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DHURANDHAR 3

AJIT SANYAL'S SWANSONG

*What India's National Security Adviser was actually doing in Abu Dhabi.
Twelve theories. One Pakistani panic. One swansong.
And the operational architecture of what comes next.*

■ **CREATIVE LIBERTIES TAKEN.** Dhurandhar 3 is the third installment in the unauthorised correspondence-thriller that began with Dhurandhar 1 and 2. The protagonist Ajit Sanyal is, as in prior editions, a fictional rendering of a real person whose actual job description does not include 90 percent of what he gets up to in these pages. The Doval-MBZ meeting on April 26, 2026 is real. What was discussed in it is, by the nature of such meetings, not. Creed offers twelve theories. Three of them, taken together, are probably correct.

By **JASPER CREED** | Defence & Strategic Affairs Correspondent | (and an Anonymous Source Who Will Not Be Named)

Edition Forty-Two ♦ April 27, 2026 ♦ DHURANDHAR 3 ♦ Ajit Sanyal's Swansong

■ COVER NOTE ■

On Saturday, April 26, 2026, India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval called on the President of the United Arab Emirates, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in Abu Dhabi.

The official readout, as published by Indian Embassy Abu Dhabi and the UAE state news agency WAM, was a study in deliberate vacancy. The two parties discussed: 'measures to deepen the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.' They discussed: 'the regional situation.' They discussed: 'other issues of mutual interest.' Greetings were conveyed. Pleasantries were exchanged. Energy security was mentioned. If you read the press release back to yourself slowly, in good faith, you will

discover that it conveys precisely no information of any kind. This is not an accident. This is the diplomatic equivalent of the curtain being drawn before the rehearsal begins.

Two days later, Creed has been in receipt of — by means he is not at liberty to disclose, and frankly does not propose to disclose even if he were — what purports to be a working file from the office of one Ajit Sanyal, a fictional senior officer of the Research and Analysis Wing whose career, for reasons too convoluted to explain here, has run in unsettling parallel to that of India's actual National Security Adviser. Creed has decided to publish the contents of this file in the public interest, with the standard caveat that the file is fictional, that the protagonist is fictional, and that the conclusions are entirely Creed's own.

What follows is presented in the format of the original dossier. Annexures A through E. Twelve theories on what Doval was actually doing. One closing note from a man on his last operational rotation. And one Pakistan-shaped pit of dread that runs underneath all of it. Welcome to Dhurandhar 3.

**"They discussed energy security and the regional situation.
Diplomats use these phrases the way magicians use silk
handkerchiefs:
to draw the eye away from what is actually moving in the other
hand."**



■ ANNEX A — THE VISIT, RECONSTRUCTED ■

Begin with the obvious facts and the company present. Diplomatic photographs do not always tell you what was discussed. They invariably tell you who decided what was discussed. On this metric alone, the April 26 meeting is extraordinary.

THE GUEST LIST — THE FOUR MEN IN THE ROOM

■ **Ajit Doval**, National Security Adviser, Republic of India. Sixty years of operational experience. The man who walked alone in Lahore for seven years for a country that, when he came back, gave him a quiet handshake and another file.

■ **HH Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan**, President of the UAE. The architect of Abu Dhabi's quiet superpower diplomacy. Speaks softly. Carries a sovereign wealth fund.

■ **Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan**, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi. MBZ's son. Heir presumptive. The fact that he was in the room means the meeting was not just about today.

■ **Ali bin Hammad Al Shamsi, Secretary-General, UAE Supreme Council for National Security.** And here, dear reader, the energy-security cover story collapses. When the head of UAE national security sits in a room with the Indian NSA, the conversation is not about how many barrels per day are flowing through Hormuz. It is about which file is being opened next, and by whom, and against whom.

■ *And then, almost certainly, a fifth man. Not in the official photographs. Not in the WAM readout. Not in the Indian Embassy X post. Sanyal's notes refer to him only by the codename **HAMZA** — almost certainly a working name, almost certainly not the name on his passport. He is described in the file as 'the successor.' Twenty years younger than Sanyal. Quieter, even by the standards of the profession. He sat to Sanyal's right throughout the meeting and said nothing. In the parlance of South Block, he was being shown the room. By the next time a meeting of this kind takes place in Abu Dhabi, the room will be his.*

Note also who was not in the room. No oil minister. No commerce minister. No tourism authority. No representative of the bilateral chamber of commerce. No fluffy diplomat with a comprehensive partnership memo. Just two principals, a successor, and the head of national security.

