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INSTITUTE OF PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES

Charting Global Transitions

South Asia | Global Nuclear Politics | West Asia | Al Qaeda, Taliban and the Islamic State | Iran Nuclear Deal | Southeast Asia | US-Russia | Indian Ocean Region | East Asia

IPCS Annual 2015



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Cover Photo:

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About the IPCS Annual 2014-15

The Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) considers the emphasis on independent research and publication as one of its hallmarks. Every year, through the contributions of its researchers and affiliated experts, the IPCS produces substantial literature within the ambit of its four programmes: Nuclear Security (NSP), China Research (CRP), Internal and Regional Security (IReS) and Armed Conflicts in South Asia (ACSA), and Southeast Asia Research (SEARP). This edition of the IPCS Annual is a compilation of the commentaries published by the Institute over the year 2014-15, distributed into broad geographical and theme-based categories.

2014 saw the introduction of the IPCS Columns initiative, which features a roster of eminent strategists and commentators who weigh in on specific issues relevant to their areas of expertise once every month. These columns have also been incorporated into the IPCS Annual.

The Annual is essentially a stock-taking exercise, and it was initiated with the aims of projecting the Institute's work, providing a single platform to access independent and objective assessments on the most outstanding issues of the past year, and contributing to the evolution of informed thinking on strategic issues. In 2015, the IPCS Annual will also be available in print.

SOUTH ASIA

Modi in Myanmar: From 'Look East' to 'Act East'

17 November 2014

Shankari Sundararaman

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Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to the Myanmar endorses that all is well with India's policy to the countries that lie to the east. Since he took office in May 2014, there were some views among observers that India's Look East Policy (LEP) was not receiving the merit it should. Much of this was centered on the debate as to why Myanmar, a close and significant neighbour was not invited to the swearing-in ceremony of the prime minister. However, given the fact that the invitation was extended to the South Asian countries, Myanmar technically did not fit into this category. Another view was that the invitation was extended only to full democracies, which would then explain why Pakistan was present, given that there is currently a democratic intermission in the country.

But Modi's three-day visit to Myanmar this month changed the perceptions and brought the ASEAN region back into the centre-stage with the focus shifting from the LEP to the Act East Policy (AEP). While this does not really signal a departure from the LEP, it does highlight a more nuanced position of acknowledging the need to 'act' or to 'get one's act together', to move ahead on the implementation of projects and proposals that have been initiated in principle but are lagging in practice. So the shift to the AEP should be viewed as an attempt to provide an impetus to the regional integration that India has with its eastern neighbours. The ASEAN countries have often expressed a lot of concern on the slow pace of reform in India. Added to this is the issues of the signing of several agreements that need to come into force to hasten the implementation. These are the critical areas that drive policy into the action-oriented phase.

The highlight of the visit was the focus given to the three C's: culture, commerce and connectivity. In this context, India's cultural ties with Southeast Asia are being considered as a significant one that will help push critical ties forward. The recent opening of the Nalanda University is an example of this dynamic. Furthermore, an emphasis on tourism too was made. Tourism is a vital component of relations and the industry needs to be revamped in order to make India a tourist destination for Southeast Asian visitors and vice versa. The Open Skies Agreement is therefore among the key areas to focus on, to provide any momentum to the tourism industry. At present, even direct flights from India to all ten Southeast Asian countries and vice versa are unavailable.

Complementary to boosting tourism, there is also a potential to integrate cities that can be linked as sibling cities. In this context, one of the options could be to link Bodhgaya, Lumbini and Yangon, Shwedagon Pagoda together as the Buddhist circuit. Another potential option would be the linking of cities like Jogjakarta, Siam Reap and Thanjavur together as potential tourist hubs. This would make a critical impact in terms of revitalising the tourism sector and would also act as a boost in bringing about greater people-to-people contact between the regions.

The second focus, on commerce, is already an area India has made considerable strides in; and that is expected to progress even further. Projecting a new economic environment in which India has embarked upon targeted attracting investments into the country under the banner of the Make in India slogan. Currently the India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement in (FTA) in goods has been operationalised, and the FTA in services and investments, though signed with all but one (the Philippines) country, is expected to be ratified by the respective countries' parliaments soon. This is one area where India has an advantage since, globally, it ranks 9th in the services sector.

As the move to integrate with the region is further enhanced through regionally driven initiatives like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), there is likelihood of widening linkages across the region. The RCEP links the ASEAN and its dialogue partners into a regional economic grouping that will be critical since it will bring the three Asian economic giants – China, Japan and India – together. The

Chinese move to enhance regional integration via the Asian Infrastructural Investment Bank and the enhancement of the Maritime Silk Route to link the Indian and the Pacific Oceans into an economic chain are clearly moving the commercial side of the regional agreements forward.

Finally, on the issue of connectivity, there is an urgent need to move forward with the plans that have been in the pipeline. Projects such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway and the Imphal-Mandalay road are extremely important towards linking the region via land, and opening up the border areas to facilitate the easy movement of people and goods. While both Myanmar and India are focusing on the development of the border regions, these projects will act as vital catalysts to deliver on the proposed outcomes.

Chinese FDI in India: Will it Augment Bilateral Relations?

4 October 2014

Bhartendu Kumar Singh

Economic relations have propelled Sino-Indian ties in recent times and have also facilitated the management of political conflict and rivalry. In this context, the announcement by President Xi Jinping during his New Delhi's visit that China would invest US\$20 billion in next five years has added another dimension to the bilateral commitment of taking economic relations to a new height.

Will the Chinese investments help the bilateral peace process? Has there been a gap in Chinese declarations and actual investments elsewhere in the world?

China's Investments elsewhere

There is no ubiquity about economic relations being in sync with political relations. Contemporary international relations have variable trends. On the one hand, China's economic relations with Taiwan have led to a 'compatible political relations'; that with Japan has not had any collateral impact on political relations. In fact, Sino – Japanese political relations are at worst. Many Southeast Asian countries that followed the Japanese lead and poured FDI into China did not get political dividends.

China's own FDI policy in African countries has come in for criticism wherein it has been dubbed as 'neo-colonial or extractive' economy interested in minerals and oil. China has done little to use its FDI in the upgradation of local infrastructure and economy. Chinese attempts in past to purchase critical assets in US under the garb of FDI were thwarted by Congress in the name of economic security.

Chinese Investments in India

Past Chinese investments into India have suffered on two counts. First, China never placed FDI as part of its overall political economic strategy towards India. In the last decade, China has invested less than \$ 400 million into India and is 31st among all investing countries. China found other South Asian countries more attractive since they yielded political dividends through good relations and strategic outreach or for that matter African countries where there has been a lucrative market to exploit. Second, the logic of economic nationalism and security prevented India from laying down a red carpet for Chinese investments and were subjected to various regulatory mechanisms.

The Chinese in turn, have turned themselves as a manufacturing backyard supplying cheap retail products into India and adding to Sino – Indian trade deficit and rivalry.

While these factors remain insitu, the proposed Chinese FDI is also questionable for many reasons. First, the declared amount would be invested over a period of five years; so the actual investment is quite spread out and inconsequential to meet India's FDI demand. Second, there has always been a gap in Chinese declarations and actual investments elsewhere in the world and the trend is likely to continue here also.

While China has the capacity to pump in more than it has declared, much also depends upon the political camaraderie and a bad swing in relations could affect the actual FDI flow. In fact, it could also be argued that the Chinese FDI declaration was actually a one upmanship game to match the Japanese FDI declaration during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Tokyo. Third, China may not be a willing partner into critical technology since it would like to perpetuate India's dependence in such areas for foreseeable future and could even have a sabotage policy through short term capital inflows and withdrawal strategy.

Will the Chinese FDI augment Sino-Indian Peace Process?

The miniscule and debatable Chinese FDI could, nevertheless, augment Sino – Indian peace process. First, it could contribute, albeit marginally, to reduction of trade deficit of a staggering \$ 37 billion. India does have many Greenfield projects in which China can invest and reap rich dividends. Second, it will open up many areas (like railways) for functional cooperation. As the Chinese recognition of Sikkim as part of India proves, economic interaction does moderate political stand sometimes. In this context, the agreement between the two countries on 'the five – year economic and trade development plan' is an important step.

Third, when the Chinese come with their money and showcase China-made industrial parks or bullet trains or invest in other non-rival areas, there will be positive things to talk about China, irrespective of localised irritants like Chinese incursions across LAC. Fourth, FDI enjoys certain benefits over trade patterns since it is a long term game where the liberty to withdraw or alter the trade pattern at will is not available. Both China and India would take concrete steps to make this FDI assuring and sustainable on ground. Political overtures is, therefore, the *sin qua non* for successful implementation of Chinese FDI. Fifth, since China also happens to be India's neighbour, its investments across the Himalayas would induce a 'new sense of regionalism' and promote openness between the two sides.

The immediate challenge, therefore, before the policy makers in India is to work on the positive factors and implement the road map for facilitating Chinese investments. Imagine a bullet train running from Chennai to Benguluru produced by Chinese technology and funds! The goodwill created from such ventures would only perpetuate the 'relative but uncertain peace' between China and India.

India-ASEAN FTA: Gap between Expectation and Reality

5 September 2014

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Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's maiden official visits to Southeast Asian countries have highlighted India's increasing thrust towards its Look East Policy (LEP). During her visit to Vietnam, she emphasised that India should "Act East" instead of simply "Look East." India, under the new leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has generated expectations of greater cooperation of trade and investments in the nature of its foreign policy. Modi and Swaraj's visits to the neighbouring countries such as Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and other Southeast Asian nations have added to this expectation.

However India's last minute failure to sign the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) on services and investment with the ASEAN countries has raised questions regarding the newly-generated expectation. Is the new government justified in suspending the process at the last minute? Will this impact the expectations that the new government generated?

India-ASEAN FTA: A Brief Primer

India and the ASEAN signed the FTA on goods, and was operationalised in 2010. The FTA on services and investment was to be signed by the finance ministers of the 10 ASEAN countries and India in the ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting that was held in Myanmar on 27 August, 2014. This was a much-awaited agreement and had it been signed, would have provided greater opportunity to Indian businessmen and

service sectors in the Southeast Asian countries. However, India decided to postpone signing this agreement. The Minister of State (independent charge) for Commerce and Industry, Nirmala Sitharaman, cancelled her three-day visit to Myanmar at the last minute. She stated that her trip had to be cancelled because her presence at the launch of Modi's Pradhan Mantri's Jan Dhan Yojana on 28 August, was mandatory. Sitharaman is in charge of the incumbent government's aforementioned new scheme that intends to provide every Indian household with a bank account and insurance coverage.

It is surprising that Sitharaman took till the last moment to realise that her presence for the launch of this scheme was essential – despite the fact that both events had been scheduled much in advance. There could be two reasons for her absence: First, India, under Modi's leadership is not confident of signing the FTA at this juncture, and is buying time. As economist Dr. Amita Batra states, it is possible that "India is re-evaluating the FTA and the gains from it for the country." The government definitely sought more time to study the pros and cons of the agreement.

Second, as has been highlighted by the event, there exists a problem of communication gap between the Indian Finance Ministry and the External Affairs Ministry (MEA). Swaraj was vocal about the significance of the aforementioned FTA in both the meetings with her ASEAN counterparts, as well as in other multilateral meetings. It was echoed by Secretary (East), MEA, Anil Wadhwa, in the official statement which said the signing of this agreement will signal India's commitment to achieve the goal of \$100 billion (presently \$80 billion) worth trade with the ASEAN by 2016. However, within hours of Wadhwa's statement, Sitharaman cancelled her visit, making evident the MEA's cluelessness of the cancellation. Modi, in his Independence Day speech, had stated that he will emphasise on ensuring that different ministries work in cohesion with each other, but the aforementioned event indicates otherwise.

The Big Picture

The FTA on services and investment is not the only agreement India hasn't signed yet. India also refused to sign the World Trade Organisation's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). India has delayed signing the TFA because of its objection to a clause that says farm subsidies cannot be over 10 per cent of the value of the agricultural product – which contradicts India's Food Security Act.

The delay in or averseness to signing these agreements will impact India's image on the global economic platform. India already spoiled its reputation with its dismal investment levels in Myanmar. Myanmar's Union Minister of Information, Ye Htut, publically expressed Naypyidaw's unhappiness over the lack of Indian investment in the country. As rightfully blamed, Indian investors only visit Myanmar but are not interested in investing in the growing economy. India has also garnered criticism due to the delay in completion of its projects, the Kaladan Multi Modal Project, and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project. Furthermore, most ASEAN countries have blamed India to be import-heavy which was noticed in the FTA on goods with these countries. In fact, India's trade with Myanmar too is import-heavy on India's behalf. India depends on Myanmar for importing wood and pulses.

The new government has created high hopes of India's proactive economic involvement with its immediate neighbours and the Southeast and East Asian countries. Prime Minister Modi's recent Japan visit has further increased expectation from the New Delhi. India, therefore, has to undertake extra efforts to make these expectations into a reality.

India-China: Energy Competition in Nepal

25 July 2014

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After Bhutan, Nepal is now preparing itself for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit. In recent times, a 'trust deficit' seems to have developed between India and Nepal, with a gradual erosion of the bonhomie and generosity that the two nations displayed earlier. Of the many reasons that can be touted for this

'hostile-friendly' exercise, the most distinct are the China factor and energy resources shared by Nepal and India.

With 80 per cent of the population living below the poverty line and the rise of Maoism, Nepal would like to project a stronger image externally and become more assertive in its foreign policy towards India. Its increasing disenchantment with India and rising proximity with China through the suppression of Tibet's supporters on its boundary, speaks volumes about what can be expected from Nepalese leaders in the coming future.

However, Nepal is restrained in its approach towards both the proverbial 'elephant' and the 'dragon'. Saddled geographically between its two neighbours, Nepal does not want to turn itself into a political turf. In energy terms, this means that while China builds up Nepal's infrastructure the latter still relies on India for its energy imports. India already shares a 'love-hate' relationship with both its upper riparian states (Nepal and China) in terms of hydroelectricity and is in no mood to give up on its share of renewables as indicated by the recent budget.

To contextualise the Nepalese perspective, the Indian and Chinese strategies for the acquisition of oil on foreign oil must be discussed.

India

India usually targets a country by judging the competitiveness of OVL (ONGC Videsh Limited) within it. Major Indian companies like IOC (Indian Oil Corporation Limited), OVL, OIL (Oil India Limited) and GAIL (India) Limited have invested, jointly or sometimes in collaboration, with BP (British Petroleum), Exxon Mobil, SODECO (Japan) NIOC (Iran) etc. Also, India, with its commercial and strategic interests in West Asia, plays the card of a maritime power in the Indian Ocean region. Its surging demand for energy, geographical proximity to the region, and occasional siding with the US has made it increase its stakes in the Persian Gulf.

China

China aggressively pursues those states that have been isolated by the US. Iran here is a classic example, where each of India's losses due to US pressure has been China's gain. It has shifted its focus to Central Asia due to the geographical proximity and the reduced American and Russian influence. It has decided to use the platform of the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) to lure Africa and Central Asia, which it believes can help to shift one-third of its imports by 2015 from the Middle East to these regions.

China has built pipelines from Sittwe (Myanmar) to Kunming (China), and also an energy corridor from Gwadar (Pakistan) to Xinjiang (China). These two deals not only avoid all choke points in the Malacca Straits but also act as a bonus for building political alliances. Also, both bring China to India's direct neighbourhood, acting as military deterrent.

Tug of War in Nepal

Earlier this year, Xinhua reported that China has already surpassed India as the largest FDI investor in Nepal, reaching USD 174 million dollars. Compare this with news released by the Indian media, of India struggling to even finalise the official report on the Pancheswar Multi-purpose Project which was flagshipged in the year 1996, as part of the Mahakali Treaty.

The story is not new, but competition can turn into cooperation in the case of Nepal. While China is spiking its investments in Nepal's energy sector (reaching up to INR 4.23 billion in 2013), it is still a new entrant. India has a traditional advantage not only in the political and cultural areas but also monetarily, by retaining the top slot as the highest energy investor in Nepal. Moreover, most of the Chinese investments are done in the form of loans rather than grants which make the Nepalese all the more cautious of Chinese intentions towards their economy. It is this juncture of Sino-Nepalese relations that

give India an opportunity to play the role it has always promised to Nepal. Nepal cannot win its foreign policy battles on its own - this is a long standing fact, and but the ambiguous position of India is always the cause of concern. When Nepal comes into question, India plays either the 'hawk' or the 'dove', leaving Nepalese foreign policy in a quandary. If India can avoid the clutches of political quagmires and talk business to China on an equal footing, the situation can be a win-win for all the three nations.

Sino-Indian relations have often been described as 'walking on two legs', and this has been the truest in case of energy. Despite being the fiercest competitors in international biddings, both nations have displayed maturity against an aggressive West, environmental threats, vulnerability of SLOCS (Sea Lines of Communication), or the political volatility of energy rich nations. Both have realised that scarce energy can single-handedly crumble their hard earned economic growth, whether they contain each other or not. Hence, for energy, it is imperative for both nations to cash in on the convergence of their interests rather than scramble for power. Whether Nepal can provide a platform for its initiation will be watched keenly.

BRICS Summit and India-China Relations

21 July 2014

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The 6th BRICS summit, a conglomerate of world's top five emerging economies – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa was held at Fortaleza, Brazil, in July 2014. With heightened expectations, the summit is seen as to have delivered a lot in terms of establishing a Development Bank with an initial investment of \$100 billion. This is regarded as a strong counter to the existing financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. However, a major highlight of the summit is the meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Both leaders discussed a wide range of bilateral issues ranging from economic cooperation to fighting terrorism, flagging the need to resolve border issues. The meeting, scheduled for 40 minutes and that lasted 80 minutes, caught the world's attention. Many commentators place a high note of optimism on the future of bilateral ties. Yet, concerns loom large over whether this meeting will yield any concrete developments in near future. Will the historical border problem be resolved? What cooperative structures will be evolved to reduce trust deficit? More significantly, what are the likely mechanisms for enhancing all-round cooperation and engaging in non-confrontational approach to sustained relations?

The Year 2014

The year 2014 has significant historical benchmarks as the year of 60th anniversary of Panchsheel and the 100th anniversary of Shimla Convention. By revisiting history, it appears the current cooperative initiative of the BRICS Development Bank is a move towards leaving the past behind and charting a new history.

Modi's landslide victory in the 2014 Indian general elections created a storm across the globe. Many critics expressed the possibility of India becoming a "Hindu nationalist" state, but acknowledged that development will be India's priority. China, however, showered praises for Modi as an "old friend" and calling him "India's Nixon." China's position towards India shows a deviation from the past as India centres are increasing and a grand yoga festival was recently organised in Dali, Yunnan Province, to improve India's image in China.

Regional Anxiety

China has clinched the second position in the world economy, but it has also created anxiety among neighbouring states. China is seen as a threat and the probability of it becoming hegemonic has escalated in the region, especially with China's assertiveness projected in territorial disputes with Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines. With a bottom line agenda of economic development, China cannot afford to engage

in a war of words that incite nationalist sentiments within the country, as that will harm its own business interests.

Alongside, there is a strong wave of a politico-democratic movement called the “Democratic League” of countries (including India, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Australia, Philippines and Singapore under the leadership of the US) binding nations in the region, which Prof. Wang Dehua, Vice-President, Shanghai Institute for International Strategic Studies, refers to as the “Asian NATO.” China being a non-democratic country is obviously out of this coalition. However, President Xi Jinping is stressing on a good neighbourhood policy under the rhetoric of “communities of common destinies,” that inevitably requires building alliances with neighbouring states.

China’s Internal Imperatives

Modi made sharp statements against China during the election campaign, but still earned Chinese accolades. This pro-India approach can be attributed to two reasons: one, Modi is regarded as a pro-development leader and the Chinese want pure business. The other and more probable reason can be that China’s own security challenges and threat to social stability has lessons in India.

Internally, tensions in China are mounting, with recent incidents such as the knife attack in Kunming followed by knife attack in Changsha, and a bomb blast in Urumqi in May. Besides, for the past few years, the self-immolations of Tibetan monks, riots in Mongolia, and terrorist attacks in Xinjiang have all increased. The internal social stability meter is showing a red sign and social security faces challenges from various internal and external forces. The Chinese government acknowledges that cross-border terrorism is impacting its stability and has in retaliation initiated a “Strike-first” strategy to give a “crushing blow” to terrorism. India, which has dealt with this issue for decades, is more mature to handle such situations and can be a potential information sharing partner for China.

Future of India-China Relations

India and China are poised to increase bilateral trade to \$100 billion. Hence, the focus will remain on bilateral cooperation towards building industrial development parks, enhancing mutual investments, expanding the trade basket, and on regional cooperative projects such as the New Silk Route, BCIM corridor etc. On the border issue, there will be an emphasis on “negotiable resolution” with mechanism to reduce recurrent incidents, but a permanent solution is hard to chart. Regional cooperation will be a highlight, as both countries need energy resources and have concerns for territorial security. India’s greater emphasis on ‘Look East’ and China’s shift towards neighbouring countries entails potential for cooperation. BRICS has given a direction for non-confrontational cooperative strategic partnership that can change the blueprint of bilateral, regional, multilateral as well as global relationship.

India-China Bilateral Under Narendra Modi

10 June 2014

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As the recently formed government in New Delhi is settling down, the domestic and external policies to be adopted are being worked out. While no specific blue print is available, one can take the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) election manifesto, speeches of the BJP leaders during the election campaign, actions taken over the past two weeks, the president’s address to the Joint Session of the parliament on June 9, and the contextual aspects into considerations to reflect on the new government’s policies.

First, a common denominator among the aforementioned aspects is Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his team’s domestic rejuvenation agenda. President Pranab Mukherjee’s address to the parliament outlines the new government’s agenda for the next 60 months. A majority of the points in this address were taken verbatim from the BJP manifesto. These include enhancing the role of the manufacturing

sector, improving infrastructure projects across the country and overall capacity build-up. It is clear, however, that for this to happen, the foreign policy front needs to be re-calibrated for the domestic agenda.

For instance, China had become the global manufacturing hub thanks to its vigorous efforts over the past two decades of reform and opening policies and financial and technical assistance from Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and the US. In this regard, if Modi's efforts are to transform India into a "globally competitive manufacturing hub powered by Skill, Scale and Speed," he needs active cooperation of all the countries mentioned above.

Additionally, for setting up "world class investment and industrial regions, particularly along the Dedicated Freight Corridors and Industrial Corridors," the new government needs Japan and the other countries. Japan, in the recent period, committed nearly \$92 billion for the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor and had also been exploring the Bangalore-Chennai sector. While clearances on land acquisition, environmental issues, and labour reforms have delayed the project, more thrust could be expected during Modi's visit to Tokyo next month.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in his meetings with the Indian officials during his recent visit, reiterated China's interest in setting up industrial zones in five states and Beijing's participation in railway projects. For Japan, China and the EU countries, the proposed diamond quadrilateral project of high speed trains, the Sagar Mala port project, substantially augmenting electricity generation capacity, the national solar mission, etc. are lucrative and mutually beneficial. Concerns on foreign investments closer to the security establishments of course, prevail in India; and so are anti-dumping duties on solar panels from China.

There are several commonalities in the new government's path forward and that of China's. Both leaderships emphasise on nurturing innovation; urban mission programmes; renewable sources of energy; among others. China's 12th Five Year Plan outlined these aspects, and both could learn from each other's experience.

Second, several items on the Modi government's domestic agenda could provide for opportunities or even frictions with neighbours in the longer run. The BJP manifesto and the presidential address suggested to building world-class infrastructure, including the "expansion of railways in hilly states and Northeast region, conservation of Himalayan ecology; creating 50 tourist circuits and establishing a Central University of Himalayan Studies." While China itself had expanded its infrastructure projects towards its peripheries in Tibet and Xinjiang – often intruding into disputed territories between India and Pakistan in the Northern areas – it is suspicious of the dual-use aspects of these initiatives by India.

Third, during the election campaign – such as at Pasighat in February this year when Modi chastised China for its "expansionist mindset" – and subsequently, it is clear that securing the borders will be among the priorities of the new government's agenda. This is reflected in the appointments of Gen. (Retd) VK Singh, and Kiran Rejju, among others. The presidential address simply stated that the new government will "strengthen defence preparedness," but there was no mention of revising the nuclear doctrine as stated earlier by the BJP manifesto.

Fourth, the BJP-led government clearly identified the Indian neighbourhood as its foreign policy priority. It was reflected in the invitation to the South Asian neighbours to Prime Minister Modi's swearing-in ceremony, and in his choice of Thimphu for his maiden foreign visit. The presidential address also identified China, Japan, Russia, the US and the EU; but it is clear that India's relations with the US and Japan are poised to be on the upswing. Specifically on China, the address, while reiterating the "strategic and cooperative partnership" agreement of 2005, stated that the new government "will engage energetically" with Beijing.

Fifth, the BJP manifesto and the presidential address clearly identified zero tolerance to internal disturbances, including terrorist incidents. While in the foreign policy domain, this issue is mainly

directed towards Pakistan, there was also a mention during Foreign Minister Yi's visit to New Delhi that counter-terrorism efforts between India and China will be furthered. So far, although both India and China have acceded to the UN Security Council resolutions 1267, 1373 and 1540 on counter-terrorism, no effective coordination or cooperation exists between the two nations that identify this issue as number one security challenge.

Modi-fying Indo-US Relations

28 May 2014

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The UPA's commitment to transforming Indo-US ties lost steam in its second term due to several economic, defence and diplomatic issues. What impact would Narendra Modi's election as Prime Minister have in altering the strained relations between the two countries?

The Modi-US Personal Equation

In an attempt to reach out to Modi, US President Barack Obama invited him to the White House while congratulating him on his landslide victory in the current Lok Sabha elections. This 'U-turn' in US' approach to Modi, whose visa was revoked in 2005 for his alleged inaction or complicity in the 2002 Gujarat Hindu-Muslim riots, reflects a pragmatic desire in Washington to closely align itself with the new leadership in Delhi.

The US has been accused of being slow in forging better relations with Modi. US Ambassador to India Nancy Powell, who recently resigned without completing her term, held her first meeting with him only in February 2014. This was dubbed by many as "too late to be effective." Worse, the day she met him, the State Department declared that the visa policy towards him remained unchanged. The UK had effectively lifted the ban on Modi in October 2012 while the US ban was necessarily lifted only after Modi was designated to be the Prime Minister.

In the last thirteen years, Modi has worked closely with Japan, visiting the country five times, and China, on three occasions. He has also collaborated with Middle Eastern investors and officials. Although Modi had in an interview declared that relations between two countries cannot be determined by incidents related to individuals, they are bound to play a crucial role in the new administration's foreign policy, with speculations that Modi is likely to favour his relationship with these partners. It is being speculated that Japan and China may be the first two trips that Modi would make after assuming office. He is likely to visit the US only in September for the UN Summit.

Indo-US Trade under Modi

Modi has been a favourite of business leaders at home and abroad with promises to restore rapid economic growth, saying that there should be "no red tape, only red carpet" for investors.

Experts have drawn parallels between Modi and Thatcher on the basis of being "market oriented." In a Financial Times' opinion piece, Gurcharan Das wrote that India of today is similar to Britain of the later 1970s with high inflation, declining growth and high fiscal deficits. "Britain yearned for a strong leader then, and in Mrs Thatcher it got one. In Mr Modi, Indians, too, have chosen a strong leader. His Thatcherite rhetoric of "less government and more governance" resonates with the aspiring young middle class."

Modi's success on the economic front hinges on how effectively he would be able to implement the next phase of market-centred reforms. The BJP in its election manifesto talked about easing the rules of doing business by setting up business facilitation centres and making the government accountable for delays and delivery of services.

The US-India Business Council (USIBC), which comprises of Indian and American companies, has already released a comprehensive wish list - 'Way Forward Agenda 2014-2015' - which seeks bilateral trade of US\$500 billion per year. The action plan includes resolving outstanding issues related to the civil nuclear deal, e-commerce and insurance, etc. The USIBC has also reiterated its call to open India's multi-brand retail sector. However, the BJP in its manifesto clearly stated its stand against the FDI in multi-brand retail, dashing the hopes of scores of foreign supermarket groups waiting to invest in India.

Defence Relations

Modi has often alleged that India's defence procurement and the higher-level management of its defence policy have both suffered grave reverses under the UPA and that conventional military capabilities must be reformed. The BJP manifesto raised the issues of self-defence, civil defence, shortage of personnel, technology, streamlining bureaucratic processes, research, and private sector involvement in defence. It also promised greater FDI in defence. As of now, India allows 26 per cent foreign ownership in defence, and proposals to exceed that limit are considered only for state-of-the-art technology.

Ashley J Tellis of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace writes that the Modi government should give a go ahead to acquire US military equipment, especially by closing those contracts that are close to completion. This will help in improving the combat capabilities of the Indian armed forces. There are also hopes that the proposed Defence Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI) that is currently frozen will spur greater technology transfer and military modernisation if completed.

For the Pentagon, India has a geopolitical value in the context of a rising China. Protecting the sea lines of communication in the Indian Ocean, through which global trade and energy flows, makes India a valuable strategic partner. The US is thus planning extended naval cooperation with India in the Western Pacific region, which was put on the back burner during the UPA's term.

As Modi takes charge of the next government, the US is bound to remain an essential partner for India. Even though the relationship lacks the rhetoric of warmth and romance, it remains grounded in solid economic and security interests.

Modi: Perspectives from Europe

16 May 2014

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The recently-concluded general election in India was the largest democratic election in history. However, it isn't the size of the electorate that makes this election interesting. Instead, it is Narendra Modi, the controversial lead candidate of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and potential prime minister of India

The German perspective on Modi is strongly divided: On one hand he is the politician-cum-businessman, and on the other, he is the far-right leader with ties to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

Modi's alleged business acumen, his success in attracting large enterprises and his industrialisation policies have earned him a reputation concerning the economic growth of India. Many Indians, especially the urban middle classes, hope that his leadership style will bring an end to the wide-spread corruption and produce economic development; and with it jobs. After a steep decline of German investments into India over the past two years, the German business community views Modi as someone who could make investing into India lucrative again.

The BJP's election manifesto which promises tax-reforms and especially simplification of the tax-code is a good sign for German enterprises. Additionally, the BJP's promise to reform the labour laws may be in favour of foreign businesses to hire and fire as needed. Although Modi rejected the influx of foreign investments in retail, it is just a minor concern for German enterprises that are heavily centred on automobiles, services, machines and chemicals.

The German economy is also dependent on exports, especially of cars, consumer goods and machines. These are products usually aimed at a middle class that is wealthy enough to afford them. A Modi-led government will favour the middle class – it is his electoral stronghold after all – and that may give some incentives to Germans entering Indian markets. The BJP manifesto also promises banking reforms probably focused more on investment activities and less on regulation. This could be interesting for German banks that will probably face increasing regulation in the European Union.

However, one should be careful with too much enthusiasm. While it is true that Gujarat is an economic and industrial powerhouse, it is not all Modi's 'genius' and it is not all well in the state. The industrialisation of Gujarat is the product of policies which were set in motion well before 2001. And in terms of the Human Development Index, Gujarat stands 11th and 14th in people below poverty line - which are, at best, mediocre results. Even the glorified GDP per capita growth of Gujarat has decreased.

When in the Prime Minister's Office, Narendra Modi would face a challenge much larger than he currently does in Gujarat. Besides, he might not be able to lead and decide at the Centre like he did in his home State. To expect investor's paradise under a Modi regime is foolish, also for German enterprises.

The other narrative in Germany is that Modi is the Hindu-nationalist, RSS member and alleged accessory to the 2002 Gujarat communal riots. In Germany, there lingers a fear of a religious-fascist dictatorship in India under 'Führer Modi'. This narrative, to a large extent, is also a result of the coverage by the mainstream German media; and less part due to a relative ignorance towards India's political system. The term Hindu-nationalist has a different connotation in Germany and has a much more negative sound to it for German ears. Without much knowledge of the Indian system of government, Germans who follow the Indian elections causally may get the impression that Modi would have much more influence on politics as head of government than he would actually have as a prime minister with a strong opposition party and a phalanx of states ruled by the Congress or other regional parties. The biggest factor of concern evoked by Narendra Modi is probably his membership in the RSS.

Viewed as a fascist organisation not only in India or Germany, it evokes old fears in Germans of uniformed and militaristic hordes terrorising minorities; and media reports strengthen that picture. Modi is of course not a tolerant and liberal man and he is certainly not innocent of enticing anti-Muslim sentiments, especially in connection to the 2002 riots, but he will not let loose the hordes of the RSS to bring terror upon minorities. He already mellowed in his speeches and he has mellowed even more as the candidate for the prime minister of India, when he had to appease the party establishment of the BJP, their allies; of chief ministers in the States and of course of foreign politicians and investors.

The much needed 'manager of India Inc.' and the 'evil Hindu-nationalist', these are the two personae of Modi in Germany. Both sides of the Modi medal are prevalent, but Germans will deal with a completely different Modi when he assumes office.

The Oman Gas Pipeline: India's Underwater Energy Supply Chain

5 May 2014

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Energy hungry India has invested enormous political and diplomatic capital in gas pipelines such as the Iran-Pakistan-India IPI and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipelines, from Iran and Turkmenistan. However, these projects have been mired in problems of insecurity and cost. Plans to build the IPI have been shelved and the TAPI is still on the drawing board. Similarly, in 2003, a pipeline project to transport gas from Iran to India was explored but did not fructify due to high construction and transportation costs. The focus has shifted to the Oman-India Pipeline (OIP) which would run below the sea across the Arabian Sea. Iran is now being included in the pipeline network and there are plans to build an energy corridor to link Turkmenistan. The underwater supply route is expected to eliminate

potential vulnerabilities arising from attacks or hijacking of pipelines by subversive elements in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to ensure uninterrupted supply of gas to India.

The OIP project was first mooted in 1999. The two sides signed an agreement for the supply of 56.6 million cubic meters (MCM) of natural gas through the 1,130 kilometer undersea pipeline across the Arabian Sea to be built at a cost of \$5 billion. The seabed survey had revealed that the initial route of the pipeline would be via complex and rugged seabed terrain and that there were 'faulted up thrusts' enroute which would pose difficulties in the smooth and level laying of the pipeline. A new route was explored which was marginally shorter, but the technological capacity – including the lack of ships to lay pipes at 3500 meter depths, and pipeline repair systems – for deep sea pipe laying was unavailable then.

Today, the OIP project has reemerged and aims to push forwards given the existence of improved deepwater design and pipe laying technology. It will be developed by a global consortium of highly experienced designers who would execute the project using modern pipe laying techniques, systems, processes and service providers. Perhaps what is more significant is that Iran has indicated its willingness to join the project and transport gas from its South Pars gas fields to India via the undersea pipeline. Earlier this year, the foreign ministers of Iran, Oman and India met and held negotiations on the issue of Iran-Oman-India (IOI) gas grid.

According to a study conducted by the South Asia Gas Enterprise Pvt. Ltd. (SAGE), the 1400 kilometer long IOI pipeline would cost \$ 4-5 billion and would transport 31 MCM of gas daily. Meanwhile, Iran is willing to ship gas from Turkmenistan and facilitate linking that route to the IOI pipeline. This could potentially result in India shelving the TAPI project.

These developments are indeed noteworthy and offer a ray of hope for India to enhance its energy security; perhaps it is also the most economical method of supply. However, there are several challenges to underwater pipelines, arising from natural and manmade hazards. Furthermore, underwater pipelines are 'poorly armoured, rarely patrolled and occasionally monitored' and therefore require inspection and repair capabilities which are expensive to source.

There are three potential threats the pipelines will have to face: First arises from natural catastrophic events such as underwater earthquakes and Tsunamis. Although the pipes can withstand some ground shaking, severe conditions could result in ruptures and/or damages, resulting in the seepage of gas – thus causing potential environmental disasters.

The second type of threat would be posed by anchors of the ships in shallow waters. Although undersea pipelines and cables are marked in nautical charts, there have been instances when pipelines have been damaged.

The third threat arises from the wear-tear of pipes due to ageing. Although these underwater pipelines are designed to last for at least 30 to 40 years, material fatigue due to seawater corrosion can considerably reduce their durability. Furthermore, there are issues of pipelines that have been set aside following the completion of their operational life; these pipes in disuse can cause enormous environmental damage, which in turn requires expensive and difficult clean-up efforts.

Inspection and repair of undersea pipelines is a complex issue and poses a number of operational challenges. This would require underwater laser scanning systems, and CAD software to generate 3D models of the damaged/leaking pipes to carry out repair without risks to humans, among others. Iran and India have underwater operational experience and possess platforms such as submarines, but neither has the experience or technology for seabed operations.

There is an opportunity for Oman, India and Iran to develop leak detection, prevention and clean-up practices, as well as to develop manned and unmanned systems that could potentially boost their underwater platform industry.

India-China: A Water War over the Brahmaputra?

30 April 2014

Roomana Hukil

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Recently, Claude Arpi, renowned scholar on China wrote about how China's aspirations to divert the waters of the Brahmaputra River were feeding into mounting disagreements between New Delhi and Beijing. China has consistently been moving ahead with its dam construction projects and India has been pressing for a negotiation with the government of China to look into the proposed reduction in the diversion of the water flow of the Brahmaputra. Is a water conflict over the Brahmaputra River likely in the near future? What measures must the government in India, which will come to power following the conclusion of the ongoing election, adopt in order to resolve the water-sharing tensions between both states?

Water Conflict? No. Inevitable Tensions? Yes

Discourses over the waters of the Brahmaputra River have been doing the rounds ever since China's announcement about the construction of three dams on the river last year. Despite diplomatic talks, China is keen to divert the waters from the Brahmaputra. In the past, China did not have a strong *raison d'être* to divert the flow of the river. China's Vice Minister of Water Resources, Jiao Yong, stated in 2011 that the Chinese government was not planning to conduct any diversion projects along the Brahmaputra River given that there wasn't a pressing need.

However, at present, China's per capita water reserve is approximately 2300 cubic metres – one-fourth of the world's average. China is, therefore, considered as the 13th most 'water-poor' country in the world with 80 per cent of its cities severely water stressed. More so, China's northern region possesses only 14.5 per cent of the entire country's water resources. As water supplies tighten, the water quality is degrading, ecology is suffering, and lands are becoming barren. This threatens the country's economic growth. Thus, the ever-increasing gap in the demand and supply chain in China's northern region has now pushed the country to move forward with its many dam projects.

China is keen to divert 150 billion cubic meters (BCM) of water and 'push' the waters to irrigate northern China. Of this, 50 BCM would be diverted from the Brahmaputra. In October 2013, India asserted the need for a water sharing treaty with China. This came about, following the paranoia generated after the announcement of the 510-MW Zangmu project along the course of the river.

However, although Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh returned with an agreement on sharing water-related information during the monsoon months, there was no mention of the planned diversion of the Brahmaputra. So far, India has been incapable in convincing China into building bilateral cooperation over the Brahmaputra River. The previous government in New Delhi did not want to antagonise bilateral relations with Beijing, and it is possible that the new government will follow suit.

India recognises that it is not in a position to wage a war with China. However, despite tensions and disagreements over common rivers, India has maintained relatively peaceful hydrological relations with its neighbours – with the Indus, Teesta, and Ganga Rivers being cases in point. On no occasion, did India seek to wage war as a means to resolve its water woes. In this light, India may not enter into a conflict with China over the Brahmaputra, but tensions seem probable.

Role of the New Government

The next government in New Delhi needs to assess the interventions made by Beijing. With the mounting demand for water and the absence of a comprehensive water-sharing policy between India, China and Bangladesh, it is certain that the vast water resources of Tibet and the Eastern Himalayas will be debated, continually. Irrespective of whether a significant diversion in the flows takes place or not, a water sharing

agreement between the upper and lower riparian states will ensure that any violation of international norms of water-sharing is avoided.

At present, the northern regions of both China and Bangladesh face an acute water shortage. India, being a middle riparian state, too may have to bear the brunt in an event of diversion of the Brahmaputra waters; and it will directly impact the North-eastern region. The Indian government lags far behind China in terms of tapping the Brahmaputra's water.

India's hydro-power potential is 84,044 megawatts (MW). Approximately 31,857 MW can be accessed by the north-eastern part of the country. However, only three per cent of it is presently being utilised. The government recently sanctioned an 800 MW hydro-electric project on the Brahmaputra in Arunachal Pradesh, and there are more plans to generate 55,000 MW of hydro-power by constructing mega dams.

With both India and China making large scale interventions along the Brahmaputra, they are ignoring the possible implications on the ecology. The next government in New Delhi needs to cater to these concerns and push for a comprehensive tripartite water sharing treaty with all three riparian states.

India-Bangladesh LBA: Setting the Right Tone

9 December 2014

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"We can change history but not geography," India's former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had famously said. But this basic common sense has often eluded the movers and shakers of international politics, thereby resulting in constant sanguinary internecine struggle for power. The insane and inane one-upmanship among nations have engendered power games that have eventuated in 'mutually assured destruction (MAD)', a phrase often used in the context of the Cold War.

Hence, it is always advisable to have a peaceful border; otherwise developmental interests of a nation generally get compromised. Anthropogenic as they are, borders between states are often arbitrarily drawn; and the borders that divided India and Pakistan on the map were no different as they did not represent a cartographer's precision. The international boundary between the two new states was drawn hastily when the British left India. As a result, thousands of people were left high and dry; stranded in enclaves as citizens of one country but living in territories encircled by those of the other. Local folklore has it that these enclaves on either side of the border are actually remnants of high-stake barter in chess games between the erstwhile Maharajas of Cooch Behar and Rangpur in the pre-colonial, undivided Bengal.

The people in 111 Indian enclaves (17,160 acres) in Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves (7,110 acres) in India have been living in these pockets without any rights as lawful citizens of either country. However, after Bangladesh's emergence as an independent nation in 1971, in 1974, New Delhi and Dhaka signed an agreement to settle the mutual boundary dispute. In September 2011, both countries reached an understanding to implement the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement. However, due to domestic political constraints, India failed to ratify the agreement via constitutional amendments in her parliament; and this procrastination to ratify the agreement had an India-friendly Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the mat in her country. The latter was panned thoroughly by Bangladeshi opposition parties for soft-peddalling the issue.

The incumbent government in New Delhi is cautiously treading to carry forward the initiative taken by former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government. The extant government should waste no time in introducing the relevant Bill in Parliament to push through the required constitutional amendment. The good thing is that neither country loses much territory as a result of the exchange but the accruing diplomatic capital will be considerable for both sides. The agreement affords a big opportunity for India to consolidate its ties with Bangladesh.

The proposed agreement builds on the 'behind-the-scene' toil of the 31-member Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs chaired by Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor that recommended the deal in 'overall national interest'. The Committee has rightly urged the government to emergently present the Bill in the parliament to permanently settle the tickling India-Bangladesh boundary dispute. Resultantly thereof, New Delhi shall be exchanging the enclaves as well as other small plots of land that are in 'adverse possession' of either country. There would not only be an exchange of enclaves between the two countries, but there shall also be a settlement of the territories held in adverse possession by both the countries. While India legally receives 2,777 acres of land in 'adverse possession', i.e. territory already under de facto Indian control but legally owned by Bangladesh, Bangladesh will, in turn, receive 2,267 acres of territory in its adverse possession but lawfully belonging to India.

The long-delayed settlement, as and when it comes around, has been tipped to be an example of good diplomacy by the two countries. As a mature democracy, India must not allow petty politics to interfere with such diplomatic moves which consolidates its position as a regional power in South Asia. All political parties must come together to ensure the ratification of the 'swap deal' as it not only settles a contentious border but also opens a window for settlement of intractable border disputes with China. Peaceful borders with her neighbours will enable India to focus on its strengths to eventually emerge as one of the super powers to reckon with in international politics.

All said and done, India should also strive to evolve a broad-based policy mechanism whereby such issues of national importance are not held hostage to domestic politics as noticed in this case. The very fact that the deal was pigeon-holed at the last moment during the second United Progressive Alliance regime reflects poorly on the background work done by the occupants of the South Block. Due diligent effort should be made to factor all domestic concerns and take aboard all the stakeholders before moving ahead with any such diplomatic initiative so as not to lose face in the comity of nations. A nation speaking in one voice is always a nation that gains in international sweepstakes and occupies a place of pride in the international pecking order.

Floods in J&K: Hatred, Alienation and Relief Measures

19 September 2014

Ashok Bhan

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The visit to India of Chinese President Xi Jinping has provided the Indian media with a God sent opportunity to wriggle out of an erroneous belief that the flood rescue and relief in Jammu and Kashmir can be made into a turning point in conflict resolution. Indian Armed forces and NDRF must get full marks for a selfless service to their brethren in distress. They did it as part of their duty and their commitment. They did it because Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India and every citizen of India is entitled to these services of the State. As one Commanding officer candidly remarked in an interview, "we are here to do a job and as long as people need us we will continue to do it." It is as simple as that.

The rescuers had no political agenda. The media tried to fish in troubled waters in trying to make Kashmiris believe that the Indian security forces were their only hope and they needed to be grateful to them. This as expected proved counter-productive. The flood devastated valley did not need these lessons in their hour of grief and colossal loss of life and property. It has in no way helped the cause of the nation.

The shallowness of understanding of the problem; level of alienation and hatred was evident in eminent anchors making panelists to commit that the rescue and relief will be a turning point for Jammu and Kashmir. The absence of separatists in relief operations found unnecessarily wide coverage. In support of the rescuers no opportunity was lost to put in dock those demanding withdrawal of AFSPA. An inconsequential Yasin Malik incident was blown out of proportions. And then the debate on Art 370 has begun again even while flood waters are yet to recede and danger of an epidemic looms large.

The media overkill by dramatizing the rescue operations brought a sharp reaction symbolised by a banner outside Jamia Masjid, "We don't need Indian rescue and relief. Stop drama of helicopters." It was

never a secret that anti-India (and thereby anti-Indian Army) sentiments surface whenever separatists are criticized or cornered as they wield some influence in Srinagar and a few other pockets.

No doubt the promptness of rescue and relief and quality of rehabilitation now onwards will leave an indelible mark on the minds of beneficiaries in the state. The contribution of Governments in the Centre and the State and the Armed Forces will not go unnoticed. People of Kashmir have an uncanny sense of understanding who helped and who failed them in their hour of crisis. They also realise what is good for them. But such disaster mitigation efforts are slow healers of the wounds of a prolonged conflict. Their healing strength further diminishes when conditions and costs are attached to such humanitarian work. The point that is being made is that linking disaster mitigation effort with the broader issue of resolution of the conflict is a mistake. These two must run simultaneously but as strong parallel efforts.

Jammu and Kashmir will bounce back to normalcy again. The question being floated is whether hatred will get washed away by the receding flood waters. Unfortunately, hatred and alienation don't dissolve in flood waters or in the disaster mitigation effort howsoever exemplary it may be. It will need a handful of "political salt" combined with some "acid of reason." That provides a lot of work for both sides – the government as well as the people of the state in coming weeks and months.

Holding of a credible Assembly Elections as early as possible will be a strong positive in the rehabilitation effort as well as resumption of the peace process. Let people of the State chose their representatives without an unduly long interregnum. That will enable the Central Government to sit with elected representatives to effectively implement the rehabilitation plans and also work towards conflict resolution. The temptation of carrying out the entire rehabilitation by the Central Government through a prolonged Central rule will be counterproductive. The people's representatives and the state administration need to be made more accountable rather than usurping their legitimate role by handling everything from New Delhi.

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj has hit the nail on the head when she said there can be no full stops in diplomacy. Pakistan has been adequately cautioned that India sees their overt and covert contacts with separatists as an unfriendly act. There is also no doubt that Pakistan will not allow a peaceful Assembly poll and will use every opportunity to foment trouble. That would need increased vigil and preparedness on the part of security forces. But that must not stop breaking the deadlock and resuming talks with Pakistan.

The separatists must also understand that their preference for contacts with Islamabad and refusal to talk to New Delhi will harden attitudes against them and their cause in the rest of India. In view of their limited political following and opinion building against them they may find themselves irrelevant for six long years after the Assembly elections.

India and Nepal: Let There Be Light

3 September 2014

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The recent landmark visit of Narendra Modi to Nepal, the first by an Indian prime minister in 17 years is seen as a ray of hope for New Delhi-Kathmandu bilateral relations. Will the new Indian government be able to address the growing distrust between the two countries, especially vis-à-vis resource-sharing? Will the sanctioning of the \$1 billion aid to Nepal act as a starting point to strengthen relations?

The Landmark Visit

The visit has been quite successful in building faith and cooperation between the two countries. With this historical visit, both nations are hoping for a boost in the bilateral; especially in the energy sector. Modi assured that India does not want free electricity, and instead intends to purchase it. This proposal from

India would have reduced apprehensions amongst the Nepalese. They can negotiate the prices, and that may even find her a place amongst the developed countries' list in future.

Modi discussed 51 agendas in the joint commission meeting with his Nepali counterpart Sushil Koirala. Furthermore, a working team has been formed to finalise, discuss and engage in dialogue over the agendas raised in this meeting. This implies that both the countries intend to implement decisions in swift manner.

Modi's address to Nepal, which he began in in the Nepali language, and where he talked about his close relations with the country, earned him positive responses from the country's parliamentarians. He also gave his 'HIT' formula for Nepal, where H: Highways, I: Information ways and T: Transmission ways, which too received positive feedback. Additionally, Modi's decision to renegotiate the 1950 India-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty nears resetting ties with the country.

What are India's Objectives?

India's decision to sanction \$1billion in aid to Nepal is a good step towards economic assistance and cooperation. Nepal has the world's second-largest hydroelectric power potential. Its geographical proximity to India will work favourably to assuage the water and electricity problems in India. India will benefit from Nepal's estimated hydel power potential of at least 40,000 MW – of which Kathmandu has developed only approximately 600 MW of hydropower. This means a bulk of the economically feasible generation of hydropower has not been realised yet. If this could be realised with the extended aid, it will prove beneficial for both Nepal and India in future.

Second, sandwiched between India and China, Nepal has strategic importance. China's investments in Nepal as a part of its policy has provided direct strategic connectivity between China and Nepal via the Tibet route. This poses a threat to India's internal security of India as, with this, the Chinese forces will have some extra easier access routes into India – which New Delhi does not want. Therefore, India is making attempts to enter Kathmandu's good books so as to advance its respective strategic goals of combating insurgency due to cross border linkages.

Third, China has always tried to weaken India's influence in Nepal. Therefore, India always fears its neighbours reaching out to outsiders for help and playing against it – and tries to maintain its hold in South Asia. The Indian prime minister picking Nepal as the destination for his second official visit since assuming office is therefore not a mere coincidence.

Finally, Nepal is not very strong, economically. It directly benefits from its good relations with China and India with regard to infrastructure investment. Its road network is growing but there is an enormous need for more investment. China can make this investment any time to strengthen its political status quo in South Asia but India wishes to do so to keep its position in the region strong.

Moreover, whatever be the reason for India's decision to sanction the \$1billion aid to Nepal, there is a ray of hope for the bilateral relations. Although the visit was a major breakthrough in the bilateral, both sides still need to do a lot of homework to actually convert words into action. Filling up the Ambassador's position in Nepali embassy in New Delhi – that has been vacant for the past three years – will be a good start. This will help ease and speed-up talks and negotiations, taking the bilateral to new heights. The decision to renegotiation of the 1950 India-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty is an excellent start, but until it really happens, we must keep our fingers crossed and hope for the best.

India's Northeast and the Look East Policy: Challenging Established Notions

27 August 2014

Ruhee Neog

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Subir Bhaumik, in a June 2014 paper published by the Observer Research Foundation, outlines, in much detail, the challenges and prospects of looking East through the Northeast, i.e. comprehensively locating India's Northeast in its Look East Policy (LEP). Bhaumik argues that although "India will have to try to use the Northeast as a land bridge to Southeast Asia....India and its economy will largely have to 'look east' through the sea into Southeast Asia for trade and human movement for a wide variety of reasons." While he makes a compelling case for the variety of reasons identified above, there is a sense, as with most of the literature on the subject, of a tendency to favour political statements over actual policy formulation, and an unquestioning faith in the conceptualisation of the approach of "looking east through the Northeast."

This review argues that the larger problem is with the nature of the conceptualisation itself, which sees India's Northeast as a "land bridge" to connect the country's mainland with its Southeast Asian neighbours. Bhaumik starts his paper with this statement: "Since the early 1990s, India has been seeking to situate the country's troubled Northeast at the heart of what eventually evolved into its so-called 'Look East' policy." He however also writes that this reorientation "has led Indian policy-makers and analysts to revise their attitudes on the country's long troubled Northeast," presenting a contradiction in terms. One statement claims the centrality of the Northeast, another re-affirms that the LEP came first, and a change in official attitudes towards the Northeast followed.

In any case, that the LEP is centred on the Northeast is not strictly true: the decision to reorient India's foreign policy towards its eastern borders came first, and the strategic location of the Northeast, useful for the implementation of this new direction, came as a necessary corollary. The Northeast has historically been considered a means to an end – the successful implementation of the LEP – and herein lies the problem. The many problems identified with the Northeast in the context of the LEP are symptomatic of the unequal focus on forward as well as backward integration and connectivity, which implies that internal developments must be concomitant to external developments. Admittedly, this is due a variety of limitations as identified in the paper: physical terrain, violent conflicts, lack of proper infrastructure and so on. However, to claim that New Delhi is "driven as much by domestic as by foreign policy concerns to 'Look East'" grants no negative agency to the Centre, whose efforts (or lack of) at backward integration have been given much more merit than actually due.

Viewing the Northeast as a "land bridge" has also led to the fear that development will pass through without doing much good to the region itself. The author takes note of the multiple insurgencies that have held up development in the past and continue to do so (to a lesser degree, although this is not mentioned), that have also eaten into "vital resources" that could have been more gainfully used. However, he does not take note of the problem of funds not reaching their recipients due to the ubiquitous corruption in the seven states. Another issue – that of inter-state politicking – based primarily on the notion of Assam's primacy due to which the other Northeastern states are not granted equal focus, is also not discussed.

Bhaumik also talks about the opening of the defunct Stilwell Route, on which the debate is split. This is an ambitious project, and focus on this can be at the expense of sidelining the other roads/trade points that are already in existence. This attention accorded to Stilwell Road speaks volumes of the 'enclavisation' of Assam in matters of the Northeast. It is a widely acknowledged fact that of all the states in the Northeast, Assam enjoys the most political clout at the Centre. It is therefore little wonder that Stilwell Road, which is the only cross-border route that gives Assam a starring role, has garnered so much scrutiny despite lying in a state of utter disrepair for decades.

To illustrate the opposition to the Stilwell route, Bhaumik recognises the "strange security mindset" of Indian military officials who think that this could allow China great advantages in the event of a conventional war with India. However, he does not challenge the notion that "trade officials say the Stilwell road could be used by China to dump its goods on Northeast India and through it to the rest of the country." The reality is that Chinese goods have already infiltrated the Indian market through the large volume of informal trade that takes place at the border. In this paper therefore, while concessions are

made for a wide range of problems in seeking to situate the Northeast in the LEP, the 'what' has been accorded much more focus than the 'why'.

India and Bangladesh: The Northeast Thrust

27 August 2014

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The Narendra Modi Government appears bent on a new thrust to boost ties with Bangladesh with Northeast India as the key bridgehead from where to launch economic initiatives beneficial to both nations. Sushma Swaraj's first stand-alone visit as the External Affairs Minister was to Dhaka in June where she primarily sought to remove the trust deficit between the two populous neighbours, and, as a goodwill gesture, offered visa relaxation to children below the age of 13, and citizens above the age of 65. Ground prepared, it was time for her deputy in the Ministry of External Affairs, Gen (Retd) VK Singh, to visit Bangladesh (23-24 August 2014). The point to be noted here is that Gen VK Singh is also the Minister for Development of North Eastern Region or DoNER, and apart from the business delegation he was heading, he was accompanied by government leaders from the Northeast, including the Chief Minister of Meghalaya.

That the Modi Government is keen on consolidating and cementing ties with India's neighbours is apparent from its decision to improve the quality of relationship with Bangladesh and involving the Northeastern states bordering that country in the endeavour. It was for this reason that Gen Singh chaired a meeting with the Chief Ministers of the Northeastern states in Guwahati just prior to his Dhaka visit. Manik Sarkar, the Chief Minister of Tripura, which shares a 856km long border with Bangladesh, once again voiced the need for transit and trans-shipment facilities including road, rail and waterways connectivity through Bangladesh to the otherwise landlocked Northeast. He urged India's intervention in persuading Dhaka to allow multi-modal transportation of goods through Bangladesh with Ashuganj as the port of call, including a related infrastructure boost. Tripura's desire to have the waterways access through Bangladesh, in fact, is a demand voiced by the entire Northeastern region, a vast area of 270,000 square kilometres snapped from the Indian mainland after the country's partition.

If Delhi or the Northeastern states have their own wish lists, Dhaka too expects India to get a few things done to its satisfaction. For instance, when Gen Singh called on Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, she stressed the need for India to seal the Teesta Water-Sharing Treaty at the earliest possible. Dhaka is also expecting New Delhi to ratify the Land Boundary Agreement that would allow the two countries to exchange land enclaves. The BJP in Assam, going by the local public mood against transfer of land, has reservations on the ratification of this Agreement. True, the Modi Government enjoys a majority in the Lok Sabha but given the fact that the BJP is hoping to consolidate its position in states like West Bengal, the party is against ignoring local sentiments on a number of issues, including the Teesta deal. Therefore, the attempt at reaching a consensus.

Trade and commerce, besides connectivity, have been the buzzwords during Gen Singh's Bangladesh visit. He said India wants to further deepen trade ties with Bangladesh. "There is plenty of scope to expand Bangladesh's trade in India, particularly in the Northeastern region," Gen Singh said. It is commonly accepted that the economies of both India and Bangladesh can benefit immensely with enhanced bilateral trade and investments. India-Bangladesh trade amounted to a total of NR 31450.51 Crores during 2012-13, which, significantly, was only 0.73 per cent of India's total trade. The trade, however, is increasing over the years, but the balance of trade is heavily tilted towards India. This situation needs to change. India is now the third largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP). Bangladesh needs to take advantage of a bigger economy existing side by side. It has to make efforts to tap the large Indian market. The Indian government also needs to overcome challenges in infrastructure, business environment and trade restrictions in order for trade and investment to flow between the two nations.

Bangladesh is slowly becoming an attractive investment destination for Indian companies. Indian investors have further started looking towards investing in Bangladesh after the signing of the Bilateral

Investment Protection and Promotion Agreement (BIPPA) between India and Bangladesh in 2009. Both public and private sector companies of India have invested in various projects in Bangladesh. The sectors in which these companies have invested include power, transmission lines, telecom, textiles, chemicals and pharmaceutical, glass, plastics and engineering. Indian investments in Bangladesh stand at US\$2.5 billion (till 2012). These investments have created 51,653 jobs in Bangladesh. Till December 2012, 270 direct and joint venture proposals from India had been registered with the Board of Investment, Bangladesh.

Dhaka may have cracked down on Northeast Indian insurgent groups operating out of Bangladesh and facilitated their handover to Indian authorities, but now the two governments need to remove the bottlenecks in trade and connectivity. While India can further improve the export and investment climate for Bangladesh, Dhaka can formalise its decision to let India use its Chittagong and Mongla ports for goods traffic to the Northeast. The need of the hour for both India and Bangladesh is to improve infrastructure along the border and connectivity. Soft power diplomacy can, of course, help improve the man-on-the-street opinion on both sides about each other's countries.

India and the Charm Offensive in Nepal: Modi's Magic

27 August 2014

Subin Nepal

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To give a boost to improving India's relations with its neighbours, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Nepal for his second official state visit. Making it the first official visit from an Indian Prime Minister in 17 years, Modi was very clear in expressing his intentions of increased regional cooperation. While in Nepal, Modi seems to have utilised every chance to express his willingness to work with the country's government on several intricate issues.

Modi's speech at the Nepali parliament received particularly positive feedback as the first part, on his close relations with the country, was delivered in Nepali. During the two-day visit, Modi seems to have created an overall positive image of Indian leadership among the general population as well as the political leadership. Exploring the details of how exactly Modi was able to achieve this overwhelmingly positive feedback could reveal more about Modi's 'magic'.

Modi seems to have used several populist tactics during his visit to Nepal. The first one came when he stopped the car carrying him from the airport to his hotel and shook hands with people on the street - this was a major security breach, though some experts claim it may have been staged. Regardless, Modi quickly established himself as someone with the willingness to risk his security to meet people on the ground - a personal touch to his diplomatic mission.

The other major and possibly the most favoured act came when Modi spoke in Nepali. While addressing the parliament of Nepal, Modi started his speech in Nepali and went on for about two minutes before switching to Hindi. This is a rare occurrence as Indian politicians resort to Hindi for speeches - which is criticised as an 'Indian imperialist' action of assuming that all Nepalis are able to speak Hindi. This time was no different - Modi eventually resorted to Hindi for the rest of the speech. However, the first two minutes of broken Nepali was enough to convince Nepalis that he came with an agenda of friendship and was making a genuine effort by going as far as learning the language of the people he was addressing.

Modi avoided political disaster and received even more favourable reviews from the general public and the opposing factions in the parliament - mainly the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPNM) - once he rejected any possibility of meeting the ousted King Gyanendra Shah. To those worried about the BJP's support to the Nepali monarchy, this was a clear message in the other direction. Modi was successful in keeping BJP's Hindu right philosophies out of that particular conversation, which hinted at non-interference.

During a meeting with the Madhesi leaders, Modi was clear about his disinterest in ethnicity-based federalism in Nepal. This may have put him in some disagreement with the Madhesi leaders and the UCPN-M, but he was certainly able to tap into the popular view of geography-based federalism. Modi's overall language made it clear that he aligned himself with the majority on this particular issue and his clear message did not leave any room for doubt. Even more surprising was how the UCPN-M, the staunchest critic of the Indian establishment, quickly found itself praising Modi's proposals.

The Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty 1950 was at the forefront of the UCPN-M's criticism of the Indian establishment before Modi's visit. However, Modi surprised the UCPN-M when he showed his willingness to renegotiate the treaty. UCPN-M's previous prime ministers have shown little-to-no ability to renegotiate the terms of the treaty - instead using it as a measure to create anti-India sentiment. Modi's call to renegotiate the treaty was able to debunk the propaganda machine of the UCPN-M while amassing public support for India.

Finally, Modi offered his prayers at Pashupatinath temple - the most important shrine for Nepali Hindus. This was followed by the announcement of a large donation to the temple by the Indian government. Nepal is a Hindu-majority country, and this action was naturally well-received.

While Modi was obviously able to gather very warm feedback from the Nepali population, the demographic he reached out to reveals a certain pattern. Modi seems to have focused mostly on the majority - while almost completely ignoring the minority factions in the country regardless of their political and religious affiliations.

Modi's largest plan while in Nepal was to convince Nepal's leadership and public about the Power Trade Accord (PTA) - which he clearly seems to have been successful at. He said exactly what Nepalis wanted to hear - whether it was praising the bravery of the Gurkhas or relating to Nepal at a personal level. However, somewhere in his political orchestration, the larger discussion of the PTA seems to have been lost from the minds of the general public and even the leaders. All things said, it is of course too early to make definitive pronouncements on the success of the visit without any substantial results.

Indian Army & Operational Preparedness: Agenda for the New Chief

26 August 2014

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On taking over as the COAS from General Bikram Singh, General Dalbir Singh Suhag said his priorities would be to "enhance operational preparedness and the effectiveness of the Indian Army." He also said that force modernisation, infrastructure development, optimisation of human resources and the welfare of personnel are issues that are close to his heart.

In March 2012, General VK Singh, the then COAS, had written to the Prime Minister about "critical hollowness" in the army's operational preparedness. He had pointed out large-scale deficiencies in weapons systems, ammunition and equipment in service in the army and the fact that many of the weapons and equipment were obsolete or bordering on obsolescence. In particular, he had brought out that the artillery and air defence arms needed the infusion of modern guns, missiles and radars and the aviation corps required new helicopters to replace the ageing fleet.

Two consecutive reports of the CAG of December 2011 and November 2012 brought out that the state of defence preparedness was a cause for serious anxiety. The Standing Committee on Defence (SCD) in Parliament has also noted these developments with concern several times. In an unprecedented move, the SCD insisted on meeting the three Chiefs to take stock of operational preparedness. The SCD has repeatedly urged the government to increase the defence budget to enable the armed forces to undertake meaningful modernisation.

Military modernisation has two major facets: the replacement of obsolete and obsolescent weapons and equipment with modern ones, which results in increasing combat effectiveness; and the qualitative upgradation of combat capabilities through the acquisition and induction of force multipliers. General Suhag, like his predecessors, faces a major dilemma: given small budgets, how can the army improve operational preparedness while simultaneously making concerted efforts to modernise? Logically, operational preparedness takes precedence over modernisation. The art of military leadership lies in finding an optimum balance so that all efforts that are made to enhance operational preparedness also contribute substantively to modernisation.

The most critical operational deficiency is the inadequacy of artillery firepower due to the obsolescence of guns and mortars. No modernisation has taken place since the Bofors 155mm howitzer was purchased from Sweden in the mid-1980s. The 'night blindness' of the army's mechanised forces needs to be rectified immediately. The F-INSAS (future infantry soldier as a system) programme for the modernisation of infantry battalions must be implemented on an urgent basis.

Air defence guns and missiles and their radar systems are reported to be 97 per cent obsolescent. The Aviation Corps urgently needs 197 light helicopters. The old and inefficient intelligence, reconnaissance, surveillance and target acquisition systems available today adversely impact command and control and 'targeting' during war. Hence, the C4I2SR system needs a complete overhaul. The logistics support system also needs to be revamped, with the concept of 'just in time logistics' being implemented.

The new COAS will preside over the modernisation process during the remaining three years of the 12th Defence Plan, including the raising of 17 Corps for employment on the border with China. This Corps, being raised as a 'strike corps' for the mountains, is expected to cost INR 64,000 crore to raise and equip over a period of five to seven years. Approximately 90,000 new personnel will be added to the army's manpower strength, including those in ancillary support and logistics units. New weapons and equipment will have to be procured for the divisions, brigades and battalions of this Corps. It will be a retrograde step to milk these from existing battalions to equip new raisings.

Recruiting additional manpower of the requisite qualifications has so far not posed any problems for the world's third largest volunteer army. However, finding officers for 17 Corps will be a major challenge as there is an ongoing deficiency of approximately 10,000 officers in the army.

General Suhag wishes to ensure that relatively softer issues like human resources development and the welfare of serving personnel and veterans are not neglected. Morale is adversely affected if these issues are not appropriately handled. This has been a rather contentious issue in the past and will require sage handling. Finally, civil-military relations have not been good in the recent past and need to be improved.

If one may take the liberty of using a few well-known American buzzwords and catch-phrases, the 'revolution in military affairs' had whooshed by the Indian army in the 1990s. The 'transformation' process that followed must be gradually implemented even though it is a decade late - primarily due to budgetary constraints. The COAS will be responsible for the transformation of the army to a 'network-centric' force capable of executing 'effects-based operations' over the full spectrum of conflict. General Suhag must forge a light, lethal and wired army that can fight and win India's wars on the battlefields of the 21st century - jointly with the navy and the air force.

Ebola: Concerns for India

13 August 2014

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Should India be worried about the outbreak of Ebola virus in Western Africa that is more than 9000 km away? Is the situation so alarming? What is Ebola all about? What are the counter-measures required?

In an increasingly globalised world, no distance is far away. It is a matter of few hours by direct flight. The virus has been spreading fast. Thankfully, it is not an airborne disease. It is however communicable. Since the first case of outbreak reported in February 2014 in Guinea, the disease has spread to Sierra Leone, Liberia and recently to Nigeria, all along the West African coast. The main vector is the traveller, both within and outside the continent. Saudi Arabia has reported a case of an infected person, a returnee from Sierra Leone. The US has airlifted two of its infected citizens; Spain had flown an affected priest who has since passed. Usually an inland phenomenon, it is intriguing why the Ebola virus is spreading along the coast this time. The current outbreak has so far claimed over 900 lives, in addition to 2000 infected; more deadly than all the hitherto Ebola outbreaks. The cause for worry is the fact that the Ebola disease has neither a vaccine nor curative medicine; once infected there is only a 10 per cent chance of survival.

The disease took its name from the Ebola River, the site of the first outbreak in 1976 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (then Zaire). Genus Ebolavirus is one of three members of the filovirus family (the other two being Marburg Virus and Cueva Virus). Interestingly, Ebola Virus comprises five distinct species: Bundibugyo ebolavirus (BDBV), Zaire ebolavirus (EBOV), Sudan ebolavirus (SUDV), Reston ebolavirus (RESTV) and Taï Forest ebolavirus (TAFV). The present outbreak is EBOV, considered the most dangerous of all. The incubation period is 21 days.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), symptoms of the disease include the sudden onset of fever, intense weakness, muscle pain, headache and sore throat followed by vomiting, diarrhoea, rash, impaired kidney and liver function, and in some cases, both internal and external bleeding. Patients report low white blood cell and platelet counts and elevated liver enzymes. These symptoms are broadly similar to one or the other diseases like malaria, typhoid fever, shigellosis, cholera, leptospirosis, plague, rickettsiosis, relapsing fever, meningitis, hepatitis and other viral haemorrhagic fevers. This makes diagnosis all the more difficult.

Ebola is a zoonotic disease transmitted to people by wild animals or by other infected patients. Fruit bats are considered Ebola's 'reservoir host', in which a pathogen or virus lives inconspicuously without causing symptoms. That means the geographic distribution of inhabitation of fruit bats is prone to Ebola. Ebola is introduced into the human population through close contact with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected animals. Ebola then spreads in the community through human-to-human transmission, with infection resulting from direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes) with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected people, and indirect contact with environments contaminated with such fluids. Burial ceremonies in which mourners have direct contact with the body of the deceased person can also play a role in the transmission of Ebola.

The outbreak is more concerning for India because of its increasing footprints in Africa. Nearly 50,000 Indian citizens are working in the affected West African countries alone. They range from businessmen, labourers, professionals and peacekeepers who travel back home frequently. India-Africa trade is about USD 35 billion. Oil is an important component of the trade, especially from Nigeria, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Sudan, which are Ebola-prone countries.

India has stepped up preventive measures like screening and tracking of passengers originating or transiting from the region and travel advisory to defer non-essential travel to Africa, and rightly so. But this is not enough. All transit destinations like Dubai need to be alerted; flights and passengers from these transits should be screened. Maldives has already issued similar health alerts. Sri Lanka needs to follow as Colombo airport is a major travel hub. Oil-tankers and other merchant vessels have to be sanitised adequately. It is also important to raise awareness among the common man on the risk factors. Thorough cooking of animal products like milk and meat is advisable. Then, there are protective measures that require to be adopted by people closer to the patients like avoiding close physical contacts, wearing gloves and appropriate personal protective equipment when taking care of ill patients at home, regular hand washing with disinfectant after visiting patients, and prompt and safe cremation of those died of the disease. If ignored, consequences can be catastrophic in terms of lives, socio-economic disruption and spread to other countries. The longer the outbreak in West Africa persists, the more the chances for the Ebola virus to mutate and adapt. That is the main worry in the long-run.

The BRICS Development Bank: A Game-Changer?

7 July 2014

Sonia Hukil

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At the 2014 BRICS summit held in Brazil from 14-16 July, the five member countries agreed to the creation of a New Development Bank (NDB) and Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA). Will this move enhance the BRICS' economic clout by countering the hegemony of Western-run financial systems? Will it be a game-changer?

Significance of the BRICS Bank

The NDB will have an initial subscribed capital of \$50 billion, which premises on an equity principle wherein the five signatories will contribute \$10 billion each towards the \$100 billion bank corpus. The capital base will fund infrastructure and sustainable development projects in the BRICS countries and eventually in the rest of the developing countries. The CRA is a fund pool to aide countries in hedging against short-term liquidity pressures. In contrast to the NDB, the CRA will be unequally funded by the BRICS – with China, contributing 41 per cent, at the helm. These arrangements are expected to have massive economic and political impacts.

The formation of the NDB is proclaimed to be just, inclusive and forward-looking. It provides an equal voting status to the founding members and offers loans for assistance without attached conditions. This is envisioned in order to deepen present and long-term cooperation amongst the BRICS nations and further strengthen South-South economic cooperation.

Clearly, the BRICS' main motive behind these initiatives is to press for a larger role in the international economic order that is otherwise centered on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). The NDB intends to supplement, and, perhaps later, supplant these multilateral institutions for a new financial architecture. The BRICS nations are craving for more control over their own resources as well as for greater representation in order to democratise the framework of multilateral funding systems.

A Game-Changer?

Will the BRICS bank succeed in challenging the Western hold on global finance? Or will it have a mere symbolic and rhetorical impact?

In proposition at least, the BRICS hold the financial capacity to counter the hegemony of the WB and IMF given how four of the BRICS founding members – China, India, Brazil and Russia – are the among the world's top 10 economies. Yet, the reality is riddled with complexities. The NDB's subscribed capital base and authorised lending is miniscule in comparison to the WB – which is estimated to lend approximately \$60 billion this year. Clearly, lending by the NDB will not be sufficient to make a substantial impact on the development process of emerging nations. It will be difficult for the NDB to challenge the reach and expanse of existing development institutions.

Meanwhile, through the NDB, the BRICS will continue to conduct their business using the dollar, thereby making their economies function in accordance with policies and procedures designed by the US. There is no other alternative to the dollar as it is the primary choice for financial transactions, globally. Thus, instead of controlling the global economic order, the BRICS nations likely to remain stuck in it for the near future.

Furthermore, structural disparities are likely to be a tipping point for differences amongst the BRICS. This remains the core issue for de-stabilisation of the BRICS institutions. China is not only the second largest economy in the world but also substantially larger than all the BRICS nations' economies combined. China's contributions to the CRA will be significantly more than the rest of the member-nations'. Analysts state that China will bring countries from its own sphere of influence for membership. Thus, with greater

political and economic clout, Beijing will overwhelm the institution. Fears linger that more than being a jointly-held banking system, the NDB will demonstrate China's individual supremacy.

