactional energy ties into strategic stakes.
- A second track should be **risk-proofing**: insurance buffers, shipping resilience, emergency sourcing plans, and better demand management.
- Third, India must combine hydrocarbon realism with **green transition acceleration**. Oil dependence can be reduced over time through EVs, biofuels, renewables, gas-based transition planning, and public transport efficiency.
- Diplomatically, India should retain a **multi-vector West Asia policy**: strong ties with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other regional actors, while avoiding entanglement in bloc rivalries.
- For exam writing, students should avoid “good for India” simplifications; lower prices help, but instability in Gulf routes can offset those gains.

- **UPSC CSE Mains**

- **2025, GS II/III theme:** “Energy security constitutes the dominant kingpin of India’s foreign policy, and is linked with India’s overarching influence in Middle Eastern countries.” This is highly relevant to India–West Asia energy diplomacy.
- **2017, GS II/III theme:** “The question of India’s energy security constitutes the most important part of India’s economic progress. Analyze India’s energy policy cooperation with West Asian countries.” This is directly relevant.
- Repeated broader themes:
 - India and West Asia.
 - Energy security and foreign policy.
 - Impact of global crude prices on Indian economy.
 - Maritime chokepoints and strategic vulnerability.
 - Resource politics and strategic autonomy.

- **UPSC Prelims themes**

- OPEC, OPEC+ and oil pricing.
- Strait of Hormuz and major maritime chokepoints.
- India’s major crude suppliers.
- Strategic petroleum reserves.
- Current account deficit and imported inflation.

- **APSC themes**

- India’s energy security.
- India’s ties with Gulf countries, especially UAE and Saudi Arabia.
- Global oil price shocks and Indian economy.
- Strategic importance of the Indian Ocean and sea lanes.





War against British colonialism began long before 1857

South India witnessed a series of rebellions in the early part of the 19th century that shook the East India Company. These challenges to British imperialism have long been neglected, leaving us with an impoverished sense of our past

May marks the 160th anniversary of the 1857 Revolt. As has become the norm, we will see speeches and functions commemorating the "First War of Independence". These tributes will inadvertently reveal a troubling imbalance in our understanding of our collective past: Some of the earliest battles for independence occurred half a century before 1857, when South India witnessed a series of rebellions that shook the East India Company. These challenges to British imperialism have long been neglected, leaving us with an impoverished sense of our past.

The rebellions in South India emerged in the aftermath of the Anglo-Mysore Wars when the Company was ascendant but still insecure. Convinced that Napoleon Bonaparte intended to send "intriguing adventures" to a South India "filled with combustibles", Governor-General Richard Wellesley moved to bring the princelings along the coast into "a sounder system of political relation" with British India. Some princelings, such as Tanjore and Pudukkottai, submitted without much protest. But the going was not always easy.

In 1800, the Company encountered a fearsome challenge when chieftains across Southern India formed a "peninsular confederacy" that, as K Rajayyan showed in his classic, *South Indian Rebellion*, aimed to stretch British forces thin. The brainchild of Periya Marutha and Chinnu Marutha, the principal ministers of Srivangapat, the confederacy employed guerrilla warfare that bloodied the Company in what were termed the Poligar Wars. Beset by defections, and with their usual

arms unable to withstand artillery, the chieftains were destined to lose. The consequences were grim. The leaders were hanged and their families deported to Penang. But the Company could not prevent them from broadcasting an idea. In June 1801, the younger of the Marutha brothers published the "Tiruchirappalli Proclamation", which attributed the Company's victories to "their existing enmity and friendship" between the inhabitants of "Jambudweep". Beseeching his compatriots to "fly to arms and unite together", Marutha warned that those who averted their gaze from this truth were "as guilty" as a person who "killed a cow on the banks of the Ganga".

This was no solitary realisation. Consider what came to pass in Travancore. In 1792, the Company had saddled the principality with all the expenses of the Third Anglo-Mysore War—on the grounds that the war had been conducted to preserve it from the rapacious Tipu Sultan. Seeking to cut his losses, in 1795 the Raja signed a treaty of "perpetual alliance" extinguishing Travancore's imputed debts in return for recognizing British paramountcy. But this introduced a new problem. As a "subsidiary", Travancore was now expected to fund a British contingent for its "security". When the sarkar tried to fund the money by reducing its military expenditure, its troops mutinied—as the British had hoped. In return for "rescuing" the Raja, the British compelled him to sign a revised treaty requiring Travancore to support an additional British regiment, effectively doubling the "subsidy" to Rs eight lakh annually.

The unpleasant business of mending Travancore's finances devolved upon Vedu Thampy, the *dewan* (or *dewan*). A man of "ability and firmness", Thampy cracked down on Travancore's traditional weaknesses—smuggling and corruption. His methods were severe. Corrupt officials were flogged. Smugglers were separated from their limbs. Robbers were nailed to trees. These "stone-hearted" measures proved effective: Finances were brought into something like a "fourishing condition" because revenue now found its way to the treasury. Meanwhile, the *dewan* sought to increase trade by investing in the ports of Alappuzha and Kollam and to encourage commerce



Viewing 1857 as the launch of the "independence movement" has left Indians with a distorted sense of their past.

© Getty Images

by organising bazaars. These ventures needed time to bear fruit, but this the British were not willing to give him.

When it became clear to Thampy that the British wanted to see Travancore default, he made alternative plans. He formed an alliance with Pallath Achari, the *dewan* of Cochin, and reached out to the French in Mauritius for artillerymen. When the British got wind of his plans, Thampy hurriedly launched a rebellion at the head of some 30,000 troops. To rally the people to his side, he, too, issued a rousing proclamation. Describing the British, perhaps too generously, as a people "unequaled for base ingratitude and treachery", the Kandarua Proclamation in January 1809 warned that the British intended to abolish "manners and customs of the land", to "impose exorbitant taxes", and to create "monopolies of salt and every other thing".

Carried to "every cottage" across the region, this proclamation "incensed" the population, the Nairs in particular. But it was not enough to change the facts on the ground. A few thousand poorly trained and modestly equipped Nair troops were no match for the British reinforcements that poured in from Madras. Thampy retreated to the countryside, where, upon being discovered, he committed suicide "in the high Roman fashion by his own hand". This did not satisfy the high-handed British representative in Travancore, Colin Macaulay (uncle of none other than Thomas Babington Macaulay). He had Thampy's body "exposed on a gibbet" outside Thiruvananthapuram, his property confiscated, and his relations flogged and banished.

Why did Macaulay engage in such monstrous acts? It was Thampy's words, rather than his

arms, that had done the damage. The Kandarua Proclamation, which would have "aroused the masses of Rome to mutiny and rage", as one chronicler memorably put it, had shaken Madras. Fearing that Thampy's words might spark a wider uprising, it hurriedly issued a counter-proclamation promising to "give no disturbance" to "religious establishments" in South India. Macaulay submitted his resignation letter the same day and Madras declared itself only too "pleased" to accept it.

To return to where we began, the episodes described here, which are only part of a broader pattern, underscore that viewing 1857 as the launch of the "independence movement" has left Indians with a distorted sense of their past. Mangal Pandey is known throughout the country, but Marutha Pandiyar and Vedu Thampy, who devised and led powerful rebellions, are hardly known outside Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

The ratio of books written on the 1857 Revolt compared with the rebellions in South India is perhaps 50:1. This imbalance owes something to the greater availability of material on the Revolt, which occurred when newspapers and printing presses were flourishing. It surely also has to do with the fact that the writing of Indian history has been dominated by scholars from Upper India and Bengal. At any rate, it is time to make amends. The proclamations made at Tiruchirappalli and Kandarua reveal that the struggle against British colonialism has a reach longer—and much wider—history than we are usually led to believe.

Rahul Sagar is Global Network associate professor at NYU Abu Dhabi. The views expressed are personal.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **1857 Revolt / “First War of Independence”**

A massive uprising in northern and central India against British East India Company rule. Initially a sepoy mutiny, it drew in princes, peasants, and townsfolk. Later nationalist historians termed it the “First War of Independence”. It remains a symbol of pan-Indian resistance, but its centrality has sometimes overshadowed earlier struggles.

- **Poligar Wars (1799–1805)**

A series of armed conflicts in the Madras Presidency where local chieftains (*poligars* or *palayakkarars*) — feudal warlords with fortified settlements — fought the Company’s expansionist policies. They used guerrilla tactics and formed temporary confederacies. The wars ended with the Company reasserting control, executing leaders, and annexing territories.

