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INDIA

VIF PERSPECTIVE

ISSUES AND TRENDS




# SECURING INDIA

STRENGTHENING INDIA'S NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

NEIGHBOURHOOD—IMMEDIATE & EXTENDED • CIVILISATIONAL VISION

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Geopolitics is witnessing a flux not seen in decades, treading an uncertain path in the hope to arrive at a new equilibrium. India's status in this equipoise, as and when it is achieved will be decided by how deftly it deals with the changes the world is witnessing today—a combination of weakening of US as a global power and its inward-looking approach; the rise of China and its extraordinary, even dubious support for Pakistan; the 'great game' being played in West Asia and Afghanistan—not to forget, India's own challenges of manoeuvring the largest democracy in the world—the nation of 1.3 billion—on the path of strength and development.

If there could be a group of experts who could analyse this complex state of shifting loyalties, brokering of alliances and reversal of strategies, in an illuminating manner, this publication by one of India's most respected think tanks, Vivekananda International Foundation, brings them all together. They decode not just the conventional security scenario but focus on the newer frontiers of competition and cooperation—cyber security and space—as also on India's economy, environment and what has been one of its finest gifts to the world—civilisational vision.

India's most formidable practitioners of statecraft—diplomats, defence professionals, along with some of the most respected scholars, provide a highly analytical and authoritative vision, not just for securing India but in understanding the current geostrategic realpolitik, as it pans out, making this an essential reading, not just for professionals engaged in diplomacy and security, but for the uninitiated as well.

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First published 2017

Photographs: pp 2, 46, 74, 93, 94, 122, 144, 157, 158: commons.wikimedia.org; p 1: narendramodi.in;  
p 20: vsmandal.org; p 36: mygov.in; p 57: 4gwar.wordpress.com, Sergeant Tyler C Gregory; pp 58, 73:  
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ISBN 978-81-8328-510-0

*Published by*  
Wisdom Tree  
4779/23, Ansari Road  
Darya Ganj, New Delhi-110 002  
Ph.: 011-23247966/67/68  
wisdomtreebooks@gmail.com

Printed in India

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## Preface

As a sovereign, democratic nation, we are just seventy years in the making. Our expressions of various aspects of freedoms, rights and aspirations, therefore, have—of necessity—to be conceived, nurtured and articulated with great degree of deliberations. Obviously, such discussions have to be rooted in innate national wisdom covering political, strategic, administrative and economic experiences. The commitment to national consolidation is rendered more challenging when tested against the diversities of our nationhood and adversities imposed by geopolitical avarice in our neighbourhood.

The Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) was founded nearly a decade ago to sustain, promote and catalyse a noble commitment to our nationalist consolidation. In this pursuit, the Foundation has found its cause from the powerful and patriotic teachings of Swami Vivekananda while the ever-venerated Vivekananda Kendra gave our Foundation a platform for its institutional functions. That made it possible for a group of highly regarded professionals from the fields of security, military, diplomacy, economics to generate ideas in the VIF and stimulate actions for greater national security and prosperity.

The analyses, prognoses and options articulated by scholars of the Foundation have thus made a mark in shaping opinion amongst our higher State, public and private functionaries. Similarly, our factual, prejudice-free and candid confabulations with highly regarded think tanks and top intellectuals of the larger world has made it possible for the Foundation to gain deeper insight into the various challenges facing India, and so helped us in our search for appropriate policy options for the country.

VIF has been disseminating its analytical papers and reports through its website [www.vifindia.org](http://www.vifindia.org). In this endeavour, occasional papers, monographs and books having

long-term applicability are being published both in the printed form and in the e-version. This year, we decided to take another stride by requesting some of the most renowned experts in the strategic circles to pen down their observations on subjects of their expertise. These have been largely related to the aspect of 'Securing India' which has been carried as the central theme for this year's publication. These enlightening and thought-provoking essays have been compiled in the form of a set of incisive papers for dissemination as our inaugural publication: *VIF Perspective: Issues and Trends*.

There are in all fifteen papers of various lengths, each devoted to dissection of one of the salient aspects of our nation building. Papers of such nature, wherein deep knowledge and understandings have been packaged with experience and insight, are generally tedious to access for the thinking community at large. It has, therefore, been our effort to ease that avenue to analyses, enquiry and wisdom through the medium of this publication.

I am sanguine that the publication, *VIF Perspective: Issues and Trends*, would serve its purpose in its cognitive reach-out to the State, academic, public and private institutions and both at national and international levels.

Jai Hind!



April 2017  
New Delhi

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'NC Vij', with a horizontal line underneath.

—General NC Vij  
Director

Vivekananda International Foundation





MO



# Strengthening India's Nuclear Deterrence

GENERAL NC VIJ, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM,

AND

VIF EXPERT GROUP

## *Abstract*

*This paper looks at India's nuclear deterrence as it exists today and recommends ways to strengthen it by identifying current gaps and suggesting remedies to address these. This exercise is driven by a two-fold requirement: First, to generate options to counter the ongoing nuclear brinkmanship by Pakistan; and secondly, to examine the larger issues of India's nuclear doctrine in context of both Pakistan and China.*

*The paper also covers the genesis of Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) and examines the impact of these on India's nuclear deterrence. Measures to restore the credibility of India's nuclear deterrence in a responsible and credible manner, through a wider spectrum of counter measures, have also been analysed in this paper.*

## INDIA'S NUCLEAR DETERRENCE: GAPS AND REMEDIES

### SALIENT POINTS OF INDIA'S NUCLEAR DOCTRINE

In essence, the salient points of India's nuclear doctrine as per the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) notification of 4 January 2003 are that India will build up and maintain a 'credible minimum deterrence' while following a 'No First Use' (NFU) policy. It proceeds to elaborate that India will use nuclear weapons only in retaliation against nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere and that retaliation will be 'massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage'. Further, nuclear weapons would not be used against non-nuclear weapon States; however, the option of retaliating with nuclear

weapons in the event of a major attack against it with biological or chemical weapons will be open. Finally, retaliatory nuclear attacks will be authorised only by the civilian political leadership through the Nuclear Command Authority (NCA).

It is against the backdrop of the above-mentioned features of India's nuclear doctrine and the contemporary nuclear developments in the region that various contextual issues are examined in this paper.

#### THE DILEMMA OF NUCLEAR RESPONSE

In its promulgation of 'massive retaliation' to cause 'unacceptable damage', India's nuclear deterrence is but a 'one massive leap' response against one and every situation which India wants its potential adversaries to register. In that stance—essentially a mind game—as conceived by the architects of India's nuclear doctrine, lies the punch of India's deterrence. Another cardinal feature of the Indian doctrine is related to its apex command and control. In that, it is stated unambiguously that retaliatory nuclear response could only be authorised by the civilian political leadership through the NCA.

In contrast, Pakistan follows a nuclear 'first-use' policy. This policy more or less propagates Pakistan's policy of resorting to thwart any possible Indian aggression with its superior conventional forces. In late 2001, the Pakistan NCA defined their nuclear 'red lines' in the form of four potential thresholds. These were later published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). It is relevant to note that these formulations are mere pronouncements by Pakistan's NCA; there *per se* is no formally promulgated nuclear doctrine or nuclear strategy by the State. Arguably therefore, these thresholds are merely stated positions at a point in time and may well be subject to change at any time based on the ever-changing dynamics of India–Pakistan relations. Presently, the said thresholds stand stated as under:

- **Spatial Threshold.** This threshold is crossed if and when the Indian military forces penetrate on a large scale into Pakistan's territory which Pakistan is unable to thwart. The actual limits of this penetration have been left to the imagination of the analysts; the general belief is that it could be the line of Indus River—the lifeline of Pakistan. Penetration of Indian forces up to the Indus Valley and capture of key objectives along its most sensitive eastern territorial belt is therefore considered to be a situation serious enough for Pakistan to trigger nuclear first use.
- **Military Threshold.** Comprehensive destruction of a large part of its conventional forces by Indian offensive, particularly the armoured and air forces, could lead to Pakistan resorting to nuclear response. Attack on nuclear installations, or use of chemical or biological weapons against Pakistan could also trigger nuclear response.

- **Economic Threshold.** This threshold refers to a possible Indian naval blockade of the Sindh province or the Makran Coast of Baluchistan province, significant reduction of Pakistan's share of Indus, Jhelum and Chenab rivers, or the capture of vital centres and arteries of Pakistan's core economic activities.
- **Political Threshold.** Political or serious internal destabilisation that could lead to a stage when Pakistan's national integrity is threatened.

A read through of the above-mentioned thresholds suggests that these have been kept deliberately vague and sweeping to the extent that Pakistan's use of nuclear weapons might not necessarily be linked just to conventional military thrusts but it could also be triggered by economic blockade and political destabilisation. But the moot question is that why should India create such a situation that Pakistan must reach for its nuclear button? The answer lies in Pakistan's core purpose: all the nuclear posturing is to keep itself unrestrained from bleeding India with sub-conventional aggression in various forms, without having to suffer military consequences from a conventionally stronger India. With Pakistan's compulsively revisionist ideology, that is the crux of the whole issue—continuation of sub-conventional aggression with immunity, that is, restraining the victim from retaliating with its conventionally superior forces.

On the conventional front, India followed what was called as the Sunderji Doctrine. As per this doctrine, while the seven 'Holding Corps' of the Indian Army deployed along the Indo-Pakistan Border had only limited offensive capability that was just adequate to check any possible cross-border aggression from Pakistan, the main punch of offensive power rested with the three 'Strike Corps', based well away from the border, in the hinterland. Thus while the Holding Corps contained Pakistan's aggression, Strike Corps were to mobilise from their peacetime locations and launch punitive counter-offensives. Post Pakistan's formal nuclearisation, and in anticipation of its possible 'first-use' of nuclear weapons in such scenarios, the Indian Army prepared itself to conduct what it termed as 'conventional operations under a nuclear overhang', wherein the offensive operations were slated to culminate short of what could be construed as Pakistan's nuclear threshold.

Limitations of the Indian doctrine became evident during the 'Operation Parakram', which was launched after the Pakistani terrorists' attack on the Indian parliament on 13 December 2001. Herein, it took nearly three weeks for the strike forces to mobilise, thus giving not only adequate time for Pakistan to be operationally prepared, but also for the international community to intervene by urging India to exercise restraint. The Doctrine thus revealed three main weaknesses. Firstly, it was realised that the Strike Corps were far too large and located far away to make it possible for them to mobilise for offensive in quick time. Secondly, given the levels of battle transparency that existed even during that

time over a decade ago, movement of such large forces across the length and breadth of the country just could not be shrouded, whereas the long mobilisation period negated the achievement of strategic surprise. And lastly, lack of offensive power with the Holding Corps prevented them from undertaking significant offensive operations to seize fleeting opportunities.

In order to address the above weaknesses, a new doctrinal development took place in the aftermath of Operation Parakram. Colloquially referred to as the ‘Cold Start Doctrine’—conceived in General Vij’s time—and meant to address the three weaknesses as stated above, this development made a modification to the existing defence posture. It aimed to establish a proactive strategic stance with the capability to launch conventional offensives against Pakistan, and involved rapid multiple thrusts by Indian mechanised forces, supported by air, over a wide front across the Punjab and Rajasthan sectors. Needless to state that India meant to keep the objectives limited to relatively shallow depths and so deny Pakistan any provocation to use its nuclear weapons. The new doctrine thus addressed the lacunae experienced during Operation Parakram.

#### INTRODUCTION OF TNWs IN THE EQUATION

At this stage, Pakistan, having realised that its nuclear posturing, as defined by its nuclear thresholds, had been unhinged by the Indian strategy of opting for shallow multiple offensive thrusts astride a wide front, sought to recalibrate its response strategy. Starting with a series of joint military exercises by the name of ‘Azm-e-Nau III’, it focused on an offensive-defence type of response to counter the Cold Start Doctrine. One significant fallout of this focus was the testing of ‘Nasr’ (Hatf IX), a short-range ballistic missile (SRBM) with a range of 60 km. Nasr is a multiple launch rocket system capable of carrying four ready-to-fire nuclear-capable missiles with a weapon yield in the region of 0.5 to 15 kilo tonne. Starting from its first flight test on 19 Apr 2011, the missile was claimed to be operational on 5 October 2013. In the aftermath of induction of Nasr SRBM, Lt Gen Khalid Ahmed Kidwai, the then director general of Pakistan’s Strategic Plans Division (SPD) stated that in Nasr, Pakistan had consolidated its nuclear deterrence at all levels of the threat spectrum—that is, at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. It is relevant to note here that in the ‘Hatf’ series of surface-to-surface missiles (SSM), Pakistan possesses the nuclear-capable Shaheen I (Hatf IV–750 km), Shaheen IA (1100 km), Shaheen II (Hatf VI–2000 km), Shaheen III (2750 km), Babur (Hatf VII Cruise–700 Km) and Nasr (Hatf IX SRBM–60 Km). This inventory roughly spans the complete range of strategic, operational and tactical levels of warfare.

Consequent to the ‘Azm-e-Nau III’ military exercises, Pakistan stated that the development of ‘Nasr’ SSM was in response to India’s Cold Start Doctrine. This impression

is sustained by Pakistan's possession of its newly operationalised arsenal of Nasr 'low yield' or 'tactical nuclear weapons' (TNW)—essentially counter-force weapons—which are considered to be useable within a localised battlefield space, with limited and localised fallout-effects, to close India's option of undertaking even shallow-objective offensives. Thus through hints, insinuations and posturing, Pakistan implies to convey the message that its nuclear red line, aimed at defeating even limited conventional Indian offensive, stands substantially lowered, and that the strategic 'space' left for India to prosecute conventional offensive has shrunk further. Pakistani strategists proclaim that TNWs are war-fighting weapons; but that stated, it has been clarified that the competence to authorise the use of such weapons will remain to be with the Political Council of the NCA. This clarification is aimed at allaying the universal concern regarding the option of employing TNWs being left to local or theatre commanders.

With the above posture of nuclear brinkmanship in place, Pakistan continues to engage in acts of bloody cross-border aggression—terror attacks in Mumbai, Pathankot, Uri, Nagrota etc. to cite just a few. In so doing, Pakistani strategists draw assurance from their conviction that their Indian counterparts, understanding that Pakistan's thresholds of nuclear weapons-use has indeed been further lowered, are restrained from retaliating with punitive conventional strikes upon even shallow objectives. On their part, every time a hostile cross-border attack is perpetrated from Pakistan, Indian leaders have to contend with a decision dilemma regarding putting boots across the border in order to make the intransigent pay for its mischief. One of the factors of this hesitation is the matter of inviting Pakistan's use of low-yield weapons, or what it calls as 'battlefield nuclear weapon', in retaliation to India's punitive operations.

As stated, Pakistani strategists consider that even if India opted to retaliate by conventional offensive action through whatever limited strategic 'space' to do so was still left open for it under the aforementioned 'nuclear overhang', Pakistan could use low destructivity of TNWs to recoil such offensives. In their opinion, Pakistan could do so with minimal chances of India responding with 'massive' nuclear retaliation because such a situation could make it hard for Indian leaders to find justification for infliction of disproportionate damage to avenge against what limited damage the TNWs could inflict. There is indeed a serious decision dilemma amongst many of the Indian strategic community who find it hard to justify that in response to Pakistan's use of low-yield tactical battlefield nuclear weapons, the Indian leadership would react by wiping out a few cities in Pakistan—besides opening up the escalatory ladder of nuclear exchange culminating into mutual destruction. In sum, it is in the incredulity of India's policy of 'one massive leap' of massive response in their perception that emboldens Pakistan in playing the game of nuclear brinkmanship. Thus, while Pakistan's nuclear brinkmanship

succeeds, continuous acts of cross-border aggression are perpetrated under its umbrella. The question therefore arises as to who is actually getting deterred—India or Pakistan?

In the overall context, the concern is that even a limited conventional operation to punish Pakistan's proxy war could provoke Pakistan's use of TNWs against Indian forces. In that eventuality, the Indian decision-makers might find that any nuclear retaliation could eventually snowball into an uncontrollable nuclear war, something that was neither desirable nor in India's national interest. Conversely, by its passive inaction against Pakistan's relentless aggression, India would deter itself, thus allowing Pakistan's nuclear brinkmanship to succeed. More worryingly, that kind of policy passivity could lead to the Indian decision-makers inferring that the 'space' left for prosecution of conventional offensive had purportedly shrunk to inconsequential levels, and therefore there could be no option left but to sequester India's conventional power and continue to stoically suffer the consequences of Pakistan's proxy war.

Pakistan's possession of the Nasr SSM has cropped up another significant asymmetry against Indian forces, wherein the adversary has battlefield nuclear weapons which are clearly intended to be used while the own side does not possess a matching capability. The human angle to such grave asymmetry manifests by the unwelcome morale effect upon the field force commanders and the troops they command. Adversary's use of nuclear weapons, even if low-yield and localised-effect, would oblige the troops to fight through the nuclear attack with only the conventional weapons that they possess. Such feeling of inequality does not auger well for fighting morale and thus may fault the outcome of war.

#### RELEVANCE OF LOW-YIELD WEAPONS IN OWN CONTEXT

To be clear of the above discussed adverse asymmetry—mental, morale and physical—the sensible option for India may be to have its own low-yield nuclear weapons.

But converse opinions contend that by reacting to Pakistan's game of fielding low-yield nuclear weapons in a tit-for-tat mode, India will actually debilitate the sanctity of its nuclear deterrence, anchored as it is upon the declaration of inflicting 'massive retaliation with unacceptable damage' against any use of nuclear weapon, of any yield, by the adversary. India would thus signal to Pakistan that a compromise of proportional or graduated response would be acceptable in the gamut of India's nuclear deterrence. That understanding would in turn encourage Pakistan to brandish its TNWs—or battlefield nuclear weapons—even against India's small and shallow conventional offensive actions, and limit India's retaliation to nothing more than similar low-yield weapon counter-attack. In such a case, the keys to 'conventional stalemate' as well as 'escalation control' would be in Pakistan's hands, for it to continue with its mission of bleeding India with



impunity while India's nuclear as well as conventional deterrence remains stalled. This opinion therefore contends that India's policy of 'massive retaliation' should remain to be in force in order to deter Pakistan from using its TNWs in the battlefield for the fear of inviting 'unacceptable damage'. The inference drawn in this argument therefore is that India does not require low-yield nuclear weaponry in its nuclear arsenal.

The case for maintenance of status quo is, however, countered by the hard reality that in spite of the expression of India's resolve to wreck retribution by 'massive retaliation to inflict unacceptable damage', Pakistan remains comfortable in its belief that in the contingency of its using low-yield, limited-effect weapons in a localised battlefield, the 'one massive leap' response of 'massive retaliation'—being maximalist and disproportionate over-reaction besides being escalatory—is unlikely to prevail over India's conscious political decision dilemma. Such comfort of immunity emboldens Pakistan to indulge in its unending misadventures like the proxy war and cross-border terrorism activities all over India. Indeed, that perception of immunity is the centre pillar of Pakistan's nuclear brinkmanship. On the other hand, accommodating TNWs within India's existing nuclear doctrine would only add to its options of weapon selection without compromising its provisions of 'massive retaliation' and 'unacceptable damage'. It would thus curb Pakistan's nuclear brinkmanship.

#### CASE FOR INDIA'S POSSESSION OF LOW-YIELD WEAPONS

The bottom line in the Indo-Pak context is that while it is universally accepted that nuclear weapons are political weapons of deterrence, Pakistan subscribes to the notion that its battlefield nuclear weapons are an extension of the country's conventional deterrent capability—'full spectrum capability' so to state. This 'make-believe stance' however does not change the reality—and each side knows it too well—that nuclear weapons, irrespective of the yield, remain very much the political weapons of deterrence, and that once started, a nuclear exchange just cannot be controlled from spiralling out of control into an all-out nuclear war. That indeed is abhorrent because no nation wants to destroy its civilisation and progress made over time.

As to Pakistan's TNWs, there are basically three schools of thought. According to the first school, TNWs merely serve to extend Pakistan's deterrence posture further down the conflict-intensity spectrum. The second school believes that it indicates a shift in strategy from deterrence to nuclear war-fighting; while the third school has questioned the utility of TNWs in stopping India's offensives—it is estimated that hundreds of TNWs would be needed to really attrite the multiple-thrust line-mechanised attacks across a wide front.

Whatever be the case, the arguments in favour of India opting to possess TMWs are hinged at the following considerations:

- If Pakistan intends to put TNWs to military use, then it would be necessary for India to have the flexibility of possessing a matching capability in addition to its maximalist response of massive retaliation. In any case, use or otherwise of nuclear weapons of various ranges, yields and destructive effects would be decided by India according to its own plans, and in such cases it is always preferable to have more options.
- If Pakistan's possession of TNWs is to bolster its posture in deterring India across the full spectrum of strategic, operational and tactical levels of warfare, then it would make sense for India to repudiate that kind of imposition, particularly at the tactical level wherein lies the promise of India's retaliation.
- With the comfort of believing in incredulity of India's 'one massive leap' response, if Pakistan, by flouting its TNWs, seeks immunity from the consequences of its hostilities against India, then India has no option but to keep its own options secure—that of tactical retribution through offensive strikes. Such retribution would require India to possess TNWs, and display it to derail Pakistan's new-found notion of 'full spectrum' immunity.
- A most significant advantage of possessing TNWs, irrespective of its intended use, would be in allaying misgivings in the minds of our commanders and troops, that of our forces being less capable in any way as compared to the adversary. It would also allow the Indian leadership to be instilled with more conviction and confidence and freedom to make the desired decision at the time of reckoning. With low-yield weapons in our arsenal too, the feeling of a perceived inequality among the Indian forces would be obliterated, and India's deterrence-deficit against Pakistan would be overcome to good extent.

It is relevant to note that during India's nuclear tests in 1998, out of the five nuclear weapons, the first group consisted of a thermonuclear device (Shakti I), the second was the fission device (Shakti II) and the third was a sub-kiloton device (Shakti III). Nearly two decades later, and with 'Prithvi' series of SSMs well operationalised, it may be fairly simple for India to possess low-yield weapons, with no obligation to revise its nuclear doctrine. To reiterate, by implication, the possession of low-yield weapons to maintain a complete range of nuclear arsenal would expand the perceived 'space' for India to prosecute offensive conventional operations to disarm the habitual troublemaker—Pakistan.

Nuclear deterrence, as a subset of comprehensive national power (CNP), rests on three pillars. In that, while warheads of tactical, operational and strategic yields form the first pillar, the triad of delivery capability on land, sea and air make up for the second one. Finally, the third pillar is the decision, command, control and execution structure that is dedicated to the management of nuclear posture as defined in the nuclear doctrine.

The credibility of nuclear deterrence being derived from the combined strength of all the three pillars and as it is registered by the adversary, it is needless to state that strengthening of nuclear deterrence requires reinforcing all the above three pillars. The added option of India's possession of low-yield weapons would bolster the effectiveness of all the above listed pillars with the least of effort and maximum effect.

### ON DETERRENCE OTHER THAN NUCLEAR

While salience of the above-mentioned three pillars is true of nuclear deterrence, there is another very strong and expanding domain of developing nuclear deterrence capability in the non-nuclear domain. This domain of deterrence has lately assumed tremendous significance given the netcentricity of the future battlefield and its near-total dependence on the electromagnetic spectrum.

The tools of such a deterrence arsenal make use of enablers like electronic warfare, cyberwarfare and other soft kill means. The aim is to interfere, hack and debilitate adversary's surveillance networks, target acquisition capability, missile guidance capability and more, as also, to strike at its command and control networks controlling nuclear launch. The soft kill arsenal is actually huge in range and depth and is only limited by the imagination of the attacker and the technologies at hand.

The above arsenal, cumulatively referred to as electronic combat capability (ECC), spans both the offensive, as well as the defensive domains. Hierarchically, it covers the continuum starting at the national level, where it manifests as the policy and decision-making functions, and comes down to the armed forces level where execution of the said policies and decisions is to take place in a manner and sequence to be stated in our national war fighting doctrine. Needless to mention that the above 'teeth' capability needs to be meshed with the 'flesh' consisting of requisite organisations, infrastructure and the 'skin ware' with required skills and training.

In specifics, the ECC stated above would comprise electronic warfare including non-nuclear e-bombs, cyberwarfare, electromagnetic (EM) space management, EM spectrum warfare, electronic deception, optical warfare, counter-space operations and appropriate platforms for operations on land, sea, air and space. Exercise of this capability would seriously degrade the adversary's command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (C4ISTAR) systems, weapon systems, navigation, guidance and logistics, and impede his overall battlefield transparency while providing to own forces real-time intelligence and assist them in counter-intelligence.

In fact, so exponentially galloping is the pace of technology and information flow in the current era that these two verticals are going to be the new 'normals' in the future battlefield. With that as the stark reality whose time has come, it is imperative that we must develop the capability of unimpeded use of these while negating that option to

our adversary. This requirement, in the context of this paper, relates to the vertical of generating such ECC that adds strength to our nuclear deterrence by denying the use of such technologies and information flow to the adversary that may be employed in delivery of his nuclear punch—in other words, first strike. The areas to be targeted by own ECC must encompass soft-crippling adversary's those battle function areas end-to-end which unfold in the delivery of the nuclear strike. These may include the adversary's surveillance of battle space, target acquisition, command and control structures to include hierarchical chain of authorisations and successive levels of control, and finally, to cripple, dissuade and waylay the electronics and electromagnetic systems that are involved in his guidance and control of the delivery means in flight—a very tall order, no doubt.

To address the above requirement in the manner stated above is such a huge vertical and has so many complex requirements that it will call for a corresponding organisational transformation at successive levels of command. Such a transformation will aim to develop capabilities of electronic interference and soft kill means in our arsenal that will aim to cripple adversary's nuclear punch as a whole (surveillance, target acquisition, command and control et al) thereby providing strength to our nuclear deterrence by 'means other than nuclear'. Such a capability, if well disseminated will add considerable credibility to our deterrence. That such a capability needs to be developed as a part of strengthening our nuclear deterrence is a strategic imperative.

### REVISITING THE POLICY OF 'NO FIRST USE' AND 'MASSIVE RETALIATION'

'No First Use' (NFU) of nuclear weapons and the resolve to inflict 'massive retaliation' against the initiator of nuclear attack are the central pillars of India's nuclear response policy. Since there is much discussion on the issue, it would be in order to examine if there is any need to modify that policy.

One of the primary reasons of opting for the NFU policy post the nuclear weapon tests in 1998 was to assure the world of India's responsible intent. Indeed, that stance has reinforced the world view of India as a responsible nuclear power, which in turn has yielded several positives at various international confabulations, like the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Agreement and acceptability from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). Besides, the policy of NFU, read with the stipulations of 'credible minimum deterrence' (CMD), and 'massive retaliation to inflict unacceptable damage' also offer certain implied advantages. Briefly put, these expressions absolve India from engaging in nuclear arms race and yet impose adequate level of deterrence for the adversaries to desist against the pain of having to suffer the unwanted consequences of India's debilitating nuclear retaliation. Indeed, this is a policy that has held well on a couple of occasions during the last two decades.

By similar considerations, there is no requirement to redefine the expression 'massive retaliation' either with the description of 'punitive retaliation' that had been used in the draft doctrine, or by adding new qualifications to it. In fact, retracing to the draft stage expression is likely to signal an ambivalent intent on India's part and that is a very dangerous situation in the context of nuclear posturing. Indeed, that might be viewed as India's stance shifting to accommodate proportional or graduated response to the adversary's first strike, which in any case is not repudiated in India's nuclear doctrine. Such a signal would compromise the basic feature of India's nuclear doctrine without the accrual of any corresponding advantage. Conversely, India will get embroiled into warhead-matching, numbers game and readiness stress—all this just to promote a weapon which the world considers to be unusable in war.

Truly, a doctrine cannot be so rigid and fixated that it leaves no scope for periodic review or modification if found necessary. Indeed, it will remain India's sovereign right not only to revisit its nuclear doctrine but also to interpret its policy articulations in the manner as considered congruent to national interests. However, our current nuclear doctrine allows the advantages of flexible interpretation of its expressions and articulations without necessitating any change. There is nothing to debar India from resorting to nuclear warfare at tactical or strategic levels if and when it cannot avoid doing so, nor does it tie India's commitment to any preconceived scale of its own 'massive retaliation' and the adversary's 'unacceptable damage'. In the overall analysis therefore, it should be very clear to all parties that 'India will retain the right to defend itself in whatever manner it deems fit'.

At this stage of discussion on India's nuclear deterrence, it would be necessary to delve into our other nuclear neighbour and Pakistan's strong ally China's nuclear policy and its implications.

#### ASSESSMENT OF CHINA'S NUCLEAR STRATEGY

The Chinese Government published its nuclear strategy in 2005. However, in its most articulated Defence White Paper of 2013, there was no specific reference to its nuclear NFU policy, leading to speculation on whether China was moving away from its previous stance. That speculation was rested in China's white paper on 'China's Military Strategy' of May 2015, wherein the Chinese Government reiterated that 'China has always pursued the Policy of NFU of nuclear weapons and has adhered to a self-defensive nuclear strategy that is defensive in nature'. Some other salient points stated in this white paper are:

- China's nuclear force is a strategic cornerstone for safeguarding its national sovereignty and security.
- China will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon

States, or in nuclear-weapon free zones, and will never enter into a nuclear arms race with any other country.

- China would continue to maintain its nuclear capabilities at the minimum level required to maintain national security.
- China will optimise its nuclear force structure, improve strategic warning, command and control, missile penetration, rapid reaction, survivability and protection, and deter other countries from using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against China.

Notwithstanding all that has been stated, the paper also states that China upholds the principal of ‘counter-attack in self-defence’ and limited development of nuclear weapons to maintain a ‘credible nuclear deterrent force’. At the same time, there is reiteration of the stance that China does not consider nuclear weapons as offensive weapons for first use.

Strategy analysts tend to argue that China’s nuclear deterrence is basically focused on the United States (US); the India factor does not materially affect the concerns of Chinese strategists. Being aware of the military and technological gap between the two, they do not consider that India could have the capability to pose military threat to China. China’s pronouncements too refute the general perception that India chose to develop nuclear weapons to save itself from China’s nuclear arm-twisting, and instead ascribes the cause to India’s purported great power ambitions. According to Chinese experts, the mention of China during the 1998 tests was made to address domestic opposition and to help legitimise the tests to the international community. To that extent, India’s nuclear capability may not seriously impact on China’s policy articulations on nuclear deterrence, strategic stability or security threats.

Besides India’s adverse capability gap, experts further opine that China does not consider that India would seriously intend to go to war against it either on nuclear or on conventional front, even if escalation of tension on account of the border dispute remains plausible. This assessment is based on India’s strategic culture wherein China feels that India will be more cautious and would not take any provocative action that might lead to a war with China. In the context of China–Pakistan alliance, experts like Toby Dalton and George Perkovich opine that in any Indo-Pakistan confrontation, while creation of heightened tension is likely, China is unlikely to intervene with its own nuclear forces, especially if India does not initiate the use of nuclear weapons in the conflict.

While the above perceptions of the nuclear experts might stand considered at one pole of strategic thinking, it will also be a grave mistake to stand fixated in the belief that China does not consider India as a security threat and therefore, by reciprocity, it poses no threat to India. In fact, not just the history, but also the Chinese behaviour and dynamics of its policies over the decades of co-existence has taught us never ever to dilute—or

worse, not even acknowledge—the China threat factor, be it nuclear or conventional. It will be safer to assume that while China may not pose an immediate threat, it would always remain a 'threat-in-being' and India should always remain prepared accordingly.

China, however, considers India, for not having formally endorsed the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), as an illegal nuclear power. It is very critical of the India–US Civil Nuclear Deal and has been blocking India's entry into the NSG. While China may not show concern with India's civil and peaceful use of nuclear energy, it remains very serious about the grey area between civil and military nuclear use, especially in the matter of fissile material production which, on date, is not regulated by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards or the NSG technical control procedures. In the above context, China sees two main security challenges created by India's nuclear programme. First, enhanced civil nuclear capabilities and practical difficulties in verifying dual-use nuclear materials would permit India to modernise its nuclear weapons. Secondly, it perceives that should India compromise on its NFU stand, it might dilute the nuclear taboo by signalling to the other non-NPT nuclear weapon States that use of nuclear weapons might be an option during a war, and this would in turn dilute the basis for stability of nuclear deterrence.

Without prejudice to the aforementioned considerations, China could still perceive a threat from India in the medium term. This perception is apparently based on three factors, namely: Foreign support to India's great power aspirations; enhancement of India's conventional military capability; and, China's distrust of India with regard to the territorial dispute and stability in Tibet. China views the growing strategic cooperation between the US and India and the emerging US-driven bilateral and trilateral arrangements in the Asia–Pacific, including its idea of 'power rebalance', with India co-opted as a key partner, with great concern.

In the overall context of strategic factors prevailing, it would be wise to be cautious in concluding that since China does not consider India as a foreseeable security threat, and therefore, by implication it poses no threat to India. In fact, China's behavioural trend warns us not to ever discount the possibility of China posing threat to India, be it conventional or nuclear—China's military build-up is a clear indication to that end. Even if the threat is not considered to be imminent, China remains a threat-in-being and India would be wise to be prepared accordingly. Indeed, it is a strategic imperative for India to keep close watch over political, military, scientific and technological developments in China and to ensure that adequate measures are in place, effectively, to protect India's national interests, without ever committing the error of diluting or negating the Chinese threat or failing to recognise it as a threat-in-being.

## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In view of the realities of Pakistan–China–India strategic matrix as discussed above, and relating these to the issues of introduction of low-yield weapons and revisit of India’s nuclear doctrine, it is fair to conclude that there is no reason for India to amend its nuclear doctrine and modify its NFU policy, neither is there any need to be restrained in possessing low-yield weapons capability. That said, we should continue our efforts in seeking cooperation and collaboration from like-minded global powers—US, Australia, Japan, Russia...—in furtherance of our strategic capabilities, and forge partnerships that serve our overall national security interests.

## RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

In sum, the above discussion may be crystallised into the following recommendations:

- India should develop low-yield weapons to address the gaps in its nuclear arsenal and to further strengthen our nuclear deterrent in the face of the never-ending nuclear brinkmanship by Pakistan.
- Efforts should be made to strengthen our deterrence in fields other than nuclear by building the requisite electronic combat capability and putting in place a transformed organisational structure that is necessary to sustain that capability.
- No change is recommended in our existing nuclear doctrine and its articulation of ‘No First Use’ as well as ‘massive retaliation to inflict unacceptable damage’.

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Not for Sale



Portrait of a man in a red tunic and yellow turban.

There are the father the lord the husband and love

# Swami Vivekananda's Message and Vision: Some Keynotes and their Contemporary Relevance

DR ANIRBAN GANGULY

## *Abstract*

*Swami Vivekananda was unarguably one of the principal progenitors and drivers of modern India. Steeped in tradition, immersed in Indian civilisational wisdom and experience—of which he became one of the most articulate and forceful proponents—and yet remarkably up to date with the currents of world thought, Vivekananda spoke for and symbolised an aspiring India, which yearned to take her rightful place in the comity of nations.*

*Vivekananda's articulations came at a time when the burden of subjection in India was acutely felt and had its repercussions in almost all spheres of our national life. His words, first spoken and heard in the World Parliament at Chicago, generated a wave of enthusiasm back home, which gradually worked to crystallise the aspiration for freedom. I have argued that Vivekananda, while being acutely conscious of the deficiencies in our national life, was also supremely affirmative of India's potentials and future. He called for basing this movement for the 'recovery of India' on her civilisational wisdom; it is this wisdom which, he asserted, would free her from her many debilitations, direct her march towards the future and successfully enable her to recover her pre-eminence as a civilisational State. In these articulations of his, one discerns a remarkable level of contemporariness and relevance. I have put together certain pointers—keynotes as I have termed them—from his thoughts for India that continue to remain vital for the present efforts for national regeneration.*

## THE MESSAGE AT CHICAGO AND ITS IMPACT IN INDIA

The significance and contribution of Swami Vivekananda's message in articulating the aspirations of modern India, in shaping the Indian narrative of nationalism and in defining the need for an overarching national unity has often been discussed, especially by those who have interpreted his work in some detail or have put aspects of his message into contemporary practices. India, her plight, as he saw it around himself at that point in time, her state of subjection, her aspirations, her eventual liberation and her future was what dominated Vivekananda's articulation, especially over a period of nine years that began from his appearance at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893 and ended with his passing away in 1902, at the age of thirty-nine at Belur in Bengal.

The appearance of Vivekananda at Chicago as a representative of Hinduism and of India, showed, as Sri Aurobindo, one of India's leading modern philosopher-sage, has argued, that 'the spiritual ideas' for which India stood was no longer a defensive one, but an 'aggressive and invading' one, which challenged the 'materialised mentality of the Occident'<sup>1</sup>. The Swami's appearance at the World Parliament of Religions had succeeded in creating an unmistakable wave back home in India, despite many a later-day callow critics trying to play it down. As news of that grand event and Vivekananda's peroration on behalf of a colonised and unsure people, percolated back in India, a wave of enthusiasm began gathering steam. This effect of his visit to the West has been well documented and recorded.

One of Vivekananda's pre-eminent biographers and chronicler, Sankari Prasad Basu (1928-2014) noted that the Monk's words spoken in the West, instilled a national self-faith (*ātma-viśvās*) and a national self-dignity (*ātma-sammān*), among his compatriots back home<sup>2</sup>, leading to a wide and wave-generating awakening. Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble, 1867-1911), one of Vivekananda's foremost Hinduised Western disciples, perhaps best summed up the effect of Vivekananda's words on India when she wrote that as the Swami spoke in the West, 'a nation sleeping in the shadows of the darkened half of the earth, on the far side of the Pacific, waited in spirit for the words that would be borne on the dawn that was travelling towards them, to reveal to them the secret of their own greatness and strength'<sup>3</sup>.

What set Vivekananda apart from many others of his age was the fact that 'it never occurred to him that his own people were in any respect less than the equals of any other nation whatsoever...' <sup>4</sup> It was this firm conviction that enabled him to move minds and infuse a deeper collective confidence in his people, especially the youth of that epoch. Vivekananda's success at Chicago and his inspiring speeches, delivered literally across the length and breadth of India upon return, were also 'a source of inspiration to young nationalists'. Though he played no part in active politics, 'his contribution to the

Indian national movement was invaluable'. Vivekananda's messages put the image of the motherland on a high pedestal. He gave expression to India's growing 'nationalism and spirit of self-help and independence' and was seen 'as the very embodiment of courage, self-confidence and strength'<sup>5</sup>.

### THE PREOCCUPATION WITH INDIA AND HER FUTURE

In a sense, 'very little that Swami Vivekananda spoke or wrote [can] be sharply separated from his thoughts on India and fellow Indians'<sup>6</sup>. As one of Vivekananda's foremost Western biographers, the French social and political philosopher Romain Rolland (1866-1944) lyrically, yet movingly wrote, 'It was the misery under his eyes, the misery of India, which filled his mind to the exclusion of every other thought. It pursued him, like a tiger following its prey, from the north to the south in his flight across India. It consumed him during sleepless nights'<sup>7</sup>. Rolland saw in Vivekananda's indefatigable peregrinations for India's awakening a firm seeking for a 'public salvation...the regeneration of the mother-country, the resurrection of spiritual powers of India and their diffusion throughout the universe...'<sup>8</sup>

For Sister Nivedita, also among his principal chroniclers, the Master's pre-occupation with the condition and fate of India was ceaseless and this concern of his found expression in his utterances on India, which breathed a conviction of India's rise and of her capacity to unshackle herself. Nivedita argued in her masterly assessment of Vivekananda's life, that the Swami's concern and worship of his 'own land' was focused on the 'conviction that India was not old and effete, as her critics had supposed, but young, ripe with potentiality, and standing, at the beginning of the twentieth century, on the threshold of even greater developments than she had known in the past'<sup>9</sup>. Throughout the years that she worked with him, Nivedita saw how 'the thought of India was to him [Vivekananda] like the air he breathed'<sup>10</sup>. It was this unceasing preoccupation with India that led Vivekananda to lay 'the foundation for the crystallisation of Indian nationalism', when he gave a call in Madras on 14 February 1897, asking all his listeners to worship the motherland alone and exclusively for the next fifty years. 'Give up,' he said, 'being a slave [and] for the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote—this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for the time from our minds'<sup>11</sup>.

It is this ceaseless concern and preoccupation of his with the condition and the destiny of India that has made thinkers and leaders of a later age look upon him as the crystalliser and shaper of India's modern narrative, as one who articulated and imparted direction and energy to the then amorphous quest for a national self-expression. For CP Ramaswami Aiyar (1879-1966), the scholar-administrator, Vivekananda's work and action 'revived for us the idea of nationhood'. He saw Vivekananda as the 'first of those,

who made it possible to think of India as [a] whole irrespective of the existing differences of class, creed, colour and custom', as one who 'pleaded for driving away of everything that would prevent the union of India' and knew that 'unless India was one spiritually and intellectually, India could not step into the outer world'<sup>12</sup>.

As an intense patriot, the Swami felt remorse for the decline of his country and perhaps therefore, 'he wanted at times to act as the iconoclast coming like a bombshell on the evils of society'. Vivekananda may not have been a political philosopher in the strict sense of the term; he did not, for example, 'enter into the analytical study of the concepts of political philosophy, nor [did] he probe into the dynamics of political processes and behaviour', but his teachings and personality had a great influence on the nationalist movement in India. 'He was a great patriot with a burning love for the motherland' and had a vision of the unity of the country, and 'although primarily, he taught the concept of spiritual freedom, this gospel was bound to result in the popularisation of the other aspects of freedom which included the political as well'<sup>13</sup>.

#### TALKING OF A MULTIDIMENSIONAL NATIONAL REGENERATION

Vivekananda's approach, his case for India's regeneration was multidimensional and centred on the need to first reawaken a sense of wide national unity, then a reclaiming of our civilisational knowledge systems, an opening up of the national mind to the currents of world thought—scientific and technological, a wide educational sweep right down to the masses—a democratisation of education as it were, a strengthening of indigenous industries, imparting fillip to the Indian entrepreneurial spirit, a comprehensive effort for the empowerment of women as the neglect of Indian women 'distressed him'<sup>14</sup>, along with a systematic effort at religious reform in an affirmative spirit, a dynamic effort at inclusion and ending discriminations of all types and bringing about an end to sectarian strife, and all of these were to have as their basis a wide spiritual awakening. The essence of the intellectual awakening that Vivekananda spoke of was the need to effectuate foremost a 'decolonising of the Indian mind'<sup>15</sup>, the more material side of his vision for the regeneration of India, a panacea for 'India's several ills was mass education: training in useful sciences and crafts, manual skills and manufactures'<sup>16</sup>.

