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Editor Note	4-7
Climate Change Issues	8-12
<i>- Prepared by PK Khup Hangzo</i>	
Role of MSMEs in Building of Defence Manufacturing Ecosystem in India	13-18
<i>- Prepared by Dr Saroj Bishoyi</i>	
12th Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh and Its Implications for India	19-20
<i>- Prepared by Dr Anchita Borthakur</i>	
Iran-Pakistan Tensions: Implications for India	21-23
<i>- Prepared by Dr Angana Kotokey, Hirak Jyoti Da</i>	
Pakistan: Baloch Long March, Election Related issues & General Asim Munir's Visit	24-29
<i>- Prepared by Dr Angana Kotokey</i>	
2024 Outlook on India-US Relations: Challenges and Opportunities	30-33
<i>- Prepared by Dr. Sweta Kumari</i>	
US Grand Strategy and India's Place in It	34-36
<i>- Prepared by Dr. Sweta Kumari</i>	

Having joined the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) on 16th January, soon after my superannuation from the Indian Navy on 31 December 2023, I have been assigned the onerous task of editing the 'Monthly Expert Groups Report'. It is a tall order and I have some very big shoes to fill, considering that my predecessor, Commodore Gopal Suri (Retd.) was handling it. Nevertheless, it would be my endeavour to match up to him. Being my maiden effort, I wish to seek the indulgence of the readers.

During the month of January, the Climate Change Expert Group discussed the outcome of the United Nations Climate Change Conference or COP28, recently held in Dubai, and what it meant for India going forward. They also discussed enhancing the use of nuclear energy by India to expedite its peak emissions date, the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance for low-carbon development which is set to replace the earlier US \$10 billion climate financing target, the need for India to preserve its national interests in negotiations on global emissions reduction plans while continuing to enhance the resilience of its agricultural sector to climate change. The Expert Group also discussed India being at the forefront of seeking Climate Justice and the need to develop effective adaptation assessment frameworks and metrics.

The Science and Technology Expert Group focussed on the role of MSMEs in Building of Defence Manufacturing Ecosystem in India. Towards this they organised a meeting with the Coimbatore District Small Scale Industries Association (CODISSIA). The meeting was followed by a brainstorming session on various aspects relating to defence manufacturing in India, challenges and opportunities in developing indigenous capacity

and capability in the defence and strategic technologies; and role of MSMEs in setting up a robust defence manufacturing ecosystem in the country.

Several recommendations have been made which include holding the next defence expo at Coimbatore, creating awareness on DGQA certifications, appointment of nodal officers to conduct frequent interactions/ awareness sessions with industries, time bound vendor registration process, reimbursement for new product development to the industries, MSME access to government test facilities at low cost or no cost, creation of a defence fund to provide support to the industries and greater familiarization about the procurement procedures.

The Neighbourhood Expert Group discussed the recent parliamentary elections in Bangladesh and its implications for India. The discussions highlighted the disconnect between the US and the UK, which were critical of the ‘opaque’ and less than fair election process, and other countries such as India and China, which wasted no time in congratulating the winning candidate, Sheikh Hasina, who secured her fifth term in office, thereby becoming the world’s longest-serving female head of state. The discussions highlighted the regional and global imperatives of the election and evaluated what does re-election of Sheikh Hasina mean for India and the region. It was emphasized that India should consolidate the gains that it achieved vis à vis Bangladesh under the Sheikh Hasina government’s last few terms.

The discussion concluded with the recommendation that it is important to understand the internal dynamics of Bangladesh’s politics, reasons for domestic turmoil and the daunting economic crisis faced by the country at the present juncture. Therefore, India’s approach should be to engage with the government of Bangladesh both at the bi-lateral as well as at the sub regional levels on the issues of infrastructure, connectivity, economy, energy and on the promotion of the tourism sector. It was also highlighted

that understanding the shared aspirations of the youth of both the countries is significant while developing policies embedded within multiple sectors. It was further stressed that both India and Bangladesh should pursue a people centric approach and work towards the policy of regional economic integration in the neighbourhood.

The Neighbourhood Expert Group also discussed the Iran-Pakistan tensions in the wake of Iranian missile attack in Pakistan's sovereign territory. The discussion included the implications of Iran's missile attack and Pakistan's response, and the possibility of escalation by Iran and Pakistan, effects on the West Asian region, and its impact on India.

The Pakistan Study Group (PSG), during their discussions on 10 January, discussed the Baloch Long March, Pakistan's Upcoming Elections and the Electoral Alliances, the Senate's Resolution on Pakistan's Election Date, and General Asim Munir's Trip to the United States.

The USA Expert Group at the Vivekananda International Foundation organised a lecture on 2024 Outlook on India-US Relations: Challenges and Opportunities. Discussions focussed on the India-US relationship in the wider geopolitical context, including the domestic politics of the US and its impact on the relationship. Various facets of economic and strategic partnership and people-to-people connect between the US and India were also discussed. The talk emphasised that there are some roadblocks that remain in the relationship and need to be addressed. However, the relationship between India and the United States has evolved a lot from the past and is now based on a strong understanding of common values, democracy, and counterterrorism.

The Expert Group organised another talk on US Grand Strategy and India's Place in It. The US grand strategy has been one of the crucial drivers of US foreign policy and could be defined as shaping the world to accept America's will. The United States has followed four kinds of grand strategies: isolationism, offshore balancing, selective engagement,

and global domination. India plays a critical role in the US Grand Strategy because Asia balancing for the US is possible only with India on its side. It was brought out that India's strategy should focus on maintaining and expanding its strategic autonomy as much as possible and it should be cautious in dealing with the US and strive to leverage its relationship for maximum benefit.

