

INDIA-CANADA CONFLICT: An Overview

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Abstract: *The ongoing conflict between India and Canada has emerged as a significant geopolitical and diplomatic issue in contemporary international relations. Rooted in longstanding bilateral tensions, the recent escalations involve allegations of interference, human rights concerns, and divergent foreign policy priorities. The situation has been further exacerbated by disputes over the activities of diaspora communities, allegations of extraterritorial operations, and conflicting narratives on sovereignty and justice. This overview explores the historical underpinnings of the conflict, analyses its impact on trade, diplomacy, and multilateral partnerships, and highlights the role of third-party mediation in mitigating tensions. By examining the perspectives of both nations and their respective stakes, the study underscores the broader implications of this conflict for global geopolitics, regional security, and international norms. Ultimately, the analysis aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the evolving dynamics between India and Canada while identifying potential pathways to conflict resolution.*

Keywords: *India-Canada Conflict, Bilateral Relations, Geopolitics, Diaspora, International Diplomacy, Sovereignty, Human Rights, Trade Relations, Conflict Resolution.*

Introduction: The India-Canada conflict, which has intensified in recent years, stems from a complex interplay of historical, political, and social factors that reflect the broader geopolitical landscape. Central to this conflict is the issue of Khalistani separatism, which advocates for an independent Sikh state within India. This movement has found significant support among certain segments of the Sikh diaspora in Canada, leading to tensions between the Indian government and Canadian authorities.

Additionally, concerns regarding human rights, immigration policies, and the treatment of minority communities have further complicated bilateral relations. The conflict has been exacerbated by recent incidents, including diplomatic disputes, accusations of interference in domestic affairs, and differing perspectives on national security and terrorism. As both nations navigate this fraught relationship, the stakes extend beyond bilateral ties, impacting regional

stability and international diplomatic dynamics. This overview seeks to explore the key dimensions of the India-Canada conflict, examining its origins, development, and implications for future relations.

Historical Background: The India-Canada conflict, particularly in recent years, has deep historical and political roots that have evolved over time, shaped by colonialism, migration patterns, geopolitical shifts, and domestic politics in both countries. While the conflict has escalated in contemporary times, particularly surrounding issues of Sikh separatism and diplomatic disputes, its origins can be traced back to historical ties between the two nations. This essay explores the key factors contributing to the India-Canada conflict, from the colonial era to the present.

1. Colonial Era: Shared History and Divergence: India and Canada, both part of the British Empire, had early interactions through colonial trade networks. In the 19th century, Canada, as a British dominion, had a relatively small but notable Indian immigrant population. These early immigrants were largely Punjabi Sikhs who came to Canada as labourers. The colonial connection fostered some degree of familiarity between the two nations, but also laid the groundwork for racial tensions in Canada and discontent in India regarding the treatment of Indian immigrants abroad.

One significant event that marked the early stages of conflict was the **Komagata Maru incident of 1914**, where a ship carrying 376 Indians, mostly Sikhs, was denied entry into Canada due to racist exclusion laws. This incident stirred anti-British and anti-colonial sentiments in India, particularly in Punjab, and contributed to the growing sense of injustice faced by Indians under British rule.

2. Post-Colonial Era: Diplomatic Relations and Cold War Politics: After India gained independence in 1947, Canada was among the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the newly independent nation. The two countries shared common values of democracy and parliamentary systems, and both were part of the Commonwealth. Relations were largely amicable during the initial decades post-independence.

However, during the Cold War, India's alignment with the Non-Aligned Movement and its close ties with the Soviet Union created some distance between India and Canada, which was a key ally of the United States and a NATO member. Despite these differences, Canada and India maintained relatively cordial relations, especially in areas like trade and education.

