

2025 - The Year of India's Geostrategic Shock

Einar Tangen is a Senior Fellow at Teihe Institute and a Senior Fellow at CIGI. Tangen discusses the strategic shock of India in 2025 as the world changed. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glenndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. Today we're joined by Einar Tangen, a senior fellow at the Taihe Institute in Beijing and also a senior fellow at CIGI. Thank you very much for coming back on the program. We see that 2025 has been quite an eventful year in shaping international affairs, and much of the focus has, of course, been on the U.S. adjusting to this new multipolar distribution of power—again, with the return of Trump 2.0. We also have the EU's irrational and self-destructive policies, and the war in Ukraine has, of course, been at the top of the headlines recently.

Russia's pivot to the East, and Russia's and China's continued rise and self-sufficiency in the face of this economic war with the United States, show that they're becoming more confident and assertive. But we see less focus being given to one of the major powers, which is, of course, India. And 2025 has been—well, let's say—quite an eventful year for India as well, as it's been under great pressure to choose its path in this new world. Now, how one defines it—be it multipolar, post-Western, international law breaking down, or being forced to pick alliances—I'm not sure how one should define 2025. But... how are you assessing this year for India?

#Einar Tangen

Well, it was not a good year. India began the year before Donald Trump was inaugurated, assuming it would continue to be this kind of fulcrum of U.S. policy aimed at containing China. They saw themselves as going between the different powers. Obviously, they have a very large trade arrangement with China, which continues to grow. But then, you know, Donald Trump comes in and things kind of turn sour. There are a number of issues. While Trump seems friendly with Modi and talks about how Modi is his good friend, the U.S. embarks on a number of things.

One, there's this feeling within India that the U.S. interfered in the general election, which denied Modi an absolute majority in his own party, forcing him to join with a smaller party to secure the

required majority in the Lok Sabha, their house of parliament. Then you have these color revolutions in Bangladesh and Nepal, which really shocked India. They see the U.S., through various entities like the National Endowment for Democracy, actively participating. So whether it was intended or simply acquiesced to, they sense that, you know, there was money involved. They start looking at the organization itself.

The posters—how did all these people who don't have any money come up with uniform posters and things like that? How is it all organized? They start to feel there's collusion, that the U.S. fingerprints are all over it. Then you have a 50 percent trade tariff against India, which really shocks them. They don't understand the U.S. Donald Trump says, "Oh, it's about you buying Russian oil," and during this period, people from his administration are saying just horrible things about India—claiming they're responsible for the war in Ukraine, that they're funding Russia.

Well, you know, from India's point of view, they were asked by the U.S. and the Biden administration to keep buying Russian oil, because otherwise there would have been a very short, very sharp price rise. If you take away that much energy, the only thing left between demand and supply is that prices go up. So India has, of course, been profiting from this. But this was all under the auspices of Washington. Then you had the new sheriff in town under Donald Trump, and that all changes. And then there's this issue about Pakistan and India having that short war, and Donald Trump claiming that he personally settled it and prevented a nuclear catastrophe.

Well, this doesn't play well for Modi. Modi is a strongman politician. He relies on the idea that India is completely independent and separate, and that if anything happens, it's under Indian auspices. It's not something any other nation can interfere with. And this has really, really bothered him. The Indian side felt shocked—they didn't quite know what was happening. They still felt, you know, that the U.S. needs India to contain China, and they were surprised. There really wasn't the kind of reaction you would necessarily expect. Then, you know, Donald Trump calls Modi on his birthday and wishes him a happy birthday, and they seem to have a very cordial exchange.

The very next day, Donald Trump tells Europe they need to put 100 percent tariffs on India because of the Russian oil situation. Now, this all leads to a crisis of confidence. India had thrown a lot of its eggs in the U.S. basket, and now they were in this situation where they said, well, we have to retrench. They've been very slow to do much. Obviously, he had a visit to Russia, had a big, toothy hug with Putin, and then another meeting afterward, trying to signal that India has options. There was a trip—not to Busan, but to China—where he met with Xi and Putin. And then, you know, there were overtures. But you haven't seen a complete break.

And now India's in this awkward situation where they can keep chasing the U.S. and take whatever kind of abuse is being handed out—which isn't very palatable. They can try to be a kind of balancer between China and the U.S., but only if, once again, the U.S. wants to play ball on that. They can try to chart an independent course, maybe drawing on the BRICS relationship and trying to be a leader of the Global South. They all have pros and cons, but it hasn't been a good year for Modi in terms of

the U.S. Now, the economic news isn't as bad as you'd think. Despite all the demands the U.S. has made—for instance, saying India has to open up its dairy and agriculture industries—it's held up better than expected.

