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3, San Martin Marg | Chanakyapuri | New Delhi - 110021

Tel: 011-24121764 | Fax: 011-66173415

E-mail: info@vifindia.org

Website: www.vifindia.org

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Vivekananda International Foundation held meetings on a diversity of topics in the month of May 2023 with five expert group meetings and one round table discussion. The month saw the first meeting of the new formed expert group on defence, the other areas in focus in the month were Quad Plus dialogue, Japan and the Indo-Pacific, Pakistan, Africa and Climate change, in which developments and perspectives were shared and discussed.

A study group on Defence under the aegis of Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), New Delhi has been constituted, which in its inaugural meeting deliberated up on the “Fusion of Operational Strategy and Modern Instruments of War in Sino-India Context”. The meeting took stock of the China’s rapid military modernisation; PLA’s organizational reforms, arms buildup, and operational strategies; and the implications of the fusion of operational strategies and modern instruments of war in the context of Sino-India relations. It also deliberated on the necessary counter-measures to address the China challenge.

The latest edition of the Quad Plus Dialogue (QPD) at the think tanks level was held virtually on 09 May, 2023. This time Vivekananda International Foundation hosted the dialogue. Apart from VIF, the think tanks from Quad members included the Heritage Foundation, US and the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIJA). The Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR) from Taiwan also participated as a Quad-Plus partner. This edition of QPD was based on the theme “the Future of the Ukraine Crisis and its Regional and Global Implications”. The discussion revolved around various geopolitical developments taking place in the Indo-Pacific region and the new balance of power that is emerging as an

aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

A roundtable discussion was held on “India-Japan Relations, G7 Summit and Indo-Pacific Region”. Almost all aspects of India-Japan relations were brainstormed in the discussion. The challenges that hinder India and Japan from greater cooperation and the ways to overcome them were highlighted. Global South, its re-emergence in the geopolitical lexicon and its meaning were thoroughly discussed. Pertinent regional issues such as economic resilience, climate change, and technology as well as food and energy security were also deliberated. It was overall emphasised that India and Japan are natural partners which share common values and both have an important role to play in the peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

On 15th May, 2023, VIF Expert group convened at VIF to discuss the Africa policy document before adopting the same. It was assured that the document will be presented to the Government at the appropriate level as well as among other important stakeholders related to Africa in the policy circle. Certain suggestions were discussed in the experts group.

The Fourth Meeting of the Climate Change Expert Group was held on 18 May 2023. The discussion was on weather India may come under the spotlight at this year’s COP28, lifestyle changes as a solution to climate change, narrative on population density, will loss and damage will continue to pose significant challenges for India during COP28, sectoral transition pathways and reduction of the costs of de-carbonization for its industrial sector through carbon market mechanism.

The other areas of discussion were to establish credible financial framework for adaptation, establishing framework for sub-regional cooperation on climate change, preservation of wetlands and nature-based solutions as proposed by developed countries.

A meeting of the Pakistan Study Group (PSG) was held in hybrid mode on 26 May 2023. The main items on the agenda were political turmoil in Pakistan w.r.t Imran Khan, protests and the Judiciary, uncertainty within the Pakistan army, the rising security threat of the TTP, economic stagnation, and the SCO and the G20 meetings.

The coordinators and researchers associated with the expert and dialogue groups, think tanks and interactions have put unfaltering efforts to coordinate the meetings, to provide range and diversity of views as well as capture the discussion for the reports.

New Delhi
June 2023

Naval Jagota

Fusion of Operational Strategy and Modern Instruments of War in Sino-India Context

Prepared by Dr. Saroj Bishoyi

China has significantly modernised and reformed its defence forces over the last one decade. In pursuit of more sophisticated weaponry, it has been driving its domestic industries for indigenous development of critical and emerging technologies that will further strengthen the military capabilities of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). It is deploying newly acquired military power and using the PLA as an instrument of statecraft to achieve its strategic objectives in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. Under President Xi Jinping, China has increasingly become more militarily and diplomatically assertive. It has shown willingness to support and assert its claims over unresolved territory with demonstrations of its military power. The regional countries and the US have been watching closely and taking necessary counter-measures to meet any future contingency situations vis-à-vis China. Meanwhile, India's relationship with China continues to deteriorate, especially since the border conflict along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the summer of 2020. Since then the two sides have held a number of dialogues to resolve the border standoff amicably, but to no avail. Besides, the border tensions, the economic and military power gap between the two countries have increased considerably. The continuous increase of Chinese military expenditure and its plan to increase nuclear warheads from more than 400 now to over a thousand nuclear warheads by 2030 pose grave threats to India's security and strategic interest. In the meantime, China's aggressive military posture, rapid infrastructure buildup, potential deployment of newly acquired defence technologies

across the border have further created a cause of concern for India. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its nexus with 'all-weather' friend Pakistan has exaggerated those threats and challenges to India.

For understanding and analyzing the evolving strategic landscape and its security implications for India, a Study Group on Defence under the aegis of Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), New Delhi constituted, which in its inaugural meeting deliberated up on the "Fusion of Operational Strategy and Modern Instruments of War in Sino-India Context". The meeting was chaired by Lt Gen R.K. Sawhney, who in his opening remarks underscored the significance of holistic analysis of the modern instruments of war and operational readiness and strategies in the framework of Sino-India relations. The meeting was attended by distinguished members of strategic community from Army, Air Force and Navy as well as diplomatic and academia. The meeting took stock of the China's rapid military modernisation; PLA's organizational reforms, arms buildup, and operational strategies; and the implications of the fusion of operational strategies and modern instruments of war in the context of Sino-India relations. It also deliberated on the necessary counter-measures to address the China challenge.

China's Military Modernisation and Modern Instruments of War

Though China's military modernisation began prior to Xi Jinping's becoming chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) in November 2012. The pace and scope of the modernization effort has significantly accelerated under President Xi's leadership. China has introduced sophisticated weaponry and equipment, and brought in organizational reforms to make the PLA more effective force. The steady economic growth has supported this modernization process.

Aimed at becoming a dominant military power, China has been expanding its nuclear and non-nuclear arsenals. According to the US Pentagon report, the Chinese are going to have a stockpile of 1500 nuclear warheads by 2035 from the current operational stockpile of 400 nuclear warheads.