New Delhi

Anurag Bisen

March 2024

Climate Change Issues

Prepared by PK Khup Hangzo

Growing convergence between G20 and the Conference of the Parties (COP) processes

The G20 Summit and the COP are among the two annual multilateral events. While the former is an informal forum focusing on matters related to the global economy, and its declarations non-binding to its members, the latter is a formal mechanism whose decisions are binding on state parties. Successive G20 summits, beginning with the London Summit in 2009, have pledged their support to the COP process and several aspects of climate change emphasized by the G20 have found their way into the COP decisions. These include sustainable lifestyles, ecosystems approach, climate change-induced macroeconomic risks, gender inclusive climate action, climate resilience, climate finance, energy, and technology. Greater synergy between the informal and formal multilateralism such as the G20 and the COP will only strengthen global climate action.

Dilution of country classification based on differing commitments

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an international treaty on climate change, divides countries into three main groups based on differing commitments. Annexure I or “developed country Parties” includes all countries that belong to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and 12 states from Central and Eastern Europe. They are mandated to take a lead on domestic emission reductions. Annexure II countries includes only OECD countries, required to provide overseas climate finance to

developing countries. Finally, non-Annexure countries or “developing country Parties” are those outside of Annexures I and II. Overtime, there has been a gradual dilution of country classification based on differing commitments. For example, Annexure I countries are responsible for the majority of CO₂ emissions since the beginning of industrialization. As such, they are mandated to lead the charge on emission reductions and they have not shouldered their responsibility adequately, which has led to a widening deficit on trust and solidarity between them and developing countries.

Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) dilutes the spirit of the Paris Agreement

The Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), detailing how the world will adapt to climate change, was finalized during COP28. Adaptation targets under GGA include attaining climate-resilient food and agricultural production and supply; strengthening resilience against climate-related health impacts; promoting climate-resilient health services, and reducing climate-related morbidity; increasing the resilience of infrastructure and human settlements to climate change impacts to ensure basic and continuous essential services for all, and substantially reducing poverty and livelihood vulnerability in areas with high climate risk. India was of the view that most of the adaptation targets are mitigation-centric and that could potentially muddle financial flows for adaptation and mitigation. India also wanted a clear commitment of financial support for loss and damage from developed countries. It also wanted a clear reference to Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capability (CBDR-RC) in the preamble of GGA. The principle of CBDR-RC takes into account different capabilities and differing responsibilities of individual countries in addressing climate change. However, the developed countries are against any reference to CBDR-RC and that amounted to a dilution of the spirit of the Paris Agreement.

India should consider enhancing the use of nuclear energy

The 2023 G-7 Summit in Hiroshima emphasized the need for a global peak in emissions by 2025. This could potentially put pressure on India

to announce its projected carbon peaking date. Reaching peak carbon emissions early will require India to enhance its deployment of renewables and nuclear in the energy mix. Nuclear energy accounts for less than 2% of India's total installed electricity capacity and even though it is one of the cleanest sources of energy, it is often left out of the clean energy conversation. Also, unlike solar and wind energy, power from nuclear energy is weather-independent and can be generated 24 hours. Its land use footprint is also lesser than any other clean energy source. India is unlikely to achieve peak carbon emissions soon without nuclear energy and it is imperative that renewed attention is paid to it.

NCQG for low-carbon development

Despite the Article 9 of the Paris Agreement stipulating that developed countries shall provide financial resources to developing countries for both mitigation and adaptation and Article 2.1 (C) of the agreement further stating that finance flows should be compliant with low-carbon development, adequate and affordable international finance remains a constraint for India. As such, the country's climate actions have been financed primarily from domestic sources through flagship programmes and schemes with adaptation-relevant expenditure accounting for 5.6% of India's GDP in 2022. Going forward, India should actively seek adequate and affordable climate finance. Towards this end, the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on Climate Finance could be of interest to the country. NCQG, set to be agreed by 2024, will supersede the USD 100 billion target agreed in 2009. But unlike the USD 100 billion goal, which was politically determined, NCQG will be a negotiated target, scientifically based, and set to respond to the needs and priorities of developing countries.

Protecting India's agricultural sector from global emissions reduction plans

There are concerns about extending the scope of mitigation to India's agricultural sector. Agriculture accounts for around 13% of India's GDP and engages 54% of its total workforce. More importantly, 85% of farmers in the country belong to the small and marginal category with average

land holdings of less than two hectares. Global agricultural emissions reduction plans could therefore potentially threaten the livelihoods of majority of India's farmers. Consequently, India has sought actions in the agricultural sector to be adaptation-centric, to enhance the resilience of its agricultural sector. Towards this, the country has undertaken measures including the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture. In the years ahead, India ought to continue to protect its agricultural sector from global emissions reduction plans while continuing to enhance the resilience of its agricultural sector to climate change and climate variability.

Phasing down of Coal will impact India's Energy Outlook

Coal has long been targeted in global climate negotiations. During the COP26, in 2021, there was much discussion to incorporate the words "phasing out" of unabated coal power in outcome document, whereas several countries, including India, pushed for a milder "phasing down." During the COP27 in 2022, India called for a phase down of not just coal but all fossil fuels, in an equitable manner. This was opposed by several countries such as the oil-rich Saudi Arabia, and also the European countries since they consider natural gas to be a "transition" fuel and a "bridge" to clean energy. India's contention was that while natural gas is less polluting than coal, it is still a fossil fuel and is highly problematic for the climate. Since coal is the most abundant fossil fuel in the country, accounting for more than 50% of the country's energy need, India should continue to resist global efforts to single out coal till such time alternate measures are in place.