That would be political suicide for India. There are hundreds of millions of farmers there, and this would threaten their livelihoods—they'd be ruined. In the next election, they'd make their voices heard, and there'd be a new government. Regardless of who it was, they wouldn't vote for someone who was taking away their livelihood and being seen as weak in the face of the United States. So, very, very troublesome for them. They've yet to commit to any kind of real program or policy. But, you know, this issue to me is emblematic. We've been paying attention, as you said, to Gaza, to Ukraine, to Europe, and to U.S.-China relations.

But this is a good example of how what's going on in Washington is affecting the Global South. And there are real patterns here. Donald Trump made it very clear he does not like BRICS. You know, the feeling is that BRICS is big enough that it could come to Washington—especially if South American and African representatives, and even the EU, were to show up and say, "Hey, listen, Donald Trump, knock it off. We don't care what you do to your own people—that's between you and the voters. But if you think you're going to pit us against each other in some sort of cynical game of who can be nicest to you, or give as much as possible to the United States, that isn't going to happen."

So, you know, the pattern is clear. China and Russia are obviously in his sights in terms of tariffs. He put 50 percent on Brazil and 30 percent on South Africa. He's saying he's not going to the G20 next year because he's accusing them of being some sort of apartheid regime against whites in South Africa. So he seems to have something coordinated here. If you step back, it's that he doesn't like BRICS—he wants to weaken it. He hasn't been shy about saying that. So we see a real upheaval, where the United States is trying to use fear and intimidation against Third World countries to bring them into line.

#Glenn

Yeah, it's interesting that a lot of India's challenges then derive, as you said, directly from U.S. policies. And, well, one has to look at all the different countries in the world and how they're trying to adjust to this new reality, because there is a new distribution of power. There are many centers of power now, and it seems as if the U.S. effort to adjust to this new world entails demanding complete loyalty from different regions. That is, you're either with us or against us. For me, this mentality was exposed a bit in that Truth Social post by Donald Trump. You mentioned that Modi went to China, and when he wrote this post, I guess they chose Russia and China.

And instead of us—well, I hope they'll be happy. It's a kind of mentality where he didn't really accept or even recognize that India sees this as not a Cold War, that there aren't just two centers of power. It wants to be an independent pole of power, which means it has to be non-aligned. It wants to deal with all sides. But initially, though, the Americans seem to have a good partner in India, if it accepts

those basic premises—that it wants to deal with everyone. Because India doesn't want to see China become too strong. However, it still wants to work with China in BRICS, and it wants to form closer economic and political ties with Russia.

But that should also be good for the U.S. If, again, all roads don't lead only to China—if it's multipolar, not all concentrated in China—that would be good for the U.S. But it doesn't seem that this is enough. It challenges U.S. dominance altogether, and that's why they keep going after all these countries, trying to force them to choose. I think it's quite counterproductive. How do you see the role of China in India's challenges? Because it is, I guess, the counterpart to the United States. India has to work with China, though it has its problems with China, of course. How is that relationship being challenged?

#Einar Tangen

Well, it depends on what angle you're looking at it from. I mean, for India—like I said—Modi went to Tianjin. He met with Putin and Xi. And, you know, he has two choices. He can commit, saying, "Look, it's time for the BRICS to stand up." Remember, it's been India within BRICS that's been very reticent about challenging the United States directly. They make sure that if there's a joint communiqué, the U.S. and Donald Trump are not mentioned directly. They don't want to push sanctions. They haven't been pushing hard for an alternative currency. Basically, they've been more on the U.S. side. So when he's turned against, you'd think that he would do that. But there is a strong feeling—and I remember discussing this on a number of shows on Indian television—that you have a very distinct choice here.

And it comes with consequences. You can do Washington's bidding and try to use China and Russia as leverage. I said, I don't think that will work. I don't think Donald Trump really cares about India. He doesn't see it as a center of power, nor does he see it as a center of wealth for him. There's nothing in it. He has very little in India, as opposed to the Middle East and other places where his family is doing a tremendous amount of business as we speak. So he just, you know, kind of ignored it. And as you pointed out, he writes this tweet where he says, "OK, good luck." And, you know, it's kind of an offhand thing. And this is really bothersome to India, because they're thinking, well, we should have leverage. They should be coming back to us and saying, "Hey, listen, maybe we were a little hard. Let's work this out."

You're still part of our strategy. In fact, the defense policy mentions India as continuing to be a bulwark against China. The difficulty is, why would India, after receiving such humiliating treatment, want to side with the U.S.? That's the problem they're having. Now, from China's and Russia's point of view, they're saying, "OK, here's an opportunity for BRICS to stand up." Because if you have India—which has been kind of on the periphery, saying, "Oh, let's not do anything too rash"—suddenly joining in, and given the treatment that South Africa and Brazil are getting, all of a sudden you could have a consensus that it's time to come out swinging. It's time to tell Washington, "You don't want to play with us? Then we're not going to play with you."

