



Vivekananda
International
Foundation

Visiting Delegations Report

Armenia | Australia | Hungary | Iran | Italy
Russia | Taiwan | USA | Europe | SWIFT

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Edited by Anurag Bisen

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The Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) was visited by several delegations during the month of February. These included representatives of nine countries, Europe, and a delegation from the SWIFT. Diverse range of issues were discussed, including the global world order, regional security situation, ongoing conflicts, and India's bilateral relations with the individual countries. The visiting delegations represented their respective country's premier think-tanks and institutions, and their insights were greatly beneficial for the Indian participants to gain a firsthand perspective on the relevant issues. On the other hand, the visitors were also briefed about India's civilizational ethos, and core national security and foreign policy objectives, by an equally eminent panel comprising VIF's distinguished fellows and research scholars. The report of the visits, in the following paragraphs, is arranged in alphabetical order of the countries represented by the delegation.

New Delhi
April 2024

Anurag Bisen

Delegation from Applied Policy Research Institute

Prepared by Mr. Saudiptendu Ray

On February 21, a six-member delegation from the Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia (APRI) visited VIF. The Armenian delegation comprised Mr. Benyamin Poghosyan, Ms. Lusine Toroyan, Ms. Nvard Chalikyan, Mr. Karen Mkrtychyan, Mr. Davit Antonyan and Mr. Rananjay Anand (President, Indo-Armenian Friendship organisation). Participants from the VIF included Lt. Gen R. K. Sawhney, Lt Gen. (Dr) Rakesh Sharma, Amb. D. P. Srivastava, Brig Vinod Anand, Mr. Raghvendra Singh, Dr. Pravesh Kumar Gupta.

In his opening remarks Gen Sawhney highlighted the close cultural connections between India and Armenia. The discussion began with a brief introduction to the current situation in the South Caucasus and how the shifting alliances are affecting the region.

The delegation spoke about the multiple challenges faced by Armenia, including the primary threat from Azerbaijan, fully supported by Turkey. It was conveyed that after the recent wars with Azerbaijan and the subsequent loss of Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia's territorial integrity is under threat and that Azerbaijan has no intention of establishing peace with Armenia despite the capture of Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan aims to connect up with its Nakhchivan Exclave (inside the Armenian territory) and Turkey through a land bridge. It has increased its arms imports from Turkey and Israel and has been making inflammatory statements that may turn into military escalation at any time. Despite all this, Armenia is willing to be part of the peaceful negotiations with Azerbaijan.

The Armenian government has embarked on simultaneous military reform while procuring new armaments to bolster its defence capabilities. Lately,

Armenia has emerged as a significant buyer of Indian arms. Armenia seeks geopolitical allies who could counter Azerbaijani and Turkish pressures. Iran strongly opposes Azerbaijan and Turkey efforts to establish the land bridge, which would sever Iran's only land route to Europe through Armenia. Russia is a key player in the region and maintains a substantial military presence in southern Armenia.

In the assessment of the Armenian delegation, India, as a rising global power, aims to establish alternative routes to Europe via Iran, Armenia, Georgia, and the Black Sea, bypassing the Suez Canal. Any attack by Azerbaijan on Armenia would disrupt this potential route for India. India can shape South Caucasus geopolitics by supporting Armenia, fostering military cooperation, and potentially using Armenia as a production hub for spare parts of Indian weapons. Armenia and India can collaborate on developing military software for UAVs and conducting joint military exercises to strengthen ties.

The delegation conveyed that economic dependence on Azerbaijani oil and gas by the West and Europe limits their intervention capacity in favour of Armenia. The focus of Armenian military upgrades should prioritize smaller, cost-effective platforms over larger ones. Armenia maintains a positive relationship with Iran and may consider acquiring the Shahed 136 drone. Armenia must resist Azerbaijan's attempts to establish the Zangezur corridor linking Azerbaijan with Turkey. They emphasised that Armenia should diversify foreign relations while maintaining ties with Russia, cautiously navigating relations between Russia and the West to avoid becoming a battleground like Ukraine. Additionally, efforts to enhance cultural ties between India and Armenia through museum interactions and experience-sharing initiatives were discussed.

AUSTRALIA

Dr. David Brewster from National Security College

Prepared by PK Hangzo and Heena Samant

On 20 February 2024, VIF hosted Dr. David Brewster, Senior Research Fellow with the Australian National Security College (NSC). The meeting with Dr. David Brewster was attended by Lt. Gen. RK Sawhney, Brig. Vinod Anand, Amb. Anil Wadhwa, Amb. Ashok Kantha, Lt. Gen. Gautam Banerjee, Capt. Anurag Bisen, Prof. Sujit Dutta, Mr. PK Khup Hangzo, Ms. Prerna Gandhi, Dr. Sweta Kumari, Ms. Heena Samant, and Mr. Anurag Sharma. Salients of the discussion are given below.