India and Climate Justice

India is a major proponent of climate justice, particularly the CBDR-RC principle. India's stand is that while climate change is a universal problem that all countries have an obligation to address, developed countries ought to take a bigger share of the burden as they have historically emitted most of the greenhouse gases. However, developing countries are currently expected to meet the same commitments as developed countries. It is imperative continues to champion climate justice as the ideal way to solve the climate crisis and also become a voice for other developing

countries. Towards this, India should strive to communicate its position more strongly.

Need to develop effective adaptation assessment frameworks and metrics

Adaptation refers to adjustments in ecological, social, or economic systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli and their effects or impacts. Given India's vulnerability to climate change, the country should aim to develop a robust set of metrics to track and assess climate change adaptation actions and progress. These metrics can be used in several ways including for allocation of funding; determining the potential benefits of adaptation investments; tracking the process of implementation of an adaptation intervention, plan or strategy; assessing the effectiveness of an adaptation intervention, plan or strategy; assessing the effectiveness of a portfolio of adaptation interventions; assessing adaptation progress in a certain sector, theme or geographical area; etc. If used properly, adaptation metrics can enhance our understanding of what works and what does not work, why, and under which circumstances.

Role of MSMEs in Building of Defence Manufacturing Ecosystem in India

Prepared by Dr Saroj Bishoyi

In FY 2022-23 India's defence production crossed the six-figure milestone, reaching an impressive figure of Rs 1,06,800 crore. The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and startups played important role in achieving this target. Towards the continued integration of MSMEs and startups in the defence supply chain, crucial for building of defence manufacturing ecosystem and become self-reliant in defence, the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) and Coimbatore District Small Scale Industries Association (CODISSIA) held a virtual meeting on 31 January 2024. The meeting was followed by a brainstorming session on various aspects relating to defence manufacturing in India, challenges and opportunities in developing indigenous capacity and capability in the defence and strategic technologies; and role of MSMEs in setting up a robust defence manufacturing ecosystem in the country.

Flagship programmes of the government of India (GoI) such as 'Make in India', 'Make in India, 'Make for the World', 'Self-Reliant India', Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX), Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) were also deliberated upon. Director, VIF, chaired the meeting and underlined that the 'Amrit Kaal' had already begun and there was a need to make quick decisions, expedite policies and processes to start delivering indigenously designed developed components and systems. Towards this, all the stakeholders must collaborate and work together to achieve this national goal.

CODISSIA Industrial Prowess

The CODISSIA, founded in 1969, comprises some of the most competent businesses in the country, manufacturing a wide array of products, ranging from small Turbojets, machine parts made from compressed graphite; pumps, motors of various rating; industrial cleaning appliances; sophisticated instruments panels; gauges; complex pneumatic components, to mighty bull and propel machines, vital for construction and laying of roads, etc. It is a non-profit organisation supported by NITI Ayog under its AIM initiative and Ministry of Defence (MoD) under the iDEX.

Since inception, CODISSIA is supporting all the defence industries in Coimbatore region, which is regarded as India's first innovation hub and CODISSIA aims to transform it into a leading defence innovation hub. Presently, they are working with 35 defence startups, and are also about to integrate about 100 startups under the idea of iDEX inception. This will be achieved with active participation of DPSUs, industries and academic institutions.

Under the Atal Incubation Centre, CODISSIA is trying to develop new startups, working on dual use applications. Recently, they were awarded Rupees two crores for incubation of startups. CODISSIA has a well-established mechanism to identify potential ideas, potential founders and help them by providing working space, technical support, corporate compliances for becoming successful startups and graduate them as successful enterprises. With an MOU with IIT, Madras to develop products for Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and other PSUs including HAL, CODISSIA has also identified 26 products and startups. Of the 48 startups, CODISSIA is supporting 18 startups in defence products manufacturing, on various innovative technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Drones, anti-drones, blockchains and many other cutting-edge products for defence. Having created state of art facilities at their centre, CODISSIA have collaborated to develop 64 products and targeting to manufacture 100 products.

Coimbatore Region as a Defence Manufacturing Hub

CODISSIA has been vigorously working to make Coimbatore a defence manufacturing hub for last few years. They have the required expertise, and the technical capability, and are well equipped to design, develop and manufacture any military system required by the defence forces. CODISSIA is looking for developing collaboration for manufacturing critical defence technologies and are also looking for handholding by the MoD and the DRDO and their reposing faith with CODISSIA by entrusting the design, development and manufacture of a few systems required critically by the Indian military.

Key Challenges

Some of the major challenges to manufacture defence technologies, faced by the MSMEs in general and CODISSIA in particular are highlighted below:

- Identifying potential products needed for the defence forces.
- Lack of awareness about the procurement procedures. Need for greater clarification and support from the government.
- Getting access to products or specifications from user (Army/ Navy/Air Force) or buyers (DPSUs).
- Lack of awareness on certifications of DGQA/DGAQA/CEMILAC, etc.
- Difficulties in registration for the new vendors leading to the applicant losing interest.
- SRIJAN is not an interactive portal.
- In the no-cost and no-commitment (NC-NC) model the MOQ is very limited and the indigenization development cost and import pricing is very high.
- Lack of access to testing and certification facilities.
- To participate in indigenization tenders, previous defence experience is mandatory preventing new MSMEs participation.
- The procedures are too cumbersome for venture capitalists to invest in defence startups.

