

IIRF STRATEGIC YEARBOOK 2026

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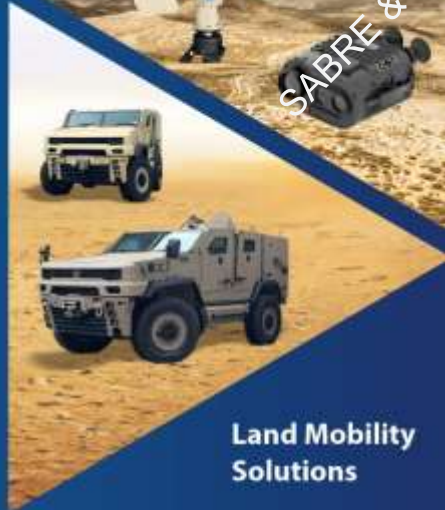


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COMMENDATION



CASS Pune offers the IIRF editors and authors great approbation on the publication of the IIRF Strategic Yearbook 2026. There is an enduring record of punctilious research and editing of this annual volume.

The Yearbook amalgamates varied clusters and geographic domains pertaining to the strategic space. The contributors are preeminent authorities in their fields. This book will be useful to the government, scholars, and the larger public.

Air Marshal Bhushan N Gokhale PVSM AVSM VM (Retd)

Former Vice Chief of Air Staff

Director, Centre for Advanced Strategic Studies, Pune



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RECOMMENDATION



The editorial team of IIRF Strategic Yearbook 2026 needs to be complemented for such consistency in maintaining high standards of academic throughput by engaging with the best minds in the country from multiple disciplines. The contributors are distinguished practitioners and scholars with decades of practice and expertise at the highest national and global levels thus ensuring that the scholarly analysis and conclusions are most relevant in the ever changing landscape across continents.

The Yearbook is an invaluable guide for practitioners, policymakers, and scholars worldwide. The book should find a place in academia, think tanks, diplomacy, media, and the military.

Continued kudos to the editorial team for this massive effort and publication. C3S and NMF commend their members and associates for the contribution towards this publication.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'RS Vasan'.

Commodore RS Vasan, IN Retd

Director General

Chennai Centre for China Studies

Regional Director, National Maritime Foundation, TN



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ENDORSEMENT



Over the past few years, the IIRF Strategic Yearbook series has carved out a niche as a valuable source of well-researched, unbiased, and in-depth analysis across several thematic domains and regions. The authors are au fait veterans and cognoscenti, bringing decades of national and global experience.

The anthology of papers in this compendium is an invaluable resource for governments, international organisations, armed forces, academia, think tanks, industry, investors, researchers and policymakers in the energy and natural resources sectors. This book will go a long way in creating awareness and a deeper understanding of the topics covered.

I commend the entire team involved in bringing out this edition. Special compliments to the Editors and the contributors.

Lt Gen CA Krishnan

PVSM, UYSM, AVSM (Retd)

Former Deputy Chief (Strategy), Indian Army

Director



India Foundation

New Delhi



The IIRF Strategic Yearbook 2026 continues to uphold its high standards, gaining further prestige and acclaim with each edition. This collection of papers covers critical domains spanning governance, industry, natural resources, and the economy. The contributors are seasoned practitioners and recognised experts in their fields.

I applaud the publication of this Yearbook and extend my warmest congratulations to the editors and authors for this outstanding work.

This volume will be of immense value in conceptualising strategic affairs both within India and abroad. It will serve as an indispensable reference for legislators, policymakers, civil servants, the armed forces, scholars, and the media worldwide as they navigate key global challenges.

Maj Gen Dhruv C Katoch
VSM, SM (Retd), former Director CLAWS
Director,
India Foundation

Foreword



The **IIRF Strategic Yearbook** reaches its fourth iteration in an evolving global scenario. The Ukraine War has entered its fifth year, while this year sees the US-Iran War. The world is morphing into a multipolar situation. Both conflicts show the allegiances of countries, even if not formalised into blocs. These will be trends to watch in the years to come. There are issues related to the military, mercantile, technological, and natural resource sectors, as well as multi-domain operations, that need to be addressed. These issues will persist in the coming year.

This Yearbook brings together foremost intellectuals to survey varied topics pertaining to security and geopolitics. The chapters chronicle political and economic events of the year gone by and present an exhaustive evaluation of India's security and economic vistas. Thematic domains include military, economic, technology, internal security, non-kinetic, and natural resources.

Designed as a valuable resource, this Yearbook serves world leaders, militaries, diplomats, think tanks, strategists, scholars, media, and others involved in international affairs. The chapters are diligently researched, impartial, and sans dogmatic predisposition, corresponding with the IIRF's tenet of unbiased, data-driven analysis. This Yearbook truly merits inclusion in premier libraries worldwide. In an era of data overload that leads to cognitive dissonance, this book is a true guide to unbiased discernment and perception.

Earnest gratitude for contributions for their exhaustive research and insightful contributions. Singular approbation to the editorial team—Air Marshal Anil Khosla, Rishi Athreya, Col P Madhavan, and Group Captain Raj Shekhar Mehta—for their commitment to curating and refining this volume. Acknowledgement to Team Indus for the steadfast backing that culminated in this volume. A sincere thanks to the advertisers and the publishers, Sabre & Quill. Their devoted cooperation, which is priceless.