They are developing hundreds of intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that can reach to the US. In a great power competition with the US, China is building its military capabilities to counter the United States' preeminent military power in Asia. Its military modernization has altered the conventional military balance in the Indo-Pacific region and poses significant challenges to the regional countries, including India.

China's strength is in space, cyber and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). It is increasingly strengthening the PLA's strategic deterrence by modernizing its nuclear, space and counter space capabilities. It also possess huge stockpile of non-nuclear missiles, which it can deploy during contingency situations. It has developed capabilities in military drone sector from micro to large level military drones. With Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) strategy, the PLA gives greater emphasis on building new capabilities by using AI and Quantum technologies, and has shifted its focus towards 'intelligentisation' warfare.

PLA's Military Infrastructure Buildup and Organisational Reforms

In addition to military modernization and acquisition of modern instruments of war, China has been building adequate logistics and infrastructure capabilities for rapid deployment of troops, weaponry and equipment. It has undertaken a major expansion of its infrastructure along its frontier. It has constructed and upgraded dozens of heliports and airports that have significantly enhanced its ability to rapidly deploy troops, weaponry and equipment via air. A phenomenal number of helipad is built on the Chinese side of the border. The PLA aims to conduct helicopter-based operations by scaling up the development of the heliports in the western region of the border. It can also use these infrastructures to conduct airborne surveillance and reconnaissance missions. China has accelerated the development of these logistics and infrastructures following the border standoff with India in the Doklam Plateau in 2017 and in the Galwan river valley, Ladakh, in 2020. The Chinese military modernization and reforms have given tremendous confidence to the PLA for projecting power farther afield.

PLA's Operational Strategies

Currently, China is in a great power competition and rivalry with the United States. The Chinese are preparing for a possible war with the US. Though it is a bit difficult to predict the exact timeline of this war, the confrontation between the two great powers have been intensified in recent years. In this context, how China thinks about India whether it wants a separate confrontation with India or whether it perceives war with India as an extension of its war with the US that is not easy to predict at present. But China surely thinks of India as a threat. The choices that the Chinese will make in the coming days, months and years, will shape the nature of threats and challenges. However, it appears that the top three short-term priorities of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are: the reunification of Taiwan, resolving the conflicts over the Senkaku Islands, and South China Sea (SCS) respectively. The next three are long-term priorities of the CCP i.e. the South Tibet, Mongolia, and taking back territory from Russia. The CCP's main priority is not to lose any territory in these unresolved areas.

It was noted that though reunification of Taiwan is number one priority of China, it is well defended by the Taiwanese itself, and also by the US and its allies. Japan and South Korea have alliance relationship with the US. If China thinks of India as an extension of its war with the US, then India appears to be the weakest link in the American front. There is need of strategic clarity on how to deal with this situation. It was pointed out that any existing strategic confusion over this issue must be avoided. Nevertheless, the CCP increasingly relies on the PLA to implement its national strategies and in pursuit of its strategic objectives the PLA has adopted a very aggressive posture and expanding its presence in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

Sino-India Relations in the Context of Modern Warfare

Sino-India relationship has been going through a tough phase, especially since the border conflict in 2020. The two sides have held several rounds of dialogues at the diplomatic and military-level to resolve the border

standoff, but that has not resulted in desired outcomes. Meanwhile, the military gap between the two countries have increased significantly. China has capabilities in the domain of space, cyber and ISR. It has been prioritizing to use critical and emerging technologies such as AI, Quantum technologies, big data to strengthen its concept of the ‘intelligisation’ warfare. The PLA’s potential application of modern instruments of warfare in various domains such as cyber poses major challenges.

However, with emergence of the modern instruments of war, there is need to define the concept of war. The war has now gone beyond borders from economic to cyber, space, and emerging technologies. China’s strength is technology, missiles and knowledge of India. Their knowledge about India to a great extent comes from the West, because of India’s growing defence and security ties with them. In particular, India’s strategic partnership with the US has been strengthened over the last two decades and together they have revived the Quad, which Beijing sees as threat to its regional interests. China perceives India as an asymmetric rival that can obstruct its ambition to dominate in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. Meanwhile, the US has expanded its military presence in the Indo-Pacific region and Sino-US ties continues to decline over bilateral and Taiwan issues. In the event of China’s invasion of Taiwan, India may get drawn into the Taiwan war. In this situation, what the Americans and its allies will expect from India need to be prepared the policy options.

Implications of the Fusion of Modern Instruments of War and Strategy

China’s rapid military modernization and reforms, deployment of modern instruments of war, the MCF strategies and its great power competition with the US have far-reaching implications for India because these are turning the PLA to a capable force. In fact, China threat is multidimensional and the material gap that India has with China quite substantial. India has unresolved border with China and safeguarding critical points such as Siliguri Corridor – the ‘Chicken’s Neck’ is very important. China is rapidly modernizing its defence through use of AI, quantum technologies. It has

expanded its maritime power. It has access points in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Cambodia and recent comments by Bhutan leadership is a bit concerning.

Moreover, the Chinese are rapidly modernizing their nuclear and non-nuclear arsenals as well as their maneuver capacity using the AI and quantum technologies. In the field of AI and Quantum technologies, India is developing its own capacity to meet the emerging challenges. In addition, the ISR system is critical to counter the nature of threat that China present across the LAC. It was noted that the entire ISR system is based on communication and GPS systems, which can be jammed by the China. Though it has major gaps vis-à-vis China, when push comes to shove, it would be ready and has necessary capability to deter and counter any external threats. Even, in some of the technology areas, India can build its capacity very rapidly such as cyber, space and AI technologies. Nevertheless, China threat is very overwhelming.

Counter-Measures to Address the China Challenge

Despite the recent scaling up of the development of airports and heliports, the PLA faces major logistical and operational challenges as well as its own defence and strategic vulnerabilities, which can be identified to exploit for tactical advantages during contingency situations. The PLA's exact military capabilities, CCP's ambitions and strategies, thus, require holistic assessments. At the same time, India needs to expand its capacity and remove the gaps vis-à-vis China. It was noted that developing a clear and unified vision of China and the long-standing assessment of the threats that China presents including military, technology, cyber, space and information war will help countering these threats and challenges. It was stressed that India needs to prepare for all kinds of scenarios for possible war with China. There is need of creative thinking to win even from a weak position like in a game of Chess.