- Lack of single point contact in the armed forces for addressing of issues.

Timelines and Procedures

Given the lengthy timelines and delaying bureaucratic procedures, often it's not clear whether new industries or MSMEs will get order or not. There is need to expedite decision making to truly realise the goal of building indigenous defence capacities and capabilities. For bigger items, Make-1 and Make-2, the provisions require to be simplified. Importantly, 'Aatmanirbharta' (self-reliant) mean to bring changes in the policies and processes to facilitate the local industries to realize the goal of make in India and self-reliant India through indigenization process.

The Government Initiatives

In the last few years, the GoI, MoD and DRDO have come out with various initiatives and schemes to build a robust defence manufacturing ecosystem in the India. The DRDO has taken a number of initiatives for hand-holding partners. These include, on development cum production partners, identifying the industry, offering it the MOQ from the user side and also the development quantity. On completion of design, doing away with repeated evaluations. And that vendor becoming the production agency for subsequent procurement. In this, the supply chain will be decided both by the DRDO and the new system integrator.

The DRDO has also signed MoUs with industry chambers and with defence corridor agencies as a technology and knowledge partner. They also conduct regular outreach to the industries on cutting down timeline and processes,

Building Defence Supply Chains

On the supply chain, it was pointed out that over 70% of global supply chains go through China and presently, majority of parts that we produce in India are coming from China, thereby making India strategically vulnerable. The capacity of MSMEs such as CODISSIA can be used to

build a strong supply chain in the country.

The Way Forward

It was recommended that the next defence expo could be held at Coimbatore as the venue and B2G meetings could be held to explore ways to partner in the defence indigenization activities.

On creating awareness on DGQA certifications, the CDIIC has expressed its willingness to provide requisite office spaces for Quality Assurance (QA) and Certification agencies in addition to Liaison Cells of the Services.

There is need of nodal officers to conduct frequent interactions/ awareness sessions with industries to familiarize about the procurement procedures.

Difficult projects may be given to the CODISSIA to test their ability to deliver the products as they promise.

For access to products from users or buyers, permanent display of products at CDIIC suggested.

Time bound vendor registration process need to be implemented.

It was suggested to remove the NC-NC model from the DPSU as the quantity is very limited and import pricing is very high.

Given that there are costs involved in testing and certification processes, it was recommended that reimbursement for new product development can be considered and MSMEs may be allowed to access test facilities with low cost or no cost.

The SRIJAN portal needs to be more interactive. It was suggested that new technologies such as AI can be used to make it user friendly.

It was also recommended that previous defence experience need to be removed to be eligible to participate in indigenization tenders. It was emphasised that there is need to simplify the procedure so that the MSMEs can partner in the indigenization process.

It was recommended to have a dedicated drone testing site. A green testing site should be created and this needs to be put in the Civil Aviation Ministry Digital-Sky.

On the design link incentive scheme, it was suggested that the PLI Scheme should be doubled if it is design linked. IDDM criteria and certification need to be formulated. The Drone technology metrics should be available on the government website. It suggested that a combined positive list of DRDO and defence industries should be created which will help understand the technologies already available and what need to be developed.

The indigenization and procurement are two separate aspects. The financial people need to be involved in the indigenization of technologies. Foreign Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) find difficult to collaborate with local suppliers and often the services are burdened with finding local suppliers and vendors. If the industries directly approach the foreign OEMs, that will help move ahead in the indigenization process. The industry should also accept the iDEX open challenge and offer technology solution to the ministry.

A defence fund should be created to provide support to the industries. Moreover, given the development of new technologies and changing nature of warfare, the industry also needs to be prepared for shouldering risks, undertaking R&D and being future ready.

12th Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh and its Implications for India

Prepared by Dr. Anchita Borthakur

On 29 January, the Vivekananda International Foundation organized a Round Table Discussion on the “Recently held 12th Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh and Its Implications for India”.

The 12th parliamentary elections in Bangladesh, held on 7 January, were boycotted by Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led opposition, allowing the Awami League (AL) to win the election virtually unopposed. With the win, with her Party winning an absolute majority in the polls, the incumbent Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has secured her fifth term in office, thereby becoming the world’s longest-serving female head of state.

The AL won 223 seats out of 299 in the national election, with independent candidates winning 62 seats. Jatiya Party, which is a part of Awami League led 14 party alliance, won 11 seats; while Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Bangladesh Workers Party, and Bangladesh Kalyan Party won one seat each. The polls saw a considerably low voter turnout of around 41.8% according to the figures provided by the Chief Election Commissioner of Bangladesh.

The elections received mixed reaction from across the globe. While the US and UK shared the view that the elections “were not free or fair,” envoys from China and Russia were among the first to congratulate Sheikh Hasina for her landslide victory. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also congratulated Hasina on her historic win and praised her for the successful conduct of the polls.

In this backdrop, the discussion highlighted the regional and global imperatives of the recently held Bangladesh's national election. The primary focus of the discussion was to evaluate what does re-election of Sheikh Hasina mean for India and the region. It was emphasized that India should consolidate the gains that it achieved vis à vis Bangladesh under the Sheikh Hasina government's last few terms.