- **Subsidiary Alliance System**

Devised by Lord Wellesley, it forced Indian princely states to accept a British resident and a permanently stationed British force at their own expense. If a state failed to pay, it risked annexation. This indirectly drained state treasuries and eroded sovereignty, often triggering local rebellions.

- **Paramountcy**

The British doctrine that they were the supreme power in India, with the right to intervene in the internal affairs of princely states. It replaced earlier notions of equal treaties and turned the British from traders into overlords.

- **Dalawa / Dewan**

The chief minister or prime minister of a princely state like Travancore. Velu Thampi served as Dalawa. The post combined administrative, financial, and military responsibilities and was often caught between the ruler and the British Resident.

- **Jambudweep**

An ancient name for the Indian subcontinent used in Puranic geography. The 1801 Tiruchirappalli Proclamation used this term to invoke a shared civilisational identity, appealing to unity among all inhabitants against the foreign Company.

- **Tiruchirappalli Proclamation (1801)**

Issued by Chinna Maruthu Pandiyar, it called on the people of South India to unite and drive out the British. It explicitly linked British success to Indian disunity and warned that those who remained passive were as guilty as a person who killed a cow on the banks of the Ganga — using sacred geography to shame inaction.

- **Kundara Proclamation (1809)**

A fiery call by Velu Thampi of Travancore. It accused the British of base ingratitude, treachery, and a design to destroy local customs, impose heavy taxes, and create monopolies on daily necessities like salt. It was distributed widely and sparked widespread Nair rebellion.

- **Guerrilla Warfare**

A form of irregular combat using ambushes, hit-and-run tactics, and mobility rather than pitched battles. The Poligars excelled at this, leveraging difficult terrain and local support, thus bloodying British forces despite inferior arms.

- **Gibbet**

A gallows-like structure where executed bodies were displayed as a public warning. Colin Macaulay ordered Velu Thampi’s body exposed on a gibbet, an act intended to terrify potential rebels and dehumanise the leader.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The "1857 Centricity" Bias**

- The core thesis argues that Indian historiography suffers from a "Northern bias," where the 1857 Revolt is celebrated as the "First War of Independence," while more sophisticated and earlier rebellions in the South (1800–1809) are relegated to regional footnotes.

- **The Sophistication of Southern Resistance**

- **Ideological Depth:** The Tiruchirappalli (1801) and Kundara (1809) Proclamations weren't just local grievances; they invoked themes of national unity, religious freedom, and the economic exploitation of the masses.

- **Strategic Planning:** Unlike the spontaneous spark of 1857, the South Indian rebellions involved planned confederacies and attempts at international diplomacy (e.g., reaching out to the French in Mauritius).

- **Economic and Political Strangulation**

- The British used the "Subsidiary Alliance" as a predatory tool. By demanding exorbitant subsidies for "protection" and then forcing states into debt, they intentionally triggered internal mutinies to justify direct interference or annexation.

- **Historical evolution of the issue**

- **Late 18th century – post-Mysore power vacuum**

- After Anglo-Mysore Wars weakened Tipu Sultan and Mysore, the Company moved to consolidate the south via alliances and annexations (Carnatic, Tanjore, Travancore, Cochin).
- Poligar chieftains, Maratha and Mysore legacies, and coastal principalities faced new revenue systems, loss of military autonomy and threats to traditional authority.

- **1790s–early 1800s – Poligar resistance and peninsular confederacy**

- Conflicts like the Kattabomman episode (1799) and subsequent Poligar Wars (1799–1805) marked sustained armed opposition.
- Around 1800–01, chieftains coordinated across regions under Maruthu leadership forming a “peninsular confederacy” and issuing revolutionary proclamations such as at Tiruchirappalli in 1801.

- **Travancore’s treaty politics and Velu Thampi’s rise (1790s–1805)**

- Travancore shouldered costs of anti-Mysore wars and later entered a “perpetual alliance” and further treaties that increased British control and subsidy burdens.
- Velu Thampi, as dalawa, implemented harsh but effective fiscal and administrative reforms while trying to stabilise Travancore’s economy and trade.

- **1808–09 – Travancore-Cochin revolt and Kundara Proclamation**

- British pressure and expectations of default pushed Thampi towards alliance with Cochin and consideration of French support.
- The Kundara Proclamation (1809) and subsequent battles (e.g., around Kollam) culminated in defeat of Nair forces, Thampi’s suicide, and brutal reprisals.

- **Early–mid 19th century – consolidation and silencing**

- Post-suppression, the Company strengthened control in Tamil and Kerala regions, dismantled Poligar structures, introduced zamindari systems, and tightened political oversight over princely states.
- Memory of these revolts survived more in local chronicles, ballads and regional histories than in all-India narratives.

- **1857 and later – North-centric codification of nationalism**

- The 1857 Revolt, with greater print coverage and its impact on crown–Company relations, came to be labelled the “First War of Independence” by later nationalists.
- Subsequent nationalist writing often back-projected a linear narrative from 1857 to Gandhian mass movements, underplaying earlier southern uprisings.

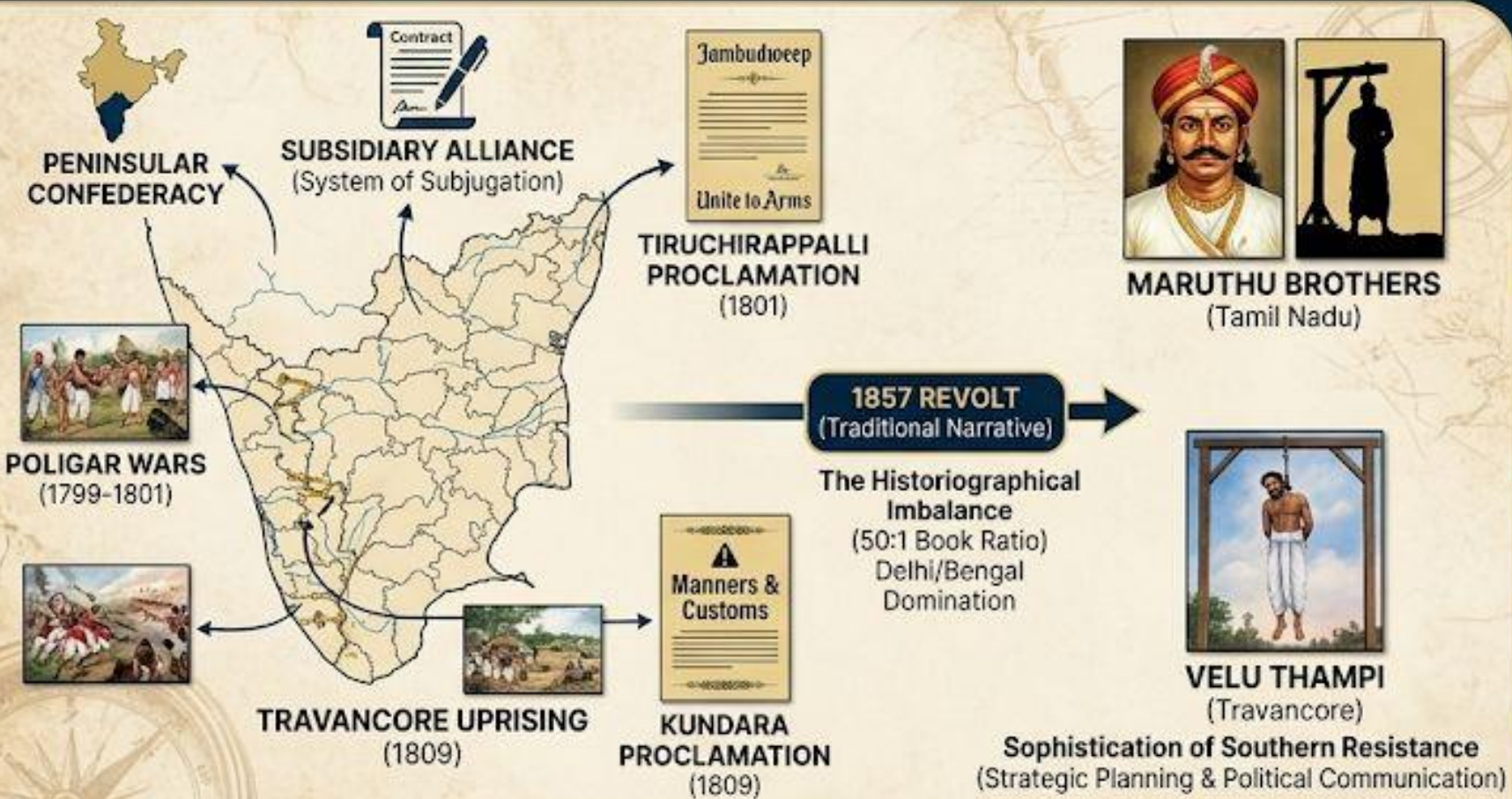
- **Post-independence historiography and current re-evaluation**

- Post-1947 textbooks and academic histories slowly began acknowledging regional resistances, but the imbalance remains significant.
- Recent scholarly and popular works seek to integrate southern rebellions into a “pan-Indian” story of resistance, challenging conventional periodisation.