Moreover, the economies of the BRICS member-nations are projected to a downturn in the foreseeable future. Their future growth will be less remarkable as compared to the past due to consistent economic troubles like inflation. Some even speculate that the next financial meltdown will come from the BRICS. Failure to sustain high growth rates will thwart the lending capacity of the BRICS and in turn augment their dependency on the WB and the IMF.

The BRICS' divergent interests, priorities, and governance systems further raise doubts on its ability to challenge the Western-dominated financial systems. Intra-BRICS dynamics too seem delicate. India-China ties have deteriorated over territorial disputes; Russia seems worried about China's growing economic influence, and South Africa's ties with China have been staggering in light of rising Chinese demands for its vital resources. The BRICS bloc therefore appears to be a fragile partnership of convenience that may possibly encounter demise in the future given China's hold on power. The initiative taken during the summit is ground-breaking. However it is doubtful to envision the BRICS bank's success in replacing the existing development banks and re-balancing the global economic order.

India has high expectations from the BRICS bank. However, policymakers in New Delhi should not be complacent with its standing within the bank. India must tread cautiously and decisively along the BRICS road, and, if needed, must not shy away from taking a different turn altogether.

India-Bangladesh: Can the Maritime Boundary Resolution Rebuild Faith?

24 July 2014

Sonia Hukil

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The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague recently rendered its judgment in the India-Bangladesh maritime boundary dispute in the Bay of Bengal on 7 July. The Arbitral tribunal unanimously ruled in favour of Bangladesh, awarding 19,467 sq km of the disputed 25,602 sq km in the Bay of Bengal, leaving 6,135 sq km for India. The award is binding on both the neighbouring countries, without scope for appeal. The verdict, marking an end to the long-standing bilateral maritime dispute, paves way for Bangladesh to explore for oil and gas reserves in the Bay of Bengal.

What are the implications of the settlement for India? Is there a potential way ahead for India-Bangladesh relations?

Win-Win Situation

The verdict is Bangladesh's second successive victory over its maritime concerns post 2012, when the UN tribunal ruled in favour of Bangladesh in its discord with Myanmar. Although India lost maritime area larger than the state of West Bengal, New Delhi welcomed the tribunal's ruling as a matter of satisfaction for numerous reasons.

First, in the delimitation process, Bangladesh's claim on New Moore Island (or South Talpatti Island as referred to by Bangladesh) could not be substantiated. The PCA acknowledged India's sovereignty over the island and granted it concomitant access to the Hariabhanga River. New Moore Island has been a traditional point of contention between the two countries since 1971. India believes the delimitation has been carried out in an arbitrary manner. Nonetheless, control of the disputed New Moore Island is viewed as a significant gain since the region is pitted to be a reservoir of oil and natural gas reserves. The Hariabhanga River is expected to hold almost twice the amount of hydrocarbon reserves than the Krishna-Godavari Basin in Andhra Pradesh. This ruling has enabled India to explore and exploit these potential oil and gas reserves alongside other mineral resources that could help strengthen its economy.

Second, the settlement has resulted in a clear delineation of the disputed territory allowing both parties to legally access the maritime resources within their respective economic zones. Offshore-drilled hydrocarbons are India's the least explored energy options. The ruling provides India with the momentum to pursue offshore exploitation, either single-handedly or in partnership. Furthermore, the UN award has been openly welcomed by the Indian fisherman in West Bengal and Odisha as well as Bangladeshi fishermen as they will now enjoy access to miles of open sea that was unavailable to them for the past 40 years. Fishermen from both sides will be able to secure a bounty when fish near the coastal areas gets depleted.

Third, the tribunal's award has split the maritime area in India's favour. The total estimated area under question was 3, 66, 854 sq km. India claimed the area to be divided in a ratio of 1:3.44, while its Bangladeshi counterpart asserted for a 1:1.52 ratio. The tribunal split the disputed area in 1:2.81 ratio – which is substantially closer to India's claim.

Possible Way Ahead for India-Bangladesh Relationship

The Bay of Bengal maritime boundary settlement is a historic development in the 40 years of dispute between India and Bangladesh. Although, both the parties fell short of their maritime expectations, the settlement is likely to strengthen and intensify their bilateral ties. The verdict will enhance mutual understanding and cooperation between the two neighbours in maritime sector activities such as exploration of offshore resources, for mutual gains. India and Bangladesh can now cooperate extensively in the conservation of the natural heritage in the Sundarbans. The ruling also paves the way for enhancing economic development of the maritime area by increasing the possibilities of joint projects becoming feasible – aiding both New Delhi and Dhaka. It is thus a win-win situation for the countries as expressed by their foreign ministries.

From a political standpoint, the maritime settlement is likely to lessen insecurities and improve the trust factor between the two countries. This instance should be treated as a lesson, and should encourage the two countries to cooperate on other long-pending issues of dispute – the Land Boundary Agreement and Teesta water sharing agreement.

Furthermore, both parties' open acceptance of the UN ruling is likely to make them look like respectable countries that accept international legal practices. Moreover, for India this can counter perceptions of attaining regional dominance and distinguish it from an expansionist China. Hopefully, this will also be an example for other countries with disputed territories to follow suit.

Finally, the proliferation of diplomatic solutions in the bilateral relationship between India and Bangladesh, although slow, has generated optimism for amicable relations between the two neighbours. The ground for a steady progress in the bilateral has been laid. Hopefully, the two South Asian neighbours will continue giving peace and diplomacy a chance.

Combating Maoism: Lessons from Jharkhand

24 July 2014

Saneya Arif

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According to the Jharkhand assessment 2014 report by the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) data base, Jharkhand today stands second, after Andhra Pradesh, in countering Maoism in the country. This commentary tries to analyse the positive changes that shows a decline in Maoism in the state, changes in the central government's policy responsible for the aforementioned achievement, and the lessons that other states of India can learn from Jharkhand to combat Maoism in their states.

What are the positive changes?

According to the SATP assessment, the figures show that the total number of Maoist related incidents in the state has come down to 4 incidents in 2014 from 383 incidents in 2013. No death has been recorded among the civilians and security force personnel in the current year. In 2013, the deaths stood at 120 and 30 respectively. There has also been a decrease in the number of Maoist deaths, which has come down to 2 deaths in 2014 from 12 in 2013.

The report also records that Maoist attacks on economic targets such as railways, telephone exchanges, mines, transmission poles, panchayat bhawans and school buildings have also reduced, which testify that Maoists have not been involved in any major incidents in Jharkhand after 2013. According to former Director General of Police (DGP) GS Rath, the police force in Jharkhand today has the greatest number of mine resistant vehicles, which has helped in bringing down the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) killings due to land mines laid by Maoist outfits. Electoral success in the state allegedly owes much to the nexus between politicians and Maoists, which has also contributed to Maoist mainstreaming. Publicly, however, politicians present an anti-Maoist agenda, as observed by Professor BK Sinha of the Political Science department of St Xavier's College, Ranchi. During election season, Maoists release statements about not voting, which prompt the politicians to initiate bargaining with them.

What changes in central government policy could have led to this success?

In 2006, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called Maoism the biggest challenge to India's internal security. He stated that any development in tribal areas must also ensure that the tribal population has a stake in it, even after it has been adequately compensated for displacement. Jharkhand, after Andhra Pradesh, has been the only state to take this very seriously. Soon after, the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) was implemented in Jharkhand. It ensured rights over minor forest produce to Gram Sabhas and removed interference by the government departments. The government of Jharkhand has also achieved remarkable success in persuading around a dozen hardcore Maoists to join mainstream society by ensuring their rehabilitation through the programme, Nayi Disha.

According to Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) Pravin Kumar, the volume of CRPF deployment in Jharkhand, which used to be three battalions six years ago, has today increased to fourteen battalions. According to him, the state government has taken the setting up of a unified command for joint action against Maoism seriously. Even the funds received under the integrated action plan (IAP) for development in the Maoism-affected areas in Jharkhand have been fully utilised.

What lesson can other states learn from the Jharkhand experience?

Other Maoists-affected states can learn valuable lessons from operation Anaconda conducted by the state in Saranda forest. Paramilitary forces established camps here for the first time. In Saranda, massive recoveries were made and at least five Maoist training camps were busted. As a result, the outfit was disbanded and all senior leaders left the area. Similar camps were also established near the Chandwa-Daltenganj route and with a similar level of success.

Furthermore, the government of Jharkhand has laid stress on police modernisation. It strengthened its intelligence, granted promotions to personnel, imparted training and strengthened police stations in affected areas, all of which also brought down the number of kangaroo courts operating in the area.

India: XVII Mountain Corps

23 July 2014

Amit Saksena

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On 1 January 2014, the flag of the newly sanctioned XVII Corps was hoisted at its interim headquarters in Ranchi, which kick-started the process of fielding a credible Indian deterrent force on the Northeastern front, from Arunachal Pradesh to Ladakh in Jammu & Kashmir. In a largely Pakistan-centric architecture of troop distribution, this Mountain Strike Corps (MSC) is the first China-oriented offensive formation to

be deployed by India. However, based on the Indian experience in weapon procurement, as well as the disjointed collaboration between auxiliary agencies, the viability of this endeavour is doubtful. The feasibility of playing catch-up, at the expense of modernisation and strategic development on other fronts, must be validated by the Government of India.

Fiscal Constraints

Monetary apprehension is a very strong factor against the operationalisation of this corps, and an analysis of the 2014-15 defense budget validate these concerns. The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has reportedly commissioned a massive INR 64,000 crore over the next 7 financial years to float the MSC. This fund will cover all the major expenses of the project, from infrastructure to recruitment and logistical expenditure of the additional 80,000 troops that the Army intends to commit to this corps. With an alarmingly high revenue expenditure (almost 82 per cent) vis-à-vis its existing force of 12,00,000 troops, the addition of a further 80,000 troops will send the fiscal budget through the ceiling. Out of the INR 73,444 crore capital allocation for the three forces, 96 per cent has already been earmarked for installments on previous purchases, leaving a meager INR 2955 crore free for new acquisitions. Compared to the annual INR 8,000 crore needed to float the MSC, there is no overt indication of where the rest of the money is coming from.

Logistical Development and Topographical Constraints

Till very recently, one of the major stumbling blocks in military infrastructure development along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has been the delay in environmental clearance. This project will require close collaboration between the Ministries of Finance and Environment, the Border Roads Organisation, and the Indian Army and Air Force (IAF). It should be noted that China presently fields five fully-operational airbases, an extensive rail network and over 58,000 km of roads in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). This allows Beijing to move over 30 divisions (each with over 15,000 soldiers) to the LAC, outnumbering Indian forces by at least 3:1.

In addition to the roads, the Army and the Air Force will require credible contractors to take on the task of building and developing military-centric installments in the region. High-altitude bases for light and stationary artillery, barracks for troops, ammunition, intelligence and logistics nodes, and training centres will have to be developed. The inhospitable weather conditions in which contractors may be unwilling to work can prove to be a serious roadblock. For instance, since 2009 the IAF has been trying to recruit contractors for upgrading the existing Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) along the Chinese border, with no success.

Empowering the Mountain Strike Corps

India, despite being the largest importer of defense equipment, does not have an ironed-out procurement policy. The military industrial complex in India fares worse than most other countries.

A Hasty Decision?

Many strategists and defense personnel have noted the impetuous nature of the decision to instate a MSC. If Chinese incursions have acted as a catalyst for raising this strike corps, then the government should have better evaluated other alternatives before making this decision. As articulated by Rear Adm (Retd) K Raja Menon, "A geographically limited one axis offensive will not destabilise the PLA, but a flotilla of nuclear submarines and a three carrier air group in the Indian Ocean can economically cripple mainland China."

Another concern is the increasingly 'infantry heavy' nature of the Indian Army. Most major militaries of the world today are concentrating on modernisation efforts rather than adding extra boots on the ground. In the last three decades, the PLA has reduced and restructured its divisional formations to slash troop count by almost half. The Ministry of Defense's ambitious Future-Infantry Soldier as a System (F-INSAS)

programme initiated in 2007 is past its 2013 deadline as the government continues to spend on projects such as the MSC.

Indeed, looking ahead, a conventional war between India and China in the future appears to be a unlikely prospect. China recently overtook the UAE as India's largest economic partner, with bilateral trade reaching US\$49.5 billion halfway through the 2013-14 fiscal year. Both India and China also have in place countless bilateral treaties, and are collaborators in many international forums on economic development and scientific research. A border dispute spawning into a war would be detrimental to both. In the same vein, the concept of a MSC against China is a necessary routine threat assessment exercise, and should go forward. What is paramount to this endeavour is a clear and transparent synergy of all the involved parties, and a well-structured, time-stamped blueprint for its successful implementation and operationalisation.

FDI in Indian Defence: Implications of Raise in the Cap

14 July 2014

Radhakrishna Rao

Freelancer, Bangalore

The May 2014 change in the Indian leadership where the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi took charge signalled a vastly stepped-up commitment to India's crisis prone defence sector with particular reference to attaining self reliance in the defence manufacturing. In fact, the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) election manifesto had made a strong and specific commitment to end

India's dependence imported arms and ammunition by boosting domestic production of high performance fighting equipment. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is already considered one of the 'game changers' for boosting India's home-grown capability in the production of state-of-the art combat systems. In fact, the 26% FDI cap on defence sector that former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government had failed to upwardly revise was considered far from an attractive proposition for the global defence and aerospace conglomerates to invest in India's defence production sector. But then whether hiking the FDI cap to 49% by the NDA government in its maiden budget presented in the Indian parliament on 10 July would prod foreign investors to pass on their latest genre technologies to Indian partners is not an easy guess at this moment.

Far from being a magic wand to help India build a home-grown defence industry based on indigenous expertise, an increased FDI could be considered no more than a catalyst for the Indian defence producers to face the challenges of designing and developing high-end, complex fighting equipment with domestic resources. In this context, Rahul Gangal, Principal, Roland Berger Strategy Consultants says, "I think this is a positive step though it may not be as much of a move forward as everyone was hoping. The treatment of the balance 51% will be critical. The earlier policy at 26% FDI required 51% to be held by one resident Indian entity. It would be interesting to note what the change in that is, if any."

Indian Finance Minister and Defence Minister Arun Jaitely, while presenting the budget for 2014-15, did admit to the ignominious distinction India has achieved as the 'largest importer' of arms and fighting systems. That a country which has sent probes to Moon and Mars continues to meet 2/3rd of its defence requirements via imports stands out as a far from edifying testimony to its "poor state of defence industrial infrastructure," said Jaitely. "We are buying a substantial portion of our defence requirements directly from foreign players. Companies controlled by foreign governments and foreign private sectors are supplying our defence requirements to us at a considerable outflow of foreign exchange," he added.

Significantly, it has also been decided to continue with the policy of permitting higher FDI cap beyond the stipulated 49 per cent in the event of a foreign investor willing to part with the latest genre technologies at his command. This, however, would be subject to approval by the Cabinet Committee on Security on a case-to-case basis. For quite some time now, industry and trade bodies in India have been lobbying for facilitating an increased FDI inflow in the defence production sector. It was in 2001 that India opened its

defence production sector to private participation. However, the view of the Indian industrial sector active in defence production is that it would be naïve to expect high technology to flow into Indian industry simply because foreign firms can invest more and repatriate profits. One would therefore need to wait and watch.

India should go about building a military-industrial complex based on its long term strategic needs. At present, much of the defence production activities in India are centred on the facilities of the Defence Public Sector Undertakings and Ordnance Factories Board (OFB). Lack of direction and motivation as well as interference meant that they could come out with very few new and innovative products featuring state of the art technologies. Conversely, private sector companies, that have made a modest foray into the defence production sector, are not enthusiastic about investing in research and development to build high-end fighting systems. As such, the private sector in India's defence manufacturing would need to be encouraged and incentivised to invest in research and development through a slew of proactive measures.

There is a need for in depth evaluation of the possible long term political, geostrategic and security fallouts of an increased FDI cap in the defence production sector.

Specifically, the trade sanction and technological embargo emanating from the US and its western allies could deal a paralysing blow to a joint venture involving a partnership of a US-based defence company. Sufficient strategic safeguards should need to be built into joint ventures involving foreign participation. Otherwise the entire exercise of enhancing FDI cap in India's defence production sector could prove counterproductive, with serious consequences for the combat-readiness of the Indian defence forces. Self reliance in defence production should revolve round a long-term vision of the security threat perception faced by the country.

India-Bangladesh: UNCLOS and the Sea Boundary Dispute

14 July 2014

Harun ur Rashid

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Bangladesh went to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at The Hague on 08 October 2009 seeking judgment under the dispute clause of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The submission of documents and oral hearings from both India and Bangladesh was concluded in December 2013 and the Court officially conveyed the result to both parties on 7 July 2014.

The judgment is final and cannot be appealed against. Among the five arbitrators only the Indian arbitrator delivered a dissenting judgment. India accepted the judgment and reportedly said that the judgment would further enhance goodwill between the two countries by putting an end to a long standing issue. It went in favour of Bangladesh because Bangladesh has been awarded 19,467 sq km of the total 25,602 sq km sea area (76 per cent), leaving 6,135 sq km (24 per cent) to India. The judgment also allows Bangladesh a 200-mile exclusive economic zone, the continental shelf beyond the 200-mile economic zone and access to the open sea, thus preventing it from turning into a 'sea-locked country'. Bangladesh's awarded area reportedly includes 10 off-shore blocs in the west which were in dispute with India; 10 per cent of the six blocs went to India. It is noted that the disputed maritime area of 25,602 sq km in the Bay of Bengal with Bangladesh constitutes probably only about 3-5 per cent of the maritime area of India's vast coastline, stretching east from the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean and to the Arabian Sea in the west. For Bangladesh, the area in the west with India is 100 per cent because there is no other maritime area available for Bangladesh to its west and it is vital for Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal to have this area under its jurisdiction.

The first session on Indo-Bangladesh sea boundary talks took place in 1974 in Dhaka at the official level. Later, several meetings took place at the level of Foreign Secretaries. When the Foreign Secretaries could not resolve the differences because of the methods of delimiting the boundary between the two sides, it was elevated to the Foreign Ministers' level in 1975 but remained inconclusive. It was reported that at the

Commonwealth Summit in Jamaica in May 1975, Bangladesh President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman proposed arbitration to resolve the issue to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi but India rejected it. Although the sea boundary talks were renewed in 1978, 1982, 2008 (under the caretaker government), and in March 2009 under the Hasina government, it could not be resolved because of the differences over boundary delimitations. When the Hasina government found that the talks had stalled, it had no option but to look out for the involvement of a third party to resolve the dispute. Finally the Hasina government decided to lodge the dispute with the Court of Arbitration under Article 287 (the dispute machinery clause) of UNCLOS. India had ratified the UN Convention in 1995 and Bangladesh in 2001, and are both therefore bound by the provisions of the UNCLOS.

The judgment stands out for several following reasons. First, both Bangladesh and India have settled the maritime boundary through the legal mechanism under the UNCLOS, which demonstrates that the two countries are committed to the peaceful settlement of disputes. It is not a complete victory for Bangladesh because India has won on some issues. It is however a victory for fairness and justice. The judgment is a win for international law which both countries have always respected. Second, the judgment substantially contributes to the development of maritime international law. There was an apprehension among some jurists that judgment by the Court of Arbitration under UNCLOS would lead to the fragmentation of maritime law, but this has been found to be unfounded. Rather, the judgment reflects the great advantages of consistency and transparency by adhering to judicial precedents.

Third, the peaceful and amicable settlement of the maritime dispute between Bangladesh and India could be an example in the international arena at a time when in many parts of the world maritime disputes are emerging as major flash points. For example, in the South China Sea, disputed maritime boundaries between China and its neighbours, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines, and in the East China Sea, between South Korea and Japan and Japan and China, are causing grave tension. Finally, the judgment may assist Bangladesh to concretise the Japanese proposal for a Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B) initiative with India and Myanmar for Japanese trade and investment. It can usher in a new era of cooperation between maritime neighbours in the Bay of Bengal.

Modi's Thimpu Visit: Deepening India-Bhutan Relations

17 June 2014

Roomana Hukil

Research Officer, IRES, IPCS

In his maiden foreign visit as premier, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, recently went to Bhutan to strengthen development cooperation and further enhance economic ties. Although there are no big agreements on the anvil, the prime minister's short visit marks his high regard for the South Asian neighbourhood over the extended international community. Prime Minister Modi stated that India and Bhutan are 'made for each other', considering the historical and traditional linkages between the two.

Why is Bhutan Vital for India Today?

The visit to Bhutan exemplifies India's strategic effort to enhance cooperation with the country. Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were the other countries that were considered for the prime minister's first foreign tour. However, trans-boundary issues and bilateral concerns hindered the PM from visiting the aforementioned places.

India and Bhutan have shared the friendliest ties in the past years when compared to India's other South Asian neighbours. The country's economies are closely related to each other despite pressure and resistance from powerful countries. China, for instance, has been trying to win Bhutan over and reduce India's growing influence. However, Bhutan has made a conscious effort to avoid taking any decision contrary to India's national interests, which India is cognisant of. Significantly, fuel subsidies to Bhutan were temporarily rolled back by India in 2013. Although the decree was later revoked, the roll-back somewhat soured bilateral relations. The PM's visit may help to bring these ties back on track.

Both India and Bhutan are interdependent States. India is Bhutan's largest trading partner (99 per cent imports and 90 per cent exports), and Bhutan is an important partner because India's economy significantly relies on Bhutan for hydropower, besides other socio-political and economic overlaps. Bhutan is set to be a major source of power for India in the upcoming years. India is expected to reap dividends worth US\$2 billion by investing in the construction of three hydro-electric projects in Bhutan with a combined installed capacity of 1400 megawatts (MW) and from three other projects, totalling 3000 MW.

Moving Beyond Rhetoric

Power sector engagement has been the primary avenue for India and Bhutan in taking their relationship forward. Power diplomacy with Bhutan has been India's most successful story. However, there is a deepening divide within Bhutan on India that is hindering bilateral relations.

Besides offering to intensify cooperation on the hydropower front, Modi emphasised the essence of greater educational contacts and stated that India will double the present number of scholarships for the Bhutanese in India, worth approximately US\$ 3 million. Modi stated that India will also assist Bhutan in the setting up of a digital library that will provide access to over two million books and periodicals. He also inaugurated the Supreme Court building that was built with Indian aid. The PM promised to help Bhutan in its science and technology sector. He noted that India's satellite technology was a model that could be used by Bhutan. Besides this, he encouraged a sports meet to enhance people-to-people contact in the region.

The India-Bhutan hydropower cooperation is a classic example of successful bilateral cooperation; however, the two countries face a range of other challenges that have been straining the ties. The PM's recent visit did make a strategic mark because he covered most of the short and long-term issues that point towards further development and cooperation between the two States. However, a vital factor that was left out of the PM's agenda was the Siliguri corridor in India. The area is vital for India as it is the sole link between the Indian mainland and the Northeast. The Chumbi Valley that connects Bhutan, India and the China border is of immense geostrategic importance to the three nations for trade and commerce.

The Indian delegation should have sought to address the Siliguri corridor since road and railway connectivity is a major hindrance that disengages the border states in this region. A free trade agreement between India, China, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh is another promising avenue that was not articulated in the meeting.

The PM is set to lay the foundation stone of the 600 MW Kholongchu hydropower project, however, his visit exemplifies that India does not regard Bhutan's hydroelectric sector as the prime vantage point for future India-Bhutan relations. Both India and Bhutan comprehend that trust and public diplomacy are the primary leverages that can take the relationship forward.

India's Northeast: An Agenda for DoNER

17 June 2014

Ruhe Neog

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In interviews conducted post his appointment as the head for the Ministry for the Development of the Northeastern Region (DoNER), General (Retd) VK Singh identified certain areas for the "overall development" of the Northeast. This article will seek to discuss and give substance to two of these areas, which have thus far been mentioned preliminarily, and suggest a third.

The very first priority, which is probably already in the works, must of course be a review of the performance of the ministry - whether it has been able to fulfil its remit, and most crucially, where it might have gone wrong. This is primarily because the goals of the ministry are going to roughly be the same as before, and the changes will most likely be in the processes employed - not the 'what' but the

'how'. An assessment therefore will be of immense help in identifying how past mistakes can be avoided and in structuring the list of priorities.

Connectivity and Economic Growth

Connectivity is essential for trade, and trade for economic growth. For this, comprehensive backward and forward links with the rest of India and across the region's massive international borders are essential. Currently, connectivity on all three counts - between the Northeast states, with the rest of India, and abroad - is dismal.

General Singh also holds the portfolio of Minister of State of External Affairs, which is very interesting because the development of the Northeast necessitates to a large part the proper implementation of India's Look East Policy (LEP). There have long been complaints about how, in the enthusiasm for the LEP's success, the Northeast would merely be a spectator of the development that would pass through it without necessarily doing any good to the region itself. The dual role that General Singh has taken on is therefore a welcome move, and it is hoped that this would lead to the DoNER and the Ministry for External Affairs (MEA) working complementarily where required.

In terms of cross-border trade, the trade conducted at Moreh in Manipur and Tamu in Myanmar is instructive. It is noted that while the essential institutions are in existence, their performance leaves a lot to be desired. For instance, Moreh has both Land Customs and Currency Exchange Centres, but they are under-staffed and do not function well. Additionally, despite there being a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement between Myanmar and India, which is meant to ensure that taxation occurs only in a company's country of permanent residence, tax irregularities continue to persist. Business is therefore sought to be conducted through seaports in Kolkata, Mumbai and Singapore, even though a land access point with (theoretically) hugely reduced transport costs is available.

Another major problem is air connectivity. Proposals for Greenfield airports in the Northeast have been bandied about but come to naught, with the exception of the airport at Pakyong, Sikkim, and the future of an Open Skies Policy as introduced by the ASEAN-India Aviation Cooperation Framework, which could be a trade multiplier, is uncertain.

Infrastructure Facilitation and Investment Promotion

The problem here is not of insufficient funds but that of funds not funnelling through to their targeted beneficiaries.

The most practicable investment model for the Northeast is the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model. However, it is difficult to chart a clear trajectory in the advancements that have apparently been made, and political imperatives often mean that these projects extend indefinitely beyond their deadline or come to a halt altogether with declarations of being revived at some point in the future. The lethargic implementations of ambitious plans and inter-state politicking have held these projects back.

Image Management and Accountability

The popular perception of DoNER in the Northeast is more negative than positive. It is seen as a region-specific ministry whose perspective is unfortunately informed more by the Centre, from which it emerges, rather than the region whose interests it seeks to represent. Added to this is its lacklustre performance and apparent inaction, which has much to do with the lack of public dissemination of information.

The deficiency in public knowledge of the DoNER's activities becomes especially important in light of the reactions to DoNER's new avatar. In particular, much has been said about the appointment of a former Army man, General (Retd) VK Singh, as the Minister in charge of this portfolio. Many have expressed their concerns about the practice of looking at the Northeast through a 'combative', military lens. To quell such misgivings, it becomes imperative for the ministry to corroborate its work to safeguard the interests of

the region through active and regular dissemination of information. Controlled transparency would allow accountability, which in turn would help inspire regional confidence in DoNER's workings.

What can be most unambiguously said about this change of guard is that above all else, DONER needed an injection of fresh blood. Whether this will be to the detriment of the region or its gain cannot be deduced in the first few days of the new ministry's existence.

Generalship and the Northeast

6 June 2014

Lt. Gen. Arvinder S Lamba

Former Vice Chief Of the Army Staff and Distinguished Member of the IPCS Executive Committee

An article by Thangkhanlal Ngaihte, an independent researcher, draws a negative dimension in its exhortation of linking the appointment of a General to oversee the Northeast-specific ministry in a perspective of Generalship, and alleging that this symbolises the BJP Government's view of the need for military control over a "troubled region with the loyalty of its people being suspect." He also alludes to Sanjib Barua's reference to the practice of sending "Generals as Governors".

Interpreting the Indian Army's long history of involvement in the Northeast as one of just quelling the people is as naïve as forgetting the true causes of insurgency and turbulence between the tribes, states and the people, and as much a grave misgiving as the Army's first induction in 1949 in the face of the Naga Revolt. The Indian Army's acrimony towards the people of the Northeast has often been focused on and flogged endlessly, giving adverse publicity to the Army, but the ironic truth lies far from this perception. The history of conflict and military presence in this region needs to be put into perspective.

The phenomenon of conflict in this region can be traced back to the tenth century. WW Hunter (1879), the British Administrator, observed that the Northeast witnessed constant friction and tension between numerous ethnic groups, tribes and peoples from the tenth through the eighteenth centuries, leading to a series of wars with the Chutiyas, Ahoms, Kacharis, Tripuris, Meiteis, Mons, Burmese, Shuns and others. The accounts of Elwin (1962, 1964), Furer Haimendorf (1969, 1976), Hutton (1921), Mills (1922, 1926, 1937) and other British administrators also show that various ethnic groups, for example the Angami, Sema, Lotha, Ao, Rengma and Konyak and other Naga tribes were involved in feuds, inter-khel (clan) quarrels and headhunting. About Arunachal Pradesh, Elwin (1964:13) wrote: "In temper aggressive, reserved and suspicious, they have quarrelled among themselves for generations; there are still old blood-feuds taking their toll of human life and cattle-theft had long been common."

The Indian Army's bond with the Northeast is older than even people from the region would know. It is pertinent to recall that the EIC (East India Company) troops predominantly comprised soldiers recruited from Eastern India till the 1857 revolt. As the Eastern India publication of Princely States' contribution to the Indian Army (2009) recalls, Cooch Behar, Tripura, and Manipur sent soldiers to take part in WW-I, the 1st Tripura Bir Bikram Manikya Rifles and the Tripura Mahabir Legion were part of the Burma campaign in 1943, and the Bihar Regiment and Assam Regiment troops participated in WW-II. When these small armies were disbanded, Communist and other militant movements in the Northeast drew recruits and arms from some of these, sowing the seeds of conflict.

The Indian Army's deep bond with the people of the Northeast has been scripted favourably by an array of authors who have lived and known the intricacies of this region. Nation-building and the development of the Northeast has been a prime focus of the Indian Army that has struggled to requisition maximum funds and resources to reconstruct and rebuild this region. This has been regardless of the challenges it has faced from the several militant movements and groups not only combating the state or the nation but also inflicting irreparable damage on the people and property of this region.

Notwithstanding provocative writings against this institution, the Indian Army has continued to give to the people the environment, infrastructure, medical help, and employability to earn their livelihoods. Dubbed "scrupulously apolitical," the Indian Army's greatest achievement since Independence is keeping

the Indian nation united despite ethnic dissonance and externally aided insurgencies. The large-scale development of border roads by the Army has led to the development of far-flung and remote under-developed parts of the country. In these outposts of the nation, the army is the flag bearer and visible face of India.

The security concerns of the Northeast in terms of aggression, transgression, infiltration and militancy are more than any region or state of India faces. The Army's presence in every state of the Northeast as part of the Eastern Command is to meet these multifarious threats, a fact that every civilian, government functionary and political leader knows and understands well. The humiliation of 1962 and increasing challenges ever since, and the spate of insurgencies fuelled by outside powers, have retarded the growth of this region to an extent that has denied its people education, higher jobs and secure futures. It is perhaps in this context that the practice of Generals as Governors posted to this environment needs to be viewed.

Generalship is not about disposition; it is about an institution, an encapsulation of experience, responsibility, commitment and unflinching trust and faith bestowed by the nation to these faithful leaders who understand the complexities of external threats and the internal security and safety of its nation and its countrymen. In a way, who else could be better suited to undertake challenges that they have faced, fought, emerged as victors and survived through times of travesty or threats to their personal selves on many occasions in their careers? The Government and the North East, would benefit immensely from the assignment given to Gen VK Singh, a thorough professional, a forward looking General, and more importantly, backed by his experience as GOC in C Eastern Command.

Many amongst the Indian Army Generals have served and died with dignity and honour for the sake of their countrymen from this great region. It is not strange that the battlefields and now famous cemetery of Kohima in the Northeast bears the epitaph: "When You go Home, tell them and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today."

India's Northeast and the New DONER Leadership

3 June 2014

Thangkhanel Ngaihte

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In the new BJP-led government that has just been sworn in, Gen VK Singh has been given the charge of Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of the Development of North Eastern Region (DONER), apart from other responsibilities. Not surprisingly, this has generated some buzz.

The Ministry of DONER is the only central ministry with a region-specific mandate. Its present remit is confined to the planning, execution and monitoring of development schemes and projects in the Northeast. The ministry's vision, as stated in its website, is "to accelerate the pace of socio-economic development of the region." Hence, it has not been tasked with policing and counter-insurgency remits, which are vested with Home at the ministry level.

However, the appointment of a just-retired Army General (who is now an elected MP) to oversee a Northeast-specific ministry carries huge symbolism and evokes many unpleasant memories. It perpetuates the still widespread perception that the Northeast is always a troubled region and the patriotism and loyalty of its people is suspect, and therefore, needs a firm military hand to control it. The appointment alludes to a continuation of the practice of sending "Generals as Governors" to the Northeast, as Sanjib Baruah put it. Only, it's a General as a Minister this time.

Frankly, the Indian army has been so deeply embedded within the political history of Northeast India that it is difficult to imagine how the perception can be otherwise. During the darkest periods of insurgency – the Naga and Mizo insurgencies especially – the region was off-limits for outsiders, particularly journalists. Hence, much of the atrocities perpetrated by the army at that time remained unknown to the outside world. The victims, most of them illiterate and ignorant of their basic rights, seemed to accept

whatever happened as fate – something that is inevitable when the vai sepaih (a Zo term for the Indian army) are unleashed. However, in some quarters, the memories are still raw and hurting. In some ways, the almost visceral dislike of outsiders that one still observes in Mizoram has a lot to do with the army's atrocities during the Mizo insurgency.

Of the unpleasant memories, there is one which stands out. Under the village grouping scheme, implemented by the Indian army in Nagaland (in the late 1950s) and Mizoram (from the late 1960s), people were ordered to vacate their old villages and come to new, "economically viable villages" that were artificially set up along highways close to army camps, so as to enable round-the-clock surveillance. The villagers were normally given a week's time to leave their village after which the old village would be burnt. In Mizoram, the lives of 80 per cent of the population were affected by this scheme. Many of those who survived to tell the tale said that they hated and dreaded the scheme even more than bullets.

In Nandini Sundar's reading, this policy of grouping villages underlies an assumption that all people in a given area, whether civilian or combatants, are potentially hostile. It is, thus, an act of war rather than an effective counter-insurgency strategy.

There is also the perception and reality of India's militaristic approach to the Northeast. "Isn't there a brigadier in Shillong?" was how India's first Deputy Prime Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel responded when told that there may be problem in merging the native State of Manipur with India in 1949. So it began. In the perceptive account of Subir Bhaumik, post-colonial India's strategy for the pacification of the Northeast has been largely influenced by the realpolitik propounded by Kautilya who advocated Sham (conciliation), Dam (bribes), Danda (force) and Bhed (split) as the four options of statecraft to be used in effective combinations rather than as single, stand-alone options. This four-pronged strategy, combined (since the mid-1990s) with aggressive regional diplomacy in which the cooperation of neighbouring countries was sought to suppress insurgency movements, constitute India's current counter-insurgency strategy in the region, according to Bhaumik. This militaristic approach seems to have been undergirded by an imagination of the people of the Northeast that place them "at either end of the spectrum stretching between the noble savage and the naked brute. The exoticised, enigmatic noble savage can be tamed (read co-opted), but the naked brute understands only the language of violence," as Uddipana Goswami had argued. Even today, the Indian State seems to have regarded only insurgent groups as legitimate representatives of the Northeast. In "peace talks", elected state governments, MLAs and MPs hardly have any place. And of course, the space for local politics and regional parties has been hollowed out for a long time now.

A New Agenda

This is the past that comes to mind, but it need not be the future. As the new central government takes charge in Delhi, there is both anxiety and anticipation in the Northeast. There is also some hope that the Modi government may boldly change gears, and treat "peace processes" as not ends in themselves, but a means to some noble ends. The people are tired of conflicts; and the insurgents or what remains of them also seem tired of underground life. It is a rare window of opportunity that Modi should embrace. Then will development follow.

Statehood Demands in India's Northeast: Is Bodoland Justifiable?

20 May 2014

Ruhee Neog

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As anticipated, the creation of Telangana has had a destabilising domino effect on the rest of India. The most recent of these is the demand for a separate Bodoland to be carved out of Assam, which has intensified since the government announced its plans for Telangana in October 2013.

While such petitions normally fall on deaf ears, this time around the government has had to sit up and listen - it is election year and the agitations in the Bodo Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) show no

signs of abating. In February 2014, therefore, an expert committee on the viability of a Bodoland state, under the stewardship of former Home Secretary GK Pillai, a former Northeast hand, was announced. The findings of this committee are expected to be submitted by November 2014.

The seemingly intractable violence in the BTAD and growing statehood demands beg two questions. How justifiable are the claims for a separate Bodoland? Is the formation of a new state viable?

Is the Statehood Demand Justifiable?

The demand for a separate state is being justified on the basis of protecting the indigenous population of the BTAD – this can be contested. Additionally, comparisons are being drawn with Telengana, which is unhelpful.

One of the major problems in the portrayal of the BTAD has to do with the simplification of categorisation. The Bodos have portrayed themselves as the most rightful representatives of the BTAD. The BTC (Bodoland Territorial Council) is predominantly Bodo, as per the provisions of the Bodo Accord of 2003, but the BTAD areas do not have a homogenous demographic profile. In fact, some villages of the BTAD are inhabited by a significantly larger number of non-Bodos than Bodos. Thus, the non-Bodo and Muslim communities feel under-represented at the BTC, and have recorded their displeasure at the inequity in distribution of resources and lack of administrative powers. In addition is the territorial nature of the problem, which creates artificial boundaries in a naturally heterogeneous state and links ethnicity to land, leading to competing claims.

To better understand the divisions within the BTAD, one need only look at the violent clashes since 2012 between Bodos and Muslims in the BTAD areas of Kokrakhar, Baksa, Chirang, and parts of Bongaigaon and Dhubri districts. It is not just with the Muslim community in the BTAD areas that conflict is known to have occurred. In the past, there have been clashes with Adivasis, as well as fratricidal killings among the Bodo community, which itself is highly fractured.

Two, another oversimplification is the ‘Bodoland, because Telangana’ argument. Assam has a very diverse ethnic make-up, consisting of both hills and plains tribes. Some of these have development councils, some have autonomous councils, and some within the previous two have voiced demands for a separate state. The Koch Rajbongshis desire their own state, Kamtapur, areas of which overlap with the current territorial demarcation of the BTAD. Thus, if Bodoland is granted, where will the buck stop?

While Bodos continue to champion the Bodoland cause and profess to speak for all communities in the BTAD, the reality is the opposite. Since the Bodo Accord was signed, the BTC has allegedly become disproportionately strong and created a new class of political elites with whom the other communities feel disconnected and victimised by. A separate state will lead to the further strengthening of the Bodo semi-criminal political elite and intensify demands for the further carving up of Bodoland. In the effort to secure Bodo identity, how many other identities will be marginalised?

Is it Viable?

One, proactive governance in the BTAD is conspicuously absent; a charge that can be levelled against both the state government and the BTC. The BTAD is considered a critically under-developed area of Assam – the state government has been accused of neglecting the infrastructure development of the BTAD and deliberately concentrating power in the hands of a few. The BTC has been accused of channelling funds intended for the BTAD into its own pockets. A new state will thus inherit an elite that may be averse to abandoning those patterns that have proved to be the most beneficial for them.

Two, even more power to Bodos will only serve to inflame the already aggrieved and under-represented non-Bodos, who will most likely take to more intense, perhaps violent, means of agitation. In such an event, tensions will never cease and the region will continue to be volatile, possibly even more so than it is now.

The government of the day may choose to rail against 'illegal immigrants' or set up committees to pacify aggrieved parties, but given these seemingly insurmountable challenges, it is unlikely that these acts are intended to move towards a conclusion that involves the granting of a separate state.

BCIM and BIMSTEC: Two Competing Initiatives for Northeast India?

20 May 2014

Leonora Juergens

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In June 2014, the second meeting of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) forum for economic cooperation will be held in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The idea of a BCIM economic corridor was primarily initiated by the 'Kunming Initiative' to establish bilateral trade and investment along the old Southern Silk Road, linking the Bay of Bengal with India's Northeastern Region (NER), Bangladesh and Myanmar to Southwest China through the deeper integration of its constituent economies.

Likewise, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral and Technical Cooperation (BIMSTEC) aims to build a sub-regional economic bloc as a part of India's Look East Policy (LEP), linking the NER to Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Economic cooperation in the geographically contiguous sub-region should have positive welfare implications particularly for the NER's economies through expanded legal trade, infrastructural connectivity and greater people-to-people contact.

However, with BIMSTEC's slow performance on the inconclusive Free Trade Agreement (FTA), New Delhi seems to attach increasing importance to the development of the BCIM corridor and has re-emphasised its readiness for closer economic cooperation with Beijing at the sixth India-China Strategic Dialogue in April 2014. This indicates a shift in India's foreign policy agenda away from the NER towards Kolkata and the Bay of Bengal as a gateway to Southeast Asia.

BCIM and BIMSTEC: Two Competitors in NER's Development?

Once the BCIM corridor is established, it will combine India, China and the ASEAN Free Trade Area, comprising 7.3 per cent of the global GDP, thus granting India significant economic outreach to China through easy market access along its Northeastern borders. An important aspect of the corridor in this regard was the 3,000-km Car Rally in February 2013 via Kolkata, Dhaka, Imphal and Mandalay to Kunming, which initially strengthened the notion that the BCIM would subsequently open up the NER to Myanmar and the Yunnan Province – and thereby to greater economic development. However a closer look at the geographical map shows that except for Manipur and Tripura, the corridor largely bypasses the NER, thus pushing its importance as a strategic centre for sub-regional development to the periphery. Instead, Yunnan as the most developed region in the cluster due to Chinese investments in Myanmar and Bangladesh, has a strong economic and political influence in the sub-region, and has moved to the fore of the BCIM.

India's Sinophobia prevents it from taking a proactive stance in a multilateral BCIM-FTA. China's claim on Arunachal Pradesh and its support of insurgency movements through drug trafficking and the supply of small arms are seen as critical in this regard. On the other hand, China's interest in the BCIM-FTA serves as an incentive to solve its border issues with India and can be utilised as a stabilising force. Tripura and Manipur for example would welcome Chinese investments in their rubber- and bamboo-based industries, while Assam has continuously made a strong plea for the re-opening of the Stilwell Road to Kunming.

Alternatively, India under BIMSTEC and the Kaladan Project for Multi Modal Transport has already invested a great deal in infrastructural connectivity and border trade with Myanmar and Bangladesh. When compared in terms of their economies (for example, their consumption and trading patterns, agricultural and industrial production, GDP) and geographical proximity, the NER shares greater structural similarities with both countries than China's Yunnan province. This in turn can provide closer

intra-industry trade and technology transfer, as well as the development of trade complementarities in the sub-region, leading to an overall economic growth in the NER's economy. Moreover, with the completion of the Trilateral Highway between India, Myanmar and Thailand under BIMSTEC by 2016 and the Asian Highway Network, trade under the BIMSTEC-FTA is projected to increase by 5 per cent, which encourages a more liberalised trade. The establishment of a permanent secretariat in Dhaka in March 2014 also proves the significance of the BIMSTEC-FTA in the Indian-ASEAN Free Trade Area and the NER's economic development.

Which Initiative is Better Suited for the NER's Development?

In order to counter-balance China's economic stronghold in the BCIM and in view of the greater economic gains outlined above, New Delhi should prioritise its stand in the BIMSTEC-FTA. However, a major bottleneck in the existing structure of the BIMSTEC is the NER's limited decision-making power. Consequently, India's politico-economic approach to the NER must be re-thought and re-focused.

First, before the NER can serve as a hub of regional commerce, a stronger domestic NER connect with the rest of the country is essential, so that the NER can function as a major driver in its own development process. Second, similar to the economic structure of China's Yunnan Province, considerable economic autonomy must be transferred from the centre to the state governments to transform the NER into an active regional body of India's foreign and domestic policy agenda. Only then are sufficient sub-regional cooperation and the strengthening of border trade between the NER and its neighbours possible.

Regarding the NER's increasing regional neglect in view of New Delhi's focus on the BCIM, a convergence of both - the BCIM and BIMSTEC - could also be an option to keep the NER in the LEP's loop. However, unless the BIMSTEC and the BCIM develop a deeper sense of regionalism and move beyond their geo-political 'linkage syndrome', this is most unlikely.

Jamaat-e-Islami Hind: Changed Political Outlook?

20 May 2014

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At the New Delhi chapter of the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH), Ameer-e-Jamaat Maulana Jalaluddin Omari, the central head of the JIH, recently said, "The Jamaat is committed to upholding the values of democracy, secularism and the principles of the Indian Constitution. We are against the parties which oppose diversity. The very language of cultural assimilation is a threat to the spirit of our Constitution."

The Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) is a major Islamic organisation formed in undivided India by Maulana Abul Ala Maudoodi in 1941. In the seventy years of its existence the JI has undergone several changes; after Partition, the Jamaat was trifurcated into Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (JIP), Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH) and Jamaat-e-Islami Kashmir (JIK). In 1974, a unit in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir was also established. The Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami developed from the Jamaat wing in then-East Pakistan and is the largest Islamist party in Bangladesh today.

JIH: Moving Away from its Roots?

The JIP and JIH shared some concerns initially, but the discourse and rhetoric shaped by the different environments they were placed in have now set them wide apart.

The Jamaat had its emergence in the period prior to the partition of the Indian sub-continent when contesting visions of nationhood emerged. Amongst Muslim theorists of the sub-continent, Jamaat leader Maudoodi represented a third strand that denounced both the composite nationalism framework of Jamiat-e-Ulema Hind and Muslim nationalism of the Muslim League. He held that the idea of territorial nationalism was antithetical to the ideal Islamic state.

In Pakistan, Maudoodi and JIP were successful in the establishment of an Islamic nation. The 1951 provincial elections brought JIP into Pakistan's mainstream political discourse. The JIP went on to emerge as a major political party in Pakistan.

In India, the Jamaat transformed itself into a cultural organisation devoted to addressing the growing influences of secularism and communalism. It set up networks of educational institutions - both schools and colleges. The JIH had no electoral compulsions and thus kept its members from taking part in elections. The Jamaat's main aim was the establishment of Hukumat-e-Ilahiya, an Islamic state. Maudoodi was against secular democracy and obligated Muslims to boycott elections as he described democracy as an anti-Islamic political system.

However, over the years due to tremendous pressure, the JIH has worked towards the modification of its political outlook by taking part in democratic processes. Therefore, the Jamaat gradually reconciled itself to secularism and democracy which it had condemned as 'haram' (forbidden) and antithetical to Muslim beliefs. Jamaat, however still calls its acceptance of secularism as a concession made for utilitarian purposes without necessarily compromising its philosophical dimension. In essence, the Jamaat has stayed away from active electoral politics and confined itself largely to ideological work through its active cadre and mass support.

Welfare Party of India: The Secular Wing of Jamaat?

In 2011, the JIH launched a political party, the Welfare Party of India (WPI), under a leadership that included both top functionaries of the organisation and members from the wider Muslim community and outside, including a Christian priest, to participate in electoral processes in a secular and democratic setting. In the 2014 Parliamentary elections the WPI contested 29 Lok Sabha seats - 9 in Bengal, 9 in Maharashtra, 5 in Kerala, 3 in Andhra Pradesh, 2 in Uttar Pradesh and 1 in Karnataka.

The WPI, which provides scope for alternative politics, is averse to joining other parties as it wants to emerge on its own strength. As compared to the Jamaat, the WPI is a more secular organisation which works with not just Muslims but also Christians, Dalits and other minorities. It presents itself as a party committed to the principles of justice, freedom and equality by seeking the empowerment of the weak, oppressed and marginalised sections.

JIH Today: Leadership, Ideology and the Future of Jamaat

The JIH has increasingly adapted itself to the democratic polity in India. In terms of its leadership, Jamaat is more secular and moderate today, taking into cognizance the leadership of the WPI that works towards the upliftment of different sections of society.

The Jamaat's support for the WPI is also reflective of the changing position of the JIH in relation to India's secular democracy and its gradual ideological shift towards religious pluralism and tolerance. Most of the members of the Jamaat are educated lower or middle class Muslim workers. It is this section of the Muslim population that is courted by major political parties for their pivotal votes. At the time of elections, the mainstream camps appeal to these sections for votes and later forget about the promises of social and financial development. Hence, the WPI provides an opportunity for the marginalised sections to come together.

The Jamaat will survive as an ideologically driven civil society movement in the near future. Though the WPI contested elections in certain pockets of India, it failed to make any impact. The Jamaat has a wide social base; it deals with a good deal of welfare programmes and enjoys social legitimacy. By supporting a secular party like the WPI, the Jamaat does not limit itself to the religious circles alone. Although the WPI lacked the sufficient strength to win a majority of the seats it contested in the Lok Sabha elections, it certainly created an electoral space for itself.

Appointment of the Next Indian Army Chief: A Contested Political Issue

7 May 2014

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The UPA government led by PM Manmohan Singh is expected to demit office on 16 May 2014 when the eagerly awaited elections results will be announced by the Election Commission (EC). Both the BJP and the Congress have been making strong claims that they will emerge as winners, though the betting is on the former – and the possibility of a non-Congress Modi led government in Delhi is the higher probability. But at the same time, it merits recall that Indian elections have not always followed opinion polls and ‘trends’ and the BJP remembers this all too well from its 2004 and 2009 experience. Thus the uncertainty about which party will get the definitive numbers (273 seats) and the nature of the new government, including who will be the Prime Minister and the composition of the coalition will continue – till all the results are announced.

Against this backdrop, the appointment of a new Army Chief to succeed General Bikram Singh, who retires on 31 July 2014, has come into sharp and undesirable focus. Under normal circumstances, the government of the day takes such decisions three months in advance and there has been no protest given the sensitivity of the office of a service Chief – which has a direct bearing on national security. It may be recalled that when the BJP-led NDA government lost the 2004 elections, there was no controversy about the appointment of the Naval Chief at the time. The incumbent was to retire in end July 2004 and the Vajpayee government announced the appointment of then Vice Admiral Arun Prakash as the next naval Chief. The Congress party which was to form the next government, as the lead entity in the UPA, did not see this as untoward or raise the ‘lame-duck’ government charge.

Regrettably in the current political environment where even civility in speech has become a casualty, the appointment of the next Army Chief has become a contested political issue. The BJP, it is understood, has questioned the propriety of the UPA government taking this decision and has approached the EC to restrain the government. The logic being advanced is that there will be a clear two months plus even after mid-May for the incumbent - General Bikram Singh - to retire and that this decision should be the prerogative of the next government, which the BJP presumes it will lead.

Earlier in end March, the EC had opined that specific to the defence forces, matters pertaining appointments, promotions, tenders and procurement do not come within the purview of the Model Code of Conduct in relation to the elections and hence the government was within its rights to proceed as deemed appropriate to ensure that the national security apparatus was in no way compromised or adversely impacted.

Given the attention the Army Chief’s appointment has received, Defence Minister Antony stated on 2 May that the government had sought the EC’s view on this issue as it wanted to “strictly follow all the procedures.” The EC in turn has indicated that they will review the matter – both the reference made by the UPA government and the BJP protest in the course of this week.

Coincidentally, mid-May is also the period when India would differently recall the Kargil war of 1999 and the manner in which national security and sovereignty were challenged. Despite the animus between the Congress and the BJP over the latter’s decision to conduct the nuclear tests of May 1998 - all political parties closed ranks over Kargil and India was able to wrest back the craggy mountain peaks stealthily occupied by the Pakistan Army - albeit at a heavy human cost.

Fifteen years later, one would submit for the consideration of the EC and the BJP leaders that national security remains as sacred and sensitive and that any decision taken ought to be based on the most objective professional considerations. As a country with nuclear weapons, it is imperative that the higher echelons of national security – both civilian and military – are appropriately staffed and here the hierarchy of the armed forces have a special status.

Over the last three years, civil-military relations in India have been muddied by the unsavory controversy generated over the date of birth issue associated with former Army Chief General VK Singh. At the time the most deplorable aspersions were cast about the integrity and rectitude of promotions to higher ranks in the Army and a certain sectarian bias was alleged. Regrettably the UPA government did not intervene in a firm and empathetic manner and the Supreme Court was invoked.

Bitter personal rivalries came to the fore and all of this had a corrosive effect on the cohesion of the Indian Army and by extension – the texture of both civil-military relations and institutional credibility. The last time that India went through such a bleak phase was in the run up to the 1962 war with China and the price paid was both heavy and ignominious.

In the current situation, the BJP would be well-advised to keep this issue quarantined - and away from media glare - and in the event there are serious and substantive differences of opinion, the same could be addressed through quiet, constructive consultation with the government. The perception in the public domain is that the entry of General VK Singh into the political arena as a high-visibility BJP member has queered the pitch. The rank and file of the Army is aware of the bitter charges and allegations that clouded the elevation of General Bikram Singh and are watching the current proceedings with some dismay.

Will the appointment of the next Army Chief proceed as per the professional norms and protocols that have been evolved in India or will certain subjective and partisan considerations come into play? The Election Commission has been unwittingly drawn in to this sensitive area which may be beyond its mandate – but its decision will have a long-term bearing on the equipoise that should characterise the political-military interface. Consequently all eyes, this week, will be on Chief Election Commissioner Sampath.

Ethnic Fault-Lines in Assam: A Separate Bodoland?

30 April 2014

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Prior to the third Phase of the 2014 Lok Sabha Elections on 24 April, Chief Minister of Assam Tarun Gogoi claimed that after prolonged agitations in Assam's Bodo heartland, the situation had returned to normal. This was apparently due to the Congress's achievements in the state. However, pre-poll violence in the Kokrajhar constituency coupled with fresh statehood demands for a separate Bodoland after the creation of Telangana prove that durable disorder prevails in the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD). This is despite the ongoing peace negotiations with the pro-talk faction of the still active insurgent outfit of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) since 2013.

Previously, the government had signed two peace accords with the Bodos, which gave constitutional recognition to a virtual Bodo homeland in Assam: the BTAD. On 27 February 2014, the Union Government, with the support of the Bodoland People's Front (BPF), the ruling party of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), set up an expert committee to examine the viability of the statehood demand.

This recent move prompts the following questions: why did the 2003 Bodo Accord fail to reconcile ethnic tensions under the BTC? Why has the BTC not been able to address the conflicting demands of exclusive citizenship and land rights of minority groups in the BTAD? Could a separate Bodoland in fact be able to solve communalism in the BTAD?

Competition over Political Representation and Natural Resources

The BTAD, formed after the 2003 Bodo Accord, has no demographic profile of a major homogeneous Bodo population. However, a substantial proportion of seats in the BTC (30 of 46) are reserved for scheduled tribes (STs) – Bodos predominantly in this case. This gives political power to an economically disadvantaged group in the presence of a dominant majority of other backward classes (OBCs) like the

Koch-Rajbonchi, Rabha, and Tiwas, who constitute over 73 per cent of the BTAD's population and feel under-represented in the BTC. These fault-lines demonstrate the incongruity in its poly-ethnic social base and the demarcation of the territorial boundaries of the BTAD along ethnic-lines (ST status), which inevitably leads to competing claims over political representation and state resources.

Furthermore, the encroachment of forest land by illegal migrants from Bangladesh in the BTAD and their steady ingress into the political spheres of the BTC has created anxiety about socio-political marginalisation and economic deprivation. The Bodos' continuous drive against Muslim settlers, as in the violent clashes in 2012, has been conceived as ethnic cleansing to substantiate their cause for a separate Bodoland. For a majority of the Muslim settlers, who constitute about 30 per cent of the electorate in the state and play a deciding role in the Lok Sabha constituencies (6 of 14), protection from harassment in the name of detection and expulsion of undocumented Bangladeshi migrants has been a dominant issue.

In January the NDFB (Progressive) contested the Congress's initiative to update the National Register of Citizens (NRC)-List to include all foreigners on the 1971 voter list and their descendants as per the 1985 Accord. Arguing that the Accord would deny the indigenous tribal people of the state their exclusive right to land as per the 1886 Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, the NDFB instead demanded 1951 as the cut-off year for the identification and deportation of foreigners from Assam. The act restricts the possession of land and land transfer to 'plains tribes' and 'hill tribes' in the BTAD, while the 1985 Accord upholds 'the existing rights and privileges of any citizen in respect of his land'. Thus, the 1886 Act has no effect on land encroachment by Muslim settlers.

A Separate Bodoland: Is it a Solution?

The proposal for an expert committee on Bodoland has already backfired due to fierce opposition from the All Bodo Student's Union (ABSU) and other non-Bodo organisations on the grounds of being inconclusive on a solution to their conflicting autonomy demands. Thus, without consent among the political stakeholders regarding a radical structural and territorial reorganisation of the BTC, conflict is prone to persist in the BTAD.

Rather than reorganising the political boundaries of the BTAD, an alternative formulation of the BTC is necessary in order to address the conflicting demands. Instead of the current model of majoritarian politics in the BTC, the practice of consociational democracy could be better suited its multi-ethnic politico-administrative structure, as it would foster inter-ethnic cooperation and tolerance. Simultaneously, proportionality as the principal standard of representation would instil greater political participation and help protect minority interests, including the allocation of public funds and possibly a comprehensive reformation of land rights and the foreigners act. In the long-term, this could lead to the formulation of a natural federation in Assam and the 'de-territorialisation' of ethnic identity, leading to long-term peace.

Pakistan: Why are Christians Being Persecuted?

19 November 2014

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On 4 November 2014, a young Christian couple was publically set on fire in Punjab, Pakistan. It was alleged by a mob of 1200 persons that the couple had desecrated verses from the Quran. According to source, the mob had apparently offered a waiving of severe retribution if the couple converted to Islam, but when the couple refused, locked them in a brick kiln, and set on fire.

Harassment and instances of violence against Pakistan's minority Christian community has increased suddenly in the past few years. Last year, anti-Christian riots erupted in Gojra and Lahore, causing 170 families to flee their homes.

According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, in 2013, 501 people were victimised on blasphemy charges that entailed incidents categorised under “attacks on places of worship, stating derogatory remarks, disgracing in any form, unclear happenings and other cases.” While most outbreaks are instigated out of socio-economic reasons, they are constantly also backed by religious dogmas and false accusations of blasphemy. In the recent years, this trend has become increasingly pronounced. Assassinations of high-profile political leaders, attacks on the impoverished populations, and expulsions of minority students for misspelling/misquoting the Quran point towards the intensification of radicalism and resultant attitudes among hard-line Islamists in Pakistan.

Why are Christians being targeted in Pakistan? Why is the Pakistani State reluctant to re-evaluate or repeal the biased blasphemy laws?

Vulnerability

Christians are the second-largest religious minority in Pakistan after the Hindus, representing 1.8 per cent of the country's total population. A large number of Christians reside in south Karachi, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. While a section resides in the poorest sectors of Pakistan involved menial jobs, there is a significant section that is flourishing in the corporate sector, in Karachi. In Pakistan, any sense of economic progression or identity-assertion by a minority group results in a sense of paranoia among the radicals in the majority groups. Consequently, both sides, irrespective of their economic contribution to the country are vulnerable to the wrath of Islamist extremism in Pakistan.

Additionally, there has been a gradual change shift in the Christian community vis-à-vis their socio-economic and political demands. Since 1992, the Pakistan Christian Congress (PCC) has been demanding a separate Christian province in Punjab. Furthermore, Christians have been extremely vocal in expressing equal rights, demanding state benefits, exhibiting intolerance towards the blasphemy laws and refuting the majoritarian attitude towards the minority groups. Asserting for greater autonomy and representation in society is largely dismissed in Pakistan. Minority communities that remain submissive and camouflage within the rest of the society are accepted by the radicals. Those who resist are assaulted.

For instance, the Pakistani Federal Minister for Minority Affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti, was assassinated on the grounds of supporting the cause of Pakistani Christians, condemning the 2009 Gojra riots and demanding for justice.

Role of Blasphemy Laws

Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code was introduced during the 1980s. It reinstated the position of religious zealots to act according to their whims and fancies. Pakistan has some of the strictest anti-blasphemy laws in the world, and they prescribe punitive punishment to those who ‘deliberately intend to wound the religious sentiments of others in their sight, hearing, and presence through imprisonment, fine or both’.

The law has been heavily criticised for extending protection towards the embodiments of the Islamic faith alone while excluding that of other religious faiths. While the law is applicable to all, in a multi-faith society such as Pakistan, it is seen as highly discriminatory, as even the slightest rumours about instances of defaming the Prophet and/or the Quran continues to spark hysteria amongst the radicalised Muslims.

Stagnant Status Quo

The state has condemned violent attacks against the Christian community, but its tight-lipped stance on the issue of amendment or repealing of the biased laws questions the government's credibility and intents on the issue. Given the identity of the country as an Islamic Republic, the government feels that any move towards altering the blasphemy laws will infuriate religious extremists who might reciprocate in unfavourable ways. In 2011, the former Governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, was assassinated for

criticising the blasphemy law while advocating for justice for Asia Bibi – a Christian woman who was sentenced to death over allegations of defaming the Prophet. The then government that had initially announced its intention to amend the law fell silent on the subject after Taseer's assassination.

Repealing the law doesn't alone or automatically mean the end of the woes of the Christian community. While it may bring about a change in the relationship politics between the majority and minority groups, this will be short-lived. Instead of promising to alter or remove the blasphemy law, one solution would be to create a national consensus on the need to reform the law by highlighting the death tolls and cases of abuse this law has invoked on minority groups.

However, the current trajectory of affairs indicates that the government will remain cautious on the issue as radical elements continue to grow in Pakistan. In the process, it will continue to disregard international humanitarian laws and continue to commit human rights violations by backing the interests of one section of the society whilst excluding the aspirations of the other.

Imran Khan, Not Taliban

7 May 2014

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It is *deja vu* in Pakistan. In a matter of month, there has been a dramatic change in the political scenario in terms of relationship between the major institutions and actors within the country.

Consider the following developments and compare it with what had happened a year before. The general elections have been declared successful, with the PML-N government forming the government in Punjab and at the federal level. The main opposition parties – PPP, Imran Khan's PTI and Altaf Hussain's MQM to a large extent agreed to the results. The PTI led by Imran Khan though had high expectations, it did not perform badly. Though it could not make a substantial impact at the federal level, it had enough seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province to form a government, obviously with support from the PML-N.

The much expected change within the military in terms of choosing the next Chief of Army Staff to replace Gen Kayani also went off smoothly for Nawaz Sharif. Though overlooked few others, the selection of Gen Raheel Sharif was seen as a smooth affair for the elected leadership and also for Nawaz Sharif. Along with the Chief of Army Staff, there was also a change in the Supreme Court; a new Chief Justice replaced the most popular Iftikhar Chaudhry.

Everything seems to be going on the right track for Nawaz Sharif, the only internal problem being the Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP). Ever since January this year, there have been numerous attempts even to initiate an internal dialogue with the TTP; initially two committees were formed to represent the TTP and the State. What was even more important for Sharif was to create a political consensus within the Parliament and with the rest of political parties. The government did succeed in creating a consensus within the political elite through All Parties Conference.

Until few weeks earlier, events were looking smoother for Sharif in terms of political stability within. Unfortunately everything has changed in the last few weeks through two events – first the Musharraf trial and the second over the ongoing war between the Establishment and the media.

For the last few weeks, there have been tensions arising between the civilian and military leadership over the proceedings against Musharraf on treason case. Though the case was pursued by the judiciary as a part of its new found activism, thanks to the legacy left by Iftikhar Chaudhry. Did Nawaz Sharif played a role in judiciary's pursuit against Musharraf is difficult to argue, but the process suited his own objectives in terms of going after the former Commando who had earlier removed him from the Office as well exiled him.

The military perhaps believe that there is a larger conspiracy to use Musharraf trial as an excuse to undermine the role of armed forces in political decision making. Perhaps there is. Perhaps not. Much would depend on who is analysing the issue and from which perspective.

On a parallel development, an attack on one of the leading journalists in Pakistan – Hamid Mir, has been perceived as an attack against the media perpetrated by the ISI. When the media went on an overdrive against the Establishment, the military and its ISI thought there is another conspiracy being hatched against to malign the security forces.

Recent developments in Pakistan have to be interpreted against the above background. Two statements in particular appears more than a mere coincidence. First has been the surprising position taken by Imran Khan; his position is based on two specific points – first that the Jang group of publications, which is in the middle of controversy over the shooting of Hamid Mir, played a role against the PTI, thereby influencing the outcome of the elections, and second the former Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry also played a role against him.

After agreeing to the results of 2013 elections, and forming the government in one of the provinces, the sudden statement by Imran Khan against the Jang group looks more than a coincidence. Not only Imran Khan, even Tahirul Qadri, who entered all of a sudden in Pakistan's political scene last year with an objective to change the electoral process, is back today, lending his full support to Imran Khan's protest.

Many within Pakistan consider Imran Khan and Tahirul Qadri as closer to the Establishment and a part of their plan to shape the internal politics. Before the elections last year, a substantial section within Pakistan did believe both Qadri and Khan were propped up by the Establishment to counter the PML-N. If the above is true, then the recent pronouncements by both these leaders will substantially change the course of politics in Pakistan.

It would also mean that the Establishment has decided to strike back against the political leadership led by Nawaz Sharif, using Imran Khan and Tahirul Qadri as pawns. Will this initiative succeed? Or is the Establishment using the above only as a pressure tactic against Sharif?

The bigger question that however needs to be addressed is why would Imran Khan and Tahirul Qadri be willing to play this game against Nawaz Sharif? And what it means for the future political stability within Pakistan?

It appears clear that Imran and Qadri are willing to play the script written by the Establishment. Perhaps, they have been promised much bigger things within Pakistan's political structure. Perhaps, the Establishment is planning to use them now and throw later. Whatever may be the larger objectives of the Establishment, what would destabilise Pakistan from within is the proposed agitation against the Sharif led government. It would do no good but create political instability within.

The fact that Imran Khan's political party is also leading the government in the crucial Khyber Paktunkhwa province also means that the PTI would use the prevailing situation in the tribal regions to its own advantage.

So what is the larger picture emerging in Pakistan? The talks with the TTP are at a crucial stage with the Taliban holding an advantage. Any internal political instability will only increase the hands of the Taliban. Second, any difference between Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif being played in the streets also mean a bigger threat to political instability within Pakistan.

It appears both the Establishment and Imran Khan have decided to sacrifice political stability for short term gains, with the former wanting to establish its own writ and control over the elected leadership. Does the script look similar?

Pakistan: Potential Blowbacks of Operation Zarb-e-Azb

30 June 2014

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On 15 June, Pakistan's military launched its most ambitious offensive on terrorists living and/or operating from the country's territory. The sharply-worded press statement marked a stark difference in Pakistan's otherwise soft adjectives for insurgents. Codenamed Operation Zarb-e-Azb, the release stated

that the “armed forces have been tasked to eliminate these terrorists regardless of hue and colour, along with their sanctuaries,” and emphasised their disinterest towards distinguishing between “foreign and local terrorists.” This week, Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions Abdul Qadir Baloch stated that “we don't want any terrorist, Haqqani or not Haqqani, on Pakistani soil.”

While there are several aspects of this issue on which deductions can be made; the immediate priority lies in understanding the nature of expected blowbacks.

Immediate Security Priorities

First, although this indispensable offensive by the Pakistani military is welcome, the timing of launching the Zarb-e-Azb might not have been most apt. Winter is gone, and it is easier for the terrorists to escape into safe havens via mountain routes. In the backdrop of this much-delayed operation, the highest priority must now be given to securing the civilians, national assets, and critical infrastructure of the country. North Waziristan may be facing military action, but that is not the only region terrorists operate from. Today, vast swathes of the country have well-established networks of terrorist outfits and sympathisers. It is unlikely that the insurgents will put up a substantial fight in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The terrorists in the FATA, realising their current inadequate capacity, will lie low for a while, and/or escape to Afghanistan or slip into mainland Pakistan, and bounce back after a few months.

Any immediate significant blowback to the country's civil society, military, government or security apparatus will originate from deep within the country – likely from Pakistan's Punjab and Sindh provinces. The recent consecutive attacks on Karachi's International Airport demonstrate the hold and reach of the terrorist networks in urban areas.

Although the Operation is making serious headway, a sizeable number of terrorists have already spilled over into Afghanistan's Kunar and Nuristan provinces; and in a seemingly coming of a full circle, thousands of displaced residents of North Waziristan have fled to Afghanistan's Khost province seeking refuge. The numerous Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in the country will be used as an excellent camouflage by the terrorists who will likely spread deeper into the country to carry out retaliatory attacks. The allies, affiliates and sleeper cells will soon enter the fray unless the Pakistani military comprehensively deals with threats in the rest of the country. Such a scenario will automatically result in heavy human losses, thus spiralling into further chaos.

This Operation should not be meant for North Waziristan alone; it has to be a large-scale effort. There is hence a need for flawless coordination between the military, the police force and other security wings – since a Zarb-e-Azb-style operation in urban areas is not feasible.

Troops have already been sent to Punjab, and the establishment of a joint operation and coordination centre is a step in this direction; but so far such an initiative has been launched only for Punjab, and especially only in the southern Punjab areas of Dera Ghazi Khan, Multan, and Sahiwal.

In Pakistan, Punjab faces the highest threat, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and all major cities will be vulnerable for various reasons. While the ongoing operation is likely to bring sizeable results, the only way eliminate the terrorists altogether would be conduct joint operations with Kabul, thereby sandwiching the terrorists and then eliminating them – which the two governments have recently agreed to work together upon.

Future Course

The border areas of FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will have to be zealously guarded to prevent the outflow of terrorists into other areas of the country. The military must take on all terrorists as it claims – including upholding Abdul Qadir Baloch's stance on the Haqqani Network – to ensure that gains made are sustainable. Furthermore, despite being far-fetched, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant group being in talks with the TTP cannot be ruled out. Although the army has stated that troops have been deployed at

all 'sensitive locations', in the cities, the country's police force is inadequate to handle high-level crises. In comparison to the terrorists' sophistication in terms of ammunition, planning and tactics, Pakistan's police forces are underequipped to tackle insurgency-like situations. The key lies in securing those areas that do not fall in the 'sensitive locations' list, for this is where the terrorists will begin their retaliatory attacks from.

There is hence a need for constant monitoring of the IDPs; and it is imperative that new IDP camps be established in secure areas outside settled urban centres as a preventive measure.

More importantly, it is necessary that there is an understanding that the success of this operation will not immediately end terrorism in Pakistan. In that context, the Protection of Pakistan Bill 2014 passed by the parliament on 2 July seems hurried – especially given the powers it grants the security forces. The military's success will mean a strong blow to the terrorist networks, but unless there is comprehensive and simultaneous action undertaken across the country, the likelihood of long-lasting peace is bleak.

Iran-Pakistan: New Leaders, Old Issues

30 May 2014

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"I am here to open a new chapter in Pakistan-Iran relationship," Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said, on a two-day visit to Iran from 11-12 May 2014 – one that took place after a sixteen-year gap.

The visit took place at a time when ties between the two neighbours have seen tensions. The Iran-Pakistan Pipeline project remains stalled, with Iran doubting Pakistan's commitment towards the project. The relationship further soured in February 2014 when five Iranian border guards were abducted by militants and allegedly held in Pakistan. In a bid to recover the guards, Iran threatened that it wouldn't refrain from sending its forces across the border if need arose, when Pakistan failed to respond in a timely manner.

Amid growing concerns regarding the closeness Pakistan and Saudi Arabia enjoy, Islamabad is walking a tight rope between a long-term ally Riyadh, and Tehran, a neighbour. However, the new leaders – Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Pakistan and President Hassan Rouhani in Iran – both of whom were elected in mid-2013 seem committed to strengthening ties.

There are many reasons for Tehran and Islamabad's eagerness to preserve close ties.

First, in his recent trip, Prime Minister Sharif informed the Iranian president that Islamabad was determined to weed out all the obstacles that currently cause friction and prevent the pipeline project from moving forward. More than economic benefits, for both the countries, the project is a crucial guidepost on the path towards greater partnership between Islamabad and Tehran. During the meeting, both the leaders reiterated their commitment to strengthen energy and security ties between the two nations.

Second, the border security issue between the two countries also featured in the discussion, where Prime Minister Sharif assured Tehran that his country will "eliminate Jaish-ul-Adl," the militant group that captured the Iranian border guards. Iran blamed Saudi Arabia for supporting the rebel group and Pakistan for not doing enough to secure the release of the guards. Pakistan does not intend to be party to the growing tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Third, in February 2014, in what was called as the largest military exercise ever conducted by Saudi Arabia, the Chief of the Pakistan Army, General Raheel Sharif, was a special guest. This was widely seen as a show of political resolve against Iran. In West Asia, Syria has become the hot spot for Saudi-Iran rivalry for regional supremacy. The recent gift of \$1.5 billion from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan was viewed with suspicion. There have been mounting speculations regarding Saudi Arabia's intention. The money is

alleged to being pumped into Pakistan's army to recruit and train volunteers who can be used against the regime in the Syrian civil war. Nawaz Sharif's trip was aimed at reassuring Iran about its neutral position on Syria. Pakistan is keen on expressing its willingness towards refraining from taking sides in order to avoid any repercussions for its ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Fourth, Tehran and Pakistan have always worked towards opposing goals in Afghanistan, supporting rival constituencies. This clash of policies regarding Afghanistan over the years has pushed Iran closer to India, isolating Pakistan at the regional level. With the impending withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan and a change in the country's leadership, in order to avoid past mistakes, it is imperative, that Iran and Pakistan adopt complementary rather than confrontational policies in post-2014 Afghanistan.

Additionally, projects such as the Middle East to India Deepwater Pipeline (MEIDP) – a sub-sea natural gas pipeline that will connect West Asia directly to India, by sidelining Pakistan – has caused further anxiety and fear that a strained Pakistan-Iran relationship would only push Islamabad away from Tehran and push other neighbouring countries in the region, closer to each other.

Lastly, the sectarian dimension of the Saudi-Iran rivalry further feeds into the tensions between the Shia and Sunni populations in Pakistan. Tehran alleges that the increasing sectarian violence in the recent years in Pakistan is a product of the Saudi hard line Wahhabi ideology promoted among Sunni groups that inspires them to target the Shia minority; and Iran is particularly concerned about the rising graph of violence against Pakistan's Shia minorities.