Remember, BRICS as a whole is much larger than the United States. And the United States has a lot of business interests, a lot of trade going on. The U.S. is still the second-largest exporter in the world. So from that perspective, they would have a lot of power against Donald Trump. And this is what he fears—he doesn't want any kind of grouping to come up and challenge him. So he's been pushing this divide-and-conquer approach on one side. We saw the efforts in the Stans, where he's trying to paint this picture of a railway that would go between Iran and Azerbaijan—things like that—as if that would be possible. He's also in Pakistan, talking about American oil investments in the most troubled part of Pakistan, Balochistan, which is also the area that leads to Gwadar Port.

Obviously, you know, I don't think that was some random, jolly sort of strategy. It was basically aimed at being a spoiler against the Belt and Road Initiative that China's been working on. So, you know, all these indirect things—China is just saying, "Okay, look, you should think about this and come to your own conclusion. India, we're not forcing you to do anything, but if you keep playing in between or on the U.S. side, you're going to get more of the same treatment." What was noticeable when Putin recently went to India was that he showed up with a full deck. He had his economic people—everyone from agriculture to mining. They were talking about all the deals they could do. It's not clear that anything has been set in stone.

But India is in this situation where it's got to make a decision pretty soon. I don't think it has three years to wait. As I said, their economy this year has actually been pretty good. They've exported despite all the tariffs and all the uncertainty. They've attracted some FDI and things like that, as people are trying to find bets that are more predictable than perhaps the U.S. So China is just kind of in a wait-and-see mode. Now, on the other hand, there are irritants. China has been pressing a couple of times about people who've been detained—those who were making allusions or had a birth certificate from a part of India that's held by India but claimed by China. And this has been hitting the headlines in India.

It hasn't been doing relations between the countries any good. There's a feeling that China is trying to send a signal—it's saying, "You need to make a choice. Are we friend or foe?" On the other hand, trade relations have improved. Direct flights are now back between the two countries; they'd been gone for many, many years. They're also easing up on visas so people can travel back and forth more easily. So there's a bit of sweet and sour on that point. But I really do think the rest of the world, especially the Global South, is waiting to see when India has had enough of the humiliation and decides to work with like-minded countries that don't want to be under the heel of another kind of autocratic power like the United States.

#Glenn

Well, if we recognize that the U.S. main approach is, again, the classical "rule and divide"—that is, to prevent BRICS from forming an alternative central power and, of course, to take advantage of the splits—then I've always made the point that the most important thing, if you want a stable,

integrated Eurasia with an economic architecture that allows countries to cooperate more and manage competition peacefully, is that the two main pieces you want to fit together are India and China, given that Russia has good relations with both. But what do you think China can do?

Because you mentioned they're standing by and watching how this is developing. But also, China, of course—you could say it's had a great year in terms of showing resilience to U.S. pressure and continuing growth. The concern in India, of course, is that the power disparity between China and India will become too great. I've also been on a few of those debate programs on Indian TV, and, you know, there's always this very rational, sensible discussion—except when the topic is, for example, Taiwan. Then I notice they all become very, well, they view it through this prism of territorial conflict, and they all turn quite hostile, it seems.

I'm not going to say everyone—that's a bit too much—but it appears that the border issues are an issue, and the economic disparity is an issue. Do you see any initiatives on India's part to try to alleviate some of this or find solutions? Because this could be a time of opportunity—when the hegemon is pressuring too much for loyalties. That's when multipolar solutions can really open the door for countries like India, which doesn't want to be anti-American but also doesn't want to fall under hegemonic control. Do you see any initiatives on the Chinese side?

#Einar Tangen

From China's side, they just keep talking about trade and trying to figure out ways they can buy more from India. The problem is, India doesn't have a tremendous amount to offer China. I mean, China is the factory of the world—they produce very, very efficiently, and their businesses work on much lower margins than Western, or practically any other, businesses in the world. I mean, they'll go down to a two or three percent return on investment. That's really, really low. In the United States, if you don't show an eight percent return, you're not going to be able to get financing, either privately or through a bank. Maybe they'll go down to seven percent, but if you say, "Oh, look, my business is going to make two percent," forget it.

You need to go somewhere else, sir. We don't service those kinds of businesses. So China is in a position where it's not going to be easily out-competed, and India has to find a way to do it. China is willing to buy—but it's not the government that's going to buy from India, it's consumers. China has a massive consumer market, but you have to cater to it. You can't just say, "Here's something from India, buy it." So there's a lot of work that needs to be done there. There are real concerns in India—and it's understandable—about regional influence. They see China's trade with, you know, 150-plus countries that are part of the BRI, and many of those have their number one trade relationship with China. And that's very hard to compete with.