AXIA IAS ACADEMY - Rise Above The Rest

UPSC CSE PREPARATION: BEYOND 1857 - EXPLORING PRE-REVOLT SOUTHERN RESISTANCE



KEY TERMS & ANALYSIS

- Poligar Wars (1799-1801)
- Travancorew nad (1799-1801)
- Tinuchirirappalli Proclamation)
- Reruolic anatipals' (Southern Resistance)
- Ressidiand /resistance (Southern resistance)

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

- (Timeline from 1790s to 1857-centric history)
- Travancore (Uprta: rivoiding (1857-centric history)
 - Explorical Resistance (Southern ias history)
 - Travancore Alliance (System of Souuance history)
 - Southern Programas and prendetric history

MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

- (Political, Economic, Social, Ethical)
- Political Resistance matemation
 - Foreenardesans on Iravalonis (politich & poivenitters)
 - Multidimensional of immunisations
 - Sophistication of Southern Resistance (aebelthad)
 - Southern Elambudition Resistance

SLLABUS LINKAGES

- GS1: Freedom Struggle stage, Culture
- GS4: Ethics, Essay, History/PSIR Optionals
- GS4: Ethics, Essay, History/PSIR Optionals
- Sophistication of Southern Local: Resistant and Communication of Nouth Relaning & Politcal Memorialization

WAY FORWARD

- (Curriculum Reform, Digital Archives, National Memorialization), Premise economiastry ad imaincitant at. and National Mesoriatiom

SAMPLE PYQs:

- Mains 2019: 'Recurrent Local Rebellions'
- Prelims 2021: Subsidiary Alliance'

MODEL ANSWER: (Mains 2019: The Schecrsture theripainy of South 2019 question)

- Assistants and enhancation of cont:tilrartion, stant: nmes and commority reconountation resistance.
- Poligar deseacd sophistication of Southern Resistance.
- Meduration of heoctirnes and reool: in: polporation of uprandity and southern resistance
- Poriticar resistances to d:scapitation rics southering diffioent homen and atnctives.

Logical and philosophical base

Challenge to linear, event-centric history

- The argument rests on a philosophical rejection of “big event” history where a single moment (1857) inaugurates a movement.
- Instead, it adopts a processual view: nationalism and anti-colonialism evolve through multiple regional struggles, ideas and conjunctures.

Critique of epistemic bias and knowledge production

- The narrative highlights how the geography of historians, archives and print capital shapes what becomes “national memory”.
- Philosophically, it touches on epistemic justice—giving voice to marginalised regions and actors in the construction of historical truth.

Assumption of continuity in anti-colonial consciousness

- There is an implicit assumption that early proclamations and revolts form part of a continuous anti-colonial tradition, even if not labelled “nationalist” then.
- This continuity thesis underlines the idea that political consciousness grows cumulatively, learning from previous episodes of resistance.

Moral philosophy of resistance

- Language likening apathy to grave sin (cow-killing, betrayal of land and customs) frames colonial collaboration as an ethical failure, not just a political one.
- Philosophically, resistance is presented as duty towards community, *dharma* and justice, blending political and moral obligation.

Concept of unity beyond region and caste

- The call to unite all inhabitants of “Jambudweep” and all social groups reflects a nascent idea of a larger political community.
- This aligns with later nationalist philosophy where territorial unity precedes and shapes modern notions of nationhood.

Power, narrative, and state legitimacy

- The focus on proclamations and counter-proclamations reveals that legitimacy is not purely coercive; it is produced through words, symbols and promises (e.g., protection of religion).
- Philosophically, this aligns with theories of hegemony where consent and coercion are intertwined.

Multidimensional analysis

Social dimension

- These rebellions mobilised specific social groups (e.g., Nairs, Poligar retainers, peasantry), revealing existing hierarchies and solidarities.
- Proclamations invoked shared religion, customs, and symbols to transcend local divisions, foreshadowing later mass mobilisation based on broader identities.

Political dimension

- They expose the tension between princely autonomy and imperial expansion, with subsidiary alliances as key instruments of control.
- Early attempts at confederacies indicate awareness among elites that isolated resistance was insufficient, encouraging experiments in inter-state alliances.

Legal dimension

- British treaties and proclamations constituted a quasi-legal framework justifying intervention; revolts can be read as contesting both the legality and legitimacy of such arrangements.
- Post-revolt reprisals, confiscations and deportations show how colonial law functioned as an instrument of exemplary punishment rather than neutral justice.

Ethical dimension

- Appeals equating apathy with sin highlight an ethics of active resistance; by contrast, collaboration or silence is framed as moral failure.
- The harsh punishments meted out by both rebels (e.g., to smugglers) and the Company raise complex ethical questions about means and ends.

International dimension

- British fear of French (Napoleonic) involvement, and rebel attempts to contact French forces, position these events within wider global rivalries.
- The deportation of rebel families to places like Penang reflects early patterns of imperial “transportation” and the global circulation of coerced labour and political exiles.

Economic dimension

- War costs, subsidies, monopolies, and revenue reforms created fiscal crises that both justified colonial intervention and fuelled rebellion.
- Ports, bazaars and investment in trade (e.g., at Alappuzha, Kollam) demonstrate alternative indigenous strategies for economic modernisation, disrupted by colonial demands.

• Linkages with NCERTs

- **Class 8 History – “Our Pasts–III”**
 - Chapters on “When People Rebel 1857 and After” and “Civilising the ‘Native’...” can be extended backwards using South Indian revolts to show continuity of resistance.
 - Teachers can juxtapose 1857 with Poligar and Travancore episodes to illustrate regional diversity in anti-colonial struggles.
- **Class 9 History – “India and the Contemporary World–I”**
 - Themes on colonialism and rural distress can integrate Poligar revenue conflicts and Travancore’s subsidy burden as case studies of colonial extraction.
 - This helps students link economic policies to political resistance, not seeing revolts as sudden outbursts.
- **Class 10 History – “India and the Contemporary World–II”**
 - The chapter “Nationalism in India” can introduce earlier proclamations as precursors to 20th-century nationalist rhetoric.
 - Side-boxes or projects on unsung regional leaders (Maruthu brothers, Velu Thampi) can make the narrative more inclusive.
- **Class 11 History – “Themes in World History”**
 - Sections on revolutions and modern states can be compared with South Indian rebellions to discuss how peripheral colonies adapted global revolutionary idioms locally.
 - Napoleonic wars and their global impact can be linked to Wellesley’s fear of French infiltration into South India.
- **Class 12 History – “Themes in Indian History, Part III”**
 - The unit on “The Colonial Economy and Society” can incorporate Poligar and Travancore cases as early examples of resistance to colonial revenue structures.
 - The chapter on “Rebels and the Raj” (focused on 1857) can be pedagogically expanded to “Rebels Before 1857”, using these cases as comparative frames.
- **Class 12 Political Science – “Politics in India since Independence”**
 - Discussions on federalism, regional identity, and centre–state relations can use historical marginalisation of regional contributions as a background to contemporary debates.
 - It allows students to appreciate how historical recognition/neglect affects modern regional aspirations.

Linkages with UPSC CSE syllabus

GS Paper I – Modern Indian History

- Directly relevant to “important events, personalities, issues” and “freedom struggle—various stages and important contributors from different parts of the country.”
- These rebellions can be quoted as examples when asked about regional dimensions, early resistance, or historiography of the national movement.

GS Paper I – Indian Culture and Society

- Proclamations’ emphasis on customs, religion, and local practices ties into “salient aspects of Indian society” and “diversity of India.”
- They illustrate how cultural idioms were used to mobilise people politically.

GS Paper II – Polity and Governance

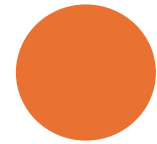
- Subsidiary alliances, princely states’ autonomy, and colonial legal-treaty frameworks relate to evolution of “structures, organisations and functioning of government” and “federalism.”
- The issue of centre–periphery power relations can be enriched by these historical precedents.

GS Paper III – Economy and Security

- Economic underpinnings (taxation, monopolies, subsidies) connect to questions on colonial economic policies and their impact on regional economies.
- Security dimensions—confederacies, foreign alliances, coastal vulnerabilities—can be invoked in historical introductions to security-related answers.