Since China threat is largely a territorial threat. India needs to have a robust and balanced border management system across the LAC. On China's plan to increase nuclear stockpile, it was noted that India's nuclear warheads

are a solid deterrence against China. However, it should continue fine-tuning its credible minimum nuclear deterrence capability for maintaining effective nuclear deterrence vis-à-vis China. It was also noted that India's ISR capacity is critical to counter the China's offensive posture on the border. The indigenous development and production of advanced defence weapons and equipment under the make-in-India initiative should be strengthened to meet the full range of 'short-of-war' activities. However, it needs to be pragmatic about the Make in India initiatives and dependency on defence technologies from foreign sources under frameworks such as the Initiatives for Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET). It needs to assess the current asymmetry and procure items from external sources which cannot be developed and manufactured in the next 10 to 15 years of timeframe. Thus, a whole-of-government approach is required to counter the threats and challenges posed by the Chinese PLA.

Moreover, India has a lot of strategic partnership in the framework of bilateral as well as through groups like the Quad. India's strategic partners are increasingly concerned about growing military assertiveness of the PLA. It shares with them building a peaceful, stable, secure and prosperous region. This growing strategic partnerships and convergence of interests provide external balancing against China in the region and beyond. Besides, India has a lot of military logistics and cooperation agreements including with the US, France, Australia and other like-minded countries. Operationalisation of these bilateral cooperation agreements such as BECA, LEMOA, and CISMOA with the US would be important. The US has military presence across the region, including Diego Garcia, which can be a significant player in contingency situations. These aspects need to be looked into for building strategic partnership at pre-war, during war or post war situation for countering China. However, the strategy of internal and external balancing China and deterrence through diplomacy and military capabilities require continued assessment from time-to-time.

The Future of the Ukraine Crisis and its Regional and Global Implications

Prepared by Dr. Sweta Kumari

The latest edition of the Quad Plus Dialogue (QPD) at the think tanks level was held virtually on 09 May, 2023. This time Vivekananda International Foundation hosted the dialogue. Apart from VIF, the think tanks from Quad members included the Heritage Foundation, US and the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA). The Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR) from Taiwan also participated as a Quad-Plus partner.

The QPD was held in an interactive mode under the chairmanship of Dr. Arvind Gupta, Director, VIF. The participants included Mr. Jeff M. Smith, Director of the Heritage Foundation's Asian Studies Center; Ms. Tomiko Ichikawa, Director General of JIIA; Prof. Tsutomu Kikuchi, Senior Adjunct Fellow of JIIA; Mr. Yuichi Yoshida, Research Fellow of JIIA; Ms. Chloe Fu, Executive Officer, Political Division of Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the U.S. (TECRO) and; Dr. Che-chuan Lee, Research Fellow of INDSR. The VIF was represented by Lt. Gen R. K. Sawhney (Retd.), Amb. Arun Kumar Singh, Amb. Anil Wadhwa, Amb. D. B. Venkatesh Varma, Gp. Cap. Naval Jagota (Retd.), Dr. Sweta Kumari and Ms. Prerna Gandhi.

This edition of QPD was based on the theme “the Future of the Ukraine Crisis and its Regional and Global Implications”. The discussion revolved around various geopolitical developments taking place in the Indo- Pacific region and the new balance of power that is emerging as an aftermath of

the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Developments in China

In China, President Xi Jinping has consolidated his position in the last Communist Party Congress. China has taken strong and assertive positions in recent times. Xi's visit to Russia, his talk with President Zelensky and the introduction of his 12 point peace plan to end the war hold extreme geopolitical importance. There have been high level visits from Europe to China as well.

United States: Domestic Views on China

The conservative thinkers in the United States have been straightforward in citing the current situation between the US and China as a "New Cold War". China has been treating the situation as the cold war and using similar tactics against the United States. This terminology is getting traction within the US and beyond while some find this phrasing as too extreme and alarmist. With US-China rivalry getting intensified and multilayered across economics, social issues, diplomacy, military aspects and reaching to a level of global competition where the objective is to outcompete China without waging a war makes the scenario like a cold war.

Ironically, the Biden Administration (a Democratic one) has taken more actions to frame it in the cold war especially with the export controls even if it refrains from using the terminology. The attempt to have a lead on China in technology appears to be moving towards a containment strategy. Even within the United States, Chinese purchases in farmlands have been banned across the country. All states have supported the banning of TikTok and other Chinese apps. The universities are also shutting down the Confucius centre in their campuses. The favourability over China by the American companies has shrunk and there is an increasing hostility. Overall, there has been a harder posture over Taiwan and stronger commitment towards Taiwan.

However, at the same time, some changes in attitudes have been observed within the US Government. Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen has said that the US would now focus in terms of only restricting technology access where there is a specific national security dimension to it. It would not use technology restrictions when any kind of economic competition, but only look at it from the national security perspective. Similarly, NSA Jake Sullivan has stated that the US would focus on de-risking rather than decoupling economic ties with China. It was highlighted that there is a possibility that the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken could visit Beijing. His recent statements have indicated that the US might be willing to work with China to resolve the tensions between the two countries. This line of thought is similar to that of Europe and signals the lessening of restrictions related to China.

US-China Relations & Russia- Ukraine War

Secretary Blinken has hinted that the US could work with China to bring a diplomatic resolution to the Ukraine issue. For this, it is being speculated that the US could get more accommodative to China in those areas where there is some scope of cooperation such as dealing with pandemic and climate change.

However, China is not giving signs of working with the US presently. The military level contacts have frozen after Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan. China has also been taking actions against US companies such as Micron. They are restricting data access to American companies and preventing them from making assessments of the economic situation in China, thereby, blunting their competitiveness. The meeting between the Taiwanese president and the new House Speaker Kevin McCarthy has led to increased violations of the median line across the Taiwan Straits. The spy-balloon incident has further blocked the communications. A higher level of animosity and contentiousness is the new normal in the US-China relations.

Russia-China Relations

The close alignment between Russia and China post Russia-Ukraine conflict is of great geopolitical significance for the region. Traditionally, Washington viewed a limited and tactical partnership between Russia and China given their history of animosity and mistrust.

There have been fundamental changes in the relationship after Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014 and the sanctions that followed. President Putin started looking for a long-term relationship with China. Both Russia-China are united by the common point to challenge the US- led global order. The relation has become closer than ever after Russia's invasion of Ukraine leading to a greater isolation of the former from the West.

One area where China is not happy with Russia is its neutral position over the India-China border issue. Even so, Russia and China are increasingly strategically aligned and it is expected to be so in the foreseeable future.