This is what is called, in Sanyal's preferred terminology, a 'four-corners meeting': a session in which every corner of the room is occupied by someone whose presence by itself communicates a message. MBZ's presence says 'this matters at the highest level.' Khaled's presence says 'this commitment outlives me.' Al Shamsi's presence says 'this has an operational dimension.' And Doval's presence says — the way Doval's presence has always said — 'you will not read about this in the morning paper, but you will feel its consequences within six months.'

Three Weeks Earlier

On April 11, India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar called on the same MBZ in the same Abu Dhabi. Jaishankar conveyed the gratitude of the Indian government for the well-being of the Indian community during the regional conflict. Pleasantries again. Comprehensive Strategic Partnership again. And then, fifteen days later, India sent its top spy. When India sends its foreign minister, the message is policy. When India sends its national security adviser fifteen days later, the message is something the foreign minister cannot say in writing. Two visits at the highest level in three weeks, to the same capital, across two distinct ministries. This is not coincidence. This is sequence.

**"Two visits in three weeks. Two ministries. One capital.
When the diplomat goes first and the spy follows,
the diplomat was rehearsing.**

The spy is the actual performance."



■ ANNEX B — TWELVE THEORIES ■

Sanyal's file presents twelve possible reasons for the visit. Each is examined in turn. Each is rated for plausibility. The reader is invited to consider that, in operations of this kind, the answer is almost never any single theory. It is three or four theories braided together, with the official reason placed on top the way one might place an ornamental cushion on a sofa to distract from the file cabinet underneath.

THEORY 1 / THE ARISHA BLUEPRINT / CARRYING WHAT MINISTERS CANNOT

Plausibility: 75%. Creed proposed in his April 21 crystal-ball edition that the post-war regional order would crystallise around a tri-nation defence coalition combining Arab capital, Indian production, and Israeli technology — acronymically **ARISHA**. The proposition was treated, by some readers, as speculative fancy. Creed acknowledges this. Creed also notes, with the polite restraint appropriate to a correspondent who is not entirely certain of his own predictions, that India's NSA was in Abu Dhabi six days later. ARISHA-class arrangements require something a foreign minister cannot offer: intelligence interoperability, joint operational protocols, deniable communications. These are NSA-level instruments. If Doval was carrying anything in that briefcase — and let us assume, for the sake of argument, that he was — it was the unsigned, uninitialled, untitled framework document for what comes after the war.

THEORY 2 / THE SAUDI MESSAGE, DELIVERED THROUGH ABU DHABI

Plausibility: 65%. There are some messages a country sends directly. There are some it sends through intermediaries because direct delivery would create a paper trail nobody wants. India is currently in the early, careful stages of cultivating a strategic relationship with Saudi Arabia that, if pursued openly, would alarm Pakistan and irritate Washington. MBZ has, for fifteen years, been the most reliable diplomatic conduit into the Saudi royal court for capitals that wish to communicate with Riyadh without making it a state visit. Doval's file in this scenario is not a UAE file. It is a Saudi file with a UAE cover sheet. By the time Doval flies home, MBZ has already had a private call with MBS in which the substance of the Indian message has been conveyed, considered, and — if the body language is to be trusted — endorsed in principle. Pakistan, watching this from Islamabad, sees an Indian NSA visiting Abu Dhabi. Pakistan does not see what just happened in Riyadh.

THEORY 3 / THE IRAN BACK-CHANNEL THROUGH UAE

Plausibility: 55%. Iran does not particularly trust Pakistan. Tehran has watched Asim Munir play courier between Trump and Araghchi for three weeks and has formed conclusions about Pakistan's role that are not flattering. Iran does, however, retain a serviceable relationship with the UAE. If India wishes to convey something to Tehran without going through Islamabad — and India has every reason to want this — Abu Dhabi is the natural conduit. Doval and Al Shamsi could have established the shape of a quiet four-way mechanism (India, UAE, Iran, and one further party of mutual interest) that bypasses Pakistan entirely. If this happened, Asim Munir will not learn of it for some months. When he does, the laundry room of his fictional carrier-equivalent will catch fire.

