

Editorial

I am pleased to present to the readers the first issue of 2026, featuring five analytically rich articles, four commentaries and four book reviews. I would also like to inform the readers about a forthcoming special issue titled “The Year of Reforms: Reshaping India’s Defence for the Decade Ahead”, work on which is in progress. We plan to bring out another special issue subsequently.

Xi Jinping has certainly amassed more personal power than any other Chinese leader in decades. Since 2012, when he became the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, he has systematically centralised authority abolishing presidential term limits, installing loyalists and also purging them. Yet, recent events and actions have sparked debate world over on the stability of Xi’s rule. In the first article titled “Is Xi Jinping in Control for the Fourth Term? A Reality Check”, Col K. Shanaz has analysed two competing theories, one which says that Xi is losing control amid emerging fissures in the Chinese Communist Party and the People’s Liberation Army, while the second theory contends that Xi remains in full control, having vanquished rival factions and is consolidating power in preparation for the CCP’s 21st National Congress in 2027.

The next article is titled “Fighting for Red Hill or Maibam Lotpa Hill: A Decisive Episode of the Battle of Imphal, May 1944”, in which Mr Loitam Akashnanda Singh gives a detailed account of the nine-day engagement at Maibam-Lotpa Hill (Red Hill) between the British-Indian forces and the Imperial Japanese Army in May 1944, and how it played a crucial role in shaping the outcome of the Battle of Imphal in World War II. Drawing on a combination of soldiers’ memoirs, survivor testimonies and secondary sources, the article reconstructs the course of the engagement and its local consequences, and tries to address a few historiographical inaccuracies.

Operation Sindoor witnessed Pakistan launching massed drone attacks, which were effectively neutralised by India’s integrated counter-unmanned aircraft system and air defence grid. However, it is important that India prepares for the drone wars of tomorrow, focussing on innovative ideas which

can exponentially enhance the capabilities and utility of drones. At the same time, it is important to assess the indigenous drone industry landscape to gauge the readiness of the Indian drone ecosystem in adopting innovative concepts. The third article titled “Indian Drone Ecosystem: Need to Innovate to Dominate”, by Brig Rajan Desai, attempts to cover these issues in detail, and presents practical and actionable recommendations for making the Indian drone ecosystem future-ready.

The fourth article titled “India and the Strait of Hormuz: Strategic Vulnerabilities and Policy Responses in a Shifting Regional Order”, by Dr Talha Latief Tantray, examines India’s strategic interests in the Strait of Hormuz amid escalating geopolitical tensions, including US–Iran confrontations, China’s expanding regional presence through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Gwadar Port, and persistent asymmetric threats like Houthi attacks. The article highlights emerging alternatives like India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor and International North–South Transport Corridor, while arguing that India must enhance maritime domain awareness, develop forward operating capabilities, and lead unilateral security initiatives to protect its interests.

In the fifth article titled “Emerging Threat Vectors: Drones and Autonomous Systems in the Indian Defence Spectrum”, Maj Parikshit Bishnoi and Col (Dr) Rajan Bakshi (Retd) discuss the strategic implications of drones and autonomous systems within India’s evolving defence and security environment. The article presents a context-specific analysis that treats drones and autonomous systems not merely as discrete platforms or force multipliers, but as structural accelerants reshaping threat perception, decision-making and escalation control in India’s immediate conflict environment, which is characterised by its geographic proximity to adversaries, compressed timelines, contested borders and persistent grey-zone activity.

The issue also features four commentaries—“Building Adaptable, Future-Ready Air Forces: Operationalising IAF Doctrine for Multi-Domain Supremacy”, by Air Vice Marshal Anil Golani (Retd); “How Henry A. Kissinger’s *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* Moved Away from History and Back into an Unstable Nuclear Age”, by Mr Tashi Dorje Gyamba; “The Amazing Story of Akash and the Way Forward”, by Prof. Satya Narayan Misra; and “Security through Intelligence Sharing: The US–Philippines GSOMIA”, by Ms Khyati Singh and Ms Simran Walia. Four book reviews also feature in this issue.

We hope that this issue will be received well by our readers. We would also like to thank the authors and the referees who assisted us in the peer-

review process. We would appreciate feedback from our readers on topics they feel should be addressed by the journal. We hope that along with our growing readership, we will see a further increase in the number of contributions for our future issues.

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