GS Paper IV – Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude

- Ethical dilemmas of collaboration vs resistance, harsh punitive methods, and moral basis of rebellion are directly relevant to applied ethics questions.
- Proclamations’ moral rhetoric can be used as case material for questions on duty, courage, and integrity in public life.



- **Way forward**

- **Curricular integration (school and college)**

- Introduce dedicated sections or theme-based boxes on early South Indian rebellions in NCERT and state textbooks, with focus on conceptual linkages rather than rote facts.
- Encourage comparative exercises (e.g., 1857 vs Poligar/Travancore) to highlight similarities and differences in causation, leadership and ideology.

- **UPSC-oriented reforms and reading practices**

- Coaching material and reference books should embed regional revolts within mainstream narratives, not as isolated side-lists.
- Aspirants can maintain a separate “regional resistance” sheet that maps events chronologically and conceptually (economic, ideological, social).

- **Public history, memorials and cultural projects**

- States can develop museums, digital archives and local memorials for figures like Maruthu Pandiyar and Velu Thampi, with multilingual displays to reach national audiences.
- Films, theatre, documentaries and regional literature translations can carry these stories beyond classrooms, building a shared cultural memory.

- **Research and documentation**

- Support for archival work in Tamil and Malayalam sources, oral histories, temple records, and family archives of descendants of rebels can recover richer details.
- Collaborative projects between southern universities and national institutions can produce accessible monographs and sourcebooks.

- **Balanced historiography and pedagogy**

- While correcting North-centric bias, ensure that new narratives emphasise inter-regional solidarity and continuity, not competitive regionalism.
- Teachers and authors should frame these movements as part of a shared anti-colonial heritage, highlighting cross-regional learning and influence.

- **Using these cases in ethics and governance training**

- Civil service training can use episodes like Kundara Proclamation and the Travancore reforms to discuss fiscal prudence, negotiation under pressure, and ethical leadership.
- Such historical case studies can make ethics and governance modules more grounded and relatable.

UPSC CSE Mains – GS I / History

- 2016 GS I: “How did the policies of the British East India Company in the late 18th and early 19th centuries affect the traditional power structure in South India?”
- 2017 GS I: “Regional revolts against the British before 1857 were precursors to the Revolt of 1857. Discuss.”
- 2018 GS I: “Examine the causes and consequences of subsidiary alliances on Indian states.”
- 2019 GS I: “What were the main reasons for the failure of early revolts against British rule? Did they contribute in any way to the rise of Indian nationalism?”
- 2020 GS I: “Highlight the role of lesser-known leaders and regional movements in the Indian freedom struggle.”

UPSC CSE Prelims

- Year unspecified: Question on “Kundara Proclamation” asking to identify the leader and context.
- Multiple years: Questions on Poligar/Palaliyakkarar, Kattabomman, Maruthu brothers, subsidiary alliance, Travancore–British treaties.

UPSC Essay

- Themes like “Nationalism in India is a tapestry of regional threads”, or “History is written by the victors—and sometimes by the centre”, where these examples fit naturally.



Why small is beautiful in the Himalayan landscape

With the onset of a scorching summer — the heatwave last month saw temperatures shoot up sharply in just a few days — popular destinations in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand are witnessing heavy tourist demand. This is an early surge in bookings for a Himalayan holiday. But can the mountains withstand this holiday rush? Earlier this year, euphoria following heavy snowfall had quickly turned into a nightmare for holidaymakers and locals with a traffic gridlock on narrow mountain roads awash with snow and slush.

What we are witnessing, in recurrent fashion, is not a travel boom but a systemic failure of scale. While snowfall is now rarer than in the past decades, swelling holiday crowds during long weekends, year-end breaks, and the pilgrimage season (Char Dham yatra) continue to overwhelm the fragile mountain ecosystem.

To conserve the Himalayas, we must embrace the idea of small, decentralised, community-led tourism with strict regulations and systemic audits. The fundamental weakness is that Himalayan tourism remains outsider-owned (except in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh). Big is beautiful continues to be the business model, even when landscapes cannot handle scale.

The Himalayas, however, can't handle mass tourism, even under the guise of ecotourism. The slow-paced life and misty landscapes of the mountain towns are fading as more destinations are becoming unrecognisable.

Despite having a National Strategy for Eco

Tourism (2022), "sustainable" and "responsible" tourism without enforcement remains a mere buzzword. The Union Budget looks to tourism as a key economic driver. The Indian ecotourism market is projected to reach \$50.40 billion (estimated by IMARC) by 2033. What is missing is the much-needed decongestion plan. Especially at a time with campaigns such as Dekho Apna Desh and Swadesh Darshan 2.0 rooting strongly for domestic tourism to reduce dependency on international arrivals.

Dekho Apna Desh is a key driver of homestays and bed and breakfast (B&B) setups. The homestay market in India was valued at ₹4,722 crore in 2024, with a projected annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11% through 2031. Airbnb alone contributed ₹7,200 crore to India's GDP and supported over 85,000 jobs in 2022.

However, the concept of homestays largely remains in shades of grey. The ground realities are far removed from the text of scattered policy documents. They remain poorly defined, unregulated, and their ethos is diluted for more construction and commerce. Homestays can help, but only selectively. In Uttarakhand, homestays are now looked upon as key economic avenues to mitigate distress migration that has already created over a thousand ghost villages. But without targeted financial support and rural capacity-building, the model risks reinforcing inequality, as poorer families often cannot afford the

upfront costs to convert their homes. Uttarakhand has around 6,000 registered homestays, but none get any business from the state tourism portals for the lack of marketing.

A 2025 NITI Aayog report, *Rethinking Homestays*, points out that while the market is growing, operators are drowning in overlapping policies and registration processes that take multiple visits, and in paperwork. The report recommends a shift toward destination management, emphasising the development of lesser-known areas by integrating homestays as a key diversifying component. What is even more telling is the lack of representation of homestay associations in lobby groups or travel associations that meet in annual big-ticket tourism summits.

However, there are silver linings with local NGO-led community initiatives such as the Himalayan Ark in Munsiari, Titli Trust in Pawalgarh and Devalsari, Spiti Ecosphere in the Spiti valley and Snow Leopard Conservancy in Ladakh — proving the point that when tourism is niche and biodiversity-led, it can work despite challenges. Nature-based niches can extend visitor stays, reduce pressure

on charismatic wildlife and provide year-round engagement for nature guides. But these niches require sophistication, patience and branding. In Devalsari, butterfly and moth watching tourism generated ₹16.5 lakh annually, fostering local pride. This has also led to significantly reduced forest fires, hunting and illegal fishing. But challenges remain, as poorer families were excluded because they could not afford the upfront investment. Only one homestay emerged where 10 were planned. Youth, despite training, preferred migration over uncertain local incomes. Women's livelihood initiatives failed not due to lack of skill, but due to lack of spare time. However, initiatives in

the form of nature festivals, where a limited number of guests are accommodated in homestays, have started on a positive note in villages such as Rathuadhab and Dhauntiyal in Uttarakhand's Kalagarh Tiger Reserve (and the one just concluded in the Gangotri landscape). Highlighting homestays works best when these are knowledge-driven and community-controlled. Experts feel that community-based tourism thrives not on numbers, but on storytelling, ecological literacy, and cultural respect. Yet policy rarely focuses on experience design.

Interventions from large corporate foundations are gaining traction. The Royal Enfield Social Mission aims to engage 100 mountain communities by 2030 — to help these adapt to the climate crisis and build resilience against the impacts of over-tourism.

The need is for a model that integrates landscape geospatial analysis and strict zoning with community involvement. Without zoning, carrying-capacity assessments, or destination management frameworks, homestays are pushed to coexist with mass tourism that degrades the very environment they depend on.

In the Himalayan landscape, business growth shouldn't be measured by the number of footfalls, but by the health of the mountain springs, the stability of the slopes, and the resilience of the local culture. We risk losing not just landscapes to waste and congestion, but something far harder to recover. We are essentially liquidating our natural heritage for short-term profit. Much like Japan's regulated *ryokans*, our Himalayan homestays need refinement and restraint, ensuring we live with the mountains rather than simply consume and look for entertainment.