It can be argued that throughout his tours across India, Vivekananda's speeches focused essentially on three aspects: first, 'his sense of a supreme mission, which almost appeared as a historical imperative', second, 'his conviction of the indestructibility of the "Indian soul" and the invincibility of Indian "spirituality"', and third was 'his belief in "nationalism", which alone could become an effective and adequate instrument for the fulfillment of India's destiny'. These, in fact, formed the bedrock of his philosophy of Indian nationalism<sup>17</sup>. While he spoke and articulated lofty philosophical positions and



took on some of the leading thinkers of the world and quite easily mingled with the elites of the West, Vivekananda never lost connect with the aspirations of India and of her people. As one of his assessors has pointed out, during these travels, 'everywhere he mixed with the people—one day living with a pariah in his hut and the next day conversing on equal terms with the maharajas and dewans (prime ministers) at their palaces, or another day with the orthodox pandits and liberal college professors in their houses and clubs. He was as conversant with the knowledge of the pandits as with the problems of industrial and rural economy, whereby the life of the people is controlled. He came face to face with the joys and sorrows, hopes and frustrations, ideals and aspirations of all classes of people'<sup>18</sup>.

In these years of his wandering across India, Vivekananda was like 'a diver plunged into the Ocean of India, and the Ocean of India covered his tracks'<sup>19</sup>; he started his *Bhārat parikramā* 'as a holy man, but became a patriot-prophet at the end'. Identifying himself with the happiness and miseries, hopes and frustrations, ideals and aspirations of India, he became, as he declared later to a Western disciple, 'a condensed India'<sup>20</sup>.

In fact, one of the reasons that propelled Vivekananda to go to the West was to raise resources with which he could return to work out his plan of India's regeneration; as he wrote once, 'I have now travelled all over India...but alas it was agony to me, my brothers, to see with my own eyes the terrible poverty and misery of the masses, and I could not restrain my tears! It is now my firm conviction that it is futile to preach religion amongst them without trying to remove their poverty and sufferings. It is for this reason—to find more means—for the salvation of the poor of India that I am now going to America'<sup>21</sup>.

The Swami's sojourn in the West, his visits and travels across America and continental Europe, gave him as it were an experience of the freedom that the West lived in, while also exposing him to the many deficiencies of these systems and frameworks, for he was an astute and discerning observer of civilisations, of societies and of nations. This gave him perspectives, which he examined in the light of the past—the past of his people and his country—and wove through these examinations a road map for their salvation.

## RECOVERY FROM THE CIVILISATIONAL ROOT

The upholding base, the basis, the foundation of Vivekananda's national regeneration was India's spiritual and civilisational strengths. To him it was a rekindling of these inseparable and intrinsic dimensions of India's civilisational march that distinguished her from other civilisations of the world. These needed to be restated, rejuvenated and disseminated. This emphasis of his on rediscovering India's civilisational watersheds came at a time when deracinating tendencies abounded due to a system of education and discourse, which primarily divorced young minds from their civilisational roots. As KM Pannikar

(1894-1963) argued, when colonial education had made the Hindus more royal than the king by denationalising them and by making them abjure or secretly despise the beliefs and customs of their forefathers, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Dayananda Saraswati's emergence substantially contributed in arresting that trend by evolving a counter narrative:

The first leaders of the National Movement were Indian by birth, but they had abjured most of the things which their fathers had prized—all that complex tradition which had been aforetime the very soul of their people...those leaders no longer had root in their native soil; they were parasitic upon the West. Their religion was that of Spenser and Comte, their philosophy that of Bentham and the Mills, their tradition that of Macaulay...they were *déracinés*.

There was a hidden life in India which felt this like a challenge, and, in the works of two remarkable men, it became an answer and a corrective energy. The religious revival, brought about by Dayananda Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda, was India's first modern effort at self-protection, her first reply to the challenges of Western culture. From that time onwards, an indivisible nationalism had two aspects—one political and the other religious<sup>22</sup>. But Vivekananda's emphasis on deriving essential and propelling national strength from the roots of India's civilisational past, from her traditions and their life-infusing spirit, from the entire corpus of the high watermarks of her past was not a backpedaling revivalism, but rather an energy that would push forth India, then in a state of subjugation, towards a greater and liberated future.

That India's aspiration for freedom, for selfhood and for a coequal partnership in the comity of nations had to be inspired and driven by this rediscovery and restating of her rich and multi-hued civilisational experience was clear to the Swami, and he in turn made it clear in his hundreds of public talks, writings, letters and personal communications. He was never apologetic about such an approach; through it he perceived a clear path and direction towards national salvation. Vivekananda's life and action turned young India nationalist and that nationalism, in turn, 'realised its true nature' and was 'informed, illumined and inspired by a strong consciousness of the past achievements of India, of the glorious part which, in spite of the vicissitudes...she had played in history, and of the high and noble mission which, in the inscrutable dispensation of providence, she was called upon to play in the modern world'<sup>23</sup>.

Vivekananda's conviction that any forward national direction must be imbued with a sense of past achievements, essentially stemmed from his deep and meditative study of India's past. He was not 'only a great philosopher but also a close student of history'. 'Long before the publication of KP Jayaswal's (1881-1937) *Hindu Polity*<sup>24</sup>, for example,

Vivekananda spoke 'of ancient Indian republics' and argued 'that the government by the people was not totally unknown in ancient India'. He spoke of how 'the doctrine of self-government was fully developed in the Buddhist monasteries' and 'refused to parrot the findings of the Orientalists' while diving 'deep into the ancient Sanskrit literature to find out the sequence of social development in the country'<sup>25</sup>. His extensive and prolific studies and his travels across India convinced Vivekananda, thus, that the source, the inspiring fountain of India's regeneration was to be initially found in her civilisational past. In this approach he was unequivocal and unambiguous:

...Many times have I been told that looking into the past only degenerates and leads to nothing, and that we should look to the future. That is true. But out of the past is built the future. Look back, therefore, as far as you can, drink deep of the eternal fountains that are behind, and after that, look forward, march forward and make India brighter, greater and much higher than she ever was. Our ancestors were great. We must recall that. We must learn the elements of our being, the blood that courses in our veins; we must have faith in that blood and what it did in the past; and out of that faith and consciousness of past greatness, we must build an India yet greater than what she has been...<sup>26</sup>

It was this approach of the Swami that inspired legions of young Indians across the decades, long after his passing, lending continuous fuel to India's quest for freedom. In this, Vivekananda is indeed the originator of spiritual nationalism, one, who before many others, articulated and shaped India's collective quest for emancipation. Vivekananda's task 'was to provide a solid spiritual foundation to the national movement. None before him had taken such a view of the social and political problems of India'<sup>27</sup>. For him, 'spirituality and patriotism were evidently continuous in his awareness. Only rarely was he impatient with the duties imposed by his concern for his countrymen and longed to break away into an uninterrupted mystical quest'<sup>28</sup>.

It is this seamless continuity of spirituality and of patriotism in Vivekananda's nature and work which, I argue, was an aspect that was unique and inspiring and over the years, long after he had ceased to physically exist, continued to inspire legions of young minds and thinkers. Because he was seen as having imparted a vision of spiritual and material freedom, Vivekananda came to be looked upon by a large section of Indians as a prophet, who indicated a distinct path of liberty and freedom to his subject people.

## THE PLAN

Vivekananda proposed a distinct plan for India's regeneration, the fundamental elements of which, some of its key signposts, continue to remain relevant to our contemporary collective aspirations and challenges. Through his vast corpus of intellectual and spiritual output, certain distinct keynotes emerge—keynotes that essentially define India's

national life and form and in a sense, offer a distinct programme for a continuous national regeneration. It is through these keynotes that the contemporary relevance of Vivekananda's message continues to shine forth and it is in that sense that these keynotes need to be reexamined and worked out.

Vivekananda emphasised on 'unity in variety'—in other words on diversity in oneness or unity in diversity. 'Unity in variety', he noted 'is the plan of nature' and that varieties of expressions and manifestations must remain. In God, he argued, we are 'all one' but, 'in manifestation, these differences must always remain'<sup>29</sup>. 'Differentiation, infinitely contradictory, must remain, but it is not necessary that we should hate each other; it is not necessary therefore that we should fight each other'<sup>30</sup>, he argued. He did not accept uniformity as an expression of unity, but rather talked of the Indian way of preserving diversities within an essential and all encompassing unity.

Vivekananda spoke of 'assimilation and not destruction', he did not believe in mere tolerance—tolerance for him still had a certain amount of coercion, he advocated instead, acceptance, which he saw as a more complete step towards a harmonious collective coexistence, especially in societies and nations that pulsed with diversities of many types. 'Holiness, purity and charity,' he told his Western audience and through them sent a message to those evangelists among them who insisted on the sole right of their concept of divinity, 'are not the exclusive possession of any church in the world, every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart'<sup>31</sup>.

In almost all the regions and countries that he visited, Vivekananda perceived this deficiency in acceptance, 'Take my experience for that...there is tremendous religious persecution yet in every country in which I have been, and the same old objections are raised against learning anything new'. The little toleration that he saw in the world was in India: 'The little toleration that is in the world, the little sympathy that is yet in the world for religious thought, is practically here in the land of the Aryas, and nowhere else'<sup>32</sup>. It was this uniqueness that India had to preserve and to perpetuate in order to emerge as a great power that successfully harmonised her diversities and unity.

The Swami also argued that both individuals as well as nations had missions. For him, the essential task was the discovery of that mission and the nurturing of aims that would lead to its accomplishment. Such an action, he argued, could enable an uninterrupted existence and progression, both for the individual as well as the collective. It was clear that the nation for Vivekananda was a living entity with a soul and had a distinct mission of its own. Like the individual, he saw the nation too as having a mission, a destiny to fulfil and a message to deliver. In his characteristic style, speaking on the theme, the Swami

argued that as every human being is the embodiment of an ideal, a mission and so long as the ideal was not lost, the mission was not lost, nothing could destroy the individual, similarly, the nation too is 'multiplied individuals' and 'each nation has a mission of its own to perform in this harmony of races; and so long as that nation keeps to that ideal, that nation nothing can kill...' <sup>33</sup> It was essential for him that India rediscovers and restates this civilisational mission of hers. Such a mission for India was primarily the dissemination of her unique civilisational, cultural and spiritual wisdom.

Vivekananda almost always referred to a spiritual conquest—that of India conquering or going forth into the world with the power of her spiritual message and genius. He spoke of how India could perennially renew the world's hope through her spiritual and civilisational message and vision of life. India's mission, he argued in his first public lecture after returning from the West in 1897 is 'to conserve, to preserve, to accumulate, as it were, into a dynamo, all the spiritual energy of the race, and that concentrated energy is to pour forth in a deluge on the world whenever circumstances are propitious...India's gift to the world is the light spiritual' <sup>34</sup>. This was her unique mission as a civilisation, she had to be made conscious of it, and her people had to actively participate in its fruition.

At the time of articulating this position, Vivekananda also pointed out that India's civilisational thoughts, her wisdom were already permeating the West. His interaction with the German Indologist Max Mueller (1823-1900), with the other German Indologist and philosopher Paul Deussen (1845-1919), who had studied and written extensively on the Upanishads and Vedanta, must have also convinced him of the progress of that process. 'Those who keep their eyes open, those who understand the workings in the minds of different nations of the West, those who are thinkers and study different nations,' he told his Indian adherents, 'will find the immense change that has been produced in tone, the procedure, in the methods, and in the literature of the world by this slow, never-ceasing permeation of Indian thought' <sup>35</sup>.

### SOME KEYNOTES AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

The contemporary relevance of this position that India's civilisational wisdom can indeed be a salvaging power for a world where a variety of conflicts continue, can never be over-emphasised, especially now, when one is increasingly faced with challenges of dissolving human ties, accelerated competition—both individual and collective—unbridled consumerism and friction with increased predatory tendencies evident between nations and collectivities. In India, as in the world, the relevance of this position continues to grow, Indian spiritual and civilisational thought is in fact permeating global thinking and working at altering mindsets and narratives. The power of Indian yoga, of her scriptural wisdom, of the storehouse of higher knowledge and truth of her various philosophies

have begun to increasingly attract people across the world. Vivekananda's vision of India's spiritual conquest of the world is indeed proceeding apace.

India remained central to Swami Vivekananda's entire philosophical formulation. Scattered throughout his vast corpus of work, are interesting and thought-provoking signposts that continue to retain a perpetual degree of relevance in the present times. Vivekananda's talk on 'The Future of India'<sup>36</sup>, for example, remains as relevant today as when it was delivered more than a century ago. The 'Future of India' address is a comprehensive exposition of the fundamentals of his thoughts and vision for India. He discussed in it certain problems and proffered certain proposals for a national action. The address thus articulates and expresses, some of the key dimensions for national regeneration and national unity.

Some of the fundamental pointers that emerge from this seminal address of his are reiterations of the cardinal points that we have discussed above: It was essential to develop an understanding, faith and consciousness of past greatness in order to build an India greater than what she was. Looking back into the past does not necessarily degenerate or lead to atrophy. India's problems are varied and complicated, but unity can be based on traditions and on religion, religion in India's case can actually unite; common grounds of religions and sects therefore, must be discovered and explored. Vivekananda saw 'our sacred traditions, our religion' as providing a common ground. 'In Europe', he argued, it was 'political ideas' that formed 'national unity', whereas in Asia, 'religious ideals form the national unity', and therefore, 'unity in religion' was an 'absolute necessity as the first condition of the future of India'<sup>37</sup>.

Vivekananda's first plank towards the making of a future India was that Hindus had to unite and not be diverted and divided by sectional and sectarian strife and differences. 'All of us have to be taught,' he reminded his audience, 'that we Hindus—dualists, qualified monists, or monists, Shaivas, Vaishnavas or Pashupatas—to whatever denomination we may belong, have certain common ideas behind us, and that the time has come when for the well-being of ourselves, for the well-being of our race, we must give up all our little quarrels and differences'<sup>38</sup>.

He saw spirituality (*ādhyatma*) as India's lifeblood, which strengthens the national body, prevents diseases and decay (in this address Vivekananda uses the word religion and spirituality interchangeably), and therefore, it cannot be negated or ignored. 'Our lifeblood is spirituality', he exhorted his people. 'If it flows clear, if it flows strong and pure and vigorous, everything is right; political, social, any other material defects, even the poverty of the land, will all be cured if that blood is pure'<sup>39</sup>. Therefore, it was essential, imperative for India, to preserve, perpetuate and disseminate this vast corpus of spiritual knowledge and experience; it is this that has always been India's civilisational distinctness.

As an obituary, making an assessment of Vivekananda's brief meteor-like life noted: 'He bitterly felt that India had completely degenerated; and his idea of curing her was to make her recognise that in spiritualism lay her strength and what was wanted was only faith in herself'<sup>40</sup>.

One of Vivekananda's formula, the secret, which he perceived could push India to greatness lay in organisation, accumulation of power, coordination of wills, and for that to effectively happen, the trivial caste-, religion- and sect-enjoined quarrels had to end. These only served to dissipate the accumulated energies and wills. He was electric when he placed his point on this aspect, 'Why is it,' he asked, 'to take a case in point, that forty million of Englishmen rule three hundred million of people here? What is the psychological explanation? These forty million put their wills together and that means infinite power, and you three hundred million have a will each separate from the other. Therefore, to make a great future India, the whole secret lies in organisation, accumulation of power, coordination of will...for mark you, the future India depends entirely upon that. That is the secret—accumulation of willpower, coordination, bringing them all... into one focus'<sup>41</sup>. These words galvanised young India then, like never before; it was an unheard of assertion on the way forward towards achieving national greatness.

The other unambiguous line of action that Vivekananda propounded, a line that he was convinced was essential for an overall and comprehensive national growth was, as he said, attacking customs and practices that perpetuated oppression and subjugation of the marginalised, 'The solution is not by bringing down the higher, but by raising the lower up to the level of the higher'.<sup>42</sup> It was clear to him that 'so long as Indians do not raise the standard of life of the masses and enlist their wholehearted cooperation'<sup>43</sup>, salvation and national emancipation would be 'fruitless'. That proposition continues to remain as relevant in this age, as it was when Vivekananda had pointed it out.

For Vivekananda, the empowerment and upliftment of India's women was a sine qua non for our integral national growth and he argued that it would alone, in a sense guarantee, the 'recovery of India'. He was unequivocal in this stance of his, in fact he had already drawn up plans for erecting another unit, which would also train women workers for disseminating his master's message<sup>44</sup>. It exasperated him to see how women were discriminated against. 'It is very difficult to understand why in this country,' he once exclaimed, 'so much difference is made between men and women, whereas the Vedanta declares that one and the same conscious self is present in all beings. You always criticise the women, but say what have you done for their uplift? Writing down *Smritis*, etc., and binding them by hard rules, the men have turned the women into mere manufacturing machines! If you do not raise the women, who are the living embodiment of the Divine Mother, don't think that you have any other way to rise'<sup>45</sup>. In his characteristic style,

he threw a constant challenge to the extreme orthodox thinking, which propagated a secondary or tertiary role and status for women in our national life. In what scriptures, he asked:

...Do you find statements that women are not competent for knowledge and devotion? In the period of degradation, when the priests made other castes incompetent for the study of the Vedas, they deprived the women also of all their rights. Otherwise you will find that in the Vedic or Upanishad age, Maitreyi, Gargi and other ladies of revered memory have taken the places of rishis through their skill in discussing about Brahman. In an assembly of a thousand Brahmans, who were all erudite in the Vedas, Gargi boldly challenged Yajnavalkya in a discussion about Brahman. Since such ideal women were entitled to spiritual knowledge, why shall not the women have the same privilege now? What has happened once can certainly happen again. History repeats itself. All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future. The principal reason why your race has so much degenerated is that you have no respect for these living images of Shakti. Manu says, "Where women are respected, there the gods delight; and where they are not, there all works and efforts come to naught." (Manu.III.56) There is no hope of rise for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness. For this reason, they have to be raised first...<sup>46</sup>

Finally, in Vivekananda's scheme of things, like in those of most of the epochal leaders and thinkers who followed him in India, education played a defining role. At a time when the colonial system of education dominated, when the movement for taking control of Indian education, for evolving a national system of education had not yet been conceived of, Vivekananda spoke of the need to take control of our education and to evolve and to alter its focus and objective towards a different goal altogether. He called for taking hold of both 'spiritual and secular' (material) education. Vivekananda was clear on why the education system as he witnessed it was detrimental to our national awakening and growth. 'The education that you are getting now has some good points, but it has a tremendous disadvantage which is so great that the good things are all weighed down. In the first place, it is not man-making education, it is merely and entirely a negative education. A negative education or any training that is based on negation is worse than death'<sup>47</sup>.

Such a negative education works to eradicate the young learners' civilisational beliefs, traditions and rootedness and, as he observed, they eventually become 'a mass of negation'. Vivekananda famously delineated his fundamental philosophy of education when he said that, 'Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making,



character-making assimilation of ideas.' The ideal was therefore, to have the 'whole education of our country, spiritual and secular, in our own hands, and it must be on national lines, through national methods as far as practical'<sup>48</sup>. The national dimension of education, a national system of education that would be rooted in India's civilisational ethos and was responsive to and respectful of her vast cultural and philosophical wisdom and outpouring remains an ongoing quest.

### 'A CERTAIN HOPE'

The relevance and vibrancy of Vivekananda's message, the keynotes of his vision continue to retain their original dynamism. In the task of India's national regeneration, the dream of which has been seen by leaders of the intellectual, political and spiritual realm across the decades, Vivekananda's example and words continue to remain key ignition points for further rumination and action. Every problem or challenge that is faced by a nation and a civilisationally evolved people striving to evolve a modern polity out of an ancient civilisational experience shall continue to find signposts and keynotes in Vivekananda's thoughts and message.

Vivekananda's own life embodied that possibility, in him the intrinsic mingling of action and thought with the aspirations of this vast and varied land was genuine and established, it was at least evident to those who saw him at close quarters and in the early years had toiled to set his mission on track. One of the foremost among such ones was Sister Nivedita, and in a succinct yet profound assessment of the Swami's life and work she recalled how, 'seated in his retreat at Belur, Vivekananda received visits and communications from all quarters' of the land, '...no hope but was spoken into his ear, no woe but he knew it, and strove to comfort or rouse...he held in his hands the thread of all that was fundamental, organic, vital; he knew the secret springs of life; he knew with what word to touch the hearts of millions. And he had gathered from all this knowledge a clear and certain hope'<sup>49</sup>.

The dimensions of that vision, of that 'certain hope', continue to exercise our collective mind. It is in Vivekananda's articulations on India, in his utterances of her civilisational mission and potential that one continues to discover the vital milestones of India's national march. I have argued that in reigniting and crystallising the sense of selfhood, in providing an early direction to an all-encompassing national overhaul, in rekindling faith in India's civilisational strength and in her perennial message, Vivekananda played a decisive role. Coming as it did in the throes of subjection, his vision and conviction galvanised the national mind and psyche and placed these on an irreversible forward trajectory.

In his reading of Vivekananda, Romain Rolland had written thus: 'Sixteen years passed between Ramakrishna's death [1886] and that of his great disciple [1902]...years

of conflagration...he was less than forty years of age when the athlete lay stretched upon the pyre...but the flame of that pyre is still alight today. From his ashes, like those of the Phoenix of old, has sprung—the magic bird—[of] faith in her [India's] unity and in the Great Message...”<sup>50</sup>

Who can disagree on the still radiating power of that lighted pyre!

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**सभी जुड़ेंगे, सभी बढ़ेंगे ॥**

**Financial Inclusion Plan  
An initiative of Ministry of Finance**

# Case for India-specific Economic Model

S GURUMURTHY

## *Abstract*

*In the year 1951, the world economic establishment mandated One-Size-Fit-All [OSFA] economic model to remove poverty and bring prosperity for all underdeveloped nations. Since the early and mid-1990s, the belief turned into an ideological conviction and the guild of world economists put total trust in globalisation and free trade as the new OSFA vehicle. The world nations—the West and the rest together—institutionalised it through World Trade Organization (WTO) and other multilateral setups. While the global market players still swear by the OSFA model, the world leaders have, of late, begun doubting its viability. The critical question that has been raised is whether the economic model is to be tweaked and tuned for each nation and society to suit its distinct characteristics including its culture. This question is being debated among world leaders since least 2005. Yet, surprisingly, it is not debated—in fact it is not even noticed—in the Indian economic discourse.*

## OSFA DEVELOPMENT MODEL

The philosophy and premise of One-Size-Fit-All (OSFA) as a modern development economic model that dominated the global economic discourse for over half a century post World War II, was no theory or body of expert opinion. It was virtually mandated by the West for the rest through the United Nations itself as early as in 1951. The UN had said: ‘There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons

who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress<sup>1</sup>.

This mandate was based on US President Harry Truman's inaugural address as the US president on 20 January 1949 announcing his concept of 'fair deal' for the entire world<sup>2</sup>. The Truman-influenced UN mandate suggested no less than total restructuring of underdeveloped societies—on the model of the West—in an amazingly ethno-centric and arrogant, at best naive, manner. Yet, by the early 1950s, the UN mandate had become hegemonic at the levels of circles of power<sup>3</sup>.

### WESTERN ANTHROPOLOGICAL MODERNITY AND MODERN ECONOMICS

The OSFA was sourced in the evolution of Western anthropological modernity—or simply Western modernity, which extended as, and into, modern economics. Modern economics is founded on the Western anthropological assumption that humans are rational economic beings (*homo economicus*). Being from the West, the theory had its origins in Christianity. Max Weber, the German sociologist, theorised that Protestant Christianity led to the rise of individualism, which encouraged entrepreneurship and enterprise, and consequently, Protestant ethic became the foundation of modern capitalism<sup>4</sup>. Weber, arguably the foremost social theorist of the twentieth century, is known as a principal architect of modern social science along with Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim<sup>5</sup>. In Weber's theory originated methodological individualism that led to the advent of rational economic man<sup>6</sup> on which development of efficient market hypothesis rested<sup>7</sup>. Efficient market hypothesis became the foundation of neo-classical economics<sup>8</sup>.

Consequently, the modern Western anthropology extended as modern economics. Western modernity, which was theorised and structured to contract people out of traditions, in effect meant negation of social and filial relations with contracts substituting for relations including, as it turned out later, not just social relations like community or caste, but also for family relations<sup>9</sup>. Modernity meant contracting people out of their traditions. Even Karl Marx accepted the concept of modernity<sup>10</sup> except that he would rely on the communist doctrine instead of capitalism to achieve it<sup>11</sup>. Both capitalism and Marxism advocated break with all traditions and traditional relations—namely a total break from the past as conditional precedent for economic development<sup>12</sup>. This was actualised increasingly in the post-World War II Anglo-Saxon West and commended to the rest of world by no less than the UN in 1951 as mentioned earlier.

Deepening this view, sociologist Karl Popper first declared that there was no such thing as society, and later an influential political economist, Margaret Thatcher, accepted him with a rider, 'except family'<sup>13</sup>. At present, even the family has collapsed in the West with most children born being born to unwed mothers in the UK<sup>14</sup>, as many as four

out of ten in the US<sup>15</sup> and less than half the US households now consist of traditional families<sup>16</sup>. To make it worse, 55 per cent of first marriages end in divorce, while 67 per cent of the second and 73 per cent of the third too meet a similar fate<sup>17</sup>. When this trend was visible in the 1970s, the State began to step in to provide universal social security for the unemployed, the infirm and the aged. This further broke up families and relations, as was feared in 1980s by well-known economists, including Milton Friedman<sup>18</sup>. Finally, the publicly-funded universal social security and increasing health security costs, the present value of which in US is estimated at a minimum of USD 87 trillion and a maximum of USD 222 trillion<sup>19</sup>, meant nationalisation of families and making people State dependent! As the nationalisation of families accelerated in late 1970s and 1980s, the concept of privatisation of government functions commenced in the US with the appointment of US President's Commission on Privatisation, 1987-88<sup>20</sup>.

#### G-20, WORLD BANK, UN REJECT OSFA, TURN TO NATION-SPECIFIC, CULTURE-CENTRIC ECONOMIC MODEL

Global trust in the OSFA model peaked in early 1990s after the fall of the Soviet Union through the escalation of globalisation. Globalisation was founded on the conviction that the Western model had emerged as the final victor<sup>21</sup> over the rest and therefore, the rest of the world wanting to develop should integrate into the West-led global economy soonest. Therefore, the West-centric OSFA economic philosophy became the accepted way forward and consequently global rule-making institutions like the WTO emerged in 1995. But, in little more than a decade, globalisation seems to have fatigued. It is now not seriously disputed that globalisation, which was held out as the OSFA escalator for all nations to develop is fading into history<sup>22</sup>.

How did the idea of OSFA-driven globalisation, which was considered as the vehicle for growth and prosperity, nearly collapse so soon? Globalisation as the escalator for development was seen as manifesting in the global trade growing at double the global GDP from 1970s<sup>23</sup>, which lifted hundreds of millions in the developing world, including in Southeast Asia and China, out of poverty in 1980s and 1990s<sup>24</sup>. But global trade as related to global GDP began to decline from 2001<sup>25</sup>. The global meltdown in 2008 intervened as never before and questioned the viability of the global financial order<sup>26</sup>. The global trade is now struggling to grow at less than the global GDP<sup>27</sup>. Even earlier, particularly when this trend was getting visible in 2005, the global leaders began rethinking on the OSFA model.

The central bank governors and finance ministers of G-20 nations declared in October 2005, 'We note development approaches are evolving over time, and thus need to be updated as economic challenges unfold.... We recognised there is no uniform development approach that fits all countries. Each country should be able to choose

the development approaches and policies that best suit its specific characteristics', while benefiting from accumulated experiences of the past<sup>28</sup>. Later, in May 2008, just ahead of the global meltdown, the World Bank said in its newsletter: 'In our work across the world, the World Bank has learned the hard way that there is no one model that fits all. Development... means taking the best ideas, testing them in new situations, and throwing away what doesn't work. It means, above all, having the ability to recognise when we have failed. This is never an easy thing to do. It is even more difficult for an organisation to do so, be it the government or the World Bank, which constantly need to adapt to the changing nature of the development challenge<sup>29</sup>.'

The UN, which had officially endorsed the modern Western anthropological model of development for all and called for the destruction of the indigenous philosophies and values in 1951, formally joined the band-wagon of 'no one size fits all' paradigm in 2010—a bit late though. 'Development must be nationally driven', the then Deputy Secretary-General UN Asha-Rose Migiro stressed, rejecting the OSFA approach to eradicate poverty and foster economic growth<sup>30</sup>. It took over half a century for the West and the world to realise that the Western model would not work everywhere and every nation and society would have to work out its own model.

### IMPACT OF WESTERN INTELLECTUALISM ON INDIA

But long before, thanks to colonisation, the elite Indian mind was overawed by modern Western intellectualism, and in default of de-colonisation after independence, it continued to remain under its dominance. With the Indian mind still impacted by the West, while India became a free nation, it did not really become an independent one in the real sense. The story of dominance of the West over Indian thinking has a long history. In mid-nineteenth century, Karl Marx described the cow- and monkey-worshipping Hindu society as semi-barbaric. He endorsed the British destruction of the Hindu society which, he said, had not changed for two thousand years, as painful, yet pleasurable one to prepare Indians for revolution and modernity<sup>31</sup>. Max Weber considered Hinduism and Buddhism, which believed in karma and rebirth, as militating against entrepreneurship and enterprise<sup>32</sup> thus virtually disqualifying India and China from development under modern capitalism<sup>33</sup>. Studies have established that Karl Marx and Max Weber, despite the fact that neither of them came to India nor met any Indian scholar or leader to know about India, exerted the greatest influence on the Indian mindset in the twentieth century<sup>34</sup>.

That was why when socialist India was growing slowly, Prof Raj Krishna made his famous observation linking it to Hinduism—and called it as Hindu rate of growth<sup>35</sup>, which is being repeated even today by many Indian intellectuals and leaders<sup>36</sup>. But all these theories which regarded Hinduism and Indian civilisation as other-worldly and therefore, not suited for development, predated the works of Paul Bairoch in 1983<sup>37</sup> and



Angus Madison in 2001<sup>38</sup>, which established that Hindu India was the leader of the world economy for almost 1800 years and lost its lead position only in the last two hundred years, when it had remained colonised. However, by the time these studies showed that India was a high performer in world economy, the Western view that unless Indians gave up their philosophy and social structure they are unfit to develop, had become a matter of almost a conviction for many educated Indians. The advent of globalisation further deepened the belief that India could not develop unless it distanced itself from its past and embraced the West. Ironically, it is at this stage that the Western world has begun to say that there is no OSFA based on the West and each nation has to work out its own model consistent with its conditions including its culture!

### NITI AAYOG RECOGNISES THE NEED FOR INDIA-SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENT MODEL

While the Indian economic discourse is still rooted in the idea of OSFA approach, after the present government led by Narendra Modi took over, it has begun recognising the need for an India-specific development model. The cabinet resolution constituting the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog passed by the Modi government on 1 January 2015 stated: 'Perhaps most importantly, the institution must adhere to the tenet that while incorporating positive influences from the world, no single model can be transplanted from outside into the Indian scenario. We need to find our own strategy for growth. The new institution has to zero in on what will work in and for India. It will be a Bharatiya approach to development<sup>39</sup>.' This means a huge U-turn on what India has been believing and doing for the last six decades under the socialist regime till 1990, and later under the liberalisation and globalisation period since then.

The NITI Aayog mandate implies not just policy tweaking for India but recognises the need for deeper re-education and reorientation of India. The NITI Aayog talks about 'social capital'<sup>40</sup>—a term which Marxism believing in social engineering would detest and capitalism founded on methodological individualism would abhor. Social capital is the relation of a collective of people inter se, like a family, caste, community and mutual associations, which unburdens the State. The NITI Aayog document says: 'In fact, the "social capital" that is present in our people has been a major contributor to the development of the country thus far and, therefore, it needs to be leveraged through appropriate policy initiatives<sup>41</sup>.' The recognition of social capital is a total repudiation of the mandate of the 1951 United Nations that the old social institutions have to disintegrate and bonds of caste and creed have to burst. This also completely negates the assumptions of both Marx and the market. Marx believed that socialism would make the society irrelevant. Capitalism trusted the market to do what Marx felt the State would do. The NITI Aayog's emphasis on social capital, which is founded on relations, also

implicitly rejects the contract-based and methodological individualism-shaped OSFA model commended by the West for the rest, post World War II. But now the new theories evolving in the West believe that social capital is society's commons, like environment and ecology, which operates outside the State and the market. The NITI Aayog also refers to millions of non-corporate businesses, two-thirds of which are owned by backward castes, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes as the area of focus for job creation and knowledge, technology and skill upgradation<sup>42</sup>.

### INDIANISED EDUCATION, INDIGENISED PUBLIC DISCOURSE MUST FOR EVOLVING INDIA-SPECIFIC ECONOMIC MODEL

Yet, even after more than a decade, the Indian economic and public discourse has still not responded to the global view that each nation has to evolve its own development model. It does not seem to have taken notice of the NITI Aayog mandate to work out an India-specific economic model for India. This shows that the Indian economic thinking and academics has been merely a carbon copy of the Western model without any Indian content or context. Indian content in economy or polity cannot emerge unless the education system is revamped to make it culturally Indian and to give indigenous orientation to the public discourse. While in 1950s national culture was seen by the United Nations as the disabler of economic development<sup>43</sup>, now the same United Nations has turned around and said that without culture, development is difficult, even impossible. In the General Assembly debates in June 2013<sup>44</sup>, the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said: 'Too many well-intended development programmes have failed, because they did not take cultural settings into account. This must be an overarching principle for all development efforts<sup>45</sup>.' Saying that, 'Development has not always focused enough on people,' he added, 'To mobilise people, we need to understand and embrace their culture. This means encouraging dialogue, listening to individual voices, and ensuring that culture and human rights inform the new course for sustainable development. The fundamental role of culture was not fully acknowledged within the MDGs (millennium development goals) as a goal, an overarching principle, or as an enabler<sup>46</sup>.'

Given the UN view that without a reference to culture there is no development possible and unless Indian culture studies become fully integral to the Indian education system, there is no way that a developmental economic model specific to India can be created in the Indian academia and in the public discourse. Unless national cultural and social impulses are fully grasped and understood in our educational system, reorienting the national discourse to prepare the people and the establishment for the task of building a national economic model suited to India and Indian culture and values will be difficult, if not impossible. In short, what is needed is an Indianised educational system and indigenised public discourse.

## NEED LATERAL THINKING AND LATERAL AND STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS IN EDUCATION AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

It is unfortunate that the political ecosystem of India virtually prevents the emergence of an Indianised education system. It is least conducive to any substantial intervention in the present education model which is largely influenced by the Marx and Weber view of Indians, and their philosophy, culture and worldview<sup>47</sup>. Therefore, there is urgent need to eliminate the Marx–Weber domination in the Indian educational system. Without eliminating the Marx–Weber web over the Indian education system, the influence of the Western duo in Indian public discourse cannot be eliminated. And unless the public discourse is rid of the Marx–Weber influence, the education system cannot be revamped and Indianised. It is thus a Catch-22 situation which can only be resolved by political will. But till the Catch-22 situation is resolved and the education is Indianised and the public discourse is indigenised, it is necessary to think laterally and intervene laterally in both through the holistic efforts of the society. Lateral intervention goes hand in hand with lateral thinking. Lateral thinking ‘solves problems by an indirect and creative approach, typically through viewing the problem in a new and unusual light’<sup>48</sup>. This is in contrast to vertical thinking<sup>49</sup>, which is hierarchic and top-down in approach and effect.

The vertical and hierarchic thinking in India is frozen in Marx–Weber formulations imposing the OSFA model which has proven to be no more valid or appropriate. What is needed is lateral thinking and lateral interventions in the currently operative vertical and hierarchic thought structures. This can be done by independent think tanks and private educational and research institutions outside the formal control of the establishment, which is a prisoner of the Marx–Weber ideologies, which need to be challenged. As the former US President Bill Clinton said, ‘Ideologies do not allow debates which philosophies do’<sup>50</sup>. OSFA is based on ideology, while recognising that diversity is founded on philosophy. Ideological approach, which is essentially Western, needs to be converted into philosophic approach, which is inherently Indian. Philosophy tends to unite humans but ideology aims to divide them<sup>51</sup>.

The Indian society has huge private educational, academic and media infrastructure which can be leveraged to influence the academics and the public discourse. Concerned citizens who have influence over educational institutions, research institutions, think tanks and media should be approached with the need for developing an India-specific economic model for which they need to be convinced that education needs to be Indianised and the public discourse has to be indigenised. They need to be co-opted in the task. It is necessary and even inevitable to strategise lateral interventions in Indian education and public discourse through individuals and institutions committed to national interest, in order to break the intransigence of national education and public discourse.



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# Evolving US Foreign Policy under Trump and its Implications for India

KANWAL SIBAL

## *Abstract*

*The global scenario has become uncertain and unpredictable with President Trump in the White House. He had promised during his election campaign that his political, security and economic policies would be materially different from the misguided policies of previous administrations that damaged US national interest. His slogans of 'Make America Great Again', 'America First' foreshadowed a more inward-looking America, more transactional, repudiating globalisation and non-interventionist abroad. His advocacy during the election campaign of more 'Brexit's from the European Union (EU), tougher postures towards China, willingness to work with Russia, caused consternation amongst the neocons, the ultra-liberals, those linked to the Democratic establishment, even prominent Republicans, the mainstream media, the think tanks and the intelligence agencies.*

*Faced with enormous political pressures at home by diverse lobbies, Trump has had to change tack on many issues. On Russia, many members of his own cabinet have made discordant noises. Early hopes that US–Russia relations that had sharply deteriorated under Obama might improve under Trump have been laid to rest by Trump's decision to launch cruise missile attacks against Syria. It is the first time that the US has intervened militarily directly against the Assad regime, opening new uncertainties in the region and the US–Russia relations.*

*On Japan, Trump has moved from jolting the relationship to reassuring Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of US commitment to Japanese security, specifically including*

*the Senkakus within the ambit of the US–Japan defence treaty. On China, Trump has reiterated US adherence to the ‘One China’ policy after questioning it. The decision to step back from a confrontational posture towards China and move towards engagement, but failing to issue a joint statement during President Xi’s visit to the US suggests uncertainty ahead. On the EU, Trump has softened his rhetoric though German Chancellor Merkel’s visit to Washington was not too successful. He now does not find NATO obsolete as he did earlier.*

*If Trump’s election raised a great deal of uncertainty abroad because of his unorthodox positions, his move towards more traditional ones only increases this uncertainty, as the President is exposing himself as an opportunist, with no firm convictions and capable of disavowing his postures without embarrassment. Even the reversal of his positions on Russia, China or Japan cannot give the assurance that yet more reversals will not take place as the situation develops. The way that the Trump administration is functioning, with family members engaged in foreign policymaking, the State Department sidelined, Trump’s team adopting positions that contradict his stances, the President distracted by persistent efforts domestically to undo his presidency and so on, this concern is real.*

*India is not a priority country for Trump, if only because we are not the source of his concerns about issues on which he has wanted to reverse earlier US policies. We are not part of trade blocs which he feels were badly negotiated by the US and which he wants to revise or has repudiated. We are not the source of his concerns about Islamic radicalism and terrorism. We are not part of the refugee influx into the US that he has wanted to stem. India not being a military ally, we cannot be accused of not paying for our protection. But there are issues on which bilaterally and more widely Trump’s policies could affect us for better or for worse. If US–Russia relations were to improve we could be beneficiaries. The sentiment in Russia is growing that India is moving into the US camp, diluting in the process the geopolitical importance of formats such as the Russia–India–China dialogue, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). This perception is strengthened by the expanding India–US defence trade, seen in Russia as being at its expense. If Russia–US relations were to move into a positive phase, these Russian concerns would diminish.*

*US and EU pressure on Russia has pushed it increasingly into the arms of China. Better US–Russia ties would prevent a still tighter Russia–China strategic embrace. Treating Russia as the principal geopolitical enemy is too trans-Atlantic a view, rooted in Cold War politics. If the US loses its global hegemony, the process will start in the Asia–Pacific. China is already challenging US power in the Western Pacific.*



*It has begun to dominate Central Asia economically; it has strongly positioned itself in Iran taking advantage of US sanctions. Its geopolitical commitment to Pakistan has increased manifold with the announcement of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). With its One Belt One Road (OBOR) project, China is expanding geopolitically across Asia, taking advantage of the vacuum created by the weakening of Russia and US failure to establish itself in the area because of differences with Russia, the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, tensions with Iran and inability to shape developments in Central Asia.*

*For India, US encouragement to China to play a role in Afghanistan is a problem as China's role there would be inevitably aligned with Pakistani interests, given China's decision to invest massively in Pakistan for gaining access through it to the Arabian Sea and eventually building Gwadar into a naval base for its fleet. India fails to see the logic of the US treating China as an adversary in the Western Pacific and a partner in our region. It is unclear how much we can rely on Trump to deal with Pakistan forcefully on the issue of terrorism. His Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, has in early April raised the possibility of US intervening to defuse a developing India–Pakistan conflict proactively at an early state and push for a dialogue in order to prevent escalation. The blinkered US view of Pakistan and India–Pakistan relations was evident again in the testimony of the US Central Command (CENTCOM) chief before the Senate Armed Services Committee on 9 March in which he implicitly criticised India's public policy to diplomatically isolate Pakistan as it hinders any prospects of improved relations, which he found troubling because of the danger of an India–Pakistan conflict escalating into a nuclear exchange.*

*The uncertainty that is hovering over US–EU ties can become more problematic with the internal turmoil in Europe with the refugee crisis, the rise of nationalist parties, election results in France and Germany this year and the instabilities in the Euro-zone. This has implications for India, as the EU is India's biggest trade and investment partner. It is important that as we develop our global strategy we send a clear message that we reserve a prominent place for Europe in it. Europe and India have a shared interest in opposing protectionism, safeguarding the World Trade Organization (WTO) system and preserving the Paris Agreement on climate change, all points on which Trump's thinking presents a challenge.*

The global scenario has become uncertain and unpredictable with President Donald Trump in the White House. He had promised during his election campaign that his political, security and economic policies would be materially different from the misguided policies of previous administrations that damaged US national interest. They had

weakened the United States (US), especially economically, with loss of manufacturing jobs and imposition of an excessive burden on it to defend others. His slogans of 'Make America Great Again', 'America First' foreshadowed a more inward-looking America, more transactional, repudiating globalisation and non-interventionist abroad.