The discussion concluded with the recommendation that it is important to understand the internal dynamics of Bangladesh's politics, reasons for domestic turmoil and the daunting economic crisis faced by the country at the present juncture. Therefore, India's approach should be to engage with the government of Bangladesh both at the bi-lateral as well as at the sub regional levels on the issues of infrastructure, connectivity, economy, energy and on the promotion of the tourism sector. It was also highlighted that understanding the shared aspirations of the youth of both the countries is significant while developing policies embedded within multiple sectors. It was further stressed that both India and Bangladesh should pursue a people centric approach and work towards the policy of regional economic integration in the neighbourhood.

Iran-Pakistan Tensions: Implications for India

Prepared by Dr Angana Kotokey & Hirak Jyoti Das

On 24 January, Vivekananda International Foundation conducted a Roundtable discussion on “Iran-Pakistan Tensions: Implications for India”. The discussion included the implications of Iran’s missile attack and Pakistan’s response, and the possibility of escalation by Iran and Pakistan, effects on the West Asian region facing volatility due to the Israel-Hamas war, and controlled escalation by Houthis, Hezbollah, and its impact on India. The key takeaways from the roundtable are summarized below-

On 16 January 2024, the Islamic Republic of Iran carried out attacks on alleged strongholds of the armed non-state actor, Jaish al-Adl (a Sunni and Balochi-dominated separatist militant group operating in Iran’s Sistan Balochistan province) in the Balochistan province of western Pakistan. Two days later 18 January, Pakistan in a reciprocal attack conducted airstrikes in south-eastern Iran, targeting several hideouts and sanctuaries of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF). The reciprocal attacks between Pakistan and Iran were a marked escalation to decades of skirmishes along one of the world’s more remote border regions. Despite growing concerns of further escalation in attacks between Iran and Pakistan, it was observed that both countries de-escalated tension by stating that their actions intended only to target insurgent groups present within each other’s territories. On the diplomatic level, leaders from Pakistan and Iran met during the NAM conference and the World Economic Forum at Davos. However, many scholars and policy makers are of the opinion that these attacks conducted in the name

of counter-terrorism are likely to have an impact on the regional countries, including several non-state actors at different levels.

Jaish al-Adl, has carried out attacks against Iranian security forces since 2013 killing several Iranian soldiers and border guards and causing tension in Iran-Pakistan relations. In December 2023, Jaish al-Adl carried out one of the deadliest attacks in a police station in the south-eastern border province of Sistan-Balochistan that killed 11 Iranian security personnel. Iran's lack of response to these earlier assaults by the militants on security personnel saw criticism coming from the public circle regarding Iran's eroding deterrence capability in the region. Further, last December, Israel killed top IRGC commander, Sayyed Razi Mousavi. In the same month, 11 security personnel were killed by Jaish Al-Adl and in January 2024, around 90 people were killed in Kerman by the Islamic State. These incidents have further raised worry among civilians about Iran's weakening intelligence capability and lack of political will to respond on casualties. Therefore, Iran's recent attack on Pakistan allowed the former to demonstrate its strength in the face of external threats. Moreover, on the domestic front, Iran's attack on Pakistan comes at a time when the country is going for its legislative elections in March. In addition, Iran has been plagued by public protests and riots for the last two years due to the poor state of the economy which has led to demand for political and social reforms.

Iran's show of strength is based on regional dynamics as well. The overall threat perception of an escalated regional war in light of the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict is growing after the Iran backed proxies revitalized securitization in the region to deter the expanding range of threats. Before conducting attacks on Pakistan, Iran fired missiles at the Islamic State in Syria, after claiming that it was an Israeli base for intelligence gathering in northern Iraq which, the Iraqi government denied being tied to Israel. Amid all these developments, the attack on Pakistani territory in addition to Syria and Iraq is aimed at re-assuring the domestic audience especially the hardliners about Iran's combat capabilities against any outside assault. Though the strikes on Pakistan were relatively low-scale, it was however integral to Iran's deterrence policy without pushing for an all-out war.

From Pakistan's perspective, the retaliatory attack against the BLA and the BLF assets inside Iran was important at a time when the country is heading towards its 16th parliamentary election on 8th February. The attack was important for the Pakistan military to project its strength and capability to the outside world with regard to protect the country's territorial integrity. Their counter-attack is also rooted in domestic considerations and the military will broadly determine the limits of tension with Iran in the future. Islamabad's choice of targets avoided the Iranian military and appeared to be a calculated move—a proportional response to Iranian strikes only.

Further, Iran's actions amid widespread fears that the devastating war in Gaza could become a broader and deadlier regional conflict should be seen as a signal to the US and Israel to showcase its political will to retaliate. The Iranian-backed Houthis, operating from Yemen, have been disrupting global shipping by attacking vessels in the Red Sea, while Hezbollah has been launching strikes on northern Israel from Lebanon which has set off a low-level conflict between Iranian proxy forces and the United States and other Western powers. Amid these developments, Iran's conflict with Pakistan might lead to another potential front to worry about in the future.

Iran and its allies' activities in the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Red Sea could threaten India's maritime security. For India, sea links and an uninterrupted energy supply are critical. From India's perspective, the military lessons as well as Pakistan and Iran's weapons capacity should be studied to prepare itself for any regional conflict. However, India's stand to implicitly back Iran and its anti-terror actions is consistent with its policy to stand with Israel against terrorism.