India-Australia Relations

- Dr Brewster observed that India and Australia have an underutilised potential as defence partners. He called for the two countries to advance their defence relationship from “interoperability” to “interchangeability.”
- The maritime domain in particular offers ample opportunity for cooperation due to the Royal Australian Navy’s (RAN) planned historic expansion.

Australia’s Defence Plan

- The Australian government recently allocated more than USD 35 billion for acquiring new capabilities over the next 10 years. These include 20 new destroyers and frigates, and six Large Optionally Crewed Surface Vessels (LOSVs) that can operate with sailors aboard or independently as drones.
- These surface vessels will join a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines Australia plans to build under the AUKUS pact with the U.S. and the U.K., the first three of which are expected to be

delivered by early next decade.

- As India has a proven capability in designing and building complex warships, it was suggested that India should aim to take advantage of Australia's planned expansion of its surface and underwater naval fleet.

Space Cooperation

- Space is another area where India and Australia can collaborate. Australia has a strong heritage in space domain awareness. India on the other has an outstanding launch capability. It also has a large constellation of Earth observation satellites.
- Australia could therefore become a greater consumer of India's satellite services. Beyond this, India and Australia should engage in collaborative satellite projects, data sharing for weather monitoring, and joint research initiatives.

Under-sea Infrastructure

- It was also highlighted that undersea infrastructure could be a potential area for cooperation between India and Australia. As an island nation, Australia is highly reliant on undersea infrastructure such as cables (for telecommunication and power transmission) and pipelines.
- However, this undersea infrastructure is particularly vulnerable to submarine cable outages caused by different natural and man-made hazards. Their protection therefore is of critical importance.
- Towards this end, India and Australia could work together to secure and defend critical undersea infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region.

Maritime Domain Awareness

- Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) can be a key area of cooperation between India and Australia. It is the key to maritime security. However, no one country can independently generate MDA over large areas beyond its immediate waters. As such, India and Australia should enhance their cooperation in MDA.

- That entails, among other things, sharing the burden on maritime aerial surveillance and sharing key facilities that are located in Darwin, Cocos Island and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- India and Australia should also aim to use MDA as a tool for cooperation with smaller countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Smaller and poorer countries often struggle to buy, operate, and maintain high-end military-style maritime surveillance systems. As such, they are unable to monitor their maritime domains. The focus should therefore be on low cost, web-based platforms. Such platforms can help democratise access to information and help Indo-Pacific countries, big and small, to have sovereign capabilities to better monitor their maritime domains.

Recommendations

- Dr Brewster cautioned that India and Australia should not undertake a unilateral approach in the Indo-Pacific region.
- He recommended that both countries should be mindful of the concerns and sensitivities of their smaller neighbours. Smaller countries in South Asia and Australasia are wary of being dominated by bigger neighbours including India and Australia.
- The way forward for the two countries is to undertake a cooperative approach including pooling resources and investing in strategic projects all across the Indo-Pacific region.

Dr Brewster further stressed that both India and Australia can play a constructive role in each other's region. For example, India is considered a reliable and trustworthy partner and a benign power by Pacific Island states. As such, they would welcome India's overtures in the region. Likewise, Australia is also considered a trustworthy partner and a benign power by countries in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region. Therefore, it can play a constructive role there as well.

Delegation from Danube Institute

Prepared by Dr. Angana Kotokey

On 23 February, VIF organized an interaction with the visiting Hungarian delegation led by István Kiss, the Executive Director of the Danube Institute. Lt. General R. K. Sawhney delivered the opening remarks, highlighting the civilizational linkages between India and Hungary followed by a brief presentation from Csaba Barnabás Horváth, a senior researcher at the Danube Institute. The meeting was attended by Lt Gen R. K. Sawhney, Brig. Vinod Anand, Amb. Anil Trigunayat, Prof. Sujit Dutta, Dr. Arpita Anant, and Dr. Angana Kotokey from the VIF.

India-Hungary Relations

- The discussion focused primarily on civilizational and historical connections between India and Hungary.
- It was also highlighted that India's relations with Hungary have been multifaceted, and substantive, and that both nations share several common areas of interest.
- It was asserted that both India and Hungary believe in civilization playing an important role in the nation-building process of a country. The discussion underscored the role of faith and the importance of family in today's world.

Global Conflicts

- The panel also discussed the rise in regional conflicts, especially the Russian-Ukraine war and the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the issue of displacements causing international migration.
- It was also stressed that both Hungary and India should raise the problem of international migration at different multilateral platforms.

Technological Cooperation

- In the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Hungarian delegation emphasized that both nations could collaborate to leverage AI to enhance defence capabilities in preventive maintenance, surveillance, and cyber security.
- While defining cybersecurity and cyberspace, it was underlined that 'internet governance' can be a common ground for collaboration between India and Hungary in the future.