Even during Barack Obama's presidency, concerns in the US and European circles were widespread that the international order was breaking down and serious instability lay ahead as no single power was now capable of upholding it. The American public was seen as being tired of foreign interventions and the economic costs they entailed for an America whose infrastructure was breaking down and needed heavy investment to rebuild, where inequalities had widened, the condition of the middle class had deteriorated and the working class had suffered massive job losses because of globalisation. Obama's perceived unwillingness to lead from the front and resist further military entanglements abroad, as in the case of Syria, fuelled this geopolitical angst about impending global disarray.

With the positions Trump took during the run up to the presidency, consternation about the US ceasing to exercise hegemony over global affairs was widespread amongst the neocons, the ultra-liberals, those linked to the Democratic establishment, even prominent Republicans, the mainstream media, the think tanks and the intelligence agencies. After assuming power, Trump issued several presidential directives to implement some of his campaign promises on repudiating the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), renegotiating North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), temporarily suspending the entry of nationals of seven Islamic countries into the US, erecting a wall on the Mexican border and devising a time-bound strategy to destroy the Islamic State (IS) and so on. His position on climate change and clearing the way for controversial pipelines within the US scoffed at environmental lobbies at home and abroad.

His advocacy of more 'Brexit's from the European Union (EU), accusing Germany of hurting US economic interests and attacking the Euro-riled major European countries raised murmurs of a possible trade war between the US and EU. He berated the Europeans for not spending 2 per cent of their GDP on defence and went to the extent of demanding Germany to reimburse the US for the contributions it failed to make within the ambit of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for the defence it provided to German security. Indeed, he questioned the continuing relevance of NATO, causing flutters in Europe and the US security establishment. He took hard positions on China, upsetting many assumptions of the relationship. He spoke on the telephone to the independence-minded Taiwanese president, questioned US continuing adherence to a One China policy and threatened to impose 40 per cent tariff on Chinese exports to the US. He called on Japan to assume more responsibility for its own defence, to the point of suggesting, during his campaign, that Japan could go nuclear to defend itself against China.

On Russia, he maintained an open posture during his election campaign and even after, angering the American ‘deep state’ who continues to see Russia as the biggest geopolitical enemy of the US. The allegations of Russian interference in the presidential elections in favour of Trump and against the candidature of Hillary Clinton bugged the Trump campaign and continue to bug his presidency. This has become a huge political issue domestically, with legal ramifications. The US intelligence agencies appear to have engaged in leaks to the press to keep the issue politically alive, embarrass Trump and countering his declared intention to find some *modus vivendi* with Russia, at least in West Asia for combating the IS.

Faced with enormous political pressures at home by diverse lobbies that want to erode his capacity to pursue his disruptive policies, and who believe he is unfit to be president and are not reconciled to the electoral verdict in his favour, Trump has had to change tack on many issues and his own team has suffered blows. His National Security Adviser (NSA), General Michael Flynn, for instance, had to resign because of his contacts with Russia during the election campaign. The head of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Senator Devin Nunes had to recuse himself under pressure from chairing the Senate investigation into the Russian role in the presidential election. It is widely believed that no US president can succeed in a confrontation with the intelligence agencies and their nexus with the mainstream media. Trump’s resistance has suffered erosion as can be seen from the reversal of his position on several issues.

On Russia, many members of his own cabinet have made discordant noises. The new NSA Lt General Herbert McMaster views Russia as a hostile country and so do Defence Secretary James Mattis and Vice President Mike Pence. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has used strong language against Russia on the Ukraine issue and Crimea. The US Ambassador to the United Nations (UN) Nikki Haley has been notably aggressive towards Russia. Early hopes that US–Russia relations that had sharply deteriorated under Obama might improve under Trump have been laid to rest by Trump’s decision to launch cruise missile attacks against Syria. It is the first time that the US has intervened militarily directly against the Assad regime, opening new uncertainties in the region and US–Russia relations. Trump’s action contradicts his administration’s statements just before the bombing of Syria that removing Assad was not a priority and that he was reality on the ground that the US had to deal with, besides gainsaying his oft-repeated desire to work with Russia to destroy the IS as well as opposition to US military interventions abroad. Russia has condemned the US action as a violation of international law and President Putin has called it a significant blow to Russia–US relations. From an expectation that US–Russia relations might move towards a semblance of normalcy, the opposite is happening.

On Japan, Trump has moved from jolting the relationship to reassuring Prime Minister Abe of US commitment to Japanese security, specifically including the Senkaku Islands within the ambit of the US–Japan defence treaty. On China, Trump showed an anxiety to have a telephonic contact with President Xi that became possible only when the US side accepted the condition that Trump would reiterate support to the One China policy during the conversation, which he did. Trump even characterised his talk with Xi as ‘excellent’, standing alongside Abe in Florida. This has been followed up with an early visit by Xi to the US, though its political focus was lost in view of the US attack on Syria while the visit was on. The decision to step back from the early confrontational posture towards China—reflected also in Tillerson’s statements to the Senate during his confirmation hearings that the US will deny access to China to the newly militarised islands in the South China Sea and engage China early—raised speculation that the US and China may move towards a G-2 in Asia with which Obama had flirted at the start of his first presidency. Tillerson’s statement during his visit to Beijing using the vocabulary used by China to describe the kind of ‘equal’ relationship it, as a big power, sought with the US strengthened this impression. Eventually, Xi’s visit had low visibility, with no joint statement issued. The two countries have given themselves 100 days to address the economic issues troubling their relationship. The future contours of the US–China relationship remain unclear.

On the EU and NATO, Trump has softened his rhetoric though German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s visit to Washington seems to have had limited success. Merkel has, in fact, been positioning herself as a defender of Western values that Trump is perceived as abandoning, but whether she can sustain this posture that would pit Germany against the US is questionable. Germany can hardly afford to confront both the US and Russia on ‘Western values’ and have tensions with both countries. One could argue that its attention should be primarily focused on reviving the EU politically and economically after Brexit and the rise of nationalist parties within the Union who question it.

If Trump’s election raised a great deal of uncertainty abroad because of his unorthodox positions, his move towards more traditional ones only increases this uncertainty, as the President is exposing himself as an opportunist, with no firm convictions, and capable of disavowing his postures without embarrassment, which was an accusation against him by his detractors during the election campaign and continues to be made. Even the reversal of his positions on Russia, China or Japan cannot give the assurance that yet more reversals will not take place as the situation develops. The way that the Trump administration is functioning, with family members engaged in foreign policymaking, the State Department sidelined, Tillerson losing ground, Trump’s team adopting positions that contradict his stances, the infighting within his team, the President distracted by

persistent efforts domestically to undo his presidency and so on—this concern is real. Because the US remains the foremost global power and its policies and actions have repercussions worldwide, a changeable leader at helm in Washington can be destabilising for both allies and adversaries and those in between.

India is not a priority country for Trump, if only because we are not the source of his concerns about issues on which he has wanted to reverse earlier US policies. We are not part of trade blocs which he feels were badly negotiated by the US and which he wants to revise or has repudiated. We are not the source of his concerns about Islamic radicalism and terrorism. We are not part of the refugee influx into the US that he has wanted to stem. India not being a military ally, we cannot be accused of not paying for our protection. But there are issues on which bilaterally and more widely Trump's policies could affect us for better or for worse. If US–Russia relations were to improve we could be beneficiaries. In Russia a sentiment is growing that India is moving into the US camp, diluting in the process the geopolitical importance of formats such as the Russia–India–China dialogue, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). This perception is strengthened by the expanding India–US defence trade, seen in Russia as being at its expense. If Russia–US relations were to move into a positive phase, these Russian concerns would diminish. Russia's overtures to Pakistan seem to be motivated by a desire to develop a new leverage against India, besides signifying some alignment of its Pakistan policy with China. A worsening of US–Russia ties will make Russia increasingly suspicious of US intentions in the Afghanistan–Central Asian region aimed at exploiting radical Islamist ideology, including the IS, to destabilise Russia's periphery in the east. Such scenarios can only damage India's security by exposing us even more to radical Islam and terrorism.

US and EU pressure on Russia has pushed it increasingly into the arms of China. Better US–Russia ties would prevent a still tighter Russia–China strategic embrace. Treating Russia as the principal geopolitical enemy is too trans-Atlantic a view, rooted in Cold War politics. The post-Cold War world has been marked by the decline of Russia and the spectacular rise of China. It is China, with its economic and financial muscle and increasing military strength that is threatening US power in Asia and even beyond. If the US loses its global hegemony, the process will start in the Asia–Pacific. China is already challenging US power in the Western Pacific. It has reclaimed rocks and militarised artificial islands in the South China Sea under the nose of a formidable US military presence in this area represented by the Seventh Fleet, several military bases and thousands of US forces stationed in the region. China is threatening US allies like Japan, knowing America's treaty obligations to defend that country. It has succeeded in dividing Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), even weaning the Philippines

president away from the US despite Philippines obtaining satisfaction on all points against China's claims in the South China Sea from the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) Tribunal (the Permanent Court of Arbitration, or PCA). China has begun to dominate Central Asia economically; it has strongly positioned itself in Iran taking advantage of US sanctions. Its geopolitical commitment to Pakistan has increased manifold with the announcement of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). With its One Belt One Road (OBOR) project, China is expanding geopolitically across Asia, taking advantage of the vacuum created by the weakening of Russia and US failure to establish itself in the area because of differences with Russia, the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, tensions with Iran and inability to shape developments in Central Asia.

For India, US encouragement to China to play a role in Afghanistan is a problem as China's role there would be inevitably aligned with Pakistani interests, given China's decision to invest massively in Pakistan for gaining access through it to the Arabian Sea and eventually building Gwadar into a naval base for its fleet. India fails to see the logic of the US treating China as an adversary in the Western Pacific and a partner in our region. It is by no means certain that US–China tensions in the Western Pacific will make the US more willing to counter China's expanding influence around us in the west. Many Americans, otherwise negative towards China, believe that the CPEC can be helpful in stabilising Pakistan and thus be to India's benefit eventually. Beyond that, the US has interests in Pakistan that it wants to conserve, with a strategic balance in South Asia in its mind too. Pakistan is viewed as a major Islamic country equipped with nuclear weapons and therefore, too important not to be engaged.

It is unclear how much we can rely on Trump to deal with Pakistan forcefully on the issue of terrorism. His Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, has in early April raised the possibility of US intervening to defuse a developing India–Pakistan conflict proactively at an early state and push for a dialogue in order to prevent escalation, without waiting for something to happen. She added that Trump himself may participate in this exercise that the National Security Council would initiate. The US seems to have a blind spot when it comes to dealing forcefully with Pakistan's involvement with terrorism from which it too has suffered. The root cause of tensions and a potential conflict between India and Pakistan is terrorism, but the US establishment refuses to acknowledge this reality while expressing concern about the situation between India and Pakistan. The blinkered US view of Pakistan and India–Pakistan relations was evident again in the testimony of the US Central Command (CENTCOM) chief before the Senate Armed Services Committee on 9 March in which he spoke of Pakistan remaining a critical partner in the counterterrorism fight.

He spoke with moderation about Pakistani support for the terrorist Haqqani network, noted positively some promising coordination between the Pakistan and Afghanistan militaries aimed at addressing instability in the Afghanistan–Pakistan border region, and acknowledged Pakistani support for the operation of the coalition forces in Afghanistan. He expressed concern about India’s military response to terrorist attacks in ‘India-held’ territory leading to miscalculation on both sides. He implicitly criticised India’s public policy to diplomatically isolate Pakistan as it hinders any prospects of improved relations, which he found troubling because of the danger of an India–Pakistan conflict escalating into a nuclear exchange, besides Pakistan’s increased focus on its eastern border detracting from its efforts to secure the western border. He noted that the Pakistani military also continues to support US efforts elsewhere in the region. Viewed in the context of this testimony, the US would welcome Pakistani military involvement in support of Saudi Arabia against the Houthis in Yemen. This kind of diehard US military thinking about Pakistan’s usefulness will remain a problem for us. While the US Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command (CINCPAC) will continue to woo us to counter China geopolitically, the Pentagon will continue its dual policy of shielding Pakistan against India.

The uncertainty that is hovering over US–EU ties can become more problematic with the internal turmoil in Europe with the refugee crisis, the rise of nationalist parties, election results in France and Germany this year and the instabilities in the Eurozone. This has implications for India, as the EU is India’s biggest trade and investment partner. It is important that as we develop our global strategy we send a clear message that we reserve a prominent place for Europe in it. Economic growth is India’s priority. Collectively, EU is India’s biggest trading and investment partner. Within Europe, three or four of the world’s largest economies are located. With each of them India’s trade and investment relationship is on the ascendant. In developing our inadequate infrastructure, Europe can provide the material, technical and financial resources. In Information Technology (IT) and Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) sectors, our overdependence on the US market requires a shift towards Europe. The tapping of vast reservoirs of frontline technologies in European small and medium enterprises will be required for deepening the base of our industrial economy. Potentially, our young and plentiful human resource base can meet the needs of Europe’s ageing societies within the logic of globalisation, economic interdependence and all round prosperity. Europe and India have a shared interest in opposing protectionism, safeguarding the World Trade Organization (WTO) system and preserving the Paris Agreement on climate change, all points on which Trump’s thinking presents a challenge.



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# Engaging China in an Uncertain World

ASHOK K KANTHA

## *Abstract*

*Acknowledging that India–China relations are currently suffering from an overhang of differences and suspicions, the paper suggests that this important but difficult relationship has entered a phase which is even more challenging, involving an uncertain mix of cooperation and competition. The future directions of this relationship will increasingly be shaped by the course taken by the rise of China, the parallel rise of India and others, and the related issue of the changing and unpredictable dynamics of the international landscape around them. The paper analyses the present challenges in India–China relations and offers some suggestions for devising a new modus vivendi and an updated framework for managing this relationship and for taking it along a pragmatic path, complex and demanding and yet, constructive and forward-looking.*

India–China relations are today passing through a period of marked stress. We are faced with an accumulation of issues and concerns in bilateral engagement, ranging from the boundary question to trans-border rivers to stapled visas for residents of Arunachal Pradesh to disquiet about China's stand on India's membership of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and listing of well-known terrorists like Masood Azhar in the 1267 Committee of the UNSC. China has its own set of concerns, including non-acceptance by India of its 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) and concerns over India's stance on Tibet, Dalai Lama and South China Sea. Since early last year in particular, the two sides have, unfortunately, got into a negative cycle of public airing of differences in an action-reaction mode. This has affected the narrative of the relationship.

Bilateral differences have acquired greater prominence as the convergence between the two countries on geopolitical issues is seen to be weakening. In India, China is increasingly being viewed as not being supportive of India's rise or responsive to its concerns, interests and aspirations. There are discernible anxieties about China's growing footprint in South Asia and in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). In China, India is seen in some quarters as getting co-opted in the US-led strategy to counter its rise. Moreover, we need to manage our relations with China in an international context which is increasingly volatile and unpredictable.

The election of Donald Trump, the vote for 'Brexit' and the fact that populist parties are now part of the government in about a dozen Western democracies, represent powerful forces which are bringing about fundamental shifts in the US and Western societies in general. Over the past year, we have witnessed emergence of populist movements in the West that oppose key elements of the liberal-democratic status quo, question pluralism and liberalism, and rail against perceived threats ranging from immigration to globalisation, international institutions and multilateralism. Linked to the rise of populist and protectionist sentiments is the Donald Trump phenomenon. With his 'America First' slogan, his aggressive agenda on trade and immigration issues, and his ambivalence over the USA's global leadership role and the continued relevance of its alliance system, as also his cynicism about the merits of globalisation and multilateral institutions, Trump has caused disquiet and enhanced unpredictability in the international environment. Notwithstanding his unorthodox methods, however, Trump represents the most prominent manifestation of an important trend in the West. Ironically, China has quickly moved to position itself as an anchor of stability in an uncertain international climate and as a defender of globalisation, multilateralism and rule-based open trade.

Notwithstanding Trump's harsh rhetoric on China, Sino-US relations appear to have stabilised after the initial Chinese jostling with the new administration. Trump reaffirmed the 'One China' policy during his telephonic conversation with President Xi Jinping; US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson unexpectedly repeated the Chinese mantra of 'no-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation' during his visit to Beijing; the US has unilaterally ceded space to China by withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP); Trump has abandoned his oft-repeated campaign pledge to declare China a currency manipulator; and the outcome of the Trump–Xi summit at Florida is being projected by both sides in positive light, even though it did not result in anything spectacular and was upstaged, to an extent, by the US missile attack on Syria. However, Trump enjoys being unpredictable and we may yet have disruptions in store.

The current international uncertainty is in part stemming from, and is compounded by,

the protracted geopolitical shift triggered by the rise of China, India and other countries. With China progressively asserting itself, the flux and contestation in the geopolitical landscape, particularly in Asia–Pacific, has increased significantly. The brief period of unipolar dominance enjoyed by the US is over, but a new equilibrium is yet to emerge. We are in the midst of a period of transition with uncertain outcomes. It is important to take note of these broader international trends because they will increasingly shape the engagement between India and China. For instance, the task of dealing with China will become more challenging for us if the rise of China and its assertive behaviour is juxtaposed with a gradual retreat by the USA from the Asia–Pacific region. However, one can argue that with his ‘Make America Great Again’ goal and 350-ship US Navy target, Trump may not lead the US into a period of retrenchment from its leadership role in the Asia–Pacific region, as many fear at present. Likewise, the US, with its considerable edge in technology, innovation and the corporate domain and given its tremendous capacity for self-renewal, is far from a declining power, even though the gap between the economic and military capabilities of the USA and China is narrowing.

Coming to our relations with China, the relationship is at present under some strain, as noted above. However, if one steps back and takes an objective and longer-term view, the overall report card for India–China relations will come across as reasonably substantial. It has been rightly assessed that today India and China are more engaged with each other than ever before<sup>1</sup>. India–China ties are complex with outstanding issues but have also advanced well in multiple fields. The leaders of both India and China have invested in fostering engagement between the two countries, as reflected in the remarkable frequency of summit-level exchanges. There is a major economic component in the relationship, though trade remains lopsided in China’s favour. Sub-national cooperation between provinces and cities has emerged as a potent instrument for scaling up bilateral ties, particularly in developing economic and commercial links. Contacts at the level of ordinary people, though still limited, are expanding. There are over 16,000 Indian students in China<sup>2</sup>. Indian movies are once again finding a large and welcoming market in China. During the Chinese Lunar New Year holidays this year, two of the top four grossing movies, *Kungfu Yoga* and *Buddies in India*, were India–China joint ventures which became possible due to the film co-production agreement signed during President Xi’s visit to India in September 2014<sup>3</sup>. Border areas are essentially peaceful.

Beyond bilateral engagement, the two countries have built upon their shared interests to develop a cooperative though limited agenda on multilateral and global issues. India–China relations have acquired attributes of normal State-to-State and people-to-people relations. While the gains in India–China relations are substantial, so are the challenges.

One can argue that India–China relations have entered a phase which is more complex and challenging. It involves an uncertain mix of cooperation and competition between the two countries which are simultaneously rising in a highly unpredictable international environment. Hence, it is evident that the future directions of our relations with China will increasingly be shaped by the course taken by the rise of China, the parallel rise of India and others, and the related issue of the changing dynamics of the geopolitical landscape around us, described above. At the same time, there are aspects of the emergence of China that are becoming reasonably clear.

First, there is little doubt now that China is prepared to aggressively deploy its considerable political, economic, military and diplomatic clout in pursuit of its strategic objectives. Deng Xiaoping's dictum of 'hiding one's capabilities and biding time' is rapidly receding in the rear-view mirror. China seeks supremacy in Asia–Pacific at the expense of the US, even though the element of interdependence in their relationship remains strong.

Secondly, China is also a country at an inflection point, adjusting to a 'new normal' not only in its economy but also in its polity and diplomacy. The new normal in politics and diplomacy involves emergence of the 'core' leader in Xi Jinping who is systematically pursuing the 'Chinese dream' of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Under his leadership, China is seeking to shape its neighbourhood, through the BRI and other initiatives, deploying huge resources. At the same time, the Chinese economy is slowing down with a host of structural challenges, even while the country deals with an aging population, internal security risks and other domestic issues.

At a path-breaking Work Conference on Peripheral Diplomacy convened in October 2013, Xi Jinping noted that neighbours had 'extremely significant strategic value' and remarked:

Maintaining stability in China's neighbourhood is the key objective of peripheral diplomacy. We must encourage and participate in the process of regional economic integration and speed up the process of building up infrastructure and connectivity. We must build the Silk Road Economic Belt and Twenty-first Century Maritime Silk Road, creating a new regional economic order<sup>4</sup>.

The BRI has several pragmatic considerations linked to China's connectivity agenda, the quest for new growth engines for its slowing economy and the desire to stabilise its western periphery. However, it is also a geostrategic play aimed at carving out a continental-cum-maritime realm with China as the anchor and central player. It helps China achieve its geopolitical objectives by binding its neighbouring countries more closely to its own growth story. China is systematically putting in place a universe of institutions led by it, without challenging existing international institutions, where it seeks to play a larger role.

China is a revisionist power which seeks to incrementally alter the status quo to its advantage, but it is not a revolutionary power determined to upturn the global order.

Thirdly, given Trump's 'America First' policy and his ambivalence over the US's global leadership role, China discerns a strategic opening today to further expand its regional and global profile. This could be the third wave of assertion by China of its leadership role, the first two being in the aftermath of the global economic crisis of 2008 and following Xi Jinping coming to power in late-2012. However, it is still reluctant to expand its international responsibility too rapidly.

Fourthly, the rapid accumulation of power by China has led to balancing and hedging by countries of the region but this has not deterred it. China's assessment has been that long-term benefits of its assertive stance outweigh attendant risks. For instance, it is prepared to pay the price of some diplomatic damage as it entrenches its physical and military presence in the South China Sea. It is counting on its economic pull and the reluctance of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to take sides between the US and China. The US does not seem to have any effective strategy so far to prevent China from incrementally changing facts on the ground to its advantage in the South China Sea. There is, however, an element of hubris in the Chinese behaviour as can be seen in the punishment currently being meted out to South Korea to coerce it to change its policy on hosting the anti-missile system, 'Terminal High Altitude Area Defence' or THAAD, on its territory. China's assertive attitude is opening up opportunities which countries like the US and Japan are seeking to utilise.

Finally, it is important to note that China now considers protection of overseas interests and its emergence as a maritime power as strategic priorities. In the Chinese white paper on military strategy released in May 2015, there was a major shift in the focus of the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) Navy, or PLAN, with addition of 'open seas protection' to its existing role of 'offshore waters defence'. The white paper stated that the 'traditional mentality that land outweighs the sea must be abandoned'. This doctrinal shift, the rolling out of the Maritime Silk Road initiative and other actions taken by China on the ground will progressively result in a much bigger footprint of the Chinese Navy in the IOR, in consonance with China's stated policy of becoming a maritime power.

Indeed, we are witnessing a new phase in the PLA's expanding footprint abroad. Overseas military bases were until recently considered anathema by the Chinese, but now Djibouti is likely to be only the first of many such facilities for China. Instead of constructing large US-style overseas military bases in the Indian Ocean, China may prefer a mixture of preferred access to overseas commercial ports and a limited number of exclusive PLA Navy logistic facilities, possibly co-located with commercial ports<sup>5</sup>. China is likely to establish logistics hubs at Gwadar and possibly even Karachi or Ormara

in Pakistan. There is even talk of deploying Chinese Marines at Djibouti and Gwadar. In our immediate neighbourhood, there are concerns about China's plans for ports like Hambantota and Colombo where it has secured long-term presence and operational control. We may expect that the operations of the Indian Navy and the PLA Navy will increasingly coincide, both in the IOR and the Western Pacific. We are going to face enlarged Chinese military presence closer to us in the maritime domain, apart from along the land borders.

Looking ahead, a primary challenge for us is going to be managing the simultaneous rise of China and India. The areas of influence of the two countries overlap and there will be growing competition in their shared periphery. As China's global footprint is expanding so is its political, economic and strategic presence in India's immediate and extended neighbourhood. China's actions will increasingly impact India's pursuit of its national interests in its vicinity.

Growing strategic linkages between China and Pakistan have become a major concern in India. China appears to be doubling down on its commitment to Pakistan, as manifested recently in its actions in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and the 1267 Committee. With the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the relationship is acquiring a major economic component, in addition to its traditional politico-security preoccupation. China is, for the first time, getting involved in the business of delivering stability and economic development in Pakistan. Pakistan today has increased utility in China's foreign policy priorities. It is taking advantage of its strategic economic geography, bilateral trust developed over the last six decades, and Chinese concerns about growing strategic ties between India and the USA, to position itself as a major partner in advancing China's regional and global aspirations. Pakistan is at the intersection of the land and maritime dimensions of the BRI, and the CPEC is its flagship project and most advanced component. CPEC has limited economic rationale for China but its geostrategic drivers are compelling. Pakistani ports are likely to play an important role in China's emergence as a leading maritime power with major presence in the IOR, as noted above. The upgraded Karakoram Highway is finally emerging as a relatively viable transit route. However, given its terrain and high cost of transit, it is unlikely to become a major trade and energy corridor as billed; its value will be more strategic and military, than commercial. China has decided to disregard India's concerns, including on the CPEC passing through POK, and has continued to assist in building up Pakistan's strategic capabilities, which will be used against India.

India has its own aspirations of emerging as a leading power, though the Indian dream is less clearly articulated so far. It has disavowed any interest in being part of any containment strategy directed towards China. However, like many others in the region,



India too, is hedging to deal with the uncertainties associated with the rise of China and a geopolitical landscape in flux. India prefers a multipolar world and a multipolar Asia. India does not want to see an Asia–Pacific region dominated by China. The challenge of dealing with China is compounded by the fact that a yawning gap has opened between India and China in terms of their economic, technological and military capabilities. China's GDP at around USD 11.5 trillion is five times larger than India's USD 2.2 trillion. China spends over four times as much on defence than India does<sup>6</sup>, and has much larger resources at its command to advance its regional and global agenda, including in our neighbourhood. Thus, we do not have the option of outbidding China for projects in our periphery. Instead, we will have to build on our strengths in terms of natural synergies and connectivity, which are considerable. We should also not lose sight of the fact that, given its size, civilisational heritage, economic achievements and potential, manpower resources, basic stability and demographic advantage, India is best placed among the emerging countries to eventually catch up with China, if it puts its act together. However, the gap between India and China will continue to widen in the near term, which could make China more assertive in its behaviour.

How do we navigate India–China relations in these unpredictable waters? Some recalibrating and reimagining of the paradigm of the relationship is called for. Let us consider some suggestions.

One, we must build on and update the basic template of the relationship adopted by the two countries since the late 1980s. This pragmatic approach involves compartmentalising and managing differences, not letting them come in the way of development of positive engagement to the extent feasible and of exploring areas of convergence, cooperation and collaboration in bilateral, regional and multilateral domains. It has served us well till now.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that outstanding issues are affecting expansion of India–China relations and fuelling mutual distrust. There is a clear case for addressing these issues with a sense of urgency rather than merely seeking to compartmentalise them. Even incremental but steady progress on unresolved matters will generate positive sentiments about India–China relations.

Let us take up the issue of terrorism. At the bilateral level, there are shared concerns and indeed a good beginning has been made in terms of cooperation. This was quite evident during the talks Home Minister Rajnath Singh had in China during his official visit in November 2015. The subsequent visit of the Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China, Meng Jianzhu, to India in November 2016 also reflected a degree of convergence of interests on terrorism between the two countries. Yet, the Chinese stance opposing the listing of Masood Azhar under the

1267 Committee has become a major irritant in bilateral relations, souring perceptions in India about China. The Chinese position is linked to their readiness to be Pakistan's diplomatic protector. Is it possible to make progress on this question through quiet, patient discussions without making it a make-or-break issue in relations? In parallel, the two sides can develop bilateral and even multilateral cooperation on terrorism, utilising the ministerial-level dialogue and other mechanisms agreed upon in November 2015.

There are other complex issues like the boundary question which have defied solution. Both sides have averred on multiple occasions that an early boundary settlement will advance the basic interests of the two countries and should, therefore, be pursued as a strategic objective. There was an important breakthrough in April 2005 when the Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the Boundary Question (APPGP)<sup>7</sup> was concluded. Under the Agreement, both sides decided to seek a 'political settlement of the boundary question in the context of their overall and long-term interests', abandoning the dreary and unproductive path of trying to reconcile their highly divergent and entrenched historical narratives on the issue. This was to be done on the basis of a number of eminently sensible and pragmatic propositions (such as, 'due consideration to each other's strategic and reasonable interests, and the principle of mutual and equal security'; taking into account 'historical evidence, national sentiments, practical difficulties and reasonable concerns and sensitivities of both sides, and the actual state of border areas'; identifying boundary 'along well-defined and easily identifiable natural geographical features'; both sides to 'safeguard due interests of their settled populations in the border areas'; and so on).

However, when negotiations moved to the next stage of exploring an 'agreed framework for a boundary settlement', the Chinese side started reinterpreting the agreed parameters and principles, showing little keenness to move towards an early settlement. The Agreement of 2005 requires the two sides to 'make meaningful and mutually acceptable adjustments to their respective positions on the boundary question, so as to arrive at a package settlement' to the boundary question. In the negotiations leading up to the APPGP and subsequently, it was conveyed without any ambiguity that India could not make any major adjustments in the Eastern Sector, let alone ceding Tawang or any of the areas with settled populations. Indeed, any pragmatic solution would involve 'meaningful adjustments' in the positions of India and China in the west and east respectively, as the Chinese side had also proposed earlier as part of Deng Xiaoping's 'package' solution<sup>8</sup>. Unfortunately, any major advance in the negotiations on the 'agreed framework' has eluded the special representatives in their talks since 2005.

The Chinese side is also not ready to proceed with the line of actual control (LAC)

clarification exercise, disregarding the agreement to arrive at common understanding of the alignment of the LAC which is a prerequisite for implementation of several agreed confidence building measures (CBMs). It is relevant to recall Article X(1) of the Agreement of November 1996 on CBMs in the military field along the LAC in the India–China border areas, which stipulated:

Recognising that the full implementation of some of the provisions of the present Agreement will depend on the two sides arriving at a *common understanding of the alignment* of the line of actual control in the India–China border areas, the two sides agree to speed up the process of clarification and confirmation of the line of actual control. As an initial step in this process, they are clarifying the alignment of the line of actual control in those segments where they have different perceptions. They also agree to exchange maps indicating their respective perceptions of the *entire alignment* of the line of actual control as soon as possible<sup>9</sup>.

Unfortunately, the Chinese side stalled LAC clarification after differences emerged in 2002 when maps depicting respective perceptions of the LAC were shown to each other but not exchanged. The LAC clarification process has not been resumed by the Chinese side even though this commitment was reiterated subsequently, including in the APPGP of 2005<sup>10</sup>. Different perceptions of the LAC have contributed to border incidents, including stand-offs involving military forces of the two sides, and also prevented implementation of several agreed CBMs.

China has shown a measure of reluctance to accept the LAC as the basis for trans-border interactions, including for border trade and pilgrimage, even though both sides had pragmatically accepted such an approach in the past, beginning with the Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement of September 1993. It is worth recalling that the understanding reached in 1993 accepting the legal validity of the LAC involved a major shift in India's stand which created obligation on the part of the two countries to respect the status quo, pending an ultimate boundary settlement<sup>11</sup>. The Chinese protestations regarding the activities on our side of the LAC (in Arunachal Pradesh, for instance) are, therefore, puzzling for the Indian side. There is need to revisit these issues, respecting the understandings earlier reached between the two countries. At the same time, we must not underestimate positive gains of ensuring that border areas are peaceful despite major differences on the boundary question and significant divergence with regard to the alignment of the LAC. This has been achieved as a result of clear political commitment on both sides, mechanisms and CBMs assiduously put in place through as many as six agreements, and close contacts and cooperation between the border-guarding forces of the two countries. Both sides recognise that the maintenance of peace and tranquillity in the border areas is an essential prerequisite for the continued development of relations between the two countries.

It is also important that we anticipate contentious issues and prevent them from becoming troublesome irritants in the relationship. For example, we have the sensitive question of trans-border rivers where we can build on the existing mechanisms and move towards greater transparency and comprehensive arrangements for cooperation among co-riparians. This will help allay worries in India about the possible downstream impact of Chinese projects. Even while we must not duck contentious issues, we cannot afford to let them overwhelm the overall agenda of relations and thereby put this important relationship on a downward slope. While we seek to address our differences meaningfully, we must also learn to manage them, keeping in mind that India–China relations are vital, complex and sensitive.

This brings us to the second suggestion, the imperative of constantly investing in the positive contents of the relationship; otherwise, we run the risk of negatives dominating the bilateral discourse.

Today, India and China are the two fastest growing large economies. Present indications are that by 2030, the US, China and India will be the three largest economies in the world. While we cannot make linear extrapolation of present trends to anticipate future growth, both India and China are reasonably confident of maintaining their respective domestic transformations. How the two countries respond to and utilise each other's growth stories will be of great significance for both of them and for the global economy. This assessment was the basis of the understanding on 'closer developmental partnership' reached during President Xi's visit to India in September 2014<sup>12</sup>, which was reinforced during Prime Minister Modi's visit to China in May 2015<sup>13</sup>.

On our side, the objective was to leverage China's capabilities to advance India's domestic development agenda through participation of Chinese companies and other entities in infrastructure, manufacturing, skill development and other sectors. On the Chinese side, the decision perhaps reflects that India is now a major account for Chinese companies (seventh-largest export destination with exports of USD 62 billion last year; projects in excess of USD 60 billion; emerging destination for foreign direct investment (FDI); major market for e-commerce giants like Alibaba; and so on). One key element of rebalancing of Chinese economy is greater investment abroad; China's outward FDI of USD 148 billion exceeded inward FDI last year. It makes business sense for Chinese companies to have India as an essential part of their global portfolio.

We have made progress, as the Prime Minister noted during his visit to China in September last year. However, there are concerns in India about the lopsided and imbalanced nature of trade relations between India and China. In the last fiscal year, India had a trade deficit of USD 53 billion with China, which was 44 per cent of its global trade deficit which is clearly unsustainable. We need some visible progress on getting enhanced

access to the Chinese market for Indian goods and services. Our economic engagement is also undergoing transition as we have reached the limits of the earlier model that relied on increasingly asymmetric trade expansion. Investment, e-commerce and services have emerged as new drivers of growth, as trade in goods, especially our exports, has stagnated. Much more needs to be done to identify and utilise complementarities in the two economies and forge production and supply chain linkages.

The two sides can be more ambitious in setting and implementing the agenda of bilateral cooperation. This is particularly true of the developmental partnership. There are a whole lot of other possibilities, including in newer areas. For instance, during Prime Minister Modi's visit to China in May 2015, we agreed to cooperate on peaceful applications of nuclear energy and outer space. Can India and China look at an agreement on civil nuclear cooperation? China is, after all, one of the most competitive suppliers of nuclear power plants. Can we consider a joint project in space which will project a positive narrative of India–China cooperation?

Thirdly, while exploring opportunities for collaboration, it is important to remain pragmatic in our approach. Let me illustrate with China's Belt and Road Initiative. India has its valid reservations regarding this important Chinese initiative and it is unrealistic for the latter to expect an endorsement from India. At the same time, the two sides can explore synergies between their respective connectivity and developmental agendas and agree on specific projects. Such a practical orientation resulted in India joining the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The AIIB was initially mooted as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, but launched in June 2015 as a multilateral financial institution with the participation of fifty-seven countries, with India being the second-largest stakeholder, next only to China.

Fourthly, as noted above, a primary challenge for us in the future is going to be managing the simultaneous rise of China and India. During Prime Minister Modi's visit to China in May 2015, we sought to develop a basic political consensus on the issue of simultaneous rise of India and China. It was agreed that the re-emergence of India and China as two major powers in the region and the world must unfold in a mutually supportive manner, and that mutual sensitivity for each other's concerns, interests and aspirations will be the key to managing this process<sup>14</sup>. However, this template is aspirational and much work needs to be done to substantiate it.

The geopolitics of the simultaneous re-emergence of China and India can best be addressed through better strategic communication and mutual accommodation in respect of specific theatres, situations and issues to the extent feasible. This will involve substantive and continuous discussions and understanding each other's vital interests while avoiding any expansive definition of those interests. It will be useful for China to recognise that

a measure of hedging by India is a legitimate response in an uncertain geopolitical landscape and that India will work with third countries to offset its disadvantage arising from large asymmetries in its strengths and capabilities vis-à-vis China. On its part, India must recognise that Chinese activities in its neighbourhood are not necessarily directed against it. In the maritime domain, our navies will have to develop the habit of working together. This strategic dialogue, which should also address and manage major issues and differences in the bilateral domain and identify areas of convergence and cooperation, will essentially seek to develop a new *modus vivendi* and an updated template for India–China relations.

A beginning has been made with strategic consultations between National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and State Councillor Yang Jiechi in Hyderabad in November 2016 and the launching of restructured strategic talks between Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar and Executive Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui in Beijing in February this year. Announcing the latter talks, the spokesperson of Ministry of External Affairs acknowledged that there are ‘friction points’ in the relationship and that the dialogue will ‘take a holistic view of India–China relations, and see to what extent the two sides can accommodate each other’s concerns and interests’<sup>15</sup>. This process of reconciling the interests, concerns and aspirations of the two countries must be carried forward in a structured, sustained and constructive manner.

Fifthly, we need to forge a fresh agenda for our collaboration on regional, multilateral and global issues, proceeding from common interests. For example, India and China are two of the major beneficiaries of economic globalisation. Equally, they have the most to lose if it breaks down or even declines. Looking at what is happening around us—the populist and protectionist backlash in the US and Europe, for instance—we realise that India and China, as the two largest developing economies and sovereignty-conscious States, have greater convergence in their interests and concerns than often recognised.

Finally, as noted earlier, the challenge of management of India’s relations with an assertive China is compounded by the large gap in economic and military capabilities of the two countries. In fashioning our response to China, we should take a leaf out of China’s playbook for dealing with the US, at least until recently. While China is a potential adversary, it is not in our interest to cast it as an enemy. It will be prudent for us to assiduously narrow the still-widening capability gap. It will obviously not be possible to match the Chinese armed forces in numbers or overall strength. While stepping up our military modernisation programme, we will have to focus on developing asymmetric capabilities to offset the Chinese advantage. This will involve a mix of defensive and offensive capabilities as a deterrent along the India–China borders, and building on

the naval edge in our periphery, exploiting our strategic geography and our ‘home-field advantage’ in our proximity. A major part of our response will have to be to utilise our natural synergies and potential connectivities with our neighbours.

While seeking constructive engagement with the Chinese and utilising trade, investment and other economic linkages with China to advance our developmental agenda, we will have to, in parallel, develop leverage that China respects. Here again, our response may be asymmetric in terms of the choice of issues and theatres where we can act in a cost-effective manner, without being unduly provocative. The present geopolitical scenario where the rise of India is largely perceived as benign while there are growing anxieties regarding the rise of China, has its possibilities. At the same time, it is in our interest to ensure that our critical relationship with China remains on an even keel and moves in a positive direction to the extent feasible. This will require strategic maturity on both sides. We must keep in mind the big picture of our relations and avoid knee-jerk reactions to individual events and issues in this media-driven age.

As noted earlier, India–China relations have entered an even more challenging phase involving a changing mix of cooperation and competition in a complex and shifting geopolitical environment. Managing this relationship and ensuring that it remains on a constructive track while we hold our own ground and bide our time will possibly be the most important challenge of our foreign policy. Significantly, India and China still consider this to be a period of opportunity in their relations, despite their differences. Both have a shared desire to project bilateral relations in a positive light, even though they harbour doubts about each other’s strategic intentions. Both recognise the aspect of competition but neither wishes to cast the other as an adversary. Both are today concentrating on their internal adjustments and development and do not desire confrontation with each other. Today India–China relations are suffering from an overhang of differences and suspicions, but it is eminently feasible and desirable to develop it along a pragmatic trajectory, complex and challenging and yet, forward-looking.

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# The China–Pakistan Nexus

PRABHAT P SHUKLA

## *Abstract*

*The Chinese–Pakistani nexus has been building up over the decades since the 1960s. While some in India have downplayed the strength of the Chinese commitment to Pakistan, the history of these relations reveals a different picture. The Chinese have been deterred in the past by a conjuncture of external forces, but today, those constraints no longer operate. The 2005 Sino-Pakistan Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Neighbourly Relations symbolises the strategic and economic commitment of China to Pakistan's security. It has emboldened the latter to confront both India and the US-led forces in Afghanistan, and has been indulged by both India and the US. It is time for India to understand the hard realities of the situation and take measures to address the growing threat to its own interests.*

The China–Pakistan relationship goes back to the early 1960s. In fact, 1963 saw the boundary agreement, and served notice of a new axis emerging in the Indian subcontinent. Under this agreement, Pakistan ceded the Shaksgam Valley of the state of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) to China at a time when India and Pakistan were engaged in serious negotiations over J&K, following the 1962 India–China War. Not surprisingly, it effectively destroyed any prospect of a settlement between India and Pakistan.

But it was the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War that brought out the strength and closeness of China and Pakistan, and the danger this posed to India in a military sense. It is worthwhile going into some detail on this, as there is a general belief that China has never intervened in any of the India–Pakistan wars. In fact, China issued two ultimatums to India during the

course of the war. The first was on 8 September 1965 and in its note, the Chinese warned that an Indian attempt to take over Pakistani territory would entail 'grave consequences'. This was in response to the Indian decision to cross the international boundary on 6 September in response to the Pakistani attack in J&K. An Indian combined arms attack was then heading inside Pakistani territory towards Sindh and Lahore.

This was a sufficiently serious matter for a discussion between the Indian and American leaders, and within the US itself. President Lyndon Johnson and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara agreed that the US needed to prepare for a contingency where China would get involved. Johnson felt that the Note of 8 September indicated intent to get involved; the US could not then be caught unprepared, they agreed. The Indian leaders also approached the Soviet leaders, Leonid Brezhnev and Alexei Kosygin, less than a year into their jobs then.

The Chinese followed up with a second Note on 17 September. This was an ultimatum, and referred not to the India–Pakistan War, but to bilateral disputes, though the purpose was clear: to ease the pressure on Pakistan. It accused India of illegal constructions on the Chinese side of the border with Sikkim and demanded that these be dismantled by 20 September. There were also intrusions and firing on both the Eastern and Western sectors. Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri was sufficiently concerned about this ultimatum to approach the US for consultations under the Air Defence Agreement, the only Cold War defence agreement between the two countries, signed during the Kennedy administration. The US declined, but advised that they were restraining the Chinese through the talks they were conducting between the two embassies in Warsaw.

