

Editor's Note

Navigating an Uncertain World

As 2023 draws to a close, the last issue of *National Security* for the year focuses on some not so often discussed issues that have implications for India's security and foreign policies. It carries three thoughtful contributions on matters of security that have been authored by officers of the armed, air and naval forces who are leading analysts in their respective fields. They bring a unique soldier-scholar perspective to bear on their topics. The issue also carries four articles that have direct or indirect implications for India's foreign policy. They are reflections by scholars and practitioners who have had long engagements with these subjects.

Security Issues

In a perceptive essay, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Rakesh Sharma analyses the heinous assault of the Hamas on Israeli civilians on October 7, 2023. He explains the geopolitical developments in the region that led the Hamas to undertake such unprecedented action. He also analyses the military aspects of the attack as well as the Israeli counter offensive. From India's point of view, he draws out the lessons from the conflict. First, domestic discord and political divergences must not be allowed to weaken a strong consensus on national security. Second, lack of conflict should not lull the preparedness for surprise attacks and live borders must never be treated with complacency. Concomitantly, howsoever efficient, technology is not an infallible shield against dangers and certainly not a substitute for intelligence gathering by security agencies. Third, irrespective of the current state of relationship, long term adversaries may resort to treachery and deception, and therefore their actions must always be carefully monitored. Fourth, involvement of non-state actors who are equipped with weapons and technology as combatants in wars adds an extra-dimension to an already complex war zone. Further, wars in urban settings come with peculiar challenges. Fifth, it is not advisable to depend entirely on deterrence, which can break down due to inadvertent reasons or other strategic considerations. And finally, periods of 'no war' must be used to prepare for war.

A second contribution that has security implications is the article by Gp. Capt. (Retd.) Ajey Lele. Lele focuses on the Artemis Accords, which refer to a non-binding multilateral arrangement on use of space led by the US and signed onto by several governments. He highlights the framework of principles, guidelines, and best practices that was established

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by these Accords to ensure peaceful and transparent exploration of outer space. India signed the Artemis Accords in June 2023, and this was hailed as an important step in expanding the Indo-US strategic partnership. However, he cautions that these accords are in conflict with the idea of outer space as a Common Heritage of Mankind (CHM) that India has always championed. In this context, he argues that as more specific agreements are signed, India needs to remain watchful and ensure that its strategic and commercial interests are well protected.

The third contribution with a security dimension to it is the policy brief by Capt. (Retd.) Gurpreet S. Khurana. Khurana focuses on the south-west Pacific Ocean as an area where the geostrategic interests of several major powers intersect. The region is emerging as the next arena of major geopolitical contestation in the Indo-Pacific. India's vital interests have also expanded to this region and has ushered its politico-diplomatic engagement with the Pacific Island Developing States (PIDS) under policy initiatives like "SAGAR." He argues that as New Delhi expands its outreach to PIDS in multiple functional domains like climate change, blue economy and connectivity, the Indian Navy must necessarily be more actively involved beyond its occasional warship port calls. Navies are valuable instruments of the nation's foreign policy. Moreover, the PIDS are in dire need of trusted security partners like India. In addition, he emphasises, some of India's critical military-strategic imperatives vis-à-vis China lie in the south-west Pacific area.

International Developments

Contributions that have foreign policy implications cover an interesting array. Of direct foreign policy implication is the article by Prof. Priti Singh, who traces the evolution of India's relations with countries of Latin America and the Caribbean region. According to her, India's diplomatic relations with major Latin American countries had been established soon after independence in 1947 but it is only with the end of the 20th century, that India has been proactively engaging the Latin American countries both at multilateral and bilateral levels. She explains that historically, the multilateral aspect of the relationship has received greater weightage and within it, relations with Brazil were prioritised. She argues that the time has come for enhancing bilateral relationships with other countries of the region. Also, in the economic realm, trade must be complemented by increasing Indian investments in the region. Positive perceptions about India in the region, she believes, will help in furthering the partnership.

Three other contributions have indirect foreign policy implications as they focus on evolving US-China relations, trends in Russian foreign policy and a pertinent instance of how loosely formulated concepts such as the 'Global War on Terror' that are aimed at

promoting national security can harm basic human rights in the distant Xinjiang province of China.

In an article on US-China relations, Prof. Chintamani Mahapatra identifies the acute dilemma that confronts the Biden Administration in the United States in dealing with the rise of China as an assertive, aggressive and ambitious power. He posits that the US seeks to preserve the economic benefits of maintaining good relations with China, yet is uncomfortable with the spread of Chinese influence across the world. This policy dilemma, he says, is not new for the US foreign policymakers and there are several instances of Washington's dilemma in dealing with China in the post-World War II period. He predicts that as the existing superpower United States and the aspiring superpower China struggle to manage their relationship, the dilemmas faced by the US are likely to continue into the future. The complex interdependence marked by trade and investment relations, geopolitical imperatives and the need to prevent conflict escalation will make it difficult for Washington and Beijing to escape policy dilemmas. Needless to say, India will need to bear this in mind as it calibrates its relationship with the two countries.

Dr. Arvind Gupta deconstructs Russia's most recent Foreign Policy Concept (FPC) adopted in March 2023. He observes that while Russia has always regarded itself as a European power, the FPC speaks of it as a "unique country- civilization and a vast Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power" that is turning towards the East, including the Pacific. Moreover, Russia sees itself at the vanguard of global distribution of power and a multipolar international system. The FPC also conveys Russia's disillusionment with the US-led West as it seeks to continue its hegemony and uses military and non-military means to weaken Russia. The FPC proclaims that Russia will act decisively to enhance its economic strength. It also emphasises that regional organisations and forums constitute an important fulcrum of Russia's foreign policy. As a country that has been the foremost strategic partner of India, Russia's FPC should be understood clearly by Indian strategic thinkers and policy makers.

The final contribution is an important article by young scholar Sarada Subhash which provides an insight into 'why' and 'how' China is managing to carry out its repressive policies in Xinjiang. She situates the persecution, violence and Uyghur concerns and helplessness in a broader framework that highlights four critical dimensions of this issue. These include, the contrasting narratives about the history of East Turkestan/Xinjiang; understanding the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which China has been portraying as a significant security 'concern'; highlighting Xinjiang's geostrategic importance to China vis-à-vis Central, West and South Asia and finally, Washington's counter-terrorism strategies (post-9/11) which many see as a significant factor in

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worsening the Uyghur predicament. She demonstrates how a loosely formulated concept such as the 'Global War on Terror' aimed at promoting national security of one country can actually compromise the basic human rights of the Uyghur minority in the distant Xinjiang province of China. As the world's largest democracy bordering Xinjiang, India must remain vigilant and deeply concerned about the political developments and the persistent undermining of the basic human rights of the Uyghurs.