Delegation from Institute for Political and International Studies

Prepared by Dr. Angana Kotokey

A visiting delegation from Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), Tehran held discussions with VIF on “Regional and International developments and India-Iran relations” on 23 February. The IPIS delegation comprised Dr. Khalil Shirgholami, Vice-President, IPIS; Amb. Dr. Morteza Damanpak Jami, Senior Fellow; Omid Babelian, Research Fellow. VIF was represented by Lt. Gen. R K Sawhney; Amb. Kanwal Sibal; Amb. Prabhat Shukla; Amb. D P Srivastava; Amb. Sanjay Singh and Amb. Anil Trigunayat. The discussions focused on the following issues.

Current International Order

- Current International situation is marked by global disorder leading to emergence of new actors, new coalitions such as BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The changing distribution of power is transforming the hierarchy and logic of international relations.
- Both India and Iran want a pluralistic international system based on emerging ideas and requirements. India’s approach does not intend to completely alter the world order but reform it to make it more equal, just with appropriate representation of the Global South states.

India-Iran Relations

- India and Iran, based on changing realities should coordinate to redefine their bilateral relations, create new opportunities, strategic realignment, design and build a new future. The extent

of relations is not reflected in the overall trade volume, and this disparity requires correction. There is a need to find solutions to the sanctions to increase oil trade. The gas pipeline project should be re-started that will become a symbol of regional cooperation.

- India and Iran share civilizational ties and Vedic values are rooted in sub-consciousness of both societies. There is a need to re-invent Vedic values by both states to propagate a world order based on Dharma.

Israel-Hamas Conflict

- There is a need to address the root cause of Israel Palestine conflict i.e. the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories that has remained unsettled since 1948. Israel has denied all peace initiatives that could lead to a two-state solution.
- From the Iranian perspective, international law allows armed struggle by occupied people. Hamas has an inherent right to self-defence and armed struggle to free the territory from occupation.
- India is steadfast in its zero-tolerance policy towards terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and the death of civilians for whatsoever reason is unacceptable
- There cannot be any justifications for terrorism and hostage taking and recognition of Israel's legitimate security concerns is pertinent.
- India favours immediate ceasefire; availability of humanitarian aid; obligation to observe international humanitarian law in all circumstances and diplomatic measures to restart the political process.
- The right-ward tilt in Israeli politics and society is a dangerous trend that will lead to further instability in the region.
- Iran has tried its best to contain the spill over effects of the recent regional escalation. Iran while maintaining close communication with its allies such as Houthis, Hezbollah, Kataib Hezbollah etc., does not influence or involve itself with the military actions carried by these groups.

- The US remains steadfast in supporting Israel's brutal assault on Palestinians in Gaza and deflected any international effort including UNSC resolutions to pressurise Tel Aviv to accept a ceasefire.

Russia-Ukraine War

- The US and the European states have only ignited tensions and dissipated any effort to initiate a political process to end the conflict. Both Russia and Ukraine cannot claim conclusive and complete victory. It needs to be seen how the nature of the conflict changes in case Donald Trump assumes presidency in the US.
- Iran's secret arms and drones supply to Russia is a misperception and all bilateral arms trade and exchanges including drones have been transparent.

Pakistan

- Pakistan is a difficult state mired with complicated internal dynamics and the self-interest-based military-intelligence elites are unwilling to share power. The internal tussle has resulted in a semi-failed state. Internal stability in Pakistan is in India and Iran's interest.
- Islamabad has ignored repeated requests from Tehran to contain the attacks by Sunni and Balochi groups operating from Pakistan. Iran therefore carried out attacks in January 2024 in self-defence. Both states do not have any interest in escalation.

Afghanistan

- India and Iran have managed to work with the Taliban regime to help the civilians and ease their lives. Iran, similar to India, wants an inclusive government in Afghanistan that could bring long-term stability. The current situation in Afghanistan could directly impact and complicate regional security in West Asia. Pakistan's wrong policies have led to its tense relationship with Afghanistan.

Delegation led by Senator Giulio Terzi di Sant'Agata

Prepared by Dr. Anchita Borthakur and Dr. Arpita Anant

On 22 February, the VIF organized an interaction with the visiting Italian delegation led by Senator Giulio Terzi di Sant' Agata on developments pertaining to India-Italy bilateral relations. Lt. General R. K. Sawhney delivered the opening remarks, highlighting the close cultural connections between India and Italy, followed by brief observations from Italian Senator Giulio Terzi di Sant' Agata. In his observations, the Senator flagged the commonalities between India's foreign policy and the thrust of Italy's foreign policy as is seen in its propositions in the European Union (EU). Both countries seem to give importance to development, scientific cooperation and ensuring the growth of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The meeting was attended by Lt Gen R. K. Sawhney, Brig. Vinod Anand, Amb. Anil Trigunayat, Amb. Anil Wadhwa, Amb. Ashok Kantha, Prof. Gulshan Sachdeva, Prof. Sujit Dutta, Dr. Arpita Anant and Dr. Anchita Borthakur from the VIF.