And, you know, the irony is that India was concerned about Chinese influence over Bangladesh, Nepal, and these neighboring countries. And it turns out it's the U.S. that undercut those relationships. So, I mean, India is still trying to figure out how it's going to handle that. There's also

a real cultural divide. The Chinese tend to be friendly up front, and then when they get down to the details, it's brass knuckles in terms of negotiations and things like that. The Indian approach is different. They start out by saying, "Well, what do you offer us?" and they make it seem like you owe them something—that you owe India. And that doesn't sit well with China. They say, "Look, we're here to trade. We don't owe you anything. If you don't want to trade, okay, we'll leave. What are you doing?"

You're not being sincere. You're not being friendly. You should offer something. Well, the Chinese learn that you don't make the first offer—you have to figure out areas where there can be mutual trade. Obviously, India has benefited from the relationship. What people don't realize is that the AIIB—the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which is located in Beijing—has members from all over. China does not have veto power. But guess who has been the largest recipient of loans from the AIIB, both in number and in total value? India. So it can't say that China is somehow harboring a grudge against them. The AIIB looks at these loans in terms of their value, their ability to be repaid, and whether they're workable, ongoing projects.

And India has been very good at putting together projects that show feasibility, and therefore they get the loans. But India needs a lot more of that. We have a country where, you know, many businesses have issues with locating there because there are scheduled brownouts, sometimes blackouts. So how are you going to run a factory if, for four to six hours a day, you can't operate, or your machinery is running at less than optimum? You'll have to have diesel power generators or something like that to make up for it. That increases costs. So India has to figure out a niche for itself, and it cannot expect any country—whether it's the U.S., Europe, or China—to solve its internal issues.

They like to say, "Well, we have a huge market," but a large part of that market is very poor. They're concerned with necessities, not choice-economy issues—products and services and things like that. China, on the other hand, is more about added value. When you start talking about necessities, it's about food, seed, fertilizers—basic things you can actually do. India has a tremendous number of STEM graduates, people who are excellent engineers. They used to be, and still are, a huge body shop for tech companies, doing everything from HR down to coding—although coding is going away. There are still other areas where you need intelligent people to get things done, and they can do that, but they have to move beyond that. It's kind of like raw materials.

You're providing raw materials, but you're not really getting the added value. If you're exporting coffee right now, the coffee price goes up—but guess what? Farmers are the ones who get the pressure on them. The prices they get go down. It's the same thing with India: there's pressure on wages and things like that. They're not getting more business. And the business that's there, because of how tight the world economy is, you know, the prices are going down. Wages aren't going up stratospherically, except in some areas. So India has to solve this. This isn't something where somebody else can come in and fix it. I think India would be poised, with its young population and its educational institutions, to do more in terms of developing its own products.

You've never heard—I mean, how many Indian CEOs do you know in the U.S. who are running these big companies? Microsoft, Google, you name it. Why aren't they in India? Why aren't there Indian companies doing this? I mean, they certainly have the raw power, they certainly have the business acumen, but it's just not happening. Some in India point to the issue of the caste system, or these dominant families—the Tatas, Ambanis, Adanis, and so on—and how they kind of have a stranglehold on everything. There was even an instance where India said, "Oh, we're going to build our own submarines."

And, you know, the winning bid was put together by a major family that had opened a company claiming they could make submarines just a couple of weeks before the bid. There are real questions about whether this is crony capitalism and things like that. So there are internal issues India has to address, and it has to have its own strategy. China isn't telling it what to do. Chinese consumers are certainly willing to buy anything, but if relations between the countries turn bad, you'll see Chinese consumers move against it, as you've seen with Japan. There's a lot of feeling right now about the Japanese after statements by the prime minister.

But if you step back, this is all playing very well into Donald Trump's playbook, which, as you pointed out, is about divide and conquer. He's been pushing this kind of "I'll take everything from Greenland down to Argentina—it's mine" idea, kind of an expanded act. I forget the name of it—it was named after a president who basically said, "Look, South America belongs to us, and if anyone goes there, it's an act of war." Now they're extending that to the Monroe Doctrine and Monroe talk. Ironically, I think it was way down—thirty or forty or fifty items down—in Monroe's State of the Union address. It was just kind of a throwaway line: "And by the way, Europe, stay away from South America."