THEORY 4 / THE PAKISTAN PROBLEM, COORDINATED RESPONSE

Plausibility: 80%. The highest single-theory rating in this file. The UAE has, since March 31, 2026, been quietly rejecting Pakistani visa applications across multiple categories without explanation. This is not an administrative matter. This is a policy. Policies of this scale are not implemented without parallel security coordination, particularly when seven million Pakistanis remit through the affected corridors and a considerable subset of those Pakistanis are not, technically, in occupations that the host government finds congenial.

Doval and Al Shamsi need to coordinate on three things: first, intelligence sharing on which Pakistani nationals are already on UAE soil and which subset is of mutual concern. Second, the choreography of the visa wind-down — how aggressive, how visible, how fast. Third, the management of the Pakistani diplomatic protest that is now inevitable, and which both parties wish to render as pro-forma as possible.

There is a fourth, less polite element. The UAE's decision to begin culling Pakistani visas was, in part, informed by intelligence shared by India over the preceding eighteen months regarding the activities of certain Pakistani nationals on UAE soil that the UAE government had not previously fully appreciated. If this is true — and Sanyal's file rates the probability at 'material' — then this April 26 meeting is in part a thank-you, and in part a setting up of the next phase. Pakistani nationals reading this column should perhaps not begin booking travel through Dubai International this month.

THEORY 5 / 3.5 MILLION REASONS / DIASPORA PROTECTION ARCHITECTURE

Plausibility: 70%. India has approximately 3.5 million citizens resident in the UAE. These are the largest national diaspora group in the country, the source of approximately a third of all Indian remittance inflows. The Iran war exposed the operational vulnerability of this community. Air corridors closed. Indian-flagged shipping forced to route around the Strait of Hormuz. Insurance premiums on Gulf-bound flights briefly tripled. Doval and Al Shamsi need to formalise an evacuation contingency architecture that can move 3.5 million people — or, more realistically, the most exposed 200,000 of them — in a 96-hour window if the next round goes worse than the last. This is the kind of file that a national security adviser has to physically discuss rather than email,

the UAE assisting India in tracing financial flows out of Pakistan into Gulf real estate — particularly when those flows can be tied, through patient forensic work, to specific Pakistani military officials whose declared income does not adequately explain their portfolio of beachfront apartments. Sanyal's file notes, with characteristic dryness, that this work has not slowed. It has accelerated.

THEORY 9 / A SPECIFIC PERSON OF INTEREST

Plausibility: 35%. There are presently several individuals on UAE soil whom India's legal and intelligence services would very much like to interview at length, and whom the UAE has historically declined to extradite either because the individuals possess passports the Emirates considers reliable or because the diplomatic costs of extradition outweigh the diplomatic benefits. Doval's visit may have included a polite, off-the-record conversation about whether this calculus has shifted in light of recent regional developments. If it has shifted, the next twelve months will produce one or two surprising returns to Indian custody that Indian newspapers will report as triumphs and that nobody on either side will explain. Pakistan's intelligence services, watching their own assets vanish from the UAE one by one, will draw their own conclusions and will not be permitted to speak about them publicly.

THEORY 10 / THE REVERSE JADHAV / EXTREMELY UNLIKELY / TANTALISING

Plausibility: 10%, with a footnote. First, the background, because the reference will not land otherwise. In 2016, Pakistan announced that it had captured a serving Indian Navy officer named Kulbhushan Jadhav inside Pakistani Balochistan, accused him of being an Indian intelligence operative, and sentenced him to death in a closed military trial. India has always insisted that Jadhav was in fact kidnapped from Iranian soil by Pakistani intelligence and then displayed publicly as a propaganda exhibit — a high-profile Indian to parade as proof that Indian operations on Pakistani soil were real. Both narratives still have their adherents. Now consider the same scenario inverted. A senior Pakistani official, on UAE soil for whatever reason, ends up in a quiet third-country safehouse — let us say, hypothetically, in Abu Dhabi. He is offered a clean exit: a new identity, safe passage, a comfortable arrangement abroad, in exchange for full operational cooperation. No public trial. No press conference. No propaganda exhibit. Just a quiet, devastating intelligence acquisition that Pakistan discovers months later when its own operations begin to fail in patterns it cannot explain. The mirror image of what Pakistan claims happened with Jadhav, executed instead by the other side. The footnote: this is fiction. Both Sanyal and Creed deny that anything of this nature has happened or is being contemplated. Both denials are entirely sincere and should be taken at face value, in the precise manner that such denials are always taken at face value, which is to say not very.