Chinese Advantage in Russia-Ukraine War & US Grand Strategy

One pattern that has emerged from the Russia-Ukraine Conflict is that at every stage, China has gained more advantage. It has become more active in the Middle -East along with Central Asia and Southeast Asia. This advantage to China poses a question on the competence of the US grand strategy and indicates a fundamental flaw in it which needs to be identified and corrected.

With Russia, China seems to be extending its outreach to Russian strategic space, energy resources and markets. Militarily, China has not helped Russia in major arms supply. There has been no decisive impact of Chinese support in the ground situation in the conflict. In the economic front as well, Turkey and some of the Gulf and Southeast Asian countries have provided more help to Russia breaching international sanctions in comparison to China.

The US and Europe have cut off Russia from the western markets which

China is prepared to exploit. Giving China a monopoly over Russian energy resources at a discounted rate further highlights the US Grand Strategy catastrophe.

Situation in Taiwan

In the current situation where China's action is more comprehensive, Taiwan is investing to better its defence. There has been a 14% increase in the defence budget. It continues to procure advanced weapons from the US. It has also resumed its one year mandatory military service for the youth who would receive complete training to become qualified soldiers to defend Taiwan in case there is a need. Taiwan is also making efforts to produce indigenous weapons including submarines, advanced jet fighters and ballistic missile capabilities. With the help of experts from the United States, Taiwan is restarting its reservist training. This training used to happen previously for 5 to 7 days every two years. Now, it is happening for 14 days annually.

Taiwan is improving its mobilisation system and making preparations for all kinds of necessities in war times such as fuel, natural gas, energy, ammunition, food and medical supplies. It is focusing on infrastructure resilience in communication including undersea cable, 5G and low-orbit satellites and also cyber security resilience.

There are concerns among some Taiwanese people that the US and Taiwan are obsessed with the scenario of blockade or invasion by the PLA. This kind of thinking deviates their attention from the more urgent issues such as grey zone tactics launched by China which is becoming a new normal. If such action is not responded to, China's appetite for risk would increase and create a more dangerous situation for Taiwan.

Japan

Japan has been very active in security affairs in recent times. It has been straightforward in outlining its security concerns and priorities in the

recently released National Security Strategy and Defense papers. Japan has made an honest assessment of the security environment in the region that has been strongly impacted by the onset of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Japan is presiding over the G7 this year. The G7 has made itself more effective in the light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Japan has also actively tried to engage with the “Global South”. Japan is attaching great importance to have good coordination with India especially since it is assuming the G20 presidency this year.

The rapid progress in Japan- South Korea relations is a remarkable development in the Indo-Pacific. Shuttle diplomacy is being witnessed between the two countries after more than a decade especially with PM Kishida’s visit to South Korea.

India’s Viewpoint

India has been the leader of pushback of the narratives in the Russia-Ukraine issue. It has held a firm and principled stance and also kept the door open for dialogue. India welcomes Japan’s pro-activeness in its security strategy. It sees the Japan- South Korea rapprochement as a positive development. The US-Japan-South Korea coming up together gives a fundamentally powerful signal in the region.

India understands the grave security situation that Japan is facing and would also understand if it chooses to develop nuclear capabilities. The United States’ move to do additional nuclear sharing is also a positive development. India is concerned if the US would be capable of carrying out dual-containment vis-a-vis Russia and China. At present, the evidence does not support the same. The disturbance of Eurasian balance in favour of China worries New Delhi deeply. As there is an evolution in American thinking with regards to geopolitical developments globally as well as in the Indo-Pacific region, India as a partner of the US would like to be aware and in tune with it.

India-China Relations

China remains a serious challenge for India at the continental as well as the maritime dimensions. China is repeating the same strategy with India by making efforts to deviate from the border issue and move to other aspects of the relationship. However, India is emphasising on addressing the central issue and solving the border problem that the PLA has created by violating the 1993 agreement.

Conclusion

This edition of Quad-Plus Dialogue focused on the implications of the Russia-Ukraine War globally as well in the Indo-Pacific region. The consistency of the US support to Ukraine is a positive indication on America's willingness to go out and aid its ally. However, at the same, it is concerning for the Indo-Pacific region as the US is getting too engaged in Europe's security.

In the Indo-Pacific region and Europe, there is a unanimous understanding that the so-called "post-Cold War era" has ended definitively after the Russia- Ukraine conflict. However, there are diverse views about the characterisation of the current situation as a new cold war. Various Asian countries including China and some European nations have questioned the same. There have also been mixed opinions about the US led international order.

While the allies and partners in the Indo- Pacific seek America's commitment for the maintaining peace and security in the region, there are also concerns about the confrontational posture that the US is projecting against China. Given the deeply interdependent and complex economic relations with China, these countries do not want the situation to escalate to a level where they have to choose between the US and China. There will be a need for the like-minded countries in the region to restructure relations with China across various fronts.

It was highlighted during the discussion that the thinking about dealing with China within the US government is not monolithic, however, it is certain that the centre of gravity has shifted towards a more confrontational posture than before. It was also outlined that despite all the ongoing tensions between the US and China, the trade has been growing between the two. All these developments indicate that Washington would more likely be focusing on the national security dimension of the economic relationship with China.

With regards to Quad, it was recommended that the grouping needs to have a roadmap to deliver its commitment to infrastructure funding and its implementation. It should be undertaking some concrete projects in the region that make an impact especially to the ASEAN countries. Working on areas such as delivering global goods can serve as an example of the utility of the Quad in the Indo-Pacific region.

India-Japan Relations, G7 Summit and Indo-Pacific Region

Prepared by Dr. Sweta Kumari

The Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) organised a roundtable discussion on “**India-Japan Relations, G7 Summit and Indo-Pacific Region**” on 15 May, 2023. Amb. Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa chaired the session and gave the opening remarks. The panel of speakers included Mr. Seiichiro Taguchi, Minister-Political Affairs, Embassy of Japan; Prof. Ashok Kumar Chawla, Advisor, East Asia Division, MEA; Prof. Srabani Roy Choudhury, Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, JNU; Dr. Satoru Nagao, Fellow, Hudson Institute, Tokyo and; Dr. Titli Basu, Associate Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, JNU. Lt. Gen. R.K. Sawhney (Retd.), Amb. Anil Wadhwa, Amb. Skand Tayal, Gp. Cap. Naval Jagota (Retd.), Mr. Kanav Monga, and Dr. Harinder Sekhon participated. Dr Arvind Gupta, Director, VIF, delivered the concluding remarks.

