



सत्यमेव जयते
Policy Planning & Research Division
Ministry of External Affairs
Government of India

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS CONFERENCE

**India at the Epicentre: Strategic Responses to
Global Turbulence**
*Navigating Conflicts, Competition, and Diplomatic
Challenges*

29 - 30 November 2025

Venue: Symbiosis International University, Lavale, Pune



Organized by

SYMBIOSIS SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
SYMBIOSIS INTERNATIONAL (DEEMED UNIVERSITY)



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHANCELLOR'S DESK

Symbiosis was founded in 1971 as a “home away from home” for foreign students, a vision rooted in care, cultural understanding, and global friendship. What began as an effort to nurture international harmony has now evolved into a strong academic and intellectual movement to build meaningful global relations. This vision has found expression through the establishment of the Symbiosis School of International Studies (SSIS) and the annual International Relations Conference (IRC).



Over the years, the IRC has emerged as a premier platform for dialogue on global affairs, bringing together diplomats, policymakers, business leaders, academics, and media professionals from India and across the world. The first nine editions have explored diverse and timely themes such as:

1. *India and Development Partnerships in Asia and Africa: Towards a New Paradigm* (2013)
2. *India's Look East–Act East Policy: A Bridge to the Asian Neighborhood* (2014)
3. *Link West: India and the Gulf* (2015)
4. *India and the Indian Ocean: Sustainability, Security and Development* (2016)
5. *India–EU: Enhancing Strategic Partnerships* (2017)
6. *Shaping a New Strategic Culture for India* (2018)
7. *Competition, Convergence and Multi-alignment: Shaping India's Foreign Policy for the Next Decade* (2021)
8. *India and Africa: Old Partners, New Challenges and Opportunities* (January 2023)
9. *India's Strategic Culture: Addressing Global and Regional Challenges* (November 2023)

Each edition has deepened understanding, fostered collaboration, and contributed to policy thought in India's engagement with the world.

True to our motto, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* - “The world is one family,” Symbiosis continues to play its part in strengthening India's global outlook. I am delighted that this year's conference, “*India at the Epicentre: Strategic Responses to Global Turbulence – Navigating Conflicts, Competition, and Diplomatic Challenges*,” focuses on one of the most pressing issues of our times. I am confident that the deliberations at this conference will provide valuable insights and contribute meaningfully to shaping the evolving contours of India's foreign policy and its role in an increasingly complex world.

DR. S.B. MUJUMDAR

MESSAGE FROM THE PRO CHANCELLOR'S DESK



It is a matter of great pride and pleasure to announce that the Symbiosis School of International Studies (SSIS), under the aegis of Symbiosis International (Deemed University), is hosting the Tenth International Relations Conference (IRC). Against the backdrop of significant shifts in global politics, this year's conference is themed:

“India at the Epicentre: Strategic Responses to Global Turbulence – Navigating Conflicts, Competition, and Diplomatic Challenges.”

Over the past decade, SSIS has made a meaningful impact in the field of international studies by developing dynamic academic programmes and hosting insightful symposia and conferences. The International Relations Conference (IRC) stands as a flagship event that brings together scholars, policymakers, diplomats, and thought leaders to deliberate on contemporary global issues.

Each edition of the IRC provides a vibrant platform for discussions on international relations, security and defence, trade and investment, culture and identity, and climate change mitigation. The previous conferences have been well attended and highly appreciated by a wide range of stakeholders, including policymakers, bureaucrats, corporate leaders, media professionals, NGOs, academics, faculty, and students.

The tenth edition of the IRC will convene eminent experts from India and abroad to explore how India's rich cultural heritage shapes its foreign policy and strategic decision-making, while deepening the understanding of India's evolving role in global affairs.

We look forward to another successful edition of the IRC and extend a warm welcome to all participants and delegates.

Wishing the International Relations Conference great success!