3. The Rise of Sikh Separatism and the Khalistan Movement: A major turning point in India-Canada relations came in the 1980s with the rise of the **Khalistan movement**, a Sikh separatist movement advocating for an independent Sikh homeland in Punjab, India. Many supporters of the movement found refuge in Canada, which became a hub for Sikh diaspora activism. Tensions between the Indian government and Sikh separatists escalated, leading to violent confrontations, most notably the Indian military operation at the **Golden Temple in 1984** (Operation Blue Star) and the subsequent assassination of Indian Prime Minister **Indira Gandhi** by her Sikh bodyguards.

The aftermath of these events had a significant impact on Canada-India relations. Canada, home to a large Sikh diaspora, witnessed an increase in pro-Khalistan activities. The most devastating manifestation of this conflict occurred with the **1985 Air India bombing**, in which 329 people, mostly Canadians of Indian origin, were killed in a terrorist attack masterminded by Sikh extremists based in Canada. The incident strained diplomatic relations, as India accused Canada of not doing enough to curb extremist activities on its soil.

4. Geopolitical and Diplomatic Shifts in the 21st Century: In the 21st century, relations between India and Canada have experienced a roller-coaster dynamic, with periods of cooperation followed by sharp diplomatic rifts. Both countries have emphasized trade, education, and investment as key areas of cooperation, with Canada being a significant destination for Indian students and professionals.

However, the issue of Sikh separatism has remained a sticking point. Pro-Khalistan elements continue to operate in Canada, leading to tensions with the Indian government, which has consistently urged Canada to crack down on these activities. While Canadian governments have officially distanced themselves from supporting separatism, the country's liberal stance on freedom of expression has allowed these groups to operate openly.

Recent years have seen heightened tensions, particularly under the leadership of Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau**, whose government has been perceived by India as being lenient toward pro-Khalistan elements. In 2018, Trudeau's visit to India was marred by controversy when a known Khalistani sympathizer was invited to an official event, causing outrage in India.

5. Current Crisis: Diplomatic Fallout Over Allegations: The conflict reached a new high in 2023 when Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau accused the Indian government of involvement in the assassination of a Canadian citizen, **Hardeep Singh Nijjar**, a Sikh separatist leader, in British Columbia. India strongly denied the allegations, dismissing them as baseless and politically motivated. The diplomatic fallout led to mutual expulsions of diplomats and a freeze in trade negotiations between the two nations.

The underlying issue is the perception in India that Canada harbours extremists who threaten India's sovereignty, while Canada insists on its commitment to democratic principles, including freedom of speech and assembly. The presence of Sikh separatism in Canada, combined with political considerations, including Trudeau's reliance on the Sikh vote in Canadian elections, has made resolving the conflict difficult.

Reasons Behind India-Canada Conflict: The diplomatic conflict between India and Canada has been a prominent issue that stems from a mix of historical, political, and security concerns. The tensions between the two nations, although they have cooperated on various fronts such as trade and immigration, have escalated recently due to political disagreements. This essay explores the major reasons behind the India-Canada conflict.

1. Sikh Separatist Movement and Khalistan Issue: One of the primary reasons for the friction between India and Canada is the issue of Sikh separatism, particularly the Khalistan movement. This movement, advocating for a separate Sikh state in India's Punjab region,

gained momentum in the 1980s. After the Indian government crushed the movement militarily, some of its proponents sought refuge abroad, including in Canada.

Canada is home to a large Sikh diaspora, many of whom have prospered and gained political influence. However, a small but vocal segment of this population continues to support the Khalistan movement. Indian authorities have expressed concern over the activities of some Sikh extremist groups in Canada, accusing them of supporting terrorism and attempting to revive the separatist movement in Punjab. The Indian government has consistently asked Canadian authorities to take a firmer stance against such elements, while Canada has cited freedom of speech and assembly as reasons for allowing protests and advocacy within its borders.

This issue reached a boiling point when, in 2023, Indian officials publicly expressed discontent with what they perceived as a lack of action by the Canadian government to curb the activities of Sikh extremists. The assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Canadian citizen and Khalistan supporter, further exacerbated tensions, with allegations of Indian involvement in his killing being denied by New Delhi.