India-Japan Relations

India and Japan are close and natural partners, and the relationship is based on shared values of democracy, freedom and respect for the rule of law. India and Japan have long historical ties. Buddhism travelled from India to Japan. Interactions of Indian personalities such as Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Rash Behari Bose and Subhash Chandra Bose have highlighted Japan. India was a signatory to the Peace Treaty of 1952. Indian exports have stimulated Japan’s cotton and steel industries. In the past few decades, India and Japan have cooperated in developmental assistance.

The Indian Metro expansion is one example of that.

Recent Trends

By the year 2020, the public-private investment reached up to 3.5 trillion yen with almost 50% private sector investment. It is expected to cross 5 trillion yen by 2025. These investments through various trilateral and multilateral cooperation would strengthen future ties between the two nations.

Japan is the cornerstone of India's Act East Policy and the centerpiece of its Indo-Pacific vision. Recently, both countries celebrated their 70th anniversary of diplomatic ties. Both the countries now have practical mechanisms to work together including Act East, Trilateral Cooperation and Quad. Both countries are committed to strengthening the partnership in other key areas besides trade which includes climate change and health security. The meetings between the leaders – Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Fumio Kishida– have led to substantial outcomes.

Trade & Infrastructure

In the post-LPG period, India looked to strengthen economic ties with Japan – which was the 2nd largest economy and an Asian economic power at that time. It was hoped that Japanese ODA investment would create an ecosystem for trade for both countries. India is the number one recipient of ODA from Japan. The two countries signed the strategic partnership in 2011, however, trade has not picked up as expected. Japan is the fifth largest investor of India but the investment share is very small in comparison to countries like Thailand and Indonesia.

In the infrastructure sector, significant development has been witnessed not just in the form of roads and railways, a large number of ports are going to be mobilised through Japanese investment.

The Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) report represent India as the mid and long-term investment destination for Japanese

companies. The report also highlights the new frontiers that are opening up especially, digitalisation where India is one of the frontrunners and there is more scope for compatibility between the two countries.

Japanese private investors still consider the Indian market as volatile, complex and uncertain. There is a lot of ambiguity. Large corporates have learned to engage in India. However, the Japanese success in Southeast Asian countries has been driven by middle and small enterprise engagements which continues to be a problem in India. The upcoming ODA charter might have more concrete measures to strengthen trade relations with India.

Recommendations:

- Focus on more realistic area research by the scholars. Promoting quality language studies is required since the spectrum of relationship has increased.
- Create platforms of industry-specific advocacy through agencies such as NASSCOM and FICCI to demystify the views of Japanese companies about the Indian market. The upcoming ODA charter might have more concrete measures to strengthen trade relations with India.
- Renewable energy, food security, health and climate change can be the areas where both countries can work together.
- Moving beyond bilateral cooperation to engaging a third country could be a step forward.
- Japan is one of the leading countries in critical and emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and robotics. India has a tremendous human resource and skill set. Both countries can cooperate by co-creating, co-innovating and co-designing. It will provide India with strategic competencies and visibility to invest in countries as well.

India's Vision of Free and Open Indo-Pacific

India's approach towards Indo-Pacific focuses on a free open, inclusive and

rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific. It emphasises respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity for all nations in the region, peaceful resolutions of disputes, avoidance of use or threat of use of force and adherence to international laws, rules and regulations. Its objective is the multifaceted engagement with all countries in the region aimed at Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).

India will work with all the countries in the region to keep the seas, space and airways free and open; to keep nations secure from terrorism and piracy; to ensure that global cyberspace is free from disruption; and to ensure access to and responsible use of global commons. India is willing to partner with all countries to ensure fair, transparent and balanced trading systems and to enhance connectivity for national, regional and global economic growth. Unity and centrality of ASEAN is the key element in developing Indo-Pacific region.

Japan's redefined free and open Indo-Pacific as pronounced by PM Kishida in his visit to India in March along with the additional allocation of investment open to a lot of opportunities for both countries.

The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative and its 7 pillars of cooperation were introduced by PM Modi in 2019. India looks forward to concrete cooperation with Japan under the maritime, transport, trade and connectivity pillar that Japan agreed to co-lead.

Defence Ties

This year some important developments have taken place in India-Japan defence cooperation. The Army, Air Force and Navy of both countries have engaged in bilateral military exercises such as the Dharma-Guardian. They have also participated in multilateral naval exercise including navies from France, the US, Australia, Britain and Canada.

PM Kishida's Visit to India and Japan's Indo-Pacific Plan

PM Fumio Kishida's visit to India in March was historical as the idea of

Indo-Pacific originated from the Indian parliament by PM Shinzo Abe in 2007. The announcement of Japan's Indo-Pacific Plan from New Delhi projected India as an "indispensable partner" of Japan in the Indo-Pacific region. PM Kishida gave India its motivation back on the relationship which had developed slight misunderstanding over each other's' position over the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

PM Kishida has been pushing for a free and rule-based international order both in Europe and the Indo-Pacific region. At the same time, there is an outreach towards the Global South through investments in infrastructure by expanding its Official Development Assistance (ODA) and revising its Development Cooperation Charter. Japan also seeks to offer "offer-type" cooperation, introduce a new framework for "private capital mobilisation-type" grant aid and amend the JBIC Law.

Japan's G7 & India's G20 Presidencies

Japan and India respectively preside over the G7 and G20 for 2023 which is of great geopolitical significance for both countries. PM Narendra Modi will visit Hiroshima for the G7 summit and PM Kishida will again be in India in September to participate in the G20. It was noted that the outcomes of G7 will have an impact on the G20. India and Japan can rebuild the system for the implementation of the voices of the Global South by linking G7 and G20.

Domestic Debates in Japan on Indo-Pacific

Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, revision of the guidelines on 3 principles of transfer of defence equipment and technology has been emphasised in the conversation. The National Security Strategy released in December 2022 focuses on advancing the smooth transfer of technology to partner countries. There has been a push for developing more sustainable and robust defence industries.

Military exports will be the key policy tools to provide assistance

to countries that have faced aggression and invasion in violation of international law. Within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), a dynamic discussion is taking place among a section of lawmakers that has helped Japan successfully build a narrative that “Ukraine today can easily be Japan tomorrow”. The Komeito Party is also expected to keep a check on Japan’s military aid to Ukraine. Public opinion is largely against supplying arms to Ukraine but is very supportive of humanitarian aid.