Pakistan: Baloch Long March, Election Related issues & General Asim Munir's Trip

Prepared by Dr Angana Kotokey

The Pakistan Study Group (PSG), during their discussions on 10 January, discussed the Baloch Long March, Pakistan's Upcoming Elections and the Electoral Alliances, the Senate's Resolution on Pakistan's Election Date, and General Asim Munir's Trip to the United States. The meeting was attended by the Director VIF, Dr Arvind Gupta, Lt Gen RK Sawhney (Retd), Tilak Devasher, Dr Shalini Chawla, Rahul Bhonsle, Amb Satish Chandra, Gen NC Vij (Retd.), Sushant Sareen and Amb TCA Raghavan.

The Baloch Long March

On 6 December 2023, the Baloch women led a peaceful protest march from Turbat to Islamabad, against Pakistan, for the enforced and involuntary disappearances, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, and torture faced by the Baloch community. The Baloch have regularly raised awareness on these issues by long distance marches—the last significant one was in 2014 from Quetta to Islamabad. The ongoing Long March was triggered by the custodial killing of 24-year-old boy Balach Mulla Baksh—who was taken from his home on 29 October 2023. As claimed by his family members, he was presented in a court on 21 November, and was then killed between the nights of 22 and 23 November,

According to a report by the Balochistan Human Rights Council, in apart from the killing of Mulla Baksh, there were additional 52 cases of enforced disappearances in December, all of which contributed towards the Baloch Long March, under the banner of 'Baloch Yakjahti Committee' (BYC).

Unlike the previous editions, the present Baloch Long March, led by Dr Marhang Baloch, a Baloch activist, is significant in many ways. A noteworthy feature of the protest is that it is being led primarily by the Baloch women who walked 1,600 kilometers from Turbat-Quetta to Islamabad. The march crossed several Baloch areas, attracting large crowds wherever they stopped. Several Baloch men and women living in the Dera Ghazi Khan in southwestern Punjab, who are often less affected by the sufferings of the Baloch in Balochistan and do not support their resistance against the Pakistan State, came out in support of the Long March. The movement has been significant in uniting the Baloch population from the coastal area of Makran as well. In addition to South Punjab, the Long March was warmly welcomed in Dera Ismail Khan (DI Khan) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan, where they were greeted by supporters and received solidarity from the leaders of the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM). Despite the PTM leader Manzoor Pashteen being in jail, his parents and the former National Assembly member Ali Wazir welcomed Mahrang Baloch and other Long March participants-Sami Deen Baloch and Gulzar Dost in DI Khan. Although policy experts quash any claim of alliance between the Baloch and the Pashtuns in Pakistan to weaken the political structure of the State, another group of scholars believe that an alliance is possible if Taliban's relations with Pakistan further deteriorate

and Kabul decides to help the Baloch and use them as a pressure point against the state of Pakistan. Despite speculations, it is important to note that the mass support garnered by Dr Mahrang Baloch across Balochistan is unlikely to fade away, and for the Baloch people it appears more like a ‘ray of hope’, who are still waiting for their missing loved ones.

The Long March also caught international attention, with several foreign media houses raising widespread awareness about enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and illegal detentions of youth in Balochistan. A section of the domestic media also, despite an increase in state supervision, has been writing extensively on this non-violent movement.

On reaching Islamabad, the protestors staged a ‘sit-in’ in front of the National Press Club, advocating for an end to enforced disappearances of students, political workers, and human rights defenders, in addition to establishing a judicial commission to investigate the killing of missing persons.

The Long March caused deep concerns for both the provincial and federal governments and the state of Pakistan resorted to the using of force and intimidation in dealing with the protestors. As reported by several Pakistani newspapers, during the sit-in, the protestors were also subjected to fake cases being registered against them, and the food and water supply was stopped—causing the elderly who joined the protest to fall sick.

Despite hardships and the brutality exercised by the Pakistan’s police, the protestors (students, women, children, and the elderly), with pictures of their loved ones held firmly in their

hands, await justice and the fulfillment of their long-standing demands.

Pakistan Elections and Electoral Alliances

The upcoming General Election in Pakistan, slated for 8 February 2024, appeared marked by a subdued campaign as political parties navigated electoral alliances. The PML (N) aimed to bolster its support in Punjab, a pivotal province with 141 seats, by unveiling a nine-point agenda focusing on fiscal reform and economic revitalization. Notably, 132 nominations had been filed for the 66 reserved seats for women in the Punjab Assembly, reflecting diverse party participation.

In Sindh, potential alliances looked set to challenge the PPP's stronghold. Discussions between PML (N), Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), and MQM-P suggested a formidable coalition against the ruling party. Speculation also surrounded a prospective alliance between PML (N) and JUI F, with discussions on seat adjustments across multiple provinces.

In Balochistan, Jam Kamal Khan's alignment with PML (N) signaled a shift in electoral dynamics, with agreements for seat adjustments with the National Party in key districts. Likewise, PPP and ANP considered collaboration in Karachi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, emphasizing seat adjustments in various constituencies.

Religious parties like TLP, JI, and JUI-F play an increasingly prominent role, evident in their manifesto focusing on inclusivity and broader appeal beyond religious lines. Analysts anticipated TLP's rise as a significant force alongside mainstream parties like

PML (N), PPP, and PTI in shaping Pakistan's political landscape

The Senate's Resolution on Pakistan's Election Date

In an expected move, Pakistan's Senate in January 2024 passed a non-binding resolution demanding a delay in the upcoming elections, scheduled for the 8th February. After the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) delayed issuing list of polling stations for candidates contesting from different constituencies, and delayed releasing of the final list of candidates contesting for the National Assembly, there were speculations by several experts about the possibility of postponement of the scheduled election. These were further reinforced on 5th January by the Senate approved resolution, at a session attended by just 14 of the 97 senators. The resolution was moved by an independent legislator Dilawar Khan, from Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, who appealed for a change in the election date citing the prevailing security conditions in the country as well as the cold weather and the rise in Covid-19 cases. Despite the resolution, the Election Commission rejected the Senate's decision by stating that all arrangements had been completed and it would not be advisable to put off the planned polls.