But it was way, way down the list. Then it became a staple, a kind of pillar of American policy. Now they're expanding that to the north, saying both Canada and Greenland are somehow going to be taken or forced to join this consortium. And then, for the rest of the world, he figures Europe and Russia will carve up something or keep fighting, and China will take whatever it can. But I think Donald Trump is dealing with an old mindset. He really believes the world is all about, you know, being the victor, being the dominant player—that it's a winner-take-all, lose-lose mentality. There are only winners and losers in the world, and the pie is only so big.

China has a different approach, as they've been pushing. They say, you know, security, development, global governance, and also these civilization initiatives, which they want to use to replace ideology—instead of telling countries what they should be. In terms of ideology, they're just saying, "Hey, these are the things we want: security, development, respect, and ways of settling our differences with talks rather than tanks." So, I mean, this is the way the world is seen from China's point of view—at least, this is what they've been saying for the last twelve years, since 2013 and the Belt and Road Initiative. But going back to this issue, what can India do?

I think India needs to interact more with the Global South—BRICS in particular—and with the SCO, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which also stands for these principles of internal security. It's not a defensive mechanism against outside entities; it's about protecting countries from terrorism, separatism, and extremism. But that's internal—it's countries coming together when they're threatened by terrorists or people trying to destroy the country.

So, very different. But if India were to sign it with BRICS, with the rest of the BRICS players, and it all came together, it could have a profound effect. People say, "Well, what's the difference? They're going to try to beat up Washington, and then you get into this protracted, maybe Cold War, and everything goes bad." I disagree. I think there are a couple of things India can do. First off, the digital tools available today allow small and medium-sized enterprises to enter the global market. You can use the internet—there are systems to advertise. If you make good honey, you can find people in lots of groups on Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, and all these places where people talk about honey.

Well, advertise there. Then, in terms of logistics, the systems are in place—things can be sent around the world very, very quickly. And there are payment platforms that make sure you're actually going to get paid, and the consumer gets the goods they bargained for. So that's something where India, which, you know, has a few big family consortiums but mostly small businesses, would really have an opportunity. And second, by working with BRICS, I think they could bring together the Global South and say, "Look, it's time to turn the resource curse into a resource source." And by that, I mean putting together these— and I've talked about this before on this program—putting together these forces.

You know, four countries are responsible for 70% of the world's coffee exports. Why don't they get together and say, "Okay, we're going to price coffee at a level where our farmers can make a profit, where we can deal with climate change issues, where we can handle our own development challenges, and stop being the low man on the totem pole when it comes to pricing." The fact is, why is it that four companies from the United States and Europe control the coffee trade and the price worldwide? It doesn't make sense. They don't grow it—they grind it, they process it—and they make a heck of a lot more money than the growers. It just doesn't make sense.

And you could do this across the board, whether it's other things like cinnamon or you're talking about iron ore. If these countries come together to form their own bourses, just as OPEC did with oil, it could make a profound difference—especially for the Global South. I mean, you saw it. I'm sure you were shocked at what happened at the COP30. I mean, nothing. It was a signal to the rest of the world that help is not coming. Empty promises do not create climate change initiatives. And there's going to be nothing coming from countries—especially major ones—that are growing at a slower rate than the developing countries.

So that's gone. It's time for the rest of the world to build the kind of world they want, instead of, you know, trying to follow along, picking up the breadcrumbs or whatever's left by the former colonial powers that dominated the world. Their time is finished. They're not willing to put anything in, and that was quite clear at COP30. So India's opportunity here—and why it's so unique—is that it was basically taken for granted by the U.S. that it would play a part in containing China. Now it could be a major player, a leader in changing global governance and economics in a way the U.S. would have to respect.

#Glenn

Yes, it would be a strange time for India to subordinate itself too much to the United States, given that we're now entering what's often referred to as the post-Western world. Not that the West won't be here, but that the West won't be the only one moving the pieces across the chessboard—you'll now have other great powers as well. So at this time, of course, it would be strange if India were to begin subordinating itself and putting all its eggs in the U.S. basket. As you mentioned, in the economic sphere too, it almost seems these economic arrangements are an extension of the colonial era, where the top tiers of the global value chains—where most of the money is made—are concentrated in the West, while the Global South continues to handle the less profitable economic activities.

I did think, though, about the border issue, because for the Russians, they made a decision more than 20 years ago. We saw in the early 2000s that they looked at China and recognized, well, the Chinese are getting more powerful by the day, which means the relationship will change and we can go two different paths. We can hitch ourselves to the Chinese wagon and improve our relations and kind of grow peacefully together, or we can try to prevent it, America-style. But the Russians went with the former, so they looked at all the border disputes they had, which were deeply problematic.