The discussion primarily focused on the historic and civilisational linkages between India and Italy which got a boost after the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's state visit to India in March 2023. During this visit, both countries signed the Strategic Partnership Agreement, which marked a new chapter in India-Italy bilateral relations. In the course of discussions it was also highlighted that the strategic partnership between India and Italy is a pillar for India-EU relations as well. In the last few years, a number of MOUs have also been signed between the two countries in the field of trade, economics, science and technology, migration and mobility etc. — redefining the political, diplomatic, and economic relations between the two states. It was also affirmed that the defence cooperation agreement which was signed last year has paved the

way for further deepening of relations between India and Italy.

While defining the current relationship, it was underscored that at present the highest priority should be given to scientific and space cooperation. Artificial intelligence (AI) is another domain where both countries can cooperate with each other. In this context it was mentioned that India's AI Act which is in the making is modelled on that of the EU. The reason for this convergence, it was averred, was a common understanding of the likely impact of AI deriving in turn from the value the EU and India attach to the well-being of their people. In the context of connectivity, while Italy was enthusiastic about the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC), it was more interested in digital connectivity and data sharing. The issue of trade deficit, which is in favour of India at present, was also underlined by the speakers. It was deliberated that a balanced and fair economic arrangement will be beneficial for both the countries.

In a brief discussion on China, the Italian delegation explained that there was consensus in Italy on leaving China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This is because in the sphere of industrial cooperation as well as space cooperation, there were concerns about Chinese unfair practices. The opposition to this in Italy has largely been from the luxury goods import lobby. Also, the EU had always opposed Italy's decision to join the BRI. A study by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy on the BRI concluded that no major losses would be suffered by Italy if it leaves the BRI.

Delegation from St. Petersburg State University

Prepared by Anurag Bisen

On 22 February 2024, the VIF organised an interaction with two eminent Russian Professors of International Relations at the St. Petersburg State University, Alexander Sergunin and Valery N. Konyshyev, on the Arctic. During the interaction, the former dealt with Russia's Arctic Strategy while the latter discussed the geopolitics and security related issues.

Prof Alexander started by commenting that there exist several stereotypes about the Russian Arctic due to lack of awareness. He cited that media reports in India talk about India-Russia cooperation in the Arctic in Yakutia and in Sakha Republic, but they do not form part of the Arctic Zone of Russian Federation (AZRF). The only Indian investment in the Russian Arctic is in the Vankor Oil Fields, in a joint venture with the Russian *Rosneft*. He also mentioned present plans for Indian investment in the Western Arctic, in Murmansk, in the pharmaceutical sector and in the Arctic LNG 2 project, as also some media reports about planned Indian investments towards modernisation of port infrastructure in the Arctic. However, he added that none of them have fructified as yet. Presently, the major Russian interaction on the Arctic with India is limited to scientific cooperation, in natural sciences and in some instances, in social sciences.

Prof. Sergunin also debunked the oft narrated myth that in the Arctic, Russia's main strategic goal is to dominate the region and undertake expansion. He said that the Russian Arctic contains abundance of natural and mineral resources and 90 percent of Russia's Arctic Policy is domestically oriented. He said that the Russian Arctic produces approximately 11 percent of Russia's Gross National Product (GNP) and 22 percent of Russia's hard currency income while the Arctic population is only 1.6 percent of the total population. He also mentioned that 2/3

of Russia's strategic submarines are located on the Kola peninsula while the other 1/3 are located in the subarctic area in the Far East, near the Kamchatka peninsula. He surmised that Russia is quite serious about the development of the Russian Arctic focusing mainly on the economic, social and environmental dimensions and also on the 27 different groups of indigenous peoples. He emphasised that contrary to the Western propaganda, Russia is not interested in militarization or confrontation with native countries in this region and is interested in maintaining it as a peaceful, friendly, and cooperative space. He said that presently Russia has its hands full with Ukraine and it has neither the political will nor the resources to open another front with the West/NATO in the North.