Caught in the Crosshairs

Against this backdrop, it makes perfect sense for Pakistan to safeguard its own interests by balancing its relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran. A comprehensive solution to put an end to the Iran-Saudi rivalry might still be out of reach, but controlling the escalation of conflicts is possible. Pakistan can play the mediator in pushing Saudi Arabia and Iran closer. Iran-Pakistan relationship – political and economic – will stand to improve only following the implementation of better border management and enhanced security measures. However, Islamabad will have to draw a line in its relations with Tehran so that it does not earn the wrath of its long time benefactor, Riyadh.

Media in Pakistan: Divided They Fall

13 May 2014

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The recent unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Pakistani journalist Hamid Mir in Karachi opened a can of worms vis-à-vis the complexities in the relationship the Pakistani media shares with State and non-State actors.

That Pakistani media-persons have long held strong associations with both the military and the militants of the country is no secret; neither is the fact that the Pakistani establishment often used the media at its will to further its propaganda – and the journalists let that happen.

The Military-Media Relationship

Pakistan is among the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. In the past, when the freedom and independence of the media was stifled by the might of military dictatorship, only those media houses and journalists that had connections with the military and the intelligence managed to survive. Information inflow is tightly controlled in the country, and throughout the years, especially during the US' operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan's own domestic operations, the only sources of information were the military and/or the militants. Siding with the civilian leadership was not even an option until recently.

Those who remained close to the military sources carved out careers for themselves using this association. They managed to get exclusive news, interviews, and first-hand experience in areas otherwise cordoned off for journalists.

Although there was a chance for the media to reinvent itself when the military's grip loosened a little, it failed to do so due to the rot that has set in within the institution of the fourth estate as a whole.

Journalists and media houses who owe their existence and/or growth in prominence to the military have become comfortable with the arrangement. The media in Pakistan was never entirely independent. Theoretically speaking, they have either been in military embeds or militia embeds. Although this is not the only cause, it is among the biggest causes of the rot.

Here too, the choice of allies within the establishment and/or the militias plays a critical role. If one is in Lashkar-e-Taiba embeds, she/he has a shot at some level of safety, whereas if one enjoys a Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) association, the prospects are always uncertain. The most ill-fated ones are, unsurprisingly, the ones who work in close coordination with the civilian government.

The Hamid Mir episode highlights the likelihood of the Jang Group – the parent company of Geo TV where Mir is a journalist – teaming up with the Prime Minister's Office to challenge the military's dominance in Pakistan. They had already started becoming belligerent, especially given their shows with politically bold themes. Mir's statements about a 'deep ISI' and the possibility of differences between the Army and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) also point towards murkier issues.

Although the attack on Mir, just weeks after one on Raza Rumi, another prominent journalist, garnered condemnations from all, the incident brought into the open the entrenched divide in the Pakistani media. For the first time in the country's history a private media group openly blamed and challenged the ISI. In retaliation, cronies of the military in the media houses openly lambasted Geo TV for blaming the ISI for the attack and many rallied in support of the establishment.

Essentially, as it has historically been, this comes across as a proxy war for influence between the establishment and the civilian government. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is treading carefully here. Many believe that Mir was attacked by the ISI primarily due to their displeasure over the subjects of his recent shows; especially since the Army is doing all it can to improve its image. More the miscalculations the Army makes, the higher the civilian leadership's acceptability goes.

Where Does This Lead?

Today, the media in Pakistan is essentially a business. Revenue and survival are greater motivations than truth and objectivity of content. Unbiased reportage does exist, but such institutions and journalists are few in number and are being weeded out – either by the military or the militants, or by both.

What is more damaging is the divide among the media houses. The corporatisation of Pakistani media, where more often than not there is little or no regard for journalistic ethics, has brought about a situation where media houses and journalists scramble for business and relevance. In this commotion, they have turned against each other, using unfortunate incidents like attacks on journalists to further their agenda.

Gone are the days when people like Mir Murtaza Bhutto could run politically charged magazines like his *Venceremos*, however small in scale, editions of which derided the Shah of Iran who was then an ally of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. In fact, some of the most charged protests against press censorship and/or military control of the media took place as far back as former dictator Zia-ul-Haq's regime.

This does not bode well for a country where the military wields the whip. Infighting will only make it easier for the establishment to gain and assert more control on the flow of information – defeating the purpose of the existence of the press in the first place. In a country that is only slowly transitioning into democracy, it is crucial that the press corps remains united and objective.

Pakistan: Military and the Myth of Independent Media

8 May 2014

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When Pakistani journalists interact with Indians, it is a fairly common practise for many of them to label others of their ilk as an 'agencies man'; i.e. being on the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)/Intelligence Bureau/Military Intelligence (MI) payroll. Quite asides whether this is just a tack to win the confidence of their Indian counterparts or there is an element of truth in the insinuation, the general impression one gets is that virtually every other media-man is a mole of the 'deep state'. Despite the raucous, robust and often reckless nature of the Pakistani media, which in recent years has been pushing the envelope that much more, the infiltration and even influence of the 'agencies' over journalists was nothing extraordinary in what is by all accounts a National Security State.

Establishment's Control over the Media

In the recent years, however, the sort of control that the 'deep state' exercised over the media loosened considerably; at least in terms of its ability to shape the narrative and public discourse. Not surprisingly, the media had begun to feel empowered and top media persons would often boast about how they were now a power to reckon with and could make, break or save governments. But in the aftermath of the botched assassination attempt on journalist Hamid Mir, and with the 'empire' striking back not just against its detractors but also against 'deserters' (those who once worked hand-in-glove with the 'establishment'), the media has been disabused of its hubris.

Even though the dust is still to settle on L'affaire Hamid Mir, the military versus media (specifically only the biggest media house: the Jang/Geo group) fight has exposed the divisions in the ranks of the media between the 'agencies men' and independent journalists. Worse, it has laid bare the dark underside of the machinations and manipulation of the 'deep state' to regain control over the national narrative.

Bribing and browbeating journalists and media houses to make them fall in line is nothing new in Pakistan. What is new is the addition of bullets that have journalists in their cross-hairs. While in the past this sort of intimidation was the sole prerogative of the 'state' actors - in the Pakistani lexicon, 'sensitive agencies', better known as ISI and MI - now even non-state (the Taliban and the Baloch insurgents, among others) and quasi-state actors (state-sponsored terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba/Jamaat-ud-Dawa) have jumped into the game. Resultantly, journalists are having to walk on the razor's edge, caught as they are in a pincer between the military and the militants.

The Campaign against the Jang/Geo group

The thinly disguised animosity of the military establishment towards the media (the Jang/Geo group in particular) has been some time in the making, and is something that becomes clear in the 'charge-sheet' filed by the ISI against the Jang/Geo group with the Pakistan Electronic Media Regularity Authority. However, there is another, sinister angle to the hounding of the Jang/Geo group. Some months back, there were reports of a new news channel that was being set up by the ISI with the help of international terrorists like Dawood Ibrahim.

When the story broke, it caused immense bad blood between the military and Jang/Geo. The ISI hit back by using another channel (owned by a Dubai-based businessman who is alleged to have been involved in all sorts of nefarious activities including gold smuggling) and a dubious talk show host with links with the military and terrorist outfits to launch a sustained vilification campaign against Jang/Geo. But this campaign wasn't getting much traction, and Jang/Geo continued to dominate the media space with over 50% of market share.

The Hamid Mir case offered a Godsend to the military to cut Jang/Geo to size, something that its competitors were more than happy to become part of. As the military saw it, even if it managed to get a channel of its own, it would serve no purpose as long as Jang/Geo remained the dominant force.

Sandwiched: The Civilian Government

Caught in the crossfire of this fight between the military and the media is the civilian government, which already has tensions with the army over issues like relations with India, peace talks with the Pakistani Taliban and the treason case against former military dictator, General (Retd.) Pervez Musharraf. The Nawaz Sharif government cannot afford to let the military ride roughshod over the Jang/Geo group because this would significantly change the balance of power in favour of the military.

Simultaneously, the government ignore the military's grievances against the media group either, because this would enhance the animus of the military towards the civilian government.

How the current military-media stand-off will wind down remains to be seen. What is important is that this tussle has damaged all the actors. The media has been divided and its image has taken a beating and it no longer can make, break, and/or save governments. The limits to the army's power have also been revealed. It can raise merry hell against anyone it targets but little beyond that. The army can still send in death squads to shoot down journalists but it has clearly lost the dominance it enjoyed in the past. The civilian government too has lost because of its inability to rein in the army and enforce civilian supremacy.

Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh: Designs and Network in India

7 November 2014

N Manoharan

In the wake of Burdwan blast, the Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh recently ordered an immediate neutralisation of the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) terror modules in India. What is the JMB? What are its designs and network in India?

JMB, meaning 'Assembly of Holy Warriors in Bangladesh', is a Bangladesh-based terror outfit. Formed in 1998, the principal objective of the JMB is to establish an Islamic state in Bangladesh on the basis of Sharia laws. With a strong belief in Salafist ideology, it is opposed to modern principles of governance such as democracy, liberalism, socialism and secularism and considers them anti-Islamic. In the initial stages, funding to the JMB came from various sources: robbery, smuggling, donations, patronage, subscriptions and "taxations." Very soon, it turned to more lucrative foreign sources and counterfeit currencies.

The then Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government's political patronage also helped in the JMB's phenomenal growth and influence. The government did not realise the gravity of the JMB's designs until the terror group triggered country-wide serial bombings in August 2005 (500 bombs in 63 of 64 districts of Bangladesh in a span of half-an-hour).

In the ensuing crackdown, many of the JMB's leaders and cadres were arrested or killed, especially by the Rapid Action Battalion of Bangladesh. It was at this stage that the JMB decided to shift some of its operations to India. Abdur Rahman (alias Shahadat), who sneaked into India in 2006, was instrumental in building the outfit's network across the India-Bangladesh border. Around the same time, the operational wing of the JMB in West Bengal was declared as the "65th Unit." The JMB has been operating a bomb-making units in Burdwan, West Bengal, India, in which grenades have also been manufactured and transported to Bangladesh in consignments. The fact that bomb blasts at Chennai and Patna in May this year have had JMB signatures indicate that the IEDs might have been diverted within India as well.

India is being used by the JMB not just for hideouts, but for recruitment as well. Recruitment is done through madrasas, mosques and effective use of social media. The JMB's network is especially active in

West Bengal's districts of Murshidabad, Malda and Nadia and in parts of Muslim-majority districts in Assam. These areas are closer to the JMB's stronghold of northern and north-western Bangladesh. Also, the JMB's traditional strategy of creating networks of matrimonial alliances across the border helped in easy establishment of bases in India. Going by call records and visits of those JMB members who have now been arrested, the outfit appears to have footprints in southern India and Jammu and Kashmir as well. There are an estimated 50 modules operating in India.

What is more concerning is the JMB's linkage with other terror groups in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and even beyond. The common thread that connects all these groups is their anti-Indian, anti-democratic and pro-Salafist ideology. It is difficult to operate in India without the assistance of Indian militant groups. Some of the JMB's known collaborators are the Indian Mujahideen, al Jihad, al Ummah and the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI). In the case of Pakistan, the JMB has a good network with the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Harkat-ul Jihad-al Islami (HuJI); and with the Taliban and al Qaida in Afghanistan. For its operations in Myanmar, the JMB relied on Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO), based in the Rohingya refugee camps in southern Bangladesh. Going by the latest slogan of JMB – "Jihad from Bangladesh to Baghdad" – such a wide network is obvious. The scope of the engagement among these terror groups ranges from training, recruitment, funding, information-sharing, arms procurement, operational assistance, manpower, and logistics. Funding to the JMB has been traced to NGOs based in countries of West Asia and Europe. This shows that the JMB's network involves a section of the Bangladeshi Diaspora and other jihadi groups.

Bangladesh-based terror groups acting against India is not a new development. What is new is that this is a Bangladeshi terror group based in India acting against both India and Bangladesh. This is a serious development. It is of utmost concern that the activities of the JMB in India have gone unnoticed for over half a decade. It would have remained so for long had blasts at Burdwan not taken place accidentally. Vote bank and communal politics, lack of capability of the state police forces, lack of proper coordination between the Centre and the States, and lack of cooperation between India and Bangladesh are few reasons for the JMB's successful hiding. These issues have to be addressed on an urgent basis.

Border guarding cannot afford to be slacked off on, and requires attention. A substantial amount of the JMB's purpose is lost, if its cross-border activities are curtailed. This aside, India could consider strengthening Bangladesh's counter-terrorism capabilities, especially in dealing with radical groups. The present government in Dhaka has been helpful in stifling North-east India-based militant groups that took shelter in Bangladesh. A weak and pro-Islamist regime in Bangladesh is not in the interest of India. Robust counter-terrorism cooperation between India and Bangladesh is imperative to tackle common enemies like the JMB.

Bangladesh-Myanmar Border Skirmishes: Who, What and Why

20 June 2014

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In the recently concluded Director General-level conference between Bangladesh and Myanmar in Naypyidaw, although both countries resolved to maintain peace and tranquility on the border – after exchanging gunfire along the border – many questions still remain to be addressed.

Why did these clashes begin, and what aggravated them further? Were they just isolated border tiffs or a calculated risk by Myanmar? What are the potential larger implications of the recent scuffle for the bilateral?

What prompted the border clash?

Both the governments have provided differing accounts of the reasons for the clashes. Dhaka claimed that the Myanmar Border Guard Police (BGP) killed one soldier of the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) in an ambush on 28 May. Dhaka also claims that later, the BGP once again began a 'unprovoked attack' when

negotiations regarding returning of the body of the slain trooper was underway – triggering fresh gunfight along the border.

Conversely, Myanmar accused that clashes along the border were started by Bangladesh when armed members of the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) – founded in 1980 for protecting the rights of the Rohingya people in Myanmar – allegedly operating from Bangladeshi territory, tried to enter Myanmar. Naypyidaw explained that the BGP fired on two men because they were wearing yellow camouflage unlike the Guards' official uniform. These clashes occurred at a time when there already were tensions along the border following the May 17 incident where members of the BGP were allegedly attacked by members of the RSO. Myanmar stated that it would not tolerate any violation of its sovereignty and would make every attempt to prevent illegal border crossing from Bangladesh.

Recent violence on the border is indicative of growing lawlessness in the region. The Bangladesh-Myanmar border is known for criminal activities, including human trafficking, arms and drugs smuggling, and robbery. Additionally, the existence of improvised explosive devices in the border areas also created a trust deficit between the two neighbours. Border guards from both sides have been accused of being deeply entrenched in corrupt activities and exploitation of people living in the bordering areas, which frequently results in minor border tiffs; but sometimes taking form of a larger standoff.

Isolated Incident or a Calculated Risk?

The Bangladesh-Myanmar border has been volatile, porous and problematic since the British colonial era. Waves of ethnic violence two years ago in the Rakhine region have left this area segregated on religious lines which further aggravates the border tension. Myanmar created this border crisis with Bangladesh to gain leverage in the power struggle and divert international community's attention from its domestic political developments.

It cannot be a sheer coincidence that the border crisis started the same day when the draft of four religious conversion bills were published in Myanmar's newspapers – that require getting permission from local authorities before converting to other religions – and resumption of Myanmar's parliamentary session. These proposed bills were severely criticised by civil society organisations as undemocratic and discriminatory. Hence, border skirmishes were an attempt by the Myanmar government to galvanise people's support for the proposed legislation by dividing them on religious lines.

The border crisis was not a random incident. Prior to every election, tensions along the 270-kilometer border with Bangladesh have been escalated by the Myanmar government. In 2009, a similar situation was created along the border by Myanmar via fencing and reinforcement of the border in the run up to the 2010 elections. Now, the border issue has come up again in the name of harbouring of the RSO by Bangladesh, for putting the BGP in a positive light to gain brownie points in the 2015 elections in Myanmar.

Moreover, after the latest census in Myanmar, where the Rohingya people were stripped off their identity and recognised as 'Bengalis' illegally migrated from Bangladesh, the initiation of the border gunfight was another effort by Myanmar to negate its responsibility towards the Rohingyas and put the ball in Bangladesh's court for finding a solution to illegal migration.

Larger Implications on the Bilateral

Dhaka and Naypyidaw asserted that the recent clashes are not indications of larger trends but are just isolated incidents due to misunderstandings on the border. Both countries officially stated that border incidents would not damage diplomatic relations. Myanmar has displayed a friendly gesture for improving ties with Bangladesh by returning 30 Bangladeshis arrested for illegally crossing the border.

Both sides agreed to set up a border liaison office for curbing cross-border crimes and to educate people residing in border areas about the demarcation. Both countries also declared that they will start a

security dialogue to discuss and resolve the problems of the border areas. Thus, Dhaka and Naypyidaw governments are in no mood to further stretch the hostility on their shared frontier.

Besides, the neighbouring countries' bone of contention is problem of insurgent groups such as the RSO that allegedly operate from border areas in Bangladesh. Though Dhaka bluntly rejected the existence of the RSO or any rebellious groups in Bangladesh, Myanmar's question that if not the RSO then who is ambushing and attacking the BGP from Bangladesh territory? Hence, both countries have to engage in constructive dialogue for reaching a solution for this issue.

Bangladesh-US: Long Term Agendas over Short Term Fall-Outs

30 April 2014

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The Bangladesh-US bilateral has seen troubled times in the recent period. What are the current deadlocks between the two? Is there scope for rapprochement in the relationship?

Troubles in the Bilateral

Several issues have created a discord in the Bangladesh-US bilateral. They include the overthrowing of Prof. Muhammad Yunus from the post of managing director of Grameen Bank; the failure to ensure rights and safety of garment industry workers; the allegedly non-inclusive national elections of January 5; and the extrajudicial killings and abductions of Bangladeshi citizens.

The Obama administration sternly reacted to the ouster of Prof. Yunus, who is a Noble Peace Laureate and regarded as the father of microfinance. The US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, during her 2012 Bangladesh visit appreciated Yunus's work and criticised Dhaka for sidelining him. The Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, Nisha Desai Biswal, called the dismissal of Yunus as a "deep shame and travesty."

In June 2013, in the aftermath of the Rana Plaza building-collapse catastrophe, the US administration suspended the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) privilege for Bangladesh. The GSP is a tool to provide economic privileges to the "Most Favoured Nation." Bangladesh became conscious as the GSP suspension was 'sending a bad image' of the country to other markets.

Furthermore, post the January 5 elections of 2014, bitterness increased manifold. The US described the election as "deeply flawed" and one which did not credibly represent Bangladeshi citizens. The US administration repeatedly stated that the current political impasse will not be resolved until all political parties and the Bangladeshi civil society participate in the electoral process.

The US government also articulated its concern over extrajudicial killings and suspicious disappearances of Bangladeshi people and also raised questions over the legitimacy of the war crime trials, which they alleged that did not meet all the criteria for fair trials and due processes.

The US Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia, Atul Keshap, remarked that the US "wants to see a bright, prosperous, stable, democratic Bangladesh with the participation of all people." Nisha Desai Biswal stated that the US government continues "to press for greater political inclusion, without which, a more stable and prosperous future is put at risk." These remarks and statements are an indication of the US' pressure on Bangladesh to organise another election.

Bangladesh-US: Where next?

At present, the bilateral relationship is going through a rough patch. Despite that, the US is unlikely to ignore Bangladesh due to the geostrategic location of the country in the New Silk Road envisioned by Washington – that will connect Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and

China. Bangladesh is also an active partner country in the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation and other multilateral groupings in the areas of energy, connectivity, and security. As Tom Kelly, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, US, stated recently, “Bangladesh is located in a vital region, which required it to play an important role in maintaining security in the Bay of Bengal.”

Furthermore, Bangladesh is a role model for many Muslim-majority countries as a moderate Muslim democratic country. Additionally, the US needs Bangladesh more than the other way round to uplift its image among the Muslim nations – especially now, given its declining stronghold in West Asia, post the Arab Awakening, and its disasters in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Bangladesh too wouldn't want further deterioration of the already tense status of the bilateral, because the US is the single biggest export destination for its goods, by being responsible for 30 per cent of Dhaka's export revenue. Bangladesh gets preferential treatment from the US for its tobacco, sporting equipment, porcelain china and plastic products. In fact, approximately 5000 Bangladeshi products are accorded duty-free access to the US markets.

To improve their image in global market, the Bangladesh readymade garment sector has agreed on the manual of global standard to handle issues of workers safety. An updated labour law has been adopted in 2013 to protect the rights of the workers; Dhaka has facilitated the registration of trade unions for the same purpose. Additionally, Bangladesh will not take risk of losing grants and foreign aids by invoking the US's wrath.

Following the conclusion of the April 2014 Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework Agreement (TICFA) meeting in Dhaka, Dan Mozena, ambassador of the US to Bangladesh, stated that the bilateral relationship “was never stronger, deeper and broader than now.” In fact, the TICFA meeting was the first of its kind to be held to review bilateral trades and investment between the two countries. However, the US has shown no interest in providing duty-free market access to Bangladesh-manufactured readymade garments, and has given no positive indication on reinstating the suspended GSP, which has been a long-pending demand of Dhaka's.

Although bilateral relations cover wider socio-economic issues as well, the main focus of strategic dialogue is defence and security-oriented. The US has an interest in maintaining security in the South Asian region as US troops withdraw from Afghanistan soon, and the further rise of China is perceived as risky for Washington's influence in this region.

Therefore, in the midst of all controversial remarks by some cabinet ministers in the Bangladeshi government, and the ongoing upheavals, both the countries would come back to existential realities and make moves to improve political and economic ties through partnership in: joint military exercises and exchanges, developmental projects, counterterrorism, and security initiatives. The Bangladesh-US relationship will stand the test of time.

Afghanistan: The Fragile Future of Democracy

7 July 2014

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Afghanistan's ongoing presidential election, if successful, will mark the first transfer of power via an election in that country's history. Election does not necessarily imply democracy. Afghanistan's previous two presidential elections, both won by incumbent Hamid Karzai, saw ubiquitous election fraud; and there are legitimate questions about how representative one leader or political party can be in a country so fraught with sectarian and tribal divisions. Nowhere are these divisions more apparent than in the central challenge of selling the whole process of democracy to the Afghan people.

Afghanistan's divisions are manifested partly in the readiness of many Afghans to pursue other avenues when the State looks less than functional, which is its usual condition. Presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah, who withdrew from the 2009 election to protest Karzai's election fraud, has threatened to create a "parallel state," by force if necessary, if the currently disputed outcome cannot be resolved. This willingness on Abdullah's part is suggestive of many things, most important of which may be a lack of confidence that the central government can effectively represent more than one of Afghanistan's many groups at a time. Abdullah nominally represents Tajik interests—the northern part of the country—despite his own mixed ancestry.

Ashraf Ghani, the other candidate, has more widespread support among Pashtuns. The challenge all parties face is in trying to make this election more than a contest to see which ethnic group has more voters.

There are a lot of ways to slice Afghanistan: along tribal lines, religious lines, political allegiances, ethnicity, or even language. Western powers, however, have chosen none of these divisions. Afghanistan is to be ruled as a single state, headquartered in Kabul, and is to be a democracy. The 2004 constitution under which Karzai has vaguely been operating grants considerable powers of centralisation: for instance, the president appoints not only regional governors, but also the police chiefs.

In a country like Afghanistan, where adjacent regions may be radically different, this is understandably concerning to anyone not belonging to the current president's particular ethnic group. In part, this will be mitigated by various power-sharing measures, such as reinstating the position of a Prime Minister, as well as proposed elections for regional governors. While this is a step in the right direction, it is not without its own dangers. Democracy can take many different forms, and centralised government is not the only way to rule Afghanistan. Working with instead of against Afghanistan's existing tribal structures remains an open challenge for both the West and any future government in Kabul.

The larger question, perhaps even bigger than identifying the least dysfunctional sort of governance, is whether or not Afghanistan has improved since the US-led invasion. Certainly the problems facing Afghanistan today are not the same problems that faced the country in 2001; they are, perhaps, new twists in old problems. The Taliban government is gone, but the Taliban itself is not, and it remains a political force by virtue of its long reach and extraordinary brutality. Different ethnic groups can now sit around negotiating tables and debate representation—but ethnic divisions remain the primary backdrop against which all political manoeuvring is conducted. Afghanistan is certainly better in some ways, but it is unclear whether that change is durable, or whether a post-NATO Afghanistan can protect the improvements that have been made.

In that context, is Western involvement in the form a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) in the interest of most Afghans? Karzai, who has said he will not sign the agreement—citing heavy civilian casualties and the US' meddling in the allegedly democratic process it created—disagrees. The arguments in favour of continued Western involvement are well-known—ongoing insurgency, fragile central governance, weak institutions, al-Qaeda—but good counterinsurgency has to be more than the temporary solutions of concentrated firepower, strung together until they become permanent. If Afghanistan is to be a democracy, it must be permitted to make its own choices, right or wrong. Both Ghani and Abdullah have stated that they intend to sign the BSA if elected.

Tactical operations are easy to evaluate but strategic goals are often opaque for long periods of time. Expecting Afghanistan to be a functioning democracy right now is probably unrealistic. The things that are realistic are all short-term, and fairly precise: hold a (reasonably) legitimate election, transfer power peacefully, draw-down Western troops from the country, and sign a BSA.

The real danger here is alienation – a sense that Afghanistan is somehow impervious to improvement or positive change. That is untrue, but that perception among external actors will only be reinforced by a lengthy and fraudulent election process. What is at stake is not so much Afghanistan's present as its future. At some point, there needs to be some tangible progress, something to demonstrate that

Afghanistan can, in fact, exist as a single country under democratic leadership. Perfection is not required, but if there aren't glimpses of something better than perpetual civil war, entrenched corruption, and a total lack of trust in the process, the notion of Afghanistan itself is going to be a hard sell—both internationally, and to the Afghan people.

Afghan Presidential Run-off: Things that Matter

30 May 2014

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On 15 May, Afghan presidential candidates Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah accepted the poll results and began readying themselves for the run-off according to the Constitution, scheduled for 14 June. The results of the run-off are scheduled to be declared on 22 June and the next president will assume office within 30 days of the declaration of results.

What are the Afghans' perceptions vis-à-vis the candidates? What role will ethnic identities play in the upcoming election? How comfortable is Pakistan with the Afghan election results and projections?

Ethnicity and the Afghan Presidency

Overall, most Afghan citizens have moved on from choosing their leadership solely on ethnic lines. For the most part, their primary concerns appear to be security, economy, stability and development. However, the run-off to elect the next president of Afghanistan will allow for some ethnic bias to play a somewhat decisive role.

This election will show the level of support Abdullah and Ghani enjoy among the Pashtun electorate – the largest ethnic group in the country. From the time of announcement of candidates – and their running mates – the first round of elections promised a level playing field wherein there was no vote bank that could be completely co-opted. This was essentially due to the diversity in the ethnic backgrounds of the running mates (vice-presidential candidates), given that all presidential candidates were Pashtuns.

The role of ethnicity will come to the fore in the 14 June poll. Abdullah Abdullah is half Tajik and half Pashtun in ethnicity, while Ashraf Ghani is a Pashtun belonging to the nomadic Kuchi tribes. Abdullah was the late Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud's close associate, and someone who fought the Taliban and the Soviets. This, coupled with his lineage of Pashtun-Tajik – essentially uniting the north and the south – could work in his favour.

Ghani on the other hand, is true-blue Pashtun, a veteran academician and a former finance minister with experience of working with international organisations. Pashtuns from southern Afghanistan believe that they are not adequately represented in the parliament. Given how Abdullah is perceived more as a Tajik than a Pashtun, there is a chance that the votes might swing in favour of Ghani.

Additionally the complex web of alliances being struck by the candidates with disqualified candidates and other influential actors from the country is overwhelming.

On the whole, although ethnicity is not the primary driver for most Afghans towards casting their vote, the ethnicity factor will play a greater role during the run-off than it did during the first round of elections.

Pakistan and the Afghan Election

Given the intimacy Abdullah shares with India, it is likely that Pakistan will back Ghani's candidacy. This is not because Ghani is pro-Pakistan, but because Abdullah is extremely pro-India. The recently announced Hezb-e-Islami backing for Ghani is a clear indication of Islamabad (or Rawalpindi's) preferences. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's 11 May visit to Tehran likely saw closed door

discussions vis-à-vis India's growing influence in Afghanistan, and more importantly, the future trajectory of the country following the withdrawal of the Western troops. A stable neighbour is in Iran's interest – as is in Pakistan and India's interests – and Tehran is and will continue to be more New Delhi-friendly in its efforts towards ensuring a secure Afghanistan. Given the religious ideological differences it has with Pakistan and the Saudi-funded terrorists, Iran will likely be more guarded and intensify its efforts to secure its eastern borders. Tehran will remain pragmatic and cooperate with Pakistan wherever it finds necessary, but likely not in a nature that will threaten Indian interests in Afghanistan.

Interestingly, the Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan, General Raheel Sharif, visited Kabul on 19 May to discuss security concerns with the chiefs of the Afghan National Army and the ISAF. This could mean that the Pakistani army might be looking at Afghanistan more pragmatically. Given Pakistan's sealing of the Af-Pak border on 5 April, there appears to be a likelihood that the Pakistani army plans to engage with Kabul to tackle the insurgency in their western borders. Already, within two days of the visit, the Pakistani army launched air strikes in North Waziristan, targeting suspected Taliban hideouts. Furthermore, there might be a chance that Rawalpindi is trying to kill two birds with one stone: dealing with the Pakistani Taliban and thereby eventually de-stretching the army, and, establishing secure routes for energy supply in the future.

Taliban and the Afghan Election

The first round of the election was held on April 5 with surprisingly low instances of terrorist violence. One narrative that did the rounds was that the Taliban might have refrained from attacking the citizenry in a bid to gain some legitimacy, and eventually, stake a claim in the governing structures of the government. However, the Taliban kick-started their spring offensive on 12 May and their declaration as published on their website as well as spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid's press statements indicate otherwise.

The security prospects for 14 June seems bleak; but if the morale of the Taliban has to be substantially damaged, the Afghan citizens and the Afghan National Security Forces must ensure that the Taliban's Operation 'Khyber' does not impede the democratic process.

Nepal, India and the Electricity Trade: Advantage Kathmandu

31 July 2014

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Sitting on a theoretical possibility of producing 84,000 megawatts of hydro-electricity, Nepal currently produces about 700 megawatts of hydro-electricity. The demand for electricity has risen upwards of 20 per cent each year over the last decade; yet Nepal's production has not seen any significant rise. As a result, the population, during extreme situations, faces over 18-hour power-cuts each day.

Holding on to the historical paranoia of Indian expansionist policy, no Nepali government after 1990 has been able to create a situation to multiply hydroelectricity production. After a long stalemate over the power trade issue, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy to focus more on the neighborhood seems to have given renewed impetus on both the sides for a revitalised power trade deal. India plans to propose a new Power Trade Accord (PTA) when Modi visits Nepal in August. Though some details of the agreement are yet to be made public, speculations are on the rise and as usual there is public outcry in Nepal as to how this agreement might not benefit Nepal.

Several Nepali scholars have pointed out that the 2014 PTA undercuts Nepali sovereignty by fueling Indian interests of power while making the Nepali private power sector weak and selling energy that Nepal would require in the future for its own development projects. The PTA – that is in fact beneficial for Nepal in at present as well as in the future – doesn't appear to undermine Nepali sovereignty at all. In fact, for the present it is one way to create more jobs for newer power projects and increase electricity

distribution, as this accord doesn't plan on selling electricity to India before fulfilling demands within Nepal.

Even for the distribution, majority of the infrastructure will be built by Indian corporations. Increased distribution within Nepal would give the country an opportunity to focus on other development projects. The dissenting side of this argument seems to be holding on to the idea of the effects of selling electricity to India at a lower rate than Nepal would want. However, the ground reality is that at the moment, Nepal neither has the infrastructure nor the capacity to mobilise its own domestic industry to create mega hydro-power projects that could sell output to India at a rate it would want. The best compromise would be what has been proposed from the Indian side: consume as much electricity as you need at home and sell the rest of it at a rate that has been agreed upon by both sides.

In the long run, these mega power projects that have been envisioned by India are sure to provide a consistent supply of power to the country to make a move towards clean energy and cut back on the consumption of gasoline – thereby decreasing Nepal's international trade deficit as well as dependency on fossil fuel. Nepal already does a great job of leaving very little carbon footprint internationally and this move would only help strengthen Nepal's environmental record. While Indian power companies build power projects, Nepal has a unique opportunity to study and implement ways to make hydro-electricity the main source of power for the country.

There is a fear that any Indian proposal to Nepal is to turn it into Bhutan – that is still considered an Indian “protectorate.” However, Nepali leaders seem to be either unaware or deliberately ignoring that Bhutan's case is different as India influences its foreign policy. Kathmandu has full control over what it decides to sign off on, and the PTA, at the moment, is highly suitable for various reasons such as: India's successful experiment with such a project(s) in Bhutan; the India-Nepal, geographical and cultural proximities; the Indian power sector's familiarity with regional geography; the Indian interest to invest in Nepal and India's energy needs. One faction of Nepali leaders has been discussing the possibility of selling electricity to either Pakistan or Bangladesh via India. They seem to be unaware of the historical baggage India carries in its relations with these countries. Hence, the voices dissenting this power proposal seem to be stemming out of the paranoia towards anything tagged as Indian.

Nepal's biggest challenge in moving forward with the PTA with India would be the ability to balance the growing Chinese interest in the country. Recently, Chinese companies were awarded contracts to build a few mega hydro-power projects, and this trend might continue. If balanced diplomatically, Nepal might in fact be able to utilise this race between its two neighbours for increased infrastructure in the country; or turn into a playground if not balanced carefully. The Nepali leadership alone has the ability to decide where they would like to head towards.

Nepal: Flawed Nature of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

23 July 2014

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Nepal seems to have met another roadblock in its ongoing peace process with the ongoing debate on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Act. The idea of TRC that was conceived in 2006 became a reality on paper in 2013 when the Nepalese Constituent Assembly (CA) voted to make it a law. It was heavily scrutinised for major flaws associated with possibility of amnesty for war criminals. Eventually, the Supreme Court (SC) of Nepal decided to strike down the law and ordered compliance with international standards.

On the 11 May, a new act that directs the functionalities of the TRC was passed. This act contains the same irregularities that existed in the previous one as well. Clause 26 of the current act provides discretionary powers to the commission to grant amnesty to those accused of serious human rights violations. Furthermore, Clause 13 hands off all the cases from the decade long war to the TRC – making it impossible for victims to pursue a civil suit against perpetrators in any court of law. While several

international observers, human rights organisations, and most importantly, the victims of the civil war demand change in these provisions, the Nepali leadership seems to have turned a blind eye to the issue.

The South African model of the TRC has been an instant hit among Nepali politicians and the military leadership. Particularly, the mass amnesty provided by the South African TRC is where the focus appears to be. This skewed priority has created a commission that has serious flaws.

There have also been no nominations for the commission governance yet. The first logical step for Nepali politicians seems to make way for an impartial leadership to take over the functionalities of the TRC. The impartiality of this appointment itself seems to be a paradox. There is little to no chance that either the political parties who fear a Maoist backlash or a strong political influence from the Nepal Army would go against what has already been voted on. Additionally, there seems to have been a greater push to 'leave things behind'. While it may sometimes be a good idea for quick reconciliation, a sustained one would focus on issues such as human rights violation and war-crimes.

The issue of amnesty itself is particularly concerning in Nepal's case considering how the law was written and passed by a group with significant representation from one of the accused: Unified Communist Party Nepal – Maoist. This raises a question of obvious bias in the law. Further complications arise due to the possibility of triggers that could lead to a blockade in the peace process.

While there has been significant international pressure to amend the act since it was passed in May, there seems to be a lack of argument as to why Nepal's situation might be unique. Overlooking the cultural realities of the Nepali society and judicial system just to comply with international standards may not be the best practice to move forward with either. While basic human rights should be respected and violators of those should be prosecuted regardless of their culture and national identity, the Nepali society can and should have a greater discussion regarding the ways of dealing with the process of reconciliation. A black and white set of regulations could push the country into further distress. The uniqueness could be as small as the way hearings take place – something that could be televised for a far reaching population than secretive, closed-door ones.

The commission itself should function as a supplement to the judicial system and not something independent with the ability to decide on civil lawsuits. At present, the TRC has been charged with the duty of opening up and solving cases associated with the ten-year long conflict. However, this system creates confusion as to where the victims should go to for justice: the TRC or the courts. Having a commission created and appointed with political motivations trying to solve issues of heinous crimes might end up providing only a short term solution to the peace Nepal is looking into. On top of all, handing over all the cases to the commission may weaken the judicial system to the point where impunity might further increase. While the formation of the TRC has clear intentions to finish the peace process, hasty measures may only lead to unresolved cases.

Nepal's reconciliation debate seems to have taken one-sided stance, devoid of a larger debate, no clear participation from experts in creating policies, and a serious non-compliance with treaties Nepal is signatory to. This creates domestic as well as international problems for Nepal's peace process while moving forward. The TRC, as it is at the moment, is clearly flawed several fronts. Moving forward without a larger debate and an amendment to the act that has been passed might leave the wounds of the war exposed for years to come.

Sri Lanka: Understanding the Buddhist-Muslim Communal Clashes

24 July 2014

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In June 2014, history repeated itself when three Muslims were killed and over 50 injured in Aluthgama, Sri Lanka. Almost 100 years ago, in May 1915, communal violence erupted between Sinhala Buddhists and Muslims in Kandy, Sri Lanka.

The 1915 riot was a spontaneous expression of deep economic hostilities with Muslim traders. This time the island's Muslim community finds itself at the receiving end of a concerted and well thought-out attack by the jubilant Sinhala-Buddhists in a post-war Sri Lanka. The militant Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), an off-shoot of another hard-line Sinhala organisation the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) is spearheading a movement against Muslims. Over the past two years, the BBS has organised a systematic and structured attack on Muslim places of worship, dress-code, dietary practices, and business establishments. In February 2013, the BBS went on an aggressive campaign against 'halal' certification of foods that follow Islamic dietary guidelines. Later, the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama withdrew the 'halal' certification in the domestic market 'in the interest of peace'. Soon after, the Islamic dress-code of the 'abaya' became the new bone of contention and drew the ire and disdain of the BBS. Since 2012, the BBS has been distributing pamphlets to discourage people from buying products from Muslim-owned establishments.

Why has there been this aggressive campaign against Muslims, and what has been the Muslim response in the island's politics? The answer lies in the island's complex political history. Muslim identity in Sri Lanka grew within and as a result of competing Sinhala and Tamil identity assertions. Muslims are the third largest community in the island-nation. According to the 2011 census, they constitute 9.7 per cent of the country's population. Despite a sizeable number, they are scattered across the country, particularly in the eastern province, and in Colombo. Ethnically they comprise Sri Lankan Moors, Indian Moors, Malays, Memons and Bohras. The term 'Moor' was used by the Portuguese, and later the Dutch, to refer to Muslims of mixed Arab origin living in the coastal cities of Sri Lanka. A majority of the island's Muslims claim their ancestral connection to Arab maritime traders – that predates the birth of Islam. Except southern Muslims who are bilingual (i.e they speak Tamil and Sinhala), Muslims are predominantly Tamil-speaking. In a country sharply divided along linguistic lines, they formed an identity on the basis of religion.

Due to a history of persecution (under Portuguese and Dutch rules from the 1600s to the beginning of the 1900s), scattered geography, and competing Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms, Muslims have by and large maintained a low-profile in the complex dynamics of the island's politics. However, in the 1980s, when the fight for a Tamil homeland was happening literally in their backyard, Muslims could not remain out of the fray. They opposed a merger of Northern and Eastern Provinces fearing that they would become a 'minority within a minority'.

They demanded that the predominantly Muslim areas in the Eastern Province should be linked together as a single political and administrative entity. This was also the period when their political and electoral identity crystallised with the formation of the island's first effective Muslim political party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) under the aegis of the late MHM Ashraff. Socially, Muslims expressed an identity based on their religion to distinguish themselves from Tamils. However, despite being geo-politically located in the locus of the war, Muslims did not resort to militancy like their Tamil counterparts.

In the immediate post-war political dynamics, the SLMC initially supported the opposition coalition. However, the lasting impact of the total obliteration of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009 and the overwhelming electoral victories of the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) hereafter put minorities, particularly Muslims, on the political back foot and an end to a viable opposition. The SLMC joined the ruling coalition in 2010.

This brings us back to our initial question – why is there a systematic attack against Sri Lankan Muslims? First, this could be yet another reflection of rising Islamophobia in the Indian Ocean region as asserted by Justice Minister and SLMC leader, Rauf Hakeem. Second, the demographic number game has been critical in Sri Lankan politics. The 2011 census indicated a positive curve in the Muslim population. This growth is perceived as an upsurge of growing Muslim domination. Third, the military victory over the LTTE in 2009 gave the Sinhala Buddhist hardliners a strong 'imagined' sense of preserving the 'homeland' for themselves.

In a much delayed response to the riots of June 2014, Hakeem threatened Muslim radicalisation and claimed that Sri Lanka could become a fertile ground for 'outside' forces. Going by the history of Sri

Lankan Muslims, this may well be another strong statement by the SLMC to assert to its electorate that it is the only party that stands up for Muslim rights. But what is more disturbing is the growing latent hostility in a section of the majority mind-set.

Sri Lanka and Myanmar: Understanding the Rise of Buddhist Radicalism

24 July 2014

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Over the past three years, there has been an evident surge of Buddhist radicalism in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, with the clergy being increasingly involved in violence against minorities, especially Muslims. Both countries have sizeable Muslim populations, and while the situation in Myanmar is the worse of the two, Sri Lanka is not too far behind.

The general deduction is that the current state-of-affairs is a consequence of paranoia over losing one's culture, Islamophobia, and a typical assertion of the majority over the minority. However, there must also be a closer examination. How did the practitioners of Buddhism – widely perceived as the most peaceful religion in the world – come to resort to violence? Given how a majority of victims in both countries have been Muslims, how much of a role has Islamophobia played? Is there a non-theological reason for the proliferation of religious violence?

The Situation Today

In Myanmar, a large section of the society comprises monks, given the large-scale enlisting to monasteries that took place during the Junta years. The clergy holds a moral high ground in Myanmar society, and has a strong social standing. Throughout the decades of military dictatorship, Myanmar's clergy fought another issue – the high global attrition rate among schools of Theravada Buddhism. Therefore, protecting the culture became the mainstay, and, knowingly and/or unknowingly, aided the cultivation of non-violent radicalisation among the monks. When this met Islamophobia, it resulted in a violent campaign against 400,000 Rohingya Muslims. Naypyidaw could have easily intervened but it has its own agenda: to wash its hands off the economic costs of providing for thousands of people when its resource basket is already heavily strained. There is a strong ethnic bias element too. Rohingyas do not find favour with the Rakhine Buddhists for their ethnic origins, and given their Muslim faith, Islamophobia has been a side-effect. This, combined with the high social position occupied by the clergy, has resulted in a plausible tacit deal.

In Sri Lanka, action and literature against religious minorities began 40 years ago, soon after the government decided to stop funding the Sangha. Although the victims were not Muslims alone at the start, since the early 2000s, the focus of violent Buddhist radical actions has been Sri Lanka's Muslim population.

In Sri Lanka, three key ethnicities are identified: Sinhalas, Tamils and Muslims. This makes it evident that despite being a religious and not an ethnic construct, Muslims (who have ancestral links to Arab traders, Tamils, and Malays) are considered to be of another ethnicity – one that is identified by their religious faith. However, the Sri Lankan Buddhist radical clergy does not target Muslims alone. They began by targeting minorities, and with increasing Islamophobia, they have concentrated their attacks primarily on Muslims. In Sri Lanka, almost all political parties have monks in their membership. The monks' entry into the political arena they otherwise shunned began just before World War II, and has today become a part of Sri Lankan politics.

Myanmar and Sri Lanka: Situational Differences

The basic difference in the nature of nexus between the Buddhist clergy and the political class in Myanmar and Sri Lanka is that in Myanmar, the clergy has strong socio-political standing and cannot be ignored, and is therefore co-opted; and in Sri Lanka, the clergy – fairly strong but one that is also

influenced by modern Sinhala nationalist ideology – is used by the political class as pawns during election campaigns and/or employed to legitimise various government decisions.

However, the split that the Sri Lankan Sangha went through, over three decades ago, resulted in the fragmentation of the clergy. With no direct material support from the government, each group tries to outdo the other to ensure funding that is provided only by wealthy benefactors – who fund only the most radical groups.

In Myanmar, the Buddhist clergy is united and has an upper hand to an extent – or at least an even hand – and the government is in a quid pro quo arrangement with them to secure their individual interests. In Sri Lanka, the Buddhist clergy is becoming increasingly radicalised due to competition for sources of funds – a problem that arose primarily due to ideological differences in the Sangha itself and its implications on political preferences – and the government's use of the monks for political benefit. Furthermore, in Myanmar, violence against Rohingya Muslims has a lot to do with their ethnic and historical Bengali origins than their faith alone while that is not the case in Sri Lanka.

There are indeed several other factors at play in Sri Lanka, such as the 2004 Anti-Conversion Bill, and the politics and politicisation of the Ministry of Buddha Sasana, among others, and in Myanmar, its citizenship laws. Understanding the core differences between what is unfolding in Myanmar and Sri Lanka is crucial therefore to develop custom-made solutions for each. Evidently, the central factor sustaining these crises is money and/or the lack of it. Financial factors being the bulwark for the sustenance of violence only means it will be easier to resolve than if it were purely ideological.



EAST ASIA



India-South Korea: Non-Partners in Countering China

17 December 2014

Skand Tayal

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The steady rise of China is a reality. Its growing economic, military and consequent strategic strengths are subjects of research, analysis and debate and also of concern, particularly for China's neighbours.

There is already a considerable body of work analysing different aspects of India-China relations. The new book, 'Sino-India and Sino-South Korean Relations', is a very timely addition as it 'compares and contrasts' the compulsions of bilateral relations of two major democracies – India and Republic of Korea (ROK) – with their giant neighbour, China. For a fair assessment, the bilateral relations of a country need to be examined in a comparative framework also and the authors have conducted extensive research on how India and the ROK have been engaging with China over the years.

It is noteworthy that both India's and the ROK's relations with China have undergone phases of hostility, indifference and engagement. China has the dubious distinction of unquestionably supporting rogue states hostile to India and the ROK – North Korea on the ROK's Northern border and Pakistan at India's North-West. By its acts of omission and commission, China has also assisted in the clandestine nuclearisation of Pakistan and North Korea. With the passage of time in recent years, both India and the ROK have developed strong economic relations with China, despite an uneasy strategic relationship. The ROK has always depended on the US for its security. India also appears to be gravitating towards the US to bolster its own capacity for defence.

The book very lucidly analyses China's rise, attempting to answer the question as to how real and sustainable the trajectory of China's rise would be. In chapter three, the authors examine the available evidence to seek an answer to the million dollar question whether China's rise would be peaceful. The authors have sketched out three different scenarios (Page 58) that are ominous in varying degrees. The first is akin to the rise of aggressive Germany in Europe, i.e. 'Europe's past becomes Asia's future'. The second is China's domination over East Asia, similar to the US's domination over the Americas. The third is China's developing into a 'benign hegemon'. The authors rightly observe on page 59 that 'bilateral and multilateral security arrangements could moderate extreme behavior by China'. The authors have examined India-ROK relations in this context.

The authors have devoted considerable attention to the uneasy Sino-Indian relations in Chapters 5 and 6. They have traced the bitter history of the 1962 border conflict. Quoting former Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's letters to President John F. Kennedy in the aftermath of 1962 debacle asking for US air support is notable. (Pages 91-98). China watchers may, however, not fully agree with the observation on page 104 that "..... Chinese decision making is not reactive, but seeks to retain the initiative at all times." Chinese policies are, when required, reactive also to deal with any action of their perceived adversary. China has reacted aggressively in many situations; e.g. India's 'Forward policy' in 1962 and the Japanese assumption of sovereignty over Senkaku Islands in 2012.

From the Koreans, one learns that they have always treated China with respect. The authors have rightly emphasised that India and China should communicate better to avoid misconceptions. Fortunately, this is the current policy on both sides, evident in the frequent high level and Summit level meetings and the recent visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to India.

On page 152, the authors have analysed the logic of China's interest in South Asia, which would be useful for readers from the region. This interest is backed with a concrete offer of \$ 30 billion for roads in the region made at the recent Kathmandu SAARC Summit by Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin.

On page 200, the authors claim that 'South Korea has become assertive in its foreign policy doctrine'. However, it has been substantiated in the text only vis-à-vis Japan. Evidence suggests that mindful of its economic interests, the ROK avoids taking a stand on any bilateral or multi-lateral issue not of its direct

concerns. For instance, the ROK did not name Pakistan for sending terrorists to Mumbai for the dastardly attack on 26 November, 2008, even though the ROK Consul General was among those trapped that night on the rooftop restaurant of the Taj Mahal Hotel.

The authors have commented in detail on South Korea's journey from hostility towards PRC following the Korean War to 'Strategic Ambiguity' (Page 206) of the 1990s and the current trend towards balancing relations between the US and China. (Pages 197, 203). Both India and the ROK face a similar dilemma – their economic dependence on trade with China is growing while on security related matters, including status quo in maritime traffic in the South China Sea, both the countries are wary of China.

However, it is difficult to agree with the authors that “..... ROK is improving relations with other major powers including India to counter the rise of China.” (Page 221). The ROK studiously avoids talking about China in its official dealings with India. Additionally, the core of the India-ROK relationship continues to be economic.

India's 'strategic partnership' with the ROK would have strong elements of defence cooperation, supply of defense platforms and systems, civil nuclear and space related co-operation, maritime security and safety of sea lines; but any element of a common position against China on any subject is unlikely to be an integral component of this partnership.

The thoroughly researched volume reflects the deep understanding of the authors of the strategic, diplomatic, security and economic issues involved in the two crucial bilateral relationships in East Asia. It is a very succinct presentation of complex and interlinked issues. The volume would be both informative and thought-provoking for all those interested in studying the rise of China and how its neighbors are dealing with this new phenomenon.

China and the Uyghur Issue: Can the New Silk Route Really Help?

13 December 2014

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Today, with the increasing threat of Islamist terrorism due to the rise and reach of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, sections of societies in Central Asia, South Asia, and West Asia are getting increasingly radicalised. Will China succeed in pushing forward in its economic agendas via the Western Development Strategy – the New Silk Route project and the energy corridors between Central Asia and China – if the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), the region that borders all the aforementioned areas is constantly under unrest?

Understanding the Unrest in the XUAR

Contrary to the misrepresentation and/or misinterpretation that unrest in the XUAR is purely terrorism, terrorism and religious fanaticism, the unrest in the region is rather complex and specific. The oversimplification of the issue is what has resulted in the turmoil that exists today. The Uyghur region has witnessed several socio-political and economic changes since the time of the Silk Road trade. Since its inclusion into the Chinese State in 1949, the Communist Party of China's (CPC's) policies – that it borrowed from the erstwhile Soviet model – of making the country a Unitarian state with a singular identity across all regions, has created problems of several kinds, and the XUAR unrest is one such consequence.

The restrictions on the expression of religious and cultural heritage and choices; the increased migration of the Han Chinese into the XUAR – that has resulted in the Uyghurs getting a sense of minoritisation –; branding of any dissent and/or protest of policies as terrorism and separatism; the heavy-handed measures used to crack down on opposition; the misinformed strategy of using economic means to solve a socio-political problem; and more importantly, viewing all Uyghurs as the same – i.e. separatists –has pushed the Uyghurs to a brink causing them to resist even resiliently.

Beijing, thus, knowingly and/or unknowingly fuels the very unrest it has been trying to put an end to. Furthermore, China has, over the past few years, begun to equate Islam (the religion followed by most Uyghurs in the XUAR) to extremism – a regressive approach that will not only not resolve the unrest, but also further frustrate any effort towards the resolution of the issue.

The Core of Beijing's Misinformed Strategies

The CPC's lack of nuanced understanding of the history of the region and/or its deliberate unwillingness to admit to the actual socio-political history of the region will only prove detrimental to the strategies towards the successful implementation of its domestic and international agendas.

Beijing's approach – using economic incentives to resolve a socio-political issue – has not worked elsewhere, and is likely to fail in the XUAR as well, and for the same reasons. The overlapping of the socio-cultural and socio-political elements in the CPC's strategies in the region since 1949 have thus resulted to a certain degree, an overlap in terms of the pushback that is generated as a consequence.

Turning Liabilities into Assets

In order to ensure sustainable stability in the XUAR, Beijing must take a fresh look at the Uyghurs and view and treat them as potential stake-holders who have shared interests in ensuring stability and peace in the region. Co-opting the Uyghurs by genuine means will automatically bring down the level of unrest drastically.

Today, the Uyghur region is in the exact geopolitical and geo-economic situation it found itself in, a few centuries ago, when trade on the Silk Route was still fully functional. A case in point is that in 2012, the GDP of the XUAR stood at \$122 billion, a \$94 billion rise from \$28 billion in 2004. In fact, the role of the Uyghurs and the Region too is exactly the same: a buffer zone for the ruling entity that sat in the mainland, yet strategically important for trade and security.

Furthermore, China could harness the rich history of Islam in the region and build on the narratives to reap comprehensive overall benefits.

If the CPC leadership makes a genuine attempt to understand the history of Islam in China, it would know that there was a potent mix of peaceful actors throughout the ages. That Islam of various kinds, including Sufi Islam, spread to and settled in China as early as during the Tang Dynasty – that ruled China from 618-907 AD – means that the religion has a rich and long history in the country. Therefore, viewing the Uyghurs' demands of cultural rights should not be misinterpreted as a new phenomenon that is a result of hard-line Wahhabi indoctrination. On the contrary, the Uyghurs have historically detested the hard-line interpretations of Islam. A case in point is the strong opposition to the rigid Hanafi policies imposed by Tajik Commander of the then Khanate of Kokand, Yakub Beg, who briefly conquered the region in 1867.

China would do well to address the Uyghur issue by focusing separately but simultaneously on three areas: social freedoms, security, and inclusiveness.

Only those individuals that actually carry out violent attacks must be viewed from a security lens. Those who criticise CPC policies will have to be engaged instead of being labelled simply as separatists. Once the socio-economic concerns are genuinely addressed, any sympathies and/or support for the violent extremists such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and/or separatism will reduce considerably. The remainder can easily be tackled using its own security apparatus as well as with a little help from the governments of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

The Sino-Russian Gas Agreement: Political Implications for an Asian Rebalance

30 May 2014

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The recently concluded Sino-Russian contract has caught the attention of the world and there is no dearth of theories as to what it all means. The foremost questions this show of deepening Sino-Russian friendship raises are: how big a deal is this contract and what political implications does it hold?

The Deal

The US\$400 billion gas deal that was concluded in Shanghai between Gazprom, Russia's largest natural gas producer and the State-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) on 21 May was claimed by President Vladimir Putin to be "the biggest contract in the gas sector in the history of the former USSR," and compared by analysts to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Sino-Soviet entente of the Cold War era. According to the agreement, Russia will pipe 38bcm (billion cubic metre) of liquefied natural gas (LNG) per year to China for thirty years. Although the signatories claim that delivery of the LNG from Russia's eastern gas fields shall begin in 2018, experts are of the opinion that Russia lacks the infrastructure for this, and with its economy close to recession due to the sanctions against it, the transfer of gas may be delayed till 2020. China has agreed to advance a loan of US\$25 billion and Russia is expected to pool in US\$55 billion of its own resources to develop the required infrastructure.

A Big Deal?

Economically, despite what Putin said, the deal does not appear to be very significant. It will bring Russia an added income of only an approximate US\$13 billion a year. Russia's European market is significantly larger than this. Moreover, the operationalisation of the deal is likely to run into problems due to the lack of sufficient infrastructure in the Eastern Siberian gas fields. Kovykta and Chayanda, the largest gas fields in the region, are not producing yet, despite the negotiations having gone on for a long time.

However, since the agreement also ramped up Chinese investment in Russia, it might imply that the two countries have decided to grow closer on other platforms. The summit meeting between the Russian and Chinese presidents also focused on regional security with Putin claiming that Russia-China ties are at the highest point in history and President Xi Jinping calling for the strengthening of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and a new regional security arrangement with Russia and Iran. Putin's two-day visit to Shanghai also coincided with a joint naval exercise between the Russian and Chinese navies, the Joint Sea 2014, in the East China Sea.

The coincidence of these events and the rhetoric used by both the states indicate that Russia and China are willing to look away from existing irritants to their bilateral ties, focus on areas where their interests coincide, and explore newer avenues of cooperation, making the gas agreement between the two giants a big deal politically.

What Does It Imply?

This gas deal has been in the works for a whole decade, with negotiations beginning in 2004. The two parties could not reach a consensus on price. The successful finalisation of the agreement now could be a result of a new urgency that both Russia and China are labouring under. Russia has been suffering from economic sanctions by the US and the EU due to its actions in Ukraine. China is experiencing an economic slowdown and is looking to rejuvenate its economy. Also, since the coal-fired power plants that it currently uses are environmentally damaging, it is seeking cleaner sources of energy to feed its industrialised eastern regions.

Russia is also seeking to expand the market for its immense fossil fuel reserves into Asia, in order to decrease its unhealthy dependence on the European markets that are 'weaning' themselves off Russian gas. It has also been stated that China will increase its investments in Russia if sanctions against the country are increased.

It is possible that the two States are forming a tag-team in light of the recent events in Ukraine and the South China Sea (SCS). Russia recently annexed the Crimean Peninsula and China deployed an oil rig to disputed waters in the SCS. Having incurred international displeasure for these acts of (extreme) assertiveness, the two states might be lending support to each other; a show of presence in each other's corners.

These actions have a number of international entities worried. It could be that the Russians and Chinese are forming an axis to shift the balance of power, centering it in Asia. For States like Japan, Vietnam and others involved in conflicts with China, the prospect of China gaining Russia as an ally is to be feared, especially given doubts that the US will honour its security arrangements. For India, it is not yet time to worry. It has enjoyed a long friendship with Russia, who has not yet indicated that it is ready to take sides where India and China are concerned. It might even be a positive note, opening up a new possibility for LNG trade between Russia and India via China.

Decoding China's Silk Diplomacy at Sea

11 December 2014

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China has proposed to revive the centuries-old 'Silk Road of the Sea' into a 21st century Maritime Silk Road (MSR). The MSR initiative has a clear strategic purpose and is a helpful channel for the Chinese grand strategy. It aims to seize the opportunity of transforming Asia and to create strategic space for China.

The success of the MSR initiative will be extremely consequential to regional stability and global peace. Today, China is in the process of remaking history at sea, and some scholars view it as 'China's maritime renaissance'. China's growing merchant marine; expansion of its global shipbuilding market; increasing reach in building and managing off-shore ports and port facilities; and efforts to develop a modern blue-water navy are evident.

The thrust on reviving ancient maritime routes is the first global strategy for enhancing trade and fostering peace proposed by the new Chinese leaders. The MSR borrows and inherits the ancient metaphor of friendly philosophy to build a new one in the 21st century. It emphasises on improving connectivity with Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia and even Africa, by building a network of port cities along the Silk Route, linking the economic hinterland in China. More importantly, it aspires to improve the Chinese geo-strategic position in the world.

The idea of the MSR was outlined in Chinese President Xi Jinping's speech at the Indonesian Parliament in October 2013 and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's speech at the 16th ASEAN-China summit in Brunei. The Chinese leaders underlined the need to re-establish the centuries-old seaway as the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, while celebrating the 10th anniversary of the ASEAN-China strategic partnership. The main emphasis was placed on stronger economic cooperation, closer cooperation on joint infrastructure projects, enhancement of security cooperation, and the strengthening of maritime economies, environmental, technical and scientific cooperation. Thus, there are five key elements of the MSR: policy coordination; connectivity; trade and investment; people-to-people links; and financing development.

China plans to build a series of 'sea stations' for safe seaways. On the economic front, the MSR proposal aims to boost maritime connectivity, port and harbour cooperation, and maritime commerce. It also provides a channel for overseas investment for Chinese companies and capital, either in infrastructure construction, or in the manufacturing and foreign commodity trade and service sectors. For China, such outward infrastructure investment is important for boosting its manufacturing sector, addressing its domestic production overcapacity and stimulating domestic economic growth.

At a recent conference at Sichuan University, responding to a question about the action plan of the MSR, one senior Chinese scholar remarked that the Chinese government is following reactions from different

countries on the MSR proposal and soon a blueprint of action plan would be available. While, to create functional single market, it is necessary to overcome maritime connectivity issues, the lack of interoperability and infrastructure gaps, it is equally important for China to ensure that it draws up plans, sets priorities, and monitors and coordinates progress on the ground in collaboration with other partner countries.

Furthermore, China will require long-term commitment, political will, and a better coordination mechanism between different agencies and provinces for the smooth implementation of the MSR initiative. As outlined in their speeches, mentioned above, Chinese leaders could consider carrying out joint projects underpinned by the principles of 'mutual respect and mutual benefit'. Over time, such an approach could be helpful in changing other countries' perceptions. Chinese leaders may also consider establishing a regional maritime transport framework system with the aim to promote maritime transport facilitation under the MSR initiative.

There is, however, some anxiety within the Asia-Pacific region over Chinese actions on the ground that were contradictory to China's stated intentions of goodwill and peaceful cooperation. China's stationing of one of its oil rigs in a disputed territory in the South China Sea flared up tensions and fuelled the 'China Threat' discourse in the Asia-Pacific. Furthermore, it ruptured relationships, and cast doubts among some of the ASEAN countries vis-à-vis Beijing's recent announcements of friendship and good neighbourliness.

Given China's acts of assertiveness, it is difficult for the region's smaller states to not feel suspicious of any goodwill gesture from Beijing. It will be difficult for China to build a friendly neighbourhood if Beijing's every move is met with distrust and fear. China forgets that because of its sheer size, any move it makes that it views as insignificant could have large implications for its smaller neighbours. Hence, China needs to address the trust deficit that exists among some of its ASEAN neighbours while undertaking such initiatives.

The MSR initiative could be very helpful in reinforcing cooperation and raising it to a new level of maritime partnership. Nevertheless, China has yet to cultivate the much-needed political and strategic trust.

China's Endgame in Afghanistan

24 November 2014

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The US troops are expected to exit from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 but according to a recently signed Bilateral Security Agreement between Afghanistan and the US, the troops will remain until 'end of 2024 and beyond'. Many Western countries look forward to China's more active role in the country. Given the complexity of the situation in the country and the region, will China engage itself in Afghanistan? What is its end-game in Afghanistan?

China's Interests in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is China's neighbour and any development in the country is bound to affect internal dynamics in China. Given that Afghanistan is a landlocked country and shares a border with China, Beijing will engage with Kabul to secure its western periphery, especially Xinjiang region. Notably, non-interference in domestic issues of other countries is the lynchpin of Chinese foreign policy. However, China has so far made economic investments in Afghanistan, especially in its energy sector.

China needs a stable and secure neighbourhood for its 'Peaceful Development' plan that also emphasises on a stable and secure neighbourhood. In 2006, China and Afghanistan signed the 'Treaty of Good Neighbourly Friendship and Cooperation' to lay out basic political principles and main directions of bilateral relations.

The region assumes more importance for China as it forms an important link in the 'New Silk Road' and is interconnected to China's Western Development Strategy (WDS). Although the Road does not pass through Afghanistan and Pakistan, it does pass through Urumqi and Khorgas in Xinjiang. Thus China is concerned about the overall security environment in the country that can affect the trade conducted through the corridor. The WDS that essentially aims to develop the western provinces of China is often disrupted by the Uyghur terrorism in the Xinjiang province.

Thousands of Uyghurs fighters are being trained in Afghanistan and Pakistan. There have been several instances of attacks in the past few months alone. Consequently, China has witnessed instability spilling into Beijing as well. During the 1990s, China relied on Pakistan to manage its relationship with the extremist group but now it is sceptical of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Tools of Engagement

China has always been active in regional efforts pertaining to Afghanistan, such as: the '6 plus 2 initiative; the Kabul Process; and most recently, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Istanbul process. The SCO was created in part as a response to the events unfolding in Afghanistan. It is anticipated that it will fill the vacuum as a viable regional institution that has both Russia and China as full-time members and Afghanistan, Iran, India and Pakistan as observers. Security is one of the most important issues on the SCO's agenda; the main focus of the SCO is to combat three evils in the region: terrorism, separatism and extremism. China has been its active member and Afghan stability is one of the major concerns of the organisation.

In August 2014, China held the first and the biggest military drill under the banner of the SCO in Inner Mongolia. The drill was aimed at training 7,000 servicemen from five SCO member states to test the troops' effectiveness in fighting terrorism.

Initiated in 2011, the Istanbul Process-'Heart of Asia' is a unique regional cooperation mechanism on Afghanistan that provides a platform for regional countries to improve interaction with Afghanistan. It aims to bring stability and development to the region. The fourth ministerial conference was held recently, which saw the participation of Chinese Premier Le Keqiang who strongly emphasised on the five points of China's interests in the Afghanistan. During the conference, China put forward a proposal, titled 'peace and reconciliation forum' with an aim to revive peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. It looks forward to involve representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the Taliban.

China's Endgame

Soon after taking office, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani visited Beijing in his first international visit as the new president; his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, re-emphasised that China values 'Strategic Cooperative Partnership and supports Afghanistan to achieve stable transition and peaceful reconstruction'. During the meeting, he emphasised that Afghanistan's development goals are closely associated with China's promotion of regional cross-border economic development. The increasing China's engagement is believed to a win-win situation for both China and Afghanistan.

China will be training 3,000 Afghan professionals in various fields over the next five years but will never put 'boots on the ground'. Its role in Afghanistan will be a litmus test of its regional strategy. This can really help in establishing its image as a responsible global player in contrast to its assertive behaviour in the South and East China Seas.

Notably, China is interested in economic reconstruction of Afghanistan as much as it caters to Beijing's foreign economic policy with the ambition of a global power. China's endgame therefore is to emerge as a responsible regional power and eventually a global power.

Maritime Silk Road: Increasing Chinese Inroads into the Maldives

13 November 2014

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Chinese President Xi Jinping's September 2014 visit to the Maldives was his first visit to South Asia, indicating to the balance of power dimension with India. Through the joint press communiqué on September 15, China secured the Maldives' endorsement for upgrading Beijing's links with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Three presidential visits from Malé to Beijing have already taken place.

This was the first time a Chinese president made such a visit, indicating towards the emerging focus of this region in China's foreign policy. He was accompanied by a 100-member business delegation, demonstrating the economic focus of the visit. Besides, Beijing mooted the October 2013 idea of a Maritime Silk Road (MSR) connectivity between China and the Maldives, indicating the strategic nature of relations. The joint statement issued during Xi's visit suggested that Malé will be "prepared to actively participate" in the Maritime Silk Road initiative of China.

Interestingly, Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen had visited China in August, and attended the second Summer Youth Olympic Games in Nanjing. During the visit, Yameen secured a \$16 million grant aid from China. This sum is expected to cover costs partly for the Malé-Hulhule Bridge, other projects. Beijing, as a part of its aid program, constructed a building to house the Maldives Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a national museum, and is involved in the 1000 Housing Units Project. Additionally, Beijing is actively involved in several renewable energy projects, tourism and telecommunication sectors. That the highest leaderships of the two countries visited each other within a month shows both their priorities.

The Vice President of the Maldives, Mohamed Jameel Ahmed, visited China in June, and met his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yang. The Maldives-China cooperation on developing special economic zones, construct harbours and bunkering facilities, and diversifying from tourism in the island nation were firmed up during Xi's visit to the Maldives.

Today, China's interests in the Maldives have become multidimensional in the backdrop of its dependence on energy through the Indian Ocean Region as well as to balance the Indian rise. Strategic considerations over-weigh Beijing's postures towards Malé. For instance, China had been actively proposing its MSR idea to the Indian Ocean littorals as a part of its grand strategy to oppose the US rebalance strategy as well as to further its own influence in the region. This initiative was proposed at various venues to the Maldives and the latter had expressed interest in this initiative.

The Xi-Yameen Joint statement in September 2014 mentions the same, in addition to specific issues of maritime cooperation, thus: "We have agreed to jointly build the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and take this opportunity to enhance cooperation in the fields of maritime economy, maritime security, ocean research, environment protection, and disaster prevention. We will also try to start some key projects that can yield quick results, at an early date".

It was reported by Xinhua on August 15, 2014 that the link in this maritime route is via the Ihavandhippolhu Integrated Development Project, or iHavan, in the northern-most atoll of Maldives. The project seeks to capitalise on the location of the atoll, which lies on the seven degree channel through which the main East-West shipping routes connect Southeast Asia and China to the Middle East and Europe.

With economic interdependencies increasing and China becoming the largest trading partner for 128 countries, economic development issues have come to the fore in China's foreign policy postures. Malé could provide raw materials, market for investments and more significantly aid could transform bilateral relations in Beijing's favour. This also coincides with the Maldivian plans to transform their economy.

China's Ambassador to Maldives Wang Fukang stated that China would provide concessional loans and investments in Maldives in fisheries sector, aquatic products, etc. Bilateral trade between the two stood at \$64 million in 2010 and increased to \$ 98 million in 2013.

Furthermore, the Maldives's tourism potential is vast. The number of Chinese tourists to the country increased from 12,000 in 2010 to 330,000 in 2013. Maldivian Tourism Minister Ahmed Adeb stated in late June that his country will borrow \$400 million from China Exim Bank to develop a runway for the Ibrahim Nasir International Airport – the contract for which was originally given to Indian company GMR, but that was cancelled.

Thus China-Maldives relations are on an upswing and appear to be at the behest of Beijing's increasing initiatives. Today, these relations are expanding in terms of increasing loans from China to the Maldives for infrastructure projects; but although it is not clear how the Malé will repay these debts as most of the loans given by China are at high interest rates and often without transparent procedures. Defence cooperation between the two is imminent with long-term consequences for both India and the US in the Indian Ocean Region. It is interesting to note that President Xi termed the Maldives (and later Sri Lanka) as a "pearl" in the Indian Ocean – reviving the "String of Pearls" rhetoric.

China and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank: A New Regional Order?

31 October 2014

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The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was recently launched in Beijing and will be operational by 2015. China's proactive role in the matter has alarmed other world powers, begging the question: what are China's objectives and does the bank mark the beginning of a new regional order?

Objectives

The AIIB is an initiative by the new Chinese leadership that seeks a more equal and balanced development model in Asia. The total capital of the bank is USD 100 billion, the initial capital will be 50 billion, and the paid in ratio will be 20 per cent. China being the second largest economy falls in the 'Category II' voting bloc at the World Bank, while at the Asian Development Bank it has a 5.5 per cent share. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is always headed by Japan. China, along with other countries, therefore seeks to change the representation at these institutions.

Twenty-one countries along with China have joined the AIIB; India has joined because it wants better representation in an international economic institution. Thailand joined the bank because it was looking for an alternative means to fund its transport system. Some countries, like Australia, South Korea and Indonesia were not present at the inauguration. It thus shows that the members have joined the bank willingly and have not been co-opted by the Chinese. Although the structural modalities of the bank have not yet been spelled out, this is not the first time that a regional bank is being established. The Europe Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has been functioning since 1991, when the Soviet Union dissolved.

Recently, there have been questions about China 'peaceful development'. In terms of a foreign policy agenda, the AIIB is a step towards projecting China as responsible regional player and subsequently a global power. It is the Chinese alternative to the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) led by the US and Japan and an answer to the US 'pivot to Asia'. It is an endeavour by China to discourage Asian countries to seek help from the US or US-led institutions, thereby restricting its entry into Asia. The bank will also highlight China's significant experience in infrastructure financing, and indeed, multilateral development banking in general. Also, the APEC summit is scheduled for November 2014, and China might have wanted to launch the bank prior to it so that a formal announcement could be made at the summit in the presence of the US.

The Chinese economy is set to reach USD 10 trillion this year with a trade surplus of three trillion, and it wants to invest the money in a way that will increase its international status. This bank will be vital in tapping China's excess savings and utilising them for developing Asia. As a result, it will help China legalise the RMB and reduce its own direct lending. This will create opportunities for Chinese companies to get contracts for projects. The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is also scheduled to start functioning by the end of 2015 - China thus wants to start the bank before the AEC becomes functional so that it can involve ASEAN countries in the projects. Consequently, the bank will add value to China's relations with its neighbours by deepening trade ties.

A New Regional Order?

Asian countries are growing at a fast pace; by 2030 they will account for almost half of the global GDP. According to a report by the ADB, in the next decade, Asian countries will need USD8 trillion in infrastructure investments to maintain the current economic growth rate. Existing institutions like the ADB neither have the capital nor the expertise to cater to infrastructural needs. On the contrary, China has the money and the experience from its remarkable infrastructure development path. Drawing from China's experience, the bank will help in providing the required infrastructure for the 'Asian Century'.

It will give credit for investments in real economy unlike the 'Washington Consensus'; the first proposed project of the bank is the New Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR). Both the projects are oriented towards infrastructure development and connectivity in the region. Again, these projects will not only benefit China but the countries along which they are located and certainly, the region as a whole.

Asian economies are expanding and are expected to become more complex and interconnected. Such initiatives will help to sustain the pace of their development. This marks the beginning of a new era led by China as the leader and not the US, and will help China enhance its claim as a regional leader as this is the first initiative to strengthen economic coordination within the Asian region.

"China Threat" in South Asia: A Perspective from China

16 October 2014

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President Xi Jinping's six-day South Asian trip is over. Apart from a series of bilateral agreements, friendly high-level dialogues and other interactions, the trip also demonstrated the direction of China's South Asian policy. Indeed, with growing bilateral and multilateral interactions with South Asia, China is looking for a more flexible and comprehensive policy to accommodate the present situation, and to some extent, respond to the related arguments of China as a threat in the region.

Admittedly, one of the challenges for China's current South Asian policy is how to address doubts about the motivations for China's foreign policy in the region, in particular, India's worries about the "China threat." China has repeatedly stated that it is keen on promoting peaceful development and cooperation toward win-win outcomes and cooperate with India towards regional prosperity, but in some Indian assessments, China's rising profile in South Asia is not good news. For example, an Indian analyst argues that China is expanding its sphere of regional influence by surrounding India with a 'string of pearls' that could eventually undermine India pre-eminence and potentially become an economic and security threat.