This could fuel competition. It could be rational, in terms of competing economic interests, or it could be simply irrational, in terms of fueling nationalist sentiments, which makes it impossible to have cordial relations. Also, it can be exploited, of course, by third parties—which you see today. If you're in the United States, you don't want to see the Chinese and Russians get too close. If they had some border disputes you could take advantage of, you'd fuel that as much as you could, because then the Russians would have to align themselves under the U.S., becoming obedient, and the Chinese could be contained.

So what the Russians did over 20 years ago was begin to solve all these issues. The last deal was in 2008, when they essentially finished off all the agreements. It involved the Russians actually handing over a lot of territory to China, which had been disputed. And in all fairness, if you look at history, the Russians had taken a big chunk of Chinese territory. So, you know, you can call it even, and that'

s fair enough. But essentially, the Russians looked at it and said, well, tomorrow the Chinese are going to be more powerful than today, so it's better to make a deal now rather than later. And they did.

And now it's been 20 years, and they've formed this—now China is the most important partner they have. It's an excellent relationship. But they took that irritant off the table by doing this border settlement. And I just think that, for India, they should try to seek a similar arrangement. That is, China's going to be more powerful tomorrow—make a deal today. Any deal today, you'll have more cards than you will tomorrow. And as you said, BRICS, SCO—these are also very ideal institutions because they're not dividing the world into a bipolar one, with China and America, where they'd have to subordinate themselves to one and potentially become a front line against the other.

The beautiful part of BRICS and the SCO is that you have all these large powers coming together. In these institutions, China will be the largest economy, but it can't dominate. If you have a massive organization like BRICS and you bring in Russia, India, Indonesia—lots of large powers, including Brazil—China can't dictate everything. This is how it's done. It's not going to be like the transatlantic alliance, where the US dictates everything. They'll be leading, but they can't dictate. And I think that's an important distinction.

So I think this is also something that India should push for, and it doesn't—it doesn't. And if you listen to the main countries in BRICS and the SCO, they don't want it to be an anti-American bloc either. That's perfect for India, because they want to be non-aligned; they want multipolarity. So it looks like this is the best path—just sort out your border dispute with the Chinese, and then form and cement these strong multipolar institutions. Even if China in the future were to begin seeking an American-style hegemonic role, you'd still have that multipolar system, and you could shift a bit toward other centers of power. So China would always be aware of this mechanism, because at the moment the Chinese are very happy with having a multipolar system. It doesn't seek to be the hegemon. So as long as you put in place the institutions that make sure this remains the case, it would be the optimal thing for India. It seems to me, though.

#Einar Tangen

Well, no, I completely agree with you. But keep in mind, BRICS is not like the UN, where some members have veto power or anything like that. Even the five founding members, as they welcome more countries in, are trying to figure out how to keep a larger group focused. They work by consensus, so unless all countries agree, you can't go forward. But this is much more stable. If you have countries agreeing, it's obviously better than people feeling resentful, like they were run over or their voice was ignored, and then harboring ill will—saying, "Well, I'll just wait, I'll get mine when I can." This is a much more stable counter for the world. It's an institution that can last, because, you know, you can't do it any other way now.

You do get problems if it gets too large and becomes unwieldy, kind of like the UN. But the idea is to design a better mousetrap. In terms of the border issue, India is caught in a trap of its own making. From a rhetorical point of view, India is supreme. If you listen to Indian television or radio, it always talks about how India's the best, how the Indian man is superior to the Chinese man because he can think, there's free speech, there's a ballot, and so on. I think in most cases that's passive-aggressive. There's a real feeling about China—despite having the “wrong” system—doing much, much better than India. Well, I've scratched my head about it, but there's this feeling that India has to receive something in order to acquiesce.

And that's what I hear constantly there. You know, if you and I were on an Indian television show, there might be another ten people on it. But when the issue of the border dispute came up, they'd just say, “Okay, what is China offering? We demand all our lands back.” And this kind of strongman image that Modi has cultivated—it's very hard for him to give on any issue, because he's the dominant guy. He's the one who can make things happen, and they happen on his terms. So it's very, very difficult. I'm hoping that China will see the wisdom. It's not just India—China has to figure out better ways of dealing with India, knowing full well that India has a different approach. They need to get past the cultural obstacles and say, “Okay, why don't we try this?”

Why don't we try that? For a long time, I've believed that the areas in dispute—rather than saying they belong to India or China—could be handled like they do in that place between France and Spain, the small little principality of Andorra. Basically, the countries agree to administer it jointly. Nothing happens without the other's acquiescence. It's a consensus-type situation, but you stop having wars. You don't need police or armies there because it's jointly run. And I think those opportunities are possible between India and China—say, “Okay, there's an area that's unmarked, and we'll jointly administer it and make sure all the goats get to pasture and home safely.”