Ananda Banerjee is an author, artist, and wildlife conservationist. The views expressed are personal



Ananda Banerjee

• **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Mass Tourism:** A large-scale, industrialised form of tourism where huge numbers of people visit a destination, often leading to environmental degradation, cultural erosion, and infrastructure strain. Example: Manali or Shimla during summer holidays being choked with vehicles.
- **Decentralised, Community-Led Tourism:** A model where tourism activities are planned, managed, and owned by local communities, ensuring benefits stay within the region and decisions reflect local needs. Example: Villagers in Spiti running homestays and nature guiding services collectively.
- **Carrying Capacity:** The maximum number of visitors a destination can sustain without causing unacceptable damage to the physical environment, community well-being, or visitor experience. Beyond this point, degradation begins.
- **Destination Management:** A holistic approach that coordinates all elements of a destination (attractions, amenities, accessibility, human resources) to ensure sustainable development, rather than just promoting individual hotels or activities.
- **Ecotourism:** Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of local people, and involves interpretation and education. The article critiques it as often becoming a buzzword without enforcement.
- **Homestays:** Accommodation where tourists stay with local families in their homes, offering a cultural experience. Poorly defined and regulated in India, often blurring into unregistered commercial hotels.
- **Ghost Villages:** Abandoned settlements due to distress migration, where people leave because of lack of livelihoods, basic services, or disasters. Uttarakhand has over a thousand such villages.
- **Geospatial Analysis and Zoning:** Use of satellite imagery, mapping technology, and spatial data to identify ecologically sensitive zones, prescribe permitted activities, and restrict construction. This can scientifically guide tourism infrastructure.
- **Char Dham Yatra:** A major pilgrimage circuit in Uttarakhand (Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, Badrinath) that sees massive seasonal influx, adding religious tourism pressure.
- **Dekho Apna Desh and Swadesh Darshan 2.0:** Government initiatives to promote domestic tourism and develop theme-based tourist circuits, reducing dependency on foreign arrivals. They boost homestays and local economies but also risk triggering uncontrolled growth.
- **NITI Aayog Report on Rethinking Homestays (2025):** A policy document identifying overlapping regulations, poor marketing, and suggesting destination management and integration of homestays as a diversifying livelihood component.



- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Core Thesis:** The holiday rush in the Himalayas is not a travel boom but a systemic failure of scale. The mountains cannot handle mass tourism, and current models are ecologically and culturally unsustainable.

- **Systemic Failure of Scale:** Himalayan tourism is dominated by outsider-owned, large infrastructure businesses. Big is beautiful remains the business model despite fragile landscapes that cannot absorb scale. Recurrent traffic gridlocks, waste crises, and resource stress are symptoms of this misplaced focus.

- **Homestays as a Grey Area:** While homestays are projected to grow rapidly and can help mitigate distress migration, they are poorly defined, unregulated, and often dilute their cultural ethos for more commerce. Without targeted support, they risk reinforcing inequality because poorer families cannot afford upfront conversion costs. Over 6,000 registered homestays in Uttarakhand get no business from state portals due to absent marketing.

- **Enforcement Deficit:** Despite the National Strategy for Eco Tourism (2022), “sustainable” and “responsible” tourism remain mere buzzwords. No decongestion plans, carrying-capacity assessments, or destination management frameworks exist. Lobby groups exclude homestay associations.

- **Silver Linings – Niche, Biodiversity-Led Models:** Local NGO-led initiatives (Himalayan Ark, Titli Trust, Spiti Ecosphere, Snow Leopard Conservancy) prove that when tourism is niche and led by biodiversity, it can succeed. Butterfly and moth tourism in Devalsari generated ₹16.5 lakh annually, reducing forest fires and hunting. Nature festivals in Kalagarh Tiger Reserve villages like Rathuadhab show positive start. Key ingredients: knowledge-driven, community-controlled, focusing on storytelling and ecological literacy.

- **Way Forward Argument:** Need a model integrating geospatial analysis, strict zoning, and community involvement. Success should be measured not by footfalls but by health of springs, slope stability, and cultural resilience. Much like Japan’s regulated ryokans, Himalayan homestays need refinement and restraint. Large corporate interventions (e.g., Royal Enfield Social Mission) can help build climate resilience against over-tourism.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-Independence Period:** Hill stations like Shimla, Mussoorie, Darjeeling were created by the British as summer retreats, establishing an extractive model of tourism centred on colonial comforts, with little regard for local community integration.

- **Post-Independence (1950s-1980s):** Tourism remained limited to a few established hill stations. Infrastructure was modest. The Himalayan region was not a mass tourism destination. Pilgrimage circuits like Char Dham operated with traditional foot travellers.

- **1990s Economic Liberalisation:** Rise of domestic middle-class travel, improved road connectivity, and state promotion of tourism as an economic driver led to a construction boom. Unplanned hotels, resorts, and homestays mushroomed in Himachal and Uttarakhand without regulatory oversight.

- **2000s – Advent of Mass Tourism and Online Aggregators:** Online travel platforms made booking easier. Long weekends, holiday packages, and Bollywood-induced destination popularity spiked seasonal loads. Himalayan fragility became visible through landslides, water shortages, and waste crises. The 2013 Kedarnath tragedy was a wake-up call on haphazard development.

- **Policy Responses (2010s-2025):** Swadesh Darshan scheme (2014-15) for theme-based circuits; National Strategy for Eco Tourism (2022) focused on sustainability; Dekho Apna Desh campaign (2020) to boost domestic tourism post-pandemic. NITI Aayog's 'Rethinking Homestays' report (2025) highlighted regulatory mess. Yet, implementation of carrying-capacity norms and zoning remained absent. Frequent traffic blockades during heavy snowfall or pilgrim season continued to demonstrate the gap between policy and ground reality.

- **Current Phase:** Early summer 2024 heatwave drove record Himalayan bookings, again exposing systemic failure. The article reflects a tipping point where discourse is shifting from promoting numbers to demanding decentralised, community-controlled tourism with strict audits and landscape-based planning.

SUSTAINABLE HIMALAYAN TOURISM: CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS – A UPSC PERSPECTIVE

CRISIS OF MASS TOURISM



- Traffic gridlock on mountain roads
- Overcrowded narrow ecosslyment
- Overcrowded narrow trails for
- Environmental waste in Hirpano.



- Overwhelming Fragile Ecosystem
- Systemic Failure, Not Travel Boom
- Outsider-Owned Business Model
- Ghost Villages & Distress Migration

DECENTRALIZED COMMUNITY-LED SOLUTIONS

- Community-Led, Niche Tourism
- Ethos over Commerce
- Himalayan Specific Carrying Capacity
- Financial Support for Equity



Niche Initiatives (Case Studies)

- Himalayan Ark
- Spiti Ecosphere
- Snow Leopard Conservancy
- Butterfly Tourism (Devalsari)

HOMESTAY MARKET & REGULATIONS

Projected 11% CAGR

Poorly Defined Concept

Drowning in Overtaking Policies

Need Destination Management & Lesser-known Areas

WAY FORWARD: STRICT REGULATIONS & AUDITS

- Mandatory Carrying Capacity Audits
- Landscape Geospatial Analysis
- Strict Zoning & Destination Management
- Ryokan-Style Restraint & Refinement

KEY METRICS FOR SUCCESS

- Health of Mountain Springs
- Stability of Slopes

- **Logical and Philosophical Base**
- **Tragedy of the Commons:** The argument implicitly draws on Garrett Hardin's idea – the Himalayan ecosystem (a common resource) is being overexploited by uncoordinated commercial interests because individual businesses (and tourists) reap benefits while costs (pollution, congestion, slope destabilisation) are shared by all. Regulation and community ownership are proposed as solutions.
- **Limits to Growth and Carrying Capacity:** Rooted in ecological economics, the belief that infinite growth in a finite system (fragile mountains) is impossible. The article rejects the “big is beautiful” industrial model and calls for scale-appropriate, decentralised tourism that respects biogeophysical limits.
- **Subsidiarity Principle:** The idea that decisions should be taken at the most local level possible. Decentralised community-led tourism empowers villages to manage their resources, aligning with Gandhian Gram Swaraj self-sufficiency.
- **Deep Ecology vs. Shallow Ecology:** The critique of “ecotourism” as a buzzword aligns with Arne Naess's deep ecology, which seeks a fundamental shift in human-nature relationships (live with mountains, not consume them), as opposed to shallow ecology that just seeks to manage resources for continued human use.
- **Capability Approach (Amartya Sen):** The argument that homestay models risk reinforcing inequality unless accompanied by capacity-building and financial support reflects a concern for enhancing people's real freedoms to benefit. Poorer families are excluded because they lack the upfront capital – a failure of enabling conditions.
- **Cultural Epistemology:** The emphasis on storytelling, ecological literacy, and local knowledge-based niche tourism values indigenous ways of knowing and living with the landscape, contrasting with the extractive, entertainment-driven mass tourism model.





- **Multidimensional Analysis**

- **Social:** Impact on local culture and the potential for tourism to either mitigate or exacerbate rural-to-urban migration.