Obviously, Xi's visits in September not only tried to confirm that Beijing is putting greater emphasis on this region, but also demonstrate that it want to address its neighbours' "China threat" perception. For this, the Chinese leader presented Beijing current South Asian policy with some new characteristics.

First, Xi emphasised common regional development. In his speech at the Indian Council of World Affairs, he said, "A South Asia that enjoys peace, stability, development and prosperity serves the interests of countries and people in the region and of China as well. China wants to live in harmony with all countries in the region and contribute its share to the development of the region." Xi not only suggested that China

should work with the relevant countries to step up economic integration and connectivity in the region but also proposed that they come together to join the “Belt” and “Road” initiatives that aim at strengthening connectivity among countries along the traditional land and maritime silk roads.

Second, Xi emphasised multi-dimensional cooperation with South Asian partners. For economic cooperation, in the next five years, China plans to work with South Asian countries to increase bilateral trade to US\$150 billion, its investments in South Asia to US\$30 billion, and provide US\$20 billion in concessional facilities to the region. It needs to be mentioned that Beijing also focuses on other modes of cooperation and interaction with South Asia. China is concentrating its efforts on expanding people-to-people and cultural exchanges with South Asia. It plans to offer 10,000 scholarships, training opportunities for 5,000 people, an exchange and training programme for 5,000 youth, and train 5,000 Chinese language teachers for South Asia in the next five years. In addition, China will work with South Asian countries to implement the China-South Asia Partnership Initiative for Science and Technology, give full play to the role of the China-South Asia Expo, and build new platforms for mutually beneficial cooperation.

There is no denying that during his trip, President Xi reaffirmed China’s good neighbourly foreign policy and made efforts to deepen strategic relations at the multilateral and bilateral levels, which is a timely move. It reflects what President Xi described: “the principles of China’s neighbour diplomacy as amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness.” However, a one-time diplomatic trip may not be enough to address all the concerns and issues.

Although Xi’s South Asian trip opened a new door for China-South Asia relations, it is necessary for China to understand that challenges and problems still exist. In the future, China needs to undertake more dialogues and interactions both through the official and civilian channels with South Asia, in particular, India. As the two biggest powers in the region, China and India should both be positive and see the multiple levels of potential interaction in the future, and join hands in cooperation. It will benefit this region and the rest of Asia as well. In addition, China also should be aware of other challenges it might face such as how to deal with South Asia’s complicated regional relations, in particular, India-Pakistan relations, which needs China’s smart and cautious diplomacy. Other issues like Afghanistan’s stability and development, especially after 2014, will also test Chinese political and diplomatic wisdom. Just as some analysts say, China should realize that instability in one part of the region inevitably bleeds into other parts of South Asia and could possibly threaten China.

Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping: Strong Leaders, Hard Issues

20 September 2014

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The visit of the Chinese President Xi Jinping to India is over. A series of bilateral agreements and a new bonhomie at the highest level between Jinping and Modi are the highlights, along with border clashes in Ladakh during the same time.

What is the big picture? Is the bilateral relation now poised to take off and realise an Asian Century? Will the two leaders, be able to break the border barrier, reduce the existing reluctance in their Establishments and the red tape to take the bilateral relations ahead?

Strong Personal Chemistry and its Fallout on India-China Relations

On the positive side, the biggest outcome of the visit is the strong personal chemistry between Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi.

Both are strong leaders in their own countries. The latest essay in the Economist (The Rise and Rise of Xi Jinping: Xi who must be obeyed) and multiple commentaries elsewhere would highlight the political strength and popularity that the Chinese President has within his own country. Similarly, within India, Narendra Modi is a strong political leader, both within his own party, and as the leader of Parliament.

Both leaders are assertive and willing to take bold decisions, that the previous leaders were either not confident of or afraid to.

In this context, the personal chemistry between the two leaders has a far reaching impact, irrespective of the number of agreements that were signed and the border crisis that became the focal point in the Indian media. Modi received Jinping in Gujarat – his home state, and went beyond the protocol in hosting the Chinese President along the Sabarmati river. On his part, Jinping and his wife, extremely receptive and went along; the traditional swing is likely to coin a new phrase – Jhula Diplomacy!

The Chinese President has already returned the favour, by inviting Modi to visit his hometown – Xi'an. Personal chemistry and the nature of their political hold in their own countries will help Modi and Jinping to take the bilateral relations ahead.

12 Agreements and \$ 20 Billion: Will Quantity make Quality, in the long-term?

Twelve agreements have been signed between the two countries during Jinping's visit. And China has committed to invest USD 20 billion in the next five years. In terms of numbers, how significant are the above?

There was an expectation that China would commit to investing close to USD 100 billion; perhaps, China is cautious. Who would not, given the Indian history of "Red Tape" to foreign investors. One of the biggest dis-service to the Indian nation by the previous government in the last years have been to systematically break the enthusiasm of foreign investors; from Japan, South Korea to Singapore, India had become a horror story with its bureaucratic hurdled and omnipresent corruption in the system in the investment sectors. Foreign investors, repeatedly talk about the predatory nature of the existing system, which has become the single most obstacle to attract foreign investment. Modi's "Red Carpet" approach towards the investors should change this perception, and attract larger investment from elsewhere.

The sister cities compact, has a larger impact. The number of flights every day between different cities of China and India will soon be more than the number of flights between India and its neighbours put together. And this number means the growing movement between the two countries (more for business reasons, than tourist). The MoU on Kailash Mansarovar Yatra via Nathu La in Sikkim has a larger political and psychological meaning. Instead of the existing tough journey via Lipulekh La in Uttarakhand, the Sikkim route is easy to travel. Yatris could easily reach Bagdogra in West Bengal, travel to Gangtok and then to Nathu La by road. The road infrastructure has been improved substantially and according to the local population in Sikkim, the road from Nathu La into Tibet is even better. This has a larger political meaning to India, China, Tibet and Sikkim as well.

Among the many other agreements, the cooperation on Railways and Chinese interest to strengthen the rail network would take India far. Given the nature of revolution in rail within China (one should travel within China and see the multiple railway stations and elevated platforms) to understand the nature of changes within the Chinese rail network. India needs this crucial input in better its ailing railway infrastructure.

Hard Issues: MSR, Border Issue and the Big Picture

The challenge however is on how the two leaders resolve the problem of history, and its future "routes" both over land and across the oceans. As could be noticed during the summit, developments along the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh sector did affect the summit environment. The Maritime Silk Route (MSR) and the growing Chinese footprints in Sri Lanka and Maldives is a foreign policy concern for India.

Will the two leaders be able to convert their personal chemistry to ensure a win-win position on the above issues, and take the bilateral relations ahead? True as Jinping said, both countries have the numbers to make the world listen and pay attention, if they speak in one voice. Can they? Both countries

are attempting to break the status quo and create a favourable international environment to achieve their national interests. Can they do it together?

The two leaders can. They have the maths. And the chemistry now.

Xi Jinping and the Maritime Silk Road: The Indian Dilemma

15 September 2014

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New Delhi is abuzz with speculation that President Xi Jinping could raise the issue of Maritime Silk Road (MSR) during his visit to India this week and explore business, investments and trade opportunities for China in India. At least three reasons can be identified to uphold the above assumption; first, the issue of MSR was raised during President Hamid Ansari's visit to China in July this year and the Indian side had indicated that New Delhi would examine the idea. The Chinese would be keen for a response from the Indian side and India may push for the BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar) corridor to which it has offered wholehearted support and it serves the interests of all the partners.

The second reason is that the MSR is a pet project of the Chinese President and is believed to have been driven by his knowledge of ancient Chinese cultural and trade connections with the outside world. Apparently, between 1985 and 2002, Xi had personally taken interest in the Quanzhou Maritime Museum, and according to the curator, Xi had perused through the ancient historical records, artifacts and exhibits at the museum and may have 'learnt a lot about China's maritime history' which could have been the driver for his interest in MSR. Xi even secured substantial government grants for the museum. Incidentally, Quanzhou is home to several ancient shrines and temples built by Tamil communities who had established trading contacts with the Chinese during the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1279-1368) periods. Given his knowledge of ancient maritime trade and cultural connections between India and China, Xi may recall the cultural and Buddhist connections between the two countries. It is pertinent to mention that China has committed US \$1 million for the Nalanda University.

Third, Xi Jinping has been hard selling the MSR among a number of countries in Asia, Africa, and as far as Europe. The MSR was first discussed in 2013 with the ASEAN countries and apparently they were a little apprehensive about the idea. But now Singapore has come out in full support and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has indicated that the MSR could act as a catalyst for development of the region. In South Asia, Sri Lanka and Maldives appear to be favourably disposed about the opportunity to build maritime infrastructure and the idea is fast gaining traction in Bangladesh. Xi Jinping would have discussed the MSR with Pakistan too but Beijing had to postpone the visit to Islamabad due to prevailing political situation in the country. Interestingly, the MSR was also discussed with Iran. The MSR foot print in Africa is in Kenya and a few European countries appear to be onboard.

An Indian Response to the MSR

What could be India's response in case MSR comes up for discussions or Xi makes a reference to it during the visit? But before doing that, it is useful to understand the dominant discourse in India about the MSR. The Indian strategic community believes that the MSR can potentially help China consolidate its naval / maritime strategy of access and basing in the Indian Ocean in support of PLA Navy's future operations. Further, the MSR is essentially a Chinese ploy to dismiss the notion of 'string of pearls' strategy, dispel the 'China threat' in the Indian Ocean, and legitimize its engagement in various maritime infrastructure projects along the route. China is also facing a number of problems in East and South China Sea over the Senkaku Island with Japan and South China Sea with the Philippines and Vietnam. It must also contend with the United States with whom there is a near continuous 'silent tension' which at times shows up in the form of incidents at sea and now in the air. In essence, China has its hands full with a number of strategic 'hot spots' that can affect its ambitions and aspirations of its 'peaceful and harmonious' development.

It appears that government in New Delhi may have been pushed into a 'MSR dilemma'. On the one hand, 'come, and make in India' is the new mantra of the government, while on the other the 'China threat' looms large in the minds of the policy makers given that little progress has been made to resolve the boundary issue in the Himalayas, systematic buildup of military infrastructure along the border, and deployment of missiles in Tibet that may be targeting Indian strategic installations.

India would be tempted to part take what the Chinese offer in terms of the MSR but would China be willing to address bilateral security issues. New Delhi would also not like to be caught in a position where it is accused of cozying up to Japan who have offered nearly US \$ 33 billion in investment in India, and deprive China of such opportunities.

Contemporary Foreign Policy of China: Legacy of Deng Xiaoping

10 September 2014

Teshu Singh

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Is the new Chinese leadership carrying forward the legacies of Deng Xiaoping? What are the alterations to Deng's foreign policy legacy that have shaped Chinese foreign policy to be what it is today?

As soon as Chinese President Xi Jinping assumed power, he chose to visit Shenzhen (the Special Economic Zone where the Paramount Leader of China, Deng Xiaoping, experimented his market reform) and paid respects to the latter's statue. Since then there has been conjecture on whether Xi would take the legacy of Deng Xiaoping forward.

The trip itself is a reflection of Deng's Southern Tour that he took 20 years ago when he launched the reform and opening-up policies. Repeatedly, in his various speeches, Xi has often reiterated Deng's legacy of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Perhaps, the 110 birth anniversary of Deng Xiaoping is an apt time to analyse the legacies of the late leader in contemporary Chinese foreign policy. This article attempts to interpret the present-day path of Chinese foreign policy.

Chinese Foreign Policy under Deng Xiaoping

Chinese foreign policy under Deng was characterised by "Independent and Peaceful Development Strategy" for its external relations. The fundamental goals of this policy were to preserve China's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, create a favourable international environment for China's reform and economic opening-up, and modernisation, construction, maintaining world peace and to propel common development. To come out of the isolation following the Tiananmen Square incident, he designed a 28-character foreign policy of which "keep low profile and bind your time" (tao guang yang hui) became extremely popular. During the early 1990s, Deng had already outlined three tasks for China in the decade ahead: oppose hegemonism and preserve world peace; work on China's unification with Taiwan; and step up the drive for China's modernisation.

Deng Xiaoping and the New Leadership

After the end of the annual National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Xi visited important countries in all the continents. Additionally, during the Xi's tenure, many foreign leaders have visited China. China is, through bilateral exchanges, trying to disburse the China Threat Theory and increasing friendly exchanges and pragmatic cooperation. China is also emphasising on its peripheral diplomacy and good neighbour policy.

Through multiple visits, China has begun taking interest in multilateralism. On close examination of Xi's foreign policy, one can see his carefulness in partaking in multilateral organisations, i.e. Asia Bao Forum, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit and the BRICS. At the SCO summit, Xi stated that "China presents a model of Development" for all members. Furthermore, challenging Western-dominated international organisations such as the IMF and the World

Bank, China, during the 2014 BRICS summit, proposed a BRICS bank. The bank would have representation from all the four continents and only economic organisations that represent developing countries. However, there is a caveat to China's multilateral diplomacy. Although, today, China advocates multilateral diplomacy at various forums, in the South China Sea (SCS) dispute, Beijing opts for a bilateral solution.

Taking forward the legacy of Deng Xiaoping, China has been following 'salami tactics' in the SCS, wherein it is maintaining a low profile and taking small steps in the region. Xi, vis-à-vis Beijing's core interest areas, reiterated that China would stick to the path of peaceful development but never give up its legitimate rights nor sacrifice core national interests. This is evident in China's assertive role in its core interest areas, such as Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang and the SCS (the SCS was included as core interest in 2010).

Deng Xiaoping began the reform and opening-up process in 1978 and set the platform for the 'Chinese Dream'. Taking the dividends of the reform process forward, Xi Jinping coined the term 'Chinese Dream'. Essentially, it translates to building a moderate prosperous society and realisation of national rejuvenation. As a part of national rejuvenation, Beijing has invested heavily in the Silk Road diplomacy, dividing it into Land Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Route.

The 'US pivot to Asia' has initiated a new phase in the Washington-Beijing bilateral. Deng Xiaoping was opposed to hegemonism in world politics. Today, Xi Jinping is advocating the term 'a new type of relationship' to redefine the US- China relationship. By maintaining a low profile, China is opposing the US's hegemony and is simultaneously playing its card safely with Washington – Beijing's largest trading partner.

Notably, Xi's foreign policy does have reflections of Deng Xiaoping's policy. However, there appear to be some alterations at times. This is because, today, China is operating in a geopolitical environment very different from that which existed during Deng's era. Xi follows Deng's legacy as an ideal than any other leader. This is further exemplified in the editorial in Xinhua, titled "Xinhua Insight: To reignite a nation, Xi carries Deng's torch."

China's Meddling in the Brahmaputra: India's Options

19 August 2014

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The Brahmaputra River is likely to emerge as a new contentious front embroiling India and China. This dispute will be more deleterious given its entanglement with the India-China border issue. Earlier this year, Vice President Hamid Ansari's visit to China did not achieve much except getting 15 more days of hydrological data that too on payment to China and allowing Indian water experts to visit Tibet to monitor the river flow in its upper reaches.

China is steadfast on damming and diverting the Brahmaputra as it has no alternative but to harness the river waters to meet its acute water crisis. More than 70 per cent of its rivers are polluted. Reports suggest that three-fifth of all water supplies in China are of bad or worse quality. Topography also adds to its water woes with 90 per cent of the run-off flowing downstream to South Asia and Southeast Asia. Around 64 per cent of the land in the north receives only 19 per cent precipitation.

Added to water crisis is the increasing problem of desertification. Desertification has reportedly hit 18 provinces accounting for 27 per cent of the country and impacts more than 400 million people. China's Ministry of Water Resources points out that some 55 per cent of the 50,000 rivers and streams that existed till the 1990s has disappeared. While as per the 2007-08 Annual Report of the Water Ministry, the demand for water has been on the rise with agriculture accounting for 62.5 per cent, industry 23.4 per cent, domestic 12.3 per cent and others 1.8 per cent.

The ramifications of the twin problems of water crisis and desertification are huge and tantamount to a survival issue for China. Food security naturally acquires paramount focus. Further, insufficient water hindering economic development is the primary challenge as the survival of the Chinese Communist Party hinges on ensuring economic prosperity. Admittedly thus, water diversion and building dams are the only plausible solutions for China.

It may also be pointed out that water harnessing is nothing new in China. In the imperial times, the creation of a centralised bureaucratic empire was based on an effective water management system; the eminent sinologist Karl Wittfogel thus called China a 'hydraulic empire'. Indeed, water woes are rooted in Chinese history and so are the solutions. The moot point is that the Chinese leadership is not going to stop building or diverting rivers and this indelibly has ominous implications for India and other lower riparian countries. In this scenario, what are India's options?

Arguably, India's solution does not lie in building dams on the Brahmaputra in disregard to the concerns of Bangladesh. Rather it would be wise for India to resolve the Teesta water dispute that would be an example to the Chinese of India's benevolence. More importantly, India should form a coalition of all lower riparian countries that are afflicted with China's hydropower and river diversion projects. In fact, the third phase of China's North-South River diversion project has grave consequences not only for South Asia but Southeast Asia as well.

The Southeast Asian countries of Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam have disputes with China on the Mekong, a trans-border river emerging from the Tibetan Plateau. In 1995, the Mekong Water Commission was founded to address hydropower developments in the lower basin. However, China has refused to be a full member of the Commission. In fact, China has no water treaty with any country so far. The lower Mekong basin countries, constituting sixty million people depending on the Mekong for food and livelihood, have alleged that China has been unilaterally constructing dams without any concern for the lower riparian countries.

The lower riparian countries of South Asia and Southeast Asia should, therefore, come together to create a common front to address the water dispute with China. On river water-sharing, it should bind China in a common web of norms and regulations. But the creation of a common front would be rendered futile if it is bereft of any enforcement capacity. Therefore, it is necessary as well, to create stakes for China in upholding the interests of the lower riparian countries. This could be materialised if the concerns of the lower riparian countries are linked with China's own economic projects like the 'silk route economic belt'. For instance, instead of simply tagging along with China on the BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar) Silk Route project, India should make its collaboration on the BCIM conditional on China's cooperation on the Brahmaputra.

Apparently, the Chinese claim that the BCIM is not simply about economic cooperation but essentially about integrating the neighbouring regions. They also emphasise the BCIM's 'inclusiveness' and building a 'community of common destiny'. If the ultimate goal is indeed about creating a 'community of common destiny', China cannot remain aloof to the concerns of its neighbouring countries. In fact, the BCIM corridor would certainly collapse if China continues to pursue river diversion and dam-building projects at the cost of environmental degradation and economic dislocation of the lower riparian countries.

In sum, India has leverages on the Brahmaputra which it should weigh-in diplomatically in its dealings with China.

BRICS: China's End-Game

31 July 2014

Teshu Singh

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The recently held BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) Summit (14-16 July 2014) is representative of developing countries and forty per cent of the world's population. It is also a successful non-Western international organisation that has representation from three continents.

Among the five participating countries, China, one of the co-founders of BRICS, is the most influential. The growing role of China in the BRICS therefore raises an important question: What is the Chinese endgame in the BRICS? What are its objectives?

Strategic Importance of the BRICS for China

Since the mid-1990s China has expanded its bilateral and multilateral partnerships to increase its comprehensive national power. It joined the ASEAN+3 in 1997, WTO (World Trade Organisation) in 2001, SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) in 2001, and BRICS in 2008. Chinese foreign policy has become less personalised and more institutionalised, and more specifically, it is indicative of China's growing interest in 'multilateral diplomacy' and 'peripheral diplomacy'.

China's interest in the BRICS is further accentuated by the fact that it forms one of the pillars of China's 'multilateral diplomacy' as highlighted in the CPC (Communist Party of China) working report during the 18th Party Congress in November 2012. The other pillars of multilateral diplomacy are the UN, G20 and the SCO. For this, there are several research institutes in China for 'BRICS studies'.

All the members of the BRICS are not China's neighbours, and China is therefore using this forum to take forward its 'peripheral diplomacy'. At an exclusive conference held in Beijing on 24-25 October 2013 on 'peripheral diplomacy', Li Keqiang stated, "If there is anything like the BRICS bank plan, it is likely that China would offer to pay a larger share of the capital in exchange for greater control." During the recent BRICS Summit, China announced the establishment of a bank for the smooth functioning of the 'Maritime Silk Road' (MSR). The MSR is a tool for China's peripheral diplomacy. In addition to the smooth functioning of the MSR, China has announced the opening of the Asian Investment Infrastructure Bank dedicated to the MSR project. Thus, the developments of the BRICS indirectly cater to China's 'peripheral diplomacy' also.

Towards Achieving the Chinese End-game

In its quest for great power status and zeal to contribute to the international system, the BRICS announced the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) with its headquarters in Shanghai and the Contingent Reserve Arrangements (CRA) during the 2014 Summit. The idea of the NDB was mooted during the 2012 BRICS meetings as an alternative to the Western financial system. With respect to the CRA, each of the BRICS countries is contributing ten billion USD and China is contributing forty billion USD. This will form the backbone of the bank. The location of the headquarters itself exemplifies the dominance of China. The entire process will increase China's role and decrease dependence on the World Bank and IMF that are dominated by the West. This is a good opportunity for China to project itself as a responsible power in terms of its investment strategy in the developing countries.

Chinese leaders have deemed the next twenty years a strategic opportunity (zhanlue jiyuqi) to develop their country and China is using the BRICS as a strategic platform for its power projection. The diverse partners in the organisation have opened vistas of opportunity for China to make investments. Since China is making the maximum investments it is bound to reap larger dividends from the bank. This also exemplifies the fact that China wants to reform the international financial system in a way that will allow it to play a much larger role. Thus, the bank will bring economic and strategic benefits to China and the ratio in terms of funding has already put China in the great power club.

China is also using BRICS as a forum to disburse the 'China threat' theory. The recent developments in the Asia Pacific have projected a very aggressive view of China and have raised questions about the 'China rise'/its peaceful development. Resultantly, China is using BRICS to promote its foreign policy agenda of becoming a responsible global power.

China believes that it is imperative to restructure its foreign policy if it seeks to play a larger international role. It has started popularising new concepts like the 'model for big-small States' to highlight its relations with developing countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka. To highlight its relations with the US, it has come up with the term 'new type of relationship'. China is using the BRICS to emerge as the leader of the five countries that in turns feeds into its foreign policy agenda of becoming a responsible global power.

US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue: Lessons for India

25 July 2014

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The Sixth US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) was held in Beijing from 9-10 July 2014, amid growing tension between the US and China over the maritime disputes of the South China and the East China Seas. This commentary highlights the major outcomes of the 2014 dialogue and delves into the lessons that can be learnt for the Sino-Indian SED.

Major Outcomes of the Dialogue

More than 300 areas of cooperation were agreed; 116 from the strategic track and 90 from the economic track. With increasing stakes in the bilateral relations, the areas of cooperation between the two countries have risen from 91 to 116. The list covered almost all the major areas of cooperation. Of the 116 (divided into 8 areas), the outstanding ones were the developments in the Asia Pacific, the China Garden, health, and climate change.

- Developments in the SCS have brought US-China relations to a standstill. With the increasing US role in the SCS region there is a growing notion of containing China in the region. To dispel this notion from growing further, China was invited to the RIMPAC exercises this year. Coupled with this was the development in the Asia Pacific; ADIZ in the ECS and the developments in the Korean Peninsula. All these issues were addressed at length during the dialogue.
- To enhance bilateral relations and to give a boost to people-to-people contact, the idea of China Garden was taken forward and it was agreed that the construction would start by 2016.
- The ten year Framework on Energy and Environment was reviewed and a joint report with sections on "Building the Foundation for Continued Partnership" and Looking Ahead" was issued to review the progress for five years. The US department of Energy and National Energy Administration (NEA) of China held their first meeting. The fourth Advanced Bio Fuels Forum was agreed to be held in 2015.
- Disagreement between the US and China over many climate issues represent the biggest threat to climate change. Early this year, the US and China agreed to devote efforts and resources to climate change through the S&ED. China is the second largest emitter of carbon dioxide and the US has not ratified the Kyoto Protocol. China expects the US to start the process of cutting down on emission first. To take the initiative of the US-China Climate Change Working Group (CCWG) established during the fifth round of the S&ED forward, discussions were held on the issue of hydrofluorocarbon (HFCs). In addition, discussions were held on the regional air quality management, control of fine material, and ozone.

On the economic track, the dialogue took the Bilateral Investment treaty (BIT) a step ahead; it was agreed to identify a 'negative list' for negotiations by 2015. This would open up China's markets to foreign investments and create opportunities for US firms to participate in China.

Lessons Drawn

During the Xi-Obama meeting, it was agreed to come up with a 'new type of relationship'. To take this initiative forward, a lot of positive terms such as 'common interest', 'cooperation' and 'constructive' were

used. The S&ED has shown to the world that two countries with different cultural and social system can cooperate. The dialogue mechanism is a unique platform to promote understanding, expand consensus, manage differences, improve mutual trust and increase cooperation. It is the most intensive and expansive forum ever between both governments, bringing together dozens of agencies from both sides to discuss the most pressing bilateral issues, from security to energy to human rights. It illustrates the facts that even relations as complex as US-China can be cooperative if a platform is provided. This is evident from the exhaustive list that has been drawn by expanding consensus and narrowing their differences. Thus, a dialogue of this nature is important to address the widening mistrust in any bilateral relations and to identify future trends. It has proved that despite problems on the strategic track there can be progress on the economic front, thereby avoiding any kind of deadlock.

There are lessons to be drawn from the present S&ED for the Sino-Indian SED. The US-China S&ED was initially started as a SED and eventually a strategic track was added in 2011. The addition of the strategic track has broadened the agenda of the dialogue and created an alternate platform to discuss issues that are irresolvable on one track. On similar lines, perhaps a strategic track can also be considered for the Sino Indian SED so that security and economic issue scan be linked in a strategic way. It will help in solving the impending issues in bilateral relations, which will further help in preventing the deterioration of bilateral relations.

Rim of the Pacific Exercises (RIMPAC): Thaw in China-US Tensions?

28 June 2014

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Last week, Hawaii witnessed one of the largest assemblies of Navies for the biennial Rim of the Pacific Exercises (RIMPAC) hosted by the Commander, US Pacific Fleet (PACFLT). Nearly 50 warships, half a dozen submarines, over 200 aircraft from Asia, Australia, Europe, Latin America and the US were involved in the exercises. RIMPAC began in 1971 during the Cold War and was targeted against the Soviet Union. Over the years, the participation, philosophy and content of the exercises has changed giving RIMPAC a global flavour. The interest in RIMPAC has grown steadily from 14 countries participating in 2010, 22 in 2012 and 23 in 2014 which is an encouraging sign. It does not appear to be targeted against any one power and the participants now address a number of maritime security threats and challenges which range from sea lane security to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

RIMPAC 2014 witnessed three new entrants- Brunei Darussalam, China and Norway; but Russia, which made its debut in 2012 RIMPAC, was conspicuously absent from this year's exercises suggesting that the shadow of Russia's actions in Ukraine had stretched as far as the Pacific.

Among the new participants, China appears to have attracted maximum attention. Since 2010, the US had been urging China to participate in the RIMPAC. There were a number of reasons for the US to encourage China to join the RIMPAC; first, the US wants to dispel any notion of containment among the Chinese which has been lingering since the 2008 RIMPAC in which China and Russia had been excluded raising speculations that the exercises were targeted against China.

Second, the US Navy hopes to enhance engagements with the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). There have been a number of incidents at sea between the two forces despite the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) signed in 1998. Significantly, incidents involving the USS Kitty Hawk (1992), EP-3 incident (2001), USS Impeccable (2009) and USS Cowpen (2013) continue to loom large in the minds of the Chinese who feel that the US is challenging China's rise in the region and its growing naval power.

Third, the US is encouraging the Chinese side to be more transparent about its military spending, long term naval plans, strategy and intentions in the Asia Pacific region particularly in the South China Sea and the East China Sea which witnessed a number of incidents.

Fourth, the US Navy hopes to enmesh the Chinese into multilateral naval engagements. It may be mentioned that the PLA Navy is not new to multilateral naval exercises since it has been participating in biennial 'Aman' series of naval exercises hosted by the Pakistan Navy. In recent times, it has sent multiple task forces to the Gulf of Aden and actively participated in anti piracy operations off the coast of Somalia. Also, China has proactively engaged other navies during the ADMM Plus exercises in Brunei late last year.

The Chinese do not appear to be quite impressed by the US overtures partly due to their belief that the US will continue to contain China. Further, they are suspicious of the US motivations and intentions on account of its 'pivot' or 'rebalance' to the Asia Pacific which involves shifting about 60 per cent of US naval forces in the region by 2020.

But the Chinese do believe that by excluding themselves from the regional maritime and naval cooperative structures, they may accentuate the 'China threat' perception which pervades across the region. In that context, the endorsement of the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) agreement on procedures for 'conduct at sea' during un-alerted meetings/sightings between warships of the member countries is noteworthy. They see cooperative engagements as opportunities to work together with regional countries to address non-traditional security threats across the maritime commons.

However, the question still remains whether participation in the RIMPAC would add to transparency (for the US) and dispel containment (for the Chinese). It would be fair to argue that the RIMPAC is a worthwhile tool for constructive engagement between the PLA Navy and the US Navy which can offer good dividends but to expect it to transform their relationship is rather ambitious. This is also applicable to other participating navies particularly the Japanese and the Indian navies who see the modernization of the Chinese Navy as a threat.

The PLA Navy's participation in the RIMPAC may not serve the purpose of cooling tensions in the region, but it can potentially help mend fences between China and the US particularly after US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel's remarks at the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore accusing China of 'destabilizing' and the PLA deputy chief of staff counter-accusing Pentagon of 'stoking fires' in the region.

Japan and US in the Asia Pacific: Countering Chinese Assertiveness

11 June 2014

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The statements issued by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel at the Shangri La Dialogue show the renewal of tension in the Asia-Pacific with the rise of China. The US remarks were a follow-up to Abe's criticism against China's assertiveness in the region with a special focus on the South China Sea dispute.

What are the expectations that the US and Japan have in the region and what do they expect from China? Where is the region heading towards?

Deciphering the Statements

The statements at the Dialogue revolved around resolving the South China Sea dispute, Chinese assertiveness in the region, strengthening allies and partners in the region, and enhancing ASEAN's defence capabilities and posture. It was mostly directed against recent Chinese activities. The Chinese responded to the allegations as being untruthful and a malicious attempt that aimed at tarnishing its reputation in the international system.

Shinzo Abe stated that Japan will play a proactive role in Asia and in the world, under the new banner, "Proactive Contribution to Peace." It is likely to signify that Japan is resorting to a Cold War stance or that its role has been undermined in recent times. He also extended his support to the ASEAN countries, and advised them to act wisely and follow international rules to settle the South China Sea dispute. He

indirectly criticised China for strengthening its military and using coercion to settle the dispute, which is against the rule of law. The repetition of the phrase 'rule of law' is likely to strengthen his assertion that China is unwilling to settle the dispute through international law and is resorting to force or coercion.

Japan has resorted to alliance-making with the ASEAN and other countries in the region to their defence posture in the Asia-Pacific. This is so that the ASEAN will not be undermined by China and can prevent the use of force by the same in the future. Japan wants the ASEAN to be proactive and effectively utilise the East Asia Summit to check military expansion in the region and be transparent on their military budget so that misconception can be averted.

Hagel pointed out several security priorities: settling disputes through peaceful means, following international rules, and strengthening the defence capabilities of the allies that were directly criticising China's recent provocative behavior in the region. He mentioned that countries in Asia-Pacific are working with the US to sustain a rule-based order that has been followed since the end of World War II, suggesting perhaps that the US rule-based order has been undermined with the growing assertion of China. He reaffirmed that the US would increase its military engagement in the region than ever before and strengthen its allies and partners because the Asia-Pacific will play a crucial role in the 21st century.

Hagel also mentioned that if China wants to play a significant role in the region it has to use coercion against North Korea's destabilising provocation; this would be in its own interest and also help regional stability. This would be preferable to coercion being against neighbours and neglecting that the South China Sea is "a sea of peace, friendship and cooperation." The US believes that with the growing significance of the ASEAN forum, it is essential that each country work together to achieve greater cohesion and prevent countries like China from taking advantage of them.

Where is the Region Heading?

Chinese assertiveness in the region has brought back the US and Japan to play a proactive role. Hagel revisited General George Marshall's words that "the strength of a nation does not depend alone on its armies, ships and planes...[but] is also measured by...the strength of its friends and [its] allies." It is likely that the US is resorting to a Cold War strategy by creating alliances and partners to strengthen its presence in the region. The US and Japan acknowledged that strengthening the ASEAN security community can be effectively used to counter the growing Chinese aggression in the region. However, due to the lack of consensus on the South China Sea dispute between the ASEAN countries, it is unclear whether they will be able cooperate with the US and Japan to settle the dispute.

It is likely that the region will become more volatile with divergent issues like North Korea's nuclear programme, Thailand and Myanmar's setbacks in democratic development and various unresolved territorial disputes complicating it. In addition to these circumstances, Philippines filing a case against China in the international tribunal followed by Vietnam's threat to file a case as well are only toughening Chinese behaviour in the region.

The US and Japan are increasing their military engagement and strengthening regional countries' defence postures - this is likely to receive a counter-attack from China. The synergism of Japan and the US will first increase conflict among countries and add to instability in the region before gradually lessening tensions.

US-China: The Problem with Congagement

3 June 2014

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Over the past two decades, China has grown exponentially, both in military prowess and economic might. The US, one of the major contributing factors to China's rise, now realises the importance of countering this advancement. But is its policy of 'conagement', apt for the issue at hand?

Inconsistent Engagement

Over the past decade, the US maintained a policy of 'engagement' towards China. This has in fact been a tactic to hedge its own bets, without getting into the primary context. Militarily, Washington has been facilitating Beijing's participation in multilateral defense exercises such as the Cobra Gold and RIMPAC, thus coming clean and allowing China to gauge US intentions in the region. Economically, the US has granted China the Most Favoured Nation status, thereby reducing export control policies and allowing Beijing to operate relatively freely in the US markets.

Washington has tried to maximise bilateral ties while keeping existing disputes in control. Simultaneously, the US continuously tries to bring China into various arms control regimes dealing with WMDs, proliferation, arms trade, etc., and also into international regimes such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Bilaterally, Washington has tried to involve Beijing in the regional issues regarding North Korea, and may also invite it to assist with Iran.

While there can be several intended results from this relationship, the most practical and favorable outcome is that of Beijing's integration into the international system. If China gets as engaged in international relations as most other Western nations, the probability of a military intervention by Beijing decreases. This is because the leadership in Beijing understands the benefits the current 'rules of the game' have to offer, and also to avoid doing anything that would scuttle its own off-shore interests. However, engagement is a relatively flawed policy, as it does not offer advice on what needs to be done, in the event of Beijing not adhering to current international norms. The primary assumption – engaging China on the international stage as a primary actor, to change its outlook towards a positive direction – is an a priori concept. Should this prove to be incorrect, engagement would have only assisted China in becoming a more threatening adversary in the future.

Containment: Boon or a Bane?

Containment is seen as a more realistic approach of dealing with a powerful China in the future. Under this policy, all elements of the US-China relationship would be subservient to the primary objective: preventing China's growth. This would entail drastically reducing US-China trade agreements, particularly insuring non-proliferation of technology and military development. Furthermore, Washington will have to enhance its regional presence in the Asia-Pacific, engaging with other nation states in the region, into forming an 'anti-China' alliance. The US would also have to convince other potential political and security partners into limiting their diplomatic and trade relations with China.

As realist international theory dictates, rising powers generally tend to assert themselves on the global scene and challenge the predominant power. This challenge often translates in a systematic war with the predominant power. Washington needs to take these containment steps to ensure this 'systematic war' is not realised. Also, given its political tradition of imperial rule, China is unlikely to democratise, and this would only lead to an increase in its bellicosity.

In the present geopolitical scenario, containment will be a difficult policy to implement. Obtaining domestic consensus for subordinating other policy goals (such as trade and commerce) to dealing with a Chinese threat that is yet to manifest itself will not be easy. This may even lead to Beijing becoming increasingly hostile towards the US' interests. Furthermore, policy will require the total cooperation of all leading industrial and military nations of the world to succeed – that which doesn't seem to be the case. In the last decade, along with the US, other major regional players too have been pivoting to China, and not all of them may want to sever their economic and diplomatic relationship with the latter.

Feasibility of a Middle Path

Not only the Obama administration, but much of the US policy establishment is ambiguous in their reactions towards the growing Chinese economic and military power. Recently, the curious term called 'conengagement' (a mix of containment and engagement) is making rounds in the US policy circles. It

describes the current policy confusion and contortions of Washington towards Beijing Well. Many call this a hedging strategy.

'Congagement', however, is built on contradictory policies. The aspects of engagement and containment are incoherent – they do not complement each other. This hedging strategy is unsubstantiated. Hedging is defined as 'making an investment to reduce the risk of adverse decision movements in an asset'. In the China policy analogy, the US position is that of engaging China in bilateral agreements, facilitating the bridging of the gaps between both countries, while at the same time enhancing its own position to ensure proper counter-measures for any future Chinese threats.

This confusing stance is the primary reason why Washington cannot directly or indirectly retaliate to Beijing's influence or activities detrimental to its own security. US President Barack Obama's ambiguous silence on the issue of the South China Sea dispute stands evidence for this. Furthermore, Washington's inability to react more than just making international statements in the recent case of cyber espionage by China validates this.

China-Vietnam: The Oil Rig Non-diplomacy

28 May 2014

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The recent impasse between China and Vietnam over Beijing's deployment of oil rigs in the South China Sea (SCS) has generated chaos in the Southeast Asian political arena. The tension between the two states has renewed security challenges in Asia, pressurising the international system to accelerate a 'pivot' of military assets to the region to counter China's rising influence. Why did China choose to deploy the oil rig in the South China Sea all of a sudden? What are the potential implications of such a move?

Why did China Deploy the Oil Rigs?

There are several contrasting views over China's decision to install the oil rig in the contested waters. While some insist that the act was Beijing's attempt to gauge international responses over its maritime territorial claims, others see it plainly as China's assertiveness in the SCS.

The state-owned China National Offshore Oil Company's (CNOOC) decision to move the oil rig near Paracel Islands is not only seen as its assertion of territorial obsession but also exemplifies the well-planned, political nature of the Chinese government. The calculated decision did take into account the fact that the area possesses unverified hydrocarbon reserves that would ultimately incite a global outcry. However, that did not deter Beijing from placing the billion dollars-worth rig in the space they consider their national fisheries zone. More so, the 80 People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and Chinese coast guard ships that were present during the installation of the rig in the said area is indicative of China's strategic push towards its territorial ambitions.

China has become more assertive in pursuing its claims over the SCS in the recent years and this has been demonstrated in its stand-offs with Japan, the Philippines and now Vietnam. Until now, Beijing and Hanoi maintained relatively peaceful bilateral relations, and, in 2013, they had also agreed to enhance socio-economic and political cooperation. While China's recent provocation may be puzzling for some, it was no act of shooting in the dark.

The SCS produces 1.7 billion tonnes of fish and is considered to be a key zone for the fisheries industry. This gives China ample reason to claim the space as its 'national fisheries' zone. Energy is another motivation for China to wade into the disputed area. Last year, China imported 320 million tonnes of oil from West Asia & North Africa. Despite the discovery of shale gas reserves in China, and the Arctic being re-opened for energy cooperation, the demand for oil in China has only accelerated and is not completely met by sufficient supply.

China's move may also be a test to check Vietnam's future equation with the US. Vietnam was the best candidate for China to push the dispute in the SCS to test the mettle of the US and the ASEAN. Vietnam may not want to be an ally of the US in opposing China given that it requires China's market and investment for its own development. Hence, China gambled with confidence that despite provocations, Vietnam would respond with restraint and not use force against China. This highlights China's ambitions towards attaining a great power status in the SCS, in the midst of power transitions underway at the global level. China seeks to enhance its naval operations and project its autonomy to the hilt by reaching further out into the SCS. China's current move of reasserting its territorial foothold in areas which it sees as its 'national sovereignty' has demonstrated this intent.

How Far is the Dispute Likely to Go?

At present, the Vietnamese government is in a fix because ignoring China's aggressive act will further stoke anger within the country and for 'adopting a soft approach' towards its belligerent neighbour. Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng has hence threatened legal action against China for towing the oil rig into the sea and attacking Vietnamese vessels. Many Vietnamese citizens have also begun perceiving China as a bully who is merely interested in economic exploitation of the smaller and militarily weaker Vietnam. This sentiment is growing substantially, adding to the divide between the two nations.

While the likelihood of a full-fledged war between both states is highly unlikely, continued tensions and disturbances can be expected. Relations between the two will remain strained for a while, but trade ties (that currently remain unaffected) are likely to offer the way forward. China is Vietnam's largest trading partner. In 2013, bilateral trade stood at \$50 billion, with Beijing responsible for 28 per cent of Vietnam's imports. Given the similarities in political ideologies in both nations, especially their commitment to an autocratic rule of governance, China and Vietnam have immense potential for cooperation in the future for trade and development.

Therefore, although the currently souring in the relationship does pose problem for the bilateral at present, these tensions are likely to be short-lived.

South China Sea Dispute: China Unchallenged by ASEAN

21 May 2014

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The coincidence of the China-Vietnam tussle and the ASEAN Summit of 2014 re-focused discussions on the South China Sea dispute but failed to create a significant impact. The foreign ministers of the ASEAN countries issued a standalone declaration that called for "restraint by all parties involved in the maritime dispute and to avoid resorting to military force." However, they refrained from naming the contesting parties in the South China Sea dispute.

Why did the ASEAN fail to address the issue publicly? Is the joint statement an indication that the ASEAN is going to take maritime dispute seriously?

Are ASEAN Countries Willing to Publicly Express their Opinions on the SCS?

There have been reports of Southeast Asian countries subtly criticising the ASEAN stance on the South China Sea dispute. Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said, "We should stop this gunboat diplomacy." Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak expressed concern about the lack of solidarity within the ASEAN, and Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung directly commented on Chinese aggression. Philippine President Benigno Aquino said that the "rule of law is key in fostering a climate of stability."

Individually, the ASEAN countries want to deal with the issue pragmatically, however, at summit-level discussions, they hold back from expressing their opinions. The reasons for holding back are many;

chief among them being the fear of not being supported by other ASEAN members and being exposed to the displeasure of the Chinese.

Reluctant or Subservient?

The ASEAN did not openly name the country it claims to have concerns with. When to the ASEAN Secretary General Le Luong Minh was asked about this silence, he replied, "We know which countries are mentioned in the statement." This statement implies that ASEAN is taking a subtle approach to dealing with China. This is not surprising because even in past joint statements, ASEAN has approached the China issue indirectly.

There are various factors that prevent the ASEAN from addressing the issue publicly.

Firstly, China presumes the ASEAN to be weak and divided on the issue of settling the South China Sea dispute, which is the correct conclusion. The ASEAN countries are assumed to be divided into two blocks, one falling under China's shadow and the other resisting it with US support. US President Barack Obama's Asia tour has increased the leverage available to countries that have taken on China to resolve the dispute. For instance, the renewal of the US-Philippines military pact has increased the resilience of Philippines to settle the dispute through an international tribunal rather than through a bilateral agreement as suggested by China.

Philippines and Vietnam are the only countries to have pressurised ASEAN to approach an issue that has never been dealt with in ASEAN's history. Most of the ASEAN countries are neither pro-China nor anti-China; but preferring to stay neutral. The lack of consensus among the member countries has pushed the issue to the sidelines.

Secondly, the ASEAN countries firmly believe that offending a big power like China will have adverse consequences. Since most of the ASEAN countries are dependent on China in one way or the other, public accusations will only kindle their existing domestic crises that are of more immediate concern than the South China Sea dispute.

Is the ASEAN Joint Statement a Positive Sign?

Myanmar avoided international criticism through the joint statement that was issued during its turn to host the ASEAN Summit, unlike Cambodia and Indonesia who hosted the Summit in 2012 and 2013 respectively. Since Myanmar is closely affiliated to China, it made a vibrant attempt to address the issue without altering the status quo. Analysts have deciphered the joint statement as that of ASEAN straightening its course after the debacle of the two preceding Summits.

However, the South China Sea dispute continues to grow as a concern, as does the inability of the ASEAN member countries to address the issue directly. If firmer action was coupled with the joint statement, the impact would have been more effective. For now, the joint statement appears to be a ceremonial gesture rather than a firm commitment to solve the dispute.

Uighur Unrest: Are China's Policies Working?

21 May 2014

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The recent bomb and knife attack on 30 April at a railway station in Urumqi, China has refocused the world's attention on the Uighurs and the unrest in China's north-western Xinjiang province. The government has blamed "extremist religious thought and extremist religious activities" for the violent occurrence. Government action indicates that Uighur separatists are responsible for the recent spate of attacks, evidenced by the number of Uighurs detained for questioning, and the increase of police and paramilitary personnel in Uighur-populated areas. Within a week of the Urumqi incident, there was

another knife attack at Guangdong railway station – the third high profile attack in the recent months. Although not termed a terrorist act by the government, this raises a number of questions regarding China's immediate and long-term measures to curb terrorism, and the possible outcomes of the crackdown on the Uighur minority.

China's Response to the Attacks

While it is undeniable that the government's response time is quick, the effectiveness of its measures is questionable. Following the Urumqi attack, the affected area was cordoned off, cleared within hours, and the station was re-opened. All data regarding the incident was deleted from social media, leaving only those portions that conformed to the official statement on the attack. Over 100 Uighurs, including women and children, were detained for questioning due to their relations with the suspected perpetrators of the crime. Urumqi and other important cities across China, especially Beijing, also saw increased security. However, the government's tough stand on the matter, heightened security and crackdown on the Uighur population, failed to prevent another attack in Guangzhou, Guangdong.

Although the latest attack does not resemble the previous ones in sophistication and seems to be the action of a single disturbed individual, it is indicative of the growing unrest in China and a tendency for "propaganda by the deed." Chinese official media management which restricts the reportage of violence could be one of the reasons for the attacks becoming more numerous and elaborate.

The Urumqi attack itself occurred after the security measures were put in place following the Kunming attack in March. Terrorism in China has grown more sophisticated and random in the recent past and it is obvious that the government finds itself inexperienced in dealing with such blatant acts of terror. The pre-emptive action that President Xi Jinping promised is yet to be seen.

How Effective Have the Government's Strategies Been?

The Uighur community has long complained of repression – an accusation the government has always denied, stating its Western Development Strategy as proof. However, it is obvious that the predominantly Muslim Uighur minority who have very little in common with the Han majority do receive secondary treatment. The government quite openly tries to suppress their right to religious and cultural expression. Moreover, they are held back economically. Employment opportunities for the Uighurs are low due to existing prejudice and the preference for Mandarin Chinese speakers. The lack of jobs sees hundreds of the Uighurs migrating to the larger cities in eastern China to find employment.

In the recent years, many Southeast Asian countries, owing to the porous borders, have seen a large influx of Uighurs. China has requested the return of these refugees, most of whom are women and children, claiming that they are terrorists, and most states have complied, unwilling to risk China's ire. Increased migration, coupled with the rise in violent attacks, seems indicative of a hardening of China's policies pertaining to the Uighur community. If China's intentions, according to the aforementioned strategy, was to quell the violence and unrest in its western regions and make the population more cooperative towards the government, it obviously has not worked.

Will the repressive crackdown on the Uighur minority have the intended effect?

The attitude of the government seems indicative of its inability or unwillingness to learn from the past. If indeed these attacks are the work of Uighur terrorists, then the boilerplate method of promising economic reforms to the Uighurs while simultaneously engineering a crackdown on them is not the answer.

Moreover, though the government censors information regarding such terrorist attacks, it fails to do the same towards racist comments about the Uighurs, seemingly encouraging the spreading notion that all Uighurs are terrorists. This can serve to demonise an entire nation and definitely contributes to the rift between the Hans and the Uighurs.

It is desirable that the Chinese government institute policies that will uplift the Uighur population and shall act as decelerators to the rising terrorism; but given the current attitude of the government and its tough measures, it seems that the stage is being set for a repeat of the 2009 Urumqi riots.

However, taking into account the authoritarian nature of the Chinese state and its disregard for human rights, it is also possible that the attacks might induce a harsher reaction than what was bargained for and bring about total annihilation of the Uighur separatist movement.

China, the CUES, and Freedom of Navigation

20 May 2014

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The issue of freedom of navigation in the Asia-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea (SCS) and the East China Sea (ECS), has been a disputative one, involving narratives and counter-narratives of what constitutes a 'code of conduct'. The popular reckoning is that if a consensual code of conduct in the Asia-Pacific and its contiguous areas is worked out, geopolitical tensions emanating from the overlapping territorial claims of at least seven sovereign countries in this region – a large portion of which involves the SCS and the ECS – will be substantially subdued.

For a long time the US has been pushing for a code of conduct in the Asia-Pacific without much success. However, on 22 April, for the first time, navies of 25 leading seafaring countries met in Qingdao, China, and agreed on a code – Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) – for regulating maritime behaviour of countries in the region. The signatory countries, among others, included China, Japan, the Philippines, Malaysia and the US, who agreed to the framework at the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) 2014. In a rarity, China too agreed and promised its commitment to the principles of the CUES.

China's consent to the decision to have a consensual draft for monitoring maritime behaviour through better communication, and hence information, should be seen as the first step towards the much desired policy readjustments for China in order to be a part of the global maritime commune that accords with a commonly recognised agenda for peaceful maritime conduct.

Why did China Agree to a Regional Maritime Code?

Over the past few years, the WPNS has repeatedly brought the issue of communications code for this region to the fore, but have been torpedoed by China. At the 2012 Kuala Lumpur WPNS summit, China was the only country to oppose the CUES. After such vigorous attempts at fending off any such agreement for a maritime code in the region, why did China, in a volte-face, agree to a regional maritime code for navigation?

The CUES is a maritime communications agreement and is expected to improve communications between ships in regions with high maritime traffic density, such as the Asia-Pacific. This is expected to directly help China as it has the most number of ships in the region. Another reason for China's acquiescence could have been the non-binding character of the code. In other words, the CUES is a non-binding and voluntary agreement. Yet another reason why China agreed to the terms could be the fact that the CUES is not meant to have any effect on the ongoing territorial disputes in the Asia-Pacific region – something that would have convinced China about the non-meddling character of the Code.

Since the occasion also marked the 65th founding anniversary of the Chinese Navy, this could have been an effort by the People's Liberation Army Navy to play up its naval diplomacy to the gallery. At the WPNS 2014, China also pledged to hold the 'Sea Cooperation 2014' in which seven foreign warships entered the naval port in Qingdao. First, the list of invited countries included three countries with which China is locked in territorial disputes, and second, China pitched for greater naval cooperation with India – a country that looks at China more in the light of a maritime threat than a competitor. While these

measures reflect China's unfeigned desire to resolve maritime issues through a shot at diplomacy by involving countries they normally view as enemies, there are serious questions as to what could these steps signal?

Is Beijing's Naval Diplomacy an Earnest Effort?

Doubts about China's intentions towards initiating serious naval diplomacy through this agreement stem from the departure of Beijing's words from its actions. Soon after this attempt at naval diplomacy, China engaged Vietnam in a high-tension dispute over territory. The dispute arose when China placed an oil rig near the Paracel Islands, also claimed by Vietnam. As far as China is concerned, if it seriously intends to lead up a naval diplomacy, a significant departure from its recent assertive behaviour in and around the SCS, it will have to convince all the members of the WPNS and the global community about its earnest desire for peaceful maritime business.

Beijing needs to understand that dispute and diplomacy cannot go hand-in-hand. Since it has taken the first step towards minimising undesired maritime encounters, it should also restrain its coercive policies towards maritime expansion. In the long run, a non-binding code like the CUES is likely to help China since it is not a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It is also expected to help other countries in the region which have seen a no-holds-barred Chinese maritime behaviour, particularly since November 2013. Washington too will have a fair deal with the CUES to build strategic trust with Beijing and minimise maritime confrontations with the latter.

The CUES guidelines present Beijing with an opportunity to prove otherwise, the notion that it is always on the lookout for a *casus belli*.



SOUTHEAST ASIA



Southeast Asia: A Three-Pronged US Strategy

27 May 2014

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The intertwined nature of the post-Cold War geopolitics that comprises economics and strategy, rise of a competitive-cum-aggressive China, and a regional involvement riveted on multilateralism has transformed the US' role in the Southeast Asian region.

The US has maintained and built up its alliances in this region. Simultaneously, however, the region has witnessed the phenomenal rise of China in the past two decades, creating a strategic conundrum for the regional states – to balance against China by allying themselves with the US or bandwagoning with China. This uncertainty among the states has not only redefined the role of the US in the region but also the roles of specific states of this region. Also, since the region sits at what many see as the periphery of the US strategic-core (primarily seen as the region encircled by five US military alliances in the Asia-Pacific region), the US as an extra-regional power requires a multi-pronged strategy to sustain its influence in this part of the world.

There are at least three important factors upon which the current US strategy hinges on in the Southeast Asian region: protecting its economic stakes in the region; standing up for its strategic stakes and partners in the region (primarily comprising the efforts to bolster its rebalancing strategy); and regional stability.

Trade Security

Trade with the ASEAN forms an important part of the US' economic engagement with Southeast Asia and the main driver in this regard has been the 2006 US-ASEAN Trade and Investment Arrangement. This was followed by the launch of the US-ASEAN Expanded Economic Engagement initiative – a new framework for economic cooperation designed to expand trade and investment ties between the US and the ASEAN, in the year 2012. These major initiatives, along with a few others, have taken the US-ASEAN trade figures to approximately \$200 billion. In circumstances of such high and interdependent economic stakes with Southeast Asian countries, it is of utmost priority for the US to ensure safe sea-transit of trade through the region.

Thus, protecting the Sea Lines of Communication forms an important part of the US security dynamics in this region. The US has engaged the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) as the primary forum to ensure regional security. Cooperation between the US and the ARF now covers counter-terrorism, transnational crime, disaster relief and maritime security, among others. The US Secretary of State John Kerry's visit to the Brunei edition of the ARF meet in 2013 ensured that a multilateral management of security through regional institutions remains the focus of the US in the region – with primary concerns being maritime/territorial disputes and a code of conduct in the region. The Trans-Pacific Partnership as the economic leg of US' rebalancing will also form an important part of its strategy in this region, with Cambodia as one of the key players.

Strategic Reassurance

The US' strategic stakes in Southeast Asia have gradually been co-opted within its 'Rebalancing', since 2010. The US' cooperation with the Philippines and Vietnam is very crucial as Washington looks towards a larger military presence in this region. In April 2014, the Philippines and the US signed a deal that is expected to provide American troops with greater access to military bases in the country. The US' base in Singapore too is expected to play a supporting role in maritime security and patrolling by the US' 7th Fleet.

As a matter of strategic consideration, the US has pushed forth the concept of the Indo-Pacific, in an effort to institutionalise it. Concomitantly, the maritime gateway between the western Pacific and the eastern Indian Ocean has been left as an open ended security point as opposed to a maritime chokepoint. By doing so, the US intends to not only allow free flow between the two oceans but also gain from the collective opinion coming out of the larger conglomerate of democracies of Asia, in favour of a code of

conduct for monitoring maritime behaviour. A collective bargaining vis-à-vis China will hedge against its maritime assertiveness that has spread its tentacles up to the Indian Ocean. Among other concerns, the US' strategic goals in the region will also include countering the Chinese maritime silk route through which China seeks to connect with the Southeast Asian Region. China recently set up a \$1.6 billion fund to take forward its ambitious 'maritime silk road plan' to build ports and enhance maritime connectivity with Southeast Asian and Indian Ocean littoral countries. This is on the back of bellicose positions that China takes vis-à-vis some countries in the region.

Regional Stability

For a foreseeable future, the US will look to commit itself in Southeast Asia towards maintaining peace, security and freedom of navigation in the region. Its engagement with individual countries of this region is going to be on a multilateral basis, even if it means a curtailment in Washington's influence on the countries of the region. The US will try to avoid military confrontations with Beijing, even as regional stability continues to be of primary concern.

The countries of this region, on the other hand, will try and balance between the hegemony of Beijing and the influence from Washington.

Southeast Asia: Elections, Instability and Reconciliation

12 January 2014

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Elections, national and political reconciliation within, Myanmar becoming the next ASEAN Chair, growing Chinese influences and the American pivot were the major issues of debate in Southeast Asia during 2013. To understand the changes that are expected in 2014 it is essential to have an overview of the last year from the political, economic, and foreign policy perspective.

Malaysia and Cambodia: The Elections Storm

The 13th General Election of Malaysia on 5 May was historical. Eversince 1967, for the first time, the majority party Barisan Nasional (BN) - gained less percentage of votes in comparison to the opposition party, Pakatan Rakyat. Although BN have been able to retain their position as the ruling party due to achieving 44 seats more than PR, however the results were clear indication that Malaysians are not happy with their performance. Important was the shift of loyalty of the Malaysian Chinese population towards PR instead of Malaysian Chinese Association. The reason for the shift was the ethnicity based politics, corruption scandals and failure of Prime Minister Najib Razak's 2010 new Economic Model.

The second significant election took place in June in Cambodia. The weeks following the announcement of election results, violence prevailed in the streets of Phnom Penh, as both the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) who have been in power since Cambodian independence and the opposition party Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) claimed to have gained the majority votes. Although, the peace was reinstated after CPP formed the government, nevertheless the cold war still prevails between these two parties especial in between the two charismatic leading leaders Hun Sen and Sam Rainsy.

Thailand: Topsy-turvy

Political scenario in Thailand has taken a significant turn, since November 2013. The crisis started after Yingluck Shinawatra's government tried to introduce an amnesty bill in the Parliament, this bill would have pardoned the corruption charges of Thaksin Shinawatra, and facilitated his return to Thailand from his self-imposed exile in Dubai. The protest which was initiated against the bill slowly turned anti-government.

On 9 December 2013, Prime minister dissolved the lower House and declared an election for 2 February 2014. However the protestors have declared that the February election will not be a peaceful one. Several incidents have been reported whereby the candidatures for election were not allowed by the protestors to register themselves for the election. Thus, it is clear that the February election will not be an easy process for the Thais and evidently the political future of Thailand is to be decided by this year beginning.

A Peace deal was signed in between the Thai government and the Thai insurgent group, Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) in March 2013. However, this does not imply that peace was restored everywhere and there was no insurgency attack recorded. The northernmost islands of Malaysia were attacked by group of insurgent from Sulu, Philippines. Similarly, Zamboanga city of Philippines was attacked and captured by the insurgent group Moro National liberation Front (MNLF). All these incidents had questioned the success of the peace talks and peace deals.

Myanmar: National Reconciliation, Unsatisfactory Peace Deals & the Violence against Rohingyas

The formation of United Nationalities Federation Council (UNFC) an umbrella group of 11 armed ethnic group of Myanmar meeting in order to work towards the ethnic reconciliation was hoped to bring peace in Myanmar in 2013. However, Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) refrained from signing of the ceasefire agreement that was to establish a nationwide cease fire and paved the path towards a peace accord. The KIO refrain to sign due to a confrontation with military in Laiza in February. This further delayed the peace process. Hopefully success will be achieved by UNFC in the year 2014.

The violence against the Rohingyas, minority Muslim who have been denied citizenship by Myanmar government, continued in the year 2013 also. The violence has already taken several lives and displaced many. Two of the worst recorded violent riots against Rohingyas in the year 2013, was reported in Thandwe and Meiktila. Moreover, the roles of the police who have been installed by the government in order to restore peace have been severely criticised. The Myanmar government have been undertaken several initiative in order to resolve dispute with other ethnic groups nevertheless they have not taken any concrete steps in order to resolve the violence against the Rohingyas. The government have also refuse the request by the United States and other countries to rework the 1982 constitution which denies to grant the citizenship rights to the Rohingyas. In fact Aung Sang Suu Kyi's, the epitome of democracy in Myanmar, silence on this issue, has earned her criticism from her followers.

The Economic Decline

The economic performance of the region has been recorded poor in comparison to the last year's performance. The GDP growth rate is approximately around 5.2 percentages for this year. The two countries that are worst affected is Indonesia and Thailand. The high inflation and falling export prices have resulted to weak economic growth by Indonesia. In fact, the Indonesian stock exchange has recorded the first yearly loss since 2008, in last year.

Several protests have been reported in Indonesia for the demand of higher minimum wage. All these factors will certainly have its impact on the presidential election this year. Thailand's economy has been hampered due to the political instability, if continued it might also impact the foreign investments in this year. Interestingly, both Cambodia and Laos have reported a stable economic growth the credit for which should be accounted to the Chinese investments and support to both these countries.

Chinese Influence and the American Pivot

Growing Chinese influence through trade, aids, bilateral treaties and private investment, on most of the Southeast Asian countries was a noticeable factor for the whole world. Moreover, Chinese President Xi Jinping made his first visit to Southeast Asia in October 2013. He visited Malaysia, Indonesia and Bali, where Xi Jinping have attended 21st informal economic leaders' meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. His visit to region was seen as a milestone in strengthening the relation and reassurance of Chinese commitment of peacefully negotiating the tension over the South China Sea. However, China's declaration of an air-defence identification zone (ADIZ) over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands has recreated the suspicion against the Chinese move in Southeast Asia. The US involvement has also been a growing aspect, becoming prominent by the increase in number of American ships deployed in Northern Australia, Singapore and other Southeast Asian countries. Typhoon Haiyan hit Philippines have received a huge financial aid from US unlike China who did not play any significant role in assisting Philippines. Nevertheless, the question remains that whether this growing US pivot can negate the Chinese effect or not, can be answered by time.

Forecast 2014

Early this year will witness the general election in Thailand which has been scheduled in 2 February 2014, this election will be crucial for the political future of Thailand. Presidential election is also scheduled for this year in Indonesia; it will be an interesting to note the new President's strategy to restore the national economy.

Myanmar who is the ASEAN chair for the year 2014, is also expecting crucial political changes. The committee considering amendments of the Myanmar's constitution will submit its report. These amendments will pave the way to the next general election in 2015 and also involves the stake of all the ethnic groups in Myanmar who are demanding for a federal political system that will give ethnic states greater autonomy.

2014 will definitely be an eventful year for Southeast Asia.

Myanmar: Violence in Rakhine State and a Way Forward

31 October 2014

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The International Crisis Group (ICG) published a comprehensive report on the ongoing ethno-political and communal violence in the Rakhine state of Myanmar in October 2014, titled, "Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State."

There are four specific issues that the report has highlighted that ask for a more detailed discussion.

Buddhist Suspicions: Towards the Government or Domestic Muslims?

The report states that the Rakhines were initially suspicious of the centre due to their geographical and political isolation. However this fear and suspicion against Naypyidaw has slowly been re-directed towards the significant number of Muslims in Rakhine state. In order to substantiate its argument, four points are highlighted as the reasons for this shift.

The high birth rate among the Muslims, fear of Muslims forming an autonomous region, perception of economic deprivation among the Buddhists, and the distinctive socio-cultural divide between the religious communities further enlarges the rift. However these factors fail to explain the reason for the shift in fear and suspicion that was initially towards the centre and is currently aimed at Muslims within the state.

However, these reasons are debatable. The high birth rate among the Rakhine Muslims is surely not a new phenomenon - the increasing number of migrations could instead be one of the reasons for the increasing number of Muslims in the state. The point on economic deprivation could be questioned because Muslims dominance in small trades both in Rakhine state and other parts of Myanmar is not new. Even historically most of the Muslims who settled in Myanmar were traders. Furthermore as mentioned by the report most of the bigger trade is controlled by cronies and ex-military leaders. Why then is anger not directed towards the government instead of the Muslim community - after all, the government is the real cause for the state's poverty and economic underdevelopment.

Socio-Economic Changes

The report talks about a new socio-political backdrop that is helping the rift to thrive. However the report seems to have overlooked other changes that also play significant roles in aggravating the rift between the two communities to an unprecedented level of violence. The partial withdrawal of censorship on the media on 2011 is one reason. The media has become an avenue for the propagation of both negative and positive sentiments in society. Also, the National League of Democracy's (NLD) sweeping victory in both 1990 and 2010 has led those in the opposition to attempt to widen the rift for their own political gains. Thus the centre's change of heart towards the Rakhines, especially the Buddhists, who are not only in the majority but are also a bigger vote bank. In this new game, the political elite have allied with the Rakhine Buddhists while politically marginalising the Muslims.

Muslim Disenfranchisement?

The word Rohingya, as stated in the report, is more than an identity for the northern Rakhine Muslims. Most 'Rohingya' Muslims insist on this identification because they hope that if recognised as an indigenous group, it would allow them to be eligible for full citizenship. Full citizenship will enable them to attain all basic freedoms including enfranchisement. However the report has contradicted its own argument by stating that full citizenship may not necessarily entitle a person full freedom. It also provides the example of the Kaman Muslims, who although eligible for full citizenship face the same discrimination as the Rohingya Muslims only due on the basis of their religion.

Is there a Way Forward?

Although the report analyses whether international Islamic radicalisation will have an impact on the Rohingya, it does not look at the growth and impact of radical Buddhism on the Rakhine Buddhists. This could have been explored further in the section titled "The Way Forward." The report talks about how the problem requires a political solution and must therefore be dealt with in a holistic manner, rather than a narrow focus like the "Rakhine State Action Plan." Along with this political solution, civil society initiatives are also very important, since both political and social factors have come together to result in the present tensions.

Myanmar's Ashin Wirathu: Five Reasons for His Rise

29 October 2014

Aparupa Bhattacharjee

Research Officer, SEARP, IPCS

U Ashin Wirathu, the Buddhist monk, is seen as the face of Buddhist extremism in Myanmar by the world. The 969 movement led by him aims to save Myanmar from the perceived threat of the rising number of Muslims within the country. Both Wirathu and the 969 movement have a huge number of followers in Myanmar. Wirathu came into the limelight quite suddenly in 2012, and has become a familiar face in all national and international newspapers and journals. What has led to Wirathu's sudden popularity?

Wirathu, who has been referred to as the face of the "Buddhist terror" and the "Burmese Bin Laden" in several international newspapers, journals and magazines comes from a humble background and is comparatively young to attain this stature. Wirathu was born in a small town called Kyauke in the Mandalay province on 10 July 1968. Although he was arrested by the former military government in 2003 and sentenced to twenty five years in prison for his anti-Muslim sermons, he was granted amnesty in 2011. He came to the forefront in 2012 by leading a rally in Mandalay to support the current President Thein Sien's controversial plan to send Rohingya Muslims to another country. In a span of two years he has become the face of Buddhist radicalism in Myanmar.

He has become an abbot, at a very young age, of a huge monastery called Masoyein, with 2500 students under him, where he trains them to fight the so-called Muslim militants. Thus it seems that Wirathu is a strategist as well as an opportunist who has effectively cultivated several factors to attain this popularity.

Backstage Support

The fact that Wirathu is able to openly and freely preach his anti-Muslim ideology all over Myanmar unlike other monks, who had once been arrested by the former military government, suggests that he is being supported by a section of the government especially by the radical wing within it. Wirathu continues his provocative teaching without being arrested. 2012, the year Wirathu came to the limelight, is a significant year as this is the same year that the National League of Democracy (NLD) entered the Myanmar Parliament with a sweeping victory in the by-election held in the same year. Thus it seems support for Wirathu is a strategy by that section of the government that would prefer to have continuing violence within the country so that attention is diverted from the pro-democracy propaganda of the NLD party and their leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Internal Tensions

Both Wirathu and the 969 movement have built their support on the foundation of pre-existing tensions between the Buddhists and the Muslims, which has been around for centuries. Both have essentially cultivated these fractures to forward their agendas.

Media as a Tool

In 2011, the pro-civilian government of Myanmar partially removed censorship over the media. The freedom to use uncensored media has paved the way for Wirathu to enter the limelight. He has rarely refused journalists and scholars who have asked for his appointment or interview. Time magazine in July 2013 came up with a cover story that claimed Wirathu to be the "The Face of Buddhist Terror." Although it was vehemently opposed by both Wirathu and the present Myanmar government, it did not deter Wirathu from giving further interviews. All his sermons are widely available on YouTube. However barely any factual information about his early life is available, except for where and when he was born. It seems Wirathu knows well which aspects of his life to display and which to keep secret.

Force of Personality

Wirathu's personality also has a role to play in the achievement of his quick success. He is a good orator; this helps him gain a mass following. While preaching he keeps his calm and speaks quietly. Among his numerous followers, some of follow him because they genuinely believe in him and others follow him out of fear. In Myanmar, all Buddhist monks are attributed with respect and authority. Furthermore, being the abbot of a monastery at the heart of Mandalay has also empowered Wirathu with a higher level of blind respect and authority that has benefitted him greatly.

Alliances and International Recognition

Support from and alliances with similar radical Buddhist organisations like Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) in Sri Lanka has further enhanced Wirathu's image. Recently, both BBS and 969 movement have commenced a joint conference and pledge their allegiance to each other. Such a move has not only concretised the fear that radical Buddhism is growing and might spread to other South Asian and Southeast Asian countries but has also provided Wirathu with international recognition.

All these factors have come together to push Wirathu into the sudden limelight. Although he is portrayed as the face of Buddhist extremism, the problem of religious radicalism in Myanmar is very complex, has several roots, and many faces.

Sri Lanka, Myanmar and the Buddhist Radical Groups: New Alignments?

22 October 2014

Roomana Hukil

Research Officer, IReS, IPCS

Recently, hard-line Buddhist clerics in Myanmar and Sri Lanka stated that Buddhist associations from both countries will work together to protect Buddhism against the threat from the Muslim extremists around the globe. Last month, Myanmar's Ashin Wirathu and Sri Lanka's Galagodaththe Gnanasara met in Colombo to work towards "Buddhists around the globe to ally internationally." Following this, the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) expressed interest in seeking out to a similar partnership with India's Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) towards securing a 'Buddhist-Hindu peace zone in Asia' to counter radical elements.

Are there divergences between radical Buddhist groups with respect to their attitudes and sentiments towards minorities in Sri Lanka and Myanmar? What impact do such fundamentalist collaborative ties have on the rest of the region?

To Each His Own

Reaching out to a larger international audience by means of collaborations provides impetus for radical Buddhists in both states to exhibit their Islamophobic character whilst protecting their image from being tarnished as an extremist force. Domestic compulsions such as the ends of the civil war in Sri Lanka and

military rule in Myanmar created new fissures in the socio-political and economic fronts of the two states. However, despite the similarities, there are differences in social and ideological contexts as well as in political ambitions between the radical Buddhists of Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

Buddhist clerics' demands and statements in Sri Lanka indicate that their main objective is to form a 'single Sinhala nation'. With the fall of Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and absolute control gained over the north-east in Sri Lanka, the government considers the Tamil minority to be amongst the least of threats in attaining its goal. Thus, the next targets are the Muslims and Christians because the radical nationalist Buddhists are insecure about the perceived rapid conversion rates of the Sinhala people to Christianity and Islam.

Most minority groups in the state such as Tamils, Muslims and Christians – predominantly found, in the major cities of Sri Lanka such as Colombo – are disregarded because of their economic prosperity and domination in the service sectors. Hence, with the support of the government, both groups have been trying to contain all other religious minorities and keep a tab on them. More so, some Sinhala businessmen reportedly pay Buddhist organisations to pester the Muslim-run business groups.

More than aspiring for religious and ethnic statehood such as in the case of Sri Lanka, radical Myanmar Buddhist majorly fear that if the Muslim community acts irresponsibly, Myanmar will become an Islamist state. It is out of extreme paranoia that Muslims are loathed in Myanmar. This coupled with Muslim individuals' purchasing of Buddhist-owned land, and their increasing numbers riles Buddhist clerics. Myanmar's monks are quite isolated and maintain a rather basic relationship with the Buddhists of the rest of the world.

However, Sri Lanka is an exception because the country has historically been fraught with ethnic strife. Myanmar's monks are inspired by the assertive political nature of the monks from Sri Lanka's Sinhala majority and, therefore, reach out to them. In Sri Lanka and Myanmar, Muslims comprise approximately 10 per cent or less of the total population and Buddhists account for approximately 70 per cent. Therefore, it is difficult to determine which group is more radical in nature in its approach to the perceived threat from 'Islamists'.

Cloudy Days Ahead

Fundamental Islamic groups initially refrained from joining and assisting their Muslim counterparts in both Sri Lanka and Myanmar on the grounds that they were "unruly, sinful and did not deserve to be protected under Islamic law." However, this scenario may be changing now. The numbers of Islamist associations germinating in various pockets of both rural and urban Sri Lanka and Myanmar may be on the rise. With the Islamic State openly denouncing the extremist activities of Buddhist radical groups against minority Muslims, tensions regarding the likelihood of unrest in both these countries in the near future seep into the political discourse of the international system.

An open partnership between transnational religious nationalist groups such as the 969 Movement, the BBS and the RSS has created a cloud of concerns for the rest of the region. Assimilation of such ultranationalist groups puts the region into quandary vis-à-vis addressing the larger question of the societal integration and the States' policies on minority communities. With these unprecedented developments gaining momentum, there could be a further rise in violent aggression on the Muslim minorities, ultimately threatening peace and security in the region. Also, currently, Buddhist radical elements have increasingly created paranoia in the region resulting in Buddhism's image being branded negatively. There are fears that a conflict between jihadists and radical Buddhists may be sparked as a reciprocal violence. If such extremism were to spread to other less complex regions such as Cambodia and Laos, the repercussions of that phenomenon might frustrate the relative peace of the region.

IPCS Discussion: Contemporary Myanmar & India-Myanmar Relations

9 October 2014

Teshu Singh (Rapporteur)

On 5 September, 2014, the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi, organised a discussion on Myanmar. This was the third set of discussions, and part of the larger series of IPCS discussions on Myanmar. The discussion was held in two sessions:

- a. India-Myanmar Relations: Challenges and Opportunities for New Government
- b. Contemporary Myanmar: Political Transition and Ethnic Faultlines

Ambassador Rajiv K.Bhatia
Director General, Indian Council of World Affairs

In Myanmar, developments have been taking place gradually, without any dramatic transformation. Given that the elections are fast approaching, it is important to address some pressing issues. The key aspects of upcoming polls will be constitutional reform, ethnic issues and the free and fair nature of the election.