Meanwhile, the Soviets also made appropriate *démarches* in Beijing, but relations between the two were already on the decline, and it is not clear what effect Soviet advice had. Nonetheless, at the end of the war, the Indian government thanked both the US and the USSR for their role in restraining the Chinese. What is important to note is that the Chinese did extend their deadline from 20 to 22 September, and that was the date on which India accepted the UN-brokered ceasefire, which then came into effect, since Pakistan did likewise. According to the then Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh, he had opposed the ceasefire, and thus, it can only be speculated whether the Chinese ultimatum weighed with Shastri in disregarding Arjan Singh's advice. Perhaps it was one of the factors.

The second major episode was the 1971 War for the liberation of Bangladesh. Active hostilities began on 3 December and ended on 16 December, with the Pakistani surrender in Dhaka. The Chinese this time were much more restrained, for which there were two obvious reasons. The first was the Indo-Soviet Treaty, signed in August 1971. The archival record shows that both the US and China were greatly exercised over the fighting,

and each pressed the other to do more to help Pakistan. But, the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) put out a TASS newspaper statement on 5 December, which effectively warned off the Chinese from any interference. In fact, the leader of the Chinese delegation to the UN General Assembly recognised the reality in the following words:

On 5 December, TASS published a statement, which is full of the smell of gunpowder. It clamours that the tension between India and Pakistan has threatened the so-called interests of the security of the Soviet Union and that it cannot remain indifferent. This is blackmail and is a menace to China...

*(Peking Review, No 51, 17 December 1971)*

The Americans also approached the Shah of Iran, and he was even more explicit. He stated clearly that in the light of the Indo-Soviet Treaty, he was not prepared to confront the Soviet Union, and help Pakistan with arms and material. Despite this, the Chinese did try to put pressure later as the war progressed, and Pakistan and its protectors apprehended that India was preparing to attack the western half as well. Kissinger noted in his contemporary assessment of the war for President Nixon that the Chinese note warned India about encroachment and intrusion by Indian troops across the Sikkim border, and asked for this to be reversed immediately.

*(FRUS 1971 Vol XI, Doc 319, 16 December 1971)*

The second obvious reason is that the Cultural Revolution was at its height at this time. Amid the turmoil, the armed forces were not ready for a confrontation—least of all with the USSR, which was raring to use nuclear weapons against China, if American reports are to be believed. More importantly, the designated heir to Mao and a leading figure in the armed forces, Lin Biao had also defected. He was killed in September 1971, when the aircraft he was flying in crashed in Mongolia, while he was apparently fleeing out of China, though the circumstances of this episode remain a mystery.

A similar pattern of behaviour is evident during the Kargil War of 1999, though the Chinese displayed more restraint. Again, the reason is not hard to fathom—the US had cauterised the fighting by imposing restraints on all sides, and the Chinese had worked out an understanding with the US, reflected in their joint statement issued in 1998 after the nuclear tests. But still, there was an attempt to tie down Indian forces on the line of actual control.

The important conclusion to draw from these episodes is that in the military field, the Chinese commitment to Pakistan is strong and consistent. Such restraint, as has been evident, has been the result of deterrence by the Soviets as in 1971, or persuasion by the Americans as in 1999. Today, these factors are absent or much weaker: the Soviet Union no longer exists, and Russia is the weaker of the two—as most Russians themselves acknowledge.

As for the Americans, their role in restraining China would probably continue, but the Chinese have built up their military capability to an extent where they may not heed American advice. In this context, the recent remarks of a Chinese scholar, active in the South Asia Track II circuit, are worth noting. He said that China would have to get involved, if there was any Indian attempt to destabilise Baluchistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. These remarks were made following Prime Minister Modi's mention of these areas during his Independence Day speech on 15 August 2016. (*HT*, 29 August 2016)

The argument so far has been to establish that the Chinese commitment to Pakistan in the military field is serious, and Indian planners would be well-advised to take cognisance of this reality, especially in the event of a future confrontation or actual war. The factors of restraint that had operated in the past no longer apply—either Soviet pressure, or American persuasion. In fact, the growing understanding between India and the US is itself emerging as a factor promoting an adversarial attitude among the Chinese. However, the Chinese–Pakistani nexus goes beyond the military. In the economic and nuclear fields as well, and even on terrorism, there is an inexplicable and implausible alliance between them.

On the economic side, it was long argued, at least in India, that there was no real commitment to Pakistan on the part of China. This was factually true, but the answer was not because there was a lack of commitment. The answer was that as long as the US was willing to provide the funds required to keep the Pakistani economy afloat, the Chinese were comfortable standing aside. The reasons for the US to continue the funding, in the face of the destabilising role Pakistan was playing in Afghanistan were hard to fathom, and eventually even the US could not keep it going. From around 2011, US subventions have been declining and the Chinese have stepped in now with the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) with a pledge of USD 46 billion in energy and infrastructure projects. This is quite the biggest single-country commitment made by China. Even though many of the projects are funded by loans given by Chinese banks at commercial rates, if the past is anything to go by, much of this will end up being written off. Still, it is not a given that these projects will pay off. Many of the Chinese investments in Africa and elsewhere have failed to provide the returns, either commercial or strategic, that were expected. In the case of Pakistan, there are well-advertised differences over the substance of the projects, their geographic locations and alignments. In the case of Gilgit–Baltistan, Khyber–Pakhtunkhwa, and, above all, Baluchistan, there are demonstrations, and objections even at official and political levels. Obviously, India is concerned over the use of Gilgit–Baltistan, part of the territory of the princely state of J&K under the illegal occupation, and has made its formal *démarches*.

As the Chinese economy runs into its own economic difficulties, it will also find it problematic to continue such large-scale funding, even on commercial terms.

To substantiate: it is frequently pointed out that China holds the largest foreign exchange reserves in the world. But, these are being drawn down rapidly, and have fallen from USD 4 trillion in 2015 to USD 3 trillion in some eighteen months. Additionally, China also has among the highest foreign debt—USD 1.4 trillion—and servicing this will become more and more burdensome as US interest rates rise, and the dollar also rises against the RMB. All the same, what Chinese investments have done is to instil in Pakistan a sense that they can ignore American pressure, and continue their destabilising role vis-à-vis both, India and Afghanistan. The response from India has, unfortunately, been vacillating. Instead of indulging Pakistan's refusal to accord most favoured nation (MFN) treatment to Indian exports, we need to withdraw our grant of the same status to Pakistani exports to India. They are in violation of WTO rules, and this is one more example of how they are allowed to get away with flouting their international obligations.

Similarly, India should formally pull out from the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India gas pipeline. It is not enough to argue, as many do in India, that this pipeline has no real prospects. It is important for India to make it clear that it will not countenance Pakistan, sitting astride its energy lifelines. Equally, so long as India is part of the project, it remains bankable, and remains on the international agenda, with some of the multilateral lending agencies pushing it along.

With regard to terrorism, it is worth remembering that the Chinese did business with the Taliban when they were in power in Kabul from 1996 to 2001. During this period, the two sides signed several economic cooperation agreements covering civil aviation, mining and transport. And the Chinese have opened links with the Taliban once again in recent years, hosting them on two recent visits to Xinjiang, just before the four-way talks under the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, USA) began. Given the growing threat from Islamists in Xinjiang, one would expect the Chinese to be wary of the Taliban. The Chinese, in fact, have laid emphasis on this in their Track I and II discussions with India, with some success. But the real logic of their approach to the Taliban may be seen through the prism of the manner in which the US used the same forces, then called the Mujahideen, and the considerations that guided them. The main aim then, in the 1980s, was to defeat the USSR. They understood the nature of the men they were using, but two considerations overruled their possible reservations. The first was that they were the only effective fighters against the Soviet forces, and defeating the Soviets was the paramount objective. The second was a conviction that Pakistan would hold these forces in check, and not allow them to threaten US interests. The Chinese, *mutatis mutandis*, are being guided by the same considerations. Their aim is to defeat the US-led forces in Afghanistan, and if that means using the same Islamist forces, they can accept the risk for a higher prize. And, of course, they are also convinced that Pakistan

will ensure that these forces do not hurt their interests. How wrong this calculation is, they have had occasion to see for themselves, even if they would not learn from the bitter experience of the US. For the third time in the last two decades, the Chinese have had to close the border between Pakistan and Xinjiang because of terrorists entering from Pakistan. Still, it seems, the appeal of inflicting a humiliation on the Americans is strong enough to override all these potential troubles.

For India, there is a more troubling picture—this concerns the case of Masood Azhar and the Chinese refusal to allow him to be named as a terrorist under the UN Security Council Resolution 1267 Committee. Back in 2008, the Chinese had also blocked the naming of Jamaat-ud-Dawa and its key members, including Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, from being similarly named. This was just after the Mumbai attacks, in which 166 persons, including several foreigners, were killed. But on that occasion, the combined US and Indian pressure had persuaded China to withdraw its objection. This time, that pressure regarding Masood Azhar—if it is being applied—seems not to be working. This is further evidence that China is willing to stand up to international persuasion and pressure even in a clear-cut case of a terrorist. This is one more example of what India (and Afghanistan) can expect from the China–Pakistan nexus in the future.

The final aspect to be considered relates to nuclear and missile cooperation between the two countries. The full details of the content of this cooperation are still not known, but what is available publicly is serious enough. The Pakistanis took the decision to acquire nuclear weapons in 1972, though there had been interest in the issue ever since the Chinese nuclear test in 1964. A few years later, AQ Khan was to return to Pakistan with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's blessings, and begin work on nuclear enrichment with the aim of developing a bomb. The story of Khan's activities in west Europe and the leniency with which he was treated is well known. However, the Chinese entered into this effort sometime in the late 1980s, as the Americans grew detached with the Afghan War winding down; they had to invoke the Pressler Amendment in 1990, and impose sanctions on Pakistan. China at this stage reportedly even tested a device for the Pakistanis in their Lop Nor test site. It may be presumed that the design for the weapon was also provided by the Chinese themselves. This emerged from the exposure of the AQ Khan papers that were discovered with the Libyans after Col M Gaddafi made his deal with the US, and handed over all the documents he had received from the Pakistanis. Many of the documents for the bomb design were in Mandarin, and the design for the bomb was similar to the early Chinese devices.

China signed the nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1992, so in a purely legal sense, it was not violating any laws by sharing this technology in the late 1980s. But, even after 1992, China has continued its cooperation to Pakistan: the Khushab



reactor, which is unsafeguarded, was built in stages from the late 1990s, and is thought to be capable of producing 40 kg of weapons-grade Plutonium annually. Further, on the plea of ‘grandfathering’ new nuclear reactors, China continues to build Chashma 3 and 4, and Karachi 1 and 2. These are unambiguous violations of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) guidelines, but the Obama administration was reluctant to take any action on this. It remains to be seen whether the new Trump administration will take a more forthright stand.

There is a similar story of clandestine supply of missiles and missile technology from China to Pakistan through the decades. The beginning is in the early 1990s, when the US stopped all military cooperation with Pakistan after invoking the Pressler Amendment. Among the most serious issues for Pakistan was the ban on the supply of F-16 aircraft, which Pakistan had modified for nuclear delivery. Initially, China supplied entire systems, including the M-11 missile and then switched to components shipped in crates, once the M-11 supply was discovered. These were spotted by several intelligence agencies, and the US imposed sanctions on both Pakistan and China. However, the Clinton administration lifted these sanctions on both, and found a way out of the Pressler restrictions through the Brown Amendment, named after its author, Senator Hank Brown, which allowed a one-time waiver of the restrictions. Nonetheless, the missile cooperation continued. Some of it was direct and some of it was between North Korea and Pakistan. The former was seeking nuclear technology, and had developed missiles on the basis of the design of the Russian Scuds. Pakistani scientists made several trips to North Korea in order to help the nuclear programme along, and received missile components and technology in return, based on the No Dong, a medium-range missile.

China had also sought to limit India’s options by amending the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) draft to include the requirement that all the forty-four countries running nuclear plants had to sign the treaty for it to enter into force. This was targeting India, and was a first in the history of treaty-making to compel a third country to accede to a treaty. This was one of the major reasons that India was forced to veto the draft in Geneva in 1996, when it came before the Conference on Disarmament.

How have all these aspects manifested themselves in recent years? Probably the most important is a little-known document signed by the Chinese and the Pakistanis in 2005: their Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Neighbourly Relations. The text of this treaty has not been released, but there are two aspects that are worth stressing, on the basis of the summary released by the Chinese side. The first is the timing. This is the time that Pakistan was abandoning its supportive role in the US-led operations in Afghanistan and gradually reviving the Taliban. The second, one of the major clauses, states that China respects the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan.

Inevitably, the Pakistanis put a spin on this to suggest that China is committed to defending Pakistan's territorial integrity. True or not, it is hard to say, but what is worth noting is that from this time onwards, Pakistan was emboldened to undermine US interests in Afghanistan. Judging by the anti-Soviet Afghan War in the 1980s, Pakistan was only willing to play the role it did if it had assurances of its security, and the Reagan administration did so, on a long-term basis. It would be safe to speculate that there is some sense of security that the treaty provides, and that enabled Pakistan to rebuild the Taliban and unleash them on the Afghan battlefield.

The existence of the treaty is important to bear in mind, for the situation in each of these countries is shaky. President Trump has reached out to, or accepted the outreach of Taiwan in a way that has unsettled China. While it is true that there is a commitment on the part of the US to 'One China' in its bilateral understandings with the People's Republic, it is equally true that the Taiwan Relations Act pulls US diplomacy in the opposite direction. But apart from Taiwan, China has been facing long-term problems in Tibet and Xinjiang. Hong Kong has also emerged as a challenge to the 'one-country-two systems' formula, with its obvious implications for Taiwan.

The Chinese economy remains unsettled, despite headline GDP figures that seek to reassure. Further, the new Trump administration threatens the economic relationship as well. All talk of interdependence cannot conceal the fact that China needs the US market for its exports, because that is where it earns over half its trade surplus. And the Chinese nervousness over monetary tightening—recently referred to by Xi Jinping at Davos—is another factor of Chinese vulnerability. On top of all this, there is a major political transition due later this year when the nineteenth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party meets.

Pakistan is similarly unsettled. The periphery is growing more turbulent, and Prime Minister Modi has become the first leader to make a public reference to the problems not only in Baluchistan, but also in Gilgit–Baltistan and Pashtunistan.

All these factors make for an emerging security environment that requires careful understanding and preparation. It is worth stressing that the Chinese have recently reorganised their armed forces, establishing joint theatre commands. Under this arrangement, new military districts in Tibet and Xinjiang form part of the Western Command, thus bringing the entire Indian border under one command, unlike the previous arrangement. Tibet is, however, under the direct control of the Beijing-based Central Military Commission, and is headed by an officer of the same rank as the theatre command. *Global Times* described the arrangement as:

'After the [recent] military reform, most of the provincial military commands are now under the control of the newly-established National Defence Mobilisation Department of the Central Military Commission, and their priority is to the region's militia reserves and conscription.

The Tibet Military Command, on the other hand, is under the leadership of the Chinese ground forces, which suggests that the command may undertake some kind of military combat mission in the future,' a source close to the matter told the *Global Times*. And further: 'The Tibet Military Command bears great responsibility to prepare for possible conflicts between China and India, and currently it is difficult to secure all the military resources they need...'

There are credible reports that Chinese troops are present on the Pakistani side of the Line of Control. According to reports, they are meant to provide protection to their workers in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, but that is not convincing, since protection is the job of the host government, and this is what Pakistan is doing along the CPEC. China has also provided Pakistan two ships for security of the maritime links to Gwadar port. Two more are to follow.

Another recent development that is a cause for concern is that Russia is being drawn into this nexus. The needless pressure that the Obama–Clinton–Kerry team was putting on Russia left it with little choice but to accommodate China into its calculation, even though it has well-recognised reservations regarding the potential risk of getting too dependent on China. But it has been compelled to do so in order to break out of the isolation the West was forcing it into. This has provided both China and Pakistan with the potential of acquiring some of the best military technology in the world. Russian jet engines fill the gap that China has not been able to fill in on its own. And it is a major provider of energy, both hydrocarbon and nuclear. It must be hoped that the Trump presidency will attenuate some of the hostility that it inherited; India is well-positioned to try and bridge the differences between the two countries, and should actively try and do so.

All this suggests that there are serious security issues as a result of the growing nexus between China and Pakistan, which India would be well-advised to track closely, and find ways of neutralising the dangers they hold. This will require a mix of economic and military means as well as active diplomacy. The Trump presidency will create sharp discontinuities, and will be even more challenging for partners and adversaries alike. India must be ready with its own strategy, and coordinate its actions with the many like-minded countries in the region. The time for passivity is at an end.

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# Evolving Dynamics in Pakistan

TILAK DEVASHER

## *Abstract*

*Pakistan is in a state of flux. Even though one civilian government succeeded another in 2013, democratic consolidation continues to be fragile. Despite a solid power base in Punjab, Nawaz Sharif's position has become uncertain due to the taint of the Panama Papers and the impending Supreme Court verdict. His hastiness in putting the army in its place could lead to the revival of tensions in civil–military relations. The economy continues to suffer from serious structural flaws and Pakistan could be heading for a major balance of payment crisis in the near future. Notwithstanding the ongoing military operation in North Waziristan, incidents of terrorism continue apace. Barring the one bright spot of relations with China, Pakistan's flawed security paradigms have brought it into conflict with its neighbours, and as a result, relations with India and Afghanistan continue on a downward spiral. With the US, Pakistan faces an uncertain future. Current issues apart, the degradation of the innards of Pakistan—water, education, economy and population—requires a visionary leadership to pull Pakistan back from the abyss.*

## PAKISTAN'S PIVOTAL MOMENT

Pakistan stands at a pivotal moment in its history. It has to take major decisions regarding its future trajectory, on issues pertaining to democratic consolidation, civil–military relations, economic development, terrorism, response to religious fundamentalism and its relations with its neighbours and beyond.

The task has, no doubt, been complicated by the winds of change that are blowing across the world. Brexit in the UK and the election of Donald Trump as the US president,

point to the waning popularity of globalisation and a clamour for nationalism and protectionism. Even though Pakistan is not fully wired into the global economic system, it too will not be able to escape the impact of the flux that the world is likely to face in the coming years.

## DEMOCRACY

Despite one civilian government succeeding another in 2013, democratic consolidation continues to be brittle. In its annual report titled *Assessment of the Quality of Democracy in Pakistan 2016*, The Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT), a think tank focused on political and public policy research, made the following points: (i) The National Assembly continued to be sidelined as a forum for debate, discussion and resolution of national issues (Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has attended only 13 per cent of parliament sessions and Imran Khan even less); (ii) Lack of institutionalised decision-making, since the federal cabinet that was supposed to meet at least fifty-two times in a year, only managed to meet six times during 2016 leading to poor governance (the Supreme Court had to intervene to tell the Prime Minister to get policy decisions passed by the cabinet); (iii) The internal democracy of political parties continued to be a liability for the quality of Pakistan's democracy during 2016; (iv) The civil–military imbalance tilted even further, with the military leadership taking leading roles on matters of national security and certain areas of foreign policy, while the elected government appeared to act as an auxiliary.

The report concluded that the process of consolidation of democracy continues to be not only slow but also marked by roadblocks and twists and turns. Though a formal democracy, Pakistan had serious drawbacks that have made it fragile.

## POLITICAL DYNAMICS

Be that as it may, the pace of political activity is likely to quicken due to the general elections slated for 2018. Punjab, with over 50 per cent seats in the National Assembly, would remain the major battleground. During the last three years, the ruling Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML–N) has further consolidated its position in its power base of Punjab due to its performance in the local bodies polls. Using the criterion of loyalty, it has established a monopoly over the State machinery—bureaucracy, police and patronage in Punjab colloquially called *thana-kutcherry* model of governance. It has created a large pool of beneficiaries ranging from bureaucrats and government contractors to real estate businessmen and journalists. The future of these beneficiaries is now intricately linked with the PML–N and they will do their best to ensure its victory in the 2018 elections.

Despite this solid base in Punjab, Nawaz Sharif finds his position shaky primarily because of the Panama Papers case<sup>1</sup>. The hearing of the case has been completed and the Supreme Court, at the time of writing, had reserved its judgement that is expected any day. Though the Sharif brothers believe that they can ‘fix’ almost anything like they have been doing for the last three decades, Panama Papers are not going away and neither are the London flats. Nawaz faces difficulties in explaining the source of funds through which the flats were bought. Irrespective of the judicial decision in the case, these issues will remain part of the political narrative in Pakistan and would be like the proverbial albatross around Nawaz’s neck.

For Imran Khan, the Panama Papers were god-sent, since they gave him a new lease of life after his election-rigging campaign received a setback following the 2015 Judicial Commission report. However, tactically, Imran was unable to capitalise on the opportunity to force Nawaz Sharif’s resignation. This was primarily due to his inability to grow out of the campaign mode and to continue to depend on the power of street agitation, instead of that of the parliament. When he was unable to muster enough street power to dislodge Nawaz Sharif, he had no option but to return to parliament. The opposition remained fractious with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), especially unable to countenance that it was Imran Khan, who had emerged as the main opposition leader.

The key battleground for both the PPP and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is Punjab, where the two would be fighting to attract the same anti-Nawaz constituency. Bilawal Bhutto has been making some efforts to reinvent the party by distancing it from the label of being a ‘friendly opposition’ to the PML–N. Asif Zardari, however, continues to play an ambivalent role, hedging his bets, lest the anti-corruption campaign engulfs him too. That apart, there is considerable skepticism about the party being a crowd-puller anymore. It does not have an agenda or programme like its leftist agenda in the past of *roti, kapda aur makan*. 2017-18 would show whether the PPP is politically relevant at the national level or would remain confined to Sindh.

Imran Khan has an edge over the PPP since he has had a consistent anti-corruption agenda. He dominated the political scene in 2016 and has donned the de facto mantle of the leader of the opposition. However, the moot question is whether he can convert his 17 per cent vote share in the 2013 elections into over 30 per cent in 2018 that would be required to ensure that Nawaz does not win a fourth term. For this, his corruption plank would have to fire the imagination of the people at large or make them angry enough to see the back of Nawaz. It remains to be seen whether he can create a *hawa* in the run up to the 2018 elections to defeat the well-oiled Sharif machinery, especially in Punjab.

## CIVIL–MILITARY DYNAMICS

The state of civil–military relations is another cause of worry for Nawaz Sharif. With the on-schedule retirement of the popular Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif, Nawaz was saved the blushes of another premature termination of his premiership. Having appointed his sixth Army Chief, the debatable point is, have civil–military relations become harmonious under the new Army Chief, Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa?

It is one of Nawaz Sharif's fatal flaws (the others being demanding absolute control and loyalty and considering himself above accountability) that he thinks that having appointed his own man (*apna banda*) as army chief, the army is now beholden to him. He still hasn't learnt that the army chief is no one's man and neither has the army as an institution changed because of change in command. In trying to settle scores with the army and claw back some of the space conceded to it, Nawaz is likely to land himself in trouble. A case in point has been the efforts to tarnish the reputation of former Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif by the systematic leak of his joining the Saudi-backed Islamic Military Alliance, and later generating a controversy over the propriety of the allotment of 90 acres of land to him. This led to a sharp rejoinder from the army's mouthpiece Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) that the land was allotted strictly in accordance with the 'constitutional provisions' warning 'this debate with the intent of maligning the army has the potential to create misunderstanding between State institutions thus considered detrimental to existing cohesion'.

This was the second warning under Gen Bajwa's short tenure. The first was in mid-January 2017, when in response to a question about a 'dormant inquiry' into the *Dawn* leaks controversy during a visit to Kharian cantonment, he said that, 'There will be no compromise on the dignity of Pakistan Army<sup>2</sup>.' This was not an isolated event since he was again asked about the *Dawn* leaks issue during his visit to the Lahore cantonment in February. If the PML–N thought that the leaks controversy was done and dusted with the departure of Gen Raheel Sharif, they were mistaken.

Both these statements are indicators of the potential acrimony between the civil and the military regimes early in Gen Bajwa's term, owing to Nawaz's penchant for control. Observers have noted that the ISPR went beyond the defence of Gen Raheel Sharif to warn about misunderstanding between State institutions, i.e. the civil and the military and being detrimental to existing cohesion.

Nawaz's calculations to chip away at the army are possibly based on the reality that the opposition is in disarray, his formidable power base in Punjab is intact and the fact that the new army chief will take some time to settle down. His attempts, however, could lead to a renewal of tensions in civil–military relations. An alternative strategy of providing



good governance and strengthening institutions to claw back the space from the army does not seem to fit into Nawaz's style of governance.

### TERRORISM AND INTERNAL SECURITY

During the last fifteen years, Pakistan has lost more than fifty thousand civilians and soldiers to terrorism. According to the State Bank of Pakistan, the total direct and indirect loss and damage to Pakistan's economy, as a result of the 'war on terror' is around USD 118.3 billion from 2002 to 2016.

It required the massacre of school children at the Army Public School in Peshawar in December 2014 to make the Pak leadership, especially the army, see the writing on the wall. A quick consensus was arrived at, which mandated that the anti-Pakistan terrorist groups, especially the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the sectarian groups like the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), had to be rooted out. The violence in Karachi was already being tackled via a sustained operation. Cumulatively, these operations have led to the security situation showing considerable improvement in 2016. While the military operation, *Zarb-e-Azb* has significantly weakened the terrorist infrastructure and networks in the North Waziristan and Khyber agencies, the killing of leaders of LeJ in Quetta, Karachi and Punjab, have lowered the threat of sectarian violence. Many of the TTP leaders have relocated to Afghanistan.

However, there have been slippages in 2016 with major attacks in Quetta, Peshawar, Mardan and several areas in FATA, and in 2017 in Lahore, Sehwan and Charsadda. These attacks show that terrorist organisations still have the capacity to wreak havoc virtually at will and cast doubts on the self-proclaimed successes of Operation *Zarb-e-Azb*. It is also indicative of the fact that rival factions of the TTP have decided to come together to form a 'united front', joining hands with other terrorist outfits. In the days ahead, tackling the regrouped, united factions would be a major challenge. Moreover, the military operation has been selective in its targeting. The anti-India terrorist groups like the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), and the anti-Afghan groups like the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network have been spared. Unless Pakistan carries out an across-the-board, holistic operation, it is unlikely to be rid of the scourge of terrorism. In addition, it would be vital to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure developed over decades that would have to include a counter-terrorism narrative so as to join the ideological debate that the Pakistani State has been losing for decades.

The focus would have to be Punjab, the hub of the terrorist infrastructure. The fight to reclaim Pakistan would have to begin here. Following the 13 February 2017 Lahore attack, despite the PML-N government being in denial about the problem, Operation *Radd-ul-Fasaad* has been launched across the country. How effective it will be, remains to be seen.

Complicating the issue is the extent of polarisation in Pakistani society. This was most apparent on the death anniversary of former Punjab Governor Salman Taseer, who was shot by his own guard Mumtaz Qadri in January 2011. A section of civil society mourned Taseer's brutal murder for trying to help a Christian woman accused of blasphemy, while another section went on a rampage to flag their support for the blasphemy law. Symbolising this polarisation is the 'shrine' that has been constructed for Mumtaz Qadri near Islamabad. The shrine is now the symbol of the blasphemy law and a foe to anyone who tries to tinker with it. This is, in a fundamental sense, the net result of politicians, starting from MA Jinnah and Liaquat Ali, using religion for opportunistic purposes and now facing the consequences of that opportunism by conceding more and more space to religious groups.

The entrenched sectarian and ideological ambiguities that continue to plague Pakistan were amply demonstrated when the Interior Minister refused, in the Senate, to equate banned sectarian organisation with banned terrorist groups even though they openly advocate *takfir* (inquisition) and violence. The reason given was that the Shia–Sunni conflict went back 1,300 years.

## THE ECONOMY

The Sharif or the *Raiwind* model of economic development has major flaws. At its core are mega infrastructure projects with a focus on Punjab and massive borrowings to make the foreign exchange reserves look good. In addition, what has kept Pakistan afloat is the low price of oil. Ostensibly, the economy looks okay. The stock market is doing well, foreign reserves are healthy, the growth rate though below 5 per cent has picked up from the under 4 per cent growth of the 2000s.

However, below the surface is a different story. Workers' remittances are declining—5 per cent of the GDP in FY 2015-16, as compared to 6.9 per cent in FY 2014-15. Exports have been declining—USD 24.5 billion in 2012-13 to USD 17.9 billion in 2014-15. The trade deficit has widened to 5.9 per cent of GDP. Tax-to-GDP ratio has declined in the three years of the PML–N government and is one of the lowest in the world at 8.4 per cent of GDP in 2015-16. In the last three years, the PML–N Government has borrowed USD 25 billion in foreign loans and USD 30 billion domestically. Total level of public debt and liabilities has swollen to Rs 22,461.9 billion, which is 75.9 per cent of GDP in FY 2016 up from 72.2 per cent in FY 2015 and is likely to worsen in the next few years<sup>3</sup>. The Fiscal Responsibility and Debt Limitation Act of 2005 restricts public debt at 60 per cent of GDP. To get around this statutory violation, the PML–N government has pushed ahead the 2013 deadline to 2018 to reduce debt to 60 per cent of GDP<sup>4</sup>.

The deterioration of the macroeconomic indicators reveals structural problems in the Pakistan economy that should be a major cause of worry for the leadership. This type

of borrowing is unsustainable and together with declining exports and remittances from overseas workers, the Pakistani economy is headed for a severe balance of payment crisis in the near future.

### FOREIGN POLICY DYNAMICS

The foreign policy challenges for Pakistan continue to be Afghanistan, the US and India. The key challenge for Pakistan in Afghanistan would be to accept the sovereignty and independence of the neighbour instead of trying to impose its own proxies in Kabul. With Pakistan trying to leverage the intra-Afghan peace process for its own gains, peace in Afghanistan would remain elusive. As a consequence, peace in Pakistan would also be elusive. This is a dynamic that Pakistan just does not seem to understand.

With the US, signs of a cooling relationship were already visible under former President Barack Obama. Under President Donald Trump, this is likely to persist if not intensify, especially if Pakistan continues fooling the Americans by using US aid to fund the Taliban. Pakistan could also suffer collateral damage due to the growing US rivalry with China. What will hurt Pakistan the most is, if as a result, the US were to deepen its strategic partnership with India.

In its relations with India, Pakistan has banked on two factors: possession of nuclear weapons and non-State actors. The challenge for Pakistan is that India's retaliatory strike after the Uri camp attack in September 2016 has rescued it from its self-imposed restraint of risking a nuclear escalation. In future, jihadi strikes from Pakistan could have far more lethal consequences.

Finally, while its friendship with China continues to be 'all weather' bolstered no doubt by the USD 46 billion (now USD 51 billion) China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Pakistan will have to ensure that the projects are economically, financially and environmentally viable. Lack of transparency and the fine print of the financial proposals are ringing alarm bells in several quarters in Pakistan. The alienation of the Baloch at being neglected in the planning and sharing benefits of the mega project, the water problems in Gwadar and the monopoly of projects in Punjab are equally disturbing signs for many in Pakistan.

Beyond current issues lie the major fault-lines of Pakistan. The innards of Pakistan—water, education, economy and population—have deteriorated to such an extent that the very survival of Pakistan could have been endangered<sup>5</sup>. Pakistan faced an emergency situation in all these four areas about a decade ago. Due to lack of action then, it should be in the disaster management mode today, but there are no signs that it is. Additionally, even seventy years after its creation, Pakistan is still not sure about its identity. Neither is it sure whether it is an 'Islamic State', or a 'democratic State'. Collectively, the resolution of these issues would require a leadership with vision, its comprehension of the multiple

crises facing the country and its willingness to take resolute action to tackle each of the problems. Unfortunately, signs of such a leadership and vision are not very evident today.

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## END NOTES

- 1 The Panama Papers are over 11 million leaked documents detailing financial information of more than 200,000 offshore entities containing personal financial information about individuals and public officials using shell companies some of which were to hide illegal wealth. The leaked documents were created by Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca. The children of PM Nawaz Sharif were named in the papers.
- 2 The Dawn Leaks refers to a news story published in the *Dawn* in October 2016 that purported to contain information leaked from a top-level security meeting held in the PM's house. The Corps Commanders declared the leaks to be a breach of national security and demanded action against those responsible. With the needle of suspicion pointing towards the media cell in the PMO headed by Nawaz Sharif's daughter, the government has been trying to scuttle any enquiry/action in the matter.
- 3 State Bank of Pakistan Report 2015-16. <http://www.sbp.org.pk/reports/annual/arFY16/Chapter-05.pdf>, p-61.
- 4 Ibid., FN 1 p-59.
- 5 Collectively called the WEEP factors. See the author's *Pakistan: Courting the Abyss*, Harper Collins, India, 2016.

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# Prospects and Problems of Transition and Stability in Afghanistan

LT GEN RAVI SAWHNEY, PVSM, AVSM & SUSHANT SAREEN

## *Abstract*

*There is no gainsaying that the situation in Afghanistan is very fragile. The Taliban is in the ascendant and other terrorist groups like Islamic State of Iraq & Syria (ISIS) have established their presence in the country. Security forces are stretched and have suffered heavy casualties. Only around 60 per cent of the area is under the control of the Afghan government. The economy is in a tailspin and the political situation remains fraught and factious. And yet, despite all the existential challenges confronting Afghanistan, there is a good chance that Afghanistan will be able to ride out the storm of insurgency and instability, provided its allies and partners do not abandon it. But a more onerous challenge to Afghanistan will be the new and dangerous Great Game that is being played by some of the great powers—Russia and China—and a destructive policy being followed by Pakistan in Afghanistan. Without the end of external interference, even if the Afghan State manages to reverse the gains made by the Taliban, security and stability will remain elusive in that country. A destabilised, or worse, Talibanised Afghanistan, will in turn, destabilise the entire region. This is why the Great Game is not so ‘Great’ for the countries playing it.*

## INTRODUCTION

Ever since the Taliban’s resurgence around 2005-06, every new year has been billed as a critical year which would determine the future trajectory of the post-9/11 Afghan State. For the last ten years, the Afghan State has managed, even if not perfectly, to deal with the

political and administrative problems and confront the security and economic challenges, and in the process belie the predictions of doom and gloom. 2017 will be yet another year which will be critical for Afghanistan's future: one, the Taliban insurgency is gaining pace and has managed to garner the tacit support of countries like China and Russia, and even Iran; two, the Pakistanis continue with their double-game and double-speak in Afghanistan and seem to have got the support of the Chinese and Russians in their misadventure; and three, the US and its allies have continued to affirm support to the Afghan government, but with a new administration taking office in Washington, there is as yet no clarity on whether the US will remain committed to Afghanistan, and if so, for how long.

Domestically, the very fragile security situation is having a very negative impact on the economy, which has been further exacerbated by the steady pulling out of many of the foreign NGOs and aid workers, along with paring down of development programmes. In addition, the drawdown of foreign troops has led to a further contraction in the economy. Meanwhile, the political situation remains fraught. Despite papering over the political cleavages that opened after the 2014 presidential election, the National Unity Government (NUG) hasn't quite been able to pull itself together very amicably, much less, get its act together.

And yet, despite all the challenges, problems and uncertainty confronting both State and society in Afghanistan, and notwithstanding the shaky confidence not just among sections of the international community but also among many Afghan citizens in the ability of the Afghan State to hold its own for any length of time, it would be a mistake to write-off the Afghan State as a lost cause. If anything, far from it being the case that supporting and sustaining the Afghan State is tantamount to reinforcing failure, any abandonment of Afghanistan would in fact be the real failure because it would make the conjecture of a collapsing Afghan State a reality.

#### FRAGILE AND YET, FORMIDABLE

Any assessment of the situation in Afghanistan made in purely binary terms would be prone to glossing over all the positives that outbalance the negatives, and conversely, all the negatives that undermine the positives.

Even fifteen years after the post-Bonn Conference consensus that resurrected the Afghan State, it remains a work-in-progress. Apart from the first couple of years of relative peace, Afghanistan has been wracked by a foreign-funded, and foreign supported and supplied, Islamist insurgency commanded and controlled from a foreign country—Pakistan. For a variety of reasons, the international coalition troops took their eyes off the ball and failed to address this issue when it could have been nipped in the bud.



Asides of the failure on the security front, there was also the failure on the political front. The fiddle during successive presidential elections actually created more problems than it solved. With both politics and security in a flux, the economy, which was in any case overly dependent on external aid and assistance, was never going to be able to stand on its own feet, even less so because of the colossal wastage on account of skewed development programmes, policies and priorities that undermined the nation-building project.

Unfortunately, there is so much focus on the negative news emanating from Afghanistan, that the positives are often enough lost sight of. The fact of the matter is that despite all the mistakes made, very many good things also happened over the last decade-and-a-half. The Afghanistan of 2017 is very different from the devastated and desolate Afghanistan of 2001. A lot has changed in these years, change that is not easily reversible. A new and educated middle class, which is connected to the rest of the world, has emerged in these years. Afghanistan has seen a communications revolution with a vibrant and independent media and internet-savvy young people, who express themselves fearlessly in cyberspace. A State structure exists, which even though far from being perfect, is at the same time, far from being dysfunctional. Afghanistan has a reasonably competent army, a pretty good intelligence agency, a police force, a very active parliament, and all other elements that go into the making of a State. Modern banking, airlines, roads, schools, universities, offices, hospitals, communication and electricity networks have been established. Dams have been built, irrigation canals restored and rehabilitated, trade links revived.

Probably, the most important thing going in Afghanistan's favour is the fact that despite all the ethnic tug-of-war, the Afghan identity remains very strong. There is no ethnic or sectarian movement for separatism in Afghanistan. The Afghans remain fiercely independent and are unlikely to accept being a vassal or client State under the overlordship of a tottering and near-failed State like Pakistan, which is trying to impose itself on the Afghans. At the same time, the Afghans are pragmatic and practical enough to take assistance that they feel is in their interest. Within the security forces, there is no Bonapartism. The military remains loyal to the elected civilian leadership, something that can hardly be said for a country like Pakistan. All these positives can, of course, be overturned, if the forces of darkness represented by the Taliban and other sundry Islamist groups, including the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda were to once again either hold sway over the entire country or even over large swathes of territory. But that eventuality can be avoided by building the sinews of all the positives that exist. Despite the fatigue, even lack of interest, in the international coalition with the nation-building project, if ever there was time to double-down on nation-building in Afghanistan, it is now.

What is important is that the Western countries, which have invested so much in blood and treasure in rebuilding Afghanistan from the ashes, temper their expectations on

how Afghanistan will evolve. Applying Western standards of democracy and governance to evaluate the performance of the Afghan government is utterly pointless. In fact, the West should be happy that the democracy project in Afghanistan hasn't been unsuccessful despite their botched attempts at political engineering. Even though Afghan democracy is nowhere close to the West's conception of an ideal democracy, it has not done too badly in the last fifteen years. Despite all the allegations of stolen elections and 'industrial scale' fraud in polls, it is the maturity of the Afghan politicians that they have stuck to the democratic project. So much so, that with all its imperfections, winning an election has so far been the only way to come to power. This is saying a lot because there aren't many new democracies or even quasi-democracies where an election victory, howsoever dodgy it may have been, grants legitimacy to wield power.

Clearly, like in all other democracies, Afghanistan too will have to go through a long process before democracy can be consolidated. But unlike other fledgling democracies, the prospects for democratic political consolidation are much brighter in Afghanistan, provided the political process continues to be supported by those who have a stake in Afghanistan's survival. In order to continue the support, the international community, and in particular the West, needs to adopt greater realism about the social, cultural and political peculiarities of Afghanistan. This means that apart from showing patience with Afghanistan as it tries to consolidate its democratic polity, Afghanistan's supporters must also adopt a certain amount of equanimity in judging the progress of Afghanistan's political culture. Instead of imposing alien standards and norms, Afghanistan must be allowed to evolve its own democratic system. Quite naturally, such a system, while it conforms to the basic rules of any democracy, will at the same time have characteristics that Western and more mature democracies might not consider as being up to par.

The democratic political project was always going to be a long haul. In the more immediate future, however, there is a need for an effective leadership that enjoys credibility among and confidence of all ethnic groups. Unfortunately, there is a bit of a leadership deficit on this account. President Ashraf Ghani has not quite been able to rise to the level of being seen as a pan-Afghanistan leader, whose acceptability cuts across the ethnic divide, something that his predecessor Hamid Karzai, despite his warts and all, had managed. But given that President Ghani will serve his term, and cannot and should not be ousted mid-term because that would hardly help matters, it is important for him to build mutual trust and confidence with all political players and ethnic groups. This will mean working out a credible power-sharing arrangement within the NUG, which incidentally was the main purpose of forming it and which is something it has not quite managed to do. Some aspects of this power sharing can be formal, which will require constitutional and legal sanction, but some aspects of this can be informal which in the Afghan context, can

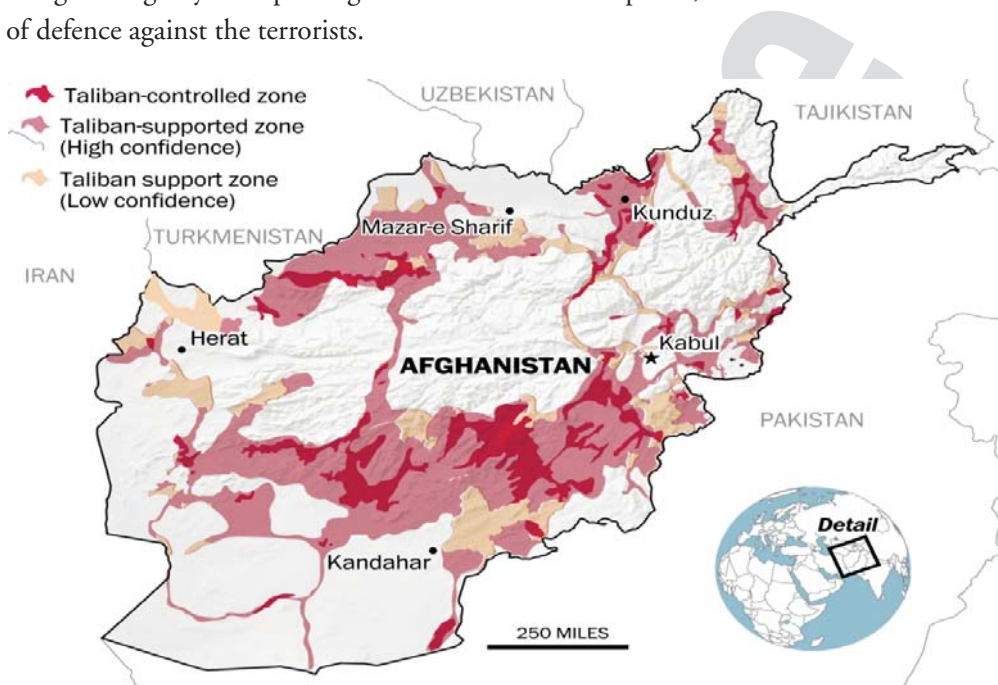
be as effective as formal arrangements. For instance, even though Afghanistan may not constitutionally be a federal State, a way has to be found to co-opt provincial leaders to give them a stake in the system by making them partners in governance.