- **Political:** The tension between the Union Government's push for tourism-led growth and the state government's duty to protect the fragile ecology.

- **Legal:** The need for a "Himalayan Specific" building code and the enforcement of the National Strategy for Eco Tourism (2022).

- **Ethical:** The "Liquidation of Natural Heritage"—the ethics of prioritizing short-term economic gains over the survival of future generations.

- **International:** Learning from global models like Bhutan (High Value, Low Volume) or Japan (Regulated Ryokans).

- **Economic:** The projected \$50 billion ecotourism market must be balanced against the massive costs of disaster relief and environmental restoration.



- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**
- **GS Paper 1 – Geography:** Geographical features and changes in critical regions, factors affecting location of tertiary sector, urbanization and associated issues. The debate on Himalayan mass tourism links to mountain ecology and sustainable development.
- **GS Paper 3 – Environment and Ecology:** Conservation, environmental impact assessment, ecotourism, disaster management, sustainable development. Crucial for questions on man-animal conflict, carrying capacity, biodiversity-linked livelihoods.
- **GS Paper 3 – Economy:** Infrastructure and growth of services sector, tourism industry, inclusive growth. Homestay market valuation, role of tourism in employment, distress migration from hill states.
- **GS Paper 2 – Governance:** Government policies and interventions, issues relating to development of social sector, role of NGOs, SHGs, and various institutions. NITI Aayog report, policy gaps, community participation, and regulation of tourism.
- **GS Paper 4 – Ethics, Integrity, Aptitude:** Corporate social responsibility, environmental ethics, intergenerational equity, conflict of interest in commercial tourism, probity in enforcing regulations.
- **Essay Paper:** Possible themes: 'Is mass tourism an ecological and cultural disaster?', 'Sustainable development in fragile ecosystems', 'Community-led growth vs. corporate-led growth in the Himalayas'.

- **Way Forward**

- **Legislate Carrying Capacity and Zoning:** Enact a model Himalayan Tourism Regulation Act mandating geospatial mapping, carrying-capacity limits for all fragile zones, and strict land-use zoning enforced by state governments with gram sabha approval.
- **Destination Management Authorities:** Create statutory Destination Management Organisations at district or landscape level, comprising community representatives, ecologists, tourism professionals, and line departments, to plan and regulate tourism, not just promote it.
- **Simplify and Incentivise Homestay Registration:** Single-window, time-bound online registration; link registration to capacity-building, training, and access to credit at concessional rates. Provide direct financial support for BPL families to convert homes, ensuring equity.
- **Knowledge-Driven Community Tourism Hubs:** Scale up successful NGO-led models as Centres of Excellence for community tourism, focusing on storytelling, ecological literacy, and nature guiding. Develop nature festival circuits with controlled visitor numbers.
- **Redirect Marketing Efforts:** State tourism portals must list, promote, and handle bookings for registered homestays, taking a small service fee to fund quality audits. Include homestay association representatives in national tourism advisory bodies.
- **Metrics for Success:** Redefine growth not by tourist numbers but by indicators like spring health index, slope stabilisation, reduction in distress migration, and women's participation. Link state tourism incentives to these metrics.
- **Corporate Engagement with Guardrails:** Encourage CSR projects like Royal Enfield's climate resilience mission, but with community-drafted terms ensuring power stays local. Corporate homestay chains should be avoided; instead, support aggregation platforms owned by federations of community homestays.
- **Strengthen Constitutional Institutions:** Utilise gram sabhas under PESA and Forest Rights Act to assert community rights over tourism resources. Capacity building and social audits mandatory.

- **UPSC Civil Services (Mains) Questions:**

- **2023:** (GS1) Discuss the geophysical characteristics of the Himalayan region and their implications for tourism and disaster management.

- **2022:** (GS3) Describe the major causes and consequences of landslides in the Himalayas. How can sustainable tourism practices mitigate these risks?

- **2021:** (GS3) “The unregulated growth of tourism in ecologically fragile areas creates more problems than opportunities.” Examine with reference to the Indian Himalayan region.

- **2020:** (GS2) The role of community participation in sustainable management of natural resources is often emphasised but rarely operationalized. Analyse.

- **2019:** (GS1) Explain the impact of tourism on the socio-cultural fabric and ecology of the mountain regions of India.

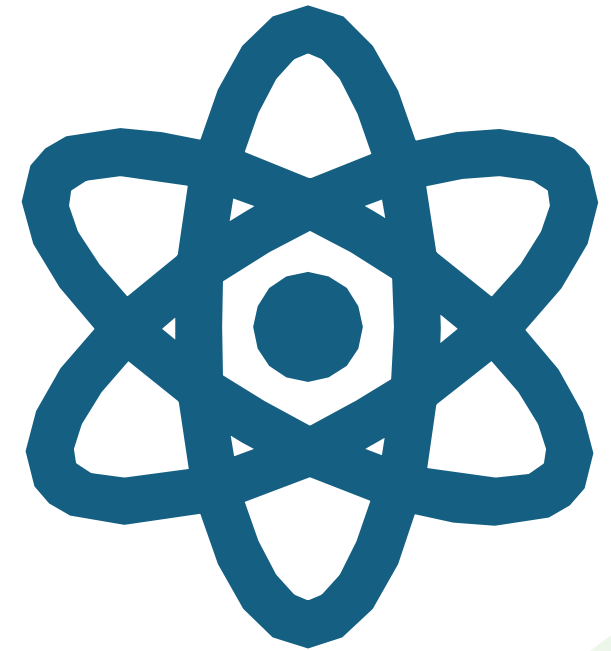
- **2018:** (GS4) Corporate social responsibility has become a mere box-ticking exercise for many companies. What ethical challenges arise, and how can they be addressed in environmentally sensitive sectors like Himalayan tourism?

- **2017:** (GS3) The Char Dham Highway project has sparked a debate on development versus environmental concerns. Present a balanced view.

- **2016:** (GS1) Globalisation has inflicted severe damage on the fragile ecology of the Himalayas. Do you agree? Give arguments.

- **2015:** (Essay) “Development and environment can go hand in hand: A Himalayan perspective.”

- **2014:** (GS3) Should the concept of “carrying capacity” be legally enforced for all tourist destinations in India? Substantiate.



Iran war leaves India with few good choices

We share centuries of historical ties and cultural affinity with Iran. That should count for something



SHYAM SARAN

In 2023, when I attended a conference on Middle East in Singapore, there was a mood of self-congratulation among participants from the Gulf states, the United States and Israel. The region was seen as having achieved a degree of peace and security. The Abraham Accords concluded in September 2020 had enabled the normalisation of relations between the UAE and Bahrain and Morocco and Sudan. There was every expectation that Saudi Arabia would follow suit, as would the remaining Gulf states — Qatar, Kuwait and Oman.

When the issue of Palestine was raised, the reaction from American, Israeli, and some Gulf country participants was that while the issue had not been resolved, it had been successfully managed. The Americans conveyed that while they would maintain a significant military presence in the region, the responsibility for maintaining

security would fall mainly on US allies in the region, with Israel as the keystone. Interestingly, the I2U2 (India, Israel, the UAE, and the US) grouping was mentioned as a potentially important component of regional security.

On September 29, 2023, just eight days before the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel, the then US National Security Advisor, Jake Sullivan, had declared that "the Middle East was one of the most peaceful and stable parts of the world." The string of violent events since, in Gaza, and then in the conflict involving Iran, has proved Mr Sullivan spectacularly wrong.

Under President Donald Trump's second term, the US can no longer pretend to be an off-shore balancer. It is directly intervening to change the geopolitical landscape in the region. Change there will be, but not to the US' advantage.

This leads one to the US Central Command — Centcom — and the role it plays in upholding security in Middle East. All the six Gulf states — Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman — are members of Centcom. Israel was not originally a member because the Gulf and Arab states objected to its presence. It was included, instead, in the US military command based in Europe — Eucom. But once the Abraham Accords were concluded in 2020,



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Israel was quietly integrated into Centcom in January 2021.

This implies that practical security cooperation between Israel and Arab states, which are part of Centcom, has been ongoing for some time. They have been integrated into the Middle East Air Defense (MEAD) system led by the US, which operates a network of radars and interceptors throughout the region. During Iran's retali-

atory attacks against Israel in the recent war involving Iran, several Gulf partners reportedly shared radar data or allowed the use of their airspace for intercepting Iranian drones and missiles and to enable US and Israeli attacks against Iranian targets. To claim that they had not allowed the US to use their territories for attack against Iran is not tenable.