Raising the budgetary allocation for the ODA is another area of debate in domestic politics.

Japan’s Overseas Strategic Assistance (OSA)

Through this mechanism, Japan seeks to deepen, security cooperation with countries and to help them advance their security and deterrence so that they can contribute to regional peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. OSA is not aimed at the export of lethal weapons but to improve the recipient countries in domains such as monitoring surveillance and disaster response capabilities. Some budgetary allocations have been made in this regard. Currently, Japan is focused on Bangladesh in South Asia; Malaysia and the Philippines in South East Asia and across Fiji for this programme.

Conclusion

Almost all aspects of India-Japan relations were brainstormed in the discussion. The challenges that hinder India and Japan from greater cooperation and the ways to overcome them were highlighted. Global South, its re-emergence in the geopolitical lexicon and its meaning were thoroughly discussed. Pertinent regional issues such as economic resilience, climate change, technology as well as food and energy security were also deliberated. It was overall emphasised that India and Japan are natural partners which share common values and both have an important role to play in the peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

Adoption of the Africa Policy Document

Prepared by Samir Bhattacharya

On 15th May, 2023, VIF Expert group convened at VIF to discuss one last time the policy document before adopting the same. Director VIF, Dr Arvind Gupta, thanked everyone on behalf of VIF and assured that the document will be presented to the Government at the appropriate level, among other important stakeholders related to Africa in the policy circle. Some of the suggestions were:

1. It is Government of India that had proposed to the United Nations for declaring 2023 as International Year of Millets and a short note on millet would add well to the document.
2. Highlighting the need for a national level exclusively Africa specific think-tank. Initially this can be done using the Africa expert group members at the VIF and later this can become autonomous.
3. There was a suggestion of creating an India Africa Think-tank network, similar to India ASEAN think-tank network.
4. Skilling (from manufacturing to pharma) emerged as the most desired mode of engagement with Africa.
5. Some cooperation related to satellite was discussed.
6. The need to put more emphasis on the role of Indian diaspora and their contribution to African nation building should find more space.
7. Direct shipping line and its importance was discussed.

8. The idea of a pan African visa, in the line of Schengen, was discussed. This would ease a lot of issues regarding the travel of Indian businessmen. Some of the RECs such as ECOWAS or COMESA are already considering issuing regional level passports.
9. Importance of Africa in the indo-pacific maritime cooperation is not coming up well in the document, and this can further be highlighted.

The meeting concluded with the adoption of the policy document.

Approach and Way Forward

Prepared by PK Khup Hangzo

The Fourth Meeting of the Climate Change Expert Group was held at the Vivekananda International Foundation on 18 May 2023. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Arvind Gupta, Director, VIF and it was attended by Lt. Gen. Ravi Sawhney (Retd.); Dr. J.R. Bhatt, Former Adviser/Scientist, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change; Prof. CR Babu, Environmentalist and Professor Emeritus, Delhi University; Amb. Deepa Wadhwa, Chairperson, India-Japan Friendship Forum; Mr. RR Rashmi, Distinguished Fellow, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI); Dr. Hishmi Jamil Husain, Head, Biodiversity and Corporate Sustainability, Tata *Steel Ltd.*; Mr. Sanjay Gupta, Consultant, the World Bank; Dr. Garima Maheshwari, Assistant Professor, Vivekananda Law School; Mr. P.K. Khup Hangzo, Associate Fellow, VIF; and Ms. Heena Samant, Research Assistant, VIF. Following are the outcomes of discussion during the meeting.

India may come under the spotlight at this year's COP28.

India is currently the third largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world. Its per capita emissions however were lower than the world average and its cumulative contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions from 1850 to 2019 is only around four per cent. However, as a result of its current level of emissions, India is likely to come under the spotlight at this year's COP28, the UN's annual climate summit. This

year's summit will assess progress made on cutting greenhouse gas emissions since the 2015 Paris agreement. As such, it is deemed to be a "global stocktake." Despite India's commitment to achieve about 50 per cent cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2030, reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 45 per cent by 2030, and achieve net zero emissions by 2070, the country's efforts so far would be deemed "inadequate." India should therefore defend its national targets as they are ambitious when compared with the level of its economic development. It should also defend the progress that it has made in climate change mitigation vehemently.

India should continue to emphasise lifestyle changes as a solution to climate change. Sustainable lifestyle ought to be brought back at the centre of the debate on climate change. This is because lifestyle is a key driver of the growth in the demand for energy, goods and food and hence greenhouse gas emissions. Adopting more sustainable lifestyle can contribute towards achieving low-carbon emission growth that is both equitable and sustainable. Towards this end, India has pioneered a new movement called Mission LIFE. Announced in 2021, the mission aims to instill a healthy and sustainable way of living among Indians based on traditions and values of conservation and moderation. Going forward, India should aim to mainstream the idea across all sections of its society. It should also use it to bolster its arguments in the upcoming COP28 in Dubai, UAE. Furthermore, India should also propose the establishment of standards or metrics for measuring national and global consumption patterns as well as propose ways to bring down the level of global consumption.

India should shift the narrative to population density. India has come under increasing pressure from Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to contribute funds to deal with loss and damage. SIDS include some of the world's smallest and most remote

states in the world and they have long suffered from catastrophic cyclones, increasing salinity in water tables, sustained droughts, loss of low-lying islands to sea level rise, etc. Although India is sympathetic to the plight of SIDS, the country argued that developed countries should take the responsibility of providing support to SIDS as they are historically responsible for climate change. Meanwhile, India itself is among the most vulnerable countries in the world to the impact of climate change. Given the sheer number of vulnerable people in India, it is imperative the country make the case for considering population density as a key metric for determining climate change vulnerability.

Loss and damage will continue to pose significant challenges for India during COP28.

Loss and damage is likely to become a “double-edged sword” and potentially the most difficult issue for India during COP28. As a major contributor to current greenhouse gas emissions, the country could be asked to contribute to the fund to compensate poor countries that are afflicted by the worst ravages of extreme weather. India should however resist any attempt to make the country pay for loss and damage. If anything, India should also be a recipient of funds owing to its limited historical emissions and its immense adaptation requirements.

India should give greater emphasis to sectoral transition pathways.