2. Political Dynamics and Domestic Vote Banks: Canada's political landscape also contributes to the strained relationship. Canadian political parties, especially the Liberals under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, rely on the support of the Sikh community, which has become an important vote bank in certain regions. The Sikhs in Canada, constituting a significant portion of the immigrant population, are influential in areas like British Columbia and Ontario, where they hold sway in key electoral districts.

This political reality has led to reluctance on the part of Canadian leaders to fully address India's concerns over Sikh extremism. While Trudeau's government has condemned violence and extremism, it has also been cautious in taking direct action against groups promoting Khalistan for fear of alienating its domestic electorate.

From India's perspective, this stance appears as tacit support for separatism, further deepening mistrust between the two countries. India sees Canada's political calculations as interfering in its internal affairs, leading to diplomatic exchanges marked by increasing hostility.

3. Diplomatic Friction and Accusations of Interference: Diplomatic exchanges between India and Canada have become more acrimonious in recent years. India has frequently accused Canada of harbouring terrorists and extremists, while Canada has raised concerns about human rights in India, particularly in relation to minority groups. Canadian politicians have criticized the Indian government's policies, including its handling of protests, such as the 2020–2021 farmers' protest, where a significant portion of the protesters were Sikhs.

Trudeau's comments on the farmers' protests in 2020 did not sit well with the Indian government, which saw this as an undue interference in its domestic affairs. India perceives such remarks as being influenced by domestic Canadian politics rather than genuine concern for human rights or democracy. In response, India has accused Canada of failing to act against

separatist elements operating on Canadian soil, viewing this as indirect support for a destabilizing movement.

4. Geopolitical and Security Concerns: The conflict between India and Canada is also shaped by their broader geopolitical and security concerns. Canada's position as part of Western alliances and India's growing influence in global politics have at times led to conflicting views on international issues.

For example, while India seeks to maintain strong relationships with major global powers such as the United States, it has also taken an independent stance on issues like Russia's invasion of Ukraine, refraining from condemning Russia due to its own strategic interests. Canada, being a member of NATO and closely aligned with Western powers, has taken a firm position against Russia, which has contributed to a difference in their approaches to global security issues.

Additionally, the two countries have differing priorities in the Indo-Pacific region. While India plays a key role in the Quad alliance, Canada's engagement in the region is more limited. These geopolitical differences often colour the way the two nations interact on other matters, including security cooperation and diplomatic engagements.

5. Economic Relations and Trade Issues: Economic relations between India and Canada have historically been strong, with both countries benefiting from trade in goods such as energy, agriculture, and technology. However, the diplomatic standoff has started to affect trade negotiations as well. Talks on a comprehensive trade agreement have stalled, and business leaders from both countries have expressed concerns about the fallout from the diplomatic tensions.

The economic relationship between the two nations is complex, with Canada being a significant source of investment in India, especially in sectors like infrastructure and technology. On the other hand, India is an important market for Canadian businesses, especially in agriculture. Any prolonged diplomatic conflict could potentially harm these economic ties, making it a crucial factor for both nations to consider in their approach to resolving the tensions.

Consequences of India-Canada Conflict: The conflict between India and Canada has serious diplomatic, economic, and geopolitical consequences, impacting not just bilateral relations but also the global stage. Both nations have historically enjoyed cooperative relations, but the recent escalation in tensions, primarily driven by political and security issues, has led to significant fallout. This essay explores the key consequences of the India-Canada conflict.

1. Diplomatic Strain and Breakdown in Relations: The most immediate and visible consequence of the India-Canada conflict is the diplomatic strain between the two countries. Diplomatic engagements have soured, with both sides taking measures that signify a breakdown in trust and cooperation. In 2023, Canada accused India of involvement in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a prominent pro-Khalistan figure in British Columbia, an allegation which India denied. This accusation led to the expulsion of diplomats from both sides and an intensification of hostilities in their diplomatic communications.