India became an observer at

Centcom in October 2020 and stationed a representative at the Navcent (naval wing of Centcom) in Bahrain soon thereafter. India is a member of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) under Centcom, which has 47 members and takes part in the task forces on counter-piracy and maritime security. This allows the Indian Navy to synchronise its activities with Centcom partners.

This suggests a closer relationship with Centcom than is generally apparent.

Against this background, India may have had less room for manoeuvre in responding to the Iran war and articulating a more balanced posture. The Iranian official statements on India's less than supportive stance has been muted but Iranian media has been openly critical. India has been accused of being complicit in the US and Israeli attacks against Iran. It has been criticised for not speaking up when the US torpedoed an Iranian vessel with young naval cadets that had taken part in the Milan naval exercise hosted by the Indian Navy and was sailing off the coast of Sri Lanka in international waters. Though unsubstantiated, Iranian media has accused India of being aware of the plan to attack the Iranian vessel and of failing to prevent it. On Chabahar Port in Iran, which India has been building as an alternative access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, it is accused of economic abandonment. In contrast, Pakistan is praised for being a brotherly country, a reliable partner, a genuine mediator and working tirelessly for peace. India-Iran relations appear to have hit a low point.

The Iran war is leading to realignments among states of the region and India will have to adjust to these changes. The UAE has announced it is leaving the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec), and will no longer observe Opec-mandated production caps on its oil production. This is as much a reflection of

its strained relationship with Saudi Arabia as it is of the country's business interests. The UAE has been openly critical of its Gulf partners for not taking a tougher stand against Iran. It is unhappy about Pakistan's mediation efforts, which it believes strengthens Iran's position. India has quickly aligned itself with the UAE. The Indian National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval, paid a visit to the UAE, and there are reports of a possible prime ministerial visit in the offing. Unlike in the past, India appears to be taking sides. Whether this will pay in the longer run remains to be seen.

India's long-term interests point to the need to urgently salvage relations with Iran before negative sentiments against India become entrenched within the government and people of Iran. Iran is far too important for India to allow relations to turn adversarial. It is a key component of India's western security perimeter. It remains potentially, a significant energy partner. Whether the conflict continues or a peace deal is reached, Iran has demonstrated its capacity to significantly disrupt and influence traffic through the Strait of Hormuz. This leverage extends not only to Gulf states but also to major energy importers such as India. And beyond these practical arguments is the people-to-people dimension. Here is a country that is India's civilisational twin, with which we share centuries of historical relations and cultural affinity. That should count for something.

The author is a former foreign secretary

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Abraham Accords (2020):** A series of U.S.-brokered normalization agreements between Israel and Arab states—UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan. They broke the long-standing Arab consensus that recognition of Israel must follow Palestinian statehood. For instance, UAE formalized diplomatic, trade, and security ties without resolving the Palestinian question.
- **CENTCOM (U.S. Central Command):** One of eleven unified combatant commands of the U.S. Department of Defense, responsible for the Middle East, Central Asia, and parts of South Asia. Its maritime arm, NAVCENT, is based in Bahrain. In 2021, Israel was moved from EUCOM to CENTCOM, enabling integrated military coordination with Arab states.
- **I2U2:** A minilateral grouping of India, Israel, the UAE, and the United States, focusing on water, energy, transport, and space cooperation. It symbolizes a new, issues-based alignment crossing old geopolitical divides.
- **MEAD (Middle East Air Defense):** A U.S.-led integrated air and missile defense network linking radars and interceptors across Gulf states and Israel. It allows real-time intelligence-sharing against common threats like Iranian drones and missiles.
- **Combined Maritime Forces (CMF):** A 47-nation naval partnership under CENTCOM, promoting security in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, and Gulf region. India joined in 2022, enabling coordinated counter-piracy and maritime security operations.
- **Chabahar Port:** Iran's only oceanic port on the Gulf of Oman, being developed by India as a strategic gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. It is critical for INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor) connectivity.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** The narrow sea passage between Iran and Oman, through which roughly one-fifth of global oil trade passes. Iran's ability to threaten or disrupt this chokepoint gives it enormous strategic leverage.
- **OPEC and OPEC+:** The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries plus allies like Russia; it regulates oil production quotas. UAE's reported exit signals intra-Gulf tensions and a more independent economic posture.

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- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **False sense of stability before October 2023:** The pre-Hamas attack mood of self-congratulation ignored the unresolved Palestinian issue, treating it as “managed” rather than solved. Jake Sullivan’s statement about the Middle East being “one of the most peaceful” regions proved myopic.
- **U.S. is no longer an offshore balancer:** Under Trump’s second term, America is directly reshaping the geopolitical landscape, not just deterring. This shift forces allies, including India, to choose sides more openly.
- **CENTCOM’s quiet integration:** The inclusion of Israel into CENTCOM after Abraham Accords, along with pre-existing Arab security cooperation, created a de facto anti-Iran coalition. India’s observer status at CENTCOM and membership in CMF binds it closer to this architecture than commonly perceived.
- **Erosion of India’s balanced posture:** Iran accuses India of complicity through radar data sharing, airspace usage, and silence on the reported U.S. attack on an Iranian vessel that had participated in India’s Milan exercise. Media in Iran openly contrasts India’s stance with Pakistan’s “brotherly” mediation.
- **Chabahar abandonment narrative:** Despite Indian investment, Iran feels Delhi has economically abandoned the project, reducing the strategic goodwill once shared.
- **India aligning with UAE:** NSA Doval’s UAE visit, possible PM visit, and rapid alignment with UAE’s anti-Iran and anti-OPEC stance indicate India is tilting toward the Abraham Accords bloc. This short-term convergence risks long-term damage with Iran.
- **Urgency to salvage Iran ties:** The author argues Iran is too vital—western security perimeter, energy partner, Hormuz leverage, civilizational twin—to allow adversarial drift.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Ancient ties:** Civilizational links dating back to the Indus Valley and Persian empires; cultural exchange through language, art, and Sufi traditions. The Parsi community in India is a living bridge.
- **Pre-1947:** British India's strategic frontier included Persia; the two regions shared anti-colonial solidarity.
- **Cold War era (1950s–70s):** Iran was a pro-West monarchy in CENTO; India pursued non-alignment, yet maintained cordial relations. Shah's Iran supplied oil during the 1971 war with Pakistan.
- **1979 Islamic Revolution:** India balanced relations with the new theocratic regime, despite initial wariness. The Iran-Iraq war saw India carefully walking a middle path.
- **1990s–2000s:** Growing energy partnership; Iran became a major oil supplier. The North-South Transport Corridor idea germinated. India and Iran, along with Russia, backed the Northern Alliance against the Taliban in Afghanistan in the late 1990s.
- **Chabahar Agreement (2003 first MoU, 2016 trilateral with Afghanistan):** India committed to developing the port. U.S. sanctions on Iran complicated but did not halt the project, with waivers granted for Chabahar.
- **Nuclear deal (JCPOA) 2015 and U.S. withdrawal 2018:** India reduced oil imports under U.S. pressure, straining economic ties with Tehran.
- **Abraham Accords 2020 and India's deeper Gulf-Israel ties:** India welcomed the Accords; I2U2 formed in 2021. India became observer in CENTCOM in 2020 and joined CMF in 2022.
- **Gaza war (October 2023 onward) and Iran-Israel direct clashes (2024–25):** Regional polarization intensified. Iran's retaliatory strikes and the U.S.-led defense exposed India's dilemma—balancing historic Iran ties with growing strategic embrace of the U.S.-Israel-UAE axis.