A lot of people live in most of these areas, and, uh, it could also be applied to the South China Sea and anywhere else there are territorial disputes. Instead of saying, you know, “this is mine” or “that's yours” or “let's keep it in dispute,” you just say, “let's put this into an entity where we all have to agree on what's going to happen.” Let's figure out how we can jointly develop the resources or whatever—literally take the air out of this balloon to make sure we can trade peacefully and move forward. You know, the question is, who's going to start? I do think, unfortunately, that it's China that's going to have to figure out a way of getting India to the table and making them feel better, because it's the bigger country. This is the problem with India.

They have this chip on their shoulder about China. So for China, it's not a question of swallowing pride or anything—it's just about being clever. How do you engineer a situation where both sides can come together and no one loses face? Now, this is something both sides are very aware of. It's a very Asian thing, this idea of “face.” No one wants to lose face. You make it seem like Modi's the hero of the moment and Xi Jinping is there, you know, raising their hands together in victory and all that. But they have a mechanism where both sides feel comfortable with what's going on. Once you

defuse that, I think there are a lot of possibilities. As I said, it's not just about what happens in India—it's about how India plays its role in the world.

It's one of the major producers of generic drugs, and there's a whole slew of them coming onto the market as generics because their IP protections are expiring. They're already a major supplier to the world. This is an area where China and India can work together, because the chemicals to make those drugs actually come from China. And, you know, one of India's laments is that they can't sell generic drugs easily in China. The Chinese say, well, why would we buy them? We can make our own generic drugs; we don't have to buy them from you. But I think, as a gesture, it doesn't matter—as long as the price is right, they should be able to compete in China. As long as the policy is there, that would go a long way toward giving, you know, some plausibility in terms of wins.

Global diplomacy in a time of multipolarity requires a lot more understanding and nuance than great-power diplomacy, where you just walk up to someone and say, "If you don't do this, I'm going to nuke you." The Donald Trump approach, as we've seen—most recently in Africa, in Nigeria—I mean, it's hard to believe he's bombing areas that have nothing to do with ISIS and then calling it a great win. That's just pure intimidation. It's like saying, "I see you, and I shoot the guy behind you as a lesson to you." That person has nothing to do with the dispute. But this is the kind of mob-style tactic Donald Trump thinks is effective. I think the Chinese have to come up with a better alternative—and they have. They've shown efficacy.

\$1.3 trillion has been invested over the last 12 years in the Belt and Road Initiative, which has changed the fortunes of many countries. If you go back to before 2020 and look at the growth averages for developing countries, and then compare them to after the Belt and Road Initiative, there's a sharp spike. That's because they now have the ability to trade, which they didn't have before. But technology is coming along. It's just that there's got to be a lot more understanding of this kind of thing coming out of Washington. It's insane. And unfortunately, I have to say, I'm disappointed by the Europeans.

You alluded to that in your preamble—their inability to recognize that they're being humiliated on a constant basis by Donald Trump. And the more they accept the humiliation, the more they get. Think about it: the only countries Donald Trump treats with any respect are the ones that fight back at him, right? Russia, China—he respects them. He says nice things about them, right? And you can say the same thing about the mayor of New York. People always ask me, "Why do you think he was so nice to the guy, the mayor of New York? I mean, he said terrible things about this guy." I said, well, think about it from Donald Trump's point of view.

If the situations were reversed and Donald Trump were the mayor of New York, and the other guy had a bunch of real estate in the city, I think he'd be worried about an army of inspectors descending on his properties, going through everything with a fine-tooth comb. Because I can think of no other reason than economic. And Donald Trump—he would have done that. He's shown he's very vindictive. If you cross him, he feels the need to send a message, a very harsh message.

Whether it's about losing an election or going after someone, he's going after all his political opponents. There's no reason to believe he wouldn't do it.

So he assumes, because he would have done it, that others will do it. But that's the classic difference here. We've really seen Donald Trump show his cards—they're the cards of a bully. And the question is, does the world want to continue in that system, or have they had enough? Have they gotten to the point—and this directly affects India—has India gotten to the point where it realizes there's no hope in dealing with the United States? Not at that level. Not by itself. It's unmatched. It's asymmetrical. It's time to bring in the cavalry, time to start working as a group and having real power to deal with Donald Trump. And finally, you'll get his respect, because he only respects people who push back against him.

#Glenn

Well, in the literature, Barry Buzan refers to it as a swing strategy. The whole premise is that if you're able to work with many different actors, then no one can control you—because if one side puts too much pressure on you, you can lean in another direction. That's the problem, though, with the Europeans. The more they lean into the United States—and that's what a swing strategy is about—if you wed yourself to one side, you lose value to both. The side you've disconnected from has no interest in you anymore, and the side you've chosen loses interest too, because they already have you. So the U.S. can comfortably sit in a position where they, you know, buy their enemies and sell their friends. And that's kind of where we are now.