The mutual diplomatic expulsions have signalled a deepening crisis, limiting dialogue and cooperation on various global platforms. This rupture in relations could have lasting implications, as diplomatic rifts between two nations often take years to repair. Without open channels of communication, resolving other related or future disputes becomes increasingly difficult. The stalemate in diplomatic exchanges also complicates joint participation in international forums like the G20, United Nations, and Commonwealth, where both countries have historically worked together on global issues such as climate change, terrorism, and economic cooperation.

2. Impact on Trade and Economic Cooperation: The conflict between India and Canada has already begun to impact economic ties, with both sides issuing warnings about trade relations. India is one of Canada's largest trading partners in Asia, and Canada has significant investments in India. The two nations were negotiating a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) to strengthen trade, but these talks have stalled as a result of diplomatic tensions.

The potential breakdown in trade negotiations could result in lost economic opportunities for both countries. Canada is a major exporter of pulses and agricultural products to India, while India supplies pharmaceuticals, textiles, and technology to Canada. Trade restrictions or punitive measures could hurt key industries in both nations, potentially leading to job losses and economic instability, especially in sectors reliant on exports.

Furthermore, as tensions continue to rise, Canadian businesses may be reluctant to invest in India, and Indian companies may reconsider their ventures in Canada. This could result in decreased foreign direct investment (FDI) and slow down the growth of sectors like technology, infrastructure, and clean energy, where both countries have had shared interests.

3. Impact on Immigration and Educational Ties: India and Canada have enjoyed strong people-to-people ties, with Canada being one of the top destinations for Indian students and immigrants. However, the ongoing conflict is likely to affect this dynamic. Canada has a large and growing Indian diaspora, and any deterioration in relations between the two countries could lead to uncertainty for immigrants and students.

Indian students account for a significant portion of Canada's international student population, contributing millions of dollars annually to the Canadian education sector. A worsening conflict could lead to a drop in the number of Indian students choosing to study in Canada, especially if visa restrictions are tightened or if diplomatic hostilities create a perception of an unsafe or unfriendly environment.

In addition, immigration policies could be impacted. Canada has been a popular destination for Indian immigrants due to its welcoming policies and job opportunities. However, rising tensions could result in slower immigration processes or a reduction in immigration quotas, leading to fewer opportunities for skilled Indian workers to settle in Canada.

4. Geopolitical Ramifications: The conflict between India and Canada has broader geopolitical ramifications that could affect their relationships with other countries, particularly Western allies. Canada, as a member of NATO and close ally of the United States, may seek support

from these nations to put pressure on India. However, India's growing strategic importance, especially in the Indo-Pacific region and its Quad alliance with the U.S., Japan, and Australia, makes it unlikely that Western powers will want to choose sides in this conflict.

This situation creates a diplomatic dilemma for Canada's allies, who must balance their relations with both countries. The U.S. and other Western powers rely on India for its role in counterbalancing China's influence in the region, and they may be hesitant to alienate India over a bilateral issue. Conversely, Canada is an integral part of Western diplomatic and security alliances, so these nations may urge both sides to de-escalate the situation through dialogue rather than confrontation.

In the broader context of international diplomacy, this conflict could also affect India's relations with the broader Commonwealth of Nations. Canada has historically played a leading role within the Commonwealth, and its strained ties with India could lead to divisions within the organization, which could hinder cooperation on common challenges like climate change, trade, and global security.

5. Security Implications: The conflict between India and Canada also has security implications, particularly regarding counterterrorism cooperation. Both countries have been involved in joint efforts to combat terrorism, but rising tensions could undermine these efforts. India has long accused Canada of not doing enough to curb the activities of Sikh extremist groups promoting the Khalistan movement. Canada, on the other hand, has argued that its government respects freedom of expression and assembly, leading to a clash in priorities.