In the security domain, the challenge is more onerous. The Afghan National Army (ANA), with all its fairly serious limitations in terms of resources, capacity and capability, has not performed very badly. Armies take a long time to rebuild, and fifteen years is just not enough time to build a conventional army, which can conduct operations on its own. In the case of the ANA, the Americans and their allies committed the blunder of building it as a conventional army but giving it the operational capability of a glorified constabulary. This was done to appease the Pakistanis who were spooked by the idea of a 300,000 odd, strong, modern Afghan army on its western front. But this turned out to be a classic Catch-22 situation: the army was not provided the wherewithal to function effectively against the foreign-sponsored insurgency in order to appease the sponsor of the insurgency, who in turn used the opportunity to bleed the newly-built army through its Taliban and other Islamist proxies.

This is a problem that needs to be fixed and some amount of work is being done to achieve this. The earlier reluctance of many of Afghanistan's friends to equip the ANA with the necessary hardware—tanks, armoured personnel carriers, helicopters, artillery, aerial platforms, for not just troop movement and casualty evacuation, but also for use in an attack role, etc—is steadily becoming a thing of the past. For example, India has started to provision some of this much-needed hardware. More importantly, the Americans too are working to provide the necessary equipment. There seems to be greater appreciation of the fact that Afghanistan does not really need state-of-the-art military equipment, only effective weapon systems which even though dated by the standards of armies of countries like India or even Pakistan, are able to meet the operational requirements of the ANA. Alongside, efforts are underway to provide training and building capacity of the ANA, to handle logistics and conduct operations on its own. A reasonably well-equipped and well-trained ANA will not only be good for the morale of the soldiery but also give Afghanistan the confidence to stand up to the bullying tactics of unfriendly countries like Pakistan.

While building the ANA's capacity and capability is necessary, it is just as important to ensure that the Afghan National Police and the intelligence service perform well. The latter has done some splendid work, but there is a lot more that can be done to make it more effective, both in collecting and analysing intelligence as well as in undertaking counterterrorism and counter-espionage operations. The National Directorate of Security (NDS) has a fairly good system of human intelligence but depends quite a lot on the Western agencies for electronic intelligence. As far as the police is concerned, it has been

often facing the brunt of terrorism. Better training, equipment, resources and facilities will go a long way in improving the effectiveness of the police, which is often the first line of defence against the terrorists.



Source: Institute for the Study of War

Districts	Government control or influence	Contested	Taliban control or influence
	64%	28%	8%
Population	68%	23%	9%
Land	61%	28%	10%

Some numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding off.

Source: Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

THE WASHINGTON POST

Besides rejigging politics and revitalising the security services, the third critical component of securing Afghanistan is economy. The drawdown, which has seen many of the foreigners (civilian and military) exiting the country, and coupled with the uncertain security situation, has had a very severe impact on the Afghan economy. The country is nowhere close to being self-sustaining. Afghanistan will require huge amounts of foreign

assistance—budgetary, military and project implementation—over at least another decade or two, before its economy can stand on its own feet. Any premature cut-off of aid could easily see the bottom fall off the Afghan State. Although donor fatigue is entirely understandable, more so given the mounting economic difficulties in many of the donor countries, the money being given to Afghanistan needs to be seen as an investment in their own security. And while strict vigil needs to be kept to ensure there is no wastage of funds, much less any skimming of aid, there also needs to be greater realism that standards of financial probity that exist in mature democracies and efficient States will need to be relaxed somewhat while dealing with a country like Afghanistan.

As much as continued foreign assistance will be an essential condition for ensuring the stability, even survival, of the Afghan State, this assistance will have to be well directed to build Afghanistan's economic potential. Afghanistan's geographical location, at the crossroads of West, Central and South Asia, is a unique resource that can make it a regional trade and transit hub. But for this to happen, greater attention will have to be paid to infrastructure development, which not only allows connectivity through Afghanistan, but also allows Afghanistan to tap its own natural resources for its development. The infrastructure development will have to include irrigation networks and hydel power plants which will in turn ensure an agricultural revival and consequently, help in curbing the narcotics trade, which has been one of the factors behind the Islamist insurgency. Efforts will also need to be made to promote skill development and improve education facilities so that the Gen Next of Afghans can participate in the global economy.

### THE EMERGING GREAT GAME

Located as it is at the crossroads of Central, South and West Asia, Afghanistan has been the playground for Great Games even before the term itself was coined. For centuries, regional and global powers have competed for influence, often at great expense to themselves and the Afghans. One Great Game's end is often enough the beginning of another Great Game. This strategic dynamic is once again playing out with the prolonged 'end-game' of US and Western presence in Afghanistan being accompanied by the unending manoeuvring by other players—Pakistan, Iran, Russia, China, and to an extent Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Central Asian States—to secure their interests and take pole position when the next Great Game begins. The tangled web of competing and converging interests—almost as complicated as the one in Syria—and shifting alliances between various players has only added to the complexity of the task of bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan. The hapless Afghans have been reduced to mere bystanders whose fate will be decided by cynical and callous strategic calculations carried out in capital cities of both regional and global powers.

The most stunning example of this was the recent trilateral meeting in Moscow—the third one, actually, between these three countries but the first to be revealed—between Russia, China and Pakistan on the future of Afghanistan, without Afghanistan having any say in what was being deliberated or decided. In many ways, therefore, it is not so much what happens inside Afghanistan in the political, economic and security domain, but more of what happens outside Afghanistan, in the conference rooms of regional and extra-regional powers that will determine the future course of events. If anything, even the politics, economics and security of Afghanistan is being decided outside Afghanistan. This, in a sense is the real tragedy of Afghanistan and the primary reason why peace and security is so elusive.

### THE TRUMP CARD

A lot will, of course, depend on the decisions taken by the incoming Trump administration in Washington. Until now, there is no clarity on what the policy of the new administration will be. While there are some indications that Trump will stay the course and not abandon Afghanistan, there is also a feeling that he might just reach the conclusion that no real good is going to come from staying on and that a totally new policy needs to be adopted. The efficacy of US decision to stay or scoot will depend in large measure on another, and perhaps more onerous decision—will the US continue to ‘incentivise’ Pakistan, but without any solid plan to also ‘dis-incentivise’ Pakistan’s bad behaviour, or will the US stop mollicoddling Pakistan and start turning the screws real tight to force compellence on Pakistan? If the US continues to repeat the mistakes of the last fifteen years by only holding carrots and not wielding the sticks then it will tantamount to reinforcing failure.

In such an event, it will make little difference to the situation in Afghanistan whether US troops stay or leave. On the other hand, if the US makes a break with the decade-and-a-half-old failed policy on Pakistan, and takes the gloves off while dealing with Pakistan’s double-dealing, then there is some chance of success. Most Americans know how Pakistan has been double-dealing them but refrain from taking any strong step since it could lead to a severance in relations with an unstable, Islamic, nuclear-armed country. But strangely, the US had no compunctions in taking on a great power like Russia and imposing sanctions, but has been chary of taking similar action against a tottering, middle-level power like Pakistan, which has been responsible for the death of a couple of thousand American soldiers.

Be that as it may, the real question is whether the strategic fatigue brought on by the seemingly unending ‘longest war’ in American history is now being replaced by strategic disinterest because of changing priorities and new hotspots that seem to be capturing

the mind-space—ISIS, South China Sea and the whole China question, trade issues and so on? If so, then it will be a matter of time before the US disengages from Afghanistan. This will mean that the Western economic and military support will be reduced to a trickle. There is little doubt that such an event will sound the death knell of the Afghan State. The resulting vacuum will be filled either by the Taliban or could see Afghanistan descend into chaos, something that will once again make it a preferred destination for jihadists from around the world, who are being squeezed in the Middle East and other countries. The repercussions of such a development on regional security are extremely negative and will radiate in Central, West and South Asia, putting paid to ambitious projects like the Chinese One Belt One Road (OBOR) and Russia’s Eurasian Economic Union.

**Table 11. Post-Taliban U.S. Assistance to Afghanistan**  
(appropriations/allocations in \$ millions)

Fiscal Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017*
ESF	117	239	894	1280	473	1211	1400	2088	3346	2168	1837	1850	851	1225	1200	1000
DA	18.3	42.5	153	170	185	167	149	.4	3	0	0	0				
GHCS	7.5	49.7	33.4	38	41.5	101	63	58.	92	70	0	0				
Refugee Accounts	160	61	63	47	42	54	44	77	82	65	99	13				
Food Aid	206	74	99	97	108	70	231	82	32	19	0.6	0				
IDA	197	86	11	4	0	0	17	27	30	66	61	14				
INCLE	60	0	220	709	216	252	308	484	589	400	324	6.1	225	325	250	185
NADR	44	34.7	67	38.	18.2	37	27	49	58	69	65	54		43.5	38	37.6
IMET	0.2	0.4	0.7	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.7	1.4	1.8	1.6	2	0.8	.51	1.4	1.2	0.8
FMF	57	191	414	397	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
Other	33	23	36	18	0.2	0.1	21	5	5.8	7.4	8	0				
DOD—ASSF	0	0	0	995	1908	7406	2750	5607	9167	10619	9200	5124	4727	4109	3652	3448
DOD—CERP	0	0	40	136	215	209	488	551	1000	400	400	200	30	15		
Infrastructure Fund	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	299	400	325	199	0		
Business Task Force	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	59	239	242	179	64	5		
DOD—CN	0	0	72	225	108	291	193	230	392	376	421	372				
DOD—Other	7.5	165	285	540	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
DEA Countermerc	0.6	2.9	3.7	17	23.7	20	41	19	0	0	0	0				
Total U.S. Assistance	909	970	2392	4712	3339	9818	5732	9292	14854	14800	13058	8084	6097	5725	5165	4672

Sources and Notes: Prepared by Curt Tarnoff, Specialist in Foreign Assistance, Department of State budget, SIGAR reports, and CRS calculations. Does not include USG operational expenses (over \$5 billion since 2002). Food aid includes P.L.480 Title II and other programs. "Other" = Office of Transition Initiatives, Treasury Assistance, and Peacekeeping. ESF = Economic Support Funds; DA = Development Assistance; GHCS = Global Health/Child Survival; FMF = Foreign Military Financing; NADR = Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, De-Mining, and Related; IMET = International Military Education and Training; INCLE = International Narcotics and Law Enforcement; ASSF = Afghan Security Forces Funding; IDA = International Disaster Assistance. Includes stipulated levels in FY2016 Consolidated Appropriation (P.L. 114-113). \*Denotes Administration request.

## CHINA'S CALCULUS

The Chinese have had a virtual free ride in Afghanistan so far. They have indulged in tall talk of their investments in Afghanistan but in reality have so far not invested more than a few million dollars. And yet, the Chinese have managed to manoeuvre themselves into a pivotal role in deciding the future of Afghanistan. By allowing the Pakistanis to front for them and by ensuring that they have Pakistan’s back covered, the

Chinese game plan is based on making Pakistan the fulcrum of their Afghan policy. Their interest is partly stated—to stabilise the region, especially its ally Pakistan, by promoting trade, investment and connectivity, which in turn will help to rein in the rise of Islamic radicalism that is also a threat for China—and partly unstated—to ensure that the Americans do not get to establish a permanent presence in Afghanistan. To a great extent, the Chinese have allowed the Pakistanis to lead them by the nose on Afghanistan and have bought the Pakistani story on engaging with the Taliban even at the expense of earning the disapproval of the Afghan government. Clearly, the Chinese, along with the Russians, have bought into the story of IS making a base in Afghanistan, which they see as an imminent threat to their own security. The Pakistani advocacy seems to have convinced both China and Russia that only the Taliban can ensure that the IS is not able to consolidate. This is so much nonsense because not only are the so-called IS elements in Afghanistan nothing more than a breakaway faction of the Taliban, but also that there is very little to choose between the IS and Taliban when it comes to medieval barbarity and worldview.

### RUSSIAN REDUX

Ostensibly, the Russians too are using the ISIS excuse to enter into a virtual alliance with the Pakistanis and Chinese on Afghanistan. Although Russia's concerns about ISIS expansion in Afghanistan are entirely understandable, these concerns are highly inflated and therefore, quite disingenuous. The Russian game plan is clearly something else. A recent interview of the Russian point man on Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, to Anadolu Agency suggests either muddled thinking or something else. Kabulov clearly contradicts himself when he first calls the Taliban a local force that has given up the global jihadist idea, and later admits that there are groups and elements in the Taliban which share an ideological affinity with the ISIS, cryptically adding that 'today the Taliban is predominantly a local force'. While the interview confirms that the Russians have a very benign, even positive, view of the Taliban (there were unconfirmed reports in the past of the Taliban emir Mullah Mansour having visited Russia and even meeting President Putin), the thrust of his interview was, however, on the US presence in Afghanistan and he pretty much blames the US for not just the drug mafia in Afghanistan, but also insinuates that the US might have something to do with the ISIS presence in Afghanistan. He raises questions about US objectives and expresses his reservations over the number of US bases in Afghanistan.

By all accounts, the ISIS angle is only a sideshow for the Russians in Afghanistan. The real objective seems to be to reassert its role and influence in the region and once again, become a player instead of being a bystander that it had been for over a decade. Linked to



this is the new, or rather revived, compact with the Chinese, who seem to be exercising a greater influence on the Russians to forge a common policy on Afghanistan with Pakistan as a fulcrum of this emerging alliance. The Russian assertiveness is causing disquiet in the Central Asian States, who fear that Russian forays in the region are part of a plan for resource grab, including in Afghanistan. Most of all, Russians seem to have joined the strategic competition with the US and would not be averse to seeing the US bow out in ignominy—a payback, or at least poetic justice, for what the erstwhile Soviet Union had to suffer for its Afghan misadventure in the 1980s.

### IRAN'S INFLECTION POINT

Iran's role is also critical in Afghanistan, more so because the old assumption of Iranian antipathy towards Taliban has been turned on its head. It is now quite apparent that the Iranians have maintained very close contact with the Taliban, something that is borne out by the fact that the now deceased Taliban chief Mansour was 'droned' in Balochistan, while he was returning from a still unexplained visit to Iran. The Iranian approach to Afghanistan and Taliban is both tactical and strategic. Given the extremely tense relations between Iran and the US, and the fact that the US was unable to make use of the opportunity offered by 9/11 and the Iranian cooperation to their war effort in Afghanistan to improve ties with Iran, it was quite natural for Iran to be seriously concerned over US presence in Afghanistan and to buy some insurance against this. This is one of the reasons why they maintained contact with the Taliban—enemy's enemy is a friend.

The emergence of ISIS also forced the Iranians to continue with their liaison with the Taliban. Quite understandably, at a time when Iran was fully occupied with trying to keep the US at bay and also defeat the ISIS (an existential threat), it made little sense to open another front against the Taliban. This was something that suited the Taliban as well. Even so, there is a fundamental problem between the Iranians and Taliban which will erupt as soon as they are free from other more pressing engagements. As a Shia State, Iran is anathema for the Sunni extremist Taliban. This sectarian divide can be bridged temporarily but not permanently. For now at least, the Iranians are dealing with the Taliban over the head of the Afghan government, something that undermines the latter and empowers the former. This equation might change if the Taliban actually manage to assume power in Afghanistan because then, unless they temper their anti-Shi'ism (a theoretical impossibility because if the Taliban could do this they would not remain Taliban), they will get into conflict with Iran.

### PERNICIOUS PAKISTAN

The real villain of Afghanistan has been and remains Pakistan. Despite all the talk from the Pakistanis, such as: 'Afghanistan's enemy is Pakistan's enemy', 'It is in Pakistan's

interest to have a stable, secure and peaceful Afghanistan’, ‘Pakistan backs an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process’, and other such palpably false formulations—the fact of the matter is that Pakistan has never let go of its policy of reducing Afghanistan into a virtual vassal State, control its foreign and defence policy (especially in relation to India) and exploit its geography and resources for its own benefit. These policy objectives have not changed and until that happens, Pakistan’s inimical Afghan policy will continue to bleed Afghanistan. With Chinese and Russian backing, and given the steady recession of US and the West from Afghanistan, Pakistan is only becoming more insincere in its declarations and emboldened in its aggressive, terrorism-based policy inside Afghanistan to bring that country to its knees.

### THE INDIAN INTENTION

The Indian policy on Afghanistan is perhaps the most Afghan friendly. Unlike most other players in Afghanistan, the prism from which India sees Afghanistan is an Afghan-centric one in which India’s interests converge with the interests of Afghans. India is not seeking to steal an advantage over any other country, nor is it seeking to use Afghan resources or its location to needle any adversary or gain some strategic foothold. Instead, the Indian policy is based on a simple fact: an unstable, chaotic Afghanistan or even an Afghanistan which is run by Islamists and terror groups is neither in the interest of Afghans nor in the interest of India. Instability or Islamist ascendancy in Afghanistan will destabilise the entire region and therefore, everything possible needs to be done to secure and stabilise the Afghan government.

Until a few years ago, the Indian focus was on development assistance to build and improve Afghan capacities to handle their own affairs. But, over the last couple of years, India has also started gravitating towards supplying much-needed weapon systems that will assist the Afghan security forces to defend themselves and protect the citizenry. Obviously, there are inherent limitations—geographical, logistical and financial—to what India can do in Afghanistan. But keeping within these limitations, India is trying to do the maximum possible to bolster the Afghan government.

### STILL NOT A LOST CAUSE

Afghanistan is not by any stretch of imagination a lost cause. This is not to deny that the challenge of securing and stabilising Afghanistan is going to be an uphill task. But it is eminently doable and, what is more, desirable.

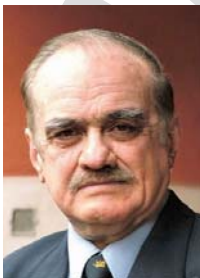
Peace in Afghanistan will however be contingent on two things: the first and necessary condition is for the international community to assist Afghanistan’s security forces and provide the necessary economic assistance, and for the Afghan politicians to get their

act together and make the NUG work; the second and sufficient condition is to ensure that external interference, and especially external support to Islamist terror groups, is eliminated. Both these conditions are easier said than done. But these have to be done in tandem because managing the internal issues without addressing the external dimension is not going to work, just as getting the external dimension right without doing anything to fix the internal issues will also not solve the problem.

The external players need to understand that strategic myopia in Afghanistan is a recipe for disaster, as all those countries which flirted with Islamists to settle scores with the Soviet Union have found to their expense. It will be no different for Russia and China, and even Iran, if for short-term advantage, they make a deal with the devil (read Taliban and other Islamist groups) in Afghanistan. The trouble, however, is that these lessons are generally learnt only after the blowback starts. The US National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was so gung-ho about the Afghan mujahideen famously claimed: ‘Which was more important in world history? The Taliban or the fall of the Soviet empire? A few over-excited Islamists or...the end of the Cold War.’ Similar myopia is guiding the policy of most countries regarding Afghanistan nearly forty years later.

These countries would do well to remember that the Cold War has restarted, albeit in a different context, and the ‘over-excited Islamists’ are wreaking havoc and destroying societies and States, including in Europe, and pose a global challenge today. Any compromise with the Taliban and any abandonment of the Afghan State will only add to the strength of the Islamists and boomerang on the very countries that prop them up for gaining some advantage over other countries. If this realisation strikes roots, the Afghan problem can be solved without too much trouble; but if this realisation does not dawn, then Afghanistan will probably go under, but it would not go down alone.

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# Daring to Dream: Restoring Connectivity in South Asia for Regional Development

TARIQ KARIM

## *Abstract*

*In this article, the author makes a strong case for restoring connectivity in the Bangladesh–Bhutan–India–Nepal (BBIN) subregion in South Asia. He draws a parallel to this newly-defined subregion having been analogous to what was historically known as the Bengal Presidency during Britain's colonial rule over the Indian subcontinent. He makes the case that the seamless matrix of connectivity that imperial Britain developed and used for its own purpose of extraction, synergising the river system of the water-dominated geo-terrain with rail and road connections, was akin to an organic circulatory system that enabled the Bengal Presidency to become the most developed and richest of its colonial domains. The author advocates that reviving the template of connectivity that imperial Britain had left behind in 1947, and which gave pre-eminence to river connectivity that was grievously disrupted in the mid-1960s, would enable the BBIN subregion in South Asia to once again become an environment-friendly yet fast growing and important driver of economic growth and development. This would enable the BBIN subregion to meaningfully address the goals of eradicating unemployment and poverty, counter marginalisation and radicalisation of peoples feeling left out, stop and then roll back environmental degradation, effectively contribute to reducing global warming and lessen its deleterious effects on climate change, and act as an effective bridge between*

*the South Asian and Southeast and East Asian regions, for the greater prosperity of all peoples. The partitioned nation-states of the subregion can be ecologically and economically reintegrated without compromising their respective sovereign and independent status.*

## FROM BEING INTEGRATED TO BECOMING DISCONNECTED

The geographical landmass known historically as the Indian subcontinent was, for well over three millennia, perhaps one of the most integrated regions of the world. Ironically, a little over three centuries of colonial rule, from the advent of the Portuguese conquering Goa in 1510 until Britain quitting India as colonial power on 14 August 1947, succeeded in partitioning India into three entities and making each look on the others with hostility bordering on enmity. These post-colonial 'neo-Westphalian' nation-states, have remained largely hostage to the 'partition syndrome' since then. The newly-created borders that separated, and defined, their sovereign territorial spaces also progressively and effectively restricted free movement of people and goods across the hitherto integrated geographical space. By the mid-1960s, their ruling dispensations had physically severed road, rail and river routes that had for long served as an organically integrated circulatory system of communication for them, particularly most severely to the detriment of the eastern part that was known as the Bengal Presidency under British rule.

The Bengal Presidency that was the largest of the colonial administrative subdivisions of British India with its seat in Calcutta (now Kolkata) extended from the present-day Khyber–Pakhtunkhwa of Pakistan in the west to Burma, Singapore and Penang in the east<sup>1</sup>. Most of this Presidency's extended territories were gradually incorporated into other British Indian provinces or crown colonies. With partition of Bengal in 1905, Dacca (now Dhaka) became the capital and Shillong the summer capital of the truncated province, but with the reorganisation of Bengal in 1912, the reorganised Presidency embraced initially the provinces of United Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam.

The *East India Gazetteer* described Bengal as 'the granary of the Indies', from where large quantities of rice were exported, along with coir, coconut oil, coconut tree produce, cowries, salt fish, turtle fish, sugar, hardware, broadcloth, cutlery, silk stuffs, coarse cottons, tobacco, etc. <sup>2</sup>Bernier, the seventeenth-century physician and traveller, in his historiography of his travels had also described Bengal as the granary of the east, and of its silk industry he wrote: 'There is in Bengal such a quantity of cotton and silk, that the kingdom may be called the common storehouse for these two kinds of merchandise, not of Hindoustan or the Empire of the Great Mogol only, but of all the neighbouring kingdoms, and even of Europe'.<sup>3</sup>



The British Bengal Presidency, including Assam, in 1874, had an area of 248,374 square miles and a population of nearly 67 million. Bengal alone accounted for one-third of the total population of British India at that time, and yielded over one-third of the aggregate revenues of the Indian Empire<sup>4</sup>. ‘The territory teemed with every product of nature, from the fierce beasts and irrepressible vegetation of the tropics, to the stunted barley which the till-man reared, and the tiny furred animal which he hunted within sight of the unmelting snows. Tea, indigo, turmeric, lac, waving white fields of the opium—poppy, wheat and innumerable grains and pulses, pepper, ginger, betel nut, quinine and many costly spices and drugs, oil seeds of sorts, cotton, the silk mulberry, inexhaustible crops of jute and other fibres, timber, from the feathery bamboo and coronetted palm to the iron-hearted *tal* tree—in short, every vegetable product which fed and clothed a people, and enabled it to trade with foreign nations, abounded<sup>5</sup>.’

Before the Partition and the Independence in 1947, the Bengal Presidency had the highest GDP and Shillong, the summer capital, boasted the highest per capita GDP. Following the Partition, the Indian subcontinent transformed overnight from having been the most integrated region for eons, into arguably perhaps, the least integrated region in the world<sup>6</sup>.

#### TOWARDS ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION

If trade and connectivity are handmaidens to each other with the latter actively promoting exchange of ideas, goods and services, it follows axiomatically that disruption to connectivity will translate into disruption of trade and people-to-people exchanges. Land, rail and riverine connectivity continued to remain hostage to negative politics until very recently. Following a bold initiative by Bangladesh, in December 1985, leaders of seven South Asian countries came together to form the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). By 1995, recognising that SAARC as originally conceived was going nowhere, Bangladesh, once more, took the initiative and in 1996 proposed to the SAARC summit the adoption of subregional approach to moving forward gradually to embrace all countries. The entire region could be conceived of as comprising three subregions: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) as the eastern subregion; India, Maldives and Sri Lanka (IMS) as the southern subregion, and Afghanistan, India and Pakistan (AIP) comprising the western subregion. If one subregion was ready to move forward together on some areas and demonstrate palpably successful model of cooperation in any given priority sector, it might attract other subregions to join or emulate.

The eastern subregion had displayed inclination to move forward, following two treaties that were signed between Bangladesh and India in 1996-97. It became obvious that at least three contiguously located neighbours needed to first establish a modicum

of good bilateral relations amongst themselves before those three (or four) sets of good bilateral relations could be triangulated (or quadrangulated) into a form of subregional cooperative grouping. This could expand through a process of accretion in specifically agreed areas as deemed comfortable by the partner countries.

### INDIA–BANGLADESH RELATIONS ASSUME CRITICAL IMPORTANCE

In this schema, getting India–Bangladesh relations right was a *sine qua non*. The two countries set about determinedly attempting to do this in 2009. The Joint Communiqué at the end of the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister to India in January 2010 set out the road map for the two countries to follow in their efforts to set right all that had been wrong earlier<sup>7</sup>. India and Bangladesh relations forged forward steadily and remarkably, with the two countries amicably and peacefully finalising demarcation of their land and maritime boundaries, and signing and operationalising coastal shipping and maritime shipping agreements, while the long-existing Inland Water Protocol has included additional ports of call, offering synergy with the new coastal and maritime shipping connectivity. In February 2017, the first shipping container vessel carried goods from India across the coastal waters of the Bay of Bengal and then travelled upstream to disgorge cargo at inland water port of Pangaon in Bangladesh<sup>8</sup>.

These are phenomenal developments, considering what had existed (or rather, not existed) less than a decade ago. The number of land customs stations has expanded exponentially, with three having been upgraded into Integrated Check Posts (ICPs). Electricity grids on bilateral basis have been connected between Bhutan and India, Bangladesh and India and Nepal and India, and power trade has commenced between the three countries (with Nepal and Bangladesh being power deficit countries). Several joint ventures between Bangladesh and India to generate power for Bangladesh are currently underway. Talks are ongoing now for a tri-nation joint venture cooperation between Bhutan, India and Bangladesh for hydroelectricity generation and shared distribution of power. Bangladesh is also sharing its surplus but fallow bandwidth for augmenting information and communication technology (ICT) capacity in north-east India.

The convincing rationale behind these initiatives was the deepening realisation that economic development was imperative for growth and for fending off anti-State movements by radical and militant elements; that there was an urgent need for creating new jobs every year, given the notorious impatience of youth who needed to be offered opportunities of positively channeling their energies<sup>9</sup>. To be able to address these compelling challenges, leaders of the eastern subregion (BBIN) realised the need to revive and reinstate the connectivity that had existed before the British left.

## ROAD CONNECTIVITY

While in most other regional groupings, whether European, South African or Southeast Asian models, motor vehicles of one member country can trundle across borders freely carrying people, goods and services, this was not so in the case of the SAARC countries. The first concrete and, for the region, revolutionary breakthrough occurred when the BBIN subregional grouping, in early 2015 decided to sign onto the BBIN–Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA). This seminal important document symbolises the beginning of the revival of historic connectivity corridors that had existed prior to 1947. The BBIN-MVA has been ratified by Bangladesh, India and Nepal and is pending final ratification by the Upper House of Bhutan’s parliament before it becomes fully operational. In the meantime, container trucks have made the trial run from Chittagong to Delhi, carrying consignment of goods for the Indian market. The visionary and farsighted leadership of Bangladesh to opening connectivity to Bhutan, India and Nepal opens new vistas of cooperative development for the subregion as well as bringing the operationalising of India’s Act East policy closer to reality. Once the BBIN–MVA’s full ratification process by all four countries is completed, work on the SAARC Corridor–4, stretching across Kathmandu (Nepal)–Kakarbita (Nepal)–Panitanki (India)–Phulbari (India)–Banglabandha (Bangladesh)–Mongla–Chittagong (Bangladesh); and the SAARC Corridor-8, linking Thimpu (Bhutan)–Phuentsoling (Bhutan)–Jaigon (India)–Changrabandha (India)–Burimari (Bangladesh)–Mongla/Chittagong (Bangladesh) can be fast tracked and operationalised. The existing relations of bonhomie between Bangladesh and India, if extended to embrace Myanmar in trilateral cooperation, would induce the completion of much remaining work on Asian Highway-2 linking north-east India–Myanmar, and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project that would reconnect Mizoram (Mobu)-Moreh (Myanmar).

## RAIL CONNECTIVITY

The four BBIN countries have also commenced discussions on similar BBIN Rail Connectivity Agreement based on SAARC Regional Rail Agreement template, with the aim of reviving and activating rail routes that had existed and connected Bangladesh and India, and to some extent Nepal, until severed following the 1965 India–Pakistan War. Of eight rail links that had existed between Bangladesh and India but had been severed, three are in operation once again, while work is in progress for upgradation, unification of gauges and restoration of services on others. Once completed and fully operationalised, the distance in the Kolkata–Agartala route will be shortened from 1590 kms to 499 kms.

The larger, more ambitious South Asia–Southeast Asia Rail Corridor of 4,430 kms, from Kolkata to Ho Chi Minh City, is still on the drawing board. It faces seemingly insurmountable challenges, with 2,493 kms missing links, incompatible track gauges,

between regions and within each region that have to be made uniform or compatible for smooth cross passageway, since transshipment is costly<sup>10</sup>.

### RIVER CONNECTIVITY IS OF PRIMARY IMPORTANCE—VISUALISING AN ORGANIC APPROACH

The best, most efficient and most optimal way forward in restoring connectivity is to adopt an organic approach. The BBIN subregion (more or less corresponding to the pre-Partition Bengal Presidency of British India) should consider reviving the connectivity in this subregion, which conforms best to the geo-morphology of the terrain. In the largely alluvial plains of a region that is dominated by the waters of its innumerable mighty eastern Himalayan rivers, and where even the hills are essentially soft alluvial foothills of the higher Himalayan range, the countries have spent countless billions to date in trying to build and maintain highways. However, it is extremely difficult to maintain round-the-year operational highways conforming to international transportation standards, when the monsoonal climate, geo-morphology and contours of the terrain, so dominated by waters, militate against these roads being all-weather highways. The British colonial rulers had taken full cognizance of these challenges and put in place a superb organic system of communications, synergising the advantages offered by the rivers as arterial waterways, the railways that formed a network analogous to the human body's venous system, linking with junctions that became hubs at major river points; with the roads comprising the capillaries that transported goods, services and peoples to and from the farthest nooks and crannies of the land to these hubs or intersection points. The efficient use of such a synergised and organically meshed communication system is what made the Bengal Presidency perhaps the richest, not only in British India, but perhaps, among all Britain's crown possessions. Where mighty rivers were un-crossable for the railways or roads, river ferries took over seamlessly. Now, we have the capacity and capability of building bridges over these rivers.

In terms of fuel economy and carbon emission, river transportation is most efficient, reducing fuel costs by close to 60 per cent and carbon-emissions by around 65 per cent. In a visionary and far-sighted decision led from the top by Prime Minister Modi, the Indian parliament adopted The National Waterways Act, 2016 unanimously, to give a fillip to moving towards greater and wider use of inland waterways as main arterial system of connectivity. The rationale given for this decision, which would have far-reaching implications, was that developing these waterways 'will enhance the industrial growth and tourism potential of the hinterland along the waterway. This will also provide an additional, cheaper and environment-friendly mode of transportation throughout the country...inland water transport is considered as the most cost effective and economical mode of transport from the point of view of fuel efficiency...one horse power can carry

4000 kg load in water, whereas, it can carry 150 kg and 500 kg by road and rail respectively. Further, in a study as highlighted by the World Bank, 1 litre of fuel can move 105 ton-km by inland water transport, whereas the same amount of fuel can move only 85 ton-km by rail and 24 ton-km by road. Studies have shown that emission from container vessels range from 32-36 gCO<sub>2</sub> per ton-km, while those of road transport vehicles (heavy duty vehicles) range from 51-91gCO<sub>2</sub> per ton-km<sup>11</sup>. Water transport is 'not only environment friendly but also much cheaper as it costs Rs 1.5 per km to carry the cargo by road, while the same stands at Re 1 by rail, whereas through waterways it reduces to only 25 paisa per km...India has about 50,000 km of waterways, which on development will change the face of India, and that the government is committed to aggressively work to develop these as the environment friendly mode of transport, which is bound to decrease significantly the huge 18 per cent logistics cost in India<sup>12</sup>.'

What is applicable for India is equally applicable to the BBIN subregion, particularly for Bangladesh, whose landmass is finitely limited, totally dominated by its myriad water bodies and crammed with a burgeoning population that makes it the most densely populated country in the world today. Bangladesh, of all the countries in this subregion, still depends the most on river connectivity serving its people. The present government in Bangladesh places great importance to reviving river navigability and restoring river health, and some major river routes of historical use and importance have been restored recently. Voices in Nepal are acknowledging the logic of the above. A former water resources minister of Nepal, advocating restoration of inland navigation stated: 'If Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Arunachal, Meghalaya, Mizoram or Uttarakhand can see that containers from Europe or Japan can come to their doorsteps at Chatra or Chisapani and similar places elsewhere—and they could benefit from reduction in the cost of their goods—there would be that much more reason for them to agree to building the Kosi, Karnali, Pancheswar and other water storage facilities that would also provide flood control, electricity and other multipurpose side benefits<sup>13</sup>. Bhutan too looks upon the rivers as integral to their concerns about their fragile and vulnerable ecology, and would like to see river connectivity, that once used to exist between Bhutan and India–Bangladesh, restored now as this would take pressure away from over-dependence on roads that requires cutting into and denuding their still largely pristine mountainous and hilly landscape.

Tragically, following the 1965 War between India and Pakistan, the extensive river connectivity that had inseparably linked the peoples and lands of the erstwhile Bengal Presidency and now the BBIN subregion was grievously disrupted. Plying of ships between Allahabad–Calcutta–Narayanganj and Guwahati–Narayanganj–Allahabad abruptly ceased. With these services being stopped, the regular annual dredging that used to be done to maintain and keep the navigable channels open and usable also ceased. These mighty

rivers, effectively had become nationally segmented by the politics of partition, for which the peoples of the entire subregion (and arguably, even the larger region) are having to pay a burdensome cost today. The flourishing river economy that had made this part of the subcontinent so famously prosperous, wilted away, with upstream and downstream industries disappearing. The dumping of vast amounts of industrial and human-generated waste, due to lack of effective regulatory or governance mechanisms in place, and ill-considered interventions on the river, have translated into a huge and complex pollution challenge. The steady and cumulative piling-up of river beds with silt has made the channels of the rivers very shallow, rendering them un-navigable, and forced the waters to wresting their own passage from the mountains to the Bay by literally devouring land and expanding its breadth. The mighty Brahmaputra today is reportedly navigable only for three months in the entire year.

Reviving the rivers for connectivity as well as for restoring the river economy, will admittedly be a huge challenge because of the accumulative damage done to these rivers by over six decades of criminal neglect. It must necessarily involve engaging proactively with the people who inhabit the countless villages, towns and cities that dot both banks of each of these rivers, and restore to them a sense of ownership and pride in their shared commons. If we wish to restore navigability of these rivers, we would need to undertake systematic and planned dredging, perhaps initially on pilot basis along certain identified lengths of rivers, for restoring navigability; in the process, we would also be regaining considerable tracts of land, lost over the years to erosion, for human habitation, agriculture and commerce. The dredging and reclamation process could well spawn a huge, river-wide cottage industry for peoples of the river who could use geo-bags to be filled by dredged-up silt and then use these bags to reclaim and buttress redefined embankments. For shoring up the embankments of these rivers, inhabitants of riverine villages would find employment and livelihood. In the process, they would become effective guardians of the river, constantly monitoring the health of the river and the state of its embankments, and acting as early-warning system for protecting these embankments from damage by sudden floods. Fishing and ancillary fisheries-related industry would also be revived massively.

Reclamation of the rivers would also revive the ship-building industry that had existed and flourished in ancient times in Bengal. The great Moroccan scholar and traveller Ibn Batuta, wrote about his visit to Bengal in the fourteenth century where he 'saw numerous boats in the river carrying men and merchandise and testified to the existence of gigantic fleet of war-boats<sup>14</sup>.' Caesaro Frederici (or Frederick Caesar), a Venetian who during his travels to the East, between 1536 and 1581, also visited Bengal, saw Chittagong as the centre of building ocean-going vessels. In the seventeenth century, the ship-building

institutions of Chittagong were reported to have built a fleet of war-boats for the Sultan of Turkey. During the Mughal period, Bengal is said to have taken the lead in building ships and boats. The Mughal naval force had many ships built at Chittagong. The British Navy also used warships built at Chittagong, at least one of which comprised Nelson's victorious fleet in the famous Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the shipyards at Chittagong built ships up to 1000 DWT<sup>15</sup>.

Reclaiming the rivers could also see well-planned expansion of existing irrigation channels (that could also serve as overflow drainage channels during high season floods) and offset the current high dependency on tube wells extracting and grievously depleting, precious underground aquifers. In large tracts of West Bengal and Bangladesh, the underground aquifers have become contaminated with arsenic and salinity-infusion. In a comprehensive approach to water management and freshwater conservation, water conservation reservoirs and pondages could be created, where feasible, to augment freshwater access to people as well as for generation of run-of-the-river hydroelectricity projects. Last, but not the least, ecotourism and cultural tourism along the rivers could be revived, reconnecting peoples with each other to rediscover their common heritage.

All these activities must involve the peoples of these rivers. This sort of collaborative activity would result in massive employment generation that would translate into a multiplier effect on the socio-economic matrix, enhancing security and stability of the peoples of the subregion. Opening the rivers to better and more optimised use for transportation, in turn will open new service sectors and industries. Dying rivers would be revived, progressive siltation of riverbeds would be reduced and the currently-endangered ecology would be resuscitated. The generation of hydroelectricity would also serve the purpose of rendering surplus hydrocarbon resources for intra-regional use, export abroad or strategic reserve. It would also dramatically reduce the current rate of deforestation for fuel as well as for illegal logging. Regeneration of forestry and increasing forest coverage would create new, and enhance existing, carbon-sequestration zones<sup>16</sup>.

These goals are not pipe dreams. Given the growing consonance of political will prevailing, they are now well within the realm of the imaginable and doable, provided leaders stay the course that their vision has charted and their mandarins do their bidding with alacrity. Regional connectivity, now under process of resuscitation within the BBIN subregion, could well serve as the operationalising pathway to larger trans-regional connectivity, between South Asia and Southeast and East Asia. Even within the South Asian configuration, Sri Lanka and Maldives could join the current coastal shipping template inaugurated bilaterally between Bangladesh and India. This could be expanded to include Myanmar and Thailand as well, giving heft to the now-somnolent

Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) grouping, invigorating a Bay of Bengal community linked together symbiotically by the Bay that laps their shores. Instead of relying solely on one mode of connectivity, all these countries could optimise limited resources, by coordinating collaborative actions and deriving synergy, from the various modes available currently to them. We could conceivably envision a 'back to the future scenario' of this subregion and beyond to the east, once more reclaiming its great reputation of prosperity that it had enjoyed as the Bengal Presidency; this time not for any foreign power coming from distant shores to colonise and extract for its own gain, but for the shared and even greater prosperity of the peoples who are inhabitants of the region now and true inheritors of this wealth.

In conceptualising this intra and inter-regional connectivity agenda for shared prosperity and growth, a moot question would be: Can the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) strength augment South Asian weakness and deficit? We must not lose sight here that what is a challenge within domestic context is often more of a challenge in regional/subregional context. Democracy, anywhere, is constantly a work-in-progress. Since we, in South Asia, are all practicing and functional democracies in different stages of perfection (or otherwise), ultimately the peoples must take charge of, and drive, this great connectivity project forward. All parties and leaderships across these regions must therefore, ensure that the full and meaningful success of this venture must, *ab initio* and necessarily, be transparent so that potential gains are perceptively large and worthwhile for all peoples concerned to wish to pursue this goal.

The compelling rationale behind the decisions of Conference of the Parties (COP)-21, moreover, dictate that in our own larger self-interest we should commence the transition to reviving riverine connectivity urgently on a priority basis. These compulsions are likely to become more demanding in future. Fortunately, there exists now a convergence of thinking that could, if seized and built upon, see this subregion once again being reunited ecologically and economically, even while retaining their respective separate sovereign status as independent nation-states.

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Europe

Mediterranean Sea

Egypt

Persia

China

Arabia

India

Somalia

Indian Ocean

Java

# India and the Indian Ocean— the Dynamics of Multiple Centralities

VICE ADMIRAL ANIL CHOPRA, PVSM, AVSM

## *Abstract*

*India and the Indian Ocean are interlinked by the word 'central' in many ways. India is geographically central in the Indian Ocean; the Indian Ocean is central to India's economy and prosperity; India is central to the security of the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean and the Indian Ocean itself is now central to global trade. As economic power shifts eastward, the Indian Ocean has indeed become the centre of gravity and the freight corridor for the world economy.*

*There is no gainsaying that the twenty-first century is the century of the seas, and the energies and strategies of nations, large and small, are focusing seawards. It is for India to take cognisance and advantage of the bounty of multiple centralities that providence has bestowed upon it, to emerge stronger and more prosperous. In recent times, New Delhi has indeed recognised the importance of the maritime dimension, but it still lacks the organisational wherewithal and coordination apparatus to aggressively pursue the Modi government's maritime vision.*

*The global quest for prosperity through trade, resources, markets and freedom of navigation is leading to many multinational and multilateral initiatives on maritime cooperation. However the same quest is also leading to competition and conflict, as can be seen in the South China Sea. There is a distinct trend towards enhancing naval force levels and maritime capacity-building all across the Indo-Pacific region, as the littoral nations aspire to strengthen maritime security which is seeing the beginning of territorialisation of the seas.*

*Global and regional development apart, for India in particular, the Indian Ocean is central and indeed critical for both its prosperity and its security. Surrounded by the ocean on three sides, and blocked off by the Himalayas in the north, India is essentially a huge island interacting with the world through the seas. More than 90 per cent of its trade is seaborne, and its energy security is completely dependent on safe sea lanes. Its influence, diplomacy and heft are also majorly linked to its visible and deployable sea power.*

*In addition to strengthening the instruments and foundations of sea power such as the Navy, Coast Guard, ports, shipyards etc., India's immediate maritime thrust should be three-pronged. First, it must look west and south in addition to looking east, especially at the geopolitics and maritime developments in West Asia, the Persian Gulf, the Horn of Africa and the small island developing States of the southern Indian Ocean. Secondly, it must create significant military capability and infrastructure in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Last, but not the least, it must set in place an apex maritime body to coordinate and make policy in respect of the multifarious objectives in the maritime domain, which involves over two dozen government departments and agencies.*

The word 'central' has been increasingly used in various contexts and connotations in the recent geopolitical discourse on India's place and role in the Indian Ocean, as well as in the renewed geostrategic focus on the Indian Ocean itself. Clearly, India occupies geographical 'centrality' in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and it is fairly evident to most discerning observers that the Indian Ocean is also 'central' to India's prosperity and security. Further, it is now an accepted geo-economic reality that the Indian Ocean itself is 'central' to international trade, and increasingly to global maritime security.