DR. VIDYA YERAVDEKAR

MESSAGE FROM THE VICE CHANCELLOR'S DESK

Building on the success of its previous nine editions, IRC 2025 is poised to bring together global policymakers, scholars, and practitioners to deliberate on India's evolving strategic role in a rapidly transforming world. The conference will explore a broad spectrum of themes - from geopolitical conflicts and economic competition to security challenges and multilateral diplomacy.

Participants will engage in high-level discussions, gain actionable insights, and contribute to shaping collaborative solutions that bridge the gap between theory and practice.

IRC 2025 promises to serve as a timely and dynamic platform for developing informed strategies, strengthening international partnerships, and amplifying India's voice in global decision-making.

I extend my best wishes for the success of this conference and commend the organizers for their continued commitment to excellence.



DR. RAMAKRISHNAN RAMAN



INDEX

- ABOUT SYMBIOSIS INTERNATIONAL (DEEMED UNIVERSITY).....iv
- ABOUT SYMBIOSIS SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES.....vi
- RATIONALE.....Page 1
- CONFERENCE AGENDA.....Page 6

ABOUT

SYMBIOSIS INTERNATIONAL (DEEMED UNIVERSITY)

Symbiosis International (Deemed University) is a multi-disciplinary university offering its students and faculty a vibrant learning ecosystem designed around its multicultural and innovative ethos. Symbiosis was established in 1971 by Prof. Dr. S.B. Mujumdar, which was a 'home away from home' for international students. The Institution is based on the principles of Vedic thought of "World as One Family". The university's name fittingly captures the quintessence of the relationship with international students; a mutually beneficial bond between India and the international student community. Symbiosis is committed to building international understanding by offering quality education and is resplendent to the activities and students of more than 85+ countries. Today the university has its campuses spread across four states and six cities in India and one international campus in Dubai. All the university campuses epitomize the Symbiosis vision, 'Promoting International Understanding through Quality Education' and are a beehive of international students from all across the globe, being privy to Indian culture and hospitality. The university has been awarded Category-I status by UGC and an 'A++' grade by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). It has been ranked 24th in India by National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) 2025, and 10th by Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievement (ARIIA) 2021. Internationally in the QS World University Rankings 2025, the university is placed in the 641–650 band globally, 216th in Asia, and 42nd in South Asia. The Times Higher Education (THE) World University Ranking 2025 rank the university in the 601–800th band, and 4th in India. THE World University Rankings 2025 by 'subject' has ranked the university in the 301-400 band in Social Sciences, in the 501-600 band in Business & Economics, in the 301- 400 band in Computer Science, in the 601-800 band in Medical and Health, and in the 601-800 band in Engineering. It is the only university to have received the Asia Pacific Quality Label. The university is a pioneer in liberal arts education and has a strong School for Liberal Arts with departments in languages, literature, music, philosophy, Indology, art, dance, theatre, education, anthropology, political science, international relations, film studies, peace and conflict studies, mathematics and statistics, pure and applied sciences, sociology, economics, sports, etc.

While offering India's pioneering 4-year honours programme, it also offers students across SIU institutes the opportunity to study courses of liberal arts, giving them a unique edge by focusing on 360° critical thinking and innovative design thinking, with the hope of finding innovative solutions to societal problems. Innovation and entrepreneurship programmes, an incubation centre and seed money for student /faculty research complete the learning ecosystem. Students and faculty are provided with opportunities to pursue their international academic interests to the fullest, be it through academic exchanges, or exposure to international conferences, seminars, workshops, and other resources. Recently, the University has established the Symbiosis Medical College for Women. The medical college and its attached Symbiosis University Hospital and Research Centre have state-of-the-art infrastructure and facilities. Symbiosis International (Deemed University) is committed towards the generation of knowledge, innovations and its contribution towards the development of the Nation.