#Einar Tangen

That's actually a good summary of the year.

#Glenn

Yeah, that's 2025 for you. Let me just ask one final, brief question, though. What do you see as the main possible paths forward for India now, given that they have a lot to think about after this very turbulent year?

#Einar Tangen

Well, they only have three. Obviously, I can't cover them all, but there are three main directions. One is to kowtow to the U.S. and hope something happens—that somehow Trump comes back to them because he needs them, or, I don't know, they just wait it out for three years or something like that. The second is to be a balancing power—try to, as they have, work all sides against Trump for their own benefit. But they'd lose a certain amount of credibility doing that, and there are real

dangers. Or they can decide they want to be a leader, to work with other components of the Global South—especially BRICS, SCO, all these other entities—and say, “Look, it’s time to say enough about Donald Trump.”

And that also has risks in terms of, you know, economic consequences in the short term. But they’re already feeling this. I mean, what more can happen? As soon as you get to 50%, right, there’s no trade. A 50% tariff means somebody else is going to make it—they’ll buy it from someone else. So the consequences right now are very minimal for India. They could say, well, we need a new protector, but they already have the nuclear umbrella. They might be concerned about regional issues, but if they’re acting under—now, I go back to what you said—if China pushes too hard on something, they can appeal to the other countries there and say, hey, listen, none of us wants to be bullied again.

We don’t want a China that replaces the U.S. as a hegemon and makes unreasonable demands for its own interests. So I do think India is going to have to make a decision this year or next. They can’t wait three years in limbo, because there are going to be effects. I mean, the global economy is slowing down. People say, well, U.S. citizens are spending more than ever—but they’re also borrowing more of what they’ve spent. And at some point, the credit card bills, the buy-now-pay-later stuff, it’s all going to come due. And when that happens, wages haven’t gone up, inflation hasn’t gone up. I was reading—CNN said there are 25 lies that Donald Trump has told.

And almost all the big ones have been on the domestic side. It’s just denying that things are that bad—trying to make people feel confident even though they don’t have the means to live confidently. So, India should probably look at that and see the reality that the U.S. is running on a short string—between debt, between a loss of soft power globally. It’s not only India that’s being treated this way. It’s time for the little people, the middle people, to get together and tell the bully it’s time to put it away—that this isn’t going to be the way it should be. It’s just not going to be the way the world works. So hopefully they realize that within a short period of time. But as I said, it’s not just something India can do by itself.

There have to be some overtures. I was hoping Russia, China, Brazil, and South Africa could sit down and say, “Listen, what are we going to do about this guy? We can’t keep going like this for another three years.” The war in Ukraine isn’t going away because of Donald Trump’s intercession. That’s the thing they have in Florida with these parallel talks—I don’t even know what that means. Not all the parties are there, and no one trusts each other. So how can you reach a peace treaty when there’s zero trust? A lot of that goes back to the deal brokered by Hollande and Merkel the first time around, in 2014, when they lied. They had no intention of following through with any kind of peace plan.

They were just buying time, thinking they were going to win on the battlefield. Right now, Ukraine is losing on the battlefield. That peace agreement they could have had in 2014—it looks like if they had that now, the war would be over. But they don’t. The realities on the ground have changed. And yet

Europe is saying, "Oh, \$900 billion in loans," or whatever you want to call it. It just seems like it's getting worse. So you have all these difficult situations. India should be assessing them, as all countries should, and saying, "Look, maybe it's time we act together and stop allowing ourselves to be pitted against each other." That's the old colonial game.

I mean, we've seen it so many times before. How is it possible that people can't see through something so transparent? Donald Trump isn't subtle about the way he goes about things—he's a hammer, nails, and all the rest of it. It's always in your face. So hopefully that happens. And the reason is, it's actually good for the United States, because it will get the U.S. into a position where it realizes it's no longer ruling the world—it's part of the world. Then it can start focusing on its own economic growth instead of trying to export more arms and ammunition to countries that really don't need them. They need economic stimulus; they don't need more missiles.

#Glenn

Well, as I was saying at the beginning, I think all countries now have to figure out how they should adjust to this new world. And I agree—the United States, too, would benefit from adapting to this new multipolar order. You can see some developments within the U.S., where new groups of people are emerging who realize that being a hegemon is no longer a source of security. Instead, it's become a burden around its neck, even undermining the republic. So hopefully 2026 will be a much better year. It wouldn't take much, because this one was quite awful in many ways. Thank you so much for taking the time.

#Einar Tangen

Thank you. Always a pleasure, Glenn. Sorry it's not the most hopeful New Year's message, but let's say there are seeds of hope within it.