General Asim Munir's Trip to the United States

Pak Army Chief General Asim Munir's 12-day trip to the United States on 11 December was a low-key event with minimal media coverage. It was reported that General Munir met the US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, and visited CENTCOM headquarters in Florida. According to the Inter-

Services Public Relations (ISPR), matters of bilateral interests, global and regional security issues, ongoing conflicts were discussed . Further, counter-terrorism cooperation and defense collaboration were identified as core areas of cooperation, whereby the leaders reiterated the intent to increase interaction and explore ways to expand the scope of engagements.

Apart from the official ISPR report, there are several speculations on the possible agenda that was discussed at the meetings. Experts are of the view that Pakistan's decision to deport undocumented Afghan Refugees is of grave concern to the US since many of them worked with the US military before the Taliban takeover and are awaiting special immigration visas to the United States. Further Asim Munir's interaction with US military and security officials during the trip indicates that Pakistan's diplomatic stand on the Russia-Ukraine war and Israel-Hamas war were part of the agenda as well. Beyond the discussions, there were reports on Gen Munir's interaction with the overseas Pakistani community during a reception hosted by the Embassy of Pakistan.

2024 Outlook on India-US Relations: Challenges and Opportunities

Prepared by Dr. Sweta Kumari

The Vivekananda International Foundation organised a talk by Dr. Aparna Pande, Director of the Initiative on the Future of India and South Asia at the Hudson Institute, Washington, DC, US on “2024 Outlook on India-US Relations: Challenges and Opportunities” on 16 January, 2024.

The India-US relationship was discussed in the wider geopolitical context, however, the domestic politics of the US and its impact on the relationship was also emphasised upon. It was highlighted that 2023 was the year of Indo-US partnership with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s state visit to the US, Joe Biden’s participation in the G20 summit hosted by India and a series of important agreements signed between the two countries. Various facets of economic and strategic partnership and people-to-people connect between the US and India were also discussed in the meeting.

People-to-People Connect

- The strong people-to-people connect between India and the US was highlighted, citing the 2023 Gallup polls which indicated that about 77% of Americans had a favourable view of Indians.
- The Indian community is actively participating in US politics. There are currently five Indian Americans serving in the US House of Representatives and one serving as Vice President.
- There is a high number of diaspora students in the US, and India values secularism and freedom of religion. However, the discussion

also acknowledged that the diaspora could pose challenges, such as polarization.

Strategic Convergence

- The emergence of China as the common aggressor in the Indo-Pacific region has brought India and US closer.
- India's crucial role in the Indo-Pacific strategy of the US as the net security provider has been highlighted by two different US presidents from two different political parties. India's position has been emphasized to attract allies and partners in the region to counter Chinese aggressive behaviour.
- The strategic importance of India to the US is also highlighted in the collaboration of both countries across various bilateral, multilateral, and mini-lateral groupings including QUAD, G20, G7, I2U2, and IMEC also strengthens India-US relations.

Defence Cooperation

- India and the US have strong defence cooperation, with India being a major defence partner and signatory to four foundational agreements with the US.
- India prefers indigenous production over just procurement. The US and India have collaborated on manufacturing jet engines, and the US, to certain extent, is now willing to share technology with India, further underlines India's importance to the US.
- However, the US wants India to diversify its supplies and find non-Russian buyers. The questions remain about whether the next administration will be interested in pushing a strong defence partnership without India's strong commitment.

i-CET

- The talk emphasised the importance of i-CET in complementing

defence and strategic relations between the two countries.

- Indian and American startups working together have the potential to promote research and development in India, building civilian technology that could be used for defence manufacturing bases.

Economic Relations

- From an economic point of view, India is one of the largest markets for the US and is further boosted by the entry of Tesla into the Indian market and the signing of the Boeing and Air India aircraft deal.
- The American acceptance of sharing civilian technology has further accelerated the growth of the Indian economy. This is crystallized in the form of i-CET which deepens the civilian and military links between the two countries.
- US goods and services trade with India in 2022 totalled \$190 billion with more focus on resilient supply chains.
- The collaboration of the semiconductor industry also bolsters Indo-US economic relations, especially to outcompete China.
- However, there are some concerns within the US about India's reluctance to level the playing field in the form of protectionism and exclusivity.

Differing Perspectives

- **Indo-Pacific:** India and the US hold slightly different inclinations when it comes to the Indo-Pacific region. For the US, the South China Sea, East China Sea, and the region from ASEAN to Japan are important, but for India, the Western Indian Ocean takes priority.
- **Terrorism:** There are different viewpoints between India and the US regarding the issue of terrorism. The US is against organised Islamic terrorism, but it takes no action against pro-Khalistani elements, which is detrimental to India's security and sovereignty.

- Moreover, India would like assurances from the US that its partners will act according to India's interests, just as the US expects its partners to act in its own interests.