ABOUT

SYMBIOSIS SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

In the contemporary scenario, India's interest in the world, as well as the world's interest in India, is visibly at its highest. Therefore, it becomes imperative that Indian scholarship on global issues should respond to the opportunities that this presents. To this end, the Symbiosis School of International Studies (SSIS) endeavours to provide a platform for teaching and research in international relations, with an emphasis on India and its role in global affairs. Set up in consonance with the broader vision of Symbiosis Society, which is "to integrate with the world", SSIS strives to constantly engage in scholarly pursuits in an environment of intellectual fellowship, aimed at the academic enrichment of the entire community. SSIS offers M.A. (International Studies) degree programme, which aims to equip students with knowledge and skills pertinent to addressing the 21st-century global challenges. The holistic nature of courses offered under the programmes provides students with the lens to critically examine, analyse and understand contemporary issues based on a multi-disciplinary approach. The specialisation offered under the course on Area Studies fosters scholarship of the region informed by a deeper understanding of an interconnected and interdependent world. The students are also offered a choice of foreign language as part of the Area Studies course (Arabic/ French/ Spanish/ Chinese). The curriculum includes a mandatory internship in the third semester that prepares students for careers with CSOs, NGOs, international organisations, think tanks, civil services, media, academia, consultancies and financial institutions. Our faculty members are a good blend of prominent academicians, active researchers and practitioners, attesting to the belief that the best pedagogy comes from a mix of theory and praxis. The students benefit from the contributions of different types of practitioners of international relations, whether they are from diplomacy, corporates, think tanks or international organisations. The diverse background of both the faculty and the postgraduate students makes for a cosmopolitan and enriching environment.

RATIONALE

The 2025 International Relations Conference titled "India at the Epicentre: Strategic Responses to Global Turbulence: Navigating Conflicts, Competition, and Diplomatic Challenges," is a continuation of the deliberations that commenced in the last edition themed "India's Strategic Culture: Addressing Global & Regional Challenges," held in November 2023. Against the backdrop of unprecedented geopolitical upheaval, escalating global conflicts, and shifting power dynamics, this edition will examine India's evolving foreign policy responses to contemporary challenges and its strategic role in navigating multipolar turbulence.

1. Rediscovering the Golden Road: Foreign Policy for a Civilizational State

The present churn in global politics and the emergence of a multipolar world order could benefit from an analysis of historical experiences, cultural identities, and political philosophies of 'civilization-states'—nations that derive legitimacy from their civilizational heritage—such as India, which have witnessed and successfully adapted to the transformation of world politics. It would be interesting to examine how civilizational states craft their foreign policy grammar and attempt to develop a non-Western approach that is starkly different from the Westphalian system that has dominated the international political ecosystem over the past several decades.

This session will focus on providing an overview and understanding of the 4 important mutually supportive and intrinsically linked policy priorities that draw inspiration from Indian strategic thought. Drawing from its rich and ancient heritage, India has identified concepts that find resonance and relevance with contemporary national, regional and international priorities, demonstrating how ancient wisdom translates into modern diplomatic practice:

- *SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)*
- *Amrit Kaal*
- *Vishwabandhu*
- *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*

The session will examine how the aforementioned concepts manifest in actual policy decisions and explore the challenges that arise when culturally-rooted diplomatic approaches interact with existing international institutions. This analysis will provide insights into how non-Western frameworks are reshaping global governance in an increasingly multipolar world.

2. India's Strategic Autonomy: Maneuvering Through Multipolar Conflicts

In an era of unprecedented geopolitical turbulence, India faces the complex challenge of maintaining strategic autonomy while navigating multiple concurrent conflicts and diplomatic crises. The contemporary landscape requires India to balance great power competition, particularly between the US and China, manage the Russia-Ukraine conflict while preserving historical partnerships, and address escalating regional tensions. India's approach to the Middle East tensions reflects its delicate balancing act between maintaining energy security partnerships with the Gulf nations while managing relationships with Iran and Israel. Further, recent diplomatic challenges with Bangladesh and persistent Pakistan border concerns have added new dimensions to India's strategic calculus, while European countries, particularly the EU member states, increasingly view India as a crucial partner for diversifying supply chains and strengthening democratic alliances.