Prof. Konyshov started by saying that contrary to the Western propaganda of Russia militarising the Arctic, a simple comparison between the US 2nd Fleet and the Russian Northern Fleet will show that US has got far more assets against Russia and this does not include the assets of the US 3rd and the 6th Fleet which can be called to join the Northern Theatre. He said that Finland becoming a NATO member has complicated the situation in the North, with the Finnish President being openly hostile to Russia and Finland increasing its defence expenditure by 36 percent. He also said that US has promised to provide 64 F-35 fighter aircraft to Finland and the Finnish airfields in a close proximity to the location of Russian strategic deterrence, vastly outnumber (26 to 10) the Russian airfields. He also said that the US has signed Bilateral Defence Cooperation Agreements with Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland which includes provisions for entry of US forces in the region, joint exercises, access to bases (14 Swedish and 16 Finnish) and storage of US weapon systems. He said that while Norway has clearly stated that it will not deploy nuclear weapons in its territory, Denmark and Sweden have remained quiet while Finland has clearly said that it will deploy nuclear weapons if necessary. Prof Konyshov made three points in his arguments. Firstly, he said that the Ukraine crisis cannot be extrapolated to the Arctic since the former is about the defence of Russian territory while in the Arctic there is an economic dimension. Secondly, Prof. Konyshov said that the US aim to restore its unipolar status in the region for which there is artificial militarization of the Arctic and thirdly he said that he does not see any improvement in the heightened security situation in the Arctic in the near future and he posed a question whether we need new Cuban Missile Crisis to stop military escalation in the Arctic?

During the discussions that followed, questions were asked regarding Russia's stand on treating part of the Northern Sea Route as internal waters and concerns regarding Russia's growing proximity with China. On the former, Prof. Sergunin replied that the Russian stand on the NSR is entirely in accordance with the UNCLOS wherein as per Article 234, the littoral state can regulate the maritime traffic in ice-covered areas, just as Canada also does in the Northwest passage. He also said that there are several myths about the NSR being global commons which it is not, being entirely situated in the Russian EEZ and is not part of the high seas. Regarding the Extended Continental Shelf disputes, it was clarified that the CLCS has approved the Russian submission and there is no threat on that account. On China, it was clarified by the Russian delegation that Russia does not need China's assistance for defending its territories and does not see the relationship as a military one. Russia seeks enhanced economic relations with China and it has normal friendly relations with that country, which have only grown due to Russia's isolation by the West.

On completion of the discussions, Lt Director Sawhney thanked the Russian delegation for visiting, saying that he looked forward to a continued engagement, and presented VIF publications to the two scholars.

Delegation from Institute for National Defense and Security Research and Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation

Prepared by Dr Cchavi Vasisht

On 21 February, the VIF organised an interaction with a Taiwanese delegation led by Dr. Ming-Shih Shen, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Director, Division of National Security Research, Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR), Professor Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, Chairperson of Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation (TAEF), Dr. Alan H. Yang, Executive Director of TAEF and Mumin Chen, Deputy Representative, Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre in India (TECC). From the VIF, Lt Gen Ravi Sawhney delivered the opening remarks and Vice Admiral Satish Soni, Amb. Anil Wadhwa, Amb. DP Srivastava, Lt Gen Rakesh Sharma, Brig Vinod Anand, Prof Sujit Datta, Ms Perna Gandhi, Dr Sweta Kumari and Dr Cchavi Vasisht were part of the discussion.

Taiwanese Elections

- Since the start of 2024, notable changes have occurred. Taiwan held elections on January 13 to select its president and 113 legislative seats.
- Lai Ching-te from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) emerged victorious in the presidential race. However, challenges persist due to the hung legislature, as the DPP secured only a limited number of seats.

India-Taiwan Relations

- India and Taiwan relations have strengthened. The bilateral trade has increased more than 70 per cent.
- Recently the two countries have signed the labour agreement to

bolster the relations and enhance mobility.

- India's Indo-Pacific Initiative and Taiwan's New Southbound Policy greatly complement each other. These initiatives aim to facilitate the prosperity, peace and the stability in the Pacific region.

Security Concerns

- Both countries face serious problems at their borders and exchanging views on crucial security aspects is important. The developments in the South China Sea and PLA Navy intrusion in Taiwan Strait need to be closely monitored.
- Chinese activities in the Indian Ocean region are a cause of concern.
- Further, there is a rise in authoritarianism and China's is trying to annex Taiwan through military means.
- In the past years, China and Taiwan shared economic dependence, but China tried to weaponize these economic relations by oppressing Taiwanese business communities and cutting commodity trade.

Future Areas of Cooperation

- In the coming years, both countries could explore potential areas for collaboration. To strengthen economic relations, they could enter into agreements aimed at enhancing cooperation. There has been mutual interest from both sides in the field of investments.
- Certain specialized sectors of manufacturing, including semiconductors, bicycles, and various types of machinery, have been identified. However, there is an issue with branding, as the components often bear Chinese names, causing complications.
- The bilateral agreement between the two entities has facilitated smooth mobility and migration. As a result, a significant number of Indians have moved to Taiwan for educational and employment prospects. Likewise, there are Taiwanese educators in India imparting Chinese language instruction.