All these 'centralities' are interlinked and merit holistic and continual examination, as India can truly emerge and rise only if its mostly continentally-focussed and sea-blind polity takes full cognisance of the extent to which India's vital interests, aspirations and ambitions are dependent on the Indian Ocean. The Modi government has certainly displayed a maritime vision and launched a number of initiatives—Sagarmala, Sagar and Mausam, to name but a few. Significance of the potentialities of the Ocean has broken through the confines of diplomatic, military, academic and journalistic circles, and does appear to have sunk into the polity at large. Should this now be translated into a 'whole-of-government' approach with cross-ministerial institutional commitment, the nation will surely reap the fruits of the bounty of maritime centralities that providence has bestowed upon it.

## THE MARITIME DIMENSION

It is abundantly clear that the twenty-first century is witnessing nations more interconnected and interdependent than ever before in human history. The globalised economy with exponentially increased trade, the internet and instant communications, quick and reliable intercontinental transportation, space-based imagery and location, and even long-range precision guided munitions, just to mention a few factors, have served to shrink the planet to a point where one can now imagine humanity as a string of communities living on the shores—the ‘Great Littoral’, if you will—of the interconnected oceans—the ‘Great Commons’—which cover 70 per cent of the Earth’s surface, and belong, as yet, to no political entity.

These increasingly contested and vast oceanic spaces have thus naturally, and progressively, occupied strategic centre stage in recent times, and the twenty-first century has been aptly termed as the ‘century of the seas’. It follows that maritime issues, such as boundary disputes, freedom of the seas, exclusive economic zone (EEZ) delineation, piracy, the right of innocent passage for military vessels, seabed mining rights, and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) treaty itself, amongst many others, are now matters of significant interest and concern for all nations, and will occupy the energies of statesmen, sailors and diplomats alike.

The maritime revolution which began in the Iberian Peninsula with the nautical emergence of Portugal and then Spain in the fifteenth century, has progressed steadily over half a millennium of trade and conflict. It has, however, truly matured only over the last half-century, as the post-War technological boom, and rapid globalisation catalysed the use of sea for a host of human aspirations, whilst simultaneously enhancing the threats to peaceful maritime activity. The maritime dimension today impinges on all aspects of universal strategic concerns, including global prosperity and stability, regional and national security, reliable energy flows, the quest for resources and markets, food security, international crime, climate change and even the safety of oil pipelines, offshore structures and the ocean-bed cables of the internet.

With maritime interests of even landlocked nations growing rapidly, the maritime space has become increasingly crowded. On the other hand, the maritime battle space has become increasingly transparent and targetable, and given the vast expanse of the oceans, it is well nigh impossible for any power, even a hyper-power, to guarantee security and stability for its own assets and interests, let alone police the seas for others. Both threats and opportunities abound, and for powers-in-being, and those in the making, an effective and imaginative maritime strategy is indeed the need of the hour. For India, poised as it is geographically and economically, it is indeed an imperative.

## THE INDIAN OCEAN'S GLOBAL CENTRALITY

'The Indian Ocean is the key to the seven seas.... In the twenty-first century, the destiny of the world will be decided upon its waters,' naval officers are inclined to frequently use this quote attributed to the strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan, who apparently articulated it a century-and-a-half ago. Irrespective of its authenticity, this was a remarkable piece of crystal-gazing to emanate from the nineteenth century as it does appear that the Indian Ocean is fast becoming the planet's geostrategic centre of gravity. It would thus only be fitting to first examine the centrality of the Indian Ocean in global affairs prior to looking at India's centrality within it, and the consequent centrality of the Ocean for India's own security and prosperity.

Indian Ocean, the third-largest ocean on the planet, is uniquely named after a single country, and is the only one which is completely landlocked to the north. It can thus be described as the navigable southern rim of the Eurasian landmass, commonly accepted as the 'heartland' of the world. Apart from the deep southern approaches, the ocean can be accessed by shipping only through a few choke points, all of which have gained tremendous strategic and economic significance; consequences of tension, let alone turmoil or closure in the Straits of Hormus, Malacca or Bab-el-Mandeb could severely affect the economies of scores of nations.

The IOR is home to almost three billion people, resident mostly in developing, conflict-ridden and poverty-stricken nations who are nonetheless rich in natural and human resources. As the global economic and demographic centres of gravity shift eastward after an interregnum of over five centuries, the Indian Ocean has emerged as the world's east-west expressway, its principal trade and energy corridor, but concurrently its most crisis-prone region in terms of both human conflict and natural disasters. It is therefore, hardly surprising that the Indian Ocean is attracting the strategic interest of the entire global community.

The Indian Ocean is today the principal highway which connects resource-hungry economies to their raw material reservoirs, and producers of goods to their ever-increasing and far-flung markets. It has overtaken the Atlantic as the world's busiest and most strategic trade corridor, carrying two-thirds of global oil shipments, half its container traffic and a third of bulk cargo. Apart from the Western Pacific, seaborne trade from other extra-regional and non-littoral regions such as the European Union, Russia, Central Asia, Western Africa and even Latin America is also increasingly transiting the Indian Ocean. In fact, about 80 per cent of the seaborne trade in the Indian Ocean is extra-regional. Much of this is headed to and from East Asia, including China, Japan, South Korea and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) nations, and has thus led to the concept of the 'Indo-Pacific' region. The Indo-Pacific label emanates from

a global realisation that the fast accelerating security and economic interdependencies between the Indian Ocean and the West Pacific have created a single overarching strategic system. This construct is essentially maritime in nature, as Asia's emerging, developing and developed nations intersect in the maritime sphere, increasingly using the sea for economic advantage and military posturing.

Around 80 per cent of China's and 90 per cent of both South Korea's and Japan's oil imports are shipped from the Middle East and/or Africa through the Indian Ocean. This is a huge strategic vulnerability for these extra-regional nations which is influencing their diplomacy and partnerships as well as naval capacity building. Beijing's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative and increasing forays of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy into the IOR must also be seen through this prism, and not only as an economic thrust for markets and resources.

#### INDIA'S CENTRALITY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

If geography is indeed a destiny for nations, then clearly a maritime future beckons India. Even a cursory glance at the map will underscore the physical centrality of the Indian peninsula jutting out into the vast southern ocean, neatly dividing its northern waters into the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. It is little wonder therefore that cartographers, both ancient and medieval, termed this essentially tropical ocean as the 'Indian Ocean'. India not only enjoys singularly fortunate location and position, but is also by far the largest country, both in terms of area and population, in the IOR, if one were to discount the Australian continent abutting the Ocean in its south-east extremities. Furthermore, India's vast coastline and extensive eastern and western sea-boards are ideal for maritime operations unconstrained by choke points, thus allowing free and multidirectional access to open waters—a significant advantage for naval forces breaking out into the maritime battle space.

Enabled by geography, size and population as it is, and with well-equipped and well-trained armed forces which are increasingly capable of rapid deployment, there is little doubt that a nuclear-capable India is by far the strongest military power in the region. With its blue-water navy, its mid-air refuelling assets and troops trained for expeditionary and out-of-area operations if so required, India already is and will continue to be the net security provider and stabilising power across the length and breadth of the IOR. As India slowly but surely strengthens its island assets into strategic military outposts, its capabilities for surveillance and interdiction will be unmatched. No other power, including extra-regional ones, can protect or disrupt on a sustained basis, the vital Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) that criss-cross the Indian Ocean, as India can. Clearly India is 'central' to the security of the region.

Furthermore, India is also the region's largest and most diverse economy with a strong industrial and manufacturing base and an accomplished services sector operating in both the public and private domains. It has significant trade with almost all the nations of the IOR and is making considerable investments in many regional economies. In addition, New Delhi has increased its assistance and aid programmes to many of the smaller countries, including all the small island developing States (SIDS). Acknowledged as the brightest spot in the global economy, India is fast becoming a wealth-creating powerhouse, driving growth not only within itself, but across the wider canvas of the IOR. With its multi-faceted economic linkages from the eastern and southern shores of Africa in the west, through the West Asia, to the portals of the Pacific in the east, India is also 'central' to the prosperity of the IOR.

In addition to its indisputable salience to the IOR geographically, militarily and economically, India's paramount status is further amplified by its ancient civilisational linkages, its modern technological prowess, widespread cultural influence, the many-hued soft power, and not the least its moral leadership that it derives from its non-violent struggle for independence. It is apparent that India occupies pre-eminence in the Indian Ocean in myriad ways. This not only spells great opportunity but also demands responsibility. The IOR can witness prolonged stability and consequently great prosperity only if India matures into a significant benign regional power. There is simply no other country in the region that can play this role.

### THE OCEAN'S CENTRALITY FOR INDIA

It would not be an exaggeration to state that the Indian Ocean provides India its vital core—prosperity and security. Sea is the medium through which India can strongly influence, shape and stabilise the regional environment towards the furtherance of its national and economic interests by the means of requisite maritime forces and infrastructure, maritime diplomacy, blue economy initiatives, and of course, provision of security to the smaller nations of the littoral. Instability in the Indian Ocean would significantly erode the growth of India's economy and pose an omnipresent threat to its security in many dimensions across the spectrum—from nuclear conflict to maritime terrorism.

95 per cent of India's trade by volume and 70 per cent by value are seaborne, and this oceanic trade accounts for almost 40 per cent of India's GDP. India's energy security is also inextricably linked to the maritime dimension. If one were to include offshore production, India is dependent on the sea for over 90 per cent of its total oil consumption, with 45 per cent of its imported Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) also coming by sea.

Over two million square kilometres in area, India's EEZ is almost two-thirds of its land mass and a potential economic powerhouse in terms of both living and non-living resources. India is already the sixth-largest fishing nation in the world, netting over four



million tonnes of fish, providing livelihood to millions of people, and also exporting. Besides oil and gas, the seabed and the column of water above it contain many valuable minerals and metals. Future technologies also hold the promise of generating alternative renewable energy and distilled water from the oceans.

The sea-leg of the nuclear triad is unquestionably the most potent deterrent on which India's nuclear strategy of 'No First Use' is predicated, as it is the least vulnerable to an attack by any weapon of mass destruction. In combination with a strong blue-water navy, the submarine deterrent offers India, as classical sea power, the most effective military and diplomatic instrument of State policy—in peacetime, in crisis situations and in full-fledged conflict.

### GEOPOLITICAL CONCERNS AND OPPORTUNITIES: VIEW FROM THE CENTRE

Given the nature of the Indo-Pacific geostrategic continuum, almost all geopolitical events and trends in this entire region, or the Indo-Asia-Pacific if you will, have the potential to affect India, with its multiple centralities, for better or for worse. There are significant tensions within and beyond the IOR, along with many opportunities. Whilst 'hot-spots', such as Yemen, the Horn of Africa, the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan-Pakistan, to name a few, are indeed of concern, India could leverage its centrality to paint the geopolitical canvas to its advantage in pursuance of its permanent long-term national interests.

Looking east to the South China Sea imbroglio, although it is not party to the territorial dispute, the emergent debate on the freedom of navigation (FON) is of utmost importance to India, as such freedom is vital to both its security and trade. FON essentially relates to the right of all vessels of all nations, including warships and military vessels, to freely navigate in the EEZs and the contiguous zones of any coastal State, without approval or permission of the coastal State. As a growing maritime power, India must unequivocally support the FON concept, and oppose the overt attempts of any nation to dilute this freedom. This would entail clear-eyed diplomacy both at the UN, whilst debating UNCLOS, and at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO). It would also entail the determination and resolve to continue to deploy maritime assets, as has been the case hitherto, in the now increasingly contested waters. Deployment need not only be exercises or patrols, but could take the form of presence through passage and transit.

By virtue of its centrality, and despite considerable economic opportunity beckoning from East of Malacca, India cannot however, be limited to looking and acting only East. It must not neglect to keep an eye on the waters both to its west and south, as there is much potential conflict as well as opportunity in the oceanic expanse towards

these cardinals. India's maritime policy, diplomacy and strategy must constantly address the east coast of Africa, West Asia, and the SIDS of the IOR.

The often and increasingly articulated objective of the US to gradually pivot out of the West Asian quagmire, and the simultaneous increasing presence of the PLA Navy in the Arabian Sea, must clearly be factored whilst shaping New Delhi's overall maritime strategy. Reduction of US engagement in the Persian Gulf is a distinct possibility due to a combination of factors including the decline in its strategic interest stemming from growing energy independence, the military fatigue resulting from over fifteen years of deployment, President Trump's seemingly isolationist proclivities, the gradual resolution of the Syrian and Islamic State issues, and the present 'drawdown' in the force levels of the US Navy.

This possible US disengagement is coincident with China's arrival on the shores of the north-west Indian Ocean through the portals of Gwadar, shortly to be linked to its heartland through the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This audacious 57 billion dollar venture affords Beijing strategic and military oversight over the Straits of Hormus, and needs to be fully assimilated by New Delhi in terms of the maritime threat and energy insecurity it implies. The increasing presence of the PLA Navy in the IOR, by way of both ships and submarines, is likely to become a permanent feature, although not immediately in any significant numbers given Beijing's preoccupations East of Malacca for the foreseeable future.

These developments should be of utmost concern to India given its massive interests in the region including energy security, the extensive diaspora and considerable commercial and business linkages and investment which can only be addressed through persistent maritime presence at sea and intensive diplomacy ashore. Given that not only nature but geopolitics too abhors a vacuum, any reluctance or vacillation on New Delhi's part will result in the growing Islamabad–Beijing combine jointly taking on the role of the principal maritime entity in the area spearheaded from Gwadar. This makes it imperative for India to increase its maritime footprint and general presence in the region. Any absence of credible rapid response capability in the waters to the west of India, would lead to both instability and insecurity.

The Chinese power play on the Makran Coast also needs to be viewed from the perspective of the ambitious and audacious OBOR or the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project. It is precisely at Gwadar that the controversial 'Belt' and 'Road' meet. It, of course, needs to be seen whether the faltering Chinese economy can fund the OBOR infrastructure, and whether its preoccupations and strategic concerns East of Malacca allow Beijing and PLA Navy the bandwidth to venture and persist in the IOR. Declining oil prices, struggling post-oil economies, and Shia–Sunni, Saudi–Iran and Arab–Israeli

discord will also continue to exacerbate the general instability in the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Straits of Bab-al-Mandab and Hormus, all of which could be detrimental to India's prosperity and interests. As both India and China will continue to be vastly dependent on unrestricted energy supplies from the region, there is bound to be competition for influence and goodwill with the littoral States of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Iran and Iraq.

India must build on its cultural and civilisational ties with Oman and Iran in particular. Muscat has adroitly established maritime infrastructure away from the Straits of Hormus in Salalah, and now in Duqm, both vital for maritime logistics. Similarly Chabahar is vital to India's interests in Afghanistan, Central Asia and beyond. Despite the signing of the Iranian accord with the P 5 + 1, renewed tension between the US and Iran, including the possibility of fresh sanctions could again alter the geopolitics in the region, and deserves close scrutiny. Further west, the Indian Navy has obtained significant experience in the waters of Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa, and its frequent visits to Djibouti and Salalah augur well for presence in the area. Once the immediate turbulence in Yemen has died down, the utility of engaging Sanaa, and recommencing the Indian Navy's traditional visits to Aden and Hudaydah in the Red Sea cannot be over emphasised.

One of New Delhi's marked successes over the last decade has been its engagement with the countries of the African east coast. Ships of the Indian Navy have increasingly and routinely visited ports and naval bases in Egypt, Eritrea, Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar, Mozambique and South Africa. Besides a manifold increase in the knowledge of the operational environment along the waters of this vital continent, such engagement has established Navy-to-Navy ties, friendship and interoperability. With India's economic, energy and commercial interests thriving in both public and private sectors in Africa, the maritime connect must be kept alive, utilising every opportunity. Membership of the Indian Ocean Commission will go a long way in further cementing maritime ties in this region.

New Delhi's seaward gaze to the south-west must take in the island nations of the IOR—Mauritius, Seychelles, Maldives and Sri Lanka. Both the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard have robust relationship with these countries, who are also being assiduously courted by China, Pakistan and extra-regional powers. India, however, has cultural, historical and ethnic linkages with all these nations, and provided New Delhi adopts a proactive approach and makes good on its promises without inordinate delays, there is no reason why these island nations would not be amongst India's most reliable supporters in the IOR.

The eastern part of the IOR, i.e. the Bay of Bengal fortuitously remains a relative oasis of oceanic calm, sandwiched between the Arabian Sea to the west and the China Seas to

the east. It would clearly be in India's interest that the status quo prevails. Towards this end, New Delhi has sagaciously resolved its maritime boundary dispute with Bangladesh under the aegis of the Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (TLOS), and stepped up its maritime engagements with Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia. Efforts to keep the Bay of Bengal free of multinational and extra-regional submarine operations are the key to stability and security in this water body. Indian diplomacy must therefore, aim to convince the aforementioned States of the Bay of Bengal littoral that neither a submarine arms race, nor hosting of extra-regional submarines would be in their overall interest in 'stability for prosperity'. By virtue of their location overlooking the choke point of Malacca, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are of great strategic value. This considerable visibility over India's maritime capabilities and its potentialities in the Bay of Bengal and the IOR and with every likelihood of India's joint command, the Andaman and Nicobar Command, gaining full time maritime leadership, these islands have the inherent wherewithal to be a potent military and maritime trump card.

Whilst some benefit may accrue to India's north-eastern and eastern states through economic activity catalysed through the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar (BCIM) initiatives, this must be weighed against the likelihood of the dynamics of the same enterprise leading to militarisation of the Bay of Bengal on a permanent basis. A strategic review of BCIM is certainly required before New Delhi commits itself to some of its strategically questionable provisions, which may allow for ease of maritime access to non-IOR powers. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) construct however offers a more advantageous way ahead to harness the economic potentialities of the Bay of Bengal littoral.

## CONCLUSION

The maritime domain in general, and the Indian Ocean in particular are indeed 'central' to India's security, growth and prosperity, as well as a prerequisite for its regional and global aspirations. Towards that end, initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Indian Ocean Nation States (IONS), International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC), BIMSTEC, Sagar and Sagarmala must receive continued and focused impetus. The Indian Navy in particular must have the means in terms of force levels as well as sustained funding to be both present and visible across the IOR, and must have the wherewithal to conduct active maritime diplomacy as also be the first responder for humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR) and non-combatant evaluation operations (NEO). Only then will it get acceptability as a credible net security provider in the vast oceanic spaces. In addition to the security aspects, commercial and economic activity is bound to increase manifold through the blue economy, oceanic research, deep-sea mining,

EEZ harvesting and infrastructure building for connectivity across the region. This would require greater policing of the coast and the maritime zones of India by constabularies such as the Coast Guard and the Maritime Police.

It would therefore be appropriate to conclude by strongly recommending the long overdue establishment of an apex maritime body to synergise the multifarious requirements, challenges and concerns of the maritime domain. Such an organisation is indeed central to the realisation of India's maritime potential in harnessing the resources and energy that are vital, and to underscore the criticality of India's maritime imperative. The opportunity must be seized if India is to emerge from the shadows and realise its tryst with destiny.

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# Emerging Contours of BIMSTEC

RAJEET MITTER

## *Abstract*

*India's imaginative and farsighted initiative to invite BIMSTEC leaders to the BRICS–BIMSTEC Outreach Summit in Goa in October 2016 refocused attention on the potential and prospects of BIMSTEC emerging as a viable vehicle for substantial subregional cooperation. As BIMSTEC approaches its twentieth anniversary, its inherent advantages are self-evident. It is home to 1.5 billion people amounting to 21 per cent of the world population with a combined GDP of USD 2.5 trillion. It is rich in natural and human resources and its unique geographical contiguity and access to the sea provide the opportunity for the establishment of an integrated economic space. Most significantly, it provides a critical bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia and the emerging economic architecture of the wider Indo-Pacific region. Importantly, from India's point of view, BIMSTEC places the relatively underdeveloped north-eastern region of the country at the heart of India's Act East policy.*

*Yet, it is widely recognised that in twenty years, BIMSTEC has not lived up to its early high expectations and promise, particularly in terms of visible and beneficial outcomes. Many of its initial proposals have been pushed forward through other bilateral, subregional and regional initiatives leaving BIMSTEC without a clear vision for the future. Nevertheless various factors now point to an opportunity for BIMSTEC to reinvent itself and move ahead. The establishment of the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka and the appointment of its first Secretary General, have filled a huge void in its institutional structure. Secondly, the apparent dead end reached*

*by SAARC, due to Pakistan's continual obstruction of its aims and programmes, has become all too evident, necessitating alternative avenues for furthering subregional cooperation. It is in this context that India's initiative in hosting the BRICS–BIMSTEC Outreach Summit in Goa in October 2016 was highly significant. It was a shot in the arm for BIMSTEC and the Outcome Document has become a comprehensive plan of action for the future.*

*The identification and pursuit of priority projects is the key to re-energising BIMSTEC. These may include early finalisation of the free trade agreement and adoption of trade facilitation measures. Other sectors that offer opportunities for substantial outcomes are connectivity, maritime cooperation, energy and counterterrorism, all of which have been highlighted in the Outcome Document. However, BIMSTEC must first also address the urgent need to strengthen the Secretariat with human and financial resources. As with other regional organisations, there is also the need to establish a special fund and tap international financial resources to execute major projects. Finally, BIMSTEC needs leadership and commitment and perhaps, India can play such a role in consonance with its Neighbourhood First policy.*

India's imaginative and farsighted initiative to invite Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) leaders to the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS)–BIMSTEC Outreach Summit in Goa, in October 2016, refocused attention on the potential and prospects of BIMSTEC emerging as a viable vehicle for substantial subregional cooperation. The BIMSTEC Summit assumed an added significance against the backdrop of the decision of four South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries to boycott the SAARC Summit in Islamabad in November 2016 on the issue of Pakistan's failure to curb cross-border terrorism emanating from its territory. It was also self-evident that Pakistan had repeatedly obstructed various SAARC initiatives and an alternative strategy was necessary to push forward greater subregional cooperation and integration.

BIST-EC, as it was first known, was formed in Bangkok in June 1997, comprising Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Myanmar attended the inaugural meeting as an observer and joined as a full member at the special ministerial meeting in December 1997. Subsequently, Nepal and Bhutan joined as full members in 2004, and at the first summit meeting held in 2004, the name of the organisation was changed to BIMSTEC. BIMSTEC did not have a founding charter, but over time member countries agreed on fourteen priority areas for cooperation with lead countries for each<sup>1</sup>. These were trade and investment, transport and communication, energy, tourism, technology, fisheries, agriculture, public health, poverty alleviation, counterterrorism and transnational crimes,



environment and natural disaster management, culture, people-to-people contacts and climate change. Apart from such sectoral meetings, BIMSTEC had summit-level meetings in Bangkok in 2004, New Delhi in 2008 and Myanmar in 2014. The fourth summit is in Nepal in 2017.

There are many inherent advantages in BIMSTEC as a subregional organisation. It is home to 1.5 billion people amounting to 21 per cent of the world population having a combined GDP of over USD 2.5 trillion<sup>2</sup>. Despite the global economic slowdown since 2008, BIMSTEC countries have been able to maintain a stable growth rate. It is rich in natural and human resources, and its unique geographical contiguity and access to the sea, provide the opportunities for establishment of an integrated economic space. Most significantly, it provides a critical bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia, complementing India's Look East and now Act East policy as well as Thailand's Look West policy. It also provides a vital link between South Asia and the emerging economic architecture of the wider Indo-Pacific region. For the least developed countries (LDC) in BIMSTEC in particular, the prospect of wider cross-border cooperation holds out much promise. The early involvement of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as a partner of BIMSTEC was also highly advantageous. The ADB completed in 2008 the BIMSTEC Transport Infrastructure and Logistics Study (BTILS), recommending a large number of connectivity and trade facilitation projects<sup>3</sup>. The ADB had earlier played a major role in the launch of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), and its association with BIMSTEC was expected to address the financial and technical shortfalls. Finally, from India's point of view, BIMSTEC places the relatively underdeveloped north-eastern region of the country at the heart of India's Act East policy. The promise of an accelerated development of the north-eastern states as a part of subregional cooperation has been a long-standing aspiration of the region.

Yet, despite its many inherent advantages, it is widely recognised that in twenty years, BIMSTEC has not lived up to its early high expectations, particularly in terms of visible and beneficial outcomes. Many of its proposals have been pushed forward through other bilateral, subregional and regional initiatives, leaving BIMSTEC without leadership and a clear vision. Most glaring has been the failure to conclude a BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement (FTA). A Framework Agreement was concluded in 2004 and a Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) was set up, but even after twenty rounds of negotiations, consensus has been elusive. Meanwhile, the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) came into force in 2006 and the India-ASEAN FTA in 2010. The India-Sri Lanka FTA (2000) and the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA) of 1976, of course, preceded the BIMSTEC negotiations. At the bilateral level, India concluded Comprehensive Economic Cooperation/Partnership Agreements with Singapore, Japan, Korea and Malaysia in the

period 2005–2011. India is engaged in FTA negotiations with other countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) that will encompass the ASEAN Plus Six countries, including China.

Similarly, in the priority area of connectivity, the major initiative of the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway is being pursued outside the BIMSTEC framework. India and Myanmar are working bilaterally on the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport project and the Zokhawthar–Tiddim axis through Rhi, to establish a viable corridor between Mizoram and the Chin state of Myanmar. Similarly, India and Bangladesh have agreed to the Agartala–Akhaura rail link and the Sabroom–Ramgarh road link, which will open up vital links between Tripura and Chittagong port in Bangladesh<sup>4</sup>. The grant of transit and trans-shipment facilities by Bangladesh to India by means of waterways and road through the inland port of Ashuganj has substantially reduced the time and cost of transporting goods from the east coast of India to Tripura and beyond<sup>5</sup>. A host of other connectivity projects are being undertaken under the umbrella of the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) programme with the assistance of the ADB. Finally, new proposals which, if implemented, will have a bearing on the BIMSTEC subregion include the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) and the Maritime Silk Route, a part of China’s One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative.

In the area of sectoral cooperation, BIMSTEC’s record is a mixed one. Two security related agreements have been finalised and are awaiting either signature or ratification. An energy-related MoU on grid connectivity has also been finalised and is awaiting signature. BIMSTEC centres for energy, weather and climate, and culture have been initiated, but are not fully operational as yet. In other areas, meetings at official, expert and even ministerial level have been held, but substantial progress and implementation has been tardy and there are very few visible outcomes. It would appear that BIMSTEC has perhaps spread itself too thin over fourteen sectoral initiatives and there is a need for focus and prioritisation.

Various factors now point to an opportunity for BIMSTEC to reinvent itself and push forward subregional cooperation. The establishment of the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka in 2014 and the appointment of its first Secretary General have filled a huge void in its institutional structure<sup>6</sup>. There is now the promise of administrative stability and continuity as well as close monitoring and follow-up of the BIMSTEC programmes. Of course, the need to further strengthen the Secretariat with human and financial resources remains imperative. Secondly, the apparent dead end reached by SAARC due to Pakistan’s continual obstruction of its programmes has become all too evident.

The denial of most favoured nation (MFN) status to India which undermined SAFTA, the last minute blocking of the agreements on Motor Vehicles and Railways at the seventeenth SAARC Summit in Kathmandu, the strident advocacy of China's entry as a full member, and Pakistan's abysmal record in curbing cross-border terrorism, are illustrative of its lack of commitment to SAARC. There are no indications of any likely change of course in the near future, and arguably, Pakistan's focus is now concentrated on the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It is in this context that India's initiative in hosting the BRICS–BIMSTEC Outreach Summit in Goa in October 2016 was hugely significant. It was a shot in the arm for BIMSTEC and the Outcome Document has become a comprehensive plan of action for the future<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, the official support given to the grouping of four countries, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN), was a response to the paralyses in SAARC, and the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement, now awaiting a final ratification by Bhutan, has been a solid achievement, and one, which can be easily replicated in BIMSTEC. Finally, BIMSTEC, which straddles South Asia and Southeast Asia, can be seen in the light of recent developments as an alternative narrative to OBOR. OBOR has been viewed in some quarters as a unilateral Chinese initiative whose aims and objectives have not been fully clarified. Whereas with its proximity to the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, BIMSTEC has the natural advantage in promoting subregional maritime cooperation.<sup>8</sup>

The identification and pursuit of priority projects is the key to the re-energisation of BIMSTEC. This should also be driven by adding value to and filling the gaps in other bilateral and regional initiatives. First and foremost would be finalisation of the BIMSTEC FTA for which, some twenty rounds of negotiations have already been held. There are reports that India is lukewarm to the modest tariff concessions that have been negotiated over a long period of time. India, being a participant in SAFTA and the ASEAN–India FTA, may not stand to benefit substantially from a BIMSTEC FTA. Nevertheless, there are compelling reasons to push it ahead. Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka on the one hand and Myanmar and Thailand on the other, are not linked by any FTA, and a BIMSTEC agreement could bring major trade gains for these countries. Intra-BIMSTEC trade has been growing in recent years, but still amounts to only 6-7 per cent of total trade, and as such, the scope for trade enhancement through an FTA is enormous. More importantly, it would facilitate cross-border production networks and regional value chains, which are the true measure of subregional economic integration. From India's point of view, the potential integration of the north-eastern states into these value chains would be a major gain. These states are emerging internationally competitive in a number of products such as pharmaceuticals, minerals like coal and limestone, agricultural and floriculture products, stone chips, bamboo, refined petroleum products,

food processing, rubber and some light engineering products<sup>9</sup>. The potential for the North East to export medical, educational and tourism services is also substantial.

A BIMSTEC FTA would also focus attention on various trade facilitation issues such as upgradation of border infrastructure, simplification of customs procedures, harmonisation of standards, cross-border testing facilities and non-tariff barriers. The extension of the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement to BIMSTEC would automatically meet a vital requirement for operationalisation of the Trilateral Highway. A trial run of a truck from Dhaka to Delhi in September 2016 under the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) was strikingly successful with GPS monitoring arrangement<sup>10</sup>. The logical next step would be a comprehensive transit agreement to facilitate the smooth flow of goods between and through BIMSTEC member countries. Thus, even a low-ambition FTA to begin with, incorporating trade in goods, services and investment could lead to other substantial benefits.

ADB's BTILS Report has a ready-made menu of connectivity projects that can be pursued by BIMSTEC and, which have not yet been taken up under other frameworks. The completion and operationalisation of the Trilateral Highway is the obvious priority. The three countries involved have already committed to completion of most sections of the highway. Opening a link from the Trilateral Highway into Mizoram is also important so as to provide an alternative to the Moreh–Tamu border point in Manipur. India has committed to finance the upgradation of the Rhi–Tiddim section in Myanmar beyond the border point at Zokhawtwar, and the next critical section to Kalemmyo is also a possible BIMSTEC project<sup>11</sup>.

There are other long-term, high-value connectivity projects that can be considered. India has been pushing railway connectivity with the north-eastern states and the Silchar–Imphal broad gauge line should be completed within the next couple of years. If eventually the line is extended from Imphal to Moreh, then there remains a relatively short missing section to Kalay for a link-up with the Myanmar railway network. This possibility has already been discussed at the first meeting in 2013 of the India–Myanmar Joint Railway Working Group. Finally, BIMSTEC can plug into the Myanmar proposals for development of port-based SEZs. The location at Dawei in southern Myanmar is ideal for road-maritime connectivity from Thailand across the Bay of Bengal to the eastern seaboard of India and Sri Lanka. This project was considered as the Mekong–India Economic Corridor (MIEC)<sup>12</sup>, but by involving Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, this could evolve into an important BIMSTEC initiative.

Indeed, there is a significant reference to the maritime heritage of BIMSTEC in the Leaders' Retreat 2016 Outcome Document<sup>13</sup>. It draws attention to the Bay of Bengal region being home to over 30 per cent of the world's fishermen, and that sustainable

development of fisheries in the region has the potential to make a significant contribution towards ensuring food security and improving livelihoods of people. The document goes on to highlight the enormous potential for the development of the blue economy with cooperation in areas such as aquaculture, hydrography, seabed mineral exploration, coastal shipping, ecotourism and renewable ocean energy. These are areas of cooperation that can be pursued by BIMSTEC without large financial implications. India and Bangladesh have already concluded a coastal shipping agreement, which can easily be extended to Myanmar and Sri Lanka. There is scope for BIMSTEC countries to coordinate their port development projects so as to maximise synergies and also offer options for the landlocked countries: Bhutan and Nepal. India's Sagarmala project envisages the development of six mega ports in the coming years and Bangladesh is also looking at deep-sea ports at Payra and Matarbari. Extending cooperation in this sector to the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) countries would be a logical next step for BIMSTEC to consider. In maritime matters, BIMSTEC and IORA face common challenges and opportunities. Cooperation could cover issues such as maritime choke points, safety and security of shipping lanes, building of maritime domain awareness, piracy, disaster relief and search and rescue<sup>14</sup>.

Among other priority sectors for BIMSTEC, cooperation in the field of energy has huge potential. The India–Nepal, India–Bhutan and India–Bangladesh electricity grids are already connected and power trading arrangements are in place. Much more work needs to be done to increase cross-border energy flows so as to unlock the enormous hydroelectric potential in Nepal, Bhutan, north-eastern India and Myanmar. For instance, hydropower potential in north-east India has been estimated at 60,000 MW. This power can be most economically transmitted to Bangladesh or to Myanmar. Myanmar itself has a hydropower potential of some 100,000 MW. India and Bangladesh are already exploring a 6000 MW transmission line from Rangia in Assam to Bihar through northern Bangladesh. Sharing of this power would be a win-win outcome for both countries. The finalisation of a BIMSTEC MoU on grid connectivity is the first step in the establishment of a regional grid, with power trading and equitable outcomes for all. The MoU provides for building blocks that are both bilateral and multilateral, and the proposal for linking the grids of India and Sri Lanka has been under serious consideration for some time now. Energy sector cooperation can be extended to cover oil, gas, LNG and renewable energy. An old proposal for a Myanmar–Bangladesh–India gas pipeline never saw the light of day, and Myanmar gas is now being exported to China. However, with the recent settlement of the Bangladesh–India and Bangladesh–Myanmar maritime boundaries, exploration for hydrocarbons in the Bay of Bengal is likely to go up and future sharing of new discoveries amongst BIMSTEC countries is a prospect worthy of serious consideration. The same applies to petroleum products. Assam is surplus in refining capacity and there

is a proposal to bring a product pipeline from Siliguri to Parbatipur in Bangladesh. A 41-km India–Nepal pipeline is under construction. A network of cross-border oil and gas pipelines will appreciably enhance energy security of all concerned.

Finally, the 2016 Outcome Document recognised that terrorism continues to remain the most significant threat to peace and stability in the region and called for concrete measures to step up cooperation among law enforcement, intelligence and security organisations. All BIMSTEC member countries have in various degrees faced the challenge of terrorism and in a veiled reference to Pakistan, the Outcome Document condemned in the strongest possible terms, recent barbaric terror attacks in the region. The need for cooperation instruments and mechanisms cannot be overemphasised. Such cooperation and preventive vigilance has to continue, irrespective of constraints that may arise in other sectors and may eventually be extended to coastal maritime security.

The illustrative priorities outlined above do not detract from other areas of cooperation such as tourism, culture, people-to-people contacts, climate change and disaster management. However, for BIMSTEC to become a successful vehicle for subregional cooperation, it has to seriously address the question of financial support for its programmes. As a member-driven organisation, it is largely dependent on the financial and technical support of its members. The time has come for BIMSTEC members to set up a special fund or a number of funds dedicated to specific projects to overcome the financial challenge. This is the practice followed by other regional organisations. Secondly, BIMSTEC has not adequately leveraged its unique partnership association with the ADB. It is not just a question of funding but also utilising the enormous technical resources available with the ADB. For instance, under SASEC, the ADB has spearheaded some forty projects worth USD 7.7 billion as of July 2016<sup>15</sup>. Most of these are in the areas of transport and connectivity, trade facilitation, energy, information and communication technology (ICT), and digital connectivity. BIMSTEC can draw on the comprehensive BTILS report and seek ADB support for identified BIMSTEC projects. Indeed, after the BRICS–BIMSTEC Outreach Summit, the BRICS New Development Bank can also be approached for funding, apart from other international financial institutions, including the China-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Finally, BIMSTEC may explore ‘open regionalism’, a concept first articulated at the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Bogor in 1989, but not fully defined. Essentially, this could involve bringing in outside countries and institutions on a project-specific basis without necessarily expanding BIMSTEC membership. For instance, Vietnam and Laos could be brought in to extend the reach of the Trilateral Highway or Japanese finances could be sought for the development of port-based Special Economic Zones in Myanmar.

BIMSTEC as a subregional grouping for fostering socio-economic cooperation has

many inherent advantages and new life has been breathed into it in the last few years. The objective factors are favourable, but there is need for strong leadership to realise the opportunities and potential. Perhaps, India needs to play such a role in consonance with its Neighbourhood First policy.

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# The Arab World—A Region in Transition

DINKAR SRIVASTAVA

## *Abstract*

*The Arab world spanning the Middle East and North Africa has been witnessing major changes. This is an ancient region, home to three great religions. The Arabic language provides a common link to an otherwise diverse area. Turkey, Israel and Iran are three non-Arab powers sharing the political space with varying degrees of competition and conflict. With the discovery of oil in the early twentieth century in Persia, followed by Saudi Arabia, geopolitical importance of the region increased. The twenty-first century saw three major events, which have shaped the region's history, and its impact on the rest of the world—9/11, the Arab Spring and the sectarian divide. The age of hydrocarbons is not over, but the OPEC's hold on the oil market is declining.*

## OVERVIEW

The Arab countries ranging from the Middle East to North Africa are witnessing a series of parallel transitions. There are political and social changes, the regional balance is changing, the role of external actors has undergone changes and the oil prices fell dramatically beginning mid-2014. A number of regional and internal conflicts have erupted in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya. The rise of sectarian tensions and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has had consequences beyond the region. The migrants' crisis has affected the European Union. The Middle East peace process remains stalled. What was termed as 'Arab Spring' by Western commentators, has belied its promise even to its supporters. With Russia's military intervention in Syria, and the ceasefire sponsored by Russia and Turkey after the fall of Aleppo, the great power equations have also changed. This comes at a time of transition in Washington, which may also affect the region.

For a region as varied as the Middle East and North Africa, no single cause can be attributed to the sweeping changes the different countries are undergoing. Revolution in Tunisia could be described as an internal change brought about by pent-up frustrations against the regime, which denied democratic aspirations of the people. In the case of Libya, the regime change could only be brought about by a sustained bombing campaign by the NATO. In Egypt, after a brief interlude of the Morsi government, the military regime is back in power. The Gulf countries could weather the storm better. High oil prices at the beginning of the crisis provided them with a financial cushion to offer subsidies. With the fall in oil prices, their margin has eroded. Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Iraq actually saw regime change. In Syria, this did not happen—only at an enormous cost in terms of civil war, refugee exodus and foreign intervention.

The rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq is sometimes described as a breakdown of the Sykes–Picot Agreement. The ISIS proclaimed itself as a worldwide caliphate, breaking down the inter-State boundaries. But the problem goes deeper, with the ISIS challenging the Westphalian concept of nation-state. The rise of ISIS has heightened Shia–Sunni schism, though its primary aim is competition for the minds of people in Sunni heartland. This coincided with an increase of Iran–Saudi tensions. After some modest steps towards rapprochement under King Abdullah, the relations between the two regional great powers have become tenser. Saudi intervention in Yemen and formation of a thirty-four country anti-terror alliance reflects increased regional rivalries. Lifting of sanctions against Iran has created the apprehension that Iran will flex its muscles in the region. The fear is shared on both sides of the Israel–Arab divide.

The Arab countries are caught in a pincer with increased competition from Turkey and Iran for regional dominance. The Ottoman and Persian empires have been the Arab's historical enemies. This has come at a time of rise of the ISIS. Vehemently anti-Shia, paradoxically, its immediate challenge is to the Arab regimes. Its ideological appeal lies more with the Sunni population.

There was nearly 80 per cent drop in price of crude oil between 2011, when Arab Spring began, and early 2016. It has recovered since, to around USD 53 per barrel. But it is still around half the price level five years ago. There is a similar drop in price of natural gas. Underlying this steep drop is a basic shift. Shale gas revolution has ended US dependency on oil from Middle East and North Africa. Though the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) still has a role in influencing crude prices, the salience of this factor in US policymaking has gone down. Lower oil prices and revenues have also reduced the cushion, which oil-rich countries had in coping with domestic social pressures.

Has there been any rethinking on the part of those, who advocated use of force in

the Middle East and North Africa in the wake of the Arab Spring? President Obama was asked in an interview to *Fox News* in April 2016 about his ‘worst mistake’. His response was: ‘Probably failing to plan for the day after, what I think was the right thing to do, in intervening in Libya.’<sup>1</sup> He also criticised the US’ European partners. He was more blunt in his May interview to *The Atlantic* magazine. Libya continues to burn. His critics hold his refusal to intervene in Syria, and quick drawdown of forces in Iraq, as failures.

Obama had been consistent in following a cautious approach. He tried to pull US troops out of Iraq. He refused to get drawn in after chemical weapons were discovered in Syria. He preferred that US should lead from behind in Libya. It was the alliance partners—UK and France, which were in the forefront, with enthusiastic support from Secretary of State, Clinton.