The internal situation of the country could be dominated by the civil-military relationship – that will form the core of national reconciliation. This in turn will be dominated by the Tatmadaw. In terms of constitutional reforms, addressing Article 436 and Article 59F will be important. The Parliamentary Joint Committee to review the constitution has suggested changes in Article 436 but not for Article 59F. However, there is no constitutional reform expected.

The Myanmar economy has begun picking up and its foreign policy is also gradually maturing. Although some red lines have been drawn vis-à-vis China, the Naypyiday-Beijing relationship is strong, particularly in defence and military areas.

In terms of India-Myanmar relations, there are some pending issues – such as the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project, and the problem of cross-border insurgency. However, India's Myanmar policy has been political fruit of India's currently ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and erstwhile ruling Congress parties, both. This has given a degree of stability to the bilateral. Interactions at the Track I level have become robust but at the Track II level, they remain weak. Needless to mention, India-Myanmar relations continue to swing between hope and reality.

Ambassador Ranjit Gupta
Distinguished Fellow, IPCS and Former Indian Ambassador to Yemen and Oman

Myanmar is the most ethnically divided country in the world. Perhaps the British rule accentuated this division. The Myanmar military played an important role in achieving independence. Plausibly, if it weren't for the military government in Myanmar, the country might have broken down. Given the central role it has played, the military has reserved a preeminent role for itself in the country's future. Therefore, Myanmar's transition from military rule to true democracy might not be easy and rapid.

After decades of military dictatorship, the country returned to civilian rule, with the 2010 elections. This precedent has not been witnessed anywhere in the world. The amendment of the constitution is in process. 25 per cent of the seats in the parliament has been reserved for the military, and discussions on the ceasefire agreement have been initiated.

As regards the marginalisation of the country's Rohingya Muslim population, the term 'Rohingya' was completely unknown during the British rule; it was not used by any Burmese group and neither was it included in the eight censuses that have taken place until now. The term does not occur in any government gazette and none of the 135 groups in the country accept the Rohingyas as an ethnicity native to Myanmar. Curiously, Aung San Suu Kyi too is silent on their status. The Rohingyas live in terrible conditions in the country. There is a need for improvement of the situation for which the starting point must be to recognise the ground reality as is.

Professor Shankari Sundararaman
Chairperson, Centre for Indo-Pacific Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

The Myanmar's political transition took roots in 2003 when the road map was launched. The period from 2003-10 witnessed two major developments: the saffron revolution and the adoption of the constitution. There are several indicators to understand the developments in the Myanmar.

a. Electoral Process: The 2010 elections took place after a gap of 20 years. 37 political parties partook in the election but the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the Shan National League for Democracy party were debarred. A major aftermath of this election was the release of Aung San Suu Kyi herself. Soon, incumbent President Thein Sein launched the political reconciliation policy – that has led to the release of political prisoners, and to lifting the curbs on political participation on the masses. This is a critical change in the context of Myanmar. This development was followed by the April 2012 elections.

b. Freedom of Press: Since the beginning of the transition process, there has been a proliferation of media groups. The State-media relationship is complex, but, interestingly, Myanmar has been ranked higher than other Southeast Asian countries as far as freedom of press is concerned.

c. Constitutional Reform Process: The 2008 constitution allows for a constitutional role for the National Defence and Security Council. This provision has actually ensured the presence of the military in political spaces: i.e. the commander-in-chief of the armed forces is tasked with appointing a representative to the legislative assembly. This is drawn from the Indonesian experience and is popularly known as the ‘dual function of military’.

The federalism issue is important, and relevant to the ongoing peace process. The two ongoing debates related to the issue are:

- a. Is federalism itself an option?
- b. Should the pattern of federalism Myanmar should adopt be symmetrical or asymmetrical?

A related debate is based on whether federalism will be implemented on ethnic lines.

Regardless, one has to be cautiously optimistic regarding changes in Myanmar.

Bibhu Prasad Routray
Visiting Fellow, IPCS

The ongoing peace process has two narratives: simple and complex. The simple narrative began in 2011 and pertains to the NCA. The time framework clearly states that the framework for the dialogue must be developed within 60 days of the signing of the Agreement and political dialogue must commence within 90 days. There has been enormous progress since then. Five rounds of the NCA have taken place and two drafts, amended. 75 per cent of the draft has been approved, 25 per cent is being debated, and approximately thirty words in the draft have to be defined.

Will Myanmar have durable peace? Myanmar’s future depends on whether the country has a vision for itself. There are expectations of political parties and international actors. Ethnic groups want a certain degree of self-determination, federalism, and international mediators and protection. The country is trying to define democracy with a local flavour.

Discussion

- Myanmar is an important neighbour of India’s. A monitoring system on Myanmar should be established under the auspices of the Indian prime minister’s office.
- Since the Electoral College elects the president of Myanmar, along with the proportional representation, the Electoral College will also be important.
- The ‘Indian Federalism’ model is unsuitable for Myanmar.
- Changes in Myanmar should be studied in light of comparative politics. Influence of external participants is evident in Myanmar. The EU has been focusing on the country, and the US too has been considering engaging Myanmar in its rebalancing strategy.
- Sectarian violence is spreading rapidly. The Rohingya issue and the Islamophobia issue are being interpreted interchangeably. This is dangerous because it defeats the purpose of reconciliation.

Anti-Rohingya and Anti-Muslim Sentiments in Myanmar: Mutually Reinforcing?

24 September 2014

Aparupa Bhattacharjee

Research Officer, Southeast Asia Research Programme (SEARP), IPCS.

Is there a cause and effect between the anti-Muslim sentiments and anti-Rohingya violence in Myanmar? Is the latter an expression of the former?

The violence against the Rohingyas appears to be a part of larger Islamophobia within Myanmar. The religious identity of the Rohingyas seems to play a larger role than their ethnic background, triggering violence from a section within Myanmar.

Islamophobia and Anti-Rohingya Riots: Five Causes

The strife between the Rohingya's and the Rakhines is embedded in Myanmar's history. The communal riots in the 1990s and later in 2001 and 2003 are the fallouts of this divide, though the June 2012 riot between the two communities attracted international attention. Until then, the existing religious tension was restricted only to some parts of the Rakhine state. Since 2012, there has been a rapid spread of the anti-Muslim sentiments to the rest of Myanmar which has also further escalated the existing tension between the Rakhines and the Rohingyas.

Several reasons triggered the scepticism against the Muslims since 2012. First, the release of the radical Buddhist monk Ashin Wirathu and formation of the 969 movement under him provided an organised platform for promoting Islamophobia. Launched in 2012, the movement propagates that the Muslims (who are recorded to be four percent of the total population according to the 1983 census in Myanmar) eventually would become the majority and the largest group within Myanmar. The members of 969 movement act as prime instigators of the anti-Muslim movement in all over Myanmar.

Second, the withdrawal of the media censorship in 2011 by the newly formed quasi-civilian government has helped in disseminating hatred. Uncensored media has opened the avenues of use and abuse of the social media, propagating anti Rohingya, anti Muslim speeches and messages. The recent riot in July 2014 in Mandalay highlights the misuse of the media. A fabricated story in social media of molestation of a Buddhist girl by her Muslim employer triggered the whole violence.

Third, the 9/11 attack in the US, had alarmed a section within Myanmar which fear being targeted by the Islamic terrorists. The Rohingya Patriotic Front (a militant group, renamed as the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) in the 1990s) and its union with Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) to evolve as the Arakan Rohingya Union (ARU) further exacerbated this fear. The secessionist demands by these militant groups have only strengthened the fear and distrust among a section of Buddhist Myanmarese against the Muslims which was flared by the radical groups such as 969 movement.

Fourth, the vulnerability of the Rohingya's made them an easy target. The Rohingyas were stripped of their citizenship rights by the 1982 Constitution, and thus perceived as an outsider in the country. They are referred as 'Bengalis' from Bangladesh, and the growth of the militants amongst them, have created an image of the whole community as a bunch of reprobate. Although the Rohingyas are a minority in the Rakhine state but their population is substantial in number (one billion approximately out of the total three billion); this has supported the notion of Muslim takeover. Additionally certain villages were recognised as the Rohingya ghettos, made them easily accessible for the perpetrators. This could be substantiated by the fact that the Rohingyas living in other district in a more mixed community setup were never attacked.

Fifth, the spread of violence to other states also indicates the anti-Rohingya hostilities are effect of the cause of Islamophobia in Myanmar. Although the June and October 2012 riots were restricted in the Rakhine state, several riots also took place across Myanmar, including the two big cities of Yangon and Mandalay. The February 2013 riot in Yangon, took place in Thaketa township comprising Muslims population of mix ethnic groups and insignificant number of Rohingyas. According to the record, the number of people murdered, raped and displaced in both the June and October 2012 riots apart from the Rohingyas also includes other Muslims such as Kaman and Barmar Muslims too. Thus elaborating attacks in most of these riots lead by the group of Buddhists radicals were inflicted upon the Muslims irrespective of their ethnicity.

The anti- Rohingya violence should not be treated separate from the problem of the rapid growth of anti-Muslim sentiments in Myanmar. Although the Rohingyas have faced the brunt of the growth of the anti-Muslim violence, the repercussion of the growth has impacted all Muslims in Myanmar irrespective of

their ethnicity. This implies that the solution to both the cause and its effect have to be addressed together, as one may again lead to other.

Myanmar: Priority for the New Indian Government

4 July 2014

Rahul Mishra

Research Fellow, Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi

Ever since Narendra Modi assumed office as the Indian Prime Minister, speculations regarding his foreign policy priorities have been rife. Many in the Indian media suggest that since this is the first time Modi is at the helm of central government affairs, he would find it tricky to deal with the foreign policy challenges on a day-to-day basis, while vigorously pursuing the domestic agenda that not only involves revamping the economy but also improving governance in the country crippled by corruption.

Though at a purely symbolic level, Modi's invitation to the South Asian leaders to attend his swearing-in ceremony gave signals regarding his foreign policy preferences: greater attention towards the immediate neighbourhood to ensure peace, partnership and development. Modi invited the heads of governments of of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) member countries, and Mauritius, who willingly attended the event. One may argue that like Mauritius, Myanmar could have also been invited as both the countries are, in geographical terms, part of Southern Asia.

At the substantive level, the highlights of Modi's foreign policy were showcased in Indian President Pranab Mukherjee's address to the joint session of the Indian Parliament on June 9, 2014. While there was no direct mention of Myanmar in the president's speech, several issues hint at the country's salience in Modi's neighbourhood policy.

Promoting Inter-regional Connectivity

In his address, President Mukherjee spoke at length about inter-regional connectivity. In the recent years, India has actively pursued the idea of trans-South Asian connectivity, links with Myanmar and countries in the Southeast Asian region. Road and rail links with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan have been worked on, with some success. In that context, India's initiatives to connect with Myanmar have been remarkable. It has 'travelled more than half' to bring Myanmar along in terms of infrastructure development and road, rail, waterways and air connectivity. Inter alia, India has initiated projects such as the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project, and revamping national waterways to link with Myanmar. In June 2014, India and Myanmar agreed on a weekly bus service connecting Imphal, Moreh, Tamu, Kalewa, Monywa and Mandalay towns. Visa-on-arrival facility will also be extended to travellers. The 579kilometer route is likely to be inaugurated in October 2014, marking the beginning of direct road links between India and Myanmar.

While it is expected that the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project will be completed by the end of 2014, Sittwe is also being revamped. Slow progress in the Sittwe project has hurt India's energy interests. So far, as the National waterways are concerned, with the restructuring of the Ministry of Water Resources to make it the Ministry for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, the government has made its intentions clear on the issue of cleaning up of the river Ganga – that wasn't just evident in Modi's pre-election campaign speeches, but has also attracted huge funds from the central government to make Ganga and other eastern rivers fully navigable, which will also benefits hinterlands. The Chennai-Dawei Corridor is another great opportunity involving Myanmar.

Illegal immigration

Illegal immigration from the eastern flank has been a major challenge for India. Due to porous borders, lack of proper fencing along the Myanmar and Bangladesh borders, lack of requisite security apparatus and strict vigil, India has been unable to check illegal immigration. While Bangladesh has been the most prominent source, Rohingya immigrants from Myanmar have also come in hoards. According to estimates, New Delhi alone has over 5000 Rohingya immigrants while an estimated 20,000 Rohingyas are present in India.

In that context, fencing along India's borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh is a critically important matter. India has been facing opposition along both the Bangladesh and Myanmar borders. Without addressing the problem resolutely, India's boundary woes are not likely to be addressed.

Bringing Northeast India into the Mainstream

The central government has already initiated plans to improve connectivity within India's Northeastern states. Developing infrastructure projects automatically involves working on energy projects. In both India and Myanmar, demand for energy far outweighs the supplies. In Myanmar, only 26% of the population has access to the electricity.

One of the most dreadful consequences of the neglect of India's Northeastern regions has been the illegal production and sale of the narcotic substances. According to some estimates, the Northeastern region has become the hub of drug trafficking, and has become the channel for drug trade from the golden triangle.

Role of Japan and the US

At the regional geopolitical level too, Myanmar will remain a key country for the Modi government. For instance, the recently conceptualised India-Japan-US trilateral dialogue has been projected as one of the major initiatives to bring India closer to the US and Japan. Myanmar is a country of great interest for India, Japan and the US.

One may argue that while the US, President Barack Obama, played a key role in bringing Myanmar back to the international system, Japan has become one of the biggest investors and a major player in Myanmar's economy. India, naturally, has direct stakes in Myanmar at all levels. If the three countries are able to devise a common strategy on Myanmar, it will not only help Myanmar, but will also bring India, Japan and the US closer.

Myanmar: How Free is the Contemporary Media?

30 June 2014

Aparupa Bhattacharjee

Research officer, SEARP, IPCS

In April 2013, for the first time in Myanmar, private newspapers were displayed in the newspaper stalls along with the state-owned newspapers that had not been censored by the Junta. In August 2012, President Thein Sein had announced the removal of the official censorship of the media in Myanmar. Further, several journalists and bloggers who were arrested during the rule of the military Junta were released through political amnesty by the President. These changes have also been evident in the Free Press Index by the Reporters Without Borders: in 2010, Myanmar was ranked 174 out of 178 countries, whereas in 2013, it was ranked 151 out of 178.

What is the state of the media in contemporary Myanmar? What are the changes that the media is looking forward to?

A Difficult Path

The removal of censorship in Myanmar has opened new avenues for several private media houses. However, there are still several hurdles that the media has to overcome. Although, according to government records, there are twelve private 'daily' newspapers, if the weekly papers and journals in both English and Burmese are taken into account, the number is huge. This has increased the competition in both the online and print media. Most of the newspapers are not well-equipped to cope in a competitive market. They lack in reporting capacity, distribution channels, legal protections, experienced business management and the concurrent growth of advertising revenues. The situation is worse for the daily newspapers in comparison to the weeklies.

Most of the newspapers (except for Eleven Media House and Yangon Times) do not have in-house printing. Furthermore, due to the slow internet connections, all the material is delivered to the printer by hand, which only delays the process. The media houses not only have a dearth of professional trained journalists to meet the needs of daily reporting but also lack sufficient funds to sustain the expensive

daily printing. Most of the media houses in Myanmar are financially dependent on either the profit from the other business of the owner or foreign sponsors. Unlike media houses in other parts of the world, those in Myanmar lack shareholders in the business. Underdeveloped infrastructure and expensive transportation have hindered the distribution channels. The distribution per day in Myanmar ranges from 10,000 to 30,000 approximately. Due to expensive printing costs and taxes, the rates for the private daily newspapers (200-500 Kyats) are higher than the state-owned ones. Apart from the state-owned newspapers, most of the readers also prefer journals as they are thicker and are therefore considered cost effective. All these issues affect the profit margin, which is nil for most of the private newspapers.

Additionally, the fact that the new government of Myanmar (after 48 years of authoritarian rule) is not well adapted to dealing with a free media presence in the country makes the struggle more difficult. The innate governmental control over the media still persists in the country. The legitimacy of the private media houses depends on licences provided by the government. The newly drafted media bill that outlines the print and publisher registrations is contradictory to media freedom. This will be similar to the 1962 law that it will replace, and will allow the government to issue or revoke licenses for any reason and prohibit a publication that is thought to endanger national security, the rule of law or community peace and tranquility. However, the criteria on which the licenses are provided by the government are not yet transparent. Although the publications are not censored officially, all editors have to install self-censorship. The government cannot be criticised negatively. Further, although the Press Security and Registration Division (PSRD) of the Junta period was disbanded, it has been replaced with the Copyrights and Registration Division that scans through all the media output.

Although several social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and the website of the opposition political parties are allowed, the restrictions still persist. Laws such as the 2004 Electronic Transaction Law, Internet Law of 2000 and others restricting the electronic media will continue to exist until new laws are formulated.

Looking Forward

There are efforts on behalf of the government to increase transparency on the drafting of the media laws. The laws are being drafted by the Interim Council of Press comprising of many editors and journalists along with the government. There are plans to install a central banking structure in Myanmar; once installed it will incentivise more shareholders and international advertising agencies to open ventures with the private media houses, thereby increasing their revenue earning. Furthermore, the government has already reduced internet installation charges from 600,000 Kyats to 50,000 Kyats, and the monthly fees have been reduced from 30,000 Kyats to 17,000 Kyats. This will enable easier and cheaper internet access to at least for some sections of society. There are several international actors, such as Australia, who are working towards improving internet services in Myanmar, which would be a big relief for the media houses. Others, such as the Norwegian Telenor company, has promised to introduce a much cheaper telephone service in Myanmar; Ooredoo, a Qatar-based firm, in collaboration with Samsung, is working towards providing cheaper internet service in Myanmar. All these promises will bring about positive changes in the country and reduce the struggle that the media houses are currently facing.

Myanmar's National Census: Fuelling Ethnic Crises

18 June 2014

Aparupa Bhattacharjee

Research Officer, SEARP, IPCS

The nationwide census that was carried out from March to May 2014 in Myanmar was an essential step in the country's preparation for the 2015 general elections. The previous census was held 31 years ago in 1983, under the military junta government. Thus, a new census was essential. However, the census-conducting process and the subsequent results may lead to the already volatile social situation in Myanmar flaring up. The census process has therefore led to severe criticism of the government both from within and outside the country.

Why is Myanmar's 2014 census controversial? Why is the process aggravating existing tensions in the country's society?

The Ethno-linguistic Mosaic of Myanmar's Society

The Myanmar society is divided into several ethnic and linguistic groups. Some ethnic groups belong to specific regions – such as the Shan community of the Shan province, the Kachin community of Kachin province, and the Karen community of Karen province, to name a few. These people are therefore referred to as taingyintha (literally sons of the geographical division) in the Burmese language. These groups are further divided into several other sub-groups. Sub-divisions exist on the basis of clans, villages, languages, religious groups, and other criteria. As a result, there are several individuals who identify themselves with more than one identity. For instance, an ethnic Kachin can also be a 'Maru' or 'Rawang' choosing their church groups.

Furthermore, internal migration and inter-ethnic marriages have resulted in the blending of several ethnic identities. Such a mix has led to the formation of perceived identities. An ethnic Karen by birth might not identify himself/herself as Karen but with the identity that the person has gained through marriage/residence in a region for a long time – generating a perceived identity. Children born of alliance between people from two different ethnic groups might identify themselves with both the ethnic groups, and or to the region they have settled in.

The Census Fuel to the Ethnic Fire

The 2014 census has either failed to recognise the complexity of the ethno-linguistic fabric of the Myanmar society or has tried to oversimplify it. The census form allows a person to choose only one ethnic identity. This has invited confusion and anger among the citizenry due to the aforementioned reasons. This issue will have political implications, given how many supporters of ethnic political parties might choose their sub-groups instead of their overarching ethnic identity in the forms. This will affect the strength of the ethnicity-based political parties.

Furthermore, the 2014 census form, like the one in 1983, identifies 135 taingyintha ethnic groups; and each group is further divided into different categories. However, different ethnic groups with no connections have carelessly been clubbed together under one ethnic group. For example, several groups in Shan provinces – such as the Palaung, Lahu and Intha – are listed as sub-groups of the Shan ethnic group; but they are neither similar to the Shan group nor to each other. This carelessness has agitated the ethnic groups.

Additionally, the ongoing conflict in Kachin and Shan provinces has disallowed the census from being conducted in the whole of the former, and parts of the latter. The conflict between the Kachin Independence Army and the Tatmadaw has resulted in some residents migrating to China and some having to shift to Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps. This hence fuels fears that the census will be unfair. This has also been inferred as ploy by the government that comprises mainly of ethnic Barmars to misrepresent percentage of the minorities. This will also lead to the over-representation of the Barmars who are already the majority 60 per cent (according to the previous census) and the under-representation of those ethnic groups whose members have either migrated to neighbouring countries or settled in the IDP camps.

Several non-ethnic groups in Myanmar, such as the Panthay Muslims, Gurkhas, people of Indian origin, and those others who have lived in the country for centuries and are in large numbers, did not find a mention in the form. They had to register themselves either in the 'others' category or according to the country of their origin – thus angering these groups. The situation is the same for the Rohingyas. Earlier, in March, Naypyidaw announced the prohibition on using the term 'Rohingya' and made them register as 'Bengalis' in the census form. This action not only denied the Rohingyas their identity but also ratified the Buddhist radicals' demand that the term Rohingya should not be included in the census form.

Ominous Implications

The census result that is scheduled to be declared in early 2015 might lead to the further violence. According to the previous census, there were only four per cent Muslims in Myanmar, and any increase in this percentage may lead to escalation of violence by Buddhist radicals. Moreover, the result may also highlight the gradual process of the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people. A national census is essential for the comprehensive development of every country. However, in Myanmar, it appears to be ringing the warning bells.

Malaysia, Thailand, and the Trafficking of the Rohingyas

30 May 2014

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Recent reports indicate a surge in the trafficking and abuse of the Rohingya migrants/refugees from within Malaysia and Thailand. Both countries have a trafficking network that is operational on a far greater scale than currently acknowledged of by the authorities. While both countries refuse to provide a legal refugee status to the Rohingya people, they are permitted to stay via UN registration. The Thai government despite being officially committed to combating human trafficking in the country, denies the Rohingyas as victims of trafficking. The rising numbers of trafficking cases have threatened to undermine their anti-human trafficking record. More so, both states are currently at the risk of being downgraded from a Tier 2 stature to Tier 3, by the US State Department in its upcoming Trafficking in Person's (TIP) Report.

Are the Rohingya Being Trafficked?

In the 2013, Thailand submitted its human trafficking report that had no mention of the trafficking of the Rohingyas. It stated that the Rohingya question is an issue of human smuggling and not trafficking. The terms smuggling and trafficking have differing meanings, wherein the smuggling takes place with consent and in trafficking, the victims are moved by persuasion and/or deception. This has given leeway to Thailand, which is currently scrambling to combat the growing menace of the rising instances of trafficking cases. According to the report, there were 225 convictions for human trafficking in 2013 as opposed to 49 in 2012. The report also stated that there were 1020 trafficking victims in 2013, as compared to 592 in 2012. Of this, 141 victims were said to be from Myanmar. However, no one was identified as a Rohingya.

Thailand aims to avoid being downgraded to Tier 3 – the lowest stature in the US State Department's TIP Report – because a Tier 3 ranking would place Thailand alongside North Korea and the Central African Republic – that are considered the world's worst human trafficking hubs. Being ranked as a Tier 3 country, Thailand would run the risk of inviting sanctions from the US and embarrassment, given how it's lobbying for a non-permanent position in the UN Security Council. Thailand claims it has undertaken maximum effort to avoid repercussions. It aims to incorporate changes in its human trafficking record before June 2014.

There is no official data available on the total number of Rohingyas in Thailand and Malaysia but unconfirmed sources estimate that there are approximately 60,000 Rohingya people residing in these countries. The lack of reliable data on the number of Rohingyas highlights their invisibility and an absence of protection for them. Prior to 2009, most Rohingyas were allowed to start businesses and settle among the Thai Muslim community. However, post 2009, this permission was suspended, and failure to provide substantial documents led to the arrests of Rohingya people; and these arrest either result in indefinite detention or a handover to human traffickers.

Authorities support the human traffickers in driving the Rohingya out of the country because of the overwhelming people in the refugee camps in these countries. These countries find it difficult to accommodate the tens of thousands of Rohingya asylum-seekers in their territories, and the easier way out is to send (and sometimes sell) them to human traffickers. Dr Dmitrina Petrova from the Equal Rights Trust pointed out that "it is more humane to release the Rohingya to the traffickers than to deport them back to Myanmar or keep them in indefinite detention camps." Thailand and Malaysia do not put a cap on their detention cells. This leads to break outs and/or the release of the Rohingya to human traffickers.

What are the Rohingya Being Trafficked Into?

There is little information that reveals the plight of the Rohingya after being trafficked. Human rights observers have claimed that the trafficking of the Rohingya is underway in Thailand and Malaysia. But details about the victims' states-of-affairs post-trafficking, is insufficient. This is alarming because Rohingya migrants include women and children.

Some accounts have exposed that the Rohingyas are mostly used for extortion. They are only allowed to leave upon payment of ransom by their relatives. Given the inadequacies in the official data/records on the plight of these people, the reports that surface pit the percentage of Rohingyas forced into labour, prostitution and/or other illegal activities as low; but the actual numbers are likely to be much higher. However, there are reports of serious physical and sexual abuse of the Rohingya by official authorities such as the Thai police. Wakar Uddin of the Arakan Rohingya Union stated that, "Some Rohingya women and minors have been sold to sex traders in southern Thailand."

Last year's TIP Report documented the failure of the Thai and Malaysian government to "adequately regulate brokers, reduce the high costs associated with registration, or allow registered migrants to change employers." Although both countries claim to have made progress on this front, there has been no substantial change in the system over the course of the previous year. At best, the governments continue to be in the trafficking of migrant workers from neighbouring countries to provide inexpensive labour for export industries.

Myanmar: Is Tatmadaw Assuming a Proactive Role?

20 May 2014

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The International Crisis Group's (ICG) recent report, titled 'Myanmar's Military: Back to the Barracks?' has tried to elaborately update the readers on the role of Myanmar's army – the Tatmadaw – in the country's transition that began in 2011. Published in April, the report finely sketches the pivotal role of the army in Myanmar's history, especially after its independence. Interestingly, towards the end, the report, illustrating Tatmadaw's role in a future democratic Myanmar, emphasises on the need for a more proactive role by the army.

While the ICG asks whether the Tatmadaw is back to its barracks in the title, the report hasn't provided a clear answer for the same. While the report suggests that the Tatmadaw is undertaking a proactive role in the three primary aspects of reform in Myanmar – political, economic and peace process – the report contradicts itself in many ways.

The report suggests that although the Tatmadaw had explicitly agreed that transition in Myanmar was essential, there were apprehensions about a civilian-run government due to historical reasons. However, this apprehension did not have any impact on the proactive role the army has been playing in the Myanmar's reform process. The report contradicts itself where it states that political reasons led the army to accept transition, and that it was not any benevolent act, and backed it with two reasons: First, over-dependence on China – that was not only providing political security to Myanmar but happened to be major investors and creditors to the country. The military regime understood and accepted the fact that the only way to counter-balance China's power was via strategic relations with the US, and therefore transition was essential.

Second, the pitiable economic condition of the nation was matter of shame for the Myanmar leaders. The elites accepted the truth that change was essential for economic development. Although, at present, the military does not play any role in the day-to-day governance, it still retains substantial constitutional and political powers. Moreover, significant resources such as land assets, factories and others still belong to the army.

The report touches up about the army's negative approach to the idea of two-third majority to be changed as the required number instead of the quarter of the total number for any amendment in the constitution. A change to the two-third majority will curtail the army's veto power to constitutional amendments. The Tatmadaw's retention of these powers and negative approaches to changes contradict their claim to be proactive in the reform process.

Acceptance of the political transition had a direct impact on the lucrative earning of the army, as economic changes were a key aspect of the transition. However, the report highlights several reasons that were evidently calculated by the military leaders when they agreed to economic reforms. First, the military-political elites of the former government had accepted the fact that some loss of privileges was

foreseeable, as economic reforms were not only essential for the nation but also for the future of the Tatmadaw.

Second, most of the revenues of these military owned economic ventures did not flow to the Tatmadaw, as a majority of the shareholders were the former army men who had suffered the most in the process of the economic reform. Third, the military-political elites had realised that depending on the national budget allocation, and not on the military conglomerates, was preferable for the Tatmadaw's budget. The disorganised and inefficient military conglomerates had a high risk of becoming a loss-making liability in the changing economic environment. Thus, evidently, the military had its own motivations for accepting transitions in Myanmar.

The Tatmadaw's role as a positive negotiator in the pan-Myanmar peace process has been appreciated by this report. The report also highlights the successful ceasefire deals with 16 armed insurgent groups and peace talks with the Kachin Independence Organisation that began in 2013 to indicate the proactive role of the army in this process. However, a milder approach has been taken to answer the question on who should be blamed for the ongoing unrest in the Kachin region and its impact on the ongoing peace talks.

As the report puts it, both sides are to be blamed, and the army, despite its proactive role, must ideally withdrawn from the region. This will aid the Tatmadaw in building a better image for itself in the eyes of the civilians. This aspect has been highlighted by the report, and has been supplemented with a suggestion for a new doctrine for improving the army's image. However, the report does not elaborate on the measures for this new doctrine.

Furthermore, the report lacks clarity vis-à-vis the future political and constitutional role of the Tatmadaw in Myanmar. This could confuse the readers over the question of whether or not the Tatmadaw is willing to denounce its political powers.

However, on the whole, the report has provided an excellent overview of kind of role the Tatmadaw should play in Myanmar's future.

Myanmar: Peace in Kachin State?

30 April 2014

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Ongoing conflicts between the Myanmar army and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) since 2011 have questioned all the peace deals signed between these two parties. The Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), the political wing of the KIA, had signed a ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar government in 1994. However, the recurrence of war led to the termination of the agreement in 2011. Several dialogues have been initiated since the 2011 clashes, however all them have failed to establish peace in the region.

What are the obstacles in the path to a successful ceasefire agreement and establishment of peace in the region?

The Game of Peace Talks

The year 2013 witnessed a series of unsuccessful peace deals that started with two meetings between the two parties in Ruili, China in the months of February and March. These peace talks led to the further signing of a preliminary peace deal agreement in May. However, ceasefire was not achieved. Since April 2013, the situation in Kachin started to worsen. A series of attacks by the Myanmar army around the town of Mansi made the conflict worse. Amid all this, another peace deal was signed in the month of October. These unsuccessful peace deals questions their seriousness and the dedication of both the parties to peace in the region. There have been continuous attacks between the army and KIA. Self-defence and the curbing of smugglers have been used as a pretext by the army for attacks, whereas the KIA is busy playing the blame game.

The first obstacle in the path towards peace in the region is the difference in demands; the government demands that the armed groups should give up their armed struggle in order to establish peace in the

country. The armed ethnic group's demands include not only a federal political system but also a federalist nature of the national army. The Myanmar army primarily consists of people from the Burman ethnic group and a federalist army will ensure representation from all ethnic groups. Thus, the army will never consent to it. Furthermore there is also an increasing demand that the Myanmar army should have lesser political authority in the government. The reframing of the 2008 constitution is highly expected to fulfil at least some of the demands.

A Long Way to Go

Second, although the government is pursuing a ceasefire agreement with the KIO, they are not clear about the plan of action after the ceasefire. If a ceasefire agreement is signed without the withdrawal of the Myanmar army from the region and the reallocation of the disbanded KIO army, it will face the same plight as the 1994 ceasefire agreement. The readymade option that government prescribes to all dissolved militias is their recruitment in the border security forces. This idea had been refused by all the ethnic groups including the KIO.

Third, peace cannot be achieved unless there is trust between the two parties. During a peace talk in 2012, the Myanmar army took the advantage of the unpreparedness of the KIO army and attacked one of the pivotal check posts under the KIO's control. Furthermore, the continuous air strikes and attacks in order to capture important road links with the region such as the Mandalay-Bhamo road and others have deepened the mistrust. The army has been severely criticised for alleged chemical weapon attacks; and there have been several cases when the army has used humanitarian aid vehicle to enter a particular town or village. All these factors make the trust-building process difficult.

Fourth, the Kachin region is rich in mineral resources, which has led to a flood of investments by various national and international companies. Thus in the name of protecting these investments in a conflict area, the army has been installed in the region in huge numbers.

The Chinese Angle

Fifth, China is playing a significant role in the peace dialogues between the KIO and the Myanmar government. However, China's presence is proving to be an obstacle. China has its own stakes in peace in Kachin. Kachin is situated next to the China-Myanmar border, and peace will lead to a stable border. Due to the conflict, there has been an influx of Kachin migrants into the bordering towns of China. It is also jeopardising several Chinese investments in the region. China also does not want the US to play any substantial role in these peace talks and therefore hinders any effort by the parties to internationalise the issue, which could further delay progress.

Both the government and the KIO need to understand that in order to establish peace, signing peace deals and ceasefire agreements is not enough - steps should be taken by both parties to end the conflict on the ground and not just on paper.

Myanmar's Energy Sector: Inviting the World to its Shore

3 April 2014

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In a bid to bolster the country's efforts to open up to the world, Myanmar, on March 26, invited 13 oil companies from all over the world to operate in oil and gas explorations in 20 offshore blocs off the coast of Myanmar in the Bay of Bengal, Moattama gulf and the Tanintharyi Basin. Ten of these are shallow water drilling projects, and the rest, deepwater drilling projects. In April 2013, the government of Myanmar had floated the tender for 30 offshore blocs and pre-approved 60 proposals in July 2013. The recent announcement comes at a critical time when the country is somewhat successfully delivering on its ASEAN Chairmanship, gradually drifting towards federalism as a founding basis of Myanmar as a nation-state, and emerging as one of the important investment destinations in Southeast Asia.

Significance of the announcement

First, these concessions expand the scope for major market players to enter Myanmar's energy sector. Major international oil businesses – Total, Royal Dutch Shell, Chevron, Unocal, ConocoPhillips, and Reliance Industries, among others – will participate in exploration and production operations. While previous explorations and marketing were confined primarily to Asian oil companies, these new concessions involve major oil businesses from the West. This will give a much-needed boost to Myanmar's international attractiveness and its investment climate.

Second, the consequent entry of major market players would bring in investment and technology – two components important for the development of Myanmar's negligible infrastructure and overall economy. With the prediction of 6-7 per cent growth in annual GDP in the short to medium term, such inflow of FDI and advanced technology may give a major boost to Myanmar's economy, and the modernisation of its port infrastructure. This can further help its developing the country's coastal areas as business hubs. In 2013 alone, Myanmar received over \$4 billion investment, with a bulk of it flowing primarily from Asian businesses in real estate, construction and energy infrastructure.

Third, this will give a major boost to both the upstream and downstream industries along the country's coastline. The development of industries along the coast may lead to the modernisation of the southern cities, further integrating Myanmar with the globalised world.

Fourth, this will accelerate the much-needed financial and banking sector reforms in Myanmar. Though Myanmar's financial sector has seen some improvements over the past two years, it still remains rudimentary and underequipped. The financial regulatory system too needs to be developed. In December 2013, Myanmar decided to allow foreign banks to set-up fully owned subsidiaries following the visit of Christine Lagarde, Managing Director, International Monetary Fund; and several Asian banks have since opened their representative offices in the country. The entry of global businesses has tempted global finances and microfinance companies, such as MasterCard to enter the local market.

Finally, the entry of international corporations and associated economic reforms indicates the end of Myanmar's international isolation, and helps its leaders project the country as a regular nation-state. The involvement of oil companies as a result of March announcement is going to boost Myanmar's normalisation and speed up the process of the country's continued integration with the international business.

However, there is a danger of locals not benefiting from this development. Myanmar learn from the Indonesian experience in its resource-rich Aceh and West Papua, which experienced decades-long instability and insurgency. Some of Myanmar's oil-rich areas – namely the Rakhine and Tanintharyin basins – have witnessed turbulence for a long time. Naypyidaw has to ensure that the entry of big businesses in the troubled regions does not fuel the rise of resource nationalism and/or greater local resentment against the developmental policies.

India in Myanmar's Energy Sector

India's presence was established at beginning of this century with the state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) entering the Myanmar market. Subsequently, two other public sector companies – Oil India Limited (OIL) and Gas Authority of India Limited – tried to enter the market somewhat unsuccessfully. These initial ventures did not go far, with both ONGC Videsh and GAIL losing the marketing rights to Chinese companies. India made its first private sector entry into Myanmar's energy market when Essar Oil Limited bought exploration and production rights in two blocs in Rakhine province.

India has since seen a continued expansion of its foray into Myanmar's energy market – with the public and private sector entering both as solo players and in joint ventures. The recent announcement has further ensconced India's presence in Myanmar's energy sector. Among the Asian companies, four Indian companies – OIL, Mercator, Oilmax, and Reliance Industries – bagged exploration and production rights for four oil blocs [M-4, M-17 and M-18 and Yetagun East Bloc (YEB)] off the gulf of Moattama in the southern peninsular Myanmar. India's two public sector oil companies – ONGC Videsh and OIL – had bid for three blocs each, with the former winning none. Essar Oil and ONGC Videsh have already been undertaking exploration operations in the country. According to the conditions put forth by Myanmar, these Indian companies will have to partner with the local Myanmar companies in their operations.

The new concessions may prove beneficial to India for three reasons: All of them involve shallow water drilling and therefore are less expensive and relatively safer. They are the most developed and explored oil blocs in the country and have been in use. Second, if India wins the marketing rights of gas from these blocs, oil and gas could be directly shipped to its southern ports, such as Vishakhapatnam and Chennai. These blocs are close to Dawei deep seaport that Thailand is developing into a mega transport hub, thereby further integrating Indian and ASEAN businesses. Third, India could avoid third-party negotiations problems that it faced in the case of the India-Bangladesh-Myanmar pipeline.

Conclusion

Myanmar is trying to balance the presence of Western and Asian energy companies to widen the FDI sources and to generate a good image for the country in the West. Simultaneously, Naypyidaw has, by making it mandatory for the foreign oil firms to partner with local businesses, ensured some level of boost to local capacity-building. Such a strategy would introduce greater transparency and aid in the country's liberalisation process.

Transition in Myanmar: Regional Implications & Future Directions

6 March 2014

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Are the changes underway in Myanmar revolutionary or evolutionary? Since the governmental structure and the methodology of governance in Myanmar since April 2012, when the transition began, represents an utterly drastic change from what had existed since 1982, the short answer would have to be that the changes are revolutionary.

However, a road map to democracy was announced in 2003 and meticulously followed, even if in an utterly arbitrary and non-transparent manner, till the actual transition started. But verbal semantics apart, the fact is that the political transition in Myanmar is utterly unique and very different from almost any other political transition anywhere ever.

Changes in Myanmar: Revolutionary or Evolutionary?

As the Chairman, since 1997, of the ruling military junta, the State Peace and Development Council, all state power got gradually completely concentrated de facto in the hands of Senior General Than Shwe alone. He was an unrelenting and unapologetic proponent of an autocratic and strong central government which exercised direct and complete control on all aspects of a citizen's activity, existence and even life itself in Myanmar. There was no threat whatsoever from any quarter to his total control of the country. Despite that and his larger than life stature for over two decades, on 30 March 2011, he voluntarily dissolved the junta SPDC, resigned from the army and all governmental positions and removed himself completely from the public domain literally overnight. He has not been seen and there is no word at all of his activities since his resignation. No other all-powerful dictator has ever done any such a thing in history.

Myanmar now has a constitution, energetically sought to be amended; a robust parliament despite an abnormal election and 25 per cent seats reserved for the military; a normal cabinet system of government answerable to parliament; a feisty opposition led by a world renowned figure, Aung San Su Kyi; and free and fair by-elections were conducted last year in which 43 of the 44 contested seats were won by the opposition, etc. This is an extraordinarily spectacular change by any standards.

Developments in Myanmar: Strategic Implications for South Asia and the Middle East

Since there has been never been any meaningful interaction between Myanmar and the Middle East, even in an increasingly globalised and interconnected world no strategic implications in the Middle East of developments within Myanmar or related to changes in Myanmar's place in Asian geopolitics are envisaged. Unfortunately, no influential political actor in the Middle East is even remotely suggesting that

the region could learn and benefit from Myanmar's extremely positive example, in a huge contrast to the bloody transitions in the Middle East.

The Rohingya issue is undoubtedly of considerable and rising concern to Islamic countries and some bilateral relationships may come under strain but the issue has not had any significant region-wide 'strategic' impact either in the Middle East, South Asia or Southeast Asia, immersed as these regions are in their own preoccupations. No Burmese government since independence has accepted that the Rohingya – the stateless Muslim minority who reside mostly in the Arakan province along the coast and in and around Sittwe - are a Burmese ethnic group; indeed, none of the 135 officially declared ethnic groups accept the Rohingya as another Burmese ethnic group. Significantly, Aung San Su Kyi has also been silent on their status as expressing support for their cause would undoubtedly have potentially serious adverse electoral consequences given the rising militancy of the Buddhist clergy and the nationalistic fervor that has been aroused amongst the majority Bamar ethnic group. No Islamic country is prepared to accept Rohingya people including Bangladesh, from the territory of which they are originally believed to have come, though there are Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Malaysia and even Thailand (Derek Tonkin, Network Myanmar, 21 February 2014 and Kyaw San Wai, "Myanmar's Religious Violence: A Buddhist 'Siege Mentality' at Work" RSIS Commentaries No. 037/2014, 20 February 2014). As long as the issue is framed in terms of the Rohingya wanting Burmese citizenship they will not get any satisfaction from any Myanmar government, democratic or otherwise, but their living and working conditions could be greatly ameliorated if the issue is considered solely from the perspective of human rights.

There will be important implications of the political transition in Myanmar for India. Irrespective of what the political establishments in China and India publicly proclaim, there is going to be increasing rivalry between the two for influence and strategic space in Asia. Myanmar is sandwiched between China and India. For the past two decades China has unquestionably been by far the most influential power in Myanmar and has developed an extensive economic and strategic presence in that country. This had been of mounting concern, particularly to India but even to ASEAN members and indeed Western countries too. This Chinese domination will inevitably diminish steadily with Myanmar's opening up. However, it is not India's intention to compete with China in Myanmar.

India's emphasis is on deepening and strengthening relations on a multi-sectoral basis for mutual benefit and advantage with India seeking to ensure that the new relationship will help secure economic development, peace and stability in India's Northeastern states bordering Myanmar and transport connectivity to them through Myanmar's territory. Meanwhile, the past three years have witnessed the most intense Indo-Myanmar engagement since both countries became independent. Significantly, Myanmar participated for the first time this year in the 14th edition of the India hosted annual Milan naval exercises this year in which 17 countries participated. Mention may also be made of BIMSTEC (of which China is not a member); Myanmar is currently its chairman and will be hosting a summit meeting of the members for the first time on 3 March 2014.

China and the Transition in Myanmar

The ongoing transition in Myanmar from a closed political system highly economically integrated with China, towards a more open system, both politically and economically, will inevitably impact considerably upon the evolving geopolitical and geo-strategic scenario in Asia. Myanmar is the second largest country in Southeast Asia; it is as richly endowed with natural resources as Indonesia, even more per capita; it is the fifth largest by population, with the second largest military; and, a strategically vital location connecting China, India and Southeast Asia. At the time of its independence in 1947 it had the best socio-economic indicators in Asia after Japan. All these advantages are going to come into play increasingly as a consequence of the ongoing political and economic reforms and Myanmar's joining the global mainstream. Putatively, Myanmar is definitely amongst the more significant Asian countries with an important potential role in Asian geopolitics.

Burma has always harboured a primordial fear of China given the long conflictual history of their relations with waves of invasions of Burma during the Yuan and Qing dynasties. In contemporary times, due to unsettled conditions in Burma and China during the decade of the 1940s, vast numbers of Chinese labourers, farmers and businessmen illegally immigrated into Burma across a disputed and mostly undemarcated border, and Britain, the then colonial ruler of Burma, did nothing to discourage this. Large

numbers of Nationalist Chinese Kuomintang troops retreated into Burma's northeastern hill areas following their defeat in the Chinese civil war and their removal was one of the early publicly avowed goals of the new Communist regime in Beijing and PRC troops intruded into Myanmar several times. All these factors combined with the assertive, expansionist, revolutionary rhetoric emanating from the new rulers of China made the leaders of the newly independent Burma particularly wary of China. Prime Minister U Nu sounded India more than once about a defence pact but Nehru not only turn down such suggestions, in fact with some asperity, but actively assisted in bringing Burma and China closer to each other. Meanwhile, until very recently, India had paid the least attention to Myanmar amongst all of its direct neighbours.

Apart from this history of bitter animosity, Myanmar's armed forces have engaged in armed conflicts with China's proxies within the country more or less continuously since its independence and senior generals have been personally involved. The first time was in 1948 when the Chinese Communist Party-backed Burma Communist Party came close to overthrowing the fledgling new post independence government. The second time was during the 1960s when a violent anti-Chinese pogrom erupted throughout the country even leading to China sending in several thousand 'volunteers' and the suspension of diplomatic relations for several years. Meanwhile, throughout there was armed conflict with different ethnic minorities since independence to the mid 1990s; most of these ethnic groups were armed, funded and otherwise supported by China. The fact is that Myanmar's relationship and interaction with China has rarely been one of choice but always a consequence of circumstantial compulsions, including due to the world distancing itself from Myanmar after 1962 and particularly after 1988.

Since 1988 more than two million Chinese, who have fraudulently acquired Myanmarese identity papers, have settled in northern Myanmar whose economy is now more integrated with that of Yunnan than with the rest of Myanmar. Even otherwise China dominates most sectors of Myanmar's economy. China had succeeded in Myanmar beyond its most optimistic expectations; ironically this success contained the seeds of a setback because it engendered a new and different additional fear of China - of being suffocated by its claustrophobic embrace through economic means rather than by internal subversion and bullying, as in the past. Reaching out to other countries had become an absolute strategic necessity for Myanmar.

Since the political transition began in Myanmar, in addition to the particularly impressive internal changes, there has been an equally remarkable transformation of its external relationships - for example, it has received visits of more heads of state and government and foreign ministers in the past three years than in all the 60 years since independence, including the first ever visits of an American President and a British Prime Minister. President Thein Sein has paid official visits to more countries in the past three years than the dictator Gen Ne Win did in 26 years of his rule, the largest number of whose visits were to China. The global business community never paid Myanmar the kind of attention that it is doing now. ASEAN members had twice earlier felt compelled to deny Myanmar its turn to assume the organisation's chairmanship but have now deliberately advanced the date for Myanmar to take over the chairmanship of ASEAN which it has done this year. China is the only country that is deeply anxious about and disturbed by the changes in both the external and internal dimensions. China is particularly concerned about the future American and Japanese roles in Myanmar.

The most remarkable manifestation of Myanmar's change happened on 30 September 2011, when, just six months after assuming office and amidst considerable uncertainty, both inside and outside the country, about the sustainability of the processes of change, President Thein Sein suspended construction of China's largest flagship investment - the US\$3.7 billion Myitsone Dam project - without giving China any prior intimation. China was stunned and very angry and is still hurting very deeply; for the first time in many decades China found itself unable to do anything about a publicly administered strong snub and that too from a still completely dependent client state. This utterly unexpected and singularly audacious decision enormously enhanced the prestige and popularity of the president amongst all sections of Myanmar's population and was received with applause abroad. However, we must not allow all this to obscure the reality that change in the extremely close economic relationship in particular will be slow and incremental; for example President's Office Minister Aung Min admitted that "we are afraid of China" during a public meeting where he met local people protesting a highly controversial Chinese-backed copper mining project. An even more telling manifestation of this guardedness is that an Aung San Su Kyi-chaired parliamentary committee recommended the continuation of this project on the grounds that sanctity of signed contracts should be maintained and Chinese investment is needed for Myanmar's development.

Myanmar: The Future Directions

The direction that Myanmar is going to follow is going to be very different from that which it was virtually compelled to do earlier. Myanmar's internal situation is quite different now with the civil war which began before its independence having mostly ended. In strong contrast to 40 years of military dictatorship Myanmar today is a budding democracy ready to harness the long suppressed energies, talents and enormous potential of its people for economic development and political progress. The post Cold War world of today is very significantly different from what Myanmar had encountered during the previous six decades when it chose isolation; in contrast, Myanmar is now vigorously pursuing engagement with the outside world which is equally vigorously courting it. Its political dependence on China will automatically lessen even while Myanmar will ensure that it does not gratuitously anger China. Chinese domination of the economy will also be diluted as a natural process with the whole world rushing into Myanmar enthusiastically. As it is, China's investment has come down drastically and no new projects have been awarded to it in the past two years.

Myanmar's Foreign policy will gradually align its position on various issues with those of ASEAN including on the rather ticklish issue of the South China Sea. The days of overweening Chinese domination in and of Myanmar are coming to an end. Till recently, Myanmar was considered a pliable tool to further China's ambitions to dominate Southeast Asia, but looking ahead, Myanmar - a fiercely nationalistic country - is likely to strive quietly but steadily to erase this stigma.

This essay is based on an earlier presentation made by the author, as a part of IPCS delegation to an international dialogue organized by the Strategic Studies Network, Center for Strategic Studies in Bangkok in February 2014

Myanmar: Why is the Clergy Angry?

31 January 2014

Rajeshwari Krishnamurthy

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A recent UN statement demanding an impartial probe into the killings of Muslims by Buddhists, in Myanmar, has once again brought the issue of the Rohingyas - widely accepted as the most persecuted minority group - to the fore. The alarming frequency, with which reports, detailing an unmistakable campaign of suppression of the community have been emerging over the past several months, is worrying.

The clergy known for their non-violent values, have taken to violence in an attempt to rid the state of Rakhine, of the Rohingya Muslims. Why have clergy in Myanmar opted for violent means? Why is the government in Naypyidaw silent on this matter?

Increasing Islamophobia

The friction between the Rakhine Buddhists and the Rohingyas began as a mild form of xenophobia in 1824. It has now evolved into a full-blown violent campaign of driving out the 'settlers,' who have now lived in the region for generations. Although, superficially, the issue appears to be similar to several other ethnic conflicts, the Rohingya issue stands because of the active participation of the Buddhist clergy.

The primary force driving this pogrom is the rising Islamophobia among the clergy and the masses in the country. The paranoia among Rakhine Buddhists, of a potential Islamisation of the nation - as in the case of Indonesia and Malaysia in the 12th and 15th centuries respectively - is deeply entrenched.

While the core essence of Buddhism lies in its principles of non-violence, inclusiveness and flexibility, the applied measures of these principles vary from one school of Buddhism to another. While Mahayana Buddhism (as practised in Tibet and Mongolia) is more flexible and inclusive, Theravada Buddhism (as practised in Myanmar and Sri Lanka) is rigid in its structures. Furthermore, the attrition rate in the schools of Theravada Buddhism is high, with very few schools in practice in today's world, as compared to other forms of Buddhism. This forms the basis of the thought in the country that their culture is under

threat. Also, a threat from an 'outsider' is often perceived as more immediate and of greater priority to thwart, as opposed to a threat from an 'insider' (In this case, the 'insider' is the attrition rate).

However, this does not translate into the notion that some forms of Buddhism accept violence.

Myanmar's Fledgling Democracy: What Role for the Clergy?

Adding to the complexity of the issue is the role of the clergy in Myanmar politics. A large section of the Myanmar society comprises of monks, as many enlisted in monasteries to escape poverty and/or orphanhood, during the Junta years. The Saffron Revolution of 2007 doubled as a show of numbers enrolled in the monkhood. Having played a role in somewhat filling the void in the absence of a benevolent and accountable government, the Buddhist clergy holds a moral high ground in the Myanmar society, and are seen as a powerful force.

When tens of thousands of monks are taught non-violent means but are at the same time systematically made paranoid of losing their faith due to an onslaught of a completely different culture, eventually, regardless of the non-violent teachings, they prepare themselves to fight off the 'enemy.'

Such a 'non-violent radicalisation' among the clergy in the country has effected in the shaping of a generation that is willing to inflict violence as offence as opposed to in defence that the religion essentially prescribes.

This does not automatically mean that all Buddhists are violent; but the recognition that Buddhist monks or not, they are human beings too – and they have the same emotions as the rest, is necessary. Once this view is recognised, it does not take long to understand the basic problem in Rakhine: there exists an ethno-religious conflict, and the side that currently has the upper hand is trying its best to weed out what they see as a problem, from its roots.

Silence of the State: Why does Naypyidaw not Intervene?

The Myanmar government has its own apprehensions over the Rohingya issue. On the social front, assimilating these people into the country would mean earning the wrath of the clergy – which enjoys considerable clout with the masses – who believe their culture is under external threat. The economic costs of including hundreds of thousands of impoverished people into its citizenry would be extremely high. Faced with the daunting task of simultaneously improving the economy, democratic structures, public services etc., and tackling armed cessation struggles, their resource basket is heavily strained. For Naypyidaw, as long as the large Rohingya population is deemed as illegal immigrants, the government technically isn't responsible for providing for them.

Unfortunately, what seems to be unfolding in Myanmar is a plausible Faustian pact between the clergy and the political class – a deadly quid pro quo agreement that will only lead to worse days. What is more dangerous of the two, however, is the non-violent radicalisation aspect of this issue – an emerging but noticeable trend in South Asian ethnic conflicts.

Myanmar: Are the Infrastructure and Economic Reforms Adequate?

31 January 2014

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With chairing the coveted ASEAN group for 2014, the extravagant ceremonies of the 27th South East Asian (SEA) games drum aloud Myanmar's return from isolation. Myanmar, given its strategic location as the link between the Bay of Bengal and East Asia, has reaped the benefits of development from its neighbours and other multilateral fora. At the core of Naypyidaw's resurgence lay two factors: China's energy security, and the West and South Asian nations' China-containment strategy. Can Myanmar utilise this as a trump card to attain economic prosperity? Or will it trip over on the roadblocks towards the transition?

Is the Infrastructure in Place?

Physical infrastructure in Myanmar is extremely under-developed and un conducive to support economic growth efforts as aspired by the government. With only 33,014 kilometers of paved roads in place and about 70% of the total population living in rural areas, there is a high demand for developing efficient transportation. At present, the railway network covers 5,844 kilometers, and hopefully, the Singapore-Kunming Rail link segment of the Trans-Asian Railway project will bring some development on completion.

At present, Myanmar's power generation capacity, at 7,346GWh, provides electricity to only 13% of the country's population. However, the Myitsone dam project, currently undertaken by China, is expected to provide relief to a larger population following completion.

The Dawei Industrial Complex project undertaken by Bangkok has run into inordinate delays due to political strife in Thailand, and the surge of reports citing land grabbing, displacement and hikes in land value has dampened the much-touted Thilawa Special Economic Zone project.

Furthermore, Myanmar has 69 airports, of which only 32 are functional; and with an accident rate that is nine times higher than the global average, the numbers of carriers operating international and domestic flights, are low.

Social infrastructure in the country too, is in a pitiable state. Only five percent of the population has tertiary and higher education credentials, and those skilled, are in the lower end of productivity. Although labour participation is at 50% of the total population, per capita productivity stands at a meager \$1500 – which is 70% below the average Asian benchmark. The historically pitiful investment in healthcare is reflected in Myanmar continuing vulnerability to communicable diseases. Despite being the ground zero of the third largest HIV epidemic, and with an adult prevalence rate of 0.6%, no measures have been undertaken to fight the disease. Although the 2013 annual budget allotted a significant sum towards healthcare, it is unlikely to generate a great impact as Myanmar lacks the administrative capacity to direct the resources effectively in its public health sector initiatives.

Reform Measures on the Ground

Naypyidaw, under the Framework for Economic and Social Reform (FESR), has outlined Myanmar's policy priorities up to 2015, with an aim to achieve the long-term goals of the National Comprehensive Development Policy. The recent telecom licenses awarded to Telenor and Ooredoo mark the beginning of initiatives undertaken to achieve the goals of the Framework. Myanmar's Foreign Investment Law is also expected to encourage greater direct investment through notable features such as 100% ownership by foreign companies. Naypyidaw's voluntary signing of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative will help regulating the mining industry and the labour concerns that fall under its purview.

One of the most significant developments is the autonomous status granted to the Central Bank of Myanmar. This measure has garnered interest, and numerous banks have set up representative offices in the country. The agreements signed by Naypyidaw with Tokyo and New Delhi, in the education sector, is an effort to improve the skills potential of the population. The \$6 billion debt relief granted by Japan and the Paris Club in 2013 has subsequently resulted in improved credentials and has placed Myanmar in a better position for seeking loans in the future. The government has brought about some reforms that were pending for over 50 years, but much is yet to be seen as the transition to democracy completes in the 2015 general elections.

Can Myanmar catch up with the ASEAN Tigers?

At present, Myanmar requires \$350 billion in investments till 2030, to improve infrastructure, and to create a sustainable market. The government should clarify the overall direction of its economic policies to the business quarters and communicate an explicit growth and investment master plan.

Today, Myanmar is where China and Thailand stood in the 1970s. Widening the economic base, increasing the levels of contribution by the manufacturing and services sector to the GDP, and increasing per capita productivity should take Myanmar on the same trajectory as its northern and western neighbours.

A complex mix of issues exists in the untangling of Myanmar's economy, and unless they are addressed, Naypyidaw will stand to ruin the golden investment climate it has today.

Thailand: Why is History Repeating Itself?

30 May 2014

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The Royal Thai Army declared martial law in Thailand on 20 May 2014. The announcement was made at 03:00 AM by the Commander in Chief General Prayuth Chan-ocha through the Army-owned television station, Channel 5. Thailand has been undergoing political instability since November 2013; a takeover by the Army was therefore a well anticipated climax. Moreover, military coups and declarations of martial law are not new to Thai political history. Since the establishment of the Constitutional monarchy in Thailand in 1932, the country had witnessed as many as seventeen successful military coups. The previous military coup that took place on 19 September 2006, like all other military coups in Thailand, led to the birth of a new Constitution in 2007. The newly installed martial law of 2014 has questioned the future of democracy in Thailand.

A Repeat of History: An Explanation

In April 2006, an ongoing protest against the then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra compelled him to call for a snap election. However a boycott by the opposition led to the election being annulled. Thus, another election was proposed to be held in October 2006, which never happened. In September 2006, when the caretaker Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was in New York for a speech at the United Nations, the Thai Army staged a military coup.

The situation in 2014 was quite similar to the above. The anti-government protesters staged a massive campaign demanding the withdrawal of the government formed by the Pheu Thai Party in 2011. The protests obliged the former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra to announce early elections in February 2014. However, the election was declared invalid due to disruption by the opposition protesters. The situation deteriorated when the Constitutional Court ordered Yingluck Shinawatra and several other ministers out of the office on allegations of irregularities in the appointment of an official. This immediately instigated protests by the pro-government Red Shirts in huge numbers. Meanwhile, the Army declared martial law in Thailand by reviving the age old law of 1914.

The core problem of all the political instabilities in the country has been hunger for power and the fact that the whole political and legal system is infected with chronic corruption. This widespread corruption has made the governing structures biased and dysfunctional.

The fact that the first military coup took place within a year of the establishment of the Constitutional monarchy could imply that there were loopholes in the fundamental governance structures of Thailand. Both in 2006 and in 2014, the military coup and the declaration of martial law were justified by the Army in the name of restoring peace and order. However, the many military coups have indicated that military intervention in the name of restoring democracy has not been able to achieve its long-term purpose. Moreover, leaders have essentially been manipulating the military and other organs of governance as tools to win political games. There has thus been a lack of strong governance structures every time the Army has withdrawn and a new government has been elected because the Army has never gone in with a set agenda.

Moreover, the political polarisation in the pro-Shinawatra and anti-Shinawatra groups has made Thai politics critical. Thaksin Shinawatra, who came to power for the first time in 2001, was able to achieve enormous support from the rural vote bank in north and northeast Thailand. However, he failed to appease the middle and elite class Thais who encompass the anti-Thaksin group. Thaksin Shinawatra's maltreatment of the insurgency in southern Thailand also defamed him in the south. Thus, the polarised groups can also be termed as the rural Red Shirts versus the elite and middle class group. The 2013 uprising against the government had its root in this past. The anti-Thaksin group has blamed Yingluck Shinawatra's government of acting as a puppet in the hands of her brother, Thaksin Shinawatra.

It should be noted that the protesters, who belong to one or the other group, have not earned any legitimacy. Although several issues like corruption and weak governance have been highlighted in these protests, none of the protests themselves have been perceived as addressing the root causes of these problems. The reason for the lack of legitimacy is that the demands are alleged to be either the demands of the elitists or the rural supporters of Thaksin Shinawatra.

End of the Coup?

Since the Army takeover on 20 May 2014, Thailand is witnessing an anti-coup movement. Presently, the Army has dissolved the Constitution and the upper and the lower houses of Parliament. Several politicians, academicians and bureaucrats have been detained by the military. Unlike other protests in Thailand, the anti-coup protest involves people from all walks of life fighting for their rights, and on behalf of any particular political group. This may thus pave the way towards a revival of democracy in Thailand.

The 2014 Indonesian Presidential Election and the New Delhi-Jakarta Bilateral

20 August 2014

Navrekha Sharma

Former Indian Ambassador to Indonesia

Indonesia's citizens, majority of who value human rights and religious pluralism, can breathe more easily after July 22 when the KPK (Indonesia's Election Commission) announced victory for Joko Widodo and Yusuf Kalla as the country's seventh President and his Vice President. Widodo, known popularly as Jokowi, won a convincing 53% of the vote as against 47% won by his rival, Subianto Prabowo.

The Presidential campaign of 2014 was however, the most polarising and divisive ever in Indonesia and its scars will take a while to go away. Already, Prabowo has charged Jokowi with election fraud and appealed to the Constitutional Court for redressal even though the prospect of him being able to overturn the verdict is practically nil given that Jokowi has won by 8 million votes!

Why then has Prabowo appealed? It is essentially because his approach to the Court has been made from a deep rooted sense of entitlement which comes from belonging to Indonesia's powerful politico-military elite. This elite has held the reins of power ever since Indonesia was recognised as an independent country. For the first 50 years, she was ruled by two successive dictators, Sukarno and Suharto, both of whom were from the entrenched Javanese aristocracy. But even after 1998, when Suharto was overthrown and democracy, restored, the same elite has continued to wield power – until Jokowi overturned the political tables.

Jokowi, who started his working life as a furniture dealer in Solo (near Yogyakarta) has been described as a "child of the slums." Prabowo Subianto on the other hand is a former army general, the son of Indonesia's former leading economist and son-in-law of President Suharto, and hence could not be more different in birth, wealth, education and experience. It is important to remember that Jokowi's very achievement in breaking the "glass ceiling" of elitist politics was possible only because of Indonesia's Democratic Revolution (Revolusi) after which power was devolved to the provinces and districts. So it was only because of the events of 1998 that a grassroots leadership could emerge. The victory of Jokowi is thus not an ordinary, run of the mill achievement: it reflects a significant evolution of democracy in Indonesia. A Prabowo victory, while it may not have reversed Democracy (given the powerful support Democracy enjoys amongst Indonesia's people) would certainly have kept it from evolving.

The political stakes being extremely high for the defenders of the "status quo", the Prabowo campaign was vicious with no holds barred. From describing Jokowi as Chinese and a Christian Communist to (now) making him out to have won by fraud, Prabowo tried every trick in the book to destroy his spirit, and reputation. Jokowi (in the interim after the end of the campaign and before the votes were cast) even had to make a quick dash to Mecca to prove his Islamic credentials. This was indeed the most worrying part of the 2014 election, i.e. Prabowo's willingness to use religion as a political weapon. Notwithstanding the fact that his own mother and brother are Christians, Prabowo built his election coalition around a group of Muslim parties which included the Islamic Defenders Front which has been responsible over the last several years for attacks on the church and also on so-called deviant Muslim sects, the Shias and

Ahmadiyyas. His manifesto included a pledge to purify religion which could have marked (even if taken with a pinch of salt as election rhetoric), for an easy-going and essentially liberal country a change of direction, with adverse implications for India. One must mention however in this connection that Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's (SBY) weakness in not leading from the front to prevent attacks on minority religions and sects is an important factor which has already taken its toll on Indonesia's credibility as a Pluralist State.

Another equally serious offer of Prabowo's campaign was to reverse Indonesia's Democracy. Here again a pinch of salt is necessary for as stated earlier, democracy has taken root in Indonesia and people will not easily abandon it. Nevertheless, Prabowo in his speeches called democracy a Western concept, unsuited to the culture and traditions of Indonesia. He indicated that if elected, he would be a strong but benevolent ruler of a style more suited to the Indonesian psyche. He projected himself as the man on horseback (literally!) who would save the country from her enemies, amongst them not only Western style democracy but also foreign investors bent upon exploiting Indonesia's rich natural resources (and poor infrastructure, technology and capital shortages). Evidently, he was counting on dissatisfaction with economic conditions amongst Indonesia's poor (more than 100 million Indonesians live on less than \$2 a day) as well as on the middle-class's fears of unemployment and their combined nostalgia for the past which is normal under such circumstances. His campaign speeches caused enough fear and alarm amongst sections of intellectual opinion in Indonesia to make the respected English daily Jakarta Post take the unprecedented step of declaring support for Jokowi as editorial policy.

Prabowo's rapidly growing voter-support (and Jokowi's shrinking margin from 30% to 6% in a few months) clearly showed that he was hitting the right note, although perhaps for the wrong reasons. It is true that the parliament, from being a mere rubber stamp under Suharto has today become extremely powerful (but more as a naysayer) and also very corrupt. The Corruption Eradication Commission has already put in jail the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court (the same office to which Prabowo has appealed) and 21 Governors. However, Indonesia's failures lie more with individuals than with institutions. President SBY is famous for his indecisiveness which has paralysed government functioning. Prabowo used the public's dissatisfaction to suggest that Jokowi's short experience of just ten years in public life (and that too at the provincial level) would bring the country to a worse pass. He urged people to vote for him on the grounds that Indonesia would be safer in his experienced hands.

This message did carry appeal, especially when he appeared in military uniform and on horseback at election rallies. An element of extreme nationalism and xenophobia has been part of the Indonesian psyche for a long time starting from Sukarno to Suharto, although it was thought to have disappeared under democracy. The consequence of Prabowo's fiery and muscular campaigns was to raise the rhetoric of competitive economic nationalism on both sides and cause fear among foreign investors (among which there are many Indians too) to invest in Indonesia.

To bolster these two diatribes, Prabowo used all the political machinery and resources of money and media at his command. His support base included major political parties such as the Golkar Party of the Suharto era, as well as SBY's ruling Democratic Party. Additionally, he had support of most of the Muslim parties. After the 2013 parliamentary elections, Prabowo's coalition partners command 52% of the 560 seats in parliament as against Jokowi's PDI-P-led coalition, which has about 40% parliamentary seats. Armed with these formidable political advantages, Prabowo, in a few months of campaigning, had reduced Jokowi's lead from 30% to 6%. In the end, however, big money and powerful media interests lost while Jokowi's charismatic appeal of simple and honest leadership, of being a man of the masses, won the day.

But the finish was nail biting.

Indeed, it is creditable that, in these circumstances of vicious personal attacks and creation of a fear psychosis, Jokowi's victory speech delivered on the day of the officially announced verdict, was graceful and mild mannered as was his entire campaign. He thanked rivals Prabowo and his Vice Presidential partner Hatta Rajasa for "being friends in a political competition to get the peoples' mandate to lead the country for the next five years." Prabowo certainly had not behaved like a friendly rival!

Given the high stakes involved in terms of democracy and pluralism (not only for Indonesia but for the ASEAN as a whole in which Indonesia is the dominant player), it is disquieting that India's press did not

reflect much interest in her presidential election. Despite geographical proximity, old cultural links, growing trade and investment stakes for Indian businesses, and above all, the importance of Indonesia for India's own security (her Maritime Security in particular), the Indian press did little justice to these momentous events next door. Even the most widely circulated newspapers paid very little attention to them.

Instead of sending reporters to cover the news (as media from across the world was doing), India's news media preferred to lift news about the Indonesian presidential elections from international news agency reports. The Indian Express was alone in carrying an editorial, titled "A People's President?" in which Indonesia was held up, as a model for nascent democracies "particularly in the Arab world." The statement overlooks the fact that even India's much older democracy has not produced many prime ministers without a family link in politics and with just ten years of experience in public life!

Foreign Policy (and relations with India in particular) did not get discussed much but several parallels with India came up during the Indonesia campaign. Arvind Kejriwal, for example, when he was elected as the Chief Minister of Delhi, briefly became the model for the Jokowi campaign which was based on a similar platform of clean and accountable Government which would fight corruption and bureaucratic red tape. Later, commentators took pains to explain that there was always a clear and marked difference between the two: Jokowi, as twice-elected Mayor of Solo followed by a short stint as Governor of Jakarta, had a proven track record which Kejriwal lacked. Jokowi's hands-on approach to governance and success in executing, transparently and with full accountability, some well designed schemes for peoples' welfare (such as a popular subsidised healthcare program and a scheme of relocating thousands from flood-prone areas) gave his campaign immense credibility.

Hurtful comparisons were also made with the Sonia Gandhi-Manmohan Singh relationship by the Prabowo camp who said that Jokowi as the President of Indonesia would, for lack of experience, become a "puppet" in the hands of the Party President, Megawati Sukarnoputri. A few months before the presidential election was to take place and in recognition of his growing popularity, Ibu Mega had given up her own bid for the Indonesian presidency in favour of Jokowi. Now that he has won, the question which is being asked (softly) is whether he will be able to hold his own against Puan Maharani, Ibu Mega's daughter, who will in all probability, be elected to the post of party president in mid-2015. Jokowi has already said he is not interested in the post. Denial of a US visa to Prabowo because of his Human Rights record in East Timor was compared with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's career in Gujarat and encouragement obtained from the fact that India's Prime Minister was assured a US visa promptly after becoming PM.

Such Indian motifs added colour to the campaign as reflected in the Indonesian press and perhaps there is nothing surprising about it, given the back-to-back timing of these two events. However, the lack of a reciprocal interest in India was not only disappointing, but could also be hurtful to India's long-term interests in Indonesia. Given the importance of the issues projected in the 2014 election, India's own security in her eastern sea board would require her to be vigilant and to preempt events, not merely to react to them when they happen. Events in the South China Sea in particular are taking place rapidly and we need to be closely aligned with the Indonesians to be able to anticipate and deal with them. As the larger partner in a Strategic Partnership, it behoves India to show more interest (although not of the kind that was shown by the US Ambassador in Jakarta who actually told the Indonesians that a vote for Prabowo would be dangerous because of his human rights record).

We need to wait until October when Jokowi will be installed as Indonesia's seventh president to see what he does with his mandate. The first indications will come from his choice of cabinet colleagues. President SBY, after the 2009 election, appointed cabinet colleagues on the basis of party representation and not merit – which was unnecessary given his huge mandate. The policy paralysis (and corruption) in the last government have been attributed to this weakness apart from his own indecisiveness. Given that Indonesia's is a presidential system, Jokowi as President should try to restore the balance between the presidency and parliament wherever required.

Unfortunately, he does not enjoy a comparably large mandate as SBY's in 2009 and parliamentary seats have been skewed against him after April; but he has demonstrated that he has the courage to lead from the front. He also has good advisors on his team, especially in foreign policy – the brilliant head of the CSIS, Rizal Sukma, is with him, and could become Indonesia's next foreign minister. There is talk already

of the Golkar party shifting support to Jokowi, a move in which the role of his astute and experienced Vice President-elect Yusuf Kalla will be important.

To conclude, the 2014 Presidential election marked a major step forward for Indonesia. Pluralism and democracy have won and we must welcome this twin victory whole heartedly. An early outreach to Jokowi by the Indian government would be advisable.

Indonesia: The 2014 Legislative Elections

22 April 2014

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The April 2014 elections in Indonesia are significant because they not only elect the members of the Regional Representative Council and the People's Representative Council but also the political parties. A political party that achieves a majority (half or more than half the seats in the House) in the legislative elections will also have leverage in the presidential elections.

Race to the Finish Line

Of the 46 registered political parties, only twelve have passed the requirement of the Election Commission and contested for the 132 seats in the Regional Representative Council and 560 seats in the People's Representative Council.

The rapid rise in corruption scandals and involvement of prominent political leaders such as Muhammad Nazaruddin and Andi Mallarangeng along with the people's dissatisfaction with Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono made it evident that Partai Demokrat would not be coming back to power in 2014. There were high expectations from the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P) under the leadership of Megawati Sukarnoputri that was in the opposition during the last government. The Partai Golkar that came second in the 2009 election was expected to suffer losses due to a corruption investigation of Ratu Atut Chosiyah, a prominent party cadre and governor of Banten.

Change was noticed in the campaigning style as most of the political parties shifted from the traditionally rally style (*pawai*) to the *blusukan* model which was first introduced to the Indonesian political society by Joko Widodo during his campaign for the office of governor of Jakarta. This style of campaigning involves candidates visiting their voters personally, such as to their houses or meeting small groups of voters during the communal prayer meeting or in small discussions. Thus Indonesian voters were able to relate to their candidates in a better way in comparison to previous elections. However this did not ensure that there was no vote buying by the different political parties; this seems to be an integral part of the election process in Indonesia.

Election Results

Although the results are not yet declared, a quick-count by tally has made them quite evident. The PDI-P is anticipated to win the election with 19 per cent of the vote that is likely to account for 106 to 118 seats. However, these numbers indicate that PDI-P has been unable to gain a clear majority. Joko Widodo (Jokowi), the governor of Jakarta who was the trump card for PDI-P was clearly unable to impress the voters to the extent that was assumed by both the national and international media. The party was confident of achieving 27 per cent of the total votes. The only reason the party failed might have been because although they were banking on the Jakarta governor, they had not projected him in their propaganda. The name of Jokowi as a presidential candidate was only declared after the legislative elections; furthermore, no party banners or rallies mentioned his name. The Partai Golkar surprisingly came second gaining 15 per cent of the votes. However, the election results do not indicate any significant change for them as they had achieved 14.5 per cent in the 2009 elections. The credit should be given to the charisma and financial influence of their chairman Aburizal Bakrie.