Domestic Factors

- The talk also touched upon the Internal dynamics of the US. The isolationist policy or tilt of the US administration depends on the domestic policy shift. If Donald Trump wins the upcoming Presidential elections, there can be more tilt towards retrenchment, protectionism and isolationism.
- However, the brighter side is that the private-to-private relations will still proceed in trade in the Indo-US relationship as it is insulated from the political side of the bureaucracy.
- Further, presently the Biden administration propagates the importance of working in trade and economics with the commitment to i-CET, supply chain resilience, and the Boeing deal between India and the US. Thus, it was concluded that domestic factors would play a critical role in shaping the future of India-US relations.

Conclusion

A wide range of issues impacting India -US relationship including China, tensions across Taiwan strait, the involvement of US military in various international conflicts and the Pannun incident were discussed. Overall, the talk emphasised that there are some roadblocks that remain in the relationship and need to be addressed. However, the relationship between India and the United States has evolved a lot from the past and is now based on a strong understanding of common values, democracy, and counterterrorism.

US Grand Strategy and India's Place in It

Prepared by Dr. Sweta Kumari

The Vivekananda International Foundation organised a talk by Prof. M. A. Muqtedar Khan, Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Delaware, US on ‘‘US Grand Strategy and India’s Place in It’’ on 24 January.

US Grand Strategy: Meaning and Importance

A Grand strategy is a feature of big nations as they have the capacity to project power unusually through which they dictate the international norms as per their interest and this strategy in turn ensures their long- term existence. The grand strategy has been one of the crucial drivers of US foreign policy. Purchasing Alaska from the Russian empire and annexation of Texas in the 19th century are some of the initial examples of the US grand strategy. The US grand strategy could be defined as shaping the world to accept America’s will.

The talk highlighted that there is a clear distinction between domination and hegemony, where domination means ruling by force, while hegemony means ruling with legitimacy. The US grand strategy is to rule by hegemony, where it controls the international system with multilateralism and a rules-based order. This is distinct from British colonialism which was about physical control over a country.

Types of American Grand Strategy

The United States has followed four kinds of grand strategies: isolationism, offshore balancing, selective engagement, and global domination. The US followed isolationism from the 1880s until it was drawn into the world wars. Even though the US surpassed Britain in economic policy, it did not challenge the British hegemony due to its isolationist policy.

The US became a hegemonic power and ended its isolationist policy in 1945, after the end of the Second World War. Initially, it was all about containing the USSR, but later it shifted towards the enlargement of markets, which allowed for free trade. The emergence of China has further shaped the US grand strategy by shifting the balance of power.

It was outlined in the discussion that, in most war games, China outcompetes the US in the Indo-Pacific region because of its naval capabilities. However, it was also highlighted that if America changes its grand strategy from global domination to offshore balancing, it would be able to defend its hegemony and restore balance in its favour in the region.

Offshore balancing involves combining the capacities of US allies in the region and sharing the responsibility of maintaining peace and stability with other like-minded countries in the region. The formation of QUAD is an example of offshore balancing of the US. By aligning with countries that share a perception of threat, the US is pushing for burden shifting. India plays an important role in the offshore balancing strategy of the United States.

Relevance of India

It was noted that the presence of multiple nuclear powers makes the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region unusual. India has a distinct feature that plays in its favour when it comes to countering China in the region, unlike other countries. Compared to Japan, India has a huge manpower advantage to deal with China on battlefield.

Its unique culture further adds to its strength, unlike some of the allies and

partners that have internalised the western culture.

The asymmetry in QUAD was also deliberated, stating that QUAD is “mismatched” which will benefit India as long as there is no war. India should be watchful of this fact.

Overall, India plays a critical role in the US Grand Strategy, because if India sides with China, it will adversely impact the global dominance of the US. Asia balancing for the US is possible only with India on its side.

Options for India

India’s strategy should focus on maintaining and expanding its strategic autonomy as much as possible. As India is facing an important historical moment where it is rising as a major global player, it should be cautious in dealing with the US and strive to leverage its relationship for maximum benefit.

India’s position in the global world has become more critical due to the uncertainty in the current geopolitical landscape. It was further argued that while dealing with the US, India should consider itself more as a civilization than just a nation, which can help it leverage its natural strengths.

Conclusion

The discussion focused on various aspects of US grand strategy and its foreign policy. Some of the failures of US grand strategy such as Iraq and Afghanistan were also flagged. Concerns were expressed regarding US inability to prevent ongoing conflicts in Europe and the Middle East. These developments have raised questions about the effectiveness of the US grand strategy as a whole. Overall, it was emphasised that it must be up to India to decide how much it can contribute and where it should be cautious about aligning with the US and other partners to obtain logistic assistance in order to counter China.

About the VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

The Vivekananda International Foundation is an independent non-partisan institution that conducts research and analysis on domestic and international issues, and offers a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. Some of India's leading practitioners from the fields of security, military, diplomacy, government, academia and media have come together to generate ideas and stimulate action on national security issues.

The defining feature of VIF lies in its provision of core institutional support which enables the organisation to be flexible in its approach and proactive in changing circumstances, with a long-term focus on India's strategic, developmental and civilisational interests. The VIF aims to channelise fresh insights and decades of experience harnessed from its faculty into fostering actionable ideas for the nation's stakeholders.

Since its inception, VIF has pursued quality research and scholarship and made efforts to highlight issues in governance, and strengthen national security. This is being actualised through numerous activities like seminars, round tables, interactive dialogues, Vimarsh (public discourse), conferences and briefings. The publications of VIF form lasting deliverables of VIF's aspiration to impact on the prevailing discourse on issues concerning India's national interest.



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