### THE ARAB SPRING

The ferment, which swept the Arab world in 2011, had different socio-economic causes. It took place in one-party States. The Western commentators, who termed it Arab Spring, focused on the political dimension. But if the absence of democracy was the cause, it is difficult to explain why the monarchies weathered the storm better. This was true not only in oil-rich Gulf countries, but also in Morocco in North Africa, which was not so well endowed. It was driven by socio-economic causes in Tunisia and Egypt. In case of Libya, the economic situation was not a factor. The use of force to bring about regime change has discredited the phenomenon, though underlying causes remain.

The Arab Spring was seen as a Western construct by many other countries. Their discomfort was reflected in abstention by Russia, China, India and Brazil on UN Security Council Resolution 1973 of 17 March 2011 on Libya. The rise of tribal warfare and Islamic extremism has reinforced the disenchantment with the Arab Spring even amongst its erstwhile supporters, who now derisively call it the Arab Winter. Libya remains divided between different governments and rival militias. In Syria, the West found itself fighting the regime as well as those who opposed it. President Obama’s interview to *The Atlantic* magazine was a candid confession of the failure of Western intervention. He blamed it on US’ European allies, particularly UK and France. But the failure was not simply because the European powers did not maintain their engagement for nation building in the aftermath of regime change. Internal evolution in any country takes time. The States concerned may also lack institutions to foster democracy. Or often, the only strong institution is the Army, which provides security, but is no guarantor of democracy.

### LIBYA

Libya under Gaddafi was never a democracy. Gaddafi did not hold any formal position in government, but wielded absolute control. He did, however, knit together a

tribal society. He had come to power overthrowing King Idris, who was head of a religious sect from the Cyrenaica region in the east. He led a lifelong struggle against political Islam and his overthrow opened a Pandora's box.

During the colonial period, Libya was divided into three different parts—eastern Libya or Cyrenaica, western Libya or Tripolitania, and southern Libya or Fezzan. The colonial powers tried to carve out their spheres of influence, and keep Libya divided. A unified country was established in 1951 by a resolution of the United Nations. Idris, who was head of a religious group, was installed as king. These historical fault lines have persisted. The Cyrenaica region where King Idris came from, had an uneasy existence under the Gaddafi regime. Islamist influence was also strongest in this region. During the civil war, Benghazi rose in rebellion against the Gaddafi rule. Despite American help in overthrowing Gaddafi, the US diplomatic compound in Benghazi was attacked and Ambassador Chris Stevens was killed in September 2012. President Obama blamed UK and France in part for the Libya situation: ‘When I go back and ask myself what went wrong, there is room for criticism, because I had more faith in the Europeans, given Libya’s proximity, being invested in the follow-up<sup>2</sup>.’

The country remains divided with Tripoli controlled by General National Congress and the eastern region controlled by the House of Representatives. Both the bodies have exhausted their mandate. The Government of National Accord (GNA) was established in Tripoli in April 2016. But it has not been able to unify the country.

Before 2011, Libya had an oil production of 1.7 million barrels per day. This included exports of 1.4 million barrels per day. Gaddafi was careful with finances. The country had no debt and foreign exchange reserves of more than USD 100 billion. Since then, its oil production has come down to 403,000 barrels per day with exports of 235,000 barrels per day.

The central part of the country, known as the Sirte region, has become a base for ISIS. Libya is barely 550 km south of Europe. The proximity has made it an ideal staging post for migrants seeking a better standard of living in Europe. The combination of terrorism and immigration crisis has torn apart EU. It has been at an enormous cost to the Libyan people.

## EGYPT

The Arab Spring brought Egyptian masses into the streets. The crisis was brewing before the events of Tunisia. Egypt witnessed the Kifaya movement, wherein, people wrote the term *Kifaya* on the walls, which means ‘enough’ in Arabic, as a reference to Hosni Mubarak’s long rule, and his attempt to bring his son to power. Socio-economic pressures too played a role. In the ensuing elections, Morsi, supported by the Muslim Brotherhood, came to

power, though on a thin majority in the presidential election. In the first round, he got 24.7 per cent votes against Ahmed Shafiq, who received 23.6 per cent of votes. Ahmad Shafiq was the last prime minister under Mubarak. In the second round, he received 51.7 per cent as against 48.7 per cent votes bagged by Ahmed Shafiq. Nevertheless, election of a Muslim Brotherhood candidate in the largest Arab nation sent a signal.

Morsi's election raised two vital questions: whether political Islam can be integrated in democratic process, and whether Egypt under Morsi will maintain its international commitments, the most important being the Camp David Accord. The answer to the second was clear. Morsi not only maintained Egypt's commitment, but played a mediating role between Israel and Palestine, as well as among different Palestinian factions. Morsi however, was less successful in working with domestic institutions, including parliamentary opposition and the judiciary.

Egypt had continued to supply natural gas to Israel till 2011 when there was a terrorist attack on the pipeline. More recently, Egypt voted in favour of UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2334 on Israeli settlements in the West Bank, as well as UNSC Resolution 2336 sponsored by Russia and Turkey on ceasefire in Syria.

General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's takeover was supported by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), who were happy to see Muslim Brotherhood ousted from power. They committed a generous financial package of USD 12 billion to bail out Egypt from its financial difficulties. They also provided crude oil. General Sisi was elected president in the election in which he won 96.91 per cent of valid votes in May 2016. Positive votes in support of the Russian–Turkish backed resolution on ceasefire in Syria may have caused some irritation in Riyadh. There may have been other contributing factors as well. Egypt sent a fleet in support of Saudi-led action in Yemen but did not commit ground troops. There have been delays in handing over two islands in the Gulf of Tirana to Saudi Arabia. Egypt has retained autonomy of its foreign policy and will continue to remain one of the most important players in the region.

#### MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

The adoption of UNSC Resolution 2334 on 23 December 2016 has brought the focus back on the Middle East Peace Process, which had remained dormant since the start of Arab Spring. The resolution affirmed: 'Settlements in Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, had no legal validity, constituting a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the vision of two States living side-by-side in peace and security, within internationally recognised borders<sup>3</sup>.' It was adopted by a vote of 14-0 with the US abstaining. The resolution, aimed at Israeli settlement activity, was adopted under Chapter VI of the UN Charter, which is not enforceable.

It reiterated the two State solution which is not new. Nevertheless, it carried a political message, particularly since it was passed by overwhelming majority.

The Israeli prime minister criticised the Obama Administration. The US PR Samantha Power, in her statement at the UN, quoted President Reagan to underline bipartisan consensus, and long-standing US policy on the subject. Then President-elect Trump said that this would not be repeated on his watch. Political process has to go on. The alternative, where Arab masses are won over by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) message of hatred, posed a greater danger. There was a terrorist attack in Israel on 8 January, which Prime Minister Netanyahu blamed on ISIS.

Expansion of settlements on the West Bank also revives Israel's classical dilemma. It can choose to be Jewish and democratic, or lose both the attributes in an expanded State, where Arab majority increases. Settlements are no defence against a missile attack which Israel had to weather in the past. President Trump's comment during a meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu's visit to Washington on 15 February 2017 suggests a rethink on US position on 'Two State Solution'. This may have major implications in future.

#### SYRIA, IRAQ, TURKEY AND ISIS

President Obama in his interview to *The Atlantic* magazine in March 2016 said, 'Right now, I do not think anybody can be feeling good about the situation in the Middle East. You have countries that are failing to provide prosperity and opportunity for their people. You have a violent, extremist ideology, or ideologies, that are turbo-charged through social media. You have countries that have very few civic traditions, so that as autocratic regimes start fraying, the only organising principles are sectarian<sup>4</sup>.'

Prolonged civil war in Syria and disenfranchisement of the Sunni minority in Iraq created political space for the rise of ISIS. The speed with which it occupied Ramadi and Mosul, and the sheer brutality displayed by it attracted much international attention. ISIS is more than a terrorist organisation. It has an army, which has displayed capacity to hold territory. More importantly, it aims at dominating Muslim minds and incite attacks in Europe and America. Syrian forces, with help from Russian bombing, have recovered Aleppo. ISIS has lost Fallujah and Ramadi in Iraq, and is expected to be pushed out of Mosul. It may no longer be a winning franchise, which can easily attract recruits and funds. But if the ideology retains its pull on the minds of alienated youth, the danger of 'lone wolf' attacks will remain.

The ISIS posed a dilemma for the US and Western countries. They were fighting the Syrian regime, and its opponent, at the same time. This was bound to weaken their war effort in Syria. The sectarian killings of Shias and Kurds by ISIS raised concerns in Iraq. But precisely because of its sectarian nature, its message had no appeal for the

Shia majority. After making initial gains in Ramadi, since reversed, ISIS fell back on the Sunni majority region of Anbar.

The rise of ISIS is sometimes projected as the breakdown of the Sykes–Picot Agreement. Actually, the first challenge to the Anglo–French accord came immediately after World War I, when Abdul Aziz, then a minor chieftain from Nejd, displaced Hashemite rule over Hejaz. This forced the British to install Prince Faisal in Iraq. Abdul Aziz established his kingdom over the Arabian peninsula, and consolidated his rule by assuming the mantle of ‘custodian of holy shrines’. It is this role, which is being challenged by the ISIS. The territorial status quo of the Sykes–Picot Agreement was based on the demise of the Ottoman empire, and the country focusing on internal consolidation, and secularism under Kemal Attaturk. Turkey, under Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is seeking reversal of both the internal and external dimensions of this legacy. It seeks greater Islamisation. It has also asserted Turkey’s role in the Arab world. Turkey along with Russia, sponsored the ceasefire agreement in Syria.

It is interesting that Turkey, a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member, has struck at least a tactical alliance with Russia. This directly challenges America’s stated objective of replacing the Assad regime. The fact that Turkey waited till the fall of Aleppo to Russian–Assad forces backed by Shia militias, shows the extent of turnaround in Turkey’s position and regional equations. Turkey was the most vociferous critic of the Assad regime. It hosts three million Syrian refugees. It has revised its priorities. It sees consolidation of a Kurdish enclave on Syrian border as a greater threat than continuation of the Assad regime, supported by Russia and Iran.

## SAUDI ARABIA

The Saudi State has shown that it has the capacity to meet the territorial challenge from ISIS. However, the bigger challenge is ideological. There was an attack on Saudi outpost on its border with Iraq in January 2016. There have been terror attacks within the Saudi kingdom, which have been checked. The real danger ISIS poses is if its message of hatred is accepted by the mainstream in Muslim countries. In claiming the caliphate, and assuming Emir’s title, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has directly challenged the Saudi monarchy, which derives its legitimacy from its role as the ‘servant of the two holy mosques’.

According to a Carnegie study by Cole Bunzel, entitled *The Kingdom and the Caliphate: Duel of the Islamic State*<sup>5</sup>, unlike Al-Qaeda for which the United States was the primary target, for Abu Baqr al-Baghdadi, the regime in Saudi Arabia is the primary target. Bunzel states: ‘This revision by the leader of the Islamic State marks a significant change in the priorities of the global jihadi movement now spearheaded by the group.’ The paper mentions that ISIS seeks to appropriate Wahabi ideology but considers the

Saudi ruling family as ‘apostates, unbelievers, who have abandoned the religion and must be killed’. A month after ISIS had declared itself the caliphate, King Abdullah in August 2014 called on ‘the scholars of the Islamic community to carry out their duty before God and confront those trying to hijack Islam and present it to the world as the religion of extremism, hate and terror.’ The Saudi clergy was upbraided by late King Abdullah as ‘lazy’, who were not doing enough to combat the ISIS message. The study says that Abd al-Aziz al-Sheikh, the grand mufti of the kingdom and the head of the Council of Senior Religious Scholars, has characterised the ISIS, along with Al-Qaeda, as ‘an extension of the Kharijites, who were the first group to leave the religion’. There are also voices outside the ranks of clergy, who have asked for reform of the Wahabi doctrine.

With the passing of King Abdullah, Saudi Arabia went through a transition. While Prince Salman became king, the appointment of Prince Mohammad Bin Nayef as crown prince, and Prince Mohammad bin Salman as deputy crown prince, the succession was passed on to the second generation. This in effect meant bypassing a number of Abdul Aziz’s sons. Prince Mohammad bin Salman, the king’s son and deputy crown prince, has effected changes in key portfolios. This includes the foreign ministry, where for the first time, a commoner, Adel al-Jubeir, has taken over as the Saudi foreign minister. The Oil Minister Ali al-Naimi was replaced by Khalid al-Falih.

Saudi Arabia has also followed a more muscular foreign policy. This includes military intervention in Yemen following Houthi takeover, which reflected an apprehension that it was inspired by Iran, a charge the latter denies. The kingdom also supports ‘moderate opposition’ in Syria. With Russian intervention in support of the Assad regime, the tide of war in that country seems turning in favour of the Syrian government.

Prince Mohammad bin Salman has also announced an ambitious plan for diversification of the Saudi economy to wean it away from dependency on oil revenues. An ambitious blueprint for the future—Vision 2025 has been released; its implementation however, will take time. The kingdom also demonstrated irritation with the US over the Obama administration’s policy in Syria, as well as the nuclear accord with Iran. Since then, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as the nuclear deal is known, has gone into effect. It is worth recalling that though there may be differences over Syria, but on the issue of nuclear deal with Iran, the US position is also supported by Russia, China and European countries. Whether there will be warming of relations with the new Republican administration remains to be seen.

Saudi Arabia announced formation of a thirty-four country alliance to counter terrorism. The group is named Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMAFIT) and includes Muslim countries, within and outside the region. It also conducted a military exercise ‘Northern Thunder’. The announcement of appointment of General Raheel



Sharif, former Pakistan Army Chief, to head the alliance was criticised in Pakistan as potentially drawing Pakistan into the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran. According to an article by Syeda Mamoona Rubab, General Sharif stated that he has made his joining conditional upon the role being ‘related to his training responsibilities, the advisory role and reconciliation efforts<sup>6</sup>.’ The article mentioned further that the Pakistan Peoples’ Party and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf have opposed General Raheel serving the Saudi alliance.

## IRAN

The nuclear deal is a multilateral agreement supported by P5+1 (US, Russia, China, UK, France and Germany) and endorsed by the UNSC. Though they opposed the deal, Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, have not called for its repeal since. President Obama in his interview to *The Atlantic* magazine in May 2016, advised that the kingdom should learn to share the neighbourhood in a ‘cold peace’ with Iran. Iran’s bilateral relations with the US remain unchanged. Indeed, normalisation of Iran–US relations was not part of the nuclear deal. Iran’s relations with Saudi Arabia also remain under strain after showing some promise during the last days of King Abdullah, when his son and deputy foreign minister visited Tehran. The passing away of Ayatollah Rafsanjani, who had close personal relations with Saudi leaders, may also complicate normalisation.

## SHIA–SUNNI TENSIONS

Saudi–Iranian competition is a reflection of geopolitics as well as rise of sectarian tensions. The Arab–Azam tensions go back to the Arab invasion of Persia in the seventh century AD. The Iranians accepted Islam, but rejected the Arab domination. Firdaus’s poetry celebrates Iran’s glorious past. The rise of the Ottoman empire added another twist to this tale. The adoption of Shia theology as State religion by the Safavids was partly an ideological defence against the Ottoman empire, which had assumed the mantle of caliphate. It defined the Iranian nation as separate from the Sunni neighbours to the west.

The sectarian divide was reinforced by the geopolitical rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the contemporary period. The rise of ISIS has heightened Shia–Sunni tensions. But ISIS targets Saudi leadership, as much as Shias. The doctrinal differences would not have assumed such an edge, if the geopolitical rivalry over Syria, Lebanon and Yemen was not there.

## FUTURE OF ISIS

The speed with which ISIS expanded in Iraq and Syria took most of the world by surprise, including the countries in the region. It is equally difficult to predict its future.

It has lost Aleppo, though it continues to retain its capital Raqqa and territory in eastern Syria. In Iraq, Mosul, remains its last major stronghold. Will the loss of territory destroy the movement? Or will the ideology continue to hold sway over the minds of the believers? The latter outcome is perhaps more dangerous. It will produce terrorism across the world.

ISIS arose in war-torn Iraq and Syria. If its followers gain control of a major State, the consequences would be far worse. By some estimates, the ISIS attracted more outside fighters than the Afghan jihad. Its impact on the outside world could be potentially more devastating as these fighters return to their native countries. The Afghan jihad was fought in the 1980s before the age of internet. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the ISIS has much more powerful tools in terms of social media to propagate its creed and attract adherents. ISIS has found adherents in the Afghanistan–Pakistan (Af-Pak) region. To what extent these were ex-Talibans, who joined the winning brand, and may melt away if ISIS is successfully contained and defeated in Arabian heartland, remains to be seen.

## OIL

The OPEC basket price came down from around USD 107 per barrel in 2011 to USD 22 per barrel by January/February 2016. It has recovered since then to USD 53.13 per barrel by the end of December 2016. Even this remains much below its historic level in 2011 at the beginning of the Arab Spring. The fluctuation goes beyond the traditional demand–supply cycle. There are fundamental changes at work. With the increase in shale production, the US demand for oil import has come down. In December 2015, the US administration lifted control on oil exports in place for more than four decades since the Seventies. The changed scenario has a salience on importance of Middle East in US policy calculus.

There are environmental pressures also on demand for fossil fuel. The International Energy Agency, in a 2016 report stated that in fifteen years' time, demand for crude oil will peak. This is reversal of the earlier theory of 'peak oil', when beyond a point the crude availability will enter a terminal decline. The prospect of oil running out had kept crude prices going up.

The economics of demand and supply were reinforced by politics. By the end of 2014, an interim nuclear deal with Iran had been reached. In the Vienna ministerial meeting in December 2014, OPEC ministers were to decide on production cut to sustain crude price, which had started going down since June of that year. The Iranian oil minister had personally lobbied his Saudi counterpart, and announced that an understanding had been reached to support price. This expectation was belied, when the Gulf producers led

by Saudi Arabia decided to let the market determine the price, and rejected production ceiling. The crude price nosedived. The Iranian suspicion was that the decision was driven by politics, with Arab Gulf countries trying to strangle Iranian economy, just as it was coming out of sanctions. The lower production also adversely affected Russia, and hence suited America politically. There was a third rationale for the decision. Lower price was to eliminate high cost shale oil producers, and thus eliminate competition for the Gulf countries.

The Gulf countries maintained that it was purely an economic decision. Earlier production cuts by OPEC did not stabilise prices. Non-OPEC producers stepped in to increase their market share, and OPEC lost market share. Saudi Arabia did not want to be the swing producer and accept losses indefinitely. In the November 2016 OPEC meeting, this cycle was reversed. OPEC agreed on production cut to sustain crude oil prices. The OPEC agreement was coordinated with non-OPEC producers like Russia, who account for two-third of the global oil production. What was remarkable was that not only did Saudi Arabia agree to accept a cut in its production, Iran was exempted till it recovered its pre-sanction production level.

## SECURITY

Saudi Arabia dominates the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), formed to provide collective response to internal and external security challenges faced by the Gulf monarchies. Within GCC, while Bahrain, Kuwait and UAE tend to be closely aligned with the Saudi policy, Oman plays a bridging role with Iran with whom it has maintained cordial relations. Qatar tended to be an outlier with support to Muslim Brotherhood, which is anathema to other Gulf monarchies. It has somewhat muted this role recently. GCC was founded to defend the legitimacy of monarchical system. It has so far weathered the storm.

There have been horrendous consequences of war in Syria, Iraq and Yemen in terms of refugee exodus, internal displacement and destruction of civilian life and property. According to UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 2017, there are 6.3 million internally displaced persons in Syria and 4.9 million people, who have fled the country. In Iraq, there are 3.1 million displaced and 1.2 million in temporary settlement. The UNHCR estimates there are 2 million persons displaced in Yemen<sup>7</sup>. Unless, reconstruction and resettlement is undertaken quickly, humanitarian disaster of this scale would have far-reaching impact on the security of the region and beyond.

Saudi Arabia and Iran, two major regional powers have a convergence of interests in political and economic fields. The emergence of ISIS is a challenge to both, though for different reasons. The movement, which calls for killing of Shias, cannot be acceptable to Shia Iran. The ISIS ideology targets the Saudi regime, as they consider it 'apostate'.

The two countries have agreed to work together to boost crude oil prices, in which they have a shared interest. However, they are yet to grasp the opportunity for cooperation at the political level. If the Trump presidency brings together US and Russia, this will help control the festering conflicts in the region. The situation is more complex than the Great Game of the nineteenth century, which was played out by external actors, where local population was not a factor. In the age of social media and faith-based wars, there is multiplicity of actors.

Being the birthplace of three great religions, West Asia will retain its importance long after the age of hydrocarbons is over. But the coincidence of depressed oil prices with the rise of ISIS, has created an explosive mix. The impact of reduced oil revenues goes beyond the Gulf monarchies, with the loss of worker remittances, which buoyed up economies of many countries of the region. ISIS not only represents a challenge to the Westphalian concept of nation-state, it has aggravated theological schism within the Islamic world. Its political and military formations have to be defeated. But military defeat, and loss of territory, will not be enough until its ideological appeal is countered. This challenge has to be met from within the Islamic world. The war devastated countries of the region also need massive reconstruction effort, and inclusive State structures.

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## END NOTES

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# Radicalisation: Developing a Counter-narrative

ALVITE NINGTHOUJAM & CD SAHAY

## *Abstract*

*The phenomenon of radicalisation has emerged to be one of the most serious security challenges before the international community today. This has been reinforced with the emergence of extremely rabid terror outfits such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Daesh, using Islam as a tool to promote radicalism and violence.*

*Beginning with the trend of radicalisation in the 1980s, under scrutiny is the current scenario of radicalisation, particularly in places where there is significant penetration of Daesh or where it is trying to establish/gain influence including India, Southeast Asia, Europe and the United States. Some of the salient features of radicalisation, use of social media as a tool, role of ideologues and institutions and vernacular publications, are also examined. A section delves into the growing trend of radicalisation in India under the influence of external groups including Daesh. The concluding sub-themes concentrate on the future threat scenario; kinetic and non-kinetic approaches to deal with the outward violent manifestation; de-radicalisation and above all, the imperatives of evolving counter-strategies including a new counter-narrative to be developed by the Islamic institutions, scholars and the relevant civilian establishments.*

## INTRODUCTION

Extreme violence fuelled by Islamic radicalisation has, understandably, emerged as the most serious security problem being faced by the international community today.

Impact of this global phenomenon is being felt not only in the traditionally conservative societies of West Asia, Middle East and to an extent even in the Indian subcontinent, but also in the Western countries, which have always taken immense pride in their time-tested values of democracy, secularism and multiculturalism. But these basic values have been thoroughly shaken at their roots by the emergence of deeply-radicalised terrorist outfits such as Daesh or Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), or just Islamic State (IS) as it is now known, over the last few years. This is not to say that radicalisation is concentrated only in the Islamic societies; it also exists in areas having serious ethno-political crisis. The Muslim insurgency in southern Thailand is a suitable example<sup>1</sup>.

Radicalisation in its current manifestation, particularly in the Islamic world and with the level of terrorism associated with organisations like Daesh and Al-Qaeda, is to be seen in a different perspective. The 'dream' of establishing the elusive 'caliphate' has caught the imagination of the followers of Islam like never before. To an extent, even Al-Qaeda in its heydays had this ambition, though it lost the focus on account of its overwhelming preoccupation with Saudi Arabia and the United States (US). Regardless of which terror organisation follows this agenda, radicalisation, as the international community perceives it, is a major threat that is not likely to fade away soon or easily.

#### INTERNATIONAL SPREAD OF RADICALISED TERROR MACHINE

In recent times, analysts believe that the rise of Islamic radicalisation began with the call for Afghan jihad in the 1980s, wherein large groups of Muslims from across the world were mobilised, deeply indoctrinated, trained in the art of jihadi warfare, fully armed and launched under official patronage to drive the Soviets/Russians out of Afghanistan. They did it successfully but in the process, left behind a massive body of highly indoctrinated and motivated army of mercenaries for the region and the world to contend with. Al-Qaeda and the Taliban became synonymous with this new crop of Islamic warriors, who were at war with virtually the entire established order, first in the region and then later with the world, as evidenced in the 9/11 attack in the US.

Following the punitive US bombing the Taliban regime out of Kabul and all that followed thereafter, including the US-led action in Iraq, the Al-Qaeda attacks against the US/Western establishments/interests around the world led to the emergence of a new narrative of deeply-radicalised Islam at war with rest of the world under the theme, 'Islam under threat'. The then US President, George Bush, described it as a 'Conflict of Civilisations'.

To cut a long story short, the international community is currently grappling with the impact of these developments that are being witnessed in the larger regions of Iraq, Syria and the adjoining neighbourhood, where Daesh, led by its firebrand leader,



Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has unleashed a reign of terror like never seen before. His call to the Muslim world to unite to establish the caliphate has found emotive resonance all around. His warriors of Islam are highly indoctrinated and deeply-radicalised. They have joined the movement from across the globe with significant numbers coming from various European countries like the United Kingdom (UK), France, Germany, etc. The presence of Daesh modules has come to notice in many other countries, including the Asian subcontinent, Afghanistan–Pakistan region, the Central Asian republics, Russia, the US, Africa, etc. Daesh recruits are, as a rule, highly radicalised, indoctrinated and intensely motivated. Where Daesh has stolen the march over other groups like Al-Qaeda and some of the African entities is the fact that they rapidly captured vast swathes of land in Iraq and Syria, built up significant financial resources and captured an enviable armoury of war weapons. They did all this in the record time of just a couple of years.

### THE HORROR OF TERROR

The horror story of terror perpetrated by Daesh can be gauged by the fact that over the last three years, the group has carried out startling attacks in different parts of the world with near impunity. To establish a well-defined Islamic State to be governed by strict Sharia Law, Daesh, since the beginning of 2014, fought unrelentingly to capture as much territory as it could, and this led to the conquest of a few major Iraqi and Syrian cities, such as Tikrit, Fallujah, Mosul, Ramadi, Raqqa, Palmyra, along with other towns and villages. By the time the self-appointed caliph made his first public appearance on 4 July 2014, his outfit had taken control of territories ‘stretching from al-Bab in Syria’s Aleppo governorate to Suleiman Bek in Iraq’s Salah-ad-Din province, over 400 miles away’<sup>2</sup>. The total territorial control in Iraq and Syria in the beginning of 2015 was about 78,100 square kilometres (sq km) but this dropped to 60,400 sq km in December 2016<sup>3</sup>.

This terror war was facilitated by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s vast army that had even attracted thousands of foreign fighters from over 100 countries. Between 2014 and mid-2015, the number of these fighters was estimated at 30,000,<sup>4</sup> with majority of them coming from Tunisia, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. A study conducted by the New York-based The Soufan Group gives the following estimates region wise: 1. Western Europe–5,000; 2. Former Soviet Republics–4,700; 3. North America–280; 4. The Balkans–875; 5. The Maghreb–8,000; 6. The Middle East–8,240; and 7. Southeast Asia–900.<sup>5</sup> Daesh militias could carry out several brazen attacks in the region while its overseas fighters, mostly in Europe, carried out similar carnages. Since June 2014, apart from Iraq and Syria, Daesh has conducted or inspired more than 140 attacks in 29 countries, killing more than 2,000 people and injuring thousands<sup>6</sup>. Apart from Syria and Iraq, after 2014, some of the countries, including, Yemen (March 2015–224 deaths),

Egypt (October 2015–224-deaths), France (November 2015–130 deaths), Belgium (March 2016–32 deaths), Turkey (June 2016–45 deaths and January 2017–39 deaths) and Pakistan (February 2017–90 deaths), have faced major attacks which were claimed by ISIS and its affiliates.<sup>7</sup> Even now when the outfit is on retreat in Mosul, it continues to carry out suicide bombing and other acts of terror.

### THE STORY OF RADICALISATION

How has Daesh achieved these within such a short span of time? The unanimous answer is: radicalisation. According to noted Indian scholar, Tufail Ahmed, ‘Radicalisation is the process of directly and indirectly motivating Muslims to participate in jihadi terror, based on religious teachings and grievance nurturing by Islamic preachers, the press and other Islamic media’<sup>8</sup>. While religion has always been used as a tool to radicalise, current international developments around the world also play a significant role as drivers of radicalisation, which ultimately facilitates recruitment into terror outfits, especially Daesh in this context. However, it is largely agreed that radicalisation on its own does not necessarily lead to violent behaviour by every individual. There is a need to differentiate between the two. More often than not, radicalisation and terrorism have been used interchangeably. No doubt, radical beliefs are a necessary precursor for terrorism but radicalisation per se does not equate with terrorism. Global polls from organisations like Pew and Gallup suggest that there are tens of millions of Muslims worldwide, who are sympathetic to ‘jihadi aspirations’, and could be branded as ‘radicalised’; but only a fraction of them engage in terrorism. Conversely, some terrorists, perhaps many of them, are not ideologues or deep believers in extremist doctrine; and yet have taken to terror violence.

Radicalisation takes place through different routes, such as Islamic institutions, media and literature, preachers, internet and cyberspace, etc. But there is also a growing number of self-radicalised or self-indoctrinated people, mostly belonging to the younger generation. They pose equally serious security challenges. The call given by al-Baghdadi asking sympathisers/supporters from all over the world to unite for the cause found resonance with Muslims everywhere. Focus on internal or domestic issues has been encouraged by Daesh and Al-Qaeda leaderships to augment both radicalisation and recruitment into their groups. Such messages are apparently received by impressionable lone individuals. However, as these elements lie low, it becomes difficult to track their activities. From interrogation of arrested persons in different countries it is clear that both offline and online mechanisms have been effectively used both to radicalise and recruit people. Outfits like Daesh and Al-Qaeda are known to have successfully radicalised and mobilised for action, thousands of foreign fighters into Syria and Iraq to join in the ranks of Daesh or Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (Conquest of Syria) Front, formerly known as Jabhat

al-Nusra or Al-Nusra Front<sup>9</sup>. This has been possible due to successful radicalisation and recruitment activities in their native countries.

Role of modern communication technologies and cyberspace has been particularly 'extraordinary' in self-radicalisation the world over. Popular social media tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype and encrypted messenger applications such as Surespot and Telegram, along with easy availability of publications in different local languages, have only made the task easier for the recruiters reaching out to those, who constantly surf the internet looking for any particular terror group, their ideologies, propaganda and their objectives. In this domain, Daesh has outshone all others of that ilk, both in terms of numbers and geographical outreach. Highlighting the role of the internet and social media in spreading radicalisation in the region, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said, 'By skilfully exploiting the internet and social media, ISIS has attracted malcontents and misfits, misguided souls and naïve youths from all over the world. More than 20,000 people have gone to Iraq and Syria from Europe, from the US, from Asia, from Australia, to fight—for what? But they are there, and one day, when they return home, they will bring the radical ideology, the combat experience, the terrorist networks and the technical know-how with them'<sup>10</sup>.

In West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region, Arabic language print and online publications have played an important role in promoting radicalisation. Likewise, this tool has been effectively used in spreading radicalisation in Central Asia, Russia, the Indian subcontinent, and Southeast Asian countries where Daesh footprints are discernible, both ideologically and physically. Fighters, mostly from Central Asian countries, have set up online forums in Russian and other local languages to make the recruitment endeavours easier. Daesh quickly saw its potential and launched its Russian-language publications *Furat-Press* and *Istok* in mid-2015, published by its propaganda unit, Al-Hayat Media Centre, which also brings out English-language *Dabiq* and *Dar-al-Islam* in French. Since September 2016, the social media campaign was further reinforced with the introduction of *Rumiyah*, the latest English propaganda magazine which called upon Daesh operatives and supporters to intensify lone-wolf attacks against the infidels and the Western interests. These publications play an extremely critical role in promoting radicalisation and perpetration of some of the successful terror attacks staged in recent times. Similar approach is applied in the Asian context, too. Daesh grabbed worldwide attention with its propaganda video in which a Canadian-origin person was featured. This clip was copied into different Indian languages like Urdu, Hindi and Tamil. Similarly, in Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines, Malay was used to establish the linkages that led to the formation, in September 2014, of a 22-member group called Katibah Nusantara Lid Daulah Islamiyya (Malay Archipelago for the Islamic States) in Al-Shadadi, Syria.

Daesh has perfected the art of exploiting linguistic affinity to attract like-minded recruits. Circulation of propaganda material in Bengali language for its audience in Bangladesh can be a concerning factor, as this language is widely spoken and understood in north-eastern Indian states and West Bengal<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, at this juncture, Bangladesh is undergoing a severe problem of radicalisation of youths who are increasingly going the terror way<sup>12</sup>.

Radicalisation propagated through religious establishments, places of public gathering and educational institutions is not new. Its efficacy is astounding—mainly in Europe, a few African countries, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, etc. Mushrooming of mosques funded by the Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, even in a tiny country like Maldives, has significantly contributed to spreading radical ideologies<sup>13</sup>. Many young Maldivians were introduced to rigid Islamic teachings during their education in Saudi and Pakistan, which was totally different from the form of Islam followed in their own country. This has led to the indoctrination of the young citizens of this nation, and it gives a leeway to the recruiters<sup>14</sup>. Induction of European teenagers into Syria and Iraq mostly happened through self-indoctrination over online route followed by contact with local leaders, ideologues and mentors, often in local mosques. While the internet and the social media do play an important part at least in the initial process of self-radicalisation, the ‘second person’, that is the motivator and the facilitator, who takes up the task of interpreting the calls of Daesh leaderships from online materials, still plays the most crucial part in the process of final conversion of the individual into an ‘asset’ for the movement.

This relationship between a recruit and a mentor usually kicks off during religion-oriented seminars, community activities and casual interactions. This is quite common in the UK and in some European Union (EU) countries. The problem is more acute in France, where young Muslims feel disconnected with the mainstream French society. Family problems, societal pressures, search for identity, acceptance and purpose and peer pressure, are some of the other attributing factors for the rising rate of radicalisation amongst the youth. Local converts to Islam in Europe and the US are more susceptible to indoctrination, and they become devout and fanatical adherents to radical Islam<sup>15</sup>. They are more receptive to radical religious views imbibed both online and on the ground. As their numbers grow, they are identified by the recruiters and brainwashed. Over a period of time, ideologues associated with certain mosques and religious institutions are able to infuse many such soft targets with radical views. The story of Shamima Begum and her three friends, who fled to Syria after getting radicalised at a women’s charity (Sisters Forum) allegedly run by a group called Islamic Forum of Europe (IFE) in an East London mosque, is an example of the involvement of religious establishments<sup>16</sup>. The problem of radicalisation through mosques in the UK is reportedly fanned by the presence of independent bodies such as the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB),

the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) and the British Council of Muslims (BCM), which are often unregulated.<sup>17</sup>

In Southeast Asia, Russia and Central Asian countries, many of the Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Tajiks are known to have joined Daesh through local mosques and prayer rooms. Similarly, in countries like Indonesia and Philippines, pro-Daesh radicalisation and recruitment happens in mosques and educational institutions<sup>18</sup>. Similar trends were noticed in some African countries where Daesh had already established some presence. A few of the recruits from countries like Ghana and Sudan happened to belong to affluent families with foreign passports of UK, US and Canada. Daniel Byman and Jeremy Shapiro from the Washington-based think tank, Brookings, have observed, ‘...foreign fighters who go to a war zone are young and ideologically informed, and the combatant groups convert them to their worldview as part of their mission, while training camps emphasise the teachings of “true” Islam and the duty of jihad besides weapons training. So individuals may enter the war with no intention of attacking at home, but their views change and come to encompass a broader set of goals...’<sup>19</sup>

In India, too, there had been instances of radicalisation of youths being carried out in educational and religious establishments. One of the earliest cases of this nature was that of a lecturer, Sufian Sheikh from Anjuman-I-Islam’s Kalsekar Technical College located in Panel (Maharashtra)<sup>20</sup>. In another instance, propaganda in support of Daesh was made by Jamaat-e-Islami Hind<sup>21</sup> and by a cleric from Darul Uloom Nadwat-ul-Ulama in Lucknow (UP) in July-August 2014<sup>22</sup>. While it is difficult to quantify the extent to which such activities resulted in actual radicalism, these acts could have far-reaching implications at this juncture when discontents among the Muslim youths are widespread due to sense of real or imagined socio-political and economic deprivations in the community. The role of Mumbai-based televangelist Zakir Naik, and his organisation, Islamic Research Foundation (IRF), in infusing radical thoughts to a few Muslim youths in India is worrisome<sup>23</sup>.

This trend is going to be a worrying factor for some time to come. The growing number of highly radicalised foreign fighters returning to their native countries as Daesh continues to lose grounds in Syria and Iraq only adds to the challenges faced in dealing with the phenomenon of rapid spread of radicalisation around the world.

## RADICALISATION AND DAESH THREAT IN INDIA

In recent times, India’s exposure to the extreme radical brand of Islam came about with the arrival of the Taliban phenomenon in our neighbourhood in the early 1990s. However, this was, to an extent, preceded by the Jamaat-e-Islami (Pakistan) trying to export radicalised Islamic ideology to the state of Jammu & Kashmir in the early 1990s by launching deeply brainwashed Kashmiri youth, under different banners, to target traditional Sufi Islam

practised for centuries in that region. They targeted moderate Islamic leaders, preachers and institutions, including the liberal educational institutions and schools in the rural areas with the aim of replacing these with Islamic madrasas that could spread radical Islamic beliefs in the Valley. The movement gained real momentum when the Taliban established firm control in Afghanistan. Almost around the same time, the Al-Qaeda too became active in this part of the world in terms of spreading radical Islamic ideology. Non-occurrence of Daesh-directed or inspired attacks should not give rise to complacency in India as radicalised individuals have the potential to perform terror attacks, as has been witnessed in other parts of the world. As a result, threats posed by radicalisation, which is being conducted in the name of religion—Islam—should not be underestimated.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi pointed out, ‘Rising tide of terrorism, especially cross-border terrorism and the rise of radicalisation are grave challenges to our security. They threaten the very fabric of our societies. It is my firm belief that those who believe in peace and humanity need to stand and act together against this menace<sup>24</sup>.’ During his meeting with the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Prime Minister Modi had said, ‘...growing radicalisation, increasing violence and spread of terror pose a real threat not just to our two countries, but also to nations and communities across regions<sup>25</sup>.’ Though the number of Indians travelling to the Syria/Iraq region is significantly less as compared to European or other Asian countries, the fact remains that al-Baghdadi has targeted this region for future expansion of his agenda of establishment of the caliphate. He made repeated reference to India in his Ramadan speech in 2014 signalling the possibilities of India being one of his prime targets, connecting this with the purported Muslims’ dissatisfaction in Myanmar, Pakistan and Jammu & Kashmir<sup>26</sup>.

Even as analysts, political leaders and Islamic scholars downplayed Daesh’s influence in India, departure of four youths from the state of Maharashtra in June 2014 to Syria and Iraq sounded the first warning of growing radicalisation among a vulnerable section of the community. Brainwashing and radicalisation became easier as many Muslim youth felt an affinity for the outfit on theological lines<sup>27</sup>. Since 2015 or so, India has witnessed several instances of radicalisation taking roots in the Muslim society, particularly in some of the southern states. The charge sheet filed against eight Muslim youths from Hyderabad (India), clearly brought out the role of online radicalisation, supplemented by radical Islamic preachers, such as Anwar al-Awlaki, Abdu Sami Qasmi, Meraj Rabbani, Tausifur Rehman, Jerjees Ansari and Zakir Naik, but also their interest in *Dabiq*, the English propaganda journal of the Daesh<sup>28</sup>. Another example of this was seen in the case of Arif Majeed and three other boys from Kalyan (in Maharashtra, India) joining Daesh. Investigation revealed three more names, out of which two were Afghan nationals, Rehman Daulati and Ahmed Rateb Hussein Zade, and one was Govind Thapar (Indian).

This proved the existence of a large network of people, both in India and abroad, involved in radicalisation and eventual recruitment of youth for deployment in the war zone.

### THE FUTURE THREAT SCENARIO

In today's reality, Daesh is obviously the most potent terror organisation, reaping maximum advantage by running an extremely effective radicalisation and recruitment machine. The impact of Islamic radicalisation is mostly noticeable in the EU countries while the US has also faced attacks which were being carried out by individuals influenced by terror outfits and Islamic preachers such as Anwar al-Awlaki. The attacks in San Bernardino in December 2015, Orlando massacre in June 2016, and bombing and knifing incidents in New Jersey, New York and Minnesota in late 2016, were all manifestations of the increasing radicalisation amongst a section of American Muslims. A study by the Virginia-based Threat Knowledge Group mentions that 'ISIS is recruiting within the US at about three times the rate of Al-Qaeda'<sup>29</sup>. In this, Muslim converts are the soft targets; 40 per cent of the arrestees belonged to this category. This is a significant share as 23 per cent of the Muslims in America are converts<sup>30</sup>. Youths as young as 15-17 years were arrested for Daesh-related activities, while the average age of its sympathisers and supporters is between 20s and late 40s.

Search for 'identity' and 'purpose' amongst young converts has motivated them towards radicalisation and ultimate recruitment. Under prolonged indoctrination, they 'emerge as some of the most dangerous and fanatical adherents to radical Islam', and their sense of disconnect from the local mosque has been attributed towards the rising rate of radicalisation in the US and in Europe<sup>31</sup>. For these people, extremist ideology propagated by terror groups and ideologues associated with them gives a sense of belonging as well as an alternative and a zeal to take revenge against the 'infidels'<sup>32</sup>. Despite the retreat of Daesh in Syria and Iraq, many of its fighters and supporters are still convinced 'of the righteousness of their cause'<sup>33</sup>. This is mostly applicable in the European context, which is witnessing an exponential rise of radicalisation within the natives and the migrants. A study conducted by the Sydney-based Lowy Institute categorises 'the future foreign fighter cohort in Syria and Iraq into four categories', including '...those who chose to remain in Syria and Iraq; those who leave in order to continue violent jihad in another theatre, either at home or elsewhere; those who seek to return to their country of origin; and those who go to a third country of refuge'<sup>34</sup>.

### COUNTER-STRATEGIES

Recognising the fact that radicalisation and the terrorism driven thereon will continue to pose a serious challenge to the world community and remain an international scourge with an ever-growing army of battle-hardened, intensely radicalised people, governments

and their intelligence and security establishments in most countries, have started evolving workable strategies and counter-narratives to soften its impact in the short- and long-term perspectives. The counter-strategies and counter-narratives include both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches; the former in terms of detecting and neutralising radicalised terror modules through the use of force, and the latter through a combination of de-radicalisation process for those already affected, and by evolving a credible counter-narrative platform designed to neutralise the ideological drivers of radicalisation. This is important to secure the lives and properties of the citizens at large, which is the primary responsibility of the State.