If security cooperation between the two countries deteriorates, it could provide opportunities for extremist groups to operate more freely, potentially threatening the security of both nations. A breakdown in intelligence sharing and coordination on counterterrorism could hinder efforts to combat global terrorism and transnational crime.

Moreover, increased polarization within the Sikh diaspora in Canada could lead to internal security challenges, with the possibility of radical elements gaining more influence. This scenario could contribute to domestic unrest in Canada and complicate its security landscape.

6. Impact on Multiculturalism and Social Harmony: The India-Canada conflict has the potential to strain social relations, particularly within Canada's multicultural society. Canada is home to a large Indian diaspora, including a significant Sikh population. Diplomatic tensions could create divisions within these communities, leading to social polarization and tensions between different ethnic and religious groups.

In particular, the Khalistan issue, which lies at the heart of the conflict, could inflame passions and lead to protests, rallies, and even violence between supporters and opponents of the movement. Social cohesion within the Sikh and Hindu communities in Canada may be tested, as political tensions seep into daily life.

Moreover, any hostile rhetoric from either government could exacerbate stereotypes and fuel xenophobia, potentially leading to discrimination against Indian nationals or people of Indian origin in Canada. This could hurt the values of multiculturalism and tolerance that Canada prides itself on.

Present Scenario: The current India-Canada conflict stems from the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Canadian citizen and pro-Khalistan Sikh activist, in June 2023. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau publicly accused the Indian government of involvement in the killing, triggering a severe diplomatic crisis. India has denied the allegations, calling them "**absurd**" and criticizing Canada for providing a platform to Sikh separatist groups advocating for an independent Khalistan. The tension escalated with both countries expelling diplomats, halting trade negotiations, and suspending visa services.

This dispute has deep roots in India's concerns over the Khalistan movement, which seeks a separate Sikh homeland in the Indian state of Punjab. Although the movement's militancy diminished in the 1990s, India remains wary of its resurgence, particularly through diaspora activism in countries like Canada, which has a significant Sikh population (about 2% of its total). For years, India has accused Canada of being lenient toward separatist groups, which has strained bilateral relations.

The ongoing crisis is affecting various sectors. Trade talks have been stalled, and a proposed Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, which could boost trade by billions, has been put on hold. The economic interests of the large Indian student community in Canada, as well as Canadian businesses operating in India, are also at risk. Additionally, political and people-to-people ties have been impacted, with broader implications for the Sikh diaspora in both countries.

However, despite these tensions, countries like the U.S. and the U.K. are carefully distancing themselves from the conflict, recognizing India's importance in the global strategic landscape, particularly as a counterbalance to China. The outcome of this diplomatic crisis remains uncertain, but it poses significant challenges for both nations in terms of economic, political, and security relations.

U.N.O and India-Canada Conflict: The United Nations (U.N.) has so far remained neutral and uninvolved in the India-Canada conflict, which erupted over allegations by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau regarding India's involvement in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Canadian Sikh leader and pro-Khalistan activist. The U.N. typically avoids intervening in bilateral disputes unless both parties seek its involvement or the conflict escalates to a broader international crisis threatening peace and security.

India, as an influential member of the U.N., particularly through its current role in the U.N. Security Council, has been vocal about its stance against Khalistan separatism. It emphasizes the principle of non-interference in its internal affairs, aligning this with U.N. charters that advocate for national sovereignty. India's representative at the U.N. could potentially utilize diplomatic channels within the U.N. to clarify its position, should Canada seek international support.

Canada, on the other hand, might leverage international forums like the U.N. to raise awareness about human rights issues or allegations of foreign interference, but as of now, it has kept the issue mostly within bilateral and Western alliance frameworks. The international community, including U.N. member states, may urge both nations to resolve their disputes diplomatically and avoid escalating tensions further.