A number of countries have announced net-zero targets, either in law or in a policy document. Net-zero however is an aspirational goal, and most countries have not presented credible plans for sectoral transition to achieve the goal. It is imperative that India prepare sectoral transition plans. Such plans could lay down the kinds of economic growth that will take place in a given economic sector, the likely year for peak demand for fossil fuel in the sector, etc. Having clear sectoral transition pathways that is based on credible scientific data is critical for India as it could enable the country to plan its low carbon transition much more effectively.

India should aim to reduce the costs of de-carbonization for its industrial sector through carbon market mechanism.

De-carbonisation is the process of reducing the amount of carbon, mainly carbon dioxide, sent into the atmosphere. It is achieved by switching to usage of low carbon energy sources. India has set a goal of complete de-carbonization by 2030. Decarbonization however require huge investments. One of the ways in which India can reduce the costs of decarbonization, for its industrial sector in particular, is through a robust carbon market mechanism. Carbon markets are trading systems in which carbon credits are sold and bought. Companies or individuals can use carbon markets to compensate for their greenhouse gas emissions by purchasing carbon credits from entities that remove or reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Carbon markets can help mobilize resources and reduce the costs of decarbonization. A domestic carbon market mechanism has already been in place for the power sector. But that may be expanded to include other industrial sectors as well. On the whole, India's carbon market should not focus solely on fixing a carbon price as that can raise the cost for industry. Instead, it should focus on creating a level playing field for all industries and as a source of finance for them to acquire newer technologies.

India should establish credible financial framework for adaptation.

Adaptation is a critical need for states in India, most of which are vulnerable to climate change. India's National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC), established in 2015, aimed to finance concrete adaptation projects and programmes in States and Union Territories (UTs) that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. However, NAFCC has been hobbled by financial constraints and that have limited the overall effectiveness of adaptation projects it has financed. It is critical that India institute solid and credible financial framework for adaptation at the state level.

India should take the lead in establishing framework for sub-regional cooperation on climate change.

India should take the lead in establishing sub-regional framework for sub-regional cooperation on climate change in South Asia. This is especially important given the ineffectiveness of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in addressing challenges pertaining to climate change in South Asia. Towards this end, India should take advantage of existing sub-regional groupings or initiatives like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN). The focus of any coordinated responses either under or BIMSTEC or BBIN could be on issues of common interests such as the Himalayan glaciers, transboundary rivers, sea level rise in the Bay of Bengal, protection of mangroves in the Sundarbans, disaster preparedness, etc.

Greater emphasis should be given to the preservation of wetlands.

Wetlands are critical in the fight against climate change. They are significant carbon sink with coastal wetlands such as mangroves storing carbon up to 55 times faster than tropical rainforests. Wetlands are also vital for adaptation. They act as sponges that ameliorate droughts by storing water and releasing it to maintain river flows long after the rains cease. And they also protect against floods and wildfires. India currently has around 2,20,000 big wetlands and 5,50,000 smaller ones. However, the country's wetlands are at risk of rapidly declining in quantity and quality. In fact, nearly two of every five wetlands in the country have lost their natural existence in the last 30 years while 40 per cent of water bodies have lost quality for survival of the aquatic animals. Preservation of wetlands therefore should be a top priority in India's effort to combat climate change.

India should be critical of nature-based solutions as proposed by developed countries.

The debate around nature-based solutions still continues to be controversial and there is no clarity over what it entails. India is concerned that nature-based solutions could become a diversionary tactic for developed countries for whom such solutions are a cheap alternative to cutting fossil fuel emissions. Also, nature-based solutions may become a convenient tool for developed countries to wiggle their way out of the adaptation responsibility that they should ideally be fulfilling. Thus, it is imperative that India pursues nature-based solutions based on its own requirements and it should not be nudged into doing so by developed countries.

Pakistan – A long way from stability

Prepared by Aarushi Gupta

A meeting of the Pakistan Study Group (PSG) was held in hybrid mode on 26 May 2023. The main items on the agenda were political turmoil in Pakistan, uncertainty within the Pakistan army, the rising security threat of the TTP, economic stagnation, and the SCO and the G20 meetings.

The meeting was attended by Dr Arvind Gupta, TilakDevasher, Lt Gen Ravi Sawhney (Retd), Ms Shalini Chawla, Lt Gen Ata Hasnain (Retd), Brig Rahul Bhonsle (Retd), Amb D P Srivastava, Shri Rana Banerjee, Shri Sushant Sareen, Amb Satish Chandra, Amb DB Venkatesh Varma, Amb G Parthasarathy, Shri CD Sahay and GpCapt Naval Jagota (Retd).

Political Turmoil: Imran Khan, protests and the Judiciary

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan was arrested by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on 9 May from the premises of the Islamabad High Court on corruption charges in the Al-Qadir Trust case. The arrest came after Imran Khan had made grave accusations alleging an assassination plot against him by top ISI generals like Major-General Faisal Naseer and the Chief of Army Staff General AsimMunir. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) had issued a press release condemning his attempts to defame the Pakistan Army through ‘unsubstantiated, defamatory and provocative statements/remarks’. Post Imran Khan’s arrest, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) called for countrywide protests

to become the voice of his fight to “save the Constitution”. The coordinated protesters stormed the residence of the corps commander in Lahore, called Jinnah House, and broke the gates of the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi and vandalised martyrs memorials. The military and the government issued stern warnings and vowed to take action against the culprits.

Soon after Imran Khan’s arrest, a three-member bench of the Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial called the arrest illegal and ordered his immediate release. In open court, CJP Bandial greeted Imran Khan with the words “Good to see you” during Khan’s appearance before the Supreme Court. This remark was widely criticised by the ruling alliance and other political parties of Pakistan for showing bias and favouritism towards Imran Khan. The Pakistan National Assembly approved a resolution against CJP Bandial, calling for the formation of a five-member committee to prepare and file references against judges of the Supreme Court over alleged misconduct.

The military reacted strongly to the 9 May attacks with a crackdown on the PTI. The PTI leadership were ill-prepared for this and, therefore, quickly switched sides to stay relevant and out of jail. Following the crackdown, over 35 members resigned from PTI till date, including some prominent figures like Fawad Chaudhry, Asad Umar and Shireen Mazari. The resigning ministers condemned the 9 May violence and parted ways with Imran Khan, adhering to the supremacy of the Pakistan Army. The other political parties and the government have made it clear that no negotiations will be held with Imran Khan in an attempt to politically isolate the PTI. They have also held the party and its workers legally responsible for targeting the military installations and agreed to try them in military courts. The rest of the PTI, under Imran Khan’s instructions, has constituted a seven-member negotiation committee for talks with the government over elections.