The kinetic approach would essentially centre on collection of intelligence by the State within its own territories and outside, develop these into actionable intelligence and terminate the imminent threat through police action. This route has high impact, brings immediate result and above all, gives a sense of assurance to the community at large that the security establishment is willing and capable of ensuring their wellbeing. However, as pointed out by the Bangladeshi scholar, Faiz Sobhan, ‘...while hard power or kinetic measures have often proved successful in removing terrorists from the battlefield, it has become increasingly evident from the global fight against terror, that it is not the sole solution to counter violent extremism. In the long run, hard security measures can prove detrimental in efforts to roll back the appeal of violent extremism. While such measures may be required in situations where threats are imminent, failure to employ “soft power” measures in the long term can be counterproductive in fighting violent extremism with any degree of success...’<sup>35</sup>

As far as non-kinetic measures are concerned, Sobhan goes on to urge the need to formulate a comprehensive policy on counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation, including a robust programme of rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremists. Examining the successes and failures of various de-radicalisation programmes worldwide, he points out that even some of the best programmes have their flaws. The de-radicalisation programme of Saudi Arabia is arguably the best-known initiative worldwide, which has also helped other countries in developing similar programmes. Following the 2003 Riyadh bombings, Saudi Arabia launched its rehabilitation and reintegration programme in 2004 to counter the extremist narrative of Al-Qaeda and those terrorist detainees imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay, who had returned to Saudi Arabia. Countries like Egypt, Singapore and Indonesia follow similar de-radicalisation programmes as Saudi Arabia. Three major aspects of the programme include: (1) rehabilitation of extremists; (2) reintegration of extremists; and (3) de-radicalisation<sup>36</sup>.

Similarly, the EU decided to focus its anti-terror/radicalisation fight with the involvement of various government, non-government, and public and private sector establishments. The efforts are mainly aimed at the initial period ‘where radicalisation is



nurtured and encouraged'; the next phase—planning—where 'terrorist plots are hatched'; and the final stage, during which 'attacks are undertaken'<sup>37</sup>. Further, the EU has outlined seven specific areas of cooperation between the member States. These are: (1) countering terrorist propaganda and hate speech online; (2) addressing radicalisation in prisons; (3) promoting inclusive education and EU common values; (4) promoting an inclusive, open and resilient society and reaching out to young people; (5) strengthening international cooperation; (6) boosting research, evidence building, monitoring and networks; and (7) focusing on the security dimension<sup>38</sup>. The counter-strategies have become more sophisticated against the changing operational tactics and effective use of social media tools by terror groups and their supporters operating in the region.

Alongside the policies adopted by the government and its agencies, a robust participation of the Muslim community is a must in evolving an effective counter-narrative to radicalisation. Community leaders and scholars need to show their vehement opposition to the fallacies spread by radical elements and terror outfits, which always portray Islam in a bad light. In one collective voice, Muslim or Islamic countries need to evolve counter-narratives against the prevailing narrative of 'Islam is in danger' and 'Muslims are severely oppressed and marginalised', etc. In other words, the theological underpinnings of Islamists, radical ideologues and Daesh and Al-Qaeda must be constantly challenged and lambasted in every possible forum—classroom lectures, Friday sermons, public speeches and popular media. This is a task that should be taken up by moderate theologians with support from the masses. In the absence of this, any counter-radicalisation strategy will be futile. As former US President Barack Obama stated, 'Groups like ISIL and Al-Qaeda want to make this war, a war between Islam and America, or between Islam and the West. They want to claim that they are the true leaders of over a billion Muslims around the world who reject their crazy notions. They want us to validate them by implying that they speak for those billion-plus people and that they speak for Islam. That is their propaganda. That is how they recruit. And if we fall into the trap of painting all Muslims with a broad brush, and imply that we are at war with an entire religion, then we are doing the terrorists' work for them'<sup>39</sup>. These steps encompass a wide range of religious, economic, security and political programmes, and as a result, they can be applied in the South Asian context, particularly India and Bangladesh, which in recent times have seen a radicalisation upsurge.

Even though in India the problem is not that acute as yet, the government has planned a comprehensive strategy to counter the threat from Daesh, its recruitment and radicalisation. In July-August 2015, the Ministry of Home Affairs identified twelve Indian states including Jammu & Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Assam, Punjab, West Bengal and Delhi, as vulnerable to

Daesh-related activities. It was decided to initiate counter-radicalisation steps including counselling of youth, involvement of community or religious leaders to persuade the younger generation not to succumb to any form of extremist ideology, constant monitoring of internet and social media sites, quick response to reports of young people planning to join Daesh or any terror group, counter-propaganda strategies, etc. The condemnation and abhorrence expressed by some leading Indian clerics, Islamic scholars and awareness campaigns by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are some social approaches that need to be promoted further. These roles should not be concentrated on a specific location but be a nation-wide activity.

There is the view that more emphasis needs to be placed on developing and propagating counter-narratives against radicalisation than merely pursuing the kinetic approach. Besides, since other regional countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan are also affected by this scourge, it is imperative for the governments to work out an all-encompassing cooperative mechanism to deal with the problem together, incorporating some of the best practices and models followed by other countries.

## CONCLUSIONS

The twin problems of radicalisation and terror are unlikely to disappear anytime soon. Even if Daesh is physically neutralised in its present strongholds, its ideology and emotive appeal will not be completely eliminated. Another al-Baghdadi, in another part of the world, will likely reappear sooner than later and perhaps, in a more virulent incarnation. There is a humongous amount of effort that needs to be put into place to counter the rising tide of radicalisation amongst the youths in Islamic and non-Islamic societies. The long-term solution lies in fighting the ideology from within and at the grass-roots level. A multi-pronged strategy needs to be evolved. In the Indian context, it is generally agreed by all stake holders that the role of the government and its entities must necessarily remain minimal and under the radar. The lead role has to be played by the community leaders and institutions.

Meanwhile, as security and intelligence apparatuses brace themselves to deal with terror attacks not only from major terror outfits but also from self-radicalised individuals, who possess the wherewithal to cause violence, the State, society at large, religious leaders, writers and intellectuals, the vernacular media, religious and educational institutions, all have to come together to develop an effective and credible counter-narrative, projecting the benign and peaceful image of Islam. The counter-narrative must deconstruct the existing narrative of conflict and war propagated by the radicals and extremists. In other words, a new 'positive' narrative of Islam built around the true essence and beliefs that would inspire the youth and wean them away from the current narrative, needs to be evolved in right earnest. The sooner this is done, greater would be chances of success.



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# The New Climate Change Regime and Its Implications for India

CHANDRASHEKHAR DASGUPTA

## *Abstract*

*The Paris Agreement requires all countries to make 'nationally determined contributions' to mitigate climate change on the basis of their 'national circumstances' and 'capabilities'. It shifts the focus from historical and current emissions to future emissions. This has major implications for India since our emission levels are expected to rise progressively from very low historical and current per capita levels as we pursue inclusive development. Projections indicate that India will contribute more than any other country to the rise in global energy demand till 2040 in aggregate terms, though India's per capita emissions will still be around 20 per cent below the global average.*

*India should, therefore, strive to ensure that the compliance procedures of the agreement take full account of per capita energy consumption, per capita emissions and energy resource endowments as elements of 'national circumstances' and per capita income as the basic element of national 'capabilities'.*

## OVERVIEW

The Paris Agreement on climate change was adopted with much fanfare in November 2015. This new agreement charts a very different course of action from the Kyoto Protocol, which it will replace after 2020. A brief overview of the preceding agreements will help us understand what is new in the Paris Agreement and the changes it introduces in the climate change regime.

## UN FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE KYOTO PROTOCOL

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), adopted in 1992, laid the basis for a global response to climate change. The convention reflected the fact that the bulk of the greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere had originated in the developed countries, that per capita emissions in the developing countries were still low and that they would increase in the course of economic development. It explicitly recognised that ‘economic and social development and poverty eradication are the first and overriding priorities of the developing country Parties.’ In accordance with the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’, the convention required developed countries to initially stabilise and thereafter, reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. It also required developed member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to contribute financial resources and transfer technology to developing countries with a view to enabling the latter to undertake mitigation and adaptation activities. The developing countries had no such commitments.

While it called upon developed countries to limit and reduce their emissions, UNFCCC did not lay down specific, time-bound targets. This lacuna was filled by the Kyoto Protocol (1997). Under this protocol, each developed country was allotted a specific, legally-binding emission reduction obligation for an initial commitment period up to 2008-12. This was to be followed by further reductions for subsequent periods, to be negotiated by 2012. The protocol created a ‘Clean Development Mechanism’, which allowed a developed country to meet part of its emission reduction commitment by financing emission limitation measures in a developing country.

The Framework Convention and the Kyoto Protocol meet the criterion of environmental justice, in the sense that they require the parties that are mainly responsible for causing climate change, to bear the burden of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change is not caused by carbon dioxide emissions per se. Indeed, life on this planet could not have been sustained in the absence of carbon dioxide. Climate change is precipitated only when the accumulated carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere exceeds certain limits. If all countries had the same per capita emission profile as, say, India, our planet would not have faced the threat of climate change induced by human activities. The developed countries have exceeded their proportionate share of carbon emission and are, thus, mainly responsible for climate change. These countries are also more amply endowed with the financial and technological resources required for mitigation and adaptation actions. Thus, the Framework Convention and the Kyoto Protocol draw a sharp distinction between the respective obligations of developed and developing countries<sup>1</sup>.



Almost immediately after the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, the developed countries reopened the question of mitigation commitments for developing countries. They brought pressure on developing countries to accept an attenuation of the differentiation in their respective commitments, following a salami-slice strategy to progressively pare down the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. They also ensured the demise of the Kyoto Protocol. The United States refused to ratify the protocol, notwithstanding the leading role of the then Vice President Al Gore in ensuring its adoption. Canada withdrew from the protocol soon after its entry into force. Japan and Russia, followed by many other developed countries, refused to accept commitments beyond 2012. The European Union (EU) reluctantly agreed to accept a very modest 2020 commitment, while declaring that it would not proceed with its mitigation commitments under the Kyoto Protocol after that date. Apart from the EU, only five developed countries have agreed to a 2020 commitment under the protocol. The Kyoto Protocol has thus been sentenced to a lingering death.

#### THE CLIMATE REGIME AND THE CHANGING GLOBAL ECONOMIC ORDER

In 1997, the developed countries accepted the equity-based Kyoto Protocol; yet, almost as soon as it entered into force, they began to demand a radically different treaty. The explanation for the turnaround lies in the domain of economics, not ecology. In 1997, the OECD countries were still confident of retaining their leadership position in the global economy. China's rise was still in its initial stages, and India's economic reforms had been introduced very recently. The situation changed sharply within a few years. China achieved spectacular growth rates, overtaking Germany and Japan to emerge as an industrial, trading and financial power, second only to the United States. Some other large developing countries, India and Brazil in particular, also achieved impressive, if less spectacular, growth rates, emerging on the global scene as major economies. These developments resulted in a radical reordering of the distribution of global economic power<sup>2</sup>.

This shift in the global economic balance initially gave rise to protectionist calls in OECD countries, thinly disguised as environmental measures. In the first decade of this century, new competitiveness concerns drove industrial circles in many OECD countries to demand border levies on imports of carbon-intensive goods from developing countries, on the plea that it was necessary to offset the carbon mitigation costs resulting from the commitments of developed countries under the Framework Convention and Kyoto Protocol. Fearing loss of jobs, trade unions in these countries made common cause with employers concerned about loss of competitive advantage. It was also argued that

the implementation of carbon emission regulations by developed countries would only result in relocation of carbon-intensive industries to developing countries, if the latter are exempted from similar obligations.

Though superficially plausible, these arguments are not backed by convincing empirical evidence. In general, carbon mitigation costs are not the decisive consideration in investment decisions. Important factors include the condition of the physical infrastructure (ports, roads, railways, etc); quality of human resources; tax regulations; legal and dispute resolution systems, and so on. These factors generally outweigh the costs of carbon regulations required by the Kyoto Protocol. Moreover, if carbon mitigation costs had been a decisive factor, it would have led to a massive transfer of carbon-intensive industries from other developed countries to the United States, since the latter had refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol and was, therefore, exempt from the commitments applicable to other OECD countries. Yet, the concerns voiced in OECD countries, focused on 'emerging economies', rather than the United States, reflecting their protectionist nature. The real source of these concerns was the rapid loss of competitive advantage to the 'emerging economies'.

Alongside these attempts to change the rules of the global trade regime, the developed countries also pressed for a fundamental change in the climate change regime. Their tactics were to divide the least developed countries (LDCs) and the small island developing States (SIDS) from the 'emerging economies'. They used economic aid as an instrument, holding out promises of largesse and, in some cases, threats of withholding aid. While insisting that the 'emerging economies' should bear a greater share of the burden of greenhouse gas mitigation, the OECD countries promised that the LDCs and SIDS would be exempted from these new obligations.

### THE PARIS AGREEMENT

Under the Paris Agreement, all countries, developed and developing alike, are expected to declare nationally determined contributions (NDCs) of a non-binding nature. However, in the case of a developing country, the NDC need not reflect an absolute reduction in greenhouse gas emissions; it could, for instance, take the form of an emission-intensity target (i.e. the quantum of greenhouse gas emissions per unit of GDP). The aim is to achieve 'global peaking' of greenhouse gas emissions as early as possible, with a view to restricting global warming to 'well below' 2 degrees Centigrade and, if possible, to 1.5 degrees. The agreement recognises that 'peaking will take longer for developing country Parties'. Each country is expected to contribute to the global mitigation effort in accordance with its 'national circumstances'.

The parties to the agreement will undertake a periodic 'global stock-take' to assess

progress towards achieving its goal. In addition, an expert committee will examine the performance of individual countries with a view to 'facilitate implementation and promote compliance' in a 'transparent, non-adversarial and non-punitive' manner, paying particular attention to 'national capabilities and circumstances'. The important question of the modalities and procedures to be followed by the expert committee is to be decided in future negotiations.

The net effect of the Paris Agreement is to weaken the differentiation between the two categories of 'developed' and 'developing' countries and to replace it with a continuum of countries at various stages of development and with differing 'national circumstances'. In blurring the line dividing the developed and developing countries, the Paris Agreement shifts the focus from accumulated historical (past) emissions present in the atmosphere to current and future emissions. It glosses over the responsibility of affluent industrialised countries to vacate the excess atmospheric space they occupy, a responsibility that requires them, under the Kyoto Protocol, to reduce their own emissions, meeting any shortfall by financing mitigation actions in developing countries. The Paris Agreement, therefore, transfers a large share of the obligations of the developed countries to the shoulders of developing countries and, in particular, to large, rapidly growing economies (such as India), whose emission trends will inevitably reflect both their rapid development and the size of their population. The focus is shifted to 'early peaking' of emissions in these countries.

Adoption of the Paris Agreement was greeted with much fanfare and it was hailed as a notably ambitious 'breakthrough'. The agreement does, indeed, set an ambitious climate stabilisation target, but it is far from clear that it provides an adequate basis for meeting the target. It may be recalled that in 1991, in the early stages of the climate change negotiations, Japan had proposed a voluntary 'Pledge and Review' accord, not dissimilar to the Paris Agreement. The Japanese proposal was rejected because it was felt that an agreement that set no legally-binding emission reduction commitments for developed countries ignoring their historical responsibility, would fail to achieve the objective of the climate change convention. The initial 'nationally determined contributions' submitted by parties, and, in particular the singularly modest contributions of the developed countries, fall far below the stabilisation target.

The prospects of the Paris Agreement are further clouded by deep uncertainty over the US policy. The newly-inaugurated President, Donald Trump, had declared during the electoral campaign his intention to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. The terms of the Paris Agreement permit a party to give notice of withdrawal only three years after the entry into force of the agreement for the concerned party and the notification takes effect after another year. However, one cannot rule out the possibility that the new administration

might withdraw from the umbrella Framework Convention itself, thereby divesting itself of all international responsibility concerning climate change. At any rate, it seems certain that the US will renege on its pledges of financial support, thereby dealing a serious blow to implementation of the Paris Agreement. The agreement will survive a US withdrawal (as did the Kyoto Protocol) but its effectiveness will be greatly impaired.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

In the wake of the Paris Agreement, the International Energy Agency (IEA) brought out a study on India's energy future, highlighting the country's current low levels of energy consumption as well as the rapid increase in energy consumption and related emissions over the next few decades<sup>3</sup>. It observed that India's current per capita energy consumption is only one-third of the global average but also that 'India is set to contribute more than any other country to the projected rise in global energy demand, around one quarter of the total' till 2040. Because of India's dependence on its coal reserves, it is projected to account for nearly 50 per cent of net coal-based power generation capacity added worldwide. Since the Paris Agreement focuses on future emission pathways, Indian emission trends and energy options will receive very close scrutiny, notwithstanding the IEA projection that India's per capita emissions will remain some 20 per cent below the world average even in 2040.

At the same time, it will be more difficult for India to find effective coalition partners in future negotiations. Despite differences on other issues, China has so far been India's closest partner in the climate change negotiations. Right from the inception of the climate change negotiations in 1991, the two countries have cooperated closely, adopting similar positions on almost all issues. This cooperation was based on common interests: both India and China had low per capita carbon dioxide emission rates and these emissions were bound to increase as a result of their development imperatives. This situation has evolved in recent years. Because of China's spectacular growth rates, its per capita carbon dioxide emissions reached a level of 6.66 tonnes by 2014, close to that of many developed countries such as UK (6.31 tonnes) or Germany (8.93 tonnes), according to IEA estimates<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, with the narrowing of China's technology gap, its growth rate is registering a gradual decline. Thus, China was in a position to submit a nationally determined contribution, which envisaged peaking of its emissions by around 2030 (indeed, a number of projections indicate a much earlier peaking date). China will soon be in a position to pledge emission reductions after the anticipated peaking date, offering pledges similar to those of the developed countries. Because of India's growth trajectory, its per capita emissions will continue to rise beyond 2040. China has reached a stage of

development where its interests in the climate change negotiations no longer necessarily coincide with those of India.

The procedures of the expert committee to ‘facilitate’ and ‘promote compliance’ have yet to be finalised. Though the committee is expected to work in a ‘non-adversarial’ and ‘non-punitive’ manner, there are suggestions that it should adopt a ‘name and shame’ approach, with a view to ratcheting up pledges of target countries. This would inevitably lead to arbitrary findings in the absence of agreed criteria for determining the entitlement of each party to a share of the global atmospheric resource. India should oppose this proposal and advance a counter-proposal for giving the expert committee a mandate to identify and publicise ‘best practices’ followed by countries at different levels of development and with different resource endowments. Unlike a ‘name and shame’ proposal, this would conform fully with provisions of Article 15 of the Paris Agreement, which requires a ‘facilitative’, ‘non-adversarial and non-punitive’ approach.

The compliance mechanism set up under Article 15 is required to pay particular attention to the ‘national capabilities and circumstances’ of each country. This term has not, however, been defined in the agreement. India should identify per capita GDP as the basic element of national ‘capabilities’. Availability of financial resources is a critical requirement for mitigation actions. Poorer countries require financial support on non-commercial terms in order to respond effectively to climate change. India should also identify per capita energy consumption, per capita emissions and resource endowments (coal, in India’s case) as the basic constituent elements of ‘national circumstances’. We should aim to keep the focus on per capita, as distinct from aggregate emissions.

## CONCLUSION

Unlike the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement glosses over the historical responsibility of developed countries arising from the disproportionately large share of the global atmospheric space occupied by them. It shifts the focus to future emissions and the rapidly-shrinking atmospheric space that is still available. India currently suffers from extreme energy poverty; its per capita energy demand and associated emissions will increase for some decades as it pursues inclusive development. Projections indicate that because of its development trajectory and the size of its population, India will account for a larger share of *incremental* emissions than any other country till at least 2040, even though its per capita emissions will remain much below the global average. To place these developments in proper perspective, it is essential that the compliance mechanism should give full weightage to per capita emissions and per capita GDP in estimating a country’s ‘national circumstances and capabilities’.



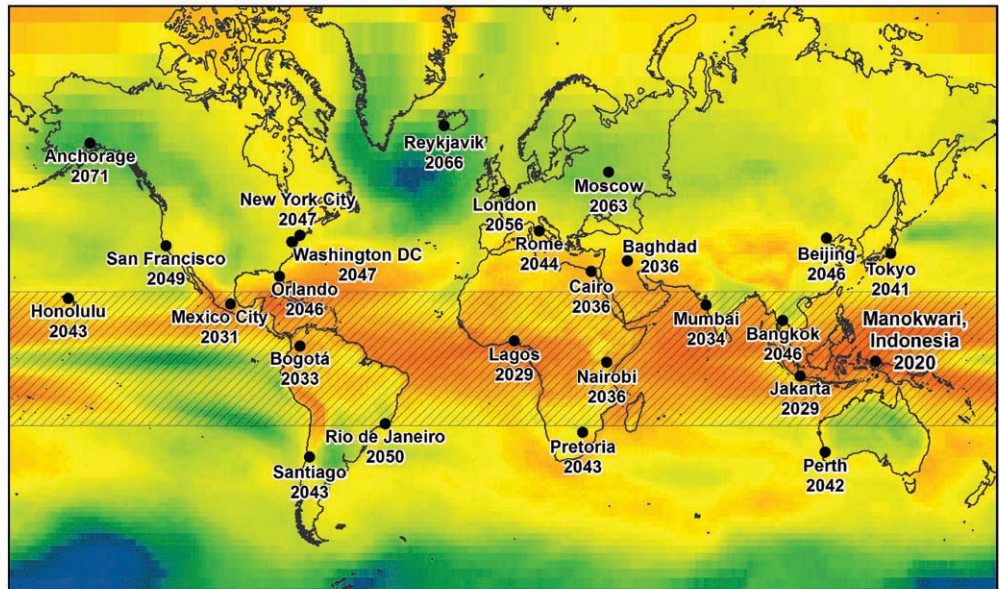
**Chandrashekhar Dasgupta** is a retired Indian Foreign Service officer. Among other posts, he served as Ambassador to the European Union and Ambassador to China. He is a Padma Bhushan awardee. Dasgupta is presently a Member of Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change, and Member of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Geneva. He is the author of *War and Diplomacy in Kashmir, 1947-48*.

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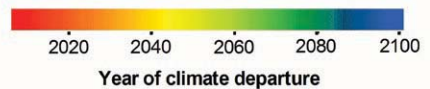
## Year of Climate Departure for World Cities

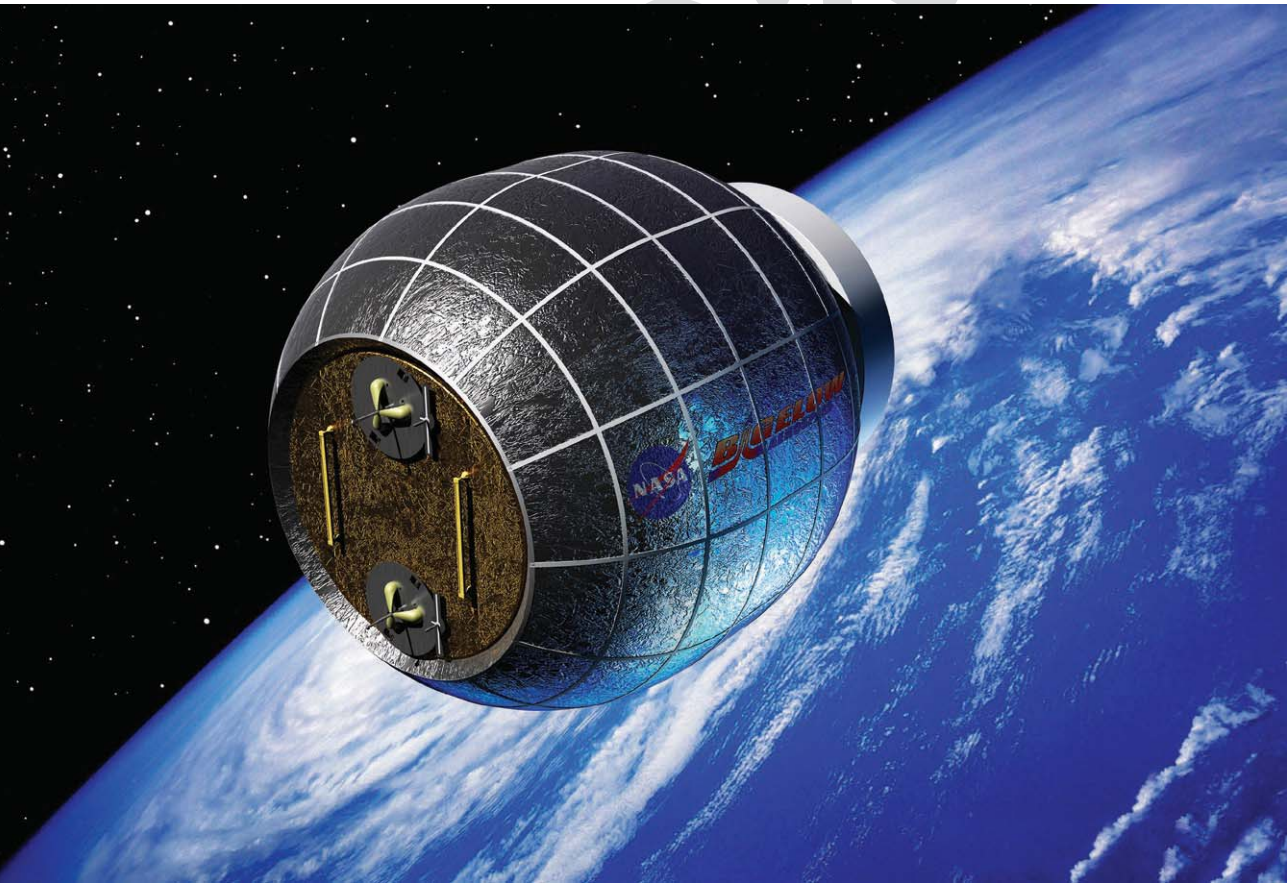
Results show multi-model averages under RCP8.5 (Mora et al. 2013)



The global mean year of climate departure is 2047. The mean for the tropics (shown in the hatched area) is 2038, compared to 2053 for all other latitudes.

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# Weaponisation of Outer Space—A Major Security Challenge

LT GEN DAVINDER KUMAR, PVSM, VSM BAR, ADC

## *Abstract*

*Outer space is being used extensively for governance, development, telecommunications, weather forecasting, education, entertainment, disaster management and for a host of other commercial and military applications. Consequently, space, a very fragile and hostile environment, has become highly crowded, contested and competitive. Developed nations, due to their extensive dependence on space systems, have become very vulnerable and are involved both in the protection of their systems and developing and testing counter-space capabilities. Countries that may either have their own power ambitions or feel threatened, are also developing counter-space technologies and weapons to gain advantage through asymmetry. The situation is accentuated by the low cost and lowering of technology threshold. While space is already heavily militarised, the challenges are the debris, traffic management, development of ballistic and anti-ballistic missile systems and imminent weaponisation.*

## INFORMATION, SPACE AND SATELLITE SYSTEMS

In the information age, satellites have become a core element of modern societies and are largely responsible for bringing nations and individuals together<sup>1</sup>. While satellite-based communications and navigation systems help to improve traffic safety, disaster response and weather forecasts, they also help in education, health, earth resource management and so on. Global climate change and the concomitant increase of water conflicts and energy crises will further enhance the importance of satellites as means of information

procurement, dissemination and disaster response. The advancement of the information society will also create new vulnerabilities. The more societies depend on satellites, the more important it will be to protect them as critical infrastructures.

For modern armed forces, satellites have become indispensable, especially considering the irresistible advance of network-centric warfare (NCW) and effect-based operations (EBOs), particularly since the war in Afghanistan from 2001 onwards<sup>2</sup>. Satellite systems are an integral part of information network, which is at the heart of decision-making process and navigation of forces. Satellites, thus, serve as force multipliers in present-day military operations.

In a space system, most of the technologies have a dual-use character and civilian satellites are increasingly being used for military purposes. This presents a dilemma to security persons as limiting them in traditional arms control measures is not possible, and, as a result, they question the very adequacy, feasibility and applicability of arms control in outer space. Dual-use technologies such as those seen in the space domain present a challenge for multilateral arms control efforts. Primarily, there are two main concerns affecting the safe and peaceful use of space: first is the increasing level of space pollution; and second, the re-emergence of arms dynamics in space.

Space-based systems and satellites will continue to increase in importance and reach<sup>3</sup>. There is a new sense of sensitivity and urgency emerging about the security of outer space and related techno-military superiority in space. Military blueprints by major space-faring powers now encapsulate concepts of 'space support' and 'force enhancement', which point to a central role of space assets in facilitating military operations, while notions of 'space control', 'space power', 'space situational awareness' and 'force application' suggest that not only has space been recognised as the new strategic frontier, but its weaponisation is imminent. The majority view indicates that space may soon be a theatre of military operations. Counter-space capabilities such as missile defence, anti-satellite capabilities and a new class of Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs), thus, assume critical importance for defence and security perceptions. Space-faring nations across the world are busy in developing technologies and capabilities both for defensive and offensive operations. Relevant technologies and methodologies are those for physical and electronic hardening, anti-jam systems, satellite maneuverability, redundancy at system and sub-system levels, quick launch facilities, as well as, mini, micro and nano satellites both for restoration of facilities and for use as killer satellites. The world seems to be in a state of transition from using space-based assets to support combat operations on the surface of the earth to using them for conducting combat operations in space, from space, and through space.

## MILITARISATION VERSUS WEAPONISATION

A distinction must be made between ‘militarisation of space’ and ‘weaponisation of space’. These terms are sometimes used as if they were interchangeable, but they are not. While there are no specifically deployed weapons in space yet, there are satellites that could be manoeuvred to act as weapons to disable or destroy the space assets of others. Therefore, when considering questions of space security, it must be recognised that though space has not yet been specifically weaponised, it is already heavily militarised<sup>4</sup>. The military operations in space have shifted gradually from scientific interest to surveillance to intelligence collection to robust combat support.

The next logical transition is the weaponisation of space. This is precisely what happened to other domains like sea and air. Space, as currently used, is a finite resource which is highly congested, contested and competitive. This competition, coupled with dependence on and the criticality of space for development and security, is likely to lead to conflicts, which will involve weaponisation of space, space control and space dominance across the full spectrum, namely orbits, space assets and ground-based facilities. In discussing the expanding role of the military in space, the term weaponisation implies an increase in the capability to conduct warfare in, from or through space. While space has not been weaponised yet, there are historical reasons for suspecting that the weaponisation of space is as inevitable as was the weaponisation of the land, sea and air domains of warfare, primarily to protect resources in those environments.

‘People no longer can do without telecommunications, navigation and the information provided by remote sensing based on space systems.’

—Russian President, Vladimir Putkov, as stated at the last UNIDIR outer space conference

Nations and societies across the world are depending increasingly on space-based systems for practically every facet and activity. The same is true for the military. As an increasing number of these critical resources and capabilities migrate to space, the need increases to protect these resources, in peace and war. Space, thus is likely to become an arena of military operations.

Having been militarised virtually since the beginning of man’s experience in this medium, societies will weaponise space as they perceive threats to the ability to gather information, communicate and trade in, from or through space<sup>5</sup>. The question is not whether societies will do so, but when, and in response to what stimulus. Control of space is not only important to ensure access to satellites but to support military operations on the earth. Just as control of the air is a precursor to effective operations on the land or sea, control of space is a prerequisite to effective operations in all terrestrial media (land, sea and air). As reliance on space assets increases, any disruptions to military access in space

would adversely affect military operations and impact national security. Space, in effect, has become the centre of gravity for national security, governance and development.

### THREATS AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

Space is an extremely harsh and inhospitable environment with solar radiation, extreme temperature gradients, micro gravity and absence of external pressure, besides transfer of heat only by conduction, ultra violet radiation, space debris and meteoroids being some of the challenges, which directly impact the design, useful life and survivability of the satellites and other space assets. The net effect is that a space system is inherently very fragile and vulnerable. The irony is that ground-based space systems are equally, if not more, susceptible to interference by physical, kinetic, electronic and cyber-systems.

Since 1957, hundreds of satellites have been launched into space, many for commercial reasons<sup>6</sup>. However, the security of the space environment has not yet been adequately addressed. Today, we face many space security challenges, including orbital crowding, debris and imminent possibility of weaponisation of space. Orbital debris is a serious threat due to the potential for collision. Despite debris mitigation guidelines, such as those of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), the problem remains overwhelming and a great threat to space assets. With 4256 satellites in different orbits, space is a very crowded place<sup>7</sup>. Out of these, only 1419 satellites are operational (June 2016). The rest are metal junk, posing a serious threat and a challenge. There is, therefore, an inescapable requirement for transparency and traffic management. The threat of weapons likely to be placed in space and weapons designed to attack space-based assets, for example, counter-space and anti-satellite weapons (ASATs), is very real. Indeed, avoidance of an arms race in outer space is the biggest challenge.

There is an urgent need to spell out strategy for the safeguarding of outer space, of the long-term viability of the use of space and of the use of space by new actors. A six-point approach, as given below, is recommended:

- First, a comprehensive and proactive strategy is needed for addressing space debris including improvements to the resolution of debris tracking systems.
- Second, traffic management should be available and applied to all in space, as a logical consequence of an increase in the number of satellites, in order to avoid collisions and to guarantee safe access.
- Third, measures to narrow the gap of technological asymmetry and ensuring equitable exploitation of space for development and disaster management should be taken.
- Fourth, a set of common and consistent rules and procedures for operating in outer space should be evolved. More integrated approach and accountability

towards space governance, including introduction of property rights envisaged in the Moon Treaty 1984, to prevent conflict are needed.

- Fifth, a way must be found to prevent conflict in space and to prohibit ASAT tests and counter-space technologies.
- Finally, space situational awareness is extremely important. Sharing of information on launch and location of space assets must be made mandatory.

## DRIVE TOWARDS WEAPONISATION

In view of the criticality of outer space for national development and security, nations across the world are engaged in developing both offensive and defensive capabilities to secure and exploit space assets both in the space and those on ground. These capabilities are being built on three pillars of space power, space control and space situational awareness.

### SPACE POWER

Space power can be defined as ‘the total strength of a nation’s capabilities to conduct and influence activities to, in, through and from space to achieve its objectives’. The definition is further expanding to being ‘the aggregate of a nation’s abilities to establish, access, leverage and sustain its orbital assets to further all other forms of national power’. Simply put, space is inherently a medium, as with air, land, sea and cyber, and ‘space power is the ability to use or deny the use by others of that medium’.

Space power is a precondition to control the sea, land or air. It provides the ability of continuous awareness of terrestrial events and has become the concern of all organisations, regardless of their technical sophistication. It is based on the following conjectures:

- Space forces are necessary to enhance war-fighting capabilities.
- Space forces can target forces at sea, land and air.
- Adversaries must be deprived access to space to gain a decisive advantage.
- Space power is perishable and must be protected and regenerated if necessary.

### SPACE CONTROL

Space control supports freedom of action in space for own forces, and when necessary, defeats adversary’s efforts that interfere with or attack own space systems and negates adversary’s space capabilities. It consists of:

- Offensive space control (OSC): Measures taken to prevent an adversary’s hostile use of space capabilities or offensive operations to negate an adversary’s space capabilities used to interfere with or attack own space systems.
- Defensive space control (DSC): DSC are operations conducted to preserve the ability to exploit space capabilities via active and passive actions, while protecting own space capabilities from attack, interference or unintentional hazards.

### SPACE SITUATIONAL AWARENESS (SSA)

SSA involves characterising, as completely as necessary, the space capabilities operating within the terrestrial environment and the space domain. SSA is dependent on:

- Integrated space surveillance.
- Collecting and processing data in real time.
- Environmental monitoring.
- Status of own and cooperative satellite systems.
- Measure of own space readiness and analysis of the space domain.
- It also incorporates the use of intelligence sources to provide insight into adversary's use of space capabilities and their threats to own space capabilities, with a view to understand adversary's intent.

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Both the US and the Soviet Union developed and tested different methods of destroying or damaging satellites or causing disruption of their operations from early sixties to mid-eighties<sup>8</sup>. The initial Anti-Satellite weapons (ASAT) were modified Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) used as direct ascent weapons with nuclear warheads. However, the US Starfish test in space in 1962 brought the realisation that nuclear explosions in space are indiscriminate and would destroy all nearby satellites in their line of sight and damage many more in the ensuing weeks by the increased radiation in Low Earth Orbits (LEOs). Consequently, the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT), signed by both the US and the Soviet Union, banned any nuclear explosion in space. The LTBT further led to the Outer Space Treaty (OST) that in 1967, banned placing of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), including nuclear weapons, in space. The OST, however, did not explicitly prohibit deliberate attacks on satellites or conduct of ASAT weapons tests. Consequently, other ASAT technologies continued to be developed and tested as space negation ability was considered integral to the larger strategic domination effort during the Cold War. Both superpowers also tested air-launched ASAT versions in the 1980s. The Chinese ASAT test in 2007 and the strategic imperative to ensuring availability of space assets changed the status quo, and many space fairing nations started work on both defensive measures and development of offensive capability.

### THE CURRENT SCENARIO

The use of outer space has all along been driven by forces from two directions: one is the impetus for outer space weaponisation<sup>9</sup>, and the other, efforts toward the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS).

In the globalised world, national security imperatives have evolved beyond securing of borders to all aspects critical to the nations' political and economic well-being.

Space-based capability has become integral to military, social and commercial interests, and any disruption of these capabilities would have huge operational and economic ramifications for most countries. Today, space-based systems are at the heart of the modern revolution in military affairs (RMA) and precision targeting that is an important part of EBOs.

Proliferation of technology and its reduced cost have allowed an increasing number of States to have the ability to develop or possess more complex and devastating weapons. Similarly, there are more seekers of ballistic technology and capabilities for access to space. Hence, the threat environment confronting the existing space-faring nations is broadening and becoming increasingly complex.

### THE UNITED STATES' POSITION

'The weaponisation of space provides the asymmetric technology the US needs to win the next war.'

—Thomas D Bell, Lt Col USAF, January 1999

The US, with 576 satellites in space in different orbits, is the largest user of space with considerable dependence for national security, development and governance<sup>10</sup>. The US, therefore, is also most vulnerable as far as space security is concerned. Accordingly, its stand on military exploitation of space is different. It wishes to expand its military capabilities and have weapons in space and therefore, also be dominant in this fourth dimension of warfare.

In April 2005, Gen James E Cartwright, who led the United States Strategic Command, told the Senate Armed Services' nuclear forces subcommittee that the goal of developing space weaponry was to allow the nation to deliver an attack 'very quickly, with very short time lines on the planning and delivery, in any place on the face of the earth.'<sup>11</sup> General Lance Lord, head of the US Air Force Space Command, quoted in 'Air Force Seeks Bush's Approval for Space Weapons Programmes', *The New York Times*, 18 May 2005: 'Space superiority is not our birthright, but it is our destiny. Space superiority is our day-to-day mission. Space supremacy is our vision for the future.'

The United States considers space capabilities—including the ground and space segments and supporting links—vital to its national interests. Consistent with this policy, the stated stance of the United States is to: 'preserve its rights, capabilities and freedom of action in space; dissuade or deter others from either impeding those rights or developing capabilities intended to do so; take those actions necessary to protect its space capabilities; respond to interference; and deny, if necessary, adversaries the use of space capabilities hostile to US national interests'. The US military explicitly says it wants to 'control' space to protect its economic interests and establish superiority over the world.

‘A century ago, nations built navies to protect and enhance their commercial interests by ruling the seas. Now it is time to rule space.’

—Karl Grossman, *Master of Space*, Progressive Magazine, January 2000

## CHINA AND SPACE

Countries that may either have their own power ambitions or feel threatened by the US are most likely to develop counter-space technologies and weapons to gain advantage through asymmetry. In this context, China is likely to be considered a possible adversary of the US in the future, and may be one of the countries that could threaten US dominance in space, even though it has constantly opposed the use of space for military purposes. The counter-space technologies being developed by China and demonstrated at times, are of serious concern. The common belief is that China is slowly flexing its muscles and that an arms race may be underway. China’s behaviour smacks of hypocrisy for wanting a global treaty to ban weapons in space on the one hand, and then developing and testing full spectrum counter-space capabilities on the other. China is of the view that to avoid taking the old path of arms control, where control comes after development, the fundamental way of preventing the weaponisation of outer space and maintaining lasting peace and security is to negotiate a legally-binding international instrument. In the meantime, it is concentrating on developing and operationalising both defensive and offensive capabilities.

## INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS FOR PEACEFUL USE OF SPACE AND SPACE GOVERNANCE

Ever since the beginning of the space age, the development and spread of space technologies have been key components of globalisation, spurring international cooperation. As an ever-larger number of players enter into space activities, it has become critically important to ensure the security and integrity of outer space. One of the most effective ways of enhancing space security is to build trust and confidence among space-faring States by promoting international partnerships and cooperation.

As of date, the 1967 Outer Space Treaty remains the primary point of reference for international space law. However, the space environment has changed drastically with the end of the Cold War, the emergence of a highly profitable space services industry and a sharp decrease in the financial and technological entry barriers. Consequently, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of actors with space assets. While the importance of matters related to peaceful space operations has been for the most part undisputed, the need for arms control in outer space has been far more contentious. Proposals include both legally-binding treaties, such as the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and the Threat or Use of Force Against Outer Space Objects



(known as the PPWT); and politically-binding norms of behaviour, such as the proposed International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities.

The draft PPWT was jointly introduced in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) by Russia and China in 2008. However, the international community has failed to embrace it as an opportunity to lay down the foundation for a robust, unambiguous and universal space security treaty that unequivocally attempts to minimise the likelihood of a weaponised space domain.

The proposed code of conduct is essentially a mechanism to codify a set of transparency and confidence-building measures for outer space activities, with the aim to reduce misperceptions and miscommunications among space actors and to spell out the sort of behaviour that will contribute to a sustainable space environment such as that which limits the further creation of space debris and reduces the likelihood of unintentional harmful interference.

#### WHAT INDIA NEEDS TO DO?

While India advocates peaceful use of space and has strong outer space capabilities, she needs to formulate without delay her 'National Space Vision' and the associated 'National Space Security Policy'. India must take a proactive and aggressive stand and build necessary capabilities both for defensive and offensive measures in a time-bound mission mode. 'Space Command' must be raised immediately and the space programme should be given an urgent techno-military orientation in response to her national security imperatives, particularly in view of the outer space and counter-space capabilities of China. Concurrently, a strategy has to be adopted for promoting an international treaty for peaceful exploitation of outer space and protecting India's interests.

There is still time for India to develop the technology, test the same and integrate with her war-fighting capability and thereby safeguard her long-term strategic interests. The window of opportunity may close any day owing to major entry of private sector in outer space and the likelihood of a shift in the stance currently adopted by the USA. The time to act is now.

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