The U.N.'s focus tends to be on broader peace and stability rather than specific bilateral spats like the India-Canada conflict. Any escalation that affects global security or has broader human rights implications could potentially prompt U.N. involvement, but the situation remains mostly contained to diplomatic exchanges at this point

Present Perspectives: The ongoing India-Canada conflict is rooted in allegations made by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in 2023, accusing Indian agents of being involved in the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a pro-Khalistan activist in Canada. This has led to significant diplomatic tensions, affecting not only bilateral relations but also regional and international politics. The present perspectives on the conflict reflect a mix of diplomatic, political, economic, and social challenges, along with broader implications for the Indian diaspora in Canada.

1. Diplomatic Breakdown: At the heart of the India-Canada conflict is a diplomatic fallout that has escalated rapidly. After Trudeau's public accusations, both nations expelled diplomats, and India suspended visa services for Canadians. India, in turn, rejected the accusations as unfounded and accused Canada of sheltering Sikh separatist groups. This diplomatic standoff has not only halted direct negotiations but also soured relations on international platforms where the two nations have previously cooperated.

India views the issue as an internal matter, with strong opposition to external interference, especially from nations that allow groups linked to separatist movements to operate freely. Canada, on the other hand, asserts its right to investigate any potential foreign interference on its soil, particularly concerning the rights and freedoms of its citizens. Both nations are standing firm in their positions, leading to a prolonged diplomatic deadlock.

2. Political Implications: Politically, this conflict reflects broader issues of national security and sovereignty for both nations. For India, the specter of Khalistan separatism, which largely died down in the 1990s, has resurfaced in the diaspora, particularly in countries like Canada and the U.K. India has repeatedly expressed concerns that the presence of pro-Khalistan groups in these countries undermines its national integrity. From Canada's perspective, Trudeau's government faces domestic pressures from the influential Sikh community, which is politically significant, especially in key regions like British Columbia and Ontario.

The political discourse within both countries has also been shaped by their respective domestic audiences. In India, the government has positioned itself strongly against separatism, framing the conflict as a matter of national unity and security. In Canada, Trudeau's accusations have been framed within the context of protecting democratic freedoms, even as opposition parties and critics raise concerns about deteriorating diplomatic relations.

3. Economic Fallout: The economic consequences of the India-Canada conflict are significant, with both countries suspending trade talks that had been progressing. The stalled Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) could have greatly enhanced bilateral trade, with potential benefits for both nations' economies, including sectors like agriculture, energy, technology, and education. Trade between the two countries, valued at approximately \$8 billion in 2022, is now at risk of decline as diplomatic ties worsen.

Canada is one of India's largest suppliers of agricultural products, including lentils, and Indian companies, particularly in the IT and pharmaceutical sectors, have a strong presence in Canada. Conversely, Canadian businesses in the energy and natural resources sectors have significant investments in India. The suspension of economic dialogues could damage both economies, particularly as India continues to rise as a global economic power.

4. Impact on the Indian Diaspora: One of the most delicate aspects of the conflict is its impact on the Indian diaspora in Canada, especially the Sikh community, which plays an important role in Canadian politics and society. The Khalistan issue has long been a point of contention between the two governments, with India accusing Canada of allowing separatist elements to flourish. Meanwhile, the Canadian government has maintained that it respects the right to free expression, which has been a fundamental point of divergence.

For the diaspora, the conflict has created uncertainty. Many families have ties to both countries, and the escalating tensions could affect everything from business opportunities to student visas. Indian students make up a significant portion of Canada's international student population, and any visa restrictions could disrupt this dynamic, impacting both Canadian educational institutions and Indian students seeking international opportunities.

5. Geopolitical Dimensions: The India-Canada conflict also has broader geopolitical dimensions, particularly in the context of the Quad alliance (India, the U.S., Japan, and Australia) and Canada's relations with its Western allies. So far, countries like the U.S. and the U.K. have not taken sides, although they have urged both nations to engage in dialogue. India's strategic importance, particularly in countering China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region, makes it unlikely that Western powers will push too hard on this issue, as they value India's partnership in regional security.