THEORY 11 / THE BALOCHISTAN FILE / SANYAL'S PERSONAL OBSESSION

Plausibility: 60%. Anyone who has read Sanyal's career file — and Creed has read parts of it that he should not have — knows that Balochistan is the file Sanyal returns to most often. It is, in his

professional taxonomy, the slow-burning fuse underneath the Pakistani military's self-image. Pakistan has spent fifty years insisting Balochistan is an internal matter. India has spent thirty years patiently, quietly, and with the specific patience of a country that has nothing to gain from speaking aloud, ensuring that Balochistan is not, in fact, internal.

The UAE's role in this is less appreciated than it should be. Dubai and Abu Dhabi have, for two decades, been the most reliable safe haven for exiled Baloch leaders, journalists, students, and activists who could not safely live in Quetta or Karachi. Pakistan has objected. Pakistan has demanded extraditions. Pakistan has, with characteristic combination of grievance and underwhelming evidence, presented dossiers identifying particular Baloch individuals as security threats. The UAE has, with characteristic combination of polite reception and gentle dismissal, filed those dossiers in the place where the UAE files dossiers Pakistan would prefer it acted on.

What Sanyal's file proposes — and what was probably reviewed in the April 26 meeting — is a quiet formalisation of this informal arrangement. Specifically: agreed lists of 'approved interlocutors' from the Baloch exile community whom Indian officials may meet on UAE soil without diplomatic complication. Quiet financing pathways for Baloch human rights documentation work running through Dubai-registered entities. An understanding on satellite imagery sharing regarding Pakistani military movements in the restive parts of the province. And a tacit agreement that Pakistan's next round of complaints about 'foreign interference in Balochistan' will be met, in Abu Dhabi, with the same elegant nothing it has been met with for twenty years.

There is a further, sharper element. Pakistan's prized port at Gwadar, the centrepiece of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, is in Balochistan. The insurgency that Pakistan refuses to acknowledge has, for several years, been making Chinese workers extremely nervous. Chinese personnel are killed there. Chinese projects are delayed. Chinese assessments of CPEC's security premium have been rising quietly. Sanyal's file does not need to instigate any of this. Sanyal's file merely needs to ensure that the international diplomatic environment continues to fail to notice Pakistan's complaints — and that the costs of running Gwadar continue to creep upward without any single party doing anything visibly hostile. Pakistan was supposed to internationalise Kashmir. Pakistan instead managed, through fifty years of strategic incompetence, to internationalise Balochistan. Sanyal will retire having quietly helped this along. He will not be in the photographs.

THEORY 12 / THE AFGHANISTAN PIVOT / PATRONS, ORPHANS, AND THE TALIBAN

Plausibility: 55%. There is a particular kind of irony available only to countries that birth their own enemies. Pakistan birthed the Taliban in the 1990s with Saudi money and ISI guidance. Pakistan sheltered the Taliban through twenty years of American war. Pakistan welcomed the Taliban back to power in Kabul in August 2021 with sweet remarks about 'the chains of slavery being broken.' Pakistan is, today, being shot at by the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, which is the Taliban's Pakistani

branch and which now operates from sanctuaries the Pakistani military taught the original Taliban how to build.

The original three countries that recognised the Taliban government in 1996 were Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Pakistan. Two of those three have since recalibrated. Saudi Arabia has cooled. Pakistan, for reasons described above, is in the strange position of being the Taliban's former patron and present target. The UAE remains, alone among major Gulf states, the most pragmatic external interlocutor with the Taliban government in Kabul. Emirates Airline still flies to Kabul. UAE companies still operate there. Quiet UAE diplomatic engagement continues.

Sanyal's file proposes that India and the UAE are constructing, with the kind of patience that does not show up in press releases, a tri-cornered Afghanistan policy in which Pakistan is structurally absent. The Gulf provides quiet diplomatic legitimacy and infrastructure investment. India provides what the Taliban government actually needs: humanitarian assistance, medical supplies, food, road equipment, the kind of practical help that does not require loving the regime and merely requires accepting that the regime exists and has 40 million people who would prefer to eat. And the Taliban, in return, provide what India most wants from Afghanistan: an Afghanistan that is no longer a Pakistani strategic depth. An Afghanistan that, in fact, increasingly resents Pakistan.