Two surprising elements in this election were the two parties, National Democratic Party (Nasdem) and the Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Gerindra Party). The Nasdem who were contesting for the first time under the leadership of Surya Paloh, a former Partai Golkar official, achieved 6.7 per cent of the vote. Although 6.7 is not a significant number it has to be taken into account that the party was formed only in

2011, and compared to the other parties in Indonesia, is newly born. The fact that Nasdem was able to win this per cent of votes can indicate that Indonesian voters are eagerly looking forward to a political party which is new and has a political platform, unlike most of the Indonesian political parties which solely depend on their leader's personality and monetary strength. However, in the case of Gerindra Party, the personality of their leader or the so called 'Prabowo effect' has been a miracle resulting in the party gaining 12 per cent of the votes, up from the 4.5 per cent of 2009. The strategy that might have worked for this party is the extensive use of social media networks. The aggressive campaigning through Facebook and Twitter helped them to rope in a major chunk of the Indonesian vote bank - the youth - who are nearly 47 million in number. Moreover, it is also evident that Prabowo will be a strong competitor who has to be defeated by Joko Widodo of the PDI-P party in order come to power.

Thus, the results make it clear that a coalition is coming to power in Indonesia. However, whether this coalition can fulfil the expectations of the Indonesians will be answered only in time.

Vietnam-Japan: Quantum Leap in Strategic Ties

3 April 2014

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Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang's visit to Japan from 16-19 March is significant, for symbolic, political, economic and strategic reasons. During his visit, President Sang held meetings with Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe; and by addressing the Japanese Parliament's House of Representatives, the Diet, became the first State Guest to address the House since French President Francois Hollande did in June 2013.

The visit complements Japan's manoeuvres in Southeast Asia since it expedited its efforts to regain the ground lost to China in the East Asian region. To this end, Abe visited the ASEAN countries in 2013, and became the first Japanese prime minister to do so in a span of 12 months. In the past year, Japan has, apart from supporting ASEAN on the issue of a "code of conduct" in the South China Sea, signed several agreements with various ASEAN countries in economic and security domains. Naturally, ASEAN countries are enthused by Abe's overtures.

Sang's Japan visit should be viewed against this backdrop. Both Vietnam and Japan are anxious of China's maritime assertions in the South China Sea and the East China Sea respectively. The Japan-China stand-off over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and the issue of the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) further complicate the situation. China's assertions over Paracel Islands have posed security challenges to Vietnam.

Strategic Ties: Gathering Momentum

The upgradation of the erstwhile 2009 Strategic Partnership Agreement to the Extensive Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia during the visit has given a boost to the strategic relationship. Vietnam and Japan have convergent views on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. Ever since Abe assumed office, Japan has been using all fora to criticise an increasingly assertive China. During the previous East Asia Summit held in Brunei, Abe supported the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and stated that Sea Lanes of Communications must be governed by "rule of law" and not by "force." Abe further stated that the "South China Sea is directly connected to the peace and stability of the region" and urged all the parties not to "change the status quo unilaterally." He opined that changing the status quo will impact the "global maritime order." The recently concluded Japan-ASEAN joint declaration reiterates Japan's commitment to maintain maritime safety and freedom of navigation in the region.

Evidently, Vietnam has taken the lead to strengthen maritime cooperation with Japan. Towards the conclusion of Sang's visit, both sides discussed the possibility of Japan sending patrol boats to Vietnam for strengthening the latter's coastal security mechanism. Clearly, China plays a role in bringing them closer on the security front. Strategic uncertainties, unfolding in the region, have compelled countries of the Indo-Pacific, to rethink their security policies and practices. The revised Vietnam-Japan strategic partnership agreement should be seen in that context.

Deepening Economic Ties

Currently, Japan is Vietnam's biggest investor and the third-largest trading partner. The Hanoi-Tokyo bilateral trade turnover stood at \$25 billion in 2013. In 2013, Japan invested over \$5.7 billion in Vietnam, via FDI – highlighting it's the former's growing importance in the latter's economy.

Moreover, Vietnam is one of the prime recipients of Japanese Official Development Assistance, having received \$ 1.55 billion in 2013. The two countries also aim to double their bilateral trade volume from the current U\$25. Evidently, Vietnam's single party system, tranquil social fabric and stable national dynamics attract investors from the region including Japan.

Regularising Mechanisms for Mutual Benefit

During Sang's visit, Hanoi and Tokyo agreed to upgrade and regularise high-level exchanges and work together proactively in critically important sectors such as defence and security, science and technology, and healthcare and education. There is a pressing need for Japan to invest in Vietnam's educational sector. Taking cognisance of Vietnam's immense human resource potential, Japan has agreed to upgrade major universities in the country to meet international standards.

Additionally, Japan agreed to help Vietnam in six key areas, within the Vietnam-Japan cooperation framework. Tokyo will also help Hanoi in building the Ninh Thuận 2 Nuclear Power Plant. Agreements regarding the construction of the Thai Binh thermal power plant, the North-South Expressway, and the development of the Haiphong International Gateway Seaport too have been finalised.

Conclusion

The rapidly changing politico-security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region makes it logical for both Vietnam and Japan to find more avenues for bilateral cooperation such as diplomatic exchanges and greater investments and cooperation in strategically important areas such as naval patrols, nuclear energy and capacity development programmes for the youth. Both Vietnam and Japan need each other's support both to safeguard their interests vis-à-vis China and to realise their own potentials.

Given the proactive measures undertaken by both nations in the recent months, it is evident that there cannot be a better time to enhance bilateral.



WEST ASIA



Iran-Pakistan: Can Rouhani Resolve the Tensions?

24 November 2014

Majid Izadpanahi

Research Intern, IPCS

Iran and Pakistan have been facing issues on the border relating to terrorism and drug trafficking for some time now. This has raised tensions between Tehran and Islamabad, resulting in clashes. The recent clash in October resulted in casualties for both sides and the Pakistani ambassador in Tehran was summoned by the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

Iranian officials state that the terrorists and bandits use Pakistani territory as a base to attack Iranian border forces, and Pakistan categorically rejects the allegations. Iranian officials allege that Pakistan has no control over its own borders and Pakistan says that Iran should not justify its internal problems with external reasons.

Iran's foreign policy post the 1979 Islamic Revolution shifted from a pro-US to anti-US stance, while Pakistan remained pro-US. The US's policy of regime change in Tehran through destabilisation by the separatists was welcomed by Pakistan, especially evident in their support of the Iranian Jundallah.

The latest clash on the Iran-Pakistan border is not a new occurrence, but it is rare that a number of clashes take place frequently in the span of few days. Insofar it is unclear whether the clash was a reaction to the terrorist attacks on the Iranian Border Police or confrontation with the armed groups and drug barons that are active in the region. Nationalist Baloch groups, radical Sunni groups and drug traffickers are active in the Iran-Pakistan border region; Pakistan accuses India and sometimes Afghanistan, of fueling instability in the region.

Evidently, the situation along the Iran-Pakistan border is worsening.

Are Both Sides Interested in a Military Solution?

Pakistan's western border is its safest border; most Pakistani forces are positioned in the country's eastern border with India and its northern borders with Afghanistan. The rest are positioned either in Sindh or Punjab. Despite the security and ethnic problems in Balochistan, Pakistan is not interested in beginning a new conflict on the western border by confronting Iranian forces. In other words, Pakistan has no military and financial ability to confront another country and engage in border conflicts. Such conflicts could lead to instability in Balochistan, such that it may get out of Islamabad's control.

Iran also understands the situation in Sistan Baluchestan, and has now engaged in a big conflict in its western borders. Tehran is therefore not interested in clashing with Pakistan and considers such a move unwise. Iran is also concerned about other actors beyond the region that tend to cause disputes in its eastern border given its wariness regarding the Islamic State and the role of some regional countries in creating it.

Therefore, Iran's hard talk vis-à-vis the border clashes can be considered a diplomatic and military show that also sends a warning to the neighbours, especially Deputy Commander Brigadier-General Hossein Salami of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps's statement that if Pakistan does not take any action against terrorists targeting Iran and drug traffickers, Iranian forces may enter its territory.

"Every country should fulfil its obligations towards its internal security as well as the security of the neighbouring countries," Salami said. "We will find rebels anywhere, even inside the neighbouring countries and will take any action against them without restrictions if they do not stop their activity," he added.

Iran's reaction, that is expected to serve as a warning to non-state actors and one that follows limited aims, can impact regional equations. However, if the situation gets out of control, it can have a serious influence on Tehran's military and security approach towards problems in Sistan Baluchestan. Such a situation will result in increased instability and insecurity in Iran's eastern border. And that too is not in Tehran's interests.

The conflict between Iran and Pakistan and Pakistan's tacit support to non-state actors and separatists against Iran could be the result of Islamabad's close relations with Riyadh and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, and Iran's shaky relations with its neighbours and the US. The Pakistani state is extremely dependent on the US military and economic aid that is used especially against India. Iran-Pakistan relations are dependent on Iran's relations with the US and the regional Arab countries.

So if Iran's new President Hassan Rouhani can achieve improved Iranian relations with the West and promoting Iran's international position, it would reduce some sources of hostility in Iran-Pakistan relations. This would push Islamabad to change its hostile behaviour toward Tehran and reduce and eventually give up support to non-state actors, namely the late Abdolmalek Rigi's Jundallah and the Jaish-al Adl.

Rouhani and Iran's Foreign Policy: Charting the Change

31 October 2014

Majid Izadpanahi

Research Intern, IPCS, and PhD Candidate, Centre for West Asian Studies, SIS, JNU

After the presidential elections of 14 June 2013, Iran's Hassan Rouhani has proved that he is introducing changes in the country's foreign policy based on cooperation and moderation as he did when he was nuclear negotiator. Iranians have shown that they seek moderation and reject a hardline policy. This election has therefore created opportunities and opened the door for a rapprochement between Iran and the West.

The results of this election was a clear message from Iranians to the world, particularly the US, that they prefer a rational policy and dialogue with the West, a moderate approach, and the preference to be a part of the international community, rather than following an adventurous policy, confrontation with the West, and isolation. The radicals in Iran faced a dramatic defeat despite their eight-year old domination of the executive system.

Why Change?

Ahmadinejad's maladministration led to economic chaos, devaluation of the Iranian currency and decline of the rate of economic growth. The conservatives' hardline policies led to the international isolation of

Iran. Admadinejad's controversial speeches and policies raised suspicions in the West about Iran's nuclear programme. This led to the imposition of international sanctions on Iran with the purpose of curbing Iran's nuclear weapons programme at the United Nations Security Council. The sanctions targeted the Iranian oil industry, banks and its economy, which had an adverse impact on the Iranian economy as well as Iran's economic relations with other countries. Through the sanctions, there was an attempt to deprive the Iranian government of oil revenue and finally influence the nuclear programme. In response to this, Ayatollah Khamenei termed the sanctions barbaric.

Today, Iranian President Rouhani is determined to bring to end speculation about Iran's nuclear weapons programme and rebuild relations with the world and the West. Beyond that, he seeks to normalise the relationship with the US – as he himself said, Iran cannot be resentful of the US forever.

Iran-Middle East

Relations between Iran and its neighbours are on an upward slope. Sultan Qaboos of Oman, who mediates between Tehran and Washington, visited Iran, perhaps to discuss mediation with the government. The ruler of Dubai, Shaikh Al Maktoum, in his interview with BBC in January 2014 demanded that the sanctions on Iran be lifted. Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Saud al Faisal met Iranian Foreign Minister, Zavad Zarif in New York, where they discussed bilateral cooperation to fight terrorism and other regional problems.

Iran-Europe

There has been a significant change in Iran's behaviour towards major European countries. After the seizing of the British Embassy by radicals and break in relations in 2011, the Iranian Foreign Minister recently met the British Foreign secretary and the respective embassies were reopened in Tehran and London. President Rouhani in his visit to Davos for the World Economic Forum invited oil companies to invest in Iran and was warmly welcomed by the large oil companies. Further, Iran and the P5+1 group reached an interim nuclear deal and the West has temporarily suspended some of the sanctions on Iran until a final agreement is reached, when all sanctions will hopefully be removed.

Nuclear Deal

Just one month after Rouhani took the office Ayatollah Khamenei paved the way for flexibility in negotiations with the West by saying, "As long as red lines are not crossed ... artful and heroic flexibility in all the political arenas are accepted." This can be interpreted as Ayatollah Khamenei's support for Rouhani's foreign policy based on interactions with the West and integration in the international system.

Iran-US

Thirty five years after the Revolution and subsequent break in ties, the Iranian and American presidents had a landmark telephonic conversation, and the foreign ministers of both states have met several times in the form of bilateral and multilateral talks. The optimism that now has appeared is not only due to the gradual lifting of sanctions but also the results of the 2013 elections that brought back the pragmatists and reformists to power, who have already shown their eagerness for friendly relations with the West.

How Long Will the Change Last?

Everything now depends on how the US perceives the political situation in Iran and responds to the policy of the moderates. If the moderates and reformists get the expected results, it can increase their political manoeuvrability against the conservatives and radicals. The bottom line would be that the radicals would then not be able to undermine the moderates' authority.

Given the upcoming parliamentary elections in December 2015 in Iran, it becomes important to point out that parliament today is under the rule of conservatives. If the moderates hope to win, they will have to strengthen their position against the conservatives, and for this they need tangible achievements in terms of the economy and a comprehensive nuclear agreement. The nuclear deal can change Iran's political and economic situation. And the sooner they achieve it, the better able they will be to change the power equation.

Can Iraq's Disintegration be Prevented?

23 July 2014

KP Fabian

Former Indian Foreign Service Officer

At present, it is difficult to see how the ongoing implosion of Iraq can be stalled and reversed. The world started taking note of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who has been declared as 'caliph' of an 'Islamic State' claiming sovereignty over a stretch of territory from Aleppo in north-western Syria to Diyala in north-eastern Iraq only when Mosul fell on June 20. But, his forces had taken over Raqqa, Syria, in March 2013, and Falluja, Iraq, in January 2014.

ISIL, a breakaway group from al Qaeda in Iraq, is basically a part of the Sunni Resistance to the 2003 US invasion and occupation of Iraq. The US had made unsuccessful, half-hearted, and not always judicious attempts to build an Iraq that could accommodate the three main groups: the Shias, the Sunnis, and the Kurds. But, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who took office in 2006 with support from the US and Iran carried out a policy of alienating the Sunnis and the Kurds. His reckless partisan policies created the conditions for the emergence of a formation called Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) to grow and derive support from the Sunni population.

Once the situation in Syria was found favourable, the ISI extended its operations to Syria and changed its name to the ISIL. Levant essentially comprises Syria, Jordan, pre-Israel Palestine, and Lebanon.

The ISIL has approximately \$2 billion, weapons mainly of US origin, and many of their men are in US army combat uniforms, even with interceptor body armour. They have Humvees and Black Hawk helicopters. Their manpower comprises young men from Chechnya, UK, France, Jordan and elsewhere who have joined them, reminiscent of the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s.

While the 'caliphate' might not have the strength to take over Baghdad, the fact remains that it will be enormously difficult for the government in Baghdad, under al-Maliki or his successor, to recapture the territory already under the control of the 'caliphate'. This means there is already a Sunnistan in Iraq with a part of Syria also in it.

The Kurds spread across Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran number about 30 million. They have their national ambitions. Saladin the Great who fought the Christians during the Crusades and captured Jerusalem in 1187 was a Kurd. After World War I, the Kurds were promised autonomy under the Treaty of Sevres (1920), but it was never implemented. Following the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, the US imposed a no-fly zone in Iraqi Kurdistan enabling the Kurds to progressively assert independence from Saddam Hussein's central government in Baghdad. Under the US occupation, Iraqi Kurds gained further and the current constitution provides for virtual autonomy. There is much tension with al-Maliki who has withheld money from the regional government that dug a pipe line to Ceyhan in Turkey to sell oil, without permission. The first tanker reached Israel recently.

Since the 1960s, Israel has been cultivating the Kurds and now Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has publicly endorsed an independent state for Iraqi Kurds. They might hold a referendum soon on independence.

The main reason the US has sent military to Iraq is to ensure safety of its embassy. US President Barack Obama does not want a repeat of the humiliating helicopter escape of its ambassador from Saigon in 1975. If Baghdad witnesses carnage with Sunnis and Shias killing each other, it will reflect badly on Obama's performance as commander in chief. The US might not mind a disintegrated Iraq in the long run. Iran too might conclude that it is not worth sacrificing men and money to retain Iraq as a single entity. Thus, Iraq might have a Kurdistan, one or more Sunnistans, and a Shiistan. The Shiistan will remain Iran's protectorate.

The Arab Spring, when it started in 2011 as a move towards democracy, did not affect India's interests adversely. India had reasons to welcome a move towards democracy. But when the Spring lost its way, except in Tunisia, and political instability with civil war fuelled by extremist violence and ideology set in, India realised that it had reasons to worry on many counts.

First, there are over 7 million Indians in the Arab world, most of them in the Gulf where currently there is no political instability. The difficulty in arranging for evacuation of 44 nurses from Kerala held up in Tikrit is an example of the problems to be confronted from time to time. India did arrange for evacuating 176,000 of its nationals from Kuwait and Iraq in 1990-1991. Second, the oil prices have shot up forcing an increase in petrol prices, boosting inflation. Third, the worsening Shia-Sunni tension can have an adverse impact on the two groups who have hitherto lived in peace in India. There are reports of some young Shia men wanting to go to Iraq. The government should be able to prevent them from going.

India has no means of influencing the course of events in Iraq or Syria, but that is not exactly India's fault as external intervention has so far only aggravated the crisis. There are about ten thousand Indians in Iraq with the majority in Kurdistan and Basra. Fortunately, there is no immediate danger to them.

IPCS Discussion: Contemporary Developments in Syria and Iraq

7 July 2014

Subin Nepal, Research Intern, IPCS

Initial Remarks

Dr D Suba Chandran
Director, IPCS

- If the international community had addressed the Syrian insurgency at the right time with the right amount of force, would the current situation in Iraq be taking place?
- Is the situation in Iraq a sudden development or did the international community miss an early warning?
- What does the rise of the ISIS mean for Iraq and international jihad?
- The trend of late is to compare Iraq with Afghanistan. Will Afghanistan go the same way as Iraq?
- What are the policy implications of the current rise of the ISIS in Iraq and Syria for India?

Amb Ranjit Gupta

Distinguished Fellow, IPCS and Former Indian Ambassador to Yemen and Oman

The situation on the ground in Syria and Iraq is very complex but the reasons why this is so are relatively straightforward. Unfortunately however prospects for solutions are not bright as the main actors seem unwilling or unable to move away from their hard-line policy approaches despite all indications that these have proved singularly counter-productive.

Iraqi history affirms the self-belief of the Sunni segment of its population that despite being a minority it is the 'natural' ruling element of the country. In the aftermath of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, developments in the country turned this historical reality on its head - for the first time in centuries Iraq has been under Shia rule and that too in an unabashedly sectarian manner. The Shia-Sunni divide was never as poisonous as it has become in the last few years. A Sunni backlash was inevitable. This is what we are witnessing today in Iraq as manifested in the lightning takeover of the Sunni-dominated provinces of Iraq by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, the ISIS, an extremist militant group even more radical and brutal than al Qaeda.

Amb Ranjit Gupta's complete presentation may be accessed at [Developments in Syria and Iraq: Implications & Policy Options for India](#).

Q&A

Is it appropriate to describe ISIS as a terrorist group?

The ISIS should not be called a terrorist outfit; it is a very well organised group. It is a mini-state that is very well-run and tightly controlled. They are extremely wealthy as well. Their overall assets today should be somewhere in the range of US\$2.4 billion. They collect taxes in the areas they control and also make money via ransom.

If Iraq were to follow the steps suggested in this discussion, would it impact Syria?

What is happening in Syria is autonomous, and will continue to happen regardless of what happens in Iraq.

Is there any role the international community can play in this crisis apart from providing humanitarian assistance only?

The international community should stop interfering and supplying arms to different factions. Bilateral talks should decide solutions to such problems though humanitarian aid needs to continue.

What is the position of the GCC in the current crisis?

The GCC has internal factions that let it perform very little. There are no unified opinions and their statements do not display a common GCC policy towards either Iran or Iraq.

Is anyone, including Turkey, ready to support an independent Kurdistan?

No neighbouring country is going to consciously support an independent Kurdistan in Iraq because it has implications for its own Kurdish territory.

Will the ISIS become like the Taliban?

Yes, although the ISIS will face difficulty in being recognised like the Taliban did by the international community.

What is the role of Russia in Syria?

Russia is the strongest power protecting Syria and as long as it continues, there is nothing the rest of the world can do.

What is the impact of this crisis on the Shias and Sunnis of India?

India has remained particularly immune from what has been happening in the Gulf, and this will continue to be the case.

Iran-Pakistan: New Leaders, Old Issues

30 May 2014

Ayesha Khanyari

Research Assistant, IReS, IPCS

“I am here to open a new chapter in Pakistan-Iran relationship,” Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said, on a two-day visit to Iran from 11-12 May 2014 – one that took place after a sixteen-year gap.

The visit took place at a time when ties between the two neighbours have seen tensions. The Iran-Pakistan Pipeline project remains stalled, with Iran doubting Pakistan’s commitment towards the project. The relationship further soured in February 2014 when five Iranian border guards were abducted by militants and allegedly held in Pakistan. In a bid to recover the guards, Iran threatened that it wouldn’t refrain from sending its forces across the border if need arose, when Pakistan failed to respond in a timely manner.

Amid growing concerns regarding the closeness Pakistan and Saudi Arabia enjoy, Islamabad is walking a tight rope between a long-term ally Riyadh, and Tehran, a neighbour. However, the new leaders – Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Pakistan and President Hassan Rouhani in Iran – both of whom were elected in mid-2013 seem committed to strengthening ties.

There are many reasons for Tehran and Islamabad’s eagerness to preserve close ties.

First, in his recent trip, Prime Minister Sharif informed the Iranian president that Islamabad was determined to weed out all the obstacles that currently cause friction and prevent the pipeline project from moving forward. More than economic benefits, for both the countries, the project is a crucial guidepost on the path towards greater partnership between Islamabad and Tehran. During the meeting, both the leaders reiterated their commitment to strengthen energy and security ties between the two nations.

Second, the border security issue between the two countries also featured in the discussion, where Prime Minister Sharif assured Tehran that his country will “eliminate Jaish-ul-Adl,” the militant group that

captured the Iranian border guards. Iran blamed Saudi Arabia for supporting the rebel group and Pakistan for not doing enough to secure the release of the guards. Pakistan does not intend to be party to the growing tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Third, in February 2014, in what was called as the largest military exercise ever conducted by Saudi Arabia, the Chief of the Pakistan Army, General Raheel Sharif, was a special guest. This was widely seen as a show of political resolve against Iran. In West Asia, Syria has become the hot spot for Saudi-Iran rivalry for regional supremacy. The recent gift of \$1.5 billion from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan was viewed with suspicion. There have been mounting speculations regarding Saudi Arabia's intention. The money is alleged to being pumped into Pakistan's army to recruit and train volunteers who can be used against the regime in the Syrian civil war. Nawaz Sharif's trip was aimed at reassuring Iran about its neutral position on Syria. Pakistan is keen on expressing its willingness towards refraining from taking sides in order to avoid any repercussions for its ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Fourth, Tehran and Pakistan have always worked towards opposing goals in Afghanistan, supporting rival constituencies. This clash of policies regarding Afghanistan over the years has pushed Iran closer to India, isolating Pakistan at the regional level. With the impending withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan and a change in the country's leadership, in order to avoid past mistakes, it is imperative, that Iran and Pakistan adopt complementary rather than confrontational policies in post-2014 Afghanistan.

Additionally, projects such as the Middle East to India Deepwater Pipeline (MEIDP) – a sub-sea natural gas pipeline that will connect West Asia directly to India, by sidelining Pakistan – has caused further anxiety and fear that a strained Pakistan-Iran relationship would only push Islamabad away from Tehran and push other neighbouring countries in the region, closer to each other.

Lastly, the sectarian dimension of the Saudi-Iran rivalry further feeds into the tensions between the Shia and Sunni populations in Pakistan. Tehran alleges that the increasing sectarian violence in the recent years in Pakistan is a product of the Saudi hard line Wahhabi ideology promoted among Sunni groups that inspires them to target the Shia minority; and Iran is particularly concerned about the rising graph of violence against Pakistan's Shia minorities.

Caught in the Crosshairs

Against this backdrop, it makes perfect sense for Pakistan to safeguard its own interests by balancing its relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran. A comprehensive solution to put an end to the Iran-Saudi rivalry might still be out of reach, but controlling the escalation of conflicts is possible. Pakistan can play the mediator in pushing Saudi Arabia and Iran closer. Iran-Pakistan relationship – political and economic – will stand to improve only following the implementation of better border management and enhanced security measures. However, Islamabad will have to draw a line in its relations with Tehran so that it does not earn the wrath of its long time benefactor, Riyadh.

Indo-Gulf Migration: Oasis or a Mirage?

31 March 2014

Kuhan Madhan

Research Intern, IPCS

India is a recipient of \$70 billion in remittances with over 30% of that amount flowing in from the Gulf countries. The Indian migrant population in the Gulf is almost 6 million, making it the second-largest Indian expatriate community in any single region. However, this might not remain the same, as the gulf nations, in the wake of the Arab Spring, are attempting to address the unemployment issue among the natives via indigenisation laws. Saudi Arabia's Nitaqat law is one such edict, which tries to classify domestic enterprises on the basis of localisation of labour.

This time, the cause célèbre over the indigenisation law is due to the significant migrant lay-offs and the decreased remittance inflow to India. In this context, what are the potential problems the migrant community would face? What are the resultant larger socio-economic complexities India will have to address?

Nitaqat Law: The Scheme of Things

Saudi Arabia intends to achieve only 10 per cent naturalization via the Nitaqat law and therefore the feasibility of the law taking effect is quite high - regardless of the lack of skilled nationals. Riyadh plans to create 1.12 million jobs to employ 92% of the Saudi nationals in 2014. Kuwait plans to repatriate 100,000 workers and replace them with local workers. Indians form 35% of the collective populations of Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE. The indigenisation laws therefore have the potential to send home a significant chunk of population. Once an oasis for the unskilled blue-collar workers, today, it also hosts approximately a large number of white-collar professionals from India.

Though the Nitaqat law caused a panic wave among the blue-collar workers, its implementation would have a profound effect on the white-collar professionals as well. This because those nationals who traditionally benefitted from a rentier economy, are only willing to take up lucrative jobs in the government, finance and banking sectors, which is currently dominated by Indians. But has the skill development of the Gulf nationals taken place in tune to their demand for more opportunities?

The answer is no. Similar laws have been implemented in other Gulf States over the past two decades, but barring Oman, all gulf countries have just taken baby steps in training the natives to replace immigrants. The cost of such an operation is high and the levels of success and sustainability of the same, given the global economic crisis, is yet to be seen.

Implications for the Indian Immigrants

The implementation of the Nitaqat law bears implications for the unskilled and/or semi-skilled labourers. The immediate effects would be losses of jobs and opportunities otherwise Indian migrants. While Kerala will be substantially affected, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar too will have to bear the brunt, reducing the contribution to the State's GDP. The large pool of unskilled labour will require rehabilitation and the states, especially Kerala, have no infrastructure to absorb or cushion such repatriation. The problem becomes multi-layered when migrants from UP, Bihar and Tamil Nadu, who came in to fill the shoes of the human resource shortage in Kerala, and who work for wages much lower than the locals, pose a threat to incoming Gulf expats.

Noticeably, a majority of the returnees are Muslims. In this regard, there are two important developments that need monitoring. First, the increasing orthodoxy of the society, on which studies on Diasporic religious practices undertaken by Gino Zacharia Oomen shed light on how religion sustains and perpetuates transnational links between home and the host nations. Another study says, "By embracing an overtly Islamic and a Gulf oriented modernity and way of life, Muslim migrants re-nourish themselves at an imagined and sentimentalised heartland of Islam, intensifying the process of communalisation and community closure." Already, Islamist groups like the Popular Front of India (PFI) have started demonising the society using the Sharia law as a reference and inciting hatred on the consumerist culture that is growing in the region.

Secondly, bitter skirmishes between Muslim radicals and Hindutva ideologues have been a growing phenomenon. Empirical investigation on the Hindu-Muslim riots in India has shown correlation between economic growth and ethnic violence; and this will be more pronounced in regions of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where annual migration to the gulf has been close to 8000 people. Additionally, these states have a history of communal riots and tensions, coupled with a poor track record in creating good socio-economic conditions.

Another notable area of difficulty permeating the migrant community, especially the blue-collar workers, is that of the psychological losses that separation from family members brings to the household. The wives and families of the emigrants face numerous social and psychological problems termed the 'Gulf Wives' and 'Gulf Parents' syndrome. White-collar professionals who temporarily migrate face problems of 'nomadic families' and 'forced return' from the host land. As of December 2013, 19,163 Keralites have returned from the Gulf and the number would skyrocket in the coming months. India must be prepared to deal with this issue, and ready contingency plans to prevent larger repercussions.

Embracing the migrant class

During India's economic crises in the 1990's, it was the slow but steadily growing remittances from the workers in the Gulf that gave India a 'saving face'. Distinguishing the Diaspora on the basis of the work they perform, but expecting remittances is hypocritical. The difficulties faced by the migrant communities need to be studied to prevent further alienation of a class which has been treated as a money making machine by their homeland and a social parasite by their host nations.

Iran-Pakistan Pipeline: Is There Scope for Hope?

25 March 2014

Ayesha Khanyari

Research Intern, IPCS

The stalled Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline is symptomatic of the reshuffle in the bilateral relations between India and Iran and Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. As Iran shifts its focus towards India, Saudi Arabia has channelled its efforts towards strengthening ties with Pakistan.

The fate of this pipeline project has constantly faced uncertainty with Pakistan repeatedly running into problems be it due to its own financial shortcomings or due to pressure from the US. Tehran, on the other hand, is exhibiting signs of frustration. Iran successfully completed the construction of the required 900-kilometer stretch of the pipeline in its territory, and threatens to evoke the penalty clauses of the 2010 Ankara agreement between Tehran and Islamabad, over Pakistan's delay in proceeding with construction. The agreement states that the construction of the pipeline is due to be completed by 2014 and if either side fails to meet the deadline, the defaulter will have to pay a penalty of \$US 1 million a day.

The project was stalled after Tehran refused Islamabad the \$2 billion financial support the latter had asked for building its side of the project. Additionally, Pakistan claims that the threat of US sanctions was a major impediment to the successful completion of the project.

To evaluate the future of the IP project, three important questions need answering:

Are the US sanctions solely responsible for the stalling? Has Pakistan completely given up the idea of actualising the project, or is there hope for it to materialise? Will India be willing to take the project forward?

The Saudi Factor

Incumbent Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, on assuming office, assured Iran that his government was committed to the IP pipeline project. Then what changed? Pakistani officials state that Western sanctions on Iran over its controversial nuclear programme spells the impossibility of the realisation of this project. The US fears that Iran will be able to check the growing influence of the US and exert political leverage in Pakistan, if the pipeline were to materialise. However, the issue of sanctions is not a new problem, and Pakistan was well aware of it even at the time of signing the agreement.

Saudi Arabia is highly sceptical of the increasing US closeness towards Iran after the interim agreement over the nuclear issue was signed between Iran and the P5+1. It fears an unopposed Iran in the region and has embarked on its own diplomatic offensive to isolate Iran. The U-turn on the IP pipeline creates a rupture in the Islamabad-Tehran relationship owing to what Shahbab Jafry calls 'riyal politics' in his article, 'Saudi's new riyal-politics', published by Pakistan Today. "Riyadh will flush Pakistan with defence contracts and petrodollars in return for military, missile and perhaps nuclear technology," he says.

The renewed Saudi-Pakistan relationship is symbiotic. Saudi Arabia needs Pakistan's military support which is comparatively reliable and cheaper than other available sources. In exchange, the Saudis can help Pakistan save its struggling economy. Only recently, the Saudi government gave financial aid worth \$ 1.5 billion to bolster Pakistan's liquid foreign reserves.

The threat of the US sanctions can be a major obstacle for the pipeline project but the renewed Saudi-Pakistan relationship, explains the stalling better. It is in this context that all future projects Pakistan will consider working on, should be assessed by.

Going back to the second question, will Pakistan resume the project ever? Pakistan, at this juncture, will be unwilling to upset its long-standing ally, Saudi Arabia. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has enduring ties

with Riyadh and wishes to maintain them. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, needs Pakistan to contain Iran. Furthermore, neither of the two countries wants to upset the US. They will not pursue a foreign policy antithetical to US interests. Thus, given the changes in the dynamics of the region, the future of the IP pipeline looks bleak.

Will India re-join the IP pipeline project?

Initially, the project included India as well, but New Delhi withdrew from the project in 2009 after signing a nuclear pact with Washington. As the region realigns itself, Iran is looking towards India. India has expressed interest to extend its support to a sub-sea natural gas pipeline project capable of bringing natural gas directly from West Asia to India. The South Asia Gas Enterprises has undertaken the Middle East to India Deepwater Pipeline (MEIDP) project to build the underwater transnational gas pipeline that will connect the gas-rich Gulf and West Asia region to India and cater to its rising energy needs.

Recent developments reveal that while the IP pipeline is going nowhere, there have been positive developments in the region that provide fresh incentives to go forward with the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project. India will most likely work on making its way into the Central Asian markets via Iran and Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan. At the moment, for India, projects such as the MEIDP and TAPI seem more tempting than rejoining the IP pipeline project.

Iran: Geostrategic Calculations vis-à-vis Afghanistan

7 March 2014

Rajeshwari Krishnamurthy

Research Officer, IPCS

With a landmark Afghan presidential election fast approaching, soon to be followed by the Western military withdrawal from the country, Tehran has stepped up efforts towards securing a stable and favourable government in Kabul. Iran's interests in Afghanistan are many and wide-ranged.

Geostrategic Calculations

Iran's interests in Afghanistan can be categorised into economy, strategy, and its larger agenda vis-à-vis South and Central Asia developments – positive or negative – on any of these fronts holds implications for the others.

Assuming that Afghanistan will not entirely de-stabilise after 2014, greater Iranian investment in and spreading outwards from central Afghanistan can be expected. Iranian influence in Afghanistan's Herat province is already tremendous, with several million dollars' worth investment and robust cross-border trade; and Tehran definitely wants to make more inroads – although they are not the most favoured, if not disapproved of, by the Afghans.

Afghanistan is Iran's gateway to the larger Central Asian region and China. It is already working towards instituting a North-South corridor between the Central Asian States, Afghanistan, China, and the greater West Asia and North Africa, using Chabahar Port on its southern border – thereby luring these countries away from their dependence on Pakistan's restive South for their access to sea lanes.

At present, there are over 7,80,000 Afghan refugees living in Iran. Eventually, some of them will return to their homeland, and they will take with them the education, experience and other such soft-power baggage that they would have gained during their time in Iran. Tehran already has an upper hand owing to linguistic proximity between Dari and Persian. Furthermore, a considerable number of Afghans – 19 per cent of the total population – are Shia Muslims, and Iran is a pre-eminent Shia State – easing Iran's inroads into Afghanistan.

Among the several outstanding issues that it would want resolved are: consensus on water-sharing; return of Afghan refugees; an end to cross-border drugs and arms smuggling in its southern borders.

Linear Algebra, Not Quadratic Equations

Tehran's Afghan calculations will not be a simple exercise to conduct. The region is not presenting a simple quadratic equation. On the contrary, the complex array of factors operational in the region is somewhat like linear algebra: i.e. involving several unknowns. Many of Iran's subsequent moves will depend on the fate of: the US-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA); Saudi Arabian manoeuvres in Pakistan and the region; Pakistan's dealings with home-grown terrorism; and most importantly, the results of the upcoming Afghan presidential elections.

Most Afghans want to sign the BSA for the security of their nation, but for Iran, it would spell a constant US presence in their immediate neighbourhood. Unsurprisingly, given its suspicions of Washington's motives, it does not support the signing of the agreement.

The increasing proximity between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, evident from but not limited to the Riyadh-Islamabad bilateral exchanges in the past few weeks, could lead to Iran upping its ante in its efforts towards bringing Afghanistan under its influence, and it could lead to some tensions between Washington and Tehran. However, although Iran, in a play of realpolitik and keeping aside ideology, will be willing to ally with an ideologically opposed and Saudi-sponsored Taliban and/or another extremist groups to an extent, to supply irritants for the US, it most definitely will not let the situation escalate beyond what it can control. While the US should only be relieved that Iran would not let the situation spiral out of control, Washington's inherent paranoia – coupled with the knowledge that the BSA will be signed after the Afghan presidential elections – will not let it relax. The post-BSA state-of-affairs will yet again be a complex unknown; especially with the potential of Russia's role in the Ukraine crisis to complicate the US withdrawal.

For Tehran, the Taliban is an expendable pawn in the context of its security interest. Hence, although it might become flexible for a while, that flexibility will only be temporary, and will wither away soon after the withdrawal of international forces. That juncture is when the difference in the ideologies of the Shia-majority Iran and the Sunni/Wahabi Saudi-backed-Taliban will again take precedence.

The temporariness and selectiveness of support to militant Islamists has been made evident in Iranian Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli's hard talk addressed to Pakistan over Jaish-ul-Adl's kidnapping of Iranian border guards in its Sistan Baluchestan province bordering Pakistan's Balochistan province.

Iran's Sunni-majority Sistan Baluchestan province borders Pakistan's restive Balochistan province that in turn borders Afghanistan's most turbulent provinces, Kandahar and Helmand. Instability in Pakistan's internal security vis-à-vis this tri-national border region and the associated illicit cross-border arms and drugs trade is a major irritant for Iran. With a Saudi-influenced government in Pakistan being an undependable option for Tehran to negotiate with – given that Islamabad does not crack down on those militant groups funded and supported by Riyadh in return for political and economic favours – Iran's only hope is a favourable government in Afghanistan.

Expect a lot of drama in the region – Iran, Af-Pak, and Central Asia – over the next three months, and hopefully, the bands of militiamen running amok in the region will not be the ones to make the most of it.

Iran 2013: Was Change the Buzzword?

13 January 2014

Ruhee Neog

Senior Research Officer, NSP, IPCS

2013 was a year of change for Iran, most of which started roughly half way through the year. There was a change in leadership and a change in the conduct of diplomacy, both of which are of particular relevance to nuclear matters. If the West were in the business of handing out awards, in the nuclear category, North Korea would have held on to the 'most disruptive' trophy (for many years running now), and Iran would have been the real breakout star.

The year started on a bad note – there was mounting pressure in the form of further sanctions from a West distrustful of Iran's nuclear ambitions, the threat of a possible 'military option' loomed large, and Iran continued to be defiant in the face of rising international opprobrium, all of which manifested in the worst way in the Iranian economy. For the most part, economic hardship triggered the changes that

followed. In retrospect, Ahmedinejad came to signify the bad first half of the year, when Iran plunged to the doldrums. Rouhani, on the other hand, signifies promise.

Elections

Rouhani's landslide win can be credited to his opponents' weaknesses, in addition to his own merits. Rouhani is an Iranian 'moderate', well known but critical of the regime, which probably did not earn him any favours. However, when Iran went to the polls in 2013, several factors were working in Rouhani's favour. One, Ahmedinejad's grand standing against the West had come to naught, and Iran's economy had taken a massive hit as a result of the many sanctions imposed on the country. Rouhani's campaign emphasised change, and more specifically, sanctions relief. He promised greater engagement with the West to resolve Iran's most outstanding issues. Two, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the way the 2009 elections had been conducted and doubts had been expressed about the authenticity of the results, leading to a certain displeasure with domestic politics. This could have made Rouhani's image more palatable to Ayatollah Khamenei, and perhaps it was hoped that Rouhani's general emphasis on change could be pupteered to restore public faith in the regime.

Greater Engagement

As always, there is a caveat. These changes may be more conducive to mould Western perceptions of Iran, rather than usher in real change in the Iranian perception of nuclear issues – the façade may have changed, but the basics persist. Hassan Rouhani won the presidential elections in June 2013, succeeding Ahmedinejad. A 'moderate', Rouhani's ascendance, on the campaign promise of sanctions relief, was also welcomed by international spectators. Many significant diplomatic overtures were made. Rouhani's phone conversation with Obama, the first between American and Iranian heads of state since the Islamic Revolution, was one such move. Leading Rouhani's new ministerial appointees is Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, who conducted the nuclear negotiations in Geneva. Much has been made of his American education - this makes him more amenable to Western perception, perhaps more so than his contemporaries. It is important to bear in mind that this precisely why Rouhani made him Foreign Minister – to smooth over the difficulties traditionally associated with engaging with Iran.

A change in style towards nuclear negotiations was expected and duly demonstrated, although it was also widely understood that despite declarations of moderation, Iran's stand on nuclear give-and-take would remain unchanged. This is for several reasons. Rouhani may have been publicly critical of the Iranian nuclear programme, and responsible for the only nuclear deal between Iran and the West signed in the early 2000s, but he has himself acknowledged that the negotiations bought Iran time to proceed with the development of its nuclear programme. Additionally, Rouhani, despite public approval, could have not assumed the presidency without the sanction of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. This grants him some leverage but it also restricts decision-making, seeing as Khamenei has the final say in all matters. The fact that Rouhani even made the cut to stand for elections (as opposed to the many who were disqualified) alone demands that his moderation be qualified.

There was greater engagement, therefore, stemming from the need for respite from sanctions. However, a reorientation of Iranian nuclear thinking is unlikely.

Geneva Negotiations

Rouhani's election paved the way for a breakthrough nuclear deal after intense negotiations in Geneva between Iran and the P5+1. This interim deal offers sanctions relief in exchange for a reduction in uranium enrichment, amongst other promises.

It is an interim deal of six months, so both parties can cautiously gauge the opposition's intentions while addressing concerns for a more conclusive resolution. This does not tie the parties to long-term commitments without proof of the other's sincerity, making it a good first step for further negotiations. Its significance is that it is of a kind that was previously missing.

The negotiations conducted in Geneva cannot be cast as a failure. It is precisely the length of this deal that allows both parties to assess each other, and make a swift exit if the results do not match expectations.



US-RUSSIA



Obama's Russian Dilemma

12 August 2014

Amit Gupta

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Has the shooting down of MH-17 heralded the start of a new Cold War? Observers in the west have likened the situation in Europe to 1914 and the hawks in Western Europe and North America have been calling for tougher sanctions against Russia. Caught in the middle of all this is President Obama who would prefer that Russia and Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin just went away.

From an American perspective, Vladimir Putin has become an irritant for while not posing an existential threat to the US and Western Europe, he does create enough waves to require some form of international action. After the annexation of Crimea, President Obama declared Russia to be a regional power and said that he was more concerned about a dirty bomb going off in New York. The American president was doing his best to minimise the American reaction to the events in Ukraine given his domestic political compulsions. First, the US is recovering from two wars the long term costs of which are over US\$3 trillion. Second, despite all the hype from Wall Street and the stock market, the economy remains fragile and cannot be pushed off the cliff by another conflict. Third, Americans have war fatigue as witnessed by the reluctance to get involved in Syria, and lastly, no one, except perhaps John Simon McCain, wants to get into a shooting war with the Russians.

Nor, in actual fact, do the Europeans, despite their protestations, want to do much about Russia. They depend on Russia for 30 per cent of their energy supplies and in an age of globalisation, Russian capital has penetrated the financial and real estate markets of the European continent. More importantly, the Europeans took the peace dividend from the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and drastically slashed their militaries. Despite events in Ukraine, Britain, France, Germany, and Italy - the big four - are not seriously discussing raising defense expenditures. Nor can they. Their aging populations and generous social welfare programmes require shifting money from guns to butter and not the other way around. So the question then arises, what to do about Russia?

Both the US and Europe are implementing harder sanctions that no doubt will hurt the Russian oligarchy. There may also be a possible push from Europe to have the 2018 World Cup taken away from Moscow. If that were to happen it would be a huge propaganda defeat for Putin since he used the Sochi Olympics to boost his international image. Having said that, there is a genuine danger that this will blow up in the face of the west because the Russians will turn the energy screws on Ukraine, and while the EU was very keen on having Ukraine move out from under the Russian umbrella, it is unlikely to foot the large bill for Ukraine's economic problems and its energy supplies.

Further, the Russians have the option of looking east although this is something that goes against the recent history and cultural mindset. Historically, the Russians have sought to be a western nation with the earthy Nikita Khrushchev telling them to be western and not perch on their toilet seats like eagles. Under Yeltsin and Putin the drive to become western has continued with the Russians being openly dismissive of the BRICS in public forums and claiming that they are a western nation. Yet, in the current climate of growing sanctions, it is the BRICS, particularly China that can save Vladimir Putin's regime - the recent US\$40 billion energy deal with Beijing being a case in point. China, in fact, can be the driver for greater economic growth for Russia through the building of pipelines and infrastructure but Moscow must worry at the same time that this will make it economically dependent on its eastern neighbour.

What is likely to happen, now that tighter sanctions have been implemented, is that after a decent waiting period the west can cool down the rhetoric about Russia while Moscow itself will be able to work around the sanctions? And given how every week a new issue catches the attention of the US media, Ukraine will be consigned to the back pages where it was before the shutdown of MH-17 put it back in the news as a crisis. Neither Europe nor the US is likely to push for military actions since it the one scenario that no one in Europe wants.

Ironically, the real winners in this may be China and India. The Chinese have been worried about the US pivot to Asia and events in Ukraine take the heat off Beijing as it solves to deal with the Senakaku-Diaoyu islands and tensions in the South China Sea. India too can be a winner if it is able to use the Ukraine crisis to better engage Russia on issues of energy supply and arms sales because Russia desperately needs friends right now. India-Russia trade is pledged to cross the US\$9 billion mark but it is a far cry from a figure comparable to India-China trade. This could be easier to do because Russia's limited options in light of the sanctions force it to look east and to strike potentially lucrative deals with the very countries it once rejected as eastern and backward.

Since the Crimean Parliament's 6 March, 2014, decision to seek independence, India has issued several official statements regarding evolving events in or related to Ukraine, including a warmly worded message of congratulations to Mr. Petro Poroshenko on his election as Ukraine's President.

The statement issued on 6 March, inter alia, stated that "India hopes that a solution to Ukraine's internal differences is found in a manner that meets the aspirations of all sections of Ukraine's population. It would be important, in this context, for a legitimate democratic process to find full expression through free and fair elections that provide for an inclusive society. India calls for sincere and sustained diplomatic efforts to ensure that issues between Ukraine and its neighboring countries are resolved through constructive dialogue."

Later on 6 March, India's National Security Advisor speaking informally to the press said, "We hope that whatever internal issues there are within Ukraine are settled peacefully and that the broader issues of reconciling the various interests involved, and there are after all legitimate Russian and other interests involved, are discussed and negotiated."

The statement issued on 18 March, inter alia, stated that "President Vladimir Putin telephoned the Prime Minister today and discussed the evolving situation in Ukraine and the recent referendum in Crimea... The Prime Minister thanked President Putin for explaining the Russian position with regard to recent developments in Ukraine. He emphasized the consistent position India has had on the issues of unity and territorial integrity of countries. The Prime Minister expressed his hope that all sides would exercise restraint and work together constructively to find political and diplomatic solutions that protected the legitimate interests of all countries in the region and ensured long-term peace and stability in Europe and beyond."

It would be relevant to note Russia's take on this conversation. As per published excerpts from a press conference held by Russian President Vladimir Putin on 24 May at St. Petersburg, in relation to India's position he stated that "Speaking of India's stance, we are, of course, grateful to the Indian government

and to the Indian people for their level-headed stance. I am glad that the Indian government considered the historical and the current political aspects in approaching this issue. I am glad that they based their opinion on these fundamental principles, including the importance of Russia-India relations. We appreciate it.”

The main reason why Putin was pleased with India’s stance despite the Indian Prime Minister specifically raising the issue of the importance of maintenance of the unity and territorial integrity of states in his conversation with Putin was because India had not condemned the Russian action and had – along with 57 other countries, including all BRICS countries – abstained in the vote on the UN resolution on 27 March.

Though India has been uncomfortable about the annexation of Crimea, India has also been cognizant of Russia’s very deep civilisational and historical linkages with Crimea. Also, India cannot entirely ignore the fact that Western activities and policies in the peripheral regions of Russia ever since the disintegration of the Soviet Union have hardly been altruistic, and appear motivated by a Cold War mindset.

Though the problem in Ukraine is pre-eminently a European problem, in an increasingly economically and geopolitically interlinked world, there are consequences even far away: the \$400 billion Russia and China gas deal, which had been under negotiation for a decade, and prospects were not very optimistic, suddenly got finalised very quickly. Another and even bigger gas deal between them may soon see the light of day. These are significant strategic consequences and they enhance China’s strategic flexibility and leverage increasing its proclivity to be assertive vis-à-vis all its neighbours. Any strengthening of the Russia-China relationship has implications for India.

Even though India has very good relations with Ukraine and is sympathetic to its plight, India has a vital national interest stake in maintaining a strong partnership with Russia. The erstwhile Soviet Union, and later Russia, has been India’s strongest, indeed more often than not the only strategic supporter amongst the major powers for India for the best part of the past six decades. Lacking the leverage provided by Permanent Membership of the UN Security Council to protect its vital national interests, India needs to maintain a strong strategic partnership with Russia. Therefore, India cannot become a partner in any Western scheme of isolating Russia.

Notwithstanding the high sounding rhetoric about principles and values that great powers constantly spout, the unvarnished reality is that it is the mechanics of global geopolitics and the imperatives of national interests that determine the stances of every country on any particular issue. There is no reason why it should be any different for India.

Some or all of these reasons would perhaps have gone into determining India’s stance in relation to events in Ukraine, which has been somewhat ambiguous and decidedly nuanced, but admittedly tilted in favour of Russia.

Worse things have happened in the past decade – the unilateral invasion and occupation of Iraq and the complete dismantling of its erstwhile administration and army leading directly to the utterly tragic consequences we are witnessing today. No major power can claim the moral high ground.

It is highly unlikely that the annexation of Crimea would be reversed. Attempts to do so will not succeed. However Russia must cease interference in eastern Ukraine. Ukraine should have a more decentralised and federalist internal polity. Neither Russia nor the West would like a major breakdown in their mutual relationship; nor can they afford it. There are indications that Russia is stepping back. A via media will be found. The Ukraine issue is amongst many and more dramatic geopolitical changes in Eurasia in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and all concerned countries have learnt to live with the changes and so it is likely to be with the situation in Ukraine.

Russia and the Ukraine Crisis: An Indian Perspective
2 July 2014

Ranjit Gupta

Former Member, National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)

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INDIAN OCEAN REGION

Asia and the Seas: Looking Back to Look Forward

19 November 2014

Vijay Sakhujia

Director, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi

Three Asian powers – China, India and Indonesia – have, in recent times, attempted to project their power potential by recalling their maritime histories. China has highlighted the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) that has foundations in the ancient world. Chinese President Xi Jinping promoted the MSR based on his reading of ancient Chinese maritime connections with Southeast Asia, India, Persia, the Arab world, and as far as Africa.

However, the MSR has invited sharp reactions from some Asian powers. They argue that China is reliving the era of Zheng He who led seven expeditions from 1405 to 1433. The Chinese fleet undertook expansive voyages and sailed through the Asian waters along the MSR, engaging in trade, projecting power, defeating challengers, and establishing spheres of influence. However, there are others such as Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Bangladesh who appear to be convinced that the MSR offers them immense opportunities and that they can benefit from the Beijing's maritime prosperity.

India has chosen Project 'Mausam' to highlight its historical connection with the contemporary. 'Mausam' or 'Mawsim' in Arabic means 'season' during which, ships would undertake voyages and sail safely. The monsoon winds had facilitated the movement of peoples, cultures and trade across the Indian Ocean. Project 'Mausam' aims to "record, celebrate history, connect and re-establish communications between countries of the Indian Ocean world" for a better understanding of cultural values and concerns in the maritime milieu.

The newly-elected Indonesian President, Joko Widodo, has called on the people of Indonesia to be "as great in the oceans as our ancestors were in the past." For Indonesia, the motto of the Indonesian Navy, 'Jales Veve Jaya Mahe', meaning 'in the water, we are triumphant', appears to be the driver.

Indeed, China, India and Indonesia were preeminent maritime powers during ancient times and had relied on the seas for a full realisation of their power potential. China's Song and Ming Dynasties, India's Chola Dynasty, and the Sumatran Srivijaya Empire had strong maritime aspirations and invested enormous capital in the development of a sophisticated maritime system. They were globalised powers and possessed formidable maritime capability that reflected in their shipping, ports and trade that crisscrossed the Asian waters, carrying goods, culture and people.

These states established political, economic, social, cultural and strategic networks as far as Africa, Eurasia, the Mediterranean and Persia - that which came to be referred to as the proverbial maritime silk

route. They also developed naval power that was effectively used during periods of crisis. It is also true that Asian powers declined due to several internecine disputes and wars that resulted in their colonisation, which came from the seas.

In the 21st century, Asian powers are experiencing high economic growth, burgeoning maritime trade, a promising maritime science and technology base, and above all, a desire to build a robust maritime military capability. There is strong evidence of sensitivities about safety and security of sea-lanes, and forward presence of extra-regional navies, which is an issue of significant concern. In the case of China and India, naval fleets built around nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers, expeditionary platforms are gaining primacy, and for Indonesia, the focus is on building robust naval capability to address a string of maritime threats and challenges.

There are at least six reasons for Asian countries to evoke their glorious maritime past and celebrate it in the 21st century:

First, the Asian states are witnessing a flourishing maritime enterprise, which displays strong elements of interdependence. This is a mirror image of the sophisticated maritime trading system that emerged in ancient Asia that contributed not only to their growth, but had linkages with other trading systems of the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean and the modern day Pacific.

Second, the Asian countries wish to demonstrate that during ancient times, they were highly interconnected and globalised and the seas had shaped their destiny in significant ways, and that they continue to do so.

The third possible reason is that the 21st century is indeed the period for the rediscovery of their maritime power with phenomenal economic growth built around trade, a bulk of which is carried out via the seas.

Fourth, the Asian powers have successfully shed the 400 years of colonial legacy that came from the seas, and are developing impressive naval capabilities to preclude dominance of their seas, protect trade over the sea-lanes, and to ensure safety of marine resources in the Exclusive Economic Zones.

Fifth, they are confident of contributing to Asian efforts to ensure order at sea. Finally, the sixth reason is that Asian countries wish to rely on the seas for a full realisation of their power potential and place in the international system.

IPCS Discussion: Securing India's Interests in the Indian Ocean: New Strategies and Approaches

29 December 2014

Teshu Singh

The Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), in collaboration with the National Maritime Foundation (NMF), has been conducting a series of discussions on the Indian Ocean Region. Based on the insights generated via the discussions, the IPCS hopes to produce a set of policy briefs for India, in 2015.

To that end, on 2 December, 2014, the fourth round of the IPCS-NMF discussion series, titled 'Securing Our Interests in the Indian Ocean: New Strategies and Approaches', was held at the NMF Conference Hall. Five presentations were made, and were followed by a brainstorming session between the panellists and the audience.

'China's Endgame' and the Maritime Silk Road'

Teshu Singh, Senior Research Officer (CRP), IPCS

China is using various tactics in its search for a stable and peaceful environment for its 'peaceful development' strategy – and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) is one of them. Essentially, it is China's soft power strategy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Today it has become a major tool of China's economic

and peripheral diplomacy. It is also part of China's larger strategy to develop extensive transport networks – roads, railway lines, ports and energy corridors. It would further cater to somewhat resolving China's Malacca Dilemma and help augment the 'String of Pearls' strategy. With the US's 'pivot to Asia', China is concerned about its aspiration to become a global power. Additionally, it is not a South Asian power but seeks a presence in the region. Therefore it is using the MSR as a tool to make its presence felt by following a policy whereby it seeks cooperation with the IOR littoral states and making gradual infrastructural investment in these countries – catering to its Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) impasse.

'Maritime Silk Road'

Captain Gurpreet S. Khurana, Executive Director, National Maritime Foundation

In retrospect, one look of the MSR suggests the strategic nature of the proposal. There was a gap between the announcements of the MSR at the Bali summit and the release of the first document in, April 2014, followed by the map in Xinhua newspaper. China is good in strategic communication and it closely follows up each development. Hence, it is pertinent to view the development from the standpoint of this perspective. India has not joined the MSR until now because of its own security considerations. The entire development in the region can be viewed within the framework of the 'Hub and Spokes' model.

'Towards an Indian Strategy: Maritime Asia/Asian Sea Lane'

D Suba Chandran, Director, IPCS

There are multiple developments taking place in the IOR. The increasing Chinese interest and announcement of the MSR is not the only development. There are other parallel developments such as the US's pivot to Asia and the Indo-Pacific underway in the region. Notably, this signifies the re-emergence of the Indian Ocean or Maritime Asia. In the given scenario, India should pitch in for its own pivot in the region and start looking for regional partners such as Sri Lanka and the Maldives. India can term its pivot in the IOR as 'Maritime Asia'. As a part of its pivot, India can initiate the Asian Sea Lane project where in it can work with the IOR littorals and, within the Non-Traditional Security framework, it can forward projects pertaining to 'Blue Economy' and 'Search and Rescue operations'.

'Maritime Piracy and Terrorism in the Indian Ocean Region: An Overview of Trends, Linkages and Counter-measures'

Aditi Chatterjee, Research Associate, National Maritime Foundation

In the current global environment, non-traditional security challenges such as piracy and maritime terrorism pose serious challenges to national and international stability. These dangers, which cannot be readily defeated by the traditional defences that states have erected to protect both their territories and populaces, reflect the remarkable fluidity that currently characterises world politics. It is a setting in which it is no longer apparent as to who can do what to whom with what means, exactly. The maritime realm is especially conducive to these types of threat contingencies given its vast, largely unregulated, and opaque nature. Since the end of Cold War, the maritime security environment in the IOR has been quite volatile and dynamic. While hard security questions of the maritime domain remain a familiar set of problem for policymakers, they have a much harder time conceptualising non-traditional and transnational security issues of piracy and maritime terrorism that do not respect national boundaries and that transcend institutional and policy stovepipes.

'Blue Economy'

Dr Vijay Sakhuja, Director, National Maritime Foundation

The concept of 'Blue Economy' is being discussed widely. It was discussed at the 22nd APEC Economic Leaders Meeting in Beijing, the 9th East Asia Summit (EAS) and the 36-point Kathmandu Declaration. By discussing it at multiple fora, Asian countries believe they can help highlight the concept and develop a sustainable development of marine resources. The main drivers for blue economy are food chain, sea-based resources, bio-diversity, trade, and tourism. With these drivers in mind India can explore opportunities vis-à-vis blue economy and also the MSR. Furthermore, the IOR littoral countries can come

together to deliver the 'goods at sea', for the Human Assistance Disaster Relief operations and also 'Aid to Civil'.

Discussion

1. The China factor has been overemphasised in the IOR while in fact, the IOR littorals should explore opportunities coupled with it.
2. India and China have similar goals in the IOR. But India is conscious about Chinese activities in the IOR due to its own security considerations. India has launched its own project, titled 'Mausam' for the same. Mausam is a Ministry of Culture project with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi, as the nodal coordinating agency.
3. The MSR project was conceived to bypass all the troubled points in SLOCS. In a multi-polar world, we should not look at it from a fixated point of view. The MSR should also be viewed from broader perspectives.
4. The Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation did not prosper because of its narrowly focussed objectives. The newly formed Indian Ocean Rim Association should have both economic and political components.
5. Given its geostrategic location, India is in a position to use the entire development in the region utilising the networks of the region.
6. Piracy is an economic phenomenon and its origin can be traced to the poor statuses of the fishermen that forced them to resort to piracy.

Indian Ocean: Why India Seeks Demilitarisation

15 December 2014

Vijay Sakhuja

Director, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi

In his remarks at the 2014 Galle Dialogue in Sri Lanka, Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval alluded to the 1971 UN General Assembly Resolution 2832 (XXVI) which declared the Indian Ocean a 'Zone of Peace' (ZoP) and called on his host and the originator of this idea, Sri Lanka, to recall and renew the declaration. He also made an earnest appeal for "no escalation and expansion of military presence in the ocean" and urged the great powers to demilitarise the Indian Ocean. There are at least five reasons that prompted Doval to raise the ZoP element in his remarks:

First, the presence of Chinese submarines in the Indian Ocean has undeniably rattled India and New Delhi is unable to impress upon its neighbours that such naval presence undermines peace and stability of the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, New Delhi believes that Pakistan would, sooner than later, provide access and basing facilities to the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) for operations in the Indian Ocean. Pakistan and China recently concluded a MoU to develop a 3000 kilometers China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and expand the existing facilities at Gwadar. The first phase of the CPEC covering 2014-2017 involves oil storage facilities and a refinery at Gwadar Port. This will facilitate China in transporting energy resources to the 'landlocked' Xinjiang. At another level, Gwadar also sits astride Xi Jinping's 21st century Maritime Silk Road under which China has indicated its willingness to develop maritime infrastructure in friendly countries in South Asia, much to New Delhi's discomfort.

Second, the UK has announced that the Royal Navy's aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, destroyers and other logistic support vessels will be forward deployed in the Indian Ocean and operate from the Mina Salman Port in Bahrain. According to UK Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond, the deployment is an "expansion of the Royal Navy's footprint" and would "reinforce stability" in the Gulf. Bahrain will invest \$

23 million for the base and the Royal Navy will meet the operating costs. Significantly, Britain is making a comeback to the Indian Ocean.

France has rejected the notion that it is an extra regional power in the Indian Ocean. It has four bases / facilities at La Réunion, Mayotte, Djibouti and the UAE and these are referred to as the 'quadrilatère français' or the 'French quadrilateral' to look after its interests in the Indian Ocean.

As far as the US is concerned, it is the predominant military power in the Indian Ocean. It is a common sight to see US naval vessels and its nuclear submarines sail in and out of the Indian Ocean. It has a number of treaties, partnerships, alliance agreements with regional countries with whom it enjoys access and basing arrangements. Some regional countries consider the US naval presence a factor of stability and for them its presence precludes coercion by others.

Third, a number of navies were forward deployed in the Indian Ocean in support of US-led Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, Global War on Terror, and to counter piracy off the coast of Somalia. Some of these operations have been completed and foreign warships must return to their respective homeports. For instance, the Chinese naval task force (CTF 525) comprising two to three vessels that has operated in the Indian Ocean since 2008 can be withdrawn from the Indian Ocean since piracy off Somalia has reduced significantly. Similarly, the Japanese, Korean and EU navies could return to their bases.

Fourth, the Indian Ocean is buzzing with naval activity, and the presence of foreign navies is unnerving a number of Indian Ocean littorals. The Indian Ocean states have become independent, emerged as sovereign states, and zealously guard their sovereignty and wish to exercise 'strategic autonomy' to pursue their national interests.

Fifth, Indian Ocean littorals have developed a number of regional institutions and mechanisms to ensure safety and security of sea-lanes. The IORA, IONS, Milan, Galle Dialogue etc. and bilateral and multilateral naval exercises can uphold maritime order in the Indian Ocean.

However, the big question is: would the international community bite into Doval's call for recalling the idea of Indian Ocean as a 'Zone of Peace'. It is true that India is a major Indian Ocean naval power and has requisite capabilities and strengths to ensure order at sea. Furthermore, the Indian political leadership sees itself as a "net security provider" in the region. However, it will be fair to argue that extra regional naval presence in the Indian Ocean is both an opportunity and a challenge. Some see it positively as an assurance against regional challengers and to respond to threats emanating from non-state actors; while for others it is construed as challenge to spheres of influence and supremacy.

Pirates Prefer Energy Cargo

14 October 2014

Vijay Sakhuja

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Early this month, pirates released the hijacked MT Sunrise 689, a small product tanker bound for Vietnam which went missing soon after it left Singapore. During the captivity that lasted nearly six days, the pirates siphoned 2,000 of the total 5,200 metric tons of oil valued at \$4 million. They also stole the personal belongings of the crew and threatened to kill if they did not follow orders – but assured them that their only aim was to steal the oil carried onboard the vessel.

This is the 12th incident of piracy in Southeast Asia involving small oil tankers. These vessels are easy targets because they are small, have smaller crews, move at slow speeds, and the low freeboard makes boarding comparatively easier and quicker. Perhaps the most worrying aspect of these attacks is that pirates in Southeast Asia have taken a liking for small product tankers carrying diesel that is sold to prospective customers, who re-sell for anywhere between \$400 and \$650 per ton in the black market.

These pirates or robbers are popularly referred to as 'Petro Pirates' and are believed to be part of transnational organised crime groups who own small tankers and are networked with the oil smuggling mafia. Furthermore, these Petro Pirates appear to only steal cargo and not harm the crew. For instance, in June 2014, pirates hijacked Orapin 4, a Thai oil tanker, with its cargo of oil worth nearly \$2.2 million; they stole the oil, did not hurt the crew, but robbed them of watches, cell phones, money and other valuables. Similarly, in April 2014, pirates raided a tanker off the coast of Malaysia and stole 3 million liters of diesel. In fact the business model of Petro Pirates' does not appear to include ransoms.

Interestingly, a similar story is being played out along the west coast of Africa but on a larger scale. Early this year, MT Kerala, a 75,000 ton tanker carrying diesel was hijacked by Nigerian pirates off the Angolan coast. The vessel was released after being siphoned of 12,270 tons of its diesel cargo. The pirates took the usual precautions of disabling the Automatic Identification System, switching off communications, and repainting the name of the vessel.

The International Maritime Bureau's half year report for January to June 2014 recorded 23 incidents off the west coast of Africa, and Nigerian waters has witnessed 10 such attacks. These trends are a continuation of the past reports and the UK Chamber of Shipping records state that acts of piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea are worrisome – 62 attacks in 2012; 51 in 2013. The Gulf of Guinea accounted for 19 per cent of all maritime attacks worldwide. Significantly, the Gulf of Guinea is believed to be a greater threat to shipping than Somalia because of its flourishing oil and gas industry which attracts shipping, unlike Somalia, where pirates preyed on targets of opportunity along the busy sea route.

The West African piracy is driven by a commodity – oil – which is available in abundance. For instance, Nigeria is an oil-rich country and produces nearly 2 million barrels of oil per day. However, it has limited refining capacity resulting in both export of crude and import of refined oil thus generating sufficient maritime traffic for pirates to feed on.

Unlike Nigeria, Singapore does not produce any oil but is the hub of the Asian petrochemicals industry with a sophisticated refining, storage, and distribution infrastructure, and therefore attracts significant tanker traffic. A variety of large and small vessels carrying oil and gas make port calls to deliver crude or carry refined products to regional and global markets. According to the US Energy Information Agency, the petrochemical industry is the backbone of Singapore's economy and it has a refining capacity of nearly 1.4 million barrels of oil per day.

The aforementioned incidents along the west coast of Africa and in Southeast Asian waters offer an interesting feature. The business model of piracy in both cases involves hijacking vessels for the cargo carried onboard, and in particular, the refined energy products such as diesel. It is plausible that pirates in Southeast Asia may have borrowed the idea from West Africa – who appear to have become more sophisticated and have graduated to hijacking bigger ships.

In essence, the pirates may not have changed their Modus Operandi of attacking both small and big ships; instead they have become cargo/commodity conscious and believe that stealing refined energy products is more lucrative than waiting for ransoms. However, it is useful to mention that the stolen oil or other products are carried in smaller vessels that are equally vulnerable to interception by security forces.

Drug Smuggling across the Indian Ocean: Impact of Increasing Interceptions

11 September 2014

Vijay Sakhuja

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Is there an increasing cooperation in the Indian Ocean to curb drug smuggling today? After piracy and terrorism, are the drug smugglers and their network being targeted now in the Indian Ocean? What is the nature of counter actions so far, and what needs to be done further?

The Kenyan Operations, August 2014

Last month, President Uhuru Kenyatta flew in a Kenyan Air Force helicopter escorted by two Russian made MI 17 helicopters to personally oversee the destruction of the ship MV Bushehr Amin Darya alias Al Noor with its cargo of about 370 Kilograms of heroin worth US \$ 11.4 million in international market. The vessel was escorted out of the harbour by three Kenyan naval ships and sunk 18 nautical miles from the coast by using explosives. Significantly, the President acted despite the Kenyan High Court ruling that the destruction of the vessel should be delayed till the trial of the accused (9 foreigners and 3 Kenyans) is completed. Also, the court admitted the defense counsel's plea that the sinking of the vessel had safety and environmental risks.

President Kenyatta's initiative should be seen as a strong message to the drug mafia, smuggling ships and agents both in Kenya and overseas about his country's commitment to prevent labeling Kenya as a transshipment hub of illicit global trade in narcotics. In recent times, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) cited 'Kenya as a transit point for re-packaging and trans-shipment of drugs to Europe and America'. Perhaps what is more disturbing is that east coast of Africa is also popular among drug smugglers from Colombia.

Countering the Drug Network: Actions in 2014

In the first half of 2014, a number of boats / dhows carrying drugs have been intercepted by the ships of Combined Task Force (CTF) 150 operating under the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF). In January 2014, HMCS Toronto, a Canadian warship intercepted a vessel carrying 280 kilograms of heroin packed in 265 bags about 40 nautical miles off the coast of Tanzania. A few months later, a British Royal navy ship HMS Somerset intercepted a fishing boat carrying 60 kilograms of drugs. This was followed by Australian Navy's HMAS Darwin intercepting a dhow carrying 1032 kilograms of heroin in 46 sacks concealed in the consignment of bags of cement. Apparently, the drugs were to be transferred on the high seas to three dhows, bound for Zanzibar and Malindi which is known to be a haven for drug smugglers and money launderers.

It has been the policy of the Combined Maritime Forces to destroy the contraband at sea and allow the crew and the dhows to continue on their voyage. Apparently, this is due to operational constraints since escorting the captured vessel back to home countries would entail long legal processes. Further, this approach could be attributed to the absence of onboard 'mechanism to enable drug trafficking prosecutions.' The UNODC is of the view that the drug smugglers should be prosecuted and not allowed to escape with impunity.

The above intercepts off the east coast of Africa suggest that the drug consignments may have originated in South Asia (Afghanistan / Pakistan / India), Southeast Asia (Thailand / Myanmar) and Latin America (Colombia). Further, East African coast (Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania) has emerged as the transshipment hub and some reports suggest that on an average, nearly 24 tons of drugs valued at US \$ 190 million are smuggled annually from the region. The easy availability of drug in East Africa appears to have encouraged Al Shabaab which is most active in Somalia, to have links with drug cartels and the drug business helps the organization to acquire weapons and other logistics.

What Next?

After the attacks on USS Cole, MV Limburg and the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, maritime security analysts were able to impress upon policy makers that robust maritime capabilities were critical to address terrorism in the littorals and at sea. Likewise, over the past five years, the Combined Maritime Forces have successfully controlled the Somali piracy and according only ten incidents of attack on shipping have been reported in waters around Gulf of Aden-Red Sea- Somalia coast which is a welcome sign.

Apparently the strategic community has got 'locked' into counter terrorism and anti piracy. The drug hauls illustrated above clearly showcases that maritime security has several dimensions and the policy-makers would have to understand the complex nature of security in the maritime domain. Although the threat of maritime terrorism may have reduced and piracy off Somalia contained, the Indian Ocean littorals would need to develop capacities to address new forms of threats and challenges. In that context, EUNAVFOR and NATO decision to extend operations until the end of 2016 in the Indian Ocean is a welcome development.

Indian Ocean: Multilateralism Takes Root

19 August 2014

Vijay Sakhuja

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India will host the Indian Ocean Dialogue (IOD) at Kochi, Kerala in September to discuss issues of maritime safety and security in the Indian Ocean. The initiative emerges from the 13th meeting of the Council of Ministers in Perth, Australia held in November 2013, where India's External Affairs Minister announced New Delhi's plans to host the IOD to bring together scholars, experts and policy-makers from the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA, earlier IOR-ARC), a pan-Indian Ocean regional grouping comprising of twenty countries across Asia, Africa and Australia, six dialogue partners, and two observers. The IOD would facilitate exchange of views on issues of 'security and safety', identified as one of the six priority areas of cooperation among IORA member states during the 12th Meeting of the Council of Ministers in Gurgaon, India.

The Gurgaon Communiqué also emphasised the role of the IORA Troika in coordinating cooperation among member States through interactions at various levels. India hosted the first Trilateral Dialogue on Indian Ocean (TDIO) in 2013 in New Delhi which was attended by eminent persons, diplomats, academics and strategic experts from India, Australia, and Indonesia. Like the IOD, the next round of TDIO is scheduled in the coming weeks in Canberra, Australia.

Like the IORA, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) is a specialised multilateral forum to address common security threats and challenges confronting the Indian Ocean States and enhance co-operation among the regional navies. Milan, another Indian initiative held biennially, brings together several navies from Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean to discuss issues of maritime security. Besides, there are several other sub-regional groupings that contribute to enhancing maritime security in the Indian Ocean through dialogue, debate and discussions.

In essence, the Indian Ocean is dotted with 'maritime security and safety' related 'alphabet soup bowl' structures, clearly showcasing a culture of working together through multilateral institutions based on common interests, concerns and challenges. Regional countries are active participants and play vital roles in the multilateral arrangements in the Indian Ocean region. There is strong evidence of new multilateral initiatives at Track 1, 1.5 and 2 levels based on geographical, economic, political, strategic interests, and these are contributing to broader institutionalisation of governance across the Indian Ocean. Interestingly, Indian Ocean security issues are also highlighted in the speeches of political leaders and debated and discussed at different levels in different parts of the world clearly suggesting the importance of the Indian Ocean in the global commerce matrix.

Ironically, the Indian Ocean is viewed through the prism of insecurity and has encouraged several extra regional powers to forward deploy their forces in the region to counter asymmetric threats and challenges arising from terrorism, piracy, gun running, drug smuggling, illegal migration, WMD proliferation etc. This has led to labelling the Indian Ocean as a 'danger zone', 'zone of insecurity', 'arena of great power competition', etc by the wider political, diplomatic and strategic constituencies. The great power competition thesis has led some to argue that the Indian Ocean could witness maritime/naval competition between India and China which could culminate in a great-power rivalry.