Brig C Sandeepkumar, VSM (Retd)

President, IIRF



Message from the President, IIRF Americas

Greetings to our distinguished readers, strategic thinkers, and global policymakers.

It is an honor to share my thoughts for this latest edition of the **IIRF Strategic Yearbook**, expertly compiled by the IIRF India team. We find ourselves at a historical crossroads, navigating a global landscape defined by rapid geopolitical shifts, emerging gray-zone challenges, and a fundamentally altering balance of power. In such turbulent times, the value of independent, rigorous, and forward-looking strategic analysis cannot be overstated.

As a global think tank, the Indus International Research Foundation has always sought to analyze complex international realities through a lens that values both empirical data and deep civilizational wisdom. From our vantage point at IIRF Americas, we constantly observe how deeply intertwined the strategic security architectures of the Western hemisphere and the Indo-Pacific have become. What happens in terms of maritime security, technological sovereignty, or economic resilience on one side of the world instantly reverberates across the other.

This edition of the Yearbook is particularly remarkable for its depth and timely focus. By bringing together an exceptional compilation of insights from well-known authors, practitioners, and veterans, the publication tackles the most pressing questions in **Geopolitics, Defense, and Security**. From re-evaluating national security strategies in a post-pandemic world to dissecting the nuances of civil-military relations, integrated defense, and maritime power dynamics, this compendium offers an invaluable roadmap for navigating today's strategic churning.

I extend my heartiest congratulations to the editorial team in India and the brilliant contributors whose distilled wisdom fills these pages. They have maintained the highest standards of analytical integrity, ensuring this book serves as a vital reference point for diplomats, military strategists, scholars, and policymakers worldwide.

Together, across our global chapters, IIRF will continue to foster the critical discourse needed to build a more secure, resilient, and cooperative global order.

I wish all our readers an enriching and thought-provoking experience.

Guru Sowle

President, IIRF America

Introduction and Editor's Note

IIRF is glad to publish the IIRF Strategic Yearbook 2026. It explores the events of the past year, encapsulated in seven comprehensive sections. India, with its unique geography, grapples with a myriad of challenges and is poised to seize numerous opportunities.

India occupies a unique geography, being at once a mountainous continental country and a peninsular maritime nation. This creates unique challenges that need to be addressed. IIRF is committed to addressing these issues at both the geographic and thematic levels.

Strategic Scenario

The first chapter by Air Marshal Khosla gives an overview of the watershed events of the past year. It examines the evolving forces and balance of power. The next chapter by Gp Capt Mehta examines the situation in West Asia.

Continental Challenges

Geography puts India at the edge of Central Asia. The chapter by Maj Gen A.K. Chaturvedi addresses the scenario in Afghanistan and implications for India. The next chapter by Maj Gen Bhattacharya examines India's relations with the five former Soviet Central Asian Republics.

Maritime

Geography has placed India at the centre of the Indo Pacific. An important aspect of the maritime sector is the merchant marine. V Adm M.P. Muralidharan's chapter covers this important topic. The next chapter by Cmde A.J. Singh addresses the Submarine Force of China, which is the premier power to India's east.

Aerospace Power

Aerospace power is relevant across land and sea. Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul of both military and civilian aircraft is an emerging sector in India. AVM S.N. Murti has written a chapter

on this key topic. In the current military situation, missiles have become a lethal offensive weapon. The chapter by Air Marshal A Khosla addresses India's defensive shield.

Internal Security

India, as a large country, faces major internal threats, often of foreign origin. The North East of India is a unique geography with a narrow passage to the rest of India. The chapter by Col P. Madhavan addresses this threat. The chapter by Gp Capt A.V. Chandrasekaran titled Confirmation Bias in Counter Terrorism, forces a new look at the approach to thinking.

Nuclear

Given the current global anarchy, nuclear weapons are becoming increasingly important. The chapter by V Adm Vijay Shankar addresses the role of the USA, particularly in nuclear armament and disarmament. India has the unique situation of being surrounded by nuclear powers. The chapter by Dr R Khanijo addresses these issues from an Indian perspective.

Non-Kinetic Warfare

Warfare is now seen as Multi-Domain Operations. Some of these are non-kinetic. The chapter by Col K.P.M. Das is on India's Cyber Doctrine. The human mind and thinking are often at the root of many conflicts. The chapter by Mr Rishi Athreya addresses Cognitive Warfare from an Indian perspective.

Goeconomics and Natural Resources

Besides the military element, holistic security needs economic stability. The chapter by Cdr Shrikumar addresses research and development in the defence industry. The Earth and its resources are fundamental to existence. The chapter by Maj Gen A.K. Chaturvedi addresses India's concerns about Rare Earths.

Editor's Note

The editors convey their thankfulness to all distinguished contributors. Every article has an analysis based on data, illustrated by maps and charts. These provide an inclusive overview of each topic. Overall, the book is a reachable and trustworthy source for the discerning reader. IIRF wishes a beneficial perusal of this compendium.

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