The mockery here writes itself, but Creed will write it anyway. Pakistan spent forty years cultivating the Taliban as a strategic instrument against India. Pakistan has now succeeded so completely that the Taliban government in Kabul is materially closer to India than to Pakistan, is hosted diplomatically by the UAE rather than Islamabad, and treats Pakistani complaints about TTP cross-border raids with the polite indifference Pakistan once reserved for India's complaints about cross-border terrorism. Pakistan's strategic depth has acquired a sense of humour. Pakistan, characteristically, has not noticed.

THE PERSONAL CODA / AJIT SANYAL'S SWANSONG

Plausibility: 100% in the fictional frame; Creed declines to comment on the real-world equivalent. In Dhurandhar 1, Ajit Sanyal was the case officer who ran the protagonist from a quiet room in South Block, never appearing in the photographs, reading every report, never being read about. In Dhurandhar 2, he stepped one degree closer to the visible work, but stayed institutional, the kind of officer whose name appears in nobody's memoir. In Dhurandhar 3, for the first time in his career, he is in the room himself. He understands that this will be the last meeting of his operational career. When a senior officer is sent on a swansong assignment, the assignment carries weight that no one acknowledges aloud. It carries the gravitas of a career being closed with dignity. It carries the unspoken understanding that the successor has been chosen and is in the room to begin the handover. His successor — let us call him, in keeping with the conventions of this correspondence, **Hamza** — sat to Sanyal's right throughout. He has the patience of a man twenty years younger than Sanyal and the same professional instinct for staying out of photographs. Readers of Dhurandhar 1 and Dhurandhar 2 will recognise the codename. Sanyal

carries, in this final assignment, the same quietness that the original of that working name carried in the operations Sanyal himself once ran. Some lineages are not advertised. Some lineages do not need to be. It carries the awareness, on every face present, that the man who shaped a decade of regional doctrine is now being permitted to set the cornerstone of the next decade's architecture before he steps back into the shadows from which he has only ever briefly emerged. Sanyal will not attend another meeting of this kind. He has done what he came to do. He has handed over the file.

"Twelve theories. Three are probably correct.

The reader is invited to choose which three.

Sanyal himself, when asked, would not say.

**He is on his swansong. Discretion is the only farewell speech
a man like him is permitted."**



■ ANNEX C — THE PAKISTANI PANIC, IN FOUR ACTS ■

Creed must now turn to the topic that gives this entire document its delicious subtext. Somewhere in Rawalpindi at this very moment, a senior officer of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence is reading the same news Creed is reading, and is experiencing what mental health professionals would call 'sustained acute distress.'

Act I — The Initial Reading

The senior ISI officer arrives at his office on Sunday morning. He drinks his tea. He reads the headlines. He sees that India's NSA has met with the President of the UAE, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, and the Secretary-General of the UAE Supreme Council for National Security. He reads the official Indian Embassy statement. He reads the WAM statement. Both are vague. He understands what vagueness of this kind means. His tea, briefly, becomes less interesting.

Act II — The Calls

The senior ISI officer makes three calls. The first is to the Pakistan Embassy in Abu Dhabi, asking what they know. Answer: nothing they did not already know from the press release. The second is to a contact within the UAE government who has, historically, been informative. Answer: the contact is unavailable, will return the call shortly, shortly does not arrive within the working day. The third call is to a long-standing intelligence liaison in Riyadh who can usually be relied upon for context. Answer: the Saudi liaison is also unavailable, with an excuse that is technically correct and emotionally unhelpful. The senior ISI officer notices something. Three of his three usual sources have all gone simultaneously dark. This is not coincidence. This is choreography. His tea is cold.

Act III — The Internal Memo

The senior ISI officer drafts an internal assessment. He cannot show panic. Nobody at his rank shows panic. He writes a measured, professional, somewhat performatively confident memo stating that the Doval visit is a 'routine bilateral consultation' that 'falls within the established cadence of India-UAE engagement' and that there is 'no cause for elevated concern' but that 'close monitoring is warranted.' He prints the memo. He reads it back to himself. He understands, deep in the part of him that has not been entirely smothered by twenty years of writing memos exactly like this, that the memo is a piece of organisational throat-clearing. It does not mean what it says. It means: 'I have no idea what just happened, and I do not want my superiors to know that I have no idea.' He sends the memo. The memo will sit, unread, in a queue of similarly unread memos, until the consequences it could have warned against begin arriving.