Finally, it is essential to monitor the outcomes closely. Further, the Chinese have attempted to disseminate disinformation campaigns in both India and Taiwan prior to the elections. Concerns have also been raised regarding the understanding of relations between the United States and China.

Interaction with an American and European delegation

Prepared by Mr. Umang Bhansali & Dr. Sweta Kumari

The VIF held a meeting with an American and European delegation led by Mr. James Carafano, Senior Counsellor to the President, Heritage Foundation, on 23 February. The 10-member delegation included Amb. Antonio Landi, Italy; Nathan Sales, Non-resident Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council; Mohammed Soliman, Manager, McLarty Associates; Damjan Krnjevic, Director for Policy Research, Analysis, and Publications, Institute for Development and Diplomacy (IDD); Carlos Roa, Visiting Fellow, Danube Institute; István Kiss, Senior Research Fellow, Danube Institute; Kaush Arha, President, Indo-Pacific Forum; and György Ilyas, Senior Analyst, Office of the Prime Minister's Political Director, Hungary.

The VIF was represented by Lt. Gen. R K Sawhney, Amb. Satish Chandra, Amb. Kanwal Sibal, Amb. Prabhat Shukla, Amb. Arun Kumar, Amb. Anil Trigunayat, Amb. Anil Wadhwa, Amb. Ashok Kantha, Lt. Gen. Anil Ahuja, Lt. Gen. Gautam Banerjee, Lt. Gen. Rakesh Sharma, Brig. Vinod Anand, Dr. Gulshan Rai, Dr. C. Rajamohan, Vice Adm. Satish Soni, Dr. Harindar Sekhon, Prof. Sujit Dutta, Prof. K.P. Vijayalakshmi, Capt. Anurag Bisen, Dr. Pravesh Gupta, Ms. Purna Gandhi, Ms. Heena Samant, Mr. Anurag Sharma, Mr. Umang Bhansali and Dr. Sweta Kumari.

The conversation addressed various topics such as the relationship between India and the United States, American foreign policy, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and Israel-Hamas conflict, all aimed at fostering sustainable solutions towards resolving conflicts. The meeting commenced with opening remarks and introductions which were followed by the delegations sharing their perspectives on the current situation.

US Election & Foreign Policy

- The forthcoming US elections are expected to have a substantial influence on global affairs. Nonetheless, certain trends are anticipated to persist irrespective of whether a Democratic or Republican administration takes office in the White House.
- It was emphasized that American involvement in the Indo-Pacific region, with equal emphasis on both the “Indo” and “Pacific” aspects, has crystallised as a bipartisan matter in American foreign policy. There is a widespread agreement that global stability cannot be achieved without a prosperous and secure Indo-Pacific region.
- While a Democratic or Republican administration may approach China differently, there is a shared recognition that China represents the most significant global challenge for the United States.

China

- It was noted that there is a slight adjustment in US-China relations, potentially leading to a new phase in bilateral ties, and discussions revolved around how such recalibrations might shape the future.
- The US’s tactical manoeuvring in its relationship with China was attributed to considerations of business interests, transitioning to green energy, and a reflexive US approach to engagement with China.
- However, despite these factors, the significant challenge posed by Chinese activities in the South China Sea and the resulting regional instability was acknowledged as a major obstacle to US strategy towards China.
- Additionally, the European stance to work in coordination on a strategy towards China was also tabled during the dialogue.

Relevance of India

- It was articulated that India has a crucial role to play in collaboratively shaping a stable world order. The Indian Ocean Region holds significant importance in the US Indo-Pacific strategy, given India’s prominent position in advocating for a Free

& Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).

- There was also a suggestion to expand the scope of FOIP to include East Europe by connecting it with the India Middle East Corridor (IMEC).
- Furthermore, discussions revolved around the importance of mechanisms such as QUAD and multilateral engagements such as I2U2. These platforms are seen as essential for India to deepen its relationships with the US and other like-minded nations. Through these forums, India has expanded its partnerships into domains like space, semiconductors, energy, and critical emerging technologies (CET), among others.
- Engagement in such diverse domains enhances existing relations and contributes to sustaining and strengthening regional security.
- The proactive nature of India-US relations aims to explore new areas of cooperation to elevate the relationship to greater heights.
- In addressing challenges and upholding the global order, the US seeks support from the democratic world, particularly from India.

Policy Towards Africa

- It was highlighted out that neither Democratic nor Republican administrations have developed a comprehensive strategy for Africa.
- There is a pressing need for the United States to place greater emphasis on Africa, not only due to the influence of China and Russia on the continent but also to address the needs of approximately one billion people living in 54 countries, each with different governance systems and many facing significant challenges.
- The importance of Africa was also highlighted in terms of energy requirements, and efforts by Italy in collaboration with the US towards the African continent were underscored.
- During discussions, it was anticipated that India would collaborate similarly with the US in Africa, particularly in East Africa. It was

suggested that such efforts would contribute to re-establishing global connectivity.