India's approach reflects its commitment to strategic autonomy—*independent decision-making while engaging constructively with all major powers*. This session examines how India leverages its democratic credentials, economic potential, and civilizational soft power to navigate geopolitical storms without compromising national interests.

This session will discuss the following aspects:

- *Managing US-China competition while maintaining technology and economic partnerships*
- *Balancing Russia-Ukraine responses with energy security and Western pressure*
- *Addressing South Asian challenges: Bangladesh crisis and Pakistan security concerns*
- *Leveraging EU-India partnership in technology, economics, and security cooperation*
- *Navigating Middle East tensions: Gulf energy partnerships and Iran-Israel dynamics*

3. Economic Warfare and Supply Chain Disruption: Global Trade Under Geopolitical Pressure

The intersection of geopolitical tensions and economic interdependence has fundamentally transformed global trade architecture, with the return of protectionist policies under Trump 2.0 marking a critical juncture for international commerce. Global Value Chains (GVCs), representing the entire range of activities involved in bringing products to markets across multiple countries, now face unprecedented disruption as nations prioritize security over efficiency. The escalating tariff wars, strategic decoupling initiatives, and weaponization of trade policy are accelerating the fragmentation of the liberal international economic order, forcing emerging economies like India to navigate an increasingly polarized geo-economic landscape.

Governments and companies are pursuing GVC resiliency through strategies like 'reshoring' and 'friend-shoring,' while geopolitical tensions create both parallel systems and new regional dynamics. This restructuring reflects broader geoeconomic trends where economic interdependence is being securitized, challenging the efficacy of Bretton Woods institutions and potentially ushering in an era of hyper-protectionism that could fundamentally reshape international commerce.

This session will discuss the following themes:

- *Trump 2.0's impact on global trade and hyper-protectionism*
- *Geopolitics transforming global value chains: COVID-19 and crisis lessons*
- *Strategic future sectors: critical minerals, semiconductors, and advanced technologies*
- *Reshoring, friend-shoring, and parallel economic systems*
- *India's geo-economic strategy: GVC participation to PLI-led leadership*
- *Bretton Woods institutions: adaptation vs replacement*
- *Alternative trade partnerships in a fragmented world*

4. Minilaterals: Future-proofing Strategic Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific

As multilateral institutions like the UN become increasingly dysfunctional in the current global environment, there has been a significant rise of minilaterals. That said, the latter are not regarded as a replacement for multilateralism but as a means to strengthen it. Owing to their non-ideological and voluntary formats, minilaterals present a smart alternative to complex multilaterals and formal alliances. Against the backdrop of growing Chinese influence globally, more specifically in Asia and the Indo-Pacific countries, have sought to come together to respond to the resultant challenges. In the last few years, many such minilaterals have emerged in the Indo-Pacific to address issues that come under the ambit of both traditional as well nontraditional security.

The session will explore the evolving contours of minilaterals in the Indo-Pacific that aim to address key issues like energy and food security, supply chain management, defence cooperation, technical cooperation amongst others. This session will examine these arrangements through functional categories: security-focused minilaterals (QUAD, AUKUS), economic and infrastructure initiatives (IMEC, I2U2), and sectoral/regional frameworks (IFU, IORA, IONS). For these minilaterals, the discussion will analyze their genesis and objectives, key achievements and limitations, and future trajectory and challenges.