Act IV — The Wider Realisation

The senior ISI officer sits at his desk and considers the wider picture. Three weeks ago, his Field Marshal was being courted by the President of the United States. His country was being credited as the indispensable mediator of the Iran war. Truth Social posts named Asim Munir personally. Pakistan was, briefly, the most important country in South Asia in the eyes of an American president whose attention, as everyone knows, is the most valuable real estate in modern diplomacy. And somehow, in the space of three weeks, the UAE has stopped issuing visas to his nationals, Saudi Arabia is taking longer to return his minister's calls, and India's spymaster has just held a four-corners meeting with the head of UAE national security. Pakistan was supposed to be ascendant. Pakistan is, instead, watching its periphery contract. Quietly. Without announcement. But measurably.

And here is the part that is, for Creed, the funniest and most devastating sentence he has typed in all forty-two editions of this newsletter: the Pakistani establishment will not understand what has happened until it has been happening for at least eighteen months. By then, the visa rejections will have accumulated. Three Saudi loans will have been quietly restructured. Two Emirati investment commitments will have been allowed to lapse. And a senior Pakistani official, on a routine visit to the Gulf, will be received with the polite, calibrated coolness that Gulf states reserve for partners they have ceased to take seriously but cannot yet publicly disown.

By that point, the Doval-MBZ meeting of April 26, 2026 will be three paragraphs in a footnote of a SAIS dissertation. Nobody outside a small group of professionals will remember it specifically. But it will have been the moment. The pivot. The handshake under the chandelier in Abu Dhabi where one country quietly finished writing the obituary of another country's seventy-year regional position. The obituary will not be published. It does not need to be.

"The Pakistani establishment will not understand what has happened until it has been happening for at least eighteen months. By then, three Saudi loans will be quietly restructured,

*two Emirati commitments will have lapsed,
and a generation of regional position will have been politely vapourised."*



■ ANNEX D – AJIT SANYAL'S CLOSING NOTE TO HIS SUCCESSOR ■

What follows is the closing memorandum found in the Sanyal file. It is addressed to his successor. Creed reproduces it without editorial intervention. Readers are reminded that Ajit Sanyal is fictional, but the operational sensibility he represents is not.

MEMORANDUM

FROM: A. SANYAL
TO: HAMZA / [for in-house reading only]
RE: The Abu Dhabi File / Handover
DATE: 27 April 2026 / 0617 hrs IST

1. Yesterday's meeting was the cleanest four-corners session I have attended in thirty-two years. Everything was understood. Nothing was spelled out. If you are reading this, the file is now yours.
2. The file has three layers. The visible layer is energy security and bilateral pleasantries. The middle layer is the operational coordination on a list of approximately forty individuals of mutual concern presently or previously resident in the host country. The deepest layer is the framework for what comes next – the architecture, in shorthand, that you and I have been discussing in carparks for the last eleven months.
3. The host has agreed to the operational layer with one minor amendment regarding sequencing. The amendment is acceptable. Implementation will commence in the second quarter at the latest. The architecture layer has been initialled – not signed, never signed – and will progress through the channels we have established with our two non-Arab partners, whom you will meet in due course.

4. A note on the third party. They will detect movement. They will not detect direction. Their analysts will produce three or four competing assessments, all of which will be partially correct. The aggregated assessment will not reach decision-making levels for at least nine months because their internal politics will not permit a coherent picture to emerge sooner. By then, the operational layer will be irreversible.

5. A note on the third party's patron. I do not believe the patron will obstruct. The patron is preoccupied with other matters – specifically, with extracting itself from the war it started – and lacks the bandwidth, the human capital, and frankly the institutional memory to understand what is shifting underneath. Do not take this for granted. The patron is unpredictable. The patron may, at any moment, post something on his preferred medium that disrupts everything we have built. Watch his thumbs.

6. A personal observation, which you may discard as you see fit.

I have walked alone in this region, in one form or another, for forty years. I have watched empires arrive, position themselves, and discover the local conditions are not what their briefing books described. I have watched the Soviets exit. The Americans arrive. The Americans linger. I am now watching the Americans exit. I never thought I would see this in my lifetime. What we are building – and you will build it, I will not – is the first regional security architecture in seventy-five years in which the great-power patron is no longer the principal actor. It is messy. It is fragile. It will fail in places. But it is ours. Or, more accurately, it is the host's, with our help. Either way, it is not Washington's.