Imran Khan’s position has been substantially weakened. However, it

seems that he still believes that he can continue and bounce back based on his charisma and popularity and stand for the polls with the help of the judiciary. Keeping the PTI away from the taint of getting designated as a terrorist group and defending the party and the perpetrators of the 9 May violence in the military courts might challenge his confidence. The resigning PTI members might form a separate faction of the PTI, possibly led by estranged leader Jahangir Khan Tareen, to get away from the taint of Imran Khan on the party and to stay relevant in the politics and with the military.

Uncertainty within the Pakistan Army

Sialkot has two Infantry divisions, and Chief of Army Staff General AsimMunir gave a ballistic speech in the garrison against the civilian politicians. While interacting with the troops, he said, “No one will be allowed to disrespect our shuhada (martyrs) and their monuments. They are a source of inspiration and pride for the rank and file of the Armed Forces, Law Enforcement Agencies, Government officials and the people of Pakistan.”

On 25 May, Pakistan observed ‘Youm-e-TakreemShuhada-e-Pakistan’ (Martyrs’ Reverence Day). The main event was held at the General Headquarters (GHQ), Rawalpindi, with Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General AsimMunir as the chief guest. Former army chief Gen (retd) Qamar JavedBajwa and former chairman of the joint chiefs of staff committee Gen (retd) Nadeem Raza, also attended the event. Pictures and verbal accounts of the three generals were circulated, conveying that the Army remains united. There has been a shake-up happening within the Army itself. There seems to be complete consonance between the Shehbaz Sharif-led PDM government and the military. It appears that Gen Munir is in control. His position is likely to be strengthened in September when the posts of five retiring three-star generals will be filled up. They will be AsimMunir’s appointees.

There might be differences of opinion within the Army, but it will not affect the overall cohesion of the military. However, at the same time, the events of May 09 and the sacking of the Corps Commander Lahore will affect the morale of the troops and the entire Army that could have long-term implications for the Pakistan Army. Efforts are also afoot to attack the credibility of Asim Munir by raising questions about his being from the OTS rather than the Military Academy, Kakul. Similarly, rumours of Gen Munir being Shia are being circulated to create a rift and heighten sectarian politics within the Army, regardless of whether he clarifies or stays silent on the matter. The supposed factionalism within the Army will not affect the threat perception in terms of the nuclear assets of Pakistan as they cannot be used against one another. However, attacks by third parties like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) on the nuclear facilities and taking over control might prove detrimental to the entire region, not just Pakistan.

The rising security challenge of the TTP

TTP and Baloch separatist groups seemed to have formed a nexus in Balochistan. Presumably, Baloch separatists have reached a tactical understanding with the TTP and have intensified their operations against Pakistan's armed/security forces. Meanwhile, the TTP has started promoting national thoughts and interests, further increasing Pakistan's already precarious security situation. These groups are filling the vacuum left by the mainstream and nationalist political parties in KPK. There has been a merger of around 20 small militant groups and four Baloch militant groups with the TTP, leading to a more substantial foothold of TTP in Balochistan and North Waziristan.

The end of the Jihadi insurgency in Afghanistan post-August 2021 Taliban takeover and the reforms in terms of centralised control and governance strategy under the current TTP leader Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud are said to be the two factors for expansion and mergers within TTP. The attacks, post the merger, have increased rapidly from the tribal belt to the country's

major cities, with a focus on the security forces. Umar Media, the highly sophisticated machinery of TTP to propagate its thought process, has also been taking shape more prominently with increased output to dispense TTP propaganda. TTP will continue to flourish as long as it enjoys the support of the Afghanistan Taliban.

While the situation in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has significantly improved, there have been sporadic incidents of terrorist activity like when five soldiers of the Indian Army's elite 9 Para SF were killed in a face-off in the Rajouri sector just before the SCO meet. Overall, the security situation in the valley has largely stabilised, but there are chances of that getting destabilised if put on the back burner. The security situation in the south of the PirPanjal is still a pressing issue as the troop density is very low. There has been a significant dilution of the Rashtriya Rifles (RR) that could have adverse implications if not compensated by the CAPFs.

Economic stagnation

The economy of Pakistan continues to be in crisis. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has continued with its demands. Saudi Arabia and UAE had agreed to provide USD 2 and USD 1 billion, respectively. Further, Pakistan had also shared a plan with the IMF to secure an additional USD 3 billion to meet the previous requirement of USD 6 billion made by the IMF. However, the IMF has upped the demand by asking Pakistan to arrange USD 8 billion in fresh loans to ensure external debt repayments during the next seven months between May-December 2023 to successfully complete the ninth review bailout package.

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar announced that a Current Account Surplus of \$654 million was recorded for March 2023. However, the economy is at a standstill, indicating that the figure must be taken with a pinch of salt. Pakistan's economic growth also came down to an abysmal 0.29 per cent in the outgoing fiscal year. It is the lowest growth rate in the last four years, indicating a severe mismanagement of Pakistan's economy. Even though the official figures claim the growth rate to be 0.29 per cent, experts

believe this figure to be negative.

FM Bilawal Bhutto in Goa for SCO and G20 meeting in Srinagar

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari told Pak journalists in Goa during the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting in response to a question about India hosting a G20 meeting in Srinagar: “Obviously, we condemn it, and at the time, we will give such a response that it will be remembered.” To cover up the threat made by the Pakistan Foreign Minister, the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, “Any insinuation, associating Foreign Minister’s remarks with a threat of violence, is not only mischievous but highly irresponsible.”

The messaging done by Bilawal was possibly done for the domestic audience back in Pakistan. However, his statements may affect his credibility as a future politician/leader regarding his engagement with India, as he has consistently pejorated his connections with India. India’s decision to hold the G20 meet in Srinagar was an excellent idea. It should be built upon by sending more delegations to J&K.

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.



VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

3, San Martin Marg, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi – 110021

Phone: +91-11-24121764, 24106698

Email: info@vifindia.org,

Website: <https://www.vifindia.org>

Follow us on [twitter@vifindia](https://twitter.com/vifindia)