During the last two and a half decades, the India-China-Indian Ocean discourse has resulted in an enormous amount of alarmist strategic literature published by the strategic community who belong to different schools of thought - realism, constructivism, etc. Among these, three discourses dominate: 'strategic encirclement' of India by China through covert and overt military-strategic support to India's neighbours particularly Pakistan, which is led by the Indian strategic community. The second discourse is spearheaded by the West, particularly the US, who views Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean through the prism of the 'string of pearls' strategy. Both discourses express concern over China's aggressive intent in its Indian Ocean strategy, pivoting on development of ports to support the Chinese Navy. The third discourse, apparently to dispel the 'China threat', is driven by Beijing's idea of the Maritime Silk Road through the Indian Ocean which envisages the 'shared destiny' of China with other Indian Ocean countries through the joint development of maritime projects to provide impetus to economic growth.

It is fair to argue that the Indian Ocean witnessed great power competition during the ancient period - Rajendra Chola I's naval expedition to Southeast Asia in 1025; Zhang He's voyages in 1405 to 1433 to the Indian Ocean to establish suzerainty and trading hubs; and in modern times, the colonisation of Asia which came from the sea through the Indian Ocean. In essence, external interests in the Indian Ocean continue even today. The Indian Ocean will attract great power interest in the future too and multilateral institutions such as the IORA can potentially play an important role to 'manage competition' and address 'insecurities'.

Will China 'Rig' the Indian Ocean?

20 May 2014

Shreya Upadhyay

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China's deployment of the Haiyang Shiyou 981, a massive billion-dollar rig designed to drill oil, in the South China Sea (SCS), has sent a clear message to the region - Beijing will drill as and where it pleases.

Is China using the oil rig as a political statement to reinforce its control over the region? Can China do the same in Indian Ocean?

Oil Rigs as Strategic Weapons in the SCS

China's dispatching of the rig inside Vietnam's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and then defending it with 80 coast guard and naval vessels is reflective of the lengths Beijing is prepared to go to assert its territorial claims in the SCS. China's naval and coast guard vessels present to protect its parked rig outnumbered and outgunned the Vietnamese force; and 15 Chinese ships rammed several vessels and sprayed an on-site Vietnamese vessel with water cannons.

It has been pointed out that the decision to move the rig into an area with questionable hydrocarbon reserves had the intention of inciting a diplomatic crisis. A foreign Policy article quoted David Lai, Research Professor, Asian Security Affairs at the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), the U.S. Army War College, stating that the "dispatch of the rig to disputed waters, which is hard to justify on commercial, oil-extraction grounds, makes more sense if understood in terms of the stones, or pieces, that are strategically placed on a wei qi board." Wei Qi is an "encircling game" that originated in China more than 2500 years ago and is rich in strategy. The recent activity of wresting control over offshore areas is about position based power where the rig has the ability to create an aura of authority and control than just scramble for resources.

China timed the move just as US President Barack Obama left Asia, and days after India and Vietnam agreed to additional presence by India's state-run Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) in Vietnam's oil blocks for joint cooperation in the hydrocarbon sector. Vietnam has offered two new exploration blocks to ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL) in addition to the five existing blocs offered in the SCS. Previously too, China carried out energy survey activities in disputed areas while preventing other countries, including

Vietnam, from carrying out their own surveys. In 2011, Hanoi had accused Beijing of deliberately severing the cables of an oil and gas survey vessel in two separate instances.

Haiyang Shiyou 981, over 100 meters high and capable of operating in 3,000 meters of water, is indigenously built. For China, self reliance was necessary for undertaking deep sea exploration. The China National Offshore Oil Corporation's (CNOOC) Chairman Wang Yilin, while launching the rig in 2012, stated that, "large-scale deep-water rigs are our mobile national territory and a strategic weapon," that can extend Chinese sovereignty to open waters.

China 'Rigging' the Indian Ocean

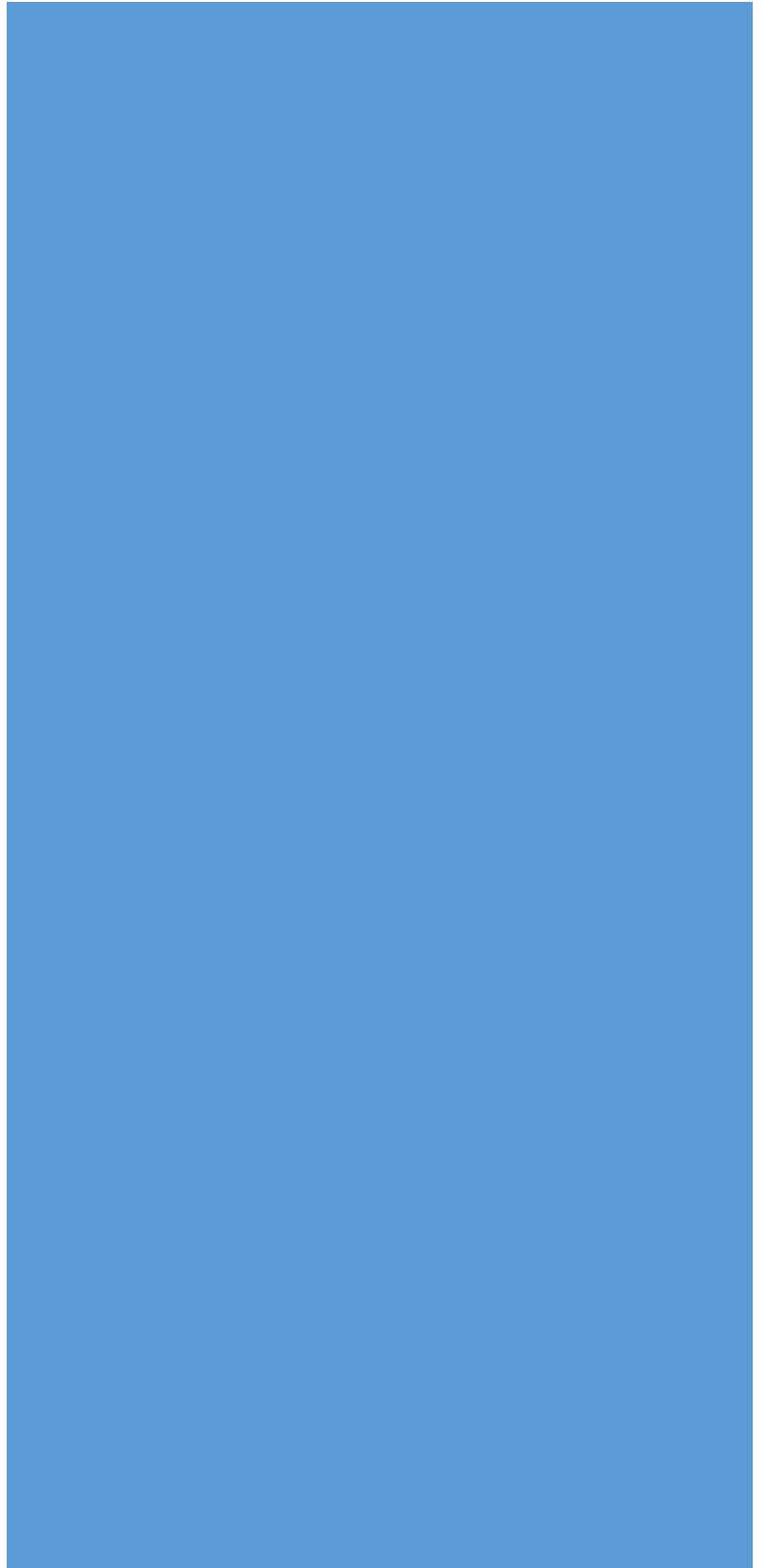
Will China repeat the assertiveness it projects in the South China Sea in distant waters as well? Beijing has maintained that its strategic focus is the Pacific and not the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). However, it eyes the region as a vital energy and trade route. The Chinese scientific agenda for 2014 includes dispatching its research vessels into the Indian Ocean to assess seabed resources and record biodiversity for exploration and mining.

China's state-owned companies are making considerable financial and diplomatic investment in East Africa and in the South-West Indian Ocean. Chinese agencies are conducting explorations in the South-Western Indian Ocean ridge in the Madagascar Plateau. China has also been offered oil blocks in the Gulf of Mannar off Sri Lanka for exploration. The opening of deep sea oil and gas exploration in Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Seychelles, and Madagascar means competition to secure rights over these resources will further intensify.

China is planning to deploy research vessels such as the indigenously built Jialong in the Indian Ocean. Deep-sea submersibles will be used carry out research activities as mentioned in the 2014 Chinese scientific data. However, China currently faces technological challenges in developing undersea exploration and extraction systems and equipment. However, Jialong can potentially monitor submarine cables that run across the Ocean and carry nearly 99 per cent of digital data. Thus, it can keep a tab on maritime and naval activity in the IOR.

It is implausible that, at least in the near future, China has the will or the ability to behave as aggressively in the Indian Ocean as it does in the South China Sea. Yet, the idea of Chinese ships and technicians searching for oil around the Indian Ocean indicates towards a bigger challenge. China is vying for a greater space in the IOR not just in resources but governance and security as well. The recent MH 370 incident is a case in point. China proved to be an active participant with over eleven naval and coast guard ships taking rounds in the Southern Indian Ocean. Nonetheless, the current scenario has provoked worries in India, the US, and in the region about an expanded Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL



Rouhani and Iran's Foreign Policy: Charting the Change

31 October 2014

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After the presidential elections of 14 June 2013, Iran's Hassan Rouhani has proved that he is introducing changes in the country's foreign policy based on cooperation and moderation as he did when he was nuclear negotiator. Iranians have shown that they seek moderation and reject a hardline policy. This election has therefore created opportunities and opened the door for a rapprochement between Iran and the West.

The results of this election was a clear message from Iranians to the world, particularly the US, that they prefer a rational policy and dialogue with the West, a moderate approach, and the preference to be a part of the international community, rather than following an adventurous policy, confrontation with the West, and isolation. The radicals in Iran faced a dramatic defeat despite their eight-year old domination of the executive system.

Why Change?

Ahmadinejad's maladministration led to economic chaos, devaluation of the Iranian currency and decline of the rate of economic growth. The conservatives' hardline policies led to the international isolation of Iran. Ahmadinejad's controversial speeches and policies raised suspicions in the West about Iran's nuclear programme. This led to the imposition of international sanctions on Iran with the purpose of curbing Iran's nuclear weapons programme at the United Nations Security Council. The sanctions targeted the Iranian oil industry, banks and its economy, which had an adverse impact on the Iranian economy as well as Iran's economic relations with other countries. Through the sanctions, there was an attempt to deprive the Iranian government of oil revenue and finally influence the nuclear programme. In response to this, Ayatollah Khamenei termed the sanctions barbaric.

Today, Iranian President Rouhani is determined to bring to end speculation about Iran's nuclear weapons programme and rebuild relations with the world and the West. Beyond that, he seeks to normalise the relationship with the US – as he himself said, Iran cannot be resentful of the US forever.

Iran-Middle East

Relations between Iran and its neighbours are on an upward slope. Sultan Qaboos of Oman, who mediates between Tehran and Washington, visited Iran, perhaps to discuss mediation with the government. The ruler of Dubai, Shaikh Al Maktoum, in his interview with BBC in January 2014 demanded that the sanctions on Iran be lifted. Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Saud Al Faisal met Iranian Foreign Minister, Zavad Zarif in New York, where they discussed bilateral cooperation to fight terrorism and other regional problems.

Iran-Europe

There has been a significant change in Iran's behaviour towards major European countries. After the seizing of the British Embassy by radicals and break in relations in 2011, the Iranian Foreign Minister recently met the British Foreign secretary and the respective embassies were reopened in Tehran and London. President Rouhani in his visit to Davos for the World Economic Forum invited oil companies to invest in Iran and was warmly welcomed by the large oil companies. Further, Iran and the P5+1 group reached an interim nuclear deal and the West has temporarily suspended some of the sanctions on Iran until a final agreement is reached, when all sanctions will hopefully be removed.

Nuclear Deal

Just one month after Rouhani took the office Ayatollah Khamenei paved the way for flexibility in negotiations with the West by saying, "As long as red lines are not crossed ... artful and heroic flexibility in all the political arenas are accepted." This can be interpreted as Ayatollah Khamenei's support for Rouhani's foreign policy based on interactions with the West and integration in the international system.

Iran-US

Thirty five years after the Revolution and subsequent break in ties, the Iranian and American presidents had a landmark telephonic conversation, and the foreign ministers of both states have met several times in the form of bilateral and multilateral talks. The optimism that now has appeared is not only due to the gradual lifting of sanctions but also the results of the 2013 elections that brought back the pragmatists and reformists to power, who have already shown their eagerness for friendly relations with the West.

How Long Will the Change Last?

Everything now depends on how the US perceives the political situation in Iran and responds to the policy of the moderates. If the moderates and reformists get the expected results, it can increase their political manoeuvrability against the conservatives and radicals. The bottom line would be that the radicals would then not be able to undermine the moderates' authority.

Given the upcoming parliamentary elections in December 2015 in Iran, it becomes important to point out that parliament today is under the rule of conservatives. If the moderates hope to win, they will have to strengthen their position against the conservatives, and for this they need tangible achievements in terms of the economy and a comprehensive nuclear agreement. The nuclear deal can change Iran's political and economic situation. And the sooner they achieve it, the better able they will be to change the power equation.

Iran-P5+1 Nuclear Negotiations: What Is Holding It Up?

31 July 2014

Ruhee Neog

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The six-month interim Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) between the P5+1 and Iran expired on 20 July with the negotiating parties failing to reach an understanding on a longer-term comprehensive agreement. This was not a shock ending – there was a growing sense, towards the conclusion of the stipulated time frame of the interim deal, that overarching consensus would not be reached by the deadline. The talks have now

been extended by four months, and are due to expire by 20 November 2014 – a year since the negotiations first began.

Sticking Points for the Negotiating Parties

One of the primary concerns that have delayed the conclusion of a comprehensive deal is the question of Iran's enrichment capacity, on which the negotiators have thus far been unable to reach any kind of consensus. Iran wants to hold on to the 19,000 centrifuges in its possession. It has also repeatedly stressed its need for an enrichment capacity that meets, among others, the requirements for the fuelling of the nuclear power reactor at Bushehr, built by Russia under an Iran-Russia contract. Russia currently supplies the low enrichment uranium (LEU) to fuel the reactor, a job that Iran sees itself taking over once the contract expires in 2021. Significantly, this would require Iran to increase its uranium enrichment capacity, which could be at cross-purposes with the eventual aim of a comprehensive agreement: to curb the possible weaponisation element of the Iranian nuclear programme in perpetuity. The P5+1, on the other hand, seek a reduction where Iran desires an expansion.

As it currently stands, Iran has voiced its opposition to reduce the number of centrifuges in existence, a position that is seen as unacceptable to the P5+1. Continued Iranian maintenance of the Arak heavy water reactor and the uranium enrichment facilities at Fordow and Natanz as components of the Iranian civilian nuclear programme have also been challenged, and Fordow's location inside a mountain and therefore fortification against a potential conventional strike has hardened this position. Although there have been some vocal demands for a complete end to Iranian uranium enrichment as an end-goal of the comprehensive agreement, it has also been recognised that this would not be politically realistic.

Iran's stand is that it will not forego its right to enrich uranium for peaceful means as promised to it by the NPT (Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty). This right, used often and publicly by Iranian statesmen to define their expectations from the P5+1, informs the Iranian approach to the talks and is therefore non-negotiable. In this light, therefore, a lower capacity for enrichment is being sought. It has been argued that this would be a win-win for Iran and the P5+1. First, it would still allow Iran to meet the "practical needs" as recognised in the JPOA of its civilian nuclear programme, such as fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR), Bushehr, and the four light-water research reactors that Iran has expressed an interest in building. Second, this is expected to extend Iran's "break-out" in the event that it decides to bow out of the agreement, and enrich uranium to weapons-grade levels for a nuclear bomb.

Additionally, Russia may apparently be willing and able to extend its contract to supply fuel to Bushehr post 2021. Also, as Mark Hibbs of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace argues, "Iran has no agreement with Russia licensing the Atomic Energy Agency of Iran (AEOI) to make Bushehr fuel, giving Iran access to the intellectual property for the design of the reactor core internals, for the design of the fuel assemblies, and for the chemical and physical specifications of the fuel." If Russia, given its commercial interests in retaining the contract, is unwilling to hand over fuel supply to Iran, then Iran's argument for greater enrichment capacity on this basis can be considered invalid.

Since the negotiations began, technical issues were expected to throw a spanner in the works – a misgiving that has since been justified. Recent frustration notwithstanding, this extension provides the necessary space for a stock-taking of where the negotiations stand, what the sticking points are, and how best to move forward in the right diplomatic direction. Also, this extension should not read as failed diplomacy, and take away from the good work done so far and the noteworthy achievements made under the JPOA. Most importantly, Iran and the West have met at the negotiating table for the first time since Iranian President Hassan Rouhani led the last (failed) talks in his former avatar as Iran's top nuclear negotiator. As starting points go, therefore, the deal itself is a diplomatic breakthrough, and in this give and take, it is hoped that the negotiating parties build on past mileage by focusing not so much on what is ideal, but what is achievable.

Comprehensive Nuclear Agreement with Iran: One Month Endgame
30 June 2014

Ayesha Khanyari

Research Assistant, IReS, IPCS

Representatives from the P5+1 will meet their Iranian counterparts in Vienna on 2 July 2014 to continue talks on Tehran's nuclear programme. Earlier, senior diplomats from both sides met in Brussels on 26 June 2014 for "an intense day of preparation" for the upcoming talks with Iran.

The stakes are high as the 20 July 2014 deadline approaches for the expiration of the interim agreement that was signed between the two sides. While the countdown begins, there are key issues that remain unresolved. At this point in time, there are major external impediments that are likely to affect the course of the negotiations in the days ahead.

Crisis in Iraq: Implications for Iran-P5+1 Negotiations

The deadline for the nuclear agreement looms against the backdrop of the worsening security situation in Iraq and Syria. Oddly enough, the US and Iran find themselves on the same side of the conflict. The US does not want to be drawn into a regional sectarian battleground against Iran.

The US faces a huge dilemma in dealing with the Iraq crisis, leaving the Obama administration with two policy options. The US can either pressurise the Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to form a more representative government in order to heal the rifts which are exploited by the insurgents, or provide military assistance without waiting for these political changes to come about.

However, the outreach to Iran on a possible common security strategy for containing the Iraq crisis was not openly welcomed by Tehran. Iranian officials are sending mixed signals on cooperating with Washington on the Iraq crisis.

Complicating the picture further are the parallel talks between Iran and the P5+1. American officials insist that the two issues should be kept separate. However, they fear that Iran might use the situation to extract concessions in the upcoming negotiations on its nuclear programme.

Will Russia Exploit this Opportunity?

As tensions between the US and Russia mount over the crisis in Crimea, concerns have emerged about the potential fall-out on areas of cooperation between the two world powers. Russia might link the Crimean issue as part of its own diplomatic leverage with the US and the European Union, the precipitant being President Obama's announcement of new sanctions that were intended to provide broad authority for penalising key areas of the Russian economy, if and as the conflict over Crimea escalated. In his recent statement, Russia's delegate to the Iran talks, Sergei A Ryabkov, the deputy foreign minister, was quoted as saying, "We wouldn't like to use these talks as an element of the game of raising the stakes, taking into account the sentiments in some European capitals but if they force us into that, we will take retaliatory measures here as well."

Any assessment of the recent history of both Russia and Iran highlights that anything is possible. Though retaliatory measures were not mentioned, it would not be surprising to see Russia reviving steps for the delayed oil-for-goods barter deal with the Iranians. The deal would enable Iran to sell more oil to Russia, undercutting the pressure exerted by Western sanctions. On the contrary, it is also possible that Russia would not seek to exploit the opportunity; it would rather comply with the other powers and preserve cooperation on the Iranian nuclear file.

Will Catherine Ashton's Exit Hinder Diplomacy?

The end of the mandate for European Union's foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, who was the prime coordinator of the negotiations, raises doubts about the future of the nuclear talks. At the end, it will be Iran and the major powers who will determine if a deal is finalised. However, Ashton's shepherding of the

entire process since 2010 is commendable. Her upcoming departure could complicate diplomacy at a critical time exposing the talks to further risks.

Given the sensitivity of the talks, constant concerns raised, and deep fissures between the two sides, delays are possible. A further delay would mean a new EU foreign policy chief taking charge, someone with less expertise on the issue or rapport with the Iranians. While it might appear to be a small matter in an incredibly complex pool of other issues, nonetheless, personalities matter. Ashton's departure from the scene would certainly impair the momentum of the talks.

A nuclear deal with Iran is certainly in Europe's interest. Apart from reducing the threat of nuclear proliferation, it could enhance economic ties with Iran. The EU could also work towards engaging Tehran on regional security threats like Syria and Iraq and combating insurgent groups like al Qaeda. Therefore, in the upcoming negotiations, it is also in Europe's interest to maintain the momentum and keep the door open to diplomacy to finalise a comprehensive deal with Iran.

Iran-P5+1: 'Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed'

30 May 2014

Ruhee Neog

Senior Research Officer, NSP, IPCS

The International Crisis Group's May 2014 report, 'Iran and the P5+1: Solving the Nuclear Rubik's Cube', is comprehensive and detailed. It is particularly useful for Iran watchers as thus far, official accounts of the negotiations have been limited and sporadic. Until some sort of a conclusive deal is reached, official statements will continue to define the talks as 'difficult but hopeful', and without any understanding of the specifics.

As the report states, the aspiration is not for the most perfect deal, but that which is most doable. It therefore helps to tether and give shape to not just what an achievable agreement ought to look like, but also how and when the three time-bound phases it has identified for the implementation of its conditions should be executed.

Acknowledging the "risks and flaws" of the negotiations process, the report considers the "alternatives... less attractive." This commentary analyses some of these risks.

Time is of the Essence

First, the report has laid out an approach that is to be undertaken in three phases covering nineteen years; each phase is to follow only upon the successful completion of the previous phase. Time will allow the P5+1 the luxury of testing Iran's commitment, and the phased approach will ensure intrusive verification until such time as Iran's inability to develop a nuclear weapon is proved beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Iran would, however, prefer a much shorter time period for the implementation of a final deal. The operative word is 'respect' for its rights, primarily to enrich uranium under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and for the good faith principle on which it professes to approach the negotiations. Iran may view the approximately 20 years of restrictive uranium enrichment and intrusive verification as violating both its right, and the respect owed to it. A shorter time period would also answer Iranian concerns about the time taken to suspend, and then lift, crucial sanctions that currently restrict its economy.

Second, unlike the interim agreement, which was concluded at breathtaking speed primarily because it focused on 'familiar' issues and was supplemented by back-channel Iran-US talks, the current talks for a comprehensive agreement focus on all aspects of the nuclear file and do not have a supplementary bilateral track. This could be potentially debilitating.

The Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) of 20 January 2014 envisages the conclusion and implementation of the 'final step' within a year, i.e. 20 January 2015 (in case the six-month deadline is not met). Whether these obstacles/differences can be reconciled within this stipulated period is debatable.

Personality Matters

The report does not discuss the imminent departure of the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton in October 2014. While it is correctly assumed that the pivotal roles are played by Iran and the US, Ashton has been known to act as a personable bridge between the negotiating sides.

Gestures and symbolism are crucial in talks as delicate and divisive as these, and Ashton's genial relationship with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif has played a significant role in maintaining positive engagement. Additionally, her team of negotiators who have been involved in the proceedings since their inception will also leave with her, with the potential for some disconnect and/or slowing down during handover to a new team. Personality may be a peripheral matter in that it would not make or break negotiations, but its importance in sustaining past momentum can hardly be overstated. Having said that, if the deal is struck by 20 July – when the interim deal runs out – these problems may not arise.

Iran's BMD and PMD

Iran has categorically stated that its ballistic missile programme (BMD) is not up for discussion since it constitutes a part of its conventional military programme, and therefore it may be just as well that the report does not mention it. In fact, fractures within the P5+1 itself are visible over this issue. A US official was recently reported as saying that the BMD would be dealt with within the comprehensive agreement, which was immediately countered by the Russians, who characterised it as a separate concern. It remains to be seen how these differences will be reconciled when a final deal takes shape.

The report talks about Iran's "possible military dimensions" (PMD) in both its second and third phases, and interestingly, recalls the exact language used in the JPOA of November 2013, that is, to resolve "all past and present issues." Given the palpable urgency for an agreement, however, the PMD issue may be side-stepped if all other conditions are fulfilled, giving primacy to the more political JPOA over the Framework for Cooperation struck between the IAEA and Iran over the technical aspects of its nuclear programme. Therefore, although the report recommends the resolution of past and present issues, to what extent is this realistically possible?

The report records that "if odds of the talks collapsing are high, the stakes of failure are higher." This has directed what is in essence an inclusive and thoughtful blueprint for an agreement between the P5+1 and Iran, and it is hoped that the governments at the helm of the negotiations take notice.



GLOBAL NUCLEAR POLITICS



Looking Up in Northeast Asia

19 May 2014

Sheel Kant Sharma

Former Permanent Representative to UN Office in Vienna & the IAEA

For weeks before President Obama's visit to Seoul in April 2014 there were a series of reports, spurred by deliberate North Korean announcements, about an impending nuclear test. It has not happened so far, nor any missile test for that matter, which marked the previous three nuclear tests by Pyongyang in 2006, 2009 and 2013.

Commercial satellite imagery from the test site at Punggye-ri, in North Korea where previous tests were done has indicated confusing activity over the past month; activity which arouses concern about an imminent test alongside doubts too whether diggings and tunnels apart, other non test-related activity should be on if they were about to do a test. In the wake of reports and analyses of satellite imagery in the website '38 North', the CTBTO was also reported to have commented last week that "There is activity at both tunnel entrances in the South Portal area, although less than in previous imagery...The May 9 imagery indicates activity in other areas at the site as well, but none seems to show a test is 'imminent'.....If a test were imminent, there would be a high level of activity, special vans used for secure communications and other vehicles spotted in the past that were unidentified but may have been somehow related to the nuclear device."

On the political side the reports from Washington indicated some revival of interest in reactivating the six party process that has lain dormant since 2008. Ambassador Glyn Davis, the point person in the Obama administration, said that he was in touch with the four parties; namely, China, Russia, Japan and South Korea, even though he discounted the raising of any expectations. There is a general sense among Korea watchers that Pyongyang is unlikely to heed advice on denuclearisation and flout sanctions as it may consider its previous tests and the time lapsed since the suspension of the six party talks as a fact of life as far as its nuclear status is concerned. Statements from North Korean officials allude to this by saying, in the midst of much vituperation about US and South Korea that its nuclear weapons are for defensive deterrence.

Voices from China have revealed mixed signals. First, a Professor at the China Institute of International Affairs, Yang Xiyu, averred on 5 May 2014 that North Korea will conduct another test for both technical and political reasons. He assessed that there could be no stopping at a fourth test and DPRK could do a fifth and a sixth test too in due course. A Chinese military expert, Peng Guangqian, dismissed this as speculation spawned by the news media. However, a more official Chinese comment has been attributed

to Professor Shi Yinong, at the People's University in Beijing, asserting that "If the DPRK should indeed conduct another nuclear test, China will definitely be prepared to play a leading role in joining other nations to endorse another UN Security Council resolution to impose sanctions on the DPRK in a collective international manner," as quoted in *The Washington Times* of 8 May 2014. Shi also cautioned during an interview to a TV channel Phoenix TV that China "is prepared to impose unilateral sanctions on North Korea if actions by Pyongyang undermine stability on the peninsula."

If the Chinese official position is nuanced to apply pressure on DPRK against further tests, what can possibly be read in to it? If the US Administration were somehow resigned to the present stalemate about denuclearising the Korean peninsula and if Pyongyang felt it could go on with missile and nuclear tests perhaps the Chinese would sit up and review what it means. Given that the US policy of rebalancing in the Asia Pacific may entail optimisation of its energies and burden, could it be that the US might let the other powers too, which could influence North Korea, realise the dangers inherent in and share some burden about North Korea's complete lack of restraint? As China may strategise for an assertive Japan in the coming years and explore common causes with South Korea, it may feel less detached from US concerns about outlaw North Korea; particularly since a nuclear peninsula would scarcely be in China's long-term interest. So far, China's line has been to hold US responsible and implore it, as well as Seoul and Tokyo, to engage and persevere with a diplomatic process which China has facilitated in the past. But all of them ought to pay heed to Pyongyang's security anxiety. If, however, China's unrestrained neighbour ventures too far and provides ground for even greater US military involvement with South Korea and Japan that should be a cause for worry.

Would a fourth nuclear test – and by now a customary missile test in tow - take North Korean defiance to unacceptable escalation? Is this why pressure may now be coming from Beijing to call a halt? If so, this may spur some dialogue, at least preparatory, towards activation of the six party process. At a long shot, the changing outlook in Tokyo about defence and security under Prime Minister Abe should perhaps inspire its neighbour to revalue the strategic point of non-proliferation.

Cooperating against the Islamic State: A Nuclear Bonus for Iran?

16 October 2014

Majid Izadpanahi

Research Intern, IPCS, and Ph.D Candidate, Centre for West Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Since the 1979 revolution, the Iran has accused the US interference in the West Asia as the root of regional instability. But there are cases when Tehran has cooperated with Washington when their interests coincided.

The Islamic State (IS) has ambitious political, economic, military and ideological plans, and continues to occupy territories and seeks recognition. The IS has captured oil-rich areas in Iraq and Syria and is smuggling oil via Turkey. It has beheaded journalists, has inflicted heavy casualties and human tragedies in Iraq and Syria's Kurdish areas. The IS has become the richest and most powerful terrorist group ever, and now is marching towards Baghdad.

Today, the IS is considered a national security threat both by Iran and the US. Its movement towards the southern Iraqi cities of Samarra, Najaf and Karbala is Iran's red line. Also, its anti-Shia policy and its military operation near Iran's border directly threaten Iran. The US considers the IS as a threat to its citizens, and especially its approach and plan to seize Iraq's oil rich areas in the south, as dangerous.

Iran and the US have a history of cooperation in tackling common enemies. First, it was the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and second, Saddam Hussain's Ba'athist regime in Iraq. Iran fully supported the US attack on the Taliban regime in 2001, and collaborated to establish political order in Afghanistan during the Bonn Conference. But immediately after that, the then US President George Bush labelled Iran as "Axis of Evil" shocking Tehran and embittering the bilateral. During the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran once again supported the US led coalition and provided them with intelligence inputs. Subsequently, however,

the “all options are on the table” and “the regime change” option had extremely adverse impacts on the reformists’ bid to improve relations with Washington.

Today, once again, there is a convergence of interests between Iran and US over Iraq. The IS is marching towards Baghdad, Iraqi Kurdistan, and southern Iraq, threatening Shia-majority areas and the oil-rich Kurdish regions of the country. An overthrow of the central government in Baghdad is neither Iran’s interest nor the US’.

At present, Iran supports all groups involved in fighting the IS inside Iraq and Syria. Iran provides military advice to the Iraqi government, has military cooperation with the Kurds and covers the news of the developments in Iraq.

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, in his recent visit to Iraq, reflected Iran’s approach towards Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi’s government by conveying Tehran’s support to him. By visiting President Masoud Barzani of the Iraqi Kurdistan, he proved Iran’s support to them by providing arms, ammunitions and intelligence.

The US also gives moral, material and logistical support to the Iraqi government to keep the IS out of Iraq. Therefore, given how Iran and the US are trying to eliminate the same enemy, it is pragmatic for the two to come closer. However, there are several reasons for Iran preference to fight the IS alone instead of joining the US-led coalition. To begin with, Iran was not invited for the Paris Conference, organised to create a coalition West Asian countries – that included a number of corrupt regimes – to defeat the IS. Saudi Arabia is accused of supporting the IS and other terrorist groups such as the Taliban. Turkey helps the IS in selling oil – the latter’s main source of income – via plastic pipelines and other routes. Iranian officials denounce this conference as a farce and state that they would rather fight the IS alone.

Despite not being invited to the Paris Conference, US leaders have admitted to the importance of Iran in eliminating the IS. On August 21, Deputy Spokesperson, US State Department, Marie Harf, stated, “There is a positive role Iran can play.”

At home, in Iran, after three decades of chanting anti-American slogan, distrusting the US and being accused of sponsoring terrorism and building nuclear weapons by the US, incumbent Iranian President Hassan Rouhani’s moderate administration is being pressured by the conservatives to continue the war alone.

Building the Iraqi army, supporting the government of Iraq, supporting the integrity of Iraq, Iraq’s stability and security and eliminating the IS are goals both Iran and the US are attempting to achieve. Iran supports US air strikes on the IS because it can help the cause: defeating a very dangerous enemy in Tehran’s neighbourhood.

Destroying the same enemy still could not form a coalition that includes both Iran and the US. Iran is now more conscious of its actions and foreign policy because it still remembers that after its unconditional cooperation with the US in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, not only they did not get the results they expected but their overtures too were rejected; and the reformists and moderates were defeated in the subsequent presidential election.

Despite the fact that the US’ elimination of the IS serves Iranian interests, it seems that the Iranian government now wants a nuclear bonus in return for coalition in order to reduce the conservatives’ pressure.

IPCS Discussion: Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Implications of Pakistan's Nuclear Developments

16 October 2014

Rajeshwari Krishnamurthy (Rapporteur)

On 4 September, 2014, the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies organised a panel discussion on Pakistan's Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs). Below is the seminar report of the event, rapporteured by Rajeshwari Krishnamurthy, Research Officer (IReS), IPCS.

Prof PR Chari
Visiting Professor, IPCS

Pakistan's nuclear capability is low and is dependent on Chinese technology. Miniaturisation of warheads is difficult and it is not clear whether Pakistan has succeeded in achieving this goal. Is Islamabad's Hatf IX (Nasr) missile ready for deployment? Nasr's 60 km range radius of action brings it within range of India's long-range artillery, and is also vulnerable to ground and air attacks. What was considered tactical, however, in the US-former USSR context during the Cold War becomes strategic in the India-Pakistan case.

Countries wishing to deploy SSBNS should ideally possess at least three; but they are very expensive. There is no country in the world that thinks nuclear weapons are sacred. Only Pakistan believes in their omniscience and displays missiles as national symbols in its public art. Pakistan believes that nuclear weapons are the solution to all its problems.

What could India's options be in case Pakistan does indeed deploy TNWs? India must pay more heed to deterring Pakistan from taking any such action.

Neil Joeck
Visiting Scholar, Institute for International Studies at the University of California, Berkeley

TNWs fundamentally change the construct of conflict in South Asia. Pakistan is prepared to use nuclear weapons to defend against an Indian offensive than just using it as deterrence. This is important because it is a low probability event but of high consequences. Furthermore, the presumption of limits is mistaken. The cold war model of nuclear war may not apply in the India-Pakistan context. Regardless of where Pakistan is placed on the Nasr, the capability exists and it will use it.

In the case of India and Pakistan, multiple differences remain over Kashmir, terrorism, militancy, Afghanistan etc. The 1999 Kargil conflict experience proves that nuclear weapons do not necessarily deter conflict. The overkill/overhang may not be present. It is difficult to avoid the battlefield initiative. In 1999, the world witnessed some nuclear readiness. In 2001-02, it may have been seen as some opportunities missed by India.

However, it is important to remember that there is no territorial buffer zone in South Asia. On the technical front, Pakistan has made progress with Plutonium. Metaphorically speaking, there's no reverse/neutral gear in Pakistan's engine. Although the Nasr may not be ready now, it will be in due course. It brings us to the question: What is Pakistan's red line?

In a crisis, it may be more difficult to authorise the second strike than a first strike. The No First Use (NFU) is not the problem; the retaliatory strike is. Will there be proportional response? Will it be useful in terms of Indian public opinion? What if Pakistan uses nuclear weapons and India chooses not to respond? Essentially, a conspicuous stopping place has been removed. For example, once you cross the Line of Control (LoC), where is the next border? In that context, in a nuclear attack scenario, what is the second border?

Can India somehow enhance the nuclear taboo? Pakistan views an attack across the international LoC into Pakistan as a threat to the viability of the State. Is use of nuclear weapons useful for India? Also, doesn't Pakistan's use of nuclear weapons, while damaging for India, threaten to bring worse consequences to Pakistan itself?

Pakistan is paranoid that India is against the very idea of Pakistan. How can that perception be changed? How can one make it antithetical to Pakistan's interest to use nuclear weapons?

Furthermore, how does one signal restraint in case of conflict? How best to convey messages to the other side?

Rear Admiral (Retd.) Raja Menon

Chairman, Task Force on Net Assessment and Simulation, National Security Council Secretariat

Pakistan's journey in the nuclear arena has been an adventurous one. Ever since the inception of its nuclear program and ever since it established capabilities for nuclear technology, it has always managed to punch much beyond its range/reach. Pakistan originally decided to run its programme on a uranium bomb-line and then changed to Plutonium bomb-line.

Did Pakistan switch to Plutonium because they had a master plan to develop TNWs five years down the line or are they switching sides to make do and to keep the developments alive?

Pakistan's nuclear programme has become bigger. What made them get bigger ambitions? What did India do (or not do) to that end?

India-Pakistan transparency on arsenal is negligible. There is no conversation of hard facts between the two countries. The closest they came to do so was during a conference in Monterey organised after Operation Parakram. The problem is that Islamabad thinks they have deterred New Delhi when India shows restraint by choice – giving an impression of Pakistan's growing power, and thereby building a falsified confidence.

Pakistan has virtually modelled itself like the NATO. They feel their nuclear doctrine has been validated by the NATO experience and therefore feel it has validity. The Warsaw Pact is seen as successful but the Pact isn't successful. One can have nuclear doctrines that are hugely dangerous, but as long as they are perceived as something else, deterrence betides. If one allows invading forces to invade one's territory, one cannot use nuclear arsenal to get rid of them – essentially because the repercussions for those who belong to the said invaded territory will be greater than it will be for the invaders.

China has not been obstructionist but has indicated that its cooperation for the Pakistani nuclear programme ended at a certain date. However, that the Pakistani army is still developing shows that Chinese cooperation hasn't really ended.

What could India have done to deter nuclear proliferation? India doesn't believe there is a cold start but Pakistan does.

One statement that Pakistan repeatedly makes at various forums is something on the lines of 'we now see India leaving us behind'. It essentially means that the Pakistani army feels they are the sole defenders of Pakistan, and that the only thing that can stop India from invading Pakistan would be the Pakistani army and TNWs.

In the India-Pakistan context, the *cassus belli* is always terrorism and nothing but that. The bigger power is forced to rely on conventional punishment.

Prof Varun Sahni

Professor in International Politics, Centre for International Politics, Organization and Disarmament (CIPOD), Jawaharlal Nehru University

One could argue that policy dictates timing or vice versa. Pakistan's narrative/effort also stems from their perception that India is reluctant to accept Pakistan's capabilities to develop nuclear weapons.

States will not undertake research and developments for their nuclear weaponisation programmes below a certain kiloton of yield. Is the impact limited in the immediate battlefield?

Some of the problems with TNWs are:

1. Lowering the nuclear threshold: the blurring of distances between conventional and nuclear marks a shift from deterrence to war fighting.
2. The problem is that, here, the control is not like that of the high-level control of command, but that low-level officers too will hold control. Therefore, delegation will become risky.
3. There also is a 'use them or lose them' problem. The danger of TNWs falling into wrong hands is real; and if not the entire weapon, the fissile material.
4. Pakistan's use of state sponsored terrorism to change geographical status quo.

India must recognise that from Pakistan's point of view, they have from the start not just demonstrated first use intent, but also early use intent. Conventionally, Pakistan is the weaker power. Nuclear technology provides some amount of leverage. Pakistan isn't just a weaker power but also a homeland state with deep existential anxieties. What nuclear technology gives them is a sense of civilisational certitude apart from just parity. Pakistan's 'hum kisise kam nahi' (we are no less than anyone) attitude that is hardwired into their system has inertia and a propulsive power of its own. India had the same, earlier.

What does all this boil down to? Whether the Nasr has entered service or whether new ones are coming in the future, does not matter. It is significant because it has forced India to re-evaluate its strategy. There are four options:

1. Make ongoing counter-terrorism efforts more effective. The Rajasthan Rifles could keep getting better at what they do. If the number of good weeks in a year are more in number than the bad weeks in the same year, India is on the right track.
2. India must set up an authentic Special Forces capability. But this is easier said than done. India hasn't truly understood what the setting-up of an authentic Special Forces capability is. Of the three fighting forces, the Indian navy is the one that has come closest to understanding authentic Special Forces capability.
3. Attempting asymmetric warfare against Pakistan in a conventional manner. But that might not serve India's purpose in a long term.
4. Trying to create space for limited war under nuclear conditions. Here's where the entry of tactical nuclear weapons makes things more complicated.
5. An arms control agreement between India and Pakistan does not seem likely. This is essentially because there's no incentive for Pakistan to remove a red line that begins at the international border itself.
6. Both the Indian policy and analytics communities need to start taking the TNWs issue seriously. India still does not run scenarios well. There's no model building/simulation etc. Even in intellectual terms, India lacks core capabilities.

Discussion:

1. Pakistan's efforts could be part of a larger master plan where they work on all fronts and whichever is the most effective, will be used.
2. It is unlikely that Pakistan is pretending to have capabilities it doesn't have. One cannot expect China to prevent Pakistan from taking actions; and neither can the US decide Pakistani battlefield strategies. How

important is the cultural issue? What does it do the doctrines? Culture is something people avoid getting into because of the trickiness involved. How does culture connect to security? What about existential anxieties?

3. Pakistan does not have a non-India focus narrative for nuclear weapons.

4. Assuming Pakistan is not bluffing and does have TNWs, how must India react to it? They have 16,000 Lashkar-e-Taiba cadre on a leash and have done nothing spectacular since 2008. Is that something India must bank on? The Pakistani government has lesser and lesser control on their terrorists. The terrorists are autonomous now. A Pakistani deep state exists. For instance, Lieutenant-General (Retd.) Hamid Gul, former director general, Inter-Services Intelligence, still calls the shots in the agency. India should explore the option of developing TNWs, but doesn't need to. India and Pakistan have often gone to a conventional alert state – one that is very divorced from a nuclear alert state. Furthermore, on every occasion India has quoted that China is helping Pakistan, the information has always come from the US. Ever since the US stopped supplying information, India has not come up with anything.

5. Although they are used for tactical purposes, Special Forces must always be seen as fundamentally strategic rather than tactical. A lot is about perceptions. It is in Pakistan's interest to signal that the stopping place is where the Pakistani sarzameen begins. What we cannot ignore is that that's what the other side is signalling to us. Do we problematise the signals?

6. Pakistan isn't looking for battlefield advantage. It doesn't bring many desirable returns anyway. India shouldn't worry about early use. Any country that has first use has to signal early use. This constant nuclear signalling between India and Pakistan will continue. Pakistan believes that the threshold of nuclear use lies at the international border, whereas India believes that it is much further ahead (such as only when the existence of the state is being threatened). Does Pakistan feel India is going to invade them one fine morning because it wants to undo partition? No; but the Pakistani army is raised with this idea that the Indians will do so. However, there seems to be a change of heart, especially because their army chief recently stated that the biggest threat to the country is an internal one and not external. This is time for diplomacy to begin.

7. They fear their terrorists as much as India does. They fear that even if India doesn't desire to do anything to Pakistan, the internal disruptions in Pakistan that are becoming problematic for India will be dealt with by India, and according to New Delhi's terms. A case in point is the creation of Bangladesh. The Bangladesh crisis was fermented by Pakistan and India had to intervene for its own reasons despite not wanting to. Therefore, Pakistan feels that they themselves will create a situation wherein India will take advantage for whatsoever reasons.

8. Military modernisation has its own logical inertia. There could be professional interests. The imperfect analogy of linking everything to nuclear issues is the very problem with Pakistan. One mustn't look at everything via the nuclear issue prism because that could distract reality.

Concluding remarks:

Prof PR Chari
Visiting Professor, IPCS

Several actions of Pakistan, led by the Pakistani military, are not rational. What exactly did Pakistan hope to achieve in Kargil? Did they have a Plan B? What was the basis of their believing that India would do nothing in retaliation? What were their assessments of international repercussions? India took more casualties because the then ruling Atal Behari Vajpayee government wanted to secure a diplomatic victory. One needs to worry about Pakistan developing and deploying TNWs. Some irrational military commander could think of doing something drastic. They might feel that if India indulges in massive retaliation, then Pakistan could do the same, and if in the process India is destroyed, they have done their bit, even if Pakistan is destroyed in the process. What is Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's

overarching foreign policy agenda? He doesn't seem to have one with regard to nuclear policy. While we continue to speak of the potential destruction that could be caused by nuclear weapons, those very weapons are steadily being improved. Conventional war across the border is now as destructive as nuclear war. Very little has been said or written in this regard.

The answer to limited nuclear war or TNWs is not no nuclear weapons but no war.

Failed Nuclear Deal with Japan: Will it affect Indo-US Nuclear Cooperation?

19 September 2014

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While Modi's visit to Japan in early September yielded dividends in other sectors, it failed to accomplish on the nuclear deal between the two countries. Reactions (or the lack of them) from Washington DC are important and warrant analysis, as India's civilian nuclear cooperation with the US is stuck, primarily due to the Liability Bill issue.

Much depends how the US perceives and reacts to the India-Japan nuclear deal, for two reasons; Japan is one of the most important post-War allies of the US and secondly, Japan and the US share a common ground to cooperate with India through a civil nuclear deal.

US: Role Versus Reaction

The role of the US has been critical in influencing the India-Japan nuclear deal. Two developments in particular, the IAEA approval and the NSG waiver, were vital in effecting a change of heart in the global strategic community towards India's inclusion and acceptance as a nuclear responsible state. This change included Japan.

The reaction of the US, on the other hand, towards the failure of the India-Japan nuclear deal has been akin to one of a mute spectator and probably, deliberately so. The US, on expected lines, has kept restraint in showing its reactions over a nuclear deal in which Japan is involved, given the unfortunate nuclear history between the two countries. Such a measured response from the US is, probably, to find a balance between its desire to make India a more nuclear-responsible state, and the benefits that are likely to accrue to the US in the eventuality of an India-Japan nuclear deal.

The US itself has a significant nuclear cooperation with Japan primarily comprising research in fast reactor technology, fuel cycle technology, advanced computer simulation and modelling, small and medium reactors, safeguards and physical protection; and nuclear waste management. A common nuclear cooperation with India of both Japan and the US could result in a nuclear 'Coalition of the Willing.' A history of trilateral talks between India, Japan and the US since 2011, adds to this expectation. In cooperating with Japan and the US, India will stand to gain on a multilateral nuclear cooperation forum. In Japan, India also sees a potential supplier of reactors. Furthermore, interlinked economic stakes of the US and Japanese companies in nuclear cooperation makes it worth for India to bring the negotiations in this regard to a conclusive halt with Japan at the soonest. The US therefore, is expected to clandestinely influence the civil nuclear deal between India and Japan without showing either too much curiosity or disinterest, as there are many convergences between Japan and the US on their civ-nuke cooperation with India.

Behind the curtain cooperation?

There is a possibility that the US and Japan could be working behind the curtain to get India to the nuclear negotiating table, which it has thus far eschewed. The US understands that India's deal with Japan could be a noose that it can tighten anytime, particularly at a nascent stage when it is still being negotiated. Blocking India's civil nuclear deal with Japan is certainly not in the interest of the US, but delaying it might well prove useful. A prolonged delay in the deal could see an energy-deficit and frustrated India, with two

of its civil-nuclear cooperation efforts in limbo, willing to renegotiate the terms of the agreement. Evidence towards this lies in the September 17 announcement by Nisha Biswal that, “There is a very strong desire by this new government, and a very strong desire by the US, to work through those tough issues and to be able to make progress.”

The fact that the new government in India has shown a “strong desire” to work through “tough issues” related to the civ-nuke cooperation just after the failure to reach an agreement on the issue with Japan shows India’s diminishing patience with its unsuccessful civil-nuclear forays. An agreement with the US vis-à-vis the nuclear deal, which appears to be on the cards during Modi’s US visit, might well be the gateway to a similar deal with Japan.

The recent failure to finalise the deal with Japan is unlikely to cast its shadow on the much ballyhooed visit of Narendra Modi to the US. However, the civil nuclear cooperation between India and the US is expected to be a dominating issue.

Nuclear Use: Need for Thinking on Political-Level Considerations

5 August 2014

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In a recent op-ed, 'Counter Pak Nuke Tactics', nuclear strategy expert Manpreet Sethi rightly states in the conclusion that “The purpose of the Indian nuclear weapon is narrow and limited to safeguarding the country against nuclear coercion, blackmail or its possible use.”

Sethi, a long time Pakistan military-watcher, is spot-on in her understanding that Pakistan’s military is using the Nasr nuclear missile system to deter India from exercising its conventional advantage in case push comes to shove in the form of a mass terror attack, a’la Mumbai II. It would like to use this to catalyse foreign intervention into moderating India’s nuclear response.

Many analysts advocate that, faced with this challenge, India needs to reinforce its existing nuclear doctrine. The existing nuclear doctrine calls for inflicting unacceptable damage in retribution for Pakistani nuclear first use, even if this in the form of a lower order tactical nuclear strike. While many want to strengthen its credibility, a few, such as professors Basrur and Rajaraman, want a shift in thinking on what deters.

There is a consensus among the competing schools that nuclear retaliation must greet nuclear first use. The difference is in the nature of the nuclear retaliation. If Pakistan resorts to ‘asymmetric escalation’, to use Vipin Narang’s phrase for escalation across the nuclear firebreak between conventional and nuclear levels of war, the former school argues for holding out the threat of escalation. The argument goes that India can withstand the loss of a couple of cities; Pakistan having just a few, cannot. This will stay Pakistan’s nuclear finger, the objective of deterrence. All India needs to do is to ensure that it unmistakably conveys to Pakistan its implacable intention, even if it is at the risk of a few Indian cities.

However, with nuclear warheads in the lower three digits, Pakistan may venture bold to get even. Taking this seriously, the ‘flexible’ response school does not rule out consideration of proportionate response. They believe that the credibility of disproportionate response is questionable. But a proportionate response can be assured and serves to deter equally.

As can be seen, both sides base their arguments on strategic level considerations focused on deterrence. Strategists dealing with deterrence are at a level lower than the political, at which the political decision-maker functions. For a political decision-maker, theirs’ is an important input to inform the nuclear decision but not to determine it. At the political level there are also other considerations over and beyond deterrence. These must override input from the strategic level on the nature of nuclear response.

First are political consequences. The Indian way of life and India as we know it cannot be endangered inordinately. Losing a few cities can perhaps be absorbed, but the communities that have lost cities lose out on life chances. This is particularly so in relation to relatively unscathed neighbours. Perceiving that India has let them down, sub-nationalisms may come to fore.

Next are social consequences. These will be long-term from the perspective of environmental effects. The number of nuclear mushrooms that need to sprout across Pakistan to deprive it of a retaliatory capability, stashed away at locations numbering in two digits, will be at least 30. Since Pakistan has second strike capability, the ability to fire back even after receiving a debilitating nuclear strike, it would be able to lob back at least 20. Fifty bombs going off is half the total of the 100 that formed the basis for 2013 estimate by environmental scientists of two billion casualties from nuclear winter induced famine. The price will be paid at the cost of inter-generational equity.

Finally are strategic consequences. Winning the war is seldom as important as winning the peace. Though Pakistan will not be on the map, it will remain as a piece of land with severely disadvantaged people. India will have to bear the additional burden of its recuperation for its own stability. It will consequently have to abandon its dream of parity with China for at least half a century.

Given these political level considerations, the political decision-maker will have to outthink his strategic advisers. Strategists have a role to play. Their discharging this role is good for deterrence. They keep nuclear dangers at the fore, lest the adversary take these as bluff. However, political level considerations trump strategic level input.

Nuclear doctrine is primarily meant for deterrence. The 'massive' retaliation school emphasising the dreadful possibilities helps deter, since inexorable escalation can well occur. However, for an NFU abiding power such as India, nuclear employment will be when deterrence has failed. Therefore, a deterrence doctrine can at best inform, but not determine, nuclear weapons employment decisions.

Eschewing Cold War thinking helps in sealing off a particular direction, but does not tell which direction to go. While deterrence relevant considerations have found reflection in the discourse, missing is thinking on what the content and checklist political level considerations needs to be for India.

Global Nuclear Arsenals: Taking Stock of Current Trends

1 July 2014

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The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) released its annual data on the global trends and developments in world nuclear forces on 16 June, 2014. In its press release, the SIPRI had this to say: "The data shows that while the overall number of nuclear weapons in the world continues to decline, none of the nuclear weapon-possessing states are prepared to give up their nuclear arsenals for the foreseeable future."

Where do things stand? What does this appraisal signify for a nuclear weapons-free world, brought back into prominence by US President Barack Obama in 2009?

Status Report

As a concept and on paper, universal nuclear disarmament appears very attractive. However, five years after Obama's Prague speech on nuclear weapons, with the singular exception of the Nuclear Security Summit process, his call has not had many takers. This is demonstrated by the SIPRI press release. It illustrates, through a table, the cuts in the overall number of nuclear warheads across the world – according to it, they have gone down from approximately 17,270 in 2013 to 16,300 at the beginning of 2014. However, there is no significant visibility of interest from the nuclear weapons-possessing states in nuclear disarmament; in fact, the trend seems to suggest just the opposite. This is predicated largely on

the concomitant deployment or announcement of plans to develop new nuclear weapons delivery systems. In addition, India, China and Pakistan continue to expand their existing capacities for the generation of fissile material for military purposes. "Israel appears to be waiting to see how the situation in Iran develops," while "There is an emerging consensus in the expert community that North Korea has produced a small number of nuclear weapons, as distinct from rudimentary nuclear explosive devices."

What Does It Signify?

The US and Russia together account for 93 per cent of the global cache of nuclear weapons, and the reductions that the report takes account of are owing primarily to the cuts achieved under the aegis of the US-Russia Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms of 2011 (New START) and some unilateral actions. President Obama's Prague speech refocused attention on the abolition of nuclear weapons, but apart from rhetorical flourishes, it has failed to inspire any noteworthy reaction from the other nuclear weapons-possessing states.

This is likely to be the trend for the foreseeable future for several reasons.

The unfortunate fact is that there exist developments that are counter to the reductions achieved by the US and Russia. While the cutback in the number of nuclear weapons is a mean feat by itself, it means little in the context of increasing sources of global insecurity. For example, advancements in delivery systems and missile defence by some states can motivate states with weaker capabilities to also seek modernisation. Perceived irresponsible behavior could also prompt a re-think and/or rationalise national missile defence strategies, such as in the case of the US missile defence after the Russian annexation of Crimea. Conventional asymmetries too provide the necessary justification for an expanding nuclear arsenal, like in the case of India and Pakistan. These developments thus very firmly reaffirm the salience of nuclear weapons despite an overall reduction in their numbers.

Deterrence with a much smaller arsenal is viewed as debilitating for stability by many commentators. Also, given the centrality of nuclear weapons in national security discourses, it is difficult to imagine the longevity of a parallel effort that would be focused on their reduction, and eventual elimination.

"Disarmament presupposes successful non-proliferation," (Dr Christopher Ford, "Too Little Disarmament, Too Much Non-Proliferation," session at the Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference, 08 April 2013) and increasing proliferation risks deal it a huge blow. With threats such as nuclear terrorism by non-state/sub-state actors gaining more notoriety, and the reality of outlier states such as North Korea following their own nuclear weapons trajectory irrespective of global trends, it has been argued that a legally binding treaty as a follow-on to New START is doubtful. It has also been argued that in any further negotiations between the US and Russia, the (developing) nuclear arsenals of the other possessors would have to be addressed in some manner. Conversely, this has been disputed on the basis of the American and Russian cuts as simply not being sufficient to motivate other states to follow suit.

Thus, while the logic for disarmament and the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons makes immense sense, its prospects, at least in the immediate and near term, seems unsurprisingly bleak.

India-US: Nuclear Ayatollahs and the Politics of Non-proliferation

17 July 2014

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In a completely partisan and somewhat condescending editorial in early-July 2014, The New York Times wrote: "If India wants to be part of the nuclear suppliers group, it needs to sign the treaty that prohibits nuclear testing, stop producing fissile material, and begin talks with its rivals on nuclear weapons containment."

The editorial is sharply critical of and vehemently opposes India's efforts to acquire membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). It bases its criticism on a report by IHS Jane's that India is in the process of enhancing its capacity to enrich uranium – ostensibly to power the nuclear reactors on the INS Arihant and future SSBNs, but much in excess of the requirement. This, the editorial says, is causing anxiety to the Pakistanis and has raised the spectre of an arms race in Southern Asia.

It is obvious that the editorial writer understands neither the background to nor the present context of India's nuclear deterrence. As stated in a letter written by then Prime Minister AB Vajpayee to US President Bill Clinton after India's nuclear tests at Pokhran in May 1998 (in an unfriendly act, the letter was leaked to the media by the White House), the primary reason for India's acquisition of nuclear weapons was the existential threat posed by two nuclear-armed states on India's borders with both of which India had fought wars over territorial disputes. The China-Pakistan nuclear and missile nexus, including the clandestine transfer of technology from China to Pakistan, has irrevocably changed the strategic balance in Southern Asia by helping Pakistan to neutralise India's superiority in conventional forces and has helped Pakistan to wage a proxy war under its nuclear umbrella.

Since then, the nuclear environment in Southern Asia has been further destabilised. China's ASAT (anti-satellite weapons) test, BMD (ballistic missile defence) programme, efforts aimed at acquiring MIRV (multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle) capability and ambiguity in its no first use (NFU) commitment, while simultaneously rapidly modernising the PLA (People's Liberation Army) and its efforts to establish a 'string of pearls' by way of ports in the Indian Ocean, are a cause for concern for India. Similarly, Pakistan is engaged in the acquisition of 'full spectrum' nuclear capability, including a triad and tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs), which invariably lower the threshold of use. Pakistan has stockpiled a larger number of nuclear warheads (100 to 110) than India (80 to 90) and is continuing to add to its numbers as it has been given unsafeguarded nuclear reactors by China. In view of several mujahideen attacks on Pakistan's armed forces' establishments during the last few years, there is apprehension in the international community, entirely justified, that some of Pakistan's nuclear warheads could fall into jihadi hands.

Some statements made by IHS Jane's in its report are factually incorrect. The research group has assessed that the new Indian uranium enrichment facility at the Indian Rare Metals Plant near Mysore would enhance India's ability to produce 'weapons-grade' uranium to twice the amount needed for its planned nuclear-powered SSBN fleet. The report does not say how the research group arrived at this deduction. Also, the nuclear power reactors of SSBNs require uranium to be enriched only up to 30 to 40 per cent. Weapons-grade uranium must be enriched to levels over 90 per cent.

For the record, the Government of India has denied reports that it is 'covertly' expanding its nuclear arsenal. An Indian official told The Hindu (Atul Aneja, "India trashes report on covert nuclear facility," 22 June 2014) that the report was "mischievously timed" as it came just before a meeting of the NSG. He said, "It is interesting that such reports questioning India's nuclear credentials are planted at regular intervals."

The US Government also dismissed the report ("US dismisses report on India covertly increasing nukes", The Hindu, 21 June 2014) as "highly speculative." The US State Department Spokesperson said, "We remain fully committed to the terms of the 123 agreement and to enhancing our strategic relationship. Nothing we provide to India under the civ-nuke agreement may be used to enhance India's military capability or add to its military stockpile..."

The Indo-US civil nuclear cooperation agreement of 2005 gives an exemption to India's nuclear weapons facilities and stockpiles of nuclear weapons fuel from inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and India is at liberty to set up additional military facilities using unsafeguarded materials if these are considered necessary. India has agreed to bring 14 nuclear power reactors under international safeguards. Eight military facilities, including reactors, enrichment and reprocessing facilities and three heavy water reactors will remain out of the purview of IAEA safeguards.

India has been a responsible nuclear power and has a positive record on non-proliferation. India has consistently supported total nuclear disarmament and is in favour of negotiations for the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT). Non-proliferation ayatollahs should channelise their efforts towards identifying and shaming the real proliferators.

INS Arihant: A 'Giant Stride' for India?

16 June 2014

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When the INS Arihant's nuclear reactor went critical in August 2013, India not only joined the blue-water navy club of countries with the capability to build nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines, but also picked on a major doctrinal headache. This, apart from the specification concerns and limited intended utility, puts the Indian Advanced Technological Vessel (ATV) programme in a quagmire. With the Indian Navy expecting to acquire and deploy the vessel in the first quarter of 2015, certain aspects of this project must be discussed to gauge New Delhi's capability to field and utilise such technology.

Manufacturing

The ATV project is believed to have been started with the objective of manufacturing SSNs –fast moving deep-diving nuclear powered attack submarines – largely based on the K-43 Charlie class vessel, leased from the Soviet Union at a time when India did not overtly possess nuclear capability. The project since then has been covertly developing in the backdrop of India conducting the Pokhran-II tests, declaring an ambiguous nuclear strategy, and making impressive strides in the development of Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs). The Arihant class seems to be a derivative of the Charlie class, with the specifications scaled up to the Akula class to accommodate a Vertical Launch System (VLS) for ballistic missiles. Although this would not hamper the general functioning of the vessel, as per reports of the sea trials, the full implications of this tweak will only emerge when the Sagarika SLBMs are integrated into the of the INS Arihant in early 2015. Furthermore, the inclusion of sail planes and a towed array pod are surprising, as they are generally avoided to counter limitations to speed and fragility.

The pressurised water reactor (PWR) aboard the vessel has also been developed with considerable assistance from the Russians, contradicting New Delhi's claims of the Arihant being an indigenously developed submarine. With no word on the progress of a domestic generator in India, the Arihant class's core component still uses Russian intelligence and technology. The initial vessel consumed more than a decade to be rolled out for primary tests, as opposed to the average five years taken for the development of vessels of the same class/category by the five other navies that possess this technology.

With the first vessel of the Arihant class still undergoing final trials, India's decision to start work on subsequent vessels is a little hurried. An ideal strategy would have been to concentrate on finishing the INS Arihant and observing it in a deployed state and then diverting time and resources on the succeeding vessels. If the claims of the INS Aridhaman (second vessel in the Arihant class) being built with 'bigger and better' specifications is true, then the Indian government has not taken any pointers from this endeavour and embarked on a new project without successfully completing the first. In any case, the US\$ 2.9 billion per unit price of the vessel does not justify its results, especially in comparison with other navies building the same submarine at a significantly lower price.

Utility: Intended Vs. Delivered

Former Naval Chief Nirmal Verma described the INS Arihant as primarily a 'technology demonstrator'. However, it remains to be seen as to what 'technology' the vessel will be demonstrating. A simple comparison of the Arihant with other submarines of comparable class/category will reflect this issue. The Arihant has an advertised maximum speed of only 24kts (submerged), as opposed to the average 30kts afforded by all the other classes. Not only does this reflect poorly on India's – DRDO and BARC's –

technological capabilities, but also impedes the operational capability of the vessel. Once discovered, the propellant potential becomes the deciding factor for the survivability of a submarine.

Also, the armament capacity of the INS Arihant is acutely inferior, with the vessel only fielding 12 K-15 short-range SLBMs. In contrast, the Astute, the Virginia and the Akula class all have provisions for at least 40 missiles.

With its slow speed and limited strike range, INS Arihant does not contribute significantly to India's second-strike capability, with both China and Pakistan fielding advanced anti-missile and early warning systems.

Doctrinal Shortcomings

The INS Arihant poses a new dilemma for the Modi government. For 'credible minimum deterrence', New Delhi is believed to have kept its nuclear weapons in a 'de-mated' state with the civilian authority exercising absolute control. For a ballistic nuclear submarine, the government will not only have to increase the readiness of the weapons, but also relinquish their command to naval officers on board the vessel. This increases the possibility of an unauthorised/erroneous launch. Also absent are well-defined protocols to dictate the steps to be taken in the event of a communications failure with the central command authority, or dealing with a hostile take-over. The INS Arihant is a classic example of governments going into the production stage of weapons without developing concomitant doctrines.

The INS Arihant maybe a landmark achievement, but it cannot stand up to China's newest Jin class vessels, reported to be one of the current best. Similarly, the implication of inducting a nuclear submarine in the Indian Navy on Pakistan remains to be seen. There are already talks of Beijing selling submarines and technology to Pakistan. In that case, the INS Arihant has only initiated another arms race in the region.

India and No First Use: Does 'Calculated Ambiguity' Help?

30 April 2014

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Since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) released its election manifesto that promises to "study in detail India's nuclear doctrine, and revise and update it, to make it relevant to challenges of current times," and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called for a global no first use (NFU) of nuclear weapons, there has much speculation on the subject of India's NFU policy.

The nuclear programme mandate that the BJP has delineated for itself, should it come to power in 2014, pins itself on the changing security scenario in South Asia. Pakistan, with its increasing nuclear stockpile and emphasis on tactical nuclear weapons, has tried to demoralise the retaliatory Indian nuclear deterrent. The most significant of the implied revisions is to its NFU policy, which is considered the bedrock of India's declaratory policy as couched in its nuclear doctrine.

Flexibility of Response

India's 2003 press statement says, "However, in the event of a major attack against India, or Indian forces anywhere, by biological or chemical weapons, India will retain the option of retaliating with nuclear weapons." There are two concerns here: one, what defines 'major'? Two, a literal interpretation of the statement means that India's first response to a chemical and/or biological weapons attack will be via the use of nuclear weapons – technically, this is in fact 'nuclear' first use, which diminishes the credibility of India's nuclear deterrent. This may have been a deliberate attempt to dilute the 1999 stand on NFU but the reasons for it have not been publicly stated, giving credence to the argument that India's own 2003 statement makes its NFU pledge ambiguous.

This could have dangerous implications for nuclear postures and arsenals. Damaging this credibility further is the justified scepticism about India actually using nuclear weapons against a chemical and/or biological attack. Quite apart from the kind of response, how will the source of the attack be determined?

The argument against this line of thought is that Pakistan could always use the 'lack of credibility' as an excuse to justify the further development of its nuclear arsenal, and therefore the Indian nuclear doctrine is perfectly adequate in its current form. Additionally, the sense in qualifying the NFU through the threat of use of nuclear weapons against a chemical and/or biological attack is to deter the eventuality of such attacks being sponsored by Pakistan.

Accidental Nuclear Escalation

While India's nuclear policy has the country's civilian leadership at the top of the command and control structure, in the event of a crisis, conventional forces may prompt inadvertent escalation. As Vipin Narang writes in "Five Myths about India's Nuclear Posture" (The Washington Quarterly, Summer 2013), this may be by targeting the adversary without knowing (or caring to know) whether these targets are conventional or nuclear, and without prior political authorisation. Such an action will of course have huge implications: through the use of its own conventional abilities against a nuclear-armed adversary, India could trigger nuclear first use – either by putting the adversary in a 'use-it-or-lose it' situation or by causing an unintended 'nuclear detonation'.

Election Posturing?

The draft Indian nuclear doctrine was promulgated in 1999 and the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) released a press statement in 2003. Significantly, the draft doctrine and the press release were both undertaken while the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government was in power. The sudden mention of India's weapons programme - which is rarely discussed in public - at this critical time, can be read most importantly as posturing for elections. The BJP has sought to re-claim ownership of the doctrine and rebuke the Congress for having 'frittered away' the 'strategic gains' made under Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's leadership. Manmohan Singh's statement therefore seems to be an attempt at responsible nuclear pledge-making in the run-up to the elections.

It must also be noted however that that the BJP had made similar promises in its election manifesto of 1998, which it delivered upon. Interestingly, although the election manifesto offers a blanket doctrinal review, with no mention of the NFU, analysts have been quick to specifically argue the merits and demerits of the NFU. If the BJP wins the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, it may keep its word and undertake a review of the nuclear doctrine. There have long been calls for a US Nuclear Posture Review style exercise in India by security analysts to review and update the doctrine in response to the dynamism of the regional security environment. This would therefore be a very welcome move, given the increasingly complex security scenario, which includes the presence of tactical nuclear weapons (Pakistan's Hatf-9), concomitant command and control issues, non-state actors (not sponsored by the State establishment) and sub-state actors (allegedly sponsored by the State establishment).

Even if there is a review or revision of the Indian nuclear doctrine, the NFU itself is unlikely to change, seeing as its current form serves the purpose of 'calculated ambiguity' rather well - although it is unclear whether this ambiguity is calculated or accidental. It remains to be seen whether the associated dangers (of a flexible response) are given equal consideration in the event of a review.



AL QAEDA, TALIBAN AND THE ISLAMIC STATE



Pak-Afghan Reset: Will the Taliban and al Qaeda follow?

11 December 2014

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Following the visits of Pakistan's National Security Advisor, Chief of Army Staff and the ISI Chief to Kabul, and then of the new Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to Islamabad – all in space of last two months, there seems to be a positive movement in the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Ashraf Ghani's visit to Pakistan in November 2014, and his meetings with Nawaz Sharif and Raheel Sharif have been reported as a big success by the local media.

There is optimism across the Durand Line that the bilateral relations are ready for a positive reset. And this is a welcome development.

But this positive development is likely to face a stiff challenge from the multiple Taliban factions and their supporters in Pakistan. The real question would be – whether the above two sections see the Pak-Afghan reset between Kabul, Islamabad and Rawalpindi as a part of their Endgame, or against their interests.

Afghan Taliban and the Pak-Afghan reset

After the bilateral visits identified above, there were two major suicide attacks in eastern Afghanistan. The first one in a play ground where the Afghans were watching a volley ball match, and the second one on a British embassy vehicle; both attacks killed more than 60 people together. The attacks signify that the multiple Taliban factions have their own agenda and may not be along the same lines on a Pak-Afghan reset. With the multiple Taliban factions well entrenched and having safe havens on both sides of the Durand Line, an Endgame not in sync with the State, efforts would be detrimental to the larger push and only undermine the regional stability.

None of the multiple Taliban factions – the Quetta Shura, the Haqqani Network and the TTP, have any successful dialogues with the governments in either Pakistan or Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban – led by the Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network, until now have shown no signs of reaching any understanding with the government in Afghanistan.

There were two parallel processes with the Afghan Taliban – one within Afghanistan, and the second one outside it. During the previous regime, Hamid Karzai, with approval from a Loya Jirga established an Afghan Peace Council to dialogue with the Taliban. Multiple meetings at formal and informal levels reached nowhere; the process only saw more targeted killings of the members of the Peace Council. Until today, there have been no signs of the Afghan Taliban wanting to engage the government in any meaningful dialogue.

Outside Afghanistan, there was an international process in engaging the Afghan Taliban, initially involving multiple actors in Europe, but finally settling with the US taking lead through Qatar. Referred as the Qatar process, this initiative also did not succeed. Though Karzai was blamed for scuttling this process, in retrospect, it appears that the Afghan Taliban was not interested in any successful engagement.

Perhaps, the Afghan Taliban has been bidding time and waiting for an opportune time. Early this year, it was waiting for the elections to take place and see the process fail. Despite the two rounds of elections and the huge crisis that followed between the two contenders – Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, thanks to the American pressure and the pragmatism shown by both groups, today Kabul is stable. Certainly the Afghan Taliban did not expect this. It should have been expecting an unstable political process, indirectly supporting its return to Kabul.

Now, the Afghan Taliban is likely to wait further till the end of 2014 and the complete withdrawal of international security forces. With gaps in Afghanistan's counter-insurgency grid and the question over the continued international assistance to sustain the Afghan National Security Forces, all that the Taliban has to do is to wait for some more time.

Also, the Afghan Taliban should find the international situation in its favour. Recent developments in Syria and Iraq have already started changing the focus of the international community from Afghanistan to Middle East. The international community considers the ISIL and not the al Qaeda and Taliban as a major threat to international stability. Such a perception should be seen as an opportunity by the Quetta Shura and Haqqani network alike. The international community may have the watch, but the Taliban has all the time.

What will be the endgame for the multiple Afghan Taliban factions towards the Afghan-Pakistan reset? If they are bidding time to strike, can they be brought on board by Kabul, Islamabad and Rawalpindi? And, can the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan be really reset, without the Afghan Taliban being onboard?

Taliban Supporters in Pakistan

At this moment, it is also not clear that the supporters of the Afghan Taliban within the Establishment (military and the ISI) in Pakistan. The question by Sartaj Aziz that why Pakistan should target those groups which are not fighting them should not be seen as an individual perspective. A substantial section within Pakistan (and its Establishment) considers that the Afghan Taliban is not a threat to them. In fact, they are perceived as a strategic asset vis-a-vis Kabul to achieve Pakistan's long term interest.

There is no evidence to believe that the supporters of Afghan Taliban in Pakistan have completely changed their minds and are willing to look at Afghanistan in a different framework. Is Pakistan today ready to give up the Taliban and its leaders who are hiding in various parts of Pakistan? This will be the most important factor in any Pak-Afghan reset.

Unless the Haqqani network is dismantled and other Afghan Taliban leaders are handed over to Afghanistan, there is no reason for anyone to believe that the Taliban backers within Pakistan's Establishment have a changed mindset today.

Role of the Pakistani Taliban

Besides the Afghan Taliban, there also is a strong network of Pakistan Taliban. Though divided into multiple factions, the Pakistani Taliban have been using Afghanistan as a backyard for their offensives east of the Durand Line. Most of them, even today consider Mullah Omar as their Supreme Leader.

Like that of the Afghan Taliban, Pakistani Taliban also entered into multiple dialogues, including the latest one early this year. None of these dialogues achieved any major breakthrough; the TTP used as a strategy to divide the public opinion within Pakistan and confuse the larger national debate.

The larger question that needs to be addressed in this context is: what is likely to be the endgame of the TTP factions, if Islamabad and Kabul decide to reset their relations? Will they abide the larger relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and decide to give up their arms?

A section within Pakistan would even prefer the multiple factions of the TTP to join the Afghan Taliban and fight on the other side of the Durand Line. If Afghanistan becomes stable, with or without Mullah Omar and Haqqani network, what will Fazlullah and Khorasani in Swat and Mohmand do? What will the Punjabi fighters of the TTP, refereed as the Punjabi Taliban do, if Kabul, Islamabad and Rawalpindi decide to work together?

And what about the al Qaeda?