IRAN WAR LEAVES INDIA WITH FEW GOOD CHOICES: A COMPREHENSIVE GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS

INDIA'S GEOPOLITICAL TIGHTROPE: POST-ABRAHAM ACCORDS & IRAN WAR

US-LED REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE (CENTCOM)



ISRAEL QUIETLY INTEGRATED INTO CENTCOM (JAN 2021)

JOINT MEAD (MIDDLE EAST AIR DEFENSE) SYSTEM

GULF PARTNERS SHARE RADAR DATA, AIRSPACE

INDIA IS CMF MEMBER & NAVCENT OBSERVER

CHALLENGE: India perceived as complicit



MISSILE NETWORK

MISSILE INTERCEPT AND EMFSTAS

INDIA'S RESPONSE & REALIGNMENTS

TILT TOWARD UAE/ISRAEL (e.g., Doval visit)

UAE LEAVES OPEC

Strategic Divergence from Multi-alignment

KEY TRENDS:

- DIRECT US INTERVENTION
- INTRA-ARAB FRACTURES (UAE vs KSA)
- DEATH OF OFF-SHORE BALANCER

INDIA'S IRANIAN VULNERABILITIES



PERCEIVED ECONOMIC ABANDONMENT OF CHABAHAR PORT



LOSS OF CENTRAL ASIA ACCESS



IMPAIRMENT OF ENERGY PARTNERSHIP



PAKISTAN ACCLAIMED BY IRAN "BROTHERLY COUNTRY"

IMPACT ON HISTORICAL & CIVILISATIONAL TIES

IRAN'S STRAIT OF HORMUZ LEVERAGE

WAY FORWARD: SALVAGING THE SITUATION



1 URGENTLY SALVAGE RELATIONS WITH IRAN (High-level Visits)



2 PRIORITIZE CHABAHAR COMPLETION



3 ACTIVATE INSTC



4 LEVERAGE MARITIME DIPLOMACY IN INDIAN OCEAN

UPSC SYLLABUS LINKAGES

- (GS 2) International Relations
- (GS 3) Security
- (Essay)
- (Ethics)

- **Logical and Philosophical Base**

- **Realism in international relations:** The article implicitly critiques a purely realist logic that prioritizes immediate security and economic gains over civilizational ties. The U.S. and its allies assume power balancing will stabilize the region, but the analysis suggests it may provoke blowback.
- **Strategic autonomy versus alliance politics:** India's traditional non-aligned philosophy, rooted in Nehruvian idealism, has gradually given way to "multi-alignment." The central tension is whether observer status at CENTCOM and closer UAE-Israel ties force India into a de facto alliance that compromises autonomy.
- **Civilizational thinking:** The plea to "count for something" the centuries-old cultural affinity with Iran invokes a civilizational state worldview, where shared heritage should guide foreign policy alongside hard interests. This is a mix of Gandhian and post-colonial ethical reasoning.
- **Assumptions under scrutiny:** The pre-October 2023 assumption that Palestine can be "managed" without resolution proved false. The article questions the assumption that Iran can be permanently contained militarily, highlighting its asymmetric leverage over Hormuz.
- **Dialectics of peace:** The narrative of "peace through strength" is contrasted with the reality of escalating violence, suggesting that genuine peace requires inclusive dialogue, not just military integration.

Multidimensional Analysis

Social

Around a million-strong Indian diaspora in Iran and Gulf, plus India's sizable Shia population, feel the strain in relations.

Cultural exchange programs, student visits, and ziarat tourism to Iranian shrines may suffer from diplomatic chill.

Political

India's ruling establishment must manage competing demands: the Muslim electorate's sentiments on Palestine and Iran, versus strategic partnership with Israel and Gulf monarchies.

Regional parties in states with Shia population (like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra) may voice concerns.

Legal

Chabahar operations operate under U.S. sanctions waiver. Any misstep risks invoking U.S. domestic law (CAATSA) and Indian companies facing punitive measures.

International law on straits and freedom of navigation: India must support rules-based order in Hormuz, but also avoid being party to blockade-like actions.

Ethical

Abandoning a civilizational partner in times of war raises moral questions about India's foreign policy values.

India's silence on the reported U.S. torpedoing of an Iranian vessel, especially after the vessel participated in India's friendly naval exercise, appears ethically inconsistent.

International

India's balancing act is watched by other middle powers; loss of credibility with Iran can signal to partners like Russia and Central Asian states that India's commitments are fungible under U.S. pressure.

BRI and CPEC fill vacuums created by India's reduced engagement with Iran, strengthening China's regional footprint.

Economic

Iran remains a viable, cost-effective source of crude oil and natural gas. Loss of this option reduces India's energy bargaining power.

Chabahar is a gateway to Central Asian markets, estimated to reduce freight costs and time significantly compared to traditional sea-land routes through Europe.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**

- **NCERT Class 12 Political Science, 'Contemporary World Politics' – Chapter 1 (The Cold War Era) and Chapter 6 (International Organisations):** The non-aligned movement's legacy vs. new alignments; CENTCOM as an instance of contemporary alliance systems.
- **Class 12 Political Science, 'Politics in India Since Independence' – Chapter 4 (India's External Relations):** India's balancing policy toward West Asia, ties with Iran pre- and post-1979, and evolution of strategic autonomy.
- **Class 12 Geography, 'India – People and Economy' – Chapter 11 (International Trade):** Ports and trade routes, Chabahar's role in India's maritime connectivity, energy imports through sea lanes.
- **Class 11 Political Science, 'Indian Constitution at Work' – Chapter 9 (Constitution as a Living Document):** Article 51, Directive Principles on international peace and security, shaping foreign policy values.
- **Class 10 History, 'The Making of a Global World' – Sub-topic on 20th-century West Asian conflicts:** Pre-independence trade and cultural links with West Asia, oil politics.



- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**

- **GS Paper 1:** World history – Cold War legacy, West Asian geopolitics; Indian culture – Persian influence, civilizational ties; Regionalism.
- **GS Paper 2:** India and its neighborhood; Bilateral, regional, and global groupings involving India; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Indian diaspora; International institutions.
- **GS Paper 3:** Energy security (oil imports, chokepoints); Infrastructure (ports, INSTC, Chabahar); Security challenges (maritime security, role of CENTCOM, CMF).
- **GS Paper 4 (Ethics):** Ethical dilemmas in international relations; Civilizational values vs. pragmatic interests; Case studies on choosing between competing loyalties.
- **Essay:** Themes like "Strategic autonomy in an age of alliances," "Heritage as a compass in foreign policy," "Balancing realism and idealism in statecraft."
- **Optional Subjects:**
 - *Political Science & IR:* Theories of international relations (realism, constructivism); India's foreign policy evolution; West Asian politics.
 - *Geography:* Geopolitics of energy, sea lanes, port development.
 - *History:* Persianate cultural sphere, India-Iran historical connections.



- **Way Forward**

- **Diplomatic outreach at the highest level:** A prime ministerial or presidential visit to Tehran, separately conveying that CENTCOM observer status and CMF membership are not directed against Iran. Clearly articulate India's continued support for Iran's territorial integrity.
- **Operationalize Chabahar with visible commitment:** Fast-track equipment procurement, involve Indian private players, and create a dedicated fund insulated from U.S. sanctions, leveraging the existing waiver. Make Chabahar a symbol of reliable partnership.
- **Energy diversification with Iran option alive:** While complying with sanctions, keep technical and commercial channels open for resuming oil imports when legally possible, signaling long-term intent.
- **Backchannel communication:** Use trusted intermediaries (like Oman, Qatar, or Russia) to clarify misinformation, especially the naval vessel incident, and reassure Iran of India's non-participation in hostile acts.
- **Cultural diplomacy:** Significantly boost scholarships for Iranian students, restore direct flights if curtailed, promote tourism to Iran's historical sites, and highlight the Parsi connection to reinforce the civilizational bridge.
- **Broker regional dialogue:** India can leverage its good offices with both Israel and Gulf states, as well as Iran, to quietly encourage de-escalation and comprehensive talks that include the Palestinian question. This would also counter Pakistan's mediator narrative.
- **SCO and BRICS platforms:** Use India's membership and Iran's full membership to discuss connectivity, counter-terrorism, and economic cooperation in a neutral forum, rebuilding normalcy.
- **Public posture calibration:** Statements on regional developments should be carefully worded to avoid the impression of joining an anti-Iran camp, while affirming India's independent foreign policy.

• **UPSC Civil Services Examination (CSE)**

- *Prelims:*
- 2022: Question on Chabahar Port location and its significance.
- 2020: International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) members and route.
- 2018: Abraham Accords – not directly asked but West Asia geopolitics is a recurring theme.
- *Mains GS2:*
- 2023: “The India-US relationship has moved from estranged democracies to engaged global partners. In this context, discuss India’s strategic autonomy in its foreign policy.”
- 2022: “What is the significance of Chabahar Port for India’s connectivity with Central Asia?”
- 2021: “Analyse the significance of India’s ‘Extended Neighbourhood’ policy in the context of its engagement with Central Asia and the Gulf.”
- 2018: “The long-drawn India-Iran relationship has stood the test of time. Discuss the key areas of cooperation and the challenges faced by both nations.”
- 2015: “India’s relations with Israel have broken new ground. What are the implications for India’s traditional support for Palestine and ties with Iran?”
- 2013: “India’s strategic interests in the Gulf region are vital. Elaborate.”
- *Mains GS3:*
- 2021: “Critically assess India’s energy security challenges in the light of geopolitical developments in West Asia.”
- 2017: “Sea lanes of communication are India’s critical strategic arteries. Discuss in the context of the Indian Ocean Region.”



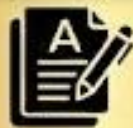
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