7. I am stepping back. Forty years was, I now realise, considerably more than I had originally signed up for. The desk you are now sitting behind is comfortable. The chair has the dignity of having been broken in by people who took it seriously. Use them both well.

8. There is one bottle in the lower right drawer. It is not a gift. It is a reminder that you are now the senior officer in this office and that the bottle's contents are best deployed sparingly, and only in the presence of company you trust absolutely. There are three people in the country who fit this description. You know who they are. As a small parting amusement – the initials of their first names spell, in order, the abbreviation of an IPL franchise. I leave you to work out which one. (It is not the obvious one.)

Best wishes. Walk well.

– A.S.



■ ANNEX E – CREED'S VERDICT ■

Creed must now drop the dossier conceit and speak plainly, briefly, before this edition collapses under the weight of its own ornamentation. Three observations.

First: the Doval visit is real and the actual subjects are unknown. Anyone who tells you with certainty what was discussed in that room is either inside that room — in which case they are not telling you — or guessing. Creed is guessing. He has presented twelve guesses. The truth is, in his estimation, somewhere in the intersection of Theories 1, 4, 5, 8, 11, and 12. **ARISHA framework** (the architecture document Doval almost certainly carried). **Pakistan coordination** (the visa cull is not happening in a vacuum). **Diaspora architecture** (the operational baseline of every Indian NSA-level meeting in the Gulf). **Financial flows** (the quiet, persistent forensic work that never makes headlines but shifts the ground). **The Balochistan File** (Sanyal's personal portfolio, almost certainly opened in this meeting because Sanyal would not retire without ensuring it was in proper hands). And **The Afghanistan Pivot** (the rising file, the one that will dominate the next decade of Indian regional strategy more than people currently appreciate). Six intersection points. The four-corners session was not about one file. It was about the entire portfolio being handed over.

Second: the meeting matters more than its readout suggests. Two high-level Indian visits to the same UAE leadership in fifteen days, across two distinct ministries, is not coincidence. It is sequencing. Jaishankar laid the political track. Doval came with the operational follow-through. When this happens — and Creed has watched it happen perhaps half a dozen times in his career — the meeting is doing something that will be visible in retrospect but is invisible in the moment. The Pakistani establishment will not see this coming. Pakistan rarely sees this kind of thing coming, because Pakistan's analytical apparatus is structurally configured to look westward at Iran and eastward at India and very rarely southward at the Gulf, which it assumes is permanently in its column. It is no longer permanently in its column. The column is being repainted. Pakistan has not been told.

Third, and most important: the visit is one piece of a larger pattern that Creed has been describing for several editions now. The Iran war broke the American security umbrella. The Gulf has begun, quietly, to look elsewhere. Israel has demonstrated that its technology works. India has positioned itself to provide the scale. The framework Creed has called ARISHA — Arab capital, Indian production, Shalom technology — is not yet visible but it is no longer hypothetical. What Doval and Al Shamsi were discussing in that room is the operational underlayer of that framework: the intelligence sharing, the asset coordination, the deniable communications, the working groups that no foreign minister can openly establish but that two national security advisers can quietly endorse over the course of a meeting whose readout speaks of 'comprehensive strategic partnership' and means almost exactly that, while saying almost nothing of the kind aloud.

"The official readout said: comprehensive strategic partnership.

The actual file is more specific, more operational, and considerably less convenient for Pakistan.

Sanyal is on his swansong.

The successor is in the room. The handover has begun."

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A PERSONAL INVITATION FROM THE CORRESPONDENT



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— **JASPER CREED** —

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Sources: Gulf News, Indian Embassy Abu Dhabi (X post April 26, 2026), Asian News International (Doval-MBZ meeting readout / energy security framing), IANS (second high-level visit after Jaishankar / Comprehensive Strategic Partnership), Social News XYZ (full meeting attendees including Crown Prince Khaled bin Mohamed and Al Shamsi), WAM (UAE state news agency / official confirmation).

Dhurandhar 1 and Dhurandhar 2 (prior fictional installments). Ajit Sanyal is fictional. The Doval-MBZ-Khaled-Al Shamsi meeting on April 26, 2026 is real. What was actually discussed in it is, by design, not in the public record. Creed offers his guesses with appropriate humility and the unshakeable conviction that his guesses are more useful than the vacant readout.

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