For Canada, this conflict poses a diplomatic balancing act. While it seeks to defend its national sovereignty, it must also navigate its relationships within the broader international community. Canada's allies may be reluctant to openly criticize India, recognizing the potential risks of alienating a key global partner.

6. Security and Counterterrorism: Security concerns, particularly regarding counterterrorism, have become a key aspect of the conflict. India has consistently highlighted the need for stronger action against groups it views as extremist and separatist, particularly the Khalistan movement. Canada, which has a significant Sikh population, has been more cautious, balancing between national security concerns and the rights of its diaspora to express political views.

The breakdown in diplomatic relations could have serious consequences for joint counterterrorism efforts. Both countries have previously collaborated on security issues through working groups and other multilateral forums. However, as diplomatic ties deteriorate, these security channels may also weaken, potentially leaving gaps in efforts to combat terrorism and organized crime.

Tentative Suggestions to Mitigate India-Canada Conflict: Mitigating the ongoing India-Canada conflict requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the diplomatic, economic, and

political tensions while fostering long-term trust and cooperation. Below are some tentative suggestions for both countries to consider:

1. Reopen Diplomatic Channels: One of the most immediate steps to de-escalate the conflict is reopening diplomatic dialogue. Both nations should re-establish formal communication at the highest levels, possibly through third-party mediation or neutral international forums such as the United Nations or G20. Diplomatic backchannels could allow for confidential discussions to resolve the key issues without the pressures of public scrutiny. Countries like the U.S. or allies within the Commonwealth may play a mediating role to facilitate a resolution.

2. Mutual Respect for Sovereignty: To build a constructive relationship, both India and Canada should reaffirm their mutual respect for each other's sovereignty. India needs to ensure that its security concerns, especially regarding separatist elements, are addressed within the framework of international norms. Canada, in turn, should ensure that any investigation into foreign interference is handled transparently, without prematurely accusing state actors before conclusive evidence is presented. Both countries should refrain from making public accusations that could escalate tensions further.

3. Re-examine Policy Toward Diaspora Activism: The Khalistan issue has long been a sticking point in India-Canada relations, largely due to the political activism of a section of the Sikh diaspora in Canada. Both countries should engage in a dialogue about the boundaries of acceptable political activism by diaspora communities, particularly when it involves separatist movements. Canada can adopt a balanced approach, protecting freedom of expression while ensuring that separatist movements do not harm its relations with India. India, on its part, can engage with diaspora groups more constructively, seeking dialogue rather than confrontation.

4. Resumption of Trade Negotiations: Economic cooperation is a critical area where both nations stand to gain significantly. To ease the economic fallout, India and Canada should prioritize resuming discussions on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). A return to the negotiation table would not only boost bilateral trade but also send a strong signal that both countries are willing to maintain their economic interdependence, despite diplomatic disputes. Trade, investment, and people-to-people ties should be kept separate from political disagreements to avoid broader consequences.

5. Confidence-Building Measures: Confidence-building measures (CBMs) could help restore trust between the two countries. These could include joint initiatives on shared global challenges such as climate change, counterterrorism, or public health. Re-establishing cooperation in areas like education, agriculture, and defence, where both countries have strong ties, could create a positive atmosphere for broader diplomatic solutions. For example, continued collaboration in academic exchanges and student mobility could serve as a low-risk platform for rebuilding trust.

6. Leverage Multilateral Platforms: Both countries are influential members of international organizations such as the U.N., G20, and Commonwealth. Multilateral diplomacy could help de-escalate the situation by encouraging both parties to cooperate on broader global issues.

Constructive engagement at such forums would demonstrate a commitment to global peace and security, encouraging de-escalation on a bilateral level.