Global Conflicts

- As the conflict between Russia and Ukraine progresses into its third year, it was noted that any alteration in US foreign policy regarding the war would remain unaffected by a change in administration. However, there has been significant attention drawn to Russia's increasing alignment with China, marking a notable shift in geopolitical tide.
- With respect to the Israel-Hamas Conflict, the Iranian angle was projected as a serious concern for the US and it was explained on how Iran has been able to activate multiple fronts in the region.
- Furthermore, it was contended that in recent times, regardless of ongoing conflicts, the Middle Eastern region as a whole has shown a desire for integration and views regional peace as a viable way forward.
- This was further explained through examples such as I2U2, highlighting how Arab capitals are observing the Indo-US partnership in the Indo-Pacific region as an additional layer contributing to global connectivity.
- It was articulated that wars are not solutions to any conflict and no victors would emerge from the two ongoing wars (Russia-Ukraine war and Israel-Hamas war).

Insight was provided into the challenge of Climate Change and the potential significance of COP 29, set to be hosted by Hungary. A notable partisan issue in the US revolves around their energy policy, with Democrats prioritizing climate change and green energy transition, while conservatives emphasize reliance on dependable and portable energy, while also considering environmental concerns. Overall, it was collectively noted that the global order is in turmoil and there is a necessity for the world to establish a sense of common purpose and promote an inclusive response to ongoing conflicts.

Mr Wilson Beaver, Senior Policy Analyst

Prepared by Dr Saroj Bishoyi

On 22 February, the VIF organized an interaction with the visiting US Senior Policy Analyst, Mr Wilson Beaver. Mr Beaver focuses on defence budgeting at the Heritage Foundation's Allison Center for National Security, and currently he is working on a report on US-Indian defence cooperation and India's defence spending. The meeting was attended by Lt Gen R. K. Sawhney, Lt Gen Rakesh Sharma, Lt Gen Anil Ahuja, Lt Gen Gautam Banerjee, Brig Vinod Anand, Capt. Anurag Bisen Col Sunil Yadav, Dr Sweta Kumari, Mr Anurag Sharma, and Dr. Saroj Bishoyi from the VIF.

Lt Gen R.K. Sawhney, Centre Head and Senior Fellow, made the opening remarks, highlighting the areas of research undertaken by the VIF including national security, geopolitics, geo-economics and civilizational studies. Mr Beaver provided an overview of US defence and strategy priorities, including defence budgeting, the ongoing Ukraine war, US-China rivalry, geopolitical developments in Indo-Pacific, India-US defence relationship and policy priority for the next conservative administration. In response, Gen Sawhney outlined the evolving India-US strategic partnership and underscored the importance of building a long-term strategic partnership between the two countries.

This was followed by a brain storming discussion on pertinent issues, including the changing nature of warfare, role of emerging technologies, lessons from the Ukraine war, China's increasing military power and assertiveness, US China strategy, challenges and opportunities in building a long-term India-US defence and security cooperation.

It was brought out that the Ukraine war, which began in February 2022, has undergone significant changes over the past two years. The conflict

has evolved considerably, with shifts in doctrine, tactics, weaponry, and the composition of forces. Presently, a non-kinetic warfare is unfolding, marked by the increasing utilization of drones, which is altering the nature of warfare. The Ukraine war serves as a lesson, demonstrating that a much smaller power can inflict significant losses on a larger adversary, despite only possessing a fraction of the latter's economy. Consequently, China is now anticipating and preparing for a different type of warfare. In this regard, the Chinese approach to drone development, both in civilian and military contexts, is noteworthy. This development is particularly relevant to asymmetric warfare and is rapidly converging with established military practices. As a result, all major powers find themselves at a disadvantage. The US, for instance, faces challenges in countering drone attacks by groups such as the Houthis, who operate with significantly lower-cost equipment compared to traditional military assets. Similarly, China is confronted with similar issues. Therefore, if countries in the Indo-Pacific region were to develop capacities on a larger scale than China, it could prove highly disadvantageous for China, similar to the impact of the Ukraine conflict on Russia.

Currently, the United States is downplaying the threat posed by China, particularly in terms of budget allocation for countering China. This is partly due to China's own underreporting of its defence budget. As a result, there is a lack of clarity in understanding Chinese military spending and the extent of the challenge it presents to the US, its allies, and partners. It is crucial to prioritise redirecting US policy towards Asia and placing greater emphasis on deterring China, rather than focusing primarily on secondary threats to the United States. This is because China's economy is rapidly approaching parity with that of the United States, and China is the only power capable of significantly challenging US interests in a manner that poses a serious threat to the average American citizen.