This session will discuss the following themes:

- *What is the future of strategic minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific?*
- *QUAD: A strategic minilateral in a multipolar world?*
- *IMEC, I2U2, IFU, AUKUS*
- *India's role in the minilaterals of the Indo-Pacific and its strategy of diversified partnerships*
- *IORA, IONS: A moment of reckoning and transformation?*
- *Challenges of institutional overlap and mechanisms for ensuring complementarity with multilateral frameworks*

5. Diplomacy of Disruptive Technologies: International Regulatory Regimes for New and Emerging Technologies

The rapid advancement of emerging technologies—including artificial intelligence, quantum systems, biotechnology, space innovations, and cybersecurity tools—is fundamentally altering international power structures. India occupies a unique position in this transformation, balancing its aspirations for technological independence with the necessity of global collaboration in an era where comprehensive international technology regulations remain underdeveloped. India's technological initiatives, particularly Digital India and the India Stack architecture, alongside its active participation in global AI governance forums, demonstrate its commitment to responsible technology leadership that prioritizes inclusive development. This positioning allows India to influence emerging technology norms while maintaining strategic autonomy in a landscape dominated by great power competition over technological supremacy.

This session will analyze India's strategy for navigating technology diplomacy, examining how the country can utilize its growing digital capabilities and democratic governance model to contribute to international technology regulation. The focus will be on India's management of dual-use technologies, its efforts to establish beneficial international partnerships, and its approach to maintaining technological sovereignty.

This session will include the following themes for discussion:

- *India's democratic technology governance approach*
- *Semiconductor diplomacy and technological resilience*
- *Digital sovereignty vs. global connectivity*
- *Technology bridge for South-South cooperation*
- *Dual-use technologies and cybersecurity frameworks*

6. South Asia's New Realities: India's Path Forward

The South Asian region faces unprecedented transformation with political upheavals in Bangladesh, economic instability in Pakistan, recovery trajectory in Sri Lanka, and the Taliban consolidation in Afghanistan fundamentally altering regional dynamics. These developments, coupled with intensifying great power competition and China's expanding influence through BRI, require India's strategic recalibration in managing evolving bilateral relationships and security cooperation mechanisms.

This session examines India's evolving South Asia policy framework, analyzing how New Delhi can leverage its economic growth, technological capabilities, and soft power to foster regional stability while addressing persistent challenges. The discussion will explore India's role in promoting regional integration through SAARC alternatives, bilateral partnerships, and connectivity programmes, while managing cross-border terrorism, refugee flows, and climate-induced migration alongside opportunities in renewable energy, digital infrastructure, and disaster management.

This session will include the following themes for discussion:

- *Managing political transitions and democratic backsliding in neighbouring countries*
- *Economic diplomacy: trade, investment, and development partnerships in South Asia*
- *Security challenges: terrorism, border management, and maritime cooperation*
- *Climate diplomacy and sustainable development in the region*
- *Cultural and civilizational ties: leveraging soft power for regional harmony*
- *Alternative regional frameworks beyond traditional multilateral institutions*
- *India's neighborhood-first policy: achievements, limitations, and future directions*

CONFERENCE AGENDA

DAY I 29 November 2025	
11:00 AM - 12:00 PM	Inaugural Ceremony & Keynote Address
12:00 PM- 01:45 PM	Session I Rediscovering the Golden Road: Foreign Policy for a Civilizational State
01:45 PM- 02:45 PM	LUNCH BREAK
02:45 PM- 04:45 PM	Session II India's Strategic Autonomy: Maneuvering Through Multipolar Conflicts
DAY II 30 November 2025	
10:00 AM- 11:30 AM	Session III Economic Warfare and Supply Chain Disruption: Global Trade Under Geopolitical Pressure
11:30 AM-11:45 AM	TEA/COFFEE BREAK
11:45 AM-01:15 PM	Session IV Minilaterals: Future-proofing Strategic Partnerships in the Indo- Pacific
01:15 PM- 02:15 PM	LUNCH BREAK
02:15 PM- 03:45 PM	Session V Diplomacy of Disruptive Technologies: International Regulatory Regimes for New and Emerging Technologies
03:45 pm-04:45 PM	Session VI South Asia's New Realities: India's Path Forward
04:45 PM- 05:00 PM	WRAP UP & CLOSING REMARKS