7. Track Two Diplomacy: Track two diplomacy, involving non-governmental actors like academics, business leaders, and civil society organizations, could complement official diplomatic efforts. This form of diplomacy can reduce the rigidity of state-level discussions by fostering informal dialogue on contentious issues like Khalistan and political activism. People-to-people exchanges and dialogue between civil society groups in India and Canada could offer alternative pathways for resolving misunderstandings.

8. Clarify Legal Issues on Foreign Interference: Given the sensitive nature of Trudeau's allegations, both countries may benefit from establishing a joint legal framework to address claims of foreign interference. A bilateral agreement or protocol on handling such allegations—focused on transparency, cooperation, and investigation—could prevent further diplomatic incidents. This would also help maintain rule-of-law principles in both countries while reducing unnecessary public escalations of allegations.

Future Prospects: The future prospects of the India-Canada conflict will depend largely on how both nations handle the current diplomatic standoff and address underlying issues. The conflict, sparked by accusations surrounding the murder of Khalistani activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, has the potential to either escalate or de-escalate based on the following factors:

1. Diplomatic Resolution or Prolonged Tension: If both countries take steps toward diplomatic resolution, such as engaging in formal dialogue or using intermediaries, tensions could ease. The international community, including countries like the U.S. and U.K., has so far encouraged dialogue and restraint. However, if the accusations persist without any diplomatic engagement, this conflict could lead to prolonged tension, impacting bilateral relations for years to come.

2. Economic and Trade Ramifications: The suspension of trade talks, especially the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), has placed billions of dollars in trade and investment at risk. The longer the conflict persists, the more economic damage both nations are likely to face. Canada is a major supplier of agricultural products to India, while India exports significant goods like pharmaceuticals and software services to Canada. If the conflict remains unresolved, both economies could lose valuable business opportunities, and Canadian companies in India could face hurdles.

3. Impact on the Sikh Diaspora and Indian Students: One of the most significant social implications of the conflict lies in its potential impact on the large Indian diaspora in Canada, particularly the Sikh community. If the tensions escalate, it could lead to further polarization and mistrust within this community, affecting their political, social, and economic interactions in both countries. Moreover, any visa restrictions or diplomatic reprisals could negatively affect the growing population of Indian students in Canada, a significant demographic for both countries' economies.

4. Geopolitical Shifts: Geopolitically, the conflict may push India to strengthen ties with other Western allies like the U.S. and Australia, while Canada could face isolation from key Asian

partners. India's role in regional stability and countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific makes it a critical player for Western powers. Canada will need to carefully navigate its foreign policy to avoid damaging its broader relationships with other global partners if the conflict with India escalates.

5. Potential for Dialogue or International Mediation: In the best-case scenario, third-party mediation or dialogue facilitated by international organizations like the U.N. or through multilateral forums like the Commonwealth or G20 could help resolve the conflict. While the U.N. has not been involved thus far, both nations could potentially turn to global diplomatic frameworks to de-escalate tensions. International diplomatic pressure, especially from key allies, could nudge both sides toward a more constructive engagement.

Summary/Conclusion: The India-Canada conflict, which erupted in 2023 over allegations by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau regarding India's involvement in the killing of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, has severely strained bilateral relations. The dispute centres around conflicting perspectives on the Khalistan issue, with India accusing Canada of harbouring separatist groups and Canada defending its commitment to democratic freedoms. Both nations have expelled diplomats, and India has suspended visa services, leading to a diplomatic standoff.

The conflict's economic implications are significant, with trade negotiations, including the stalled Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), being adversely affected. Additionally, the large Indian diaspora in Canada, particularly the Sikh community, has become a focal point of the tension, with concerns over rising polarization.

The geopolitical dimension also adds complexity, as both countries have broader strategic partnerships with global powers. Allies like the U.S. and U.K. have urged dialogue but have avoided direct involvement. Moving forward, the prospects for the conflict depend on whether both nations choose diplomacy or risk further escalation. Potential resolutions could include reopening diplomatic channels, addressing India's concerns over separatism, and resuming economic talks to prevent further damage to both countries' interests.

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