China's military spending is rising, making it challenging for India to maintain parity due to significant economic and technological disparities between the two nations. China's robust economy facilitated rapid defence modernization, leveraging emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence, data analytics, advanced chips, and cyber capabilities, bolstered by Civil-Military Fusion. Additionally, China has deployed numerous troops along the Indian border and constructed extensive infrastructure. India's military capabilities are strained to match this

challenge, necessitating innovation in cost-effective weapon systems to effectively counter the Chinese threat.

As the US and India collaborate to advance their mutual security and strategic interests, they perceive China as a shared challenge. While the US views China as its most significant challenge affecting national security, technological dominance, and the preservation of a free and open international system, India sees China's expanding military prowess and assertiveness as its primary security concern. Over the past three years, China has substantially developed infrastructure and transformed the Tibetan plateau, constructing airfields, helipads, and permanent settlements, while the Chinese PLA consistently engages in pushing back Indian forces. These threats are persistent and require collective action to deter China. While the US acknowledges the magnitude of the challenge posed by China, it cannot address it alone. Effective deterrence demands a collaborative effort involving US allies and partners across Asia, including Australia, India, and Japan.

To establish a durable defence and security partnership, it is imperative to transition current cooperation towards joint development and production of defence and strategic technologies, necessitating technology sharing from the US to India. Despite initiatives like DTTI, iCET, and INDUS-X, progress in this realm has been limited due to bureaucratic hurdles and lingering Cold War mentalities. The escalating costs of US-made weaponry pose a significant challenge. Additionally, there is a trust issue, with the US prioritizing mechanisms such as NATO and AUKUS, over India. Moreover, differences persist over India's procurement of oil and arms from Russia, invoking CAATSA, and US support for Khalistan activist Gurbhagat Singh Pannun, accused of terrorism by India. Nonetheless, the India-US relationship has evolved, with both sides engaging at the highest levels to address perennial issues and advance their mutual security and strategic interests.

Interaction with SWIFT

Prepared by Prerna Gandhi

The VIF hosted a delegation from SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications) on 21st February 2024. The delegation members included Mr Kiran Shetty, CEO & Regional Head, SWIFT, India & South Asia, Mr Hayden Allan, Global Head of Public Affairs, SWIFT and Mr Karan Bhirani, Brunswick Group, India. Lt Gen Sawhney, Lt Gen Rakesh Sharma, Vice Admiral Satish Soni, Brig Vinod Anand, Col Sunil Yadav, Capt Anurag Bisen, Dr Saroj Bishoyi, Dr Arpita Anant, and Ms Prerna Gandhi attended the meeting from VIF side. The discussion ranged from role of SWIFT in today's international financial architecture to the growing geopolitical contours of SWIFT and increasing sanctions involving SWIFT. Some of the salient points made were:

SWIFT was founded in Brussels in 1973, with 239 participating financial institutions from 15 countries. Currently, SWIFT is used by more than 11,000 banking institutions located in over 200 countries across the world, barring North Korea. Member institutions send an average of 42 million SWIFT messages per day. That amounts to communicating the entirety of world GDP every 3 days. The main responsibility of SWIFT is to hold, carry and clear funds via a secure and encrypted communication. As a global utility, SWIFT provides the pipework for banks and other financial institutions to talk to each other. SWIFT isn't owned by any single entity. Rather, it is a member-owned cooperative whose shareholders represent around 3,500 member organisations. Headquartered in La Hulpe, Belgium, the system is overseen by the central banks of the G10 countries, the European Central Bank, and the National Bank of Belgium.

SWIFT is currency agnostic as all currencies can be communicated in the SWIFT network. Dollar remains the dominant currency and drives

the increasing use of sanctions rather than the SWIFT platform per se through screening lists, designated entities etc. Presently, SWIFT sees an increasing role in anti-money laundering, sanctions screening, financial innovations such as central bank digital currencies etc. However, rather than being an execution agency, SWIFT's role is to provide lists and advise user community to abide by the regulations of that respective jurisdiction. Along with speed and transparency, there is increasing prioritization of cyber security by SWIFT. Swift's Customer Security Programme (CSP) helps financial institutions ensure their defences against cyberattacks are up to date and effective, to protect the integrity of the wider financial network. Users compare the security measures they have implemented with those detailed in the Customer Security Controls Framework (CSCF), before attesting their level of compliance annually.

The Reserve Bank of India wanted a harmonised system of digital payments to be established and wanted the payments data to remain within the country, hence it invited SWIFT to form an Indian company in 2016. SWIFT India is a joint venture established under Indian law between public and private sector Indian banks and SWIFT SC, a community-based co-operative headquartered in Belgium. SWIFT India is headquartered in Mumbai. Ms Arundhati Bhattacharya is the chairwoman of the board of directors.

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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