Finally, a short note on the likely response from the al Qaeda to Pakistan-Afghanistan reset. With a serious challenge from the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq to its international credibility within the jihadi world, and sections of the Taliban fighters willing to join the IS in Pakistan, the al Qaeda also is facing an existential challenge in South Asia. Given its investments and entrenchment in the Af-Pak region, and given the challenge to its supremacy in the Middle East, the al Qaeda is likely to refocus more within South Asia. The announcement of the al Qaeda network in South Asia by al Zawahiri recently is no coincidence.

Will the al Qaeda take a backseat and applaud the Afghan-Pakistan reset? Or will it use its network across the Durand Line to upset any understanding between the two countries? Pakistan and Afghanistan have taken a first step to restore the much wanted normalcy between the two countries. Will they also succeed in restraining the multiple Taliban factions, al Qaeda and their supporters in the Establishment? The success of the first rests on the second.

Myanmar: Why the Islamic State Failed Here

19 November 2014

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The Islamic State (IS) unilaterally declared an 'Islamic Caliphate' in Iraq and Syria in June 2014. This has resulted in the increase in the numbers of radicalised Muslims from all over the world travelling to the region to support the IS, and Southeast Asia is no exception.

According to reports, there are roughly 30 Malaysians, 60 Indonesians, 50 Filipinos, one Cambodian and a few Singaporeans have already joined the IS. However, there are barely any reports that cite Muslims from Myanmar having joined terrorist group. Why is that the case? Why are there low or negligible numbers of radical Islamist jihadists joining the IS from Myanmar? What are the general sentiments the Myanmarse Muslims foster towards the IS?

The Anti-Muslim Sentiment Factor

The growth of anti-Muslim sentiment in Myanmar to some extent thrives on the misinformed notion that most Muslims encourage terrorism. The presence of militant and secessionist groups such as Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO), the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) and a newly formed fundamental group called the Arakan Mujahedeen (AM) have resulted in the development of such a perception. Muslims in Myanmar are aware of this notion and that radical Buddhists misuse the sentiment.

Thus, Myanmarse Muslims know and feel that any news of anyone from their community's involvement in any kind of terrorist activity would worsen the already bad situation for them; especially given their small number (approximately four per cent) in comparison to the majority Buddhists (approximately 89 per cent).

Although there are grievances among Muslims over the use of violence against their community in various riots that have taken place since 2012, most of them feel that violence is not a good medium of response.

This became clear when the London based Myanmarse Muslim association became the first to announce their denial to support any al Qaeda dream to "raise the flag of Jihad" across South Asia, and stated that Myanmarse Muslims will never accept any assistance from a terrorist organisation.

Lack of Vanguard?

In Southeast Asian countries, most jihadist recruiters are home-grown terrorist organisations. In Myanmar, both the RSO and the ARNO are too weak to play this role. The AM, although armed, so far claims to want to achieve political emancipation of the Rohingya Muslims via political means as opposed to resorting to violence. The RSO, which shifted its base to Bangladesh after the 1977 Nagamin operation in Myanmar, has thrived due to support from the Islami Chhatra Shibir, a wing of Bangladesh's Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) and also from Jemaah Islamiya (JI). Heavy crackdowns by the incumbent Awami League government in Dhaka, both on the JeI and the RSO, and the disintegration of the JI into several smaller and weaker groups are among the reasons for present state of the RSO.

Significant numbers of Myanmarese Muslims are naturalised citizens of the country; and even for those who are full citizens, restrictions are placed on travel simply because they belong to a minority religion. Thus, travelling to Iraq and Syria is only possible via Bangladesh, and that too, only illegally. This is no other viable option given Dhaka's strict vigilance measures. Furthermore, the lack of support from recruiters too deters most radicalised Myanmarese Muslims from traveling to unknown lands to wage jihad.

Lower Levels of Ideological Indoctrination?

Both the RSO and the ARNO were formed with an aim to create a separate state for Rohingya Muslims as opposed to waging jihad. Economic and political segregation were the bases of the formation of these groups. They were introduced to the concept of 'global jihad' only after their link up with al Qaeda and the JI.

However, both organisations were not influential enough, and not based in Myanmar, resulted in their failure to instil their extremist ideology among the locals. Thus, unlike other terrorist organisations in Southeast Asia, the RSO and the ARNO did not manage to anchor the extremist ideology in their home ground.

The large numbers of Southeast Asian Muslims who travelled to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia for Islamic education in 1990s were the ones who brought the seeds of radical Islam to the region. Myanmar was an exception in this case. Factors such as globalisation, urbanisation, and westernisation that, in the 1990s, led other Southeast Asian Muslims to travel abroad to study religion, did not influence the Myanmarese. This was because Myanmar, during that period, was under the military Junta rule, and as a result, was cut off from the rest of the world.

Many madrassas in Indonesia, Malaysia and southern Thailand also function as media for the dissemination of jihadist ideology. In Myanmar, the presence of such madrassas preaching radicalised interpretations of Islam are only restricted to the northern areas of the Arakan province; and here too, the numbers are trivial. Thus, it appears that Myanmar so far lacks the necessary apparatus key to create a conducive environment for the growth and grip of radical Islam – which also explains the limited influence, the IS's propaganda for 'global jihad' has had on Myanmarese Muslims.

Fighting Foreign Fighters: New Legislations

13 November 2014

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Over the course of this year, the threat of Islamist terror changed dramatically for the worse. 13,000 people who do not belong either to Syria, or Iraq, now fight for the terrorist group, the Islamic State (IS) in its battles in Syria and Iraq. A multilateral approach to tackle and eliminate security issues arising from terrorism is therefore pressing.

In September 2014, the UN Security Council and its member states agreed on Resolution 2178. The resolution condemns violent extremism and urges international cooperation to prevent foreign fighters from travelling to and from conflict areas. It aims at preventing the "recruiting, organizing, transporting or equipping of individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the

purpose of the perpetration, planning of, or participation in terrorist acts". It is a binding agreement that requires all member states to implement changes in their national laws. The changes are expected to make it possible for the said States to impose stricter border controls and restrain people – from travelling to or transit through their territories – if they have “credible information that provides reasonable grounds” to believe that the person is involved in terrorism activities.

The Resolution was passed unanimously without any debate. However, what does the Resolution actually entail? Is it possible to implement laws on foreign nationals without compromising democratic values?

Considering the numbers of foreign fighters and the fear they generate is a reason in itself to agree to Resolution 2178 because it would be counter-productive to veto a move that intends to combat international threats? Furthermore, whether or not Resolution 2178 will have successful outcomes depends on how anti-terrorism laws are enforced by every individual country.

What stands out among anti-terrorism laws in several countries is the restriction on travel to conflict areas and the increase in surveillance. How countries choose to respond to the legally binding agreements, varies. In order to prevent foreign fighters from crossing borders, the Australian government has implemented strict travel laws. Suspected terrorists captured during their travel to what the Australian Bill refers to as ‘no-go-zones’, without a valid reason can result in imprisonment for 10 years.

The Bill also allows the police to detain suspects for 14 days with any specific charges as long as there is suspicion of criminal conduct. However, Resolution 2178 does not specifically outline the definition of criminal conduct or terrorism. Thus, there is scope for racial profiling to take place, given how member states can relate criminal conducts and define potential terrorists according to their own preferences and national laws. According to Marina Portnaya, Correspondent, Russia TV, this allows countries to monitor and use more targeted surveillance against people in the name of international security.

The unclear wording of the Resolution leaves room for countries to be biased, and decide whom to target, based on their own preferences. This can result in excuses for countries to implement repressive measures. In addition to racial profiling, the Resolution can end up giving law enforcement officers new tools to deal with activists or separatist groups by labelling them as terrorists according to their thoughts and beliefs rather than their actions. Additionally, governments have the authority to block websites that defend or encourage terrorism, exclusive of court orders, with imprisonment as the consequence. Critics view this as an attack on democratic rights and that innocent people become stripped of their rights regarding freedom of expression.

Another critique of Resolution 2178 is about the freedom of movement. Increased surveillance allows the legalisation of the collection of photographs at airports, and airlines will be legally obliged to pass on information about passengers flying to/from conflict areas. One of the concerns expressed has been that the restrictions on travelling to ‘no-go-zones’ can lead to the criminalisation of innocent people who genuinely go to visit family or friends.

The French Senate and its anti-terrorism laws authorised in mid-October better prepare the authorities to impose restrictions on citizens when there is a reason to believe that people are partaking or planning acts of terror. Any suspicion results in the potential listing of names on the Schengen Information System, imprisonment up to three years, and a \$58,000 fine. Immigrant support organisations and human rights groups are concerned that these laws will affect migration because the Bill allows the governments to deny foreign nationals viewed as “undesirable” access to the country. Human rights specialist Simon Slama argues that France’s fear of terrorism will be taken advantage of by the government as a means to strengthen border controls and decrease immigration into the EU, especially putting restrictions on people from eastern European countries.

Regardless of the critiques, countries have legal backing for their laws because Resolution 2178 is a binding agreement adopted by the UN Security Council, which means that violation of the Resolution would imply violation of international laws. Human rights organisations might find it frustrating, but the vaguely-worded language and flexible definitions allow countries to design anti-terrorism laws to their own advantage and implement laws that suit their national politics. What is surprising is the extent to which governments are willing to compromise democratic values for the sake of security, as long as they have an international law to fall back on.

“Britain Belongs to Allah”: Anjem Choudary and His Supporters

31 October 2014

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“We don’t abide by British rule.” “Sharia is the law of God, and should be implemented in the whole world.” “The ‘flag of Sharia’ will eventually fly over Downing Street.” These are statements voiced by the radical preacher, Anjem Choudary, in the UK.

What do Choudary and his supporters seek?

Anjem Choudary, a 47 year-old British Muslim of Pakistani descent born in England, is a former lawyer and founding member of proscribed Islamist groups like al-Muhajiroun and Islam4UK. These groups were banned based on government evidence of them operating as terrorist organisations with links to al Qaeda. According to Hope Not Hate, Choudary represents “the single biggest gateway to terrorism in recent British history.”

His support base is prominent. According to a recent poll by ICM Research, 40 per cent of 500 Muslim families that were surveyed expressed support for the establishment of strict Sharia laws in the UK. Policy Exchange reveals that one-third of the domestic Muslim youth would happily succumb to Sharia. According to Henry Jackson Society, 18 per cent of people linked to acts of terror have had associations with Choudary’s banned organisations. Hope Not Hate reveals that 200-300 supporters from Choudary’s European network have left to fight in Syria. His guidance has resulted in an indoctrination of vulnerable youth who have devoted themselves to terrorism in the UK and abroad.

The shared views of Choudary and sections of the British Muslim population who are his supporters have been well documented by the media. However, whether these supporters extend solidarity to Choudary because they genuinely believe in him or whether it is because of the cause he represents, is unclear. Jihad is considered a just war, and like Choudary, his supporters believe that the IS will surface as the winning power. They may not directly believe in Choudary as a person, but they seek the same end: a worldwide Islamic Caliphate.

If Sharia offers such an exceptional way of living, why is Choudary still living in Britain? When confronted with whether he should leave Britain, Choudary says, “Why should I? I was born here.” It is this supposedly oppressive apartheid system that, according to Choudary, impedes him from leaving; apparently if he decides to go, he will be arrested and his passport confiscated. “Muslims are imprisoned over here. We can’t travel abroad,” says Choudary. How then does he travel to Spain and France for Islamic conferences?

Choudary cheers for Muslims to quit their jobs and request unemployment benefits. He despises the country he lives in, but contentedly receives welfare benefits provided by the state. UK’s Terrorism Act 2000 categorises terrorism as the use of threat to intimidate or influence the government, organisations or the public with “the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause.” Choudary somehow seems to stay on the right side of law. On occasions where he has been linked to convicted terrorists like Habib Ahmed (convicted for membership with al-Aqeda), Choudary has proclaimed that these people left his groups prior to the conviction, and he cannot therefore be held responsible for their actions. Thus, as a former lawyer, Choudary probably knows his way around British law so as to avoid prosecution for his provocative views on race relations and religion. However, there have been debates on whether his hate speeches should be met with resistance by law enforcement officers.

In 2010, the Terrorism Act led to the banning of Islam4UK, based on accusation of the group’s controversial statements about the 9/11 attacks and the 7/7 bombings. Choudary openly condemned the act, saying, “We are now being targeted as an extremist or terrorist organisation and even banned for merely expressing that. I feel this is a failure of the concept of democracy and freedom.” On the contrary, Choudary said in an interview with Iranian Press TV: “As Muslims, we reject democracy, we reject secularism, and freedom, and human rights.” However, it is this democracy that allows Choudary to use his freedom of speech and make controversial statements.

On 25 September, Choudary and eight other radicals were arrested in an anti-terror raid, based on the accusation of their support for banned organisations and for encouraging terrorism. However, Choudary was later released on bail. According to Choudary, the arrest was nothing more than a politically motivated move for the government to gain votes on Iraqi airstrikes, and went as far as to say that this bloody war will eventually “manifest itself on the streets of London.” In a multicultural society like Britain, views similar to Choudary’s have proved difficult to silence. An interesting question to ask is: if Britain were to adopt Sharia, how would people like Choudary react to hate speech against its state, and would the same rights to protest that radical Muslims enjoy today be granted in such a state?

Islamic State and Foreign Fighters: Jihadists from Central Asia

27 October 2014

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As violent jihadist activities in Syria and Iraq intensify, the number of foreign nationals enrolling to fight for the Islamic State (IS) is witnessing an exponential growth. The case of Central Asian jihadists - fighters who are nationals of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan - joining the Islamic State (IS) is interesting, especially given the political history of the region’s neighbourhood. Despite the involvement of Central Asian-origin people in the insurgency in Afghanistan over the past few years, several Central Asian radical Islamists have chosen to travel to Syria and Iraq instead of the former. There is a need to understand why nationals of Central Asian countries are joining the IS.

Central Asian Jihadists in Syria and Iraq

Today, there are an estimated 31,500 jihadists who fight under the IS’s banner in Syria and Iraq. Approximately 15,000 of them are estimated to be foreign fighters and 2000 of them are pitted as from Western countries. While the numbers of nationals of Western countries joining the IS are easier to find, the numbers of their Central Asian counterparts are comparatively difficult to obtain and/or ascertain. Some recent estimates pit the number at anywhere between 3000-4000, with Tajiks constituting the largest chunk. According to reports, there are about “250 Kazakh citizens, 100 Kyrgyz, 190 Tajiks, 500 Uzbeks, and about 360 Turkmen fighting alongside ISIS extremists,” that have been identified, with Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan being the most vulnerable to IS influence, especially via Ferghana Valley. However, these numbers too are difficult to confirm.

Motivations for Joining the IS

Some motivations for joining the IS are common between Western jihadists and Central Asian jihadists. Among those are the organisational and administrative capabilities of the IS; the quality of life assured for IS fighters (that is comparatively higher than what the Afghan Taliban or al Qaeda ever provided); the chance to be on the ‘winning side’; and the potential to settle instead of having to run for cover (as opposed to the Taliban’s experience in Afghanistan). Another reason is the relative failure of al Qaeda in comparison to the Islamic State to hold territory.

More importantly, the 1300 year old prophecy in the Hadith about a ‘malahim’ (day of reckoning) speaks about the clash of Islam and the ‘infidels’ in Dabiq, Syria, is doing the rounds in the jihadist social media. The IS has in fact been using this Hadith to legitimise its actions in Iraq and Syria, and the historical religious significance of the prophecy has managed to draw more radical Islamists towards this insurgency. So strong is this prophecy’s influence on the group, that their official magazine is called Dabiq.

To this end, the war in Afghanistan is a jihad with nationalistic contours, but the war in Syria and Iraq is transnational in nature and does not aim to end at national borders. It is about something on a much larger scale - the recreation of the world as a single world order. And coming from the present-day territories of historical Khurasan - as also emphasised by the IS - these radicalised Central Asian fighters feel obligated to join.

Noticeable Trends

This sentiment could also have been augmented by the nature of news reports that are made available in these countries. The outrage over the humanitarian crisis in Syria, Israel’s offensives in Gaza, the flux in

the Egyptian political environment, and the mistreatment of Muslims on various occasions across the globe have found ample space in their media. As Christian Bleuer states in the recent Afghanistan Analysts Network report, "...this author has very rarely seen in the media, or heard in local discussions, concerns over Uyghurs, Rohingyas, Chechens, Dagestanis or Afghans." The argument about motivations depending on the call for universal jihad to protect Muslims everywhere therefore becomes complex here. There appears to be a general tendency to know and to be concerned more with what is happening in West Asia - Arab areas in particular - than other neighbouring areas with considerable Muslim populations. This means, in many ways, the primary driver is still the attraction to the status of the Arab world than just the cause of rallying for the global Ummah.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the IS's anti-Shia policies that otherwise do not find much resonance in the Central Asian society have begun to attract the younger generation of Kazakhs, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. This is a shift from the trend followed by Central Asian recruits when they joined al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda's policies have not been the elimination of Shias altogether, whereas, the IS's policies are as much about the elimination of Shias as their goal to expand the borders of the 'Islamic Caliphate'.

This indicates a trend of gradual Salafisation of the societies in the Central Asian republics. Ironically, the rise of al Qaeda over the past two decades has laid the groundwork for legitimising the IS's (whom they disowned in February) agenda.

Islamic State: What is Drawing the European Muslims?

21 October 2014

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The Islamic State (IS) has demonstrated a remarkable capability in enticing young Muslims from a variety of European countries into the battlefields of Iraq and Syria. These foreign fighters (FFs) have made numerous headlines, with pictures of them posing with heavy weaponry. News articles on present cases of FFs are aplenty on the Internet. Recent instances include that of the death of a Norwegian Kurd in his twenties, according to the Norwegian news channel TV2. Magnus Ranstorp, Research Director, Centre for Asymmetric Threat Studies, Sweden, points to a new generation of Jihadists. This phenomenon begs the question as to what about the IS attracts European Muslims?

Tool for Effective Recruitment

One of the key reasons behind the IS' successful recruitment process is its public relations efforts and marketing skills, that employ a tactful use of social media to broadcast high-quality and professionally-made videos. Max Abrahms, Professor of Public Policy, Northeastern University, describes the James Foley beheading video and the beheading itself as a possible means of recruitment, citing how this could be viewed as the IS's ability, commitment to and preparedness for violence. Hence, it not only attracts FFs, but, as Professor Abrahms says, it could also "induce defections from rival groups to join."

Most of the IS's videos, websites and social media activities – such as its video series named Mujatweets – are available in other languages. FFs are therefore needed to translate IS propaganda into English, French, and other languages. Accordingly, Mubin Shaikh, a former Taliban recruiter and presently a national security operative in Canada, told the International Business Times that "Westerners are involved, especially in the recruitment and social media dissemination."

Furthermore, the IS deliberately builds on the FFs' consciousness by emphasising on humiliation, prejudice and the stereotyping of Muslims and their cultural associates in the West – that may cultivate a sense of victimisation. This plays with their mindset and turns them into resources for terrorism. Identity crises and/or the sense of injustice among politically active social media users in Europe are some building factors the IS manipulates to their advantage by exploiting the potential FFs' determination and willingness to sacrifice their lives for the implementation of worldwide Islamic rule. Furthermore, FFs can also be viewed as expendable soldiers. They may not require fighting skills, but a suicide-bomber's willingness to detonate the bomb amidst the targeted crowd alone would suffice.

Attraction Towards the IS

The IS tells people to join their friends in the battlefield, as opposed to al-Qaeda that told its fighters to hide among its enemies. According to Richard Barrett, former head, UN al-Qaida and Taliban Monitoring Team, jihadists are drawn towards the IS because of its attractive character. The IS welcomes people of all nationalities regardless of personal histories and/or criminal records. Thus, FFs might join the IS to improve the quality of their lives. Additionally, some jihadists view fighting for Islam as a fast-track route to heaven. Jessica Stern, Lecturer in Government, Harvard University, calls attention to identity crisis among Muslim converts, and says that their affinity and pledge is reinforced by joining the IS.

On the other hand, Hans-Georg Maassen, head, Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Germany, stated in an interview with Reuters that, "what attracts people is the intense brutality, the radicalism and rigor. That suggests to them that it is a more authentic organization." Additionally, social media is teeming with videos carrying promises of a path to heaven, hashtags such as 'FiveStarJihad', luxuries and other facilities available in the 'Caliphate'. While some FFs leave Europe for Syria and Iraq to fight, the others do so with an intention to live a prosperous life in the 'Islamic State'.

Why are Europeans Choosing the IS?

Abu Tareq, a 23-year-old prospective engineer from Denmark, raised by Muslim parents, was, until recently, rather easygoing vis-à-vis his religion. A while ago, he began investing more into his religion, began praying regularly, practiced abstinence and became a teetotaler. His devotion to Islam resulted in a desire to join the IS. The defining moment for Tareq occurred when he watched a video of people being tortured, and his desire to join and support fellow Muslim brethren arose. In an interview with Louise Stigsgaard Nissen, Journalist, *Berlinske* and *Weekendavisen*, Tareq explained his attraction to the IS, saying "It was the humanitarian aspect that drew me to Syria. It is not only about the fighting. They have departments for Islamic education, media, humanitarian aid, electricity and roads."

The IS openly advocates its ability to control and seize territory, its provision of social services, educational systems, and other tempting luxurious items. European fighters are attracted to the IS because of its savvy tactics, extreme actions, and most of all, these FFs' appetite for a life better than the ones they otherwise live. They seek a sense of affinity, want to offer humanitarian aid to those in need, and want to live a prosperous life among fellow Muslims.

Cooperating against the Islamic State: A Nuclear Bonus for Iran?

16 October 2014

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Since the 1979 revolution, the Iran has accused the US interference in the West Asia as the root of regional instability. But there are cases when Tehran has cooperated with Washington when their interests coincided.

The Islamic State (IS) has ambitious political, economic, military and ideological plans, and continues to occupy territories and seeks recognition. The IS has captured oil-rich areas in Iraq and Syria and is smuggling oil via Turkey. It has beheaded journalists, has inflicted heavy casualties and human tragedies in Iraq and Syria's Kurdish areas. The IS has become the richest and most powerful terrorist group ever, and now is marching towards Baghdad.

Today, the IS is considered a national security threat both by Iran and the US. Its movement towards the southern Iraqi cities of Samarra, Najaf and Karbala is Iran's red line. Also, its anti-Shia policy and its military operation near Iran's border directly threaten Iran. The US considers the IS as a threat to its citizens, and especially its approach and plan to seize Iraq's oil rich areas in the south, as dangerous.

Iran and the US have a history of cooperation in tackling common enemies. First, it was the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and second, Saddam Hussain's Ba'athist regime in Iraq. Iran fully supported the US attack on the Taliban regime in 2001, and collaborated to establish political order in Afghanistan during the Bonn Conference. But immediately after that, the then US President George Bush labelled Iran as "Axis of Evil" shocking Tehran and embittering the bilateral. During the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran once

again supported the US led coalition and provided them with intelligence inputs. Subsequently, however, the “all options are on the table” and “the regime change” option had extremely adverse impacts on the reformists’ bid to improve relations with Washington.

Today, once again, there is a convergence of interests between Iran and US over Iraq. The IS is marching towards Baghdad, Iraqi Kurdistan, and southern Iraq, threatening Shia-majority areas and the oil-rich Kurdish regions of the country. An overthrow of the central government in Baghdad is neither Iran’s interest nor the US’.

At present, Iran supports all groups involved in fighting the IS inside Iraq and Syria. Iran provides military advice to the Iraqi government, has military cooperation with the Kurds and covers the news of the developments in Iraq.

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, in his recent visit to Iraq, reflected Iran’s approach towards Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi’s government by conveying Tehran’s support to him. By visiting President Masoud Barzani of the Iraqi Kurdistan, he proved Iran’s support to them by providing arms, ammunitions and intelligence.

The US also gives moral, material and logistical support to the Iraqi government to keep the IS out of Iraq. Therefore, given how Iran and the US are trying to eliminate the same enemy, it is pragmatic for the two to come closer. However, there are several reasons for Iran preference to fight the IS alone instead of joining the US-led coalition. To begin with, Iran was not invited for the Paris Conference, organised to create a coalition West Asian countries – that included a number of corrupt regimes – to defeat the IS. Saudi Arabia is accused of supporting the IS and other terrorist groups such as the Taliban. Turkey helps the IS in selling oil – the latter’s main source of income – via plastic pipelines and other routes. Iranian officials denounce this conference as a farce and state that they would rather fight the IS alone.

Despite not being invited to the Paris Conference, US leaders have admitted to the importance of Iran in eliminating the IS. On August 21, Deputy Spokesperson, US State Department, Marie Harf, stated, “there is a positive role Iran can play.”

At home, in Iran, after three decades of chanting anti-American slogan, distrusting the US and being accused of sponsoring terrorism and building nuclear weapons by the US, incumbent Iranian President Hassan Rouhani’s moderate administration is being pressured by the conservatives to continue the war alone.

Building the Iraqi army, supporting the government of Iraq, supporting the integrity of Iraq, Iraq’s stability and security and eliminating the IS are goals both Iran and the US are attempting to achieve. Iran supports US air strikes on the IS because it can help the cause: defeating a very dangerous enemy in Tehran’s neighbourhood.

Destroying the same enemy still could not form a coalition that includes both Iran and the US. Iran is now more conscious of its actions and foreign policy because it still remembers that after its unconditional cooperation with the US in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, not only they did not get the results they expected but their overtures too were rejected; and the reformists and moderates were defeated in the subsequent presidential election.

Despite the fact that the US’ elimination of the IS serves Iranian interests, it seems that the Iranian government now wants a nuclear bonus in return for coalition in order to reduce the conservatives’ pressure.

Islamic State and Foreign Fighters: Jihadists from Europe

8 October 2014

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The prolonged fighting in Middle Eastern countries have attracted numerous European Muslims to partake in them. Although estimations of exact figures vary, approximately 2,000-5,500 foreign fighters (FFs) have joined the Middle Eastern battlefield.

The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) estimates that 18 per cent of the total number of FFs is from Europe: France (63-412); Britain (43-366); Germany (43-240); Belgium (76-296); and the Netherlands (29-152) have most recruits. However, the most heavily affected countries according to population size (per million) are Belgium (27), Denmark (15), the Netherlands (9), Sweden (9), and Norway (8).

The understanding of who these FFs are, and their motivations behind participating in the various 'jihad' is obscure. This article, presented from an European research perspective, aims to widen the understanding of this phenomenon by taking into account the patterns of joining and motivating factors.

Patterns of Joining

The radicalisation of individuals and the distinct characteristics of radicalised people depend on complex factors. The general assumptions of poverty and lack of education admitted as core socio-economic reasoning for radicalisation does not always comply with statements of European researchers.

The socio-economic perspective reveals a diverse group, although rather violent in character acting on a private volunteering basis. Most commonly, they are young well-educated men and women in their twenties, either Muslim-born or Muslim converts enjoying good socio-economic footing. Many cases are similar to that of the teenager, Jehoan Bontinck, (BBC News) from Belgium, a Muslim-convert who decided to travel to Syria despite his education, sporting activities, etc. at home. Another example is that of 25-year old Abu Anwar (CNN news) from the southern England. He grew up in a middle-class household and enjoyed an easy life in Britain, but chose to leave citing the inability to practice Islam.

Furthermore, the European point of convergence tends to draw a line at this group's experience of feeling left behind in the mainstream society. There has been a tendency among some youth who lack a sense of belongingness to becoming more willing to embrace challenges more than what they already may be facing by joining the violent radical groups. According to Lars Gule, a Norwegian researcher on Extreme Islam at University College in Oslo and Akershus, some of these youths come across as inharmonious and already religiously alienated and frustrated before they join.

Moreover, European research reveals that having established a personal relationship to a central figure in a radical environment, such as a charismatic opinion leader, seems to be important when influencing people to support or carry out politically motivated attacks. More importantly, these leaders, or 'recruiters', are skilled in the sense of persuading young Muslims into believing that their religion is under attack, and as Muslims, they are obligated to defend fellow Muslims.

Identity, Revenge, Status or all Combined?

There are a variety of motivations that lead these individuals to travel and partake in jihad in far off lands. Some, the so-called identity seekers, travel with an unfulfilled need to define themselves. Raffaello Pantucci, an analyst at the Royal United Services Institute in London, argues that European FFs are drawn to join by virtue of dissatisfaction at home and the desire to find one's identity.

Alternately, for some, the motivation to travel is the desire of power and status, given how participating as a FF equals high status among extreme Islamist groups in Europe. For instance, posting pictures of themselves with heavy weaponry in Syria provides reputation and acknowledgement among similar groups back home.

Additionally, some Europeans travel for legitimate purposes, such as for visiting their families or for education, but find themselves affected by violent situations. The recruiters then provide guidance, justification and encouragement for partaking in jihad.

Lastly, those upset over gruesome videos and images of destruction and suffering, and thus, seeking revenge for the lack of contribution and empathy from Western governments, as practicing Muslims, feel compelled to join. For instance, Abu Saif (NBC News), a 31-year old chef left Belgium to fight the US and Shiite Muslims in Syria after watching a YouTube video depicting the massacre of children. Social media is a significant platform with an undeniable power. It incorporates a source of information as well as inspiration. Its ability to mobilise has been deftly taken advantage of by groups such as the Islamic State.

Given the aforementioned phenomena, European FFs cannot be characterised under one monotypic umbrella. They are young well-educated men and women in their mid-twenties, who voluntarily partake in violent struggles they otherwise have no pre-given predisposition towards. Their motivations for jihad vary. Some are based on conscious choices of revenge, their ability to do more than just participate in demonstrations, whereas others join out of frustration, lack of belonging or rebellion. Additionally, people appear to unite as a result of horrifying images presented to them daily by media outlets. Thus, whether it is an act of revenge, status or identity seeking, they all combine, and, not surprisingly, it seems that their active use of social media represents the key source of their motivation for joining the wars as FFs.

Islamic State and Indonesia: Jakarta's Counter-strategies

7 October 2014

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Earlier this year, Indonesia was shocked by the Islamic State's (IS) propaganda spread via YouTube to recruit new members. In fact, in certain parts of Java, some have even expressed their willingness to become new members of the IS. Given that Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world (around 230 million), this has attracted regional and international attention.

What is the danger attached to Indonesians joining the IS? Will the State's efforts to prevent and combat extremism be successful, given the hardline Islamic groups interested in becoming new members of the IS?

The Indonesians who are now the members of the IS are believed to be effectively influencing the hardliners to defend themselves as new members. Their role is to facilitate the IS in building relationships with radical groups in Indonesia and gaining the broad sympathy of Indonesian Muslims (The Jakarta Globe, 17 July 2014).

With respect to the IS, the Indonesian government has taken a decisive political position. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono had instructed his government to control the development of the IS.

Prospective Political Stance

Some have questioned the ability of the Indonesian government to combat radical groups in comparison with its direct war on the IS. However, it must be acknowledged that radical groups are connected to political power in Indonesia - they have a strategic position through their provision of political resources for elites. It is also important to note that the practice of political decentralisation implies that the centre's position to control the emergence of political issues in local areas is less.

It seems that Indonesia is trying to learn from its past experiences by taking a decisive position against the IS. A war against the IS provides strategic momentum to shadow the historical burden of Indonesian Islam during the last decade, which has been associated with the presence of hard-liner groups. The government is also able to take a definite position against the IS because this organisation is international in character has no affiliation with Indonesian politics.

The government has also rejected the IS based on their violent propaganda mainly to recruit Indonesian people.

Indonesian Islamic Resistance

In trying to demonstrate Indonesia's position, Indonesian Islamic scholars and some moderate (liberal) Islamic organisations have stated that the IS is not in accordance with the Islamic character of the country. In this context, it would also be interesting to discuss the positions of the existing radical groups that have been part of the Caliphate movement such as Hizb ut Tahr in Indonesia. Although they have a global Caliphate ideology, their position is contrary to that of the IS.

They believe that the violence of the IS is destroying the position of the Caliphate Islamiyah, which promotes a peaceful path without violence and brutality. They are supported by the specific

understanding that the IS is clearly not an Islamic movement but one that is using Islam as a tool for global war propaganda. From their point of view, Indonesian Islam has a peaceful image.

In addition to the above, the Indonesian public is also confused by the inconsistency of the Indonesian Ministry of Information and Communication in revoking the IS YouTube propaganda. Further confusion arises from the fact that the Minister of Information and Communication has affiliations with the Prosperous Justice Party in Indonesia.

This political party is perceived by the Indonesian public to have connections with the hardline extremist groups within the country, which intend to apply sharia law in Indonesia. In this context, even the Indonesian public has a clear political position against the IS. Now, the government needs to introduce significant institutional enforcement to back its stand and take the strong initiative to consolidate different groups within Islam to defending Indonesia against the IS.

Islamic State: Straining the US Defence Budget

30 September 2014

Vivek Mishra

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The most recent estimation vis-à-vis the US' military campaign against the Islamic State (IS) has it that the cost of Washington's war against the IS has surpassed \$780 million. This comes at a time when the Pentagon has hinted at request for more support. Essentially, the US military is spending up to \$10 million a day. While air strikes might seem to be a safe option, the costs incurred are heavy. Besides, there is increasing chorus for involvement of ground troops, as isolated air strikes are not believed to be adequate. Amidst this seemingly intractable involvement of the US in Iraq and Syria, will the US will be able to sustain budgetary allowances for its campaign, against the IS in particular and its other foreign military presence in general?

Engaging the Islamic State: A Folly?

With its newly announced campaign against the IS, the US again stands at crossroads, divided between three strenuous military commitments – Asia-pacific, Ukraine and West Asia – and a reduction in budgets back home. Although the extent of the US military involvement differs in each case, the cumulative budgetary toll on the country's defence budget has necessitated a rethink.

The pressure on Washington was evident when US President Barack Obama announced an open-ended "broad coalition" to fight the IS, instead of taking it forward unilaterally. The US restricted itself from committing fully to the anticipated long-drawn war against the IS through a combination of "no boots on ground" and "light military footprint." However, both these strategies will depend on how cooperative other allies and friends of the US, particularly those in the region, are. So far, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Bahrain, and Qatar have pledged support to the US against the IS. Whether the campaign against the IS remains to be not "America's war alone" will be contingent on the nature of support the US gets from these countries.

At least two suggestions imply that the US could get further embroiled in its fight against the IS; Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, suggested that more US ground forces could be needed in its fight against the IS and the further expansion of airstrikes by the US inside Iraq. The US wanted to disentangle from wars in West Asia but ended up redeploying troops to Iraq and expanding air operations in Syria. The nature of the threat emerging from the IS has required the US to enter deeper in the region than initially anticipated. Apart from these, the Pentagon-White House rift, on whether the US campaign against the IS will succeed, adds to its bane.

Impact on Defense Budget

These military commitments have taken a huge toll on the US defence budget. The first five weeks of US airstrikes in northern Iraq has cost \$262.5 million. The military offensive planned against the IS is likely to bite off a massive \$500 billion into Pentagon's spending cuts planned over the next decade. Since these are mandatory cuts mandated by the 2011 Budget Control Act (also called Sequestration), it would mean a resource-depleted US force over the next decade.

This is anticipated in a Department of Defence (DoD) paper released in April 2013, titled 'Defense Budget Priorities and Choice-Fiscal Year 2014.' The report mentions drawdown of forces and resource depletion as two important strategies planned in the roadmap for the US military. The paper categorically mentions that the DoD estimates a 20 per cent drop in the overall defence budget from 2010 to 2017. Sequestration, if not amended through an amendment, will lead to further cuts in the defense budget (\$50 billion each year, through 2021). Unfortunately, all of these coincide with the US' foreign military engagements.

This is a massive cut the DoD is talking about and will likely have an impact on the number of troops, overseas operations, ammunitions, military intelligence and defence research, among other things. Specifically, the US will have to do a reduction of approximately 50,000 active-duty soldiers, do away with a navy carrier and its mid-air refuel tankers KC-10s, apart from similar reductions. If the US might have to choose between strength reduction and ammunition reduction, the latter would be a harder choice. Obama, in the past, has held the relation between technology and success as directly proportional. To that extent, defence research and production are likely to continue with the current pace, or even higher. Truth, then, might be on the side of the Republican hawks when they argue that the IS has revealed the US' incapacity to cut military spending.

The beheading of two US journalists by the IS militants has garnered the necessary domestic support to carry out military strikes against these militants, which seems to have shrouded the defence budget cut debate for now. But could this only be a temporary lull?

Islamic State and Southeast Asia: Answering the Call for Jihad

30 September 2014

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On 23 July 2014, a video was posted on YouTube showed Isnilon Hapilon, a senior member of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), and other members, pledging their support to the Islamic State (IS) through both financial and manpower support. Similarly, Mochammad Achwan, the chairman of Jemmah Anshorut Tauhid (JAT) has delivered the message of their founder Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's support for IS and its self-proclaimed Caliphate of the State of Islam. There are already records of huge numbers of Southeast Asians - approximately like 12,000 - travelling to Iraq and Syria to fight for the IS.

Why are the numbers of Southeast Asians trying to join the IS growing? Why are the Southeast Asian terrorist organisations supporting IS?

Motives

The terrorist organisations have claimed that the reason for their support is that the war is being led by their Muslim "brothers" in Iraq and Syria. Another reason as claimed by these groups is the fact that the establishment of a Caliphate of the Islamic Kingdom is more or less a common goal. However the real motive for the support to the IS could also be the resurrection of their credibility and hold in Southeast Asia. ASG in was formed as a splinter group from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) is based in Philippines. Their collaboration with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and al Qaeda led to the establishment of this group as one of the most violent separatist groups in that region. Heavy crackdowns through the joint efforts of Singaporean, Malaysian and Indonesian anti-terrorist squads have led to the disintegration of the JI into numerous smaller and less powerful splinter groups and weakened the ASG whose terror attacks since 2005 have been limited to extortion and looting of local foreign tourists. Thus supporting the IS could be perceived the ASG an opportunity for them to revives their claim to fame.

The video that was posted on YouTube began with still photos of Isnilon Hapilon on US' 'most wanted' posters in addition to the symbolic black flag. This suggests that Hapilon was trying to establish their notoriety. They have already kidnapped two German tourists and demanded that the German government not support the US in their war against the IS. JAT, founded by one of the initial founders of the JI, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, is one of the most powerful splinter group of JI in comparison to other groups such as Hisbah, Tawid Wal Jihad and the Negara Islam Indonesia (NII). JAT is considered a jacket for JI

and for some as a re-emergence of JI. However, JAT did not gain the stature of JI had attained till 2005. Support for the IS could thus be visualised by Ba'asyir to attain that stature.

Employment Opportunities

Both unemployment and poverty are factors for the growing number of Southeast Asian youth who are joining the IS. Muslim youth in rural Malaysia, Indonesia, southern Thailand and Philippines are mostly educated in the pesantrens or madrassas (Islamic schools), and many of them are unable to get mainstream jobs due to the poor standards of education. Fighting for the IS is therefore a job opportunity as they are provided with both salaries and food. Further, many of the pesantrens in Indonesia are generally schools run by the former JI and members of other terrorist organisations preaching war strategies in the name of Islam.

Ideological Impact

Not all Southeast Asians joining the IS are doing so for money - for example, there are reports of a Malaysian navy officer travelling to Iraq to join the IS. Many Southeast Asians are spurred by the idea of fighting a war for the self-proclaimed Caliph and also to fight against the Shia majority (Shias are a minority in all the Southeast Asian countries). Recurring recruitment videos on YouTube also has an ideological impact on some Southeast Asian Muslims. In fact use of social media for recruitment is one of the biggest factors for the large numbers of Muslims from all over the world joining the IS.

Whatever may be the reasons, the fallout could be alarming. Both JI and ASG were organised by the Southeast Asian veterans of the Afghanistan war who had received training at al Qaeda camps. These organisations had not only developed these terror networks but had also contributed to the spread of a radical form of Islam - then a new phenomenon in Southeast Asia. History might repeat itself, and the return of the soldiers from Iraq and Syria might again lead to a development of the same pattern.

Al Qaeda in South Asia: Zawahiri will Fail in India

13 September 2014

Saneya Arif

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Ayman al-Zawahiri leader of the al Qaeda (AQ) has recently announced his intention to "raise the flag of jihad" in the Indian sub- continent. Will Zawahiri succeed in establishing AQ roots in India?

Muslims constitute around 13 percent of India's population and do not appear sympathetic towards the AQ's ideology. Despite waving of black flags of the Islamic State (IS) in certain parts and the presence of few Indian youths in the conflict theatres of Syria and Iraq, the possibility of AQ gaining a foothold in India and turning into an organisation of redemption for Muslims is remote.

Following four reasons substantiate the assertion.

Faith in democracy and secularism

Firstly, the Indian Muslims have faith in notions of democracy and secularism. Even while their social mobility has been slow and has remained a cause for concern, they do see a sign of hope for socio-economic parity with the majority. Muslim personal law is seen by them as a recognition of and respect for their distinct identity and religious freedom.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pledge to treat all Indians as equals regardless of religion can also be an additional source of optimism if followed by positive actions. Thus, the use of religion-inspired violence and destruction in the name of liberation of Muslims is unacceptable to them. Statements renouncing Zawahiri's statement by several leading Muslim organisations is a pointer towards that direction.

The most powerful statement came from the Darul Uloom Deoband which categorically asserted, "Indian Muslims would never be convinced by un-Islamic and false arguments of the Al Qaeda."

Lack of Violent Societal Cleavages

Secondly, Al Qaeda in South Asia has benefited from the existing societal cleavages, especially in the Af-Pak region. Further, it has used the existing jihadi and sectarian groups to ferment trouble. As much as it has assisted and been a magnet for groups like the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and activities of anti-Shia groups like the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) has further helped it spread the Shia versus Sunni vitriol in Pakistan and Afghanistan. As a result, besides the foreign fighters of the AQ in the Af-Pak region, local Afghans as well as Pakistanis have joined the group.

In India, it is highly unlikely that any such vehicle for hire would be available for Zawahiri who is attempting to revolutionise the minds of the Sunni Muslims in India. Both the Indian Mujahideen (IM) and its predecessor, the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) who could possibly have played a second fiddle to AQ, are in their weakest points. Arrests of a number of IM leaders and cadres have pushed these organisations to the brink of collapse.

Unlikely Mass Movement favouring the AQ

Thirdly, in the absence of a vehicle for hire, AQ's objective to find a foothold in India would require developing operational capacities among the Indian Muslims youth. Despite few recent cases of radicalisation among the Muslim youth, the possibility of a engineering a movement favouring the AQ is unlikely. The Indian political and social systems have multiple checks and balances mechanisms in place to prevent any such eventuality.

Moderate Nature of Islam in India

Fourthly, the moderate nature of Islam in India act as the most crucial shield against radicalization which could be exploited by the AQ. Islam in India has a long history, led by the Sufis who integrated the multiple communities of India sharing common cultural practices. Unlike other countries, Sufism has remained an integral part of the Indian cultural tradition. Amity exists among India's Shias and the Sunnis, in spite of a division along ideological lines.

Cultural ethos can effectively hedge against an extremist rampage is clear from the experience of India's neighbour, Bangladesh. Once touted as the next Afghanistan, Bangladesh has remained free of AQ's influence. India's ability to weather the challenges is equally robust. In India, the official approach of involving the ulemas in framing a counter-narrative to AQ's appeal has immensely helped in maintaining a divide between Islam in India and its radical stream.

However, be prepared to prevent the unforeseen

Even with this positive outlook, there is a need for caution, as even handful of cases of radicalisation, if not a fully networked AQ base, could pose significant threats to India. To prevent such a scenario, certain precautionary measures should be taken. Muslims in India do have grievances of marginalisation, state-discrimination, and sense of alienation, which may get exploited. Concerns like these needs to be tackled through affirmative actions. Experts believe that reinforcing multiculturalism is the need of the hour.

Bringing communities together will serve as the best way to prevent radicalisation of youths. Inclusive and affirmative programmes must be undertaken so that India can never become a playground for the AQ and its violent agenda. For this, the government, NGOs, and religious organizations have to work together.

Al Qaeda in South Asia: The Terror World Championship Begins

7 September 2014

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Earlier this week, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in a video message, launched an al Qaeda wing in the Indian sub-continent to "raise the flag of jihad." What does the Al Qaeda in South Asia (AQSA) mean to South Asian security? What are the significances of this branch and the timing of its launch? How will it impact the global terrorism environment?

Project Al Qaeda in South Asia: Towards an Understanding

Al-Zawahiri's AQSA launch has already led to a slightly mistaken interpretation that the group is targeting only India. However, the launch has more to do with the developments on the international front than its long-sustained ambition to establish a stronger presence in India and other countries towards the east.

Following the death of Osama bin Laden, al-Zawahiri took charge of operations, and in the face of the changing geopolitical environment – especially the Arab Awakening – decentralised operations, making the terror network a more franchisee-based model. With many allies viewing al-Zawahiri as a weak leader and 'uncharismatic' as compared to his predecessor, the localised jihadist groups – allies and affiliates of the al Qaeda – grew stronger in stature. Some became more ambitious, and one of them, the present-day Islamic State, began acting independently.

The rise of the IS has polarised the global jihadist community, with many viewing it as more effective than the al Qaeda.

When the IS unilaterally launched the 'Islamic Caliphate' and began administering towns they controlled – by collecting taxes, selling northern Syrian oil to Damascus etc, the al Qaeda felt the threat to their existence grow exponentially. The IS's release of a map charting all the territories it wants under its 'Caliphate' only reinforced the threat. The map spread from West Asia to Southeast Asia, and explicitly identified Greater Khurasan – the historical geographical construct that includes parts of Iran, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India – the very region the al Qaeda basecamp is located in.

Although the al Qaeda always had plans for India, the potential jihadists' reading of the IS as more effective, increased the immediacy in the al Qaeda's need to act quickly. Essentially, the al Qaeda's launch of its South Asian wing is its attempt to consolidate power in the region where it's based in – in the face of international competition.

AQSA and South Asia: What Next?

South Asia is a volatile region, with two countries – Afghanistan and Pakistan – in turmoil of various kinds, and other countries – especially India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh – that are vulnerable to an onslaught. The AQSA will tighten its existing terror network in the Af-Pak region. Although Indian states of Gujarat and Kashmir too remain vulnerable – as will Punjab given the geographical proximity to the Pakistan-based Punjabi Taliban – Assam is key for the al Qaeda to spread its activities east. Given the rising levels of fundamentalism in the subcontinent, thanks to Saudi Arabian petro-dollars that flow into the many madrassas that impart hard-line interpretations of the Quran in the region, the likelihood of terror networks allying and growing is very real.

The AQSA Cook to the Global Jihad Broth

Today, in several areas of South Asia, interpretation of the Quran is societally more fundamentalised than it was a decade ago. South and Southeast Asia are home to as many (or more) Muslims in West Asia. Adding to the already delicate situation is the perception of marginalisation among South Asian Muslims. The dastardly treatment of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, the rising intolerance towards Islamic ways of life in Sri Lanka, the increasing radicalism in the Maldivian polity, the disquiet over governance in Bangladesh, the politico-social flux in Pakistan, and the indecisiveness apparent in Afghanistan, provide for an excellent ground and timing for an entity like the AQSA to actually consolidate itself quickly. That al-Zawahiri spoke in a mix of Arabic and Urdu is telling. He is reaching out to his target audience by taking on their contours.

The countries of the region will have to beef up security, and communication between the al Qaeda and its regional allies, especially potential allies such as the recently-formed Arakan Mujahideen in Myanmar, will have to be meticulously tracked. It would also be important to keep a close watch on Indonesia-based Mujahidin Indonesia Timur – an umbrella organisation consisting of other groups such as the Jemaah Islamiah (of the Bali bombings) and the Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid, and the Philippines-based Abu Sayyaf and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

There is a possibility that the al Qaeda's generous funders sitting in Saudi Arabia might have egged al-Zawahiri on to ensure that the ground they hold now isn't lost to the IS – that poses serious threats even to the Saudi state. The al Qaeda, in continuation with its desperate efforts to do damage-control/salvage

its existence – which isn't entirely undermined yet – will now move east, where the IS hasn't spread its tentacles much. It will increase activities in Assam, use it as a bridge to spread to Bangladesh, and from there, to Myanmar, the increasingly radicalising Indonesia and Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei Darussalam.

Regardless of other motivations, the world is now witnessing a full-blown power-struggle between an established global leader of terror, and a fast-emerging entity that is vying for the top title.

The Islamic State: Affecting Shia-Sunni Relations in India?

3 September 2014

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The unilateral establishment of the Islamic State (IS) and a 'Caliphate' in Iraq and Syria, and its atrocious activities has intensified the debate on the issue of Shia-Sunni strife. The jihadist group, in its self-proclaimed status as a 'Caliphate', claims religious authority over all Muslims across the world. Its harsh interpretations of Wahabi Islam, atrocious violence directed at Shia Muslims in particular, and given the fact that 13.4 per cent of India's population are Muslims, there are few questions that need answers. Has the establishment of 'Caliphate' and its activities affected Shia-Sunni relations in India?

Understanding Shia-Sunni Relations in India

The present-day nature of differences between Shias and Sunnis has been the same throughout history – one that was born soon after the death of Prophet Muhammad, over succession disputes. In India, differences between Shias and Sunnis is still doctrinal, and in areas such as ritual law, theology and religious organisations. India has seen very few killings and/or clashes of sectarian nature, and those that happened took place only in Lucknow and neighbouring areas in Uttar Pradesh. The most recent incident took place in old Lucknow's Shahadganj area, following a war of words between the two sects over activities of Caliphate in Iraq, and in another incident, Anjuman-e-Haideri, a Shia group urged for volunteers to fight in Iraq against the IS's atrocities. The group even requested the Indian airlines to fly over 25,000 Shia volunteers to Iraq as reported by Yatish Yadav's report for the New Indian Express, titled 'IB fears tremors of Iraq in India'.

However, if we look closely, the volunteers wanted to reach Iraq only to protect their holiest cities of Karbala and Najaf. Even these efforts quickly receded without fuelling any further sectarian problems. According to Maulana Kalbe Sadiq, a Shia scholar, in India, groups like the Jamaat-e-Islami, the All India Muslim Personal law board and the Milli Council have repeatedly stressed the need for unity between the two Muslim sects. This shows that the developments in Iraq and Syria have had negligible or no effect on Shia-Sunni relations in India.

The Islamic 'Caliphate' and Shia-Sunni Relations in India

Interviewing some Shias and Sunnis based in India made it amply clear that relations between the two sects in India have remained unaffected, and have largely remained insulated from the blowbacks rising from the events unfolding in Syria and Iraq; and this is likely to continue. Few interviewees even believed that it was the Western media that tried to inflict the seeds of divide between Shias and Sunnis in India by reporting the civil war as a sectarian conflict but isn't so in reality. If we go into the intricacies, we find that it is the Urdu media that often projected a radically different image of the IS because they rely more on their own interpretations of news reports received from international media. Some articles by learned columnists of Urdu newspapers gave a very positive picture of the IS, where they justified its atrocious activities under the pretext of shariah law. Few reports also stated that the group had also reportedly killed dozens of Sunni imams who refuse to swear allegiance to the IS, thereby transgressing the shariah. However, it is important to mention that most Indians do not even understand the difference between Shias and Sunnis. However, those who do, continue to view the current armed conflict in Iraq not as a clash between Sunnis and Shias and instead as a well-constructed web in the ongoing power-struggle in Iraq.

Earlier, in some parts of India such as in Lucknow, few Ulemas from both Shia and Sunni sects tried to play one sect against another using this international plank. Few newspapers even reported that there

was a fear of Shia-Sunni polarisation in the country. Groups such as the Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and Anjuman-e-Haidari, operating in India, were seen as security threats fearing they might take advantage of the volatile situation, but they did not. This is essentially because these groups, especially SIMI, are anti-state and not anti-Shia. Their mission is expel Western culture from India ensure that the Muslim community lives in accordance with the Islamic code of conduct.

However, eminent clerics from both Shia and Sunni sects gathered and prayed for peace and reconciliation in Iraq. Moreover, the Israeli offensive in Gaza further strengthened the Indian Muslims' stance against the IS because Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed 'Caliph' and 'messiah' of Sunnis did not condemn Israel. Indians now know that it is not a Shia against Sunni type conflict and that instead, it's a war against Muslims because whenever an attack by this jihadist group is launched, it is launched on the public as a whole – comprising both sects and not just Shias in particular.

Furthermore, India is not a country where Shias and Sunnis view themselves as a minority and/or majority as in the case of Iraq. India therefore doesn't have to worry about sectarian divides. What really troubles India is religious and not a sectarian divide.

Islamic State and South Asia: How Real is the Threat?

27 August 2014

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The rise of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria is a game-changer in international affairs today. Their unprecedented rise and ability to fight in two countries simultaneously without suffering serious losses - while attracting more recruits - is disquieting. Today, approximately 50,000 men (and boys as young as 11) from several countries fight under the IS banner, and more are pouring in. West Asia and South Asia share strong linkages; any turbulence in West Asia has immediate direct and/or indirect repercussions in South Asia. Employing brutality that puts the al Qaeda to shame, what does the rise of the IS mean for South Asia?

Sectarian Schism: Susceptibility to Misuse

South Asia has a culturally diverse yet close-knit character with a complex political geography and history. While there are several common historical experiences, the divides are also many. The foremost, apart from inter-religious differences, is that of sectarian issues. The IS will find exploiting this schism in Pakistan to be the most potent and 'foolproof' way to get a foothold in the region. South Asia is rife with ethno-religious and sectarian differences, especially among the region's Muslim community. A significant number of people in the region belong to the Islamic faith, and the Shia-Sunni divide, although primarily historical and ideological, has taken on a sinister form - especially in Pakistan. The key to evading and/or even delaying the spread of the IS into South Asia would be to address these religious and sectarian divides.

Pakistan's leadership continues to comply and/or turn a blind eye towards the forced Sunni-sation of the country and radical Sunni jihadists continue their pogrom against religious minorities, especially the Shias, Ahmadiyyas and the Barelvis. The IS' self-portrayal as the saviours of Sunnis in a Shia-dominated land could have grave implications for Pakistan - the sectarian divide will only get worse if the IS co-opts even one Pakistan-based Wahabi jihadist group. Further, Shia-Sunni clashes will only intensify the Iran-Saudi Arabia proxy war in Western and South-western Pakistan.

While other regional countries have significant Muslim populations with common religious divides, sectarian divides are not as strong. For instance, Muslims are the largest minority in India, and despite the considerable numbers belonging to various sects and sub-sects, the divide is mostly limited only to ideological differences. Violent clashes between rival sects seldom take place. In fact, although a couple of Indian citizens have joined the IS, for the most part, Indian society does not face a direct threat from the IS. Almost all Indian Muslims - including activists, intellectuals and religious leaders - have denounced the IS. Adversity will befall only if Pakistan's terrorist groups are co-opted by the IS, and it will not be societal in nature; and whenever the IS moves forward with its South Asian agenda, Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas is where they will begin.

Fuel for Religious Radicalism

Already, many have taken a hard-line stance against the rising religious intolerance against Muslims in Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Myanmar. The House of Saud feels threatened by the IS, and is likely to fund more madrassas and radical Islamist factions in order to rev up its defences against al-Baghdadi's advance. The several Saudi-funded madrassas in western Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are already trouble-makers. Additionally, the treatment of Muslims (such as that of Myanmar's Rohingyas by both the clergy and the government, and the intolerance practised by Buddhist radicals in Sri Lanka) pushes impressionable youth to seek solutions via al-Baghdadi's means - that might reflect in the rising numbers of the Arakan Mujahideen in Myanmar, and other radicals in Sri Lanka. Although the recruits' original motivations have localised origins, they get institutionalised in the idea of a global Muslim identity to fight for, after their 'training'.

Turf War between al Qaeda and the Islamic State

The South Asian region could become the battleground for the turf war for influence and control between erstwhile allies, the IS and al Qaeda. The region is the epicentre of jihadist activities and the idea of reclaiming the historical 'Greater Khurasan' (that includes parts of modern-day Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan) is picking up pace. Both al-Baghdadi and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) chief Mullah Fazullah have set their eyes on the region.

Until now, many disillusioned youth joined the al Qaeda as a means to achieve their goals - that were usually retribution and/or radical change. However, after Osama bin Laden's death, the group's core leadership shrunk in size and the organisation became more franchisee-like. While bin Laden's successor Ayman al-Zawahiri is seen as a weak leader who has failed to maintain the al Qaeda's footing, the IS has managed to gain control and administer territories like a government.

Prospects

In South Asia, Mullah Fazlullah, the relatively unknown Jaish-e-Khurasan group, and other factions snubbed by Rawalpindi's Operation Zarb-e-Azb, are ripe for harvesting by the IS. The IS believes that all territories historically ruled by Muslims and later conquered by non-Muslims and/or non-Islamic forms of governance were wrongfully taken from them; and intend to reclaim it. Given how South Asia was under Muslim rulers for a significant portion of history, the IS's threat is very real, if not immediate.

The Islamic 'Caliphate' and Sectarian Violence: Ramifications for Pakistan

31 July 2014

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Following the unilateral declaration of an Islamic 'Caliphate' in Iraq and Syria, the self-declared 'Caliph' Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, reviling the Shia Muslims as Rafada (rejectionists), announced their campaign against the Shias of the region. While a lot of it has to do with al-Baghdadi's imprisonment in an Iraqi prison after his serving time at Camp Bucca, and is more about political ambition than ideological differences, this has fuelled the already simmering issue of sectarian strife in the delicate societal structures in West Asia.

Repercussions are felt in South Asia, where Pakistan has witnessed similar but more worrisome crises over the past few years. What is the nature of the connection between the rising Islamist militancy in the region and sectarian violence? Do Islamist jihadists residing in the country fuel sectarian differences and as a result, violence, or do they merely exploit the existing differences for their benefit? What is the role of the State institutions in this issue? What implications does this phenomenon hold for Pakistan?

Pakistan's Sectarian Schism

The anti-Shia nature of Sunni Islamist militants in Pakistan and their regional counterparts stems from the hard-line Sunni Wahabbi interpretations of the Quran and the Sharia law several of these militants learn in the Madrasas along the Durand line - funded by fundamentalists from Saudi Arabia to strengthen the Sunni wall around a Shia Iran. In addition to the Saudi Arabia-Pakistan nexus, Islamabad's own

paranoia that Iran might influence its Shia population has led to it not eliminating the hard-line Deobandi militant groups entirely. Furthermore, the sectarian nature of these jihadist militants does not stop at Shia killings. Other groups, especially the Ahmadiyyas and the Sufis, and some minority Sunni sub-groups, are heavily targeted.

Pakistan: The Role of Sectarianism in the Islamist Jihadist Agenda

Although numerous Islamist jihadist groups in Pakistan have varying endgames and work in silos, their agendas converge on various levels – especially as a result of the origins of their funding sources. Sectarian violence by Sunni Islamist jihadists intensified in 2007, alongside the rise of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), after a comparatively peaceful period from 2002-2006. The jihadists in an attempt to escape US military strikes started taking shelter in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in North-western Pakistan. The timeline of the pattern can be traced alongside the leadership of the TTP under Baitullah Mehsud, and later, under Hakimullah Mehsud – whose relationship with the Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat helped establish a strong Wahabbi Islamist jihadist network across the country.

There are considerable Shia settlements along the country's north, western and south-western borders, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, FATA, and Balochistan. These areas share international borders with Afghanistan and Iran, where too there are significant Shia settlements. While there is a back-and-forth movement of Afghan Shias, especially Hazaras from Afghanistan into Pakistan in the north, Pakistan's Balochistan province borders Iran's Sunni majority Sistan Baluchestan province.

The jihadist groups, while generally anti-Shia in character, have a more practical reason to exploit the sectarian schism. Their access routes into Afghanistan, especially ones via Khurram Agency, pass through Shia-controlled areas, where Shia extremist groups have banded together to fight the Taliban's anti-Shia campaigns. Sunni Islamist Jihadists from Sistan Baluchestan often interact with similar groups based in Balochistan.

Sustenance of Sectarian Violence

The escalation of sectarian violence in the Af-Pak border region, and in the rest of Pakistan, finds greater fuel in the Pakistani governance and justice systems than terrorists alone. The Pakistani State's Sunni Islamic leanings have muddled the functioning of state structures. Often, investigations carried out following incidents of sectarian violence are either never thoroughly followed up or are laced with a sectarian bias. The conviction rate of perpetrators and/or aides in such acts is extremely low and as a result, external actors fund groups within Pakistan to provide solidarity. This results in a vicious cycle of funding for opposing militant groups by entities with vested interests. The problem intensifies when sectarian organisations find their way into the politics of the country. The increasing political clout of these actors, coupled with the government's treatment of terrorist groups as equals during negotiations, has further entrenched the problem.

Sectarian violence in Pakistan is therefore primarily a product of misinformed political manoeuvres than purely ideology. The Islamist jihadists simply exploit the phenomenon to their benefit.

Bleak Prospects

Unless the Pakistani State takes comprehensive measures to undo the political clout enjoyed by sectarian actors and regulates the funding of the tens of thousands of Madrasas, sectarian violence will only escalate in the country. Additionally, those battle-hardened Pakistani-origin jihadist returnees of the Syrian war will try to force their writ in the region, regardless of sectarian definitions, and will bring heavy losses not limited to just religious minorities. The vicious cycle will continue, and the militants' attempts to turn Pakistan into a Salafist Wahabbi nation will not only destabilise Pakistan internally, but also fuel a larger regional instability involving Afghanistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Therefore, given the developments in West Asia, Pakistan, if it seeks stability, must clamp down on terrorists of "all hue and colour," especially the ambitious TTP chief Mullah Fazlullah, and the relatively unknown Jaish-e-Khurasan group, to crush Pakistan's own Khurasan movement – and in alliance with Afghanistan, weed out those militants hiding in Afghanistan's Khost, Kunar and Nuristan provinces to escape Operation Zarb-e-Azb.

ISIL, Iraq and Securing India's Interests

16 June 2014

Adil Rasheed

Independent Security Analyst, New Delhi

The rabbit hole of Iraq springs up bizarre and devastatingly new challenges for the US even a decade after its invasion of the country. The embarrassment does not end there. The US is now forced to re-enter the quagmire and may fight alongside its arch-enemy Iran, much to the chagrin of its most ardent allies in the region – the Arab Gulf states and Israel.

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a new virulent strain of Wahhabi militancy, recently took control over the Iraqi cities of Mosul and Tikrit and according to some regional commentators threatens to rejig the region's entire post-Ottoman shebang. Strangely, a large part of the ISIL's forces comprises remnants of Saddam's so-called secular regime – particularly the Naqshbandi Army operating under the command of the fugitive Ba'ath Party leader Izzat al-Douri. In response, Shiite militants have answered the call to arms by Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani in their thousands, raising fears that Iraq might soon disintegrate on sectarian lines.

These unforeseen events in Iraq follow other extraordinary developments that are fast transforming the geopolitical landscape of the region. Signs of a possible détente in relations between the US and Iran have taken the world by surprise. The six oil-rich Gulf monarchies that constitute the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have been particularly outraged by the so-called US 'double-cross', with Saudi Arabia being so incensed that it refused to take the UN Security Council seat to which it was elected. The country has even warned of a major shift away from the US and is seeking to build an Asian pivot for a new security architecture.

The US-GCC relationship first came under strain in 2011, when Washington sided with democratic forces that deposed Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and then recognised the Muslim Brotherhood-backed president Mohamed Morsi. Fissures widened following the US' inaction in Syria and its 'neutrality' during the Bahrain uprising, which confirmed GCC fears that Washington was no longer the guarantor of Gulf security. The last straw was the surreptitious nuclear deal with Iran last November, which apparently did not consider taking Gulf countries into confidence.

Thus, the trust is breached and the 40-year-long 'oil-for-security' pact seems past its sell-by date. The phenomenal increase in the US' shale oil and gas production has helped the superpower outgrow its 'addiction to Middle East oil', allowing it to act more independently in the region. This has impaired confidence in regional security arrangements, which could have far-reaching implications for West Asia and the world.

For its part, India would have to continue walking a diplomatic tightrope between Iran and the GCC, building on the trust and goodwill it has earned among all sides in a volatile region. Interestingly, the early signs of thaw in the US-Iran relations augur well for New Delhi, as this had been a major point of contention in Washington-New Delhi relations. India has maintained diplomatic ties with Iran and both have shared geostrategic interests, particularly in Afghanistan and Central Asia. A breakthrough in the US-Iran negotiations could also allow India to increase its oil imports from the Gulf country – which are currently limited by the sanctions regime. There is also ample scope for trade and cultural exchanges.

Still, a wide gulf exists between Washington and Tehran as the present thaw could dissipate any moment.

Moreover, any changes in regional relations should not come at the expense of India's historic and strategically important ties with the GCC states. West Asia supplies over 62 per cent of India's oil imports, most of which come from Arab Gulf countries. Moreover, the over 6 million-strong Indian Diaspora in the GCC states has created deep human links between the two societies. While 70 per cent of Indian expatriates in the GCC are blue collar workers, over 20 per cent are professionals. They remit about \$30 billion to India every year.

Additionally, the GCC countries view the emergence of Indian economy with great interest. With the rise of major non-OPEC oil producers such as Russia and the US, the Gulf is looking toward the Indian and

Chinese markets for sustainable demand. Again, following 9/11 and the 2008 global recession, Gulf capital is increasingly seeking investment out of the West. A significant degree of cultural comfort and confidence in India's property rights protection and rule of law (unlike China's) makes India an attractive investment destination. However, the policy paralysis that dogged India's previous administration proved disappointing for some corporations. It is hoped that with the coming of a strong, new leadership in New Delhi, India may finally be able to meet expectations.

However, the security architecture of the Gulf remains a major concern for India. With the US influence in retreat, India needs to actively engage with the GCC, Iran and Iraq to secure its vital trade and energy interests. In cooperation with other Asian powers such as China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia, it should initiate building a durable, non-hegemonic security architecture which ensures stability and peace in the region.

Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan: The Mehsud Breakaway

10 June 2014

Riffath Khaji

Research Intern, (IReS), IPCS

On 28 May, 2014, the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Wali-ur-Rehman faction led by Khan Said, also known as Sajna, announced its separation from the TTP, alleging that the current Mullah Fazlullah-led TTP is bombing public places using fake names to avoid responsibility. Sajna was a strong contender for the TTP's leadership after its former chief Hakimullah Mehsud was killed in a US drone attack in November 2013. The post was handed over to Mullah Fazlullah of the Swati Taliban. Sajna was a key ally of former Wali-ur-Rehman Mehsud, who originally led the breakaway group and who was killed in a US drone strike in May 2013.

Why did the Split Take Place?

The TTP split into two factions after major group based in South Waziristan quit the TTP and accused its leadership of having fallen into invisible hands and turning the TTP into an organisation providing safety to criminals. Sajna's spokesperson Azam Tariq said "We announce separation from the TTP leadership which has deviated from its path." It accused the TTP leadership of indulging in robberies, killing for money, extortion and kidnapping for ransom with the help of a group of conspirators, and said all these actions are considered as un-Islamic.

The spokesman said the split took place because the TTP under Fazlullah had become a den for extortionists, and that it carried out blasts in mosques. This assertion, however, does not hold much sincerity. This is because the TTP has a long history of carrying out blasts inside mosques, and their principal source of income is extortion. Prima facie, it appears to be a case of infighting for leadership roles.

Primarily, the split appears to have been a result of tribal infighting for the leadership of the TTP. The TTP has traditionally been a group of tribesmen from the Mehsud clan, and Fazlullah is the first non-Mehsud tribesman to have assumed leadership of the group. Prior to joining the TTP, Fazlullah used to lead his own militant organization called the Tehrik-i-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM). He was never inclined to any negotiation and used to carry out ruthlessly violent attacks.

The military's role in this split is unclear. Unlike the Afghan Taliban, the TTP never took commands from the Pakistani military. Their primary targets are the military and law-enforcing agencies. Time and again, the TTP attacked military posts, taking some officials as captives, and subsequently, killing them brutally. The government's failed attempt at negotiations with the TTP is also among the key reasons for the ongoing civil-military tension in Pakistan.

What are the Potential Implications?

It is yet to be seen how the splinter groups act in the coming days. There is a likelihood of Fazlullah regrouping the cadres of his former organization, the TNSM. His seat of power was Swat valley, where he is believed to command the loyalty of many of his followers. Now, both the splinter groups might try to assert their existence and relevance by carrying out more attacks.

The military might try to take the advantage of the ongoing infighting and mount serious offensives to cause damage to the groups. The government might try to engage in negotiations with Sajna's group that appears eager to hold talks. The consent of military to such negotiations is very less.

According to the Pak Tribune, following the aforementioned split, 13 militants were killed in a bombing and gun-fighting in North Waziristan last week. 56 people have been killed in the violence that erupted on 1 June between Sajna's supporters and those of the late Hakimullah Mehsud group in North Waziristan.

The Wali-ur-Rehman Mehsud group is likely to emerge stronger after the division because it enjoys the support of both the Punjabi Taliban, and al-Qaeda. This breakaway may end the centrality of the TTP and lead to further disintegration. However, the government has not commented on the split and it is yet to be seen as to how this would affect the government's peace initiative.

The Karachi Taliban

28 May 2014

Riffath Khaji

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The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), in order to escape operations by the Pakistani military and drone strikes by the US, has gradually spread from its traditional base in the country's Federal Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkwa (KP) to the bustling commercial hub of Karachi. Although the TTP has been doing so since 2009, the group began escalating their violent activities in June 2012. This threatens to destabilise one of the Pakistan's key cities that is home to the country central bank and stock exchange. Today, evidence suggests that the entire Psthun neighbourhood in Karachi is under the influence of the TTP. As early as in October 2012, reports stated that 7000 TTP militants had infiltrated Karachi.

TTP in Karachi

Karachi attracts the TTP because it is Pakistan's largest city, with a population of 20 million people, and that is home to different ethnic and linguistic groups, making it a tempting target. More significantly, about 5 million Pastuns – the ethnicity to which most Taliban militants belong to – live in Karachi and making it easy to find sanctuaries in the city.

Additionally, several other militant groups – such as the Jaish-e-Muhammad, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, the Jamaat ul-Furqan, and the Harkut-ul-Jihad Islami – operate in the city. In the early stages of the TTP'S spread towards Karachi, the group's primary agenda was fundraising, and well as rest and recuperation.

The Taliban faction in Karachi largely comprises of militants from Swat valley who are loyal to the current TTP chief, Mullah Fazlullah. The commander for the Swat militants in Karachi is unknown, but anti-Taliban elders in Swat allege that the Karachi-based group was mainly led by Ibn-e-Aqeel and Sher Muhammad. In June 2012, the TTP began targeting local Awami National Party (ANP) leaders in Karachi. In 2012, Sher Shah Khan, a parliamentarian elected from the Swat region, alleged that several Swati political and social figures had been killed in Karachi by TTP militants.

Political Targets

According to the ANP, the TTP has killed 70 ANP leaders in Karachi. Approximately 44 ANP party offices have been closed across the city, and several party leaders have left Karachi and moved to Islamabad due to persistent TTP threats. In addition to targeting the ANP, the TTP has also threatened the secular Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), a political party that largely represents the Urdu-speaking Muslim community. The TTP militants in Karachi have also been targeting law enforcement agencies. Officials believe that the TTP has a hit list that includes police officers who have been involved in the arrests and killings of TTP commanders and militants.

In February 2014, 13 police commanders were killed and over 57 injured, when their bus was targeted by a car bomb outside the Police Training Centre in Razzaqabad. The police personnel targeted in the attack

were part of the Special Security Unit (SSU), an elite group of the Sindh Police that is deployed for the security of important official buildings and personalities.

The TTP network in Karachi has thus weakened the local economy and threatens the overall security of the city. Pakistani security experts, politicians and law enforcement officers agree that the TTP wants to tighten its grip on Karachi. The government is still in a position to roll back the TTP's threat to the city, given their insistence that the numbers of tribal militants operating in Karachi are low. If Pakistan fails to confront these developments soon, the TTP's Karachi network will have a wider national impact.

Karachi is home to powerful liberal secular elements, as well as progressive political parties such as the MQM, Pakistan People's Party, and the ANP.

Peace in Karachi will require an even-handed and professional approach on the part of the government, the law enforcement agencies, to target all such groups that are involved in criminal activities. The federal government of Pakistan is at the receiving end in containing the spread of the TTP in Karachi; and the future looks uncertain, given the volatility of the city.

Pakistan: A Different Agenda for Taliban's Foot Soldiers?

30 April 2014

Rajeshwari Krishnamurthy

Research Officer, IReS, IPCS

Of late, the discourses on terrorism and terrorist cells operating from within and outside Pakistan have seen intensification. What are the motives of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), given how leadership changes in the organisation have resulted in changes in its agendas? Do the foot soldiers and the leadership have varying agendas? If yes, how does the difference not become an operational obstacle?

The Leadership and the Foot Soldiers

The difference in the character of the TTP under the Mehsuds and later under Mullah Fazlullah is stark. Although the primary basis of the TTP's actions under all the leaderships was that of enforcing Islamic rule, the Mehsuds employed violent strategies and their own interpretations of Islam, despite no formal training in the edicts. In fact, it appears that their primary objective was not the establishment of Sharia, but violence against the Pakistani establishment. Conversely, Mullah Fazlullah is a trained maulvi and comes from a background where establishing Sharia law is the primary objective.

Given how the TTP is not one single body but a consortium of various militias active in different agencies of Pakistan, how comfortable are the foot soldiers of these organisations with the changing nature of the operations? Is there scope for dissension among the ranks of the TTP and its franchisees over the modification of the objectives? What are the primary objectives these foot soldiers sign up to see achieved?

Demand and Supply Chain in Pakistan's Terrorism Market

As the result of several decades of unrest and instability, most settled areas in Pakistan's tribal agencies are impoverished lands. While many recruits, several in their early teens, are tapped from the madrasas that dot the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, many of these jihadists are foreign fighters.

In this context, it is important to understand the variations in the motivation of Pakistani and non-Pakistani jihadists to join militant groups.

While several Pakistani jihadists are a result of years of Wahabi Islamic teachings in these Saudi-funded madrasas, a more important factor is the use of drones by the US. While the US' drone attacks target militants holed up in the unforgiving terrains of western Pakistan, these attacks often result in several civilian deaths, and are callously termed 'collateral damage'. Such losses brought upon by faceless predators from the skies in a community whose foundations are based on the idea of avenging injustice, serves as a primary motivator. This, clubbed with heavily radical teachings imparted in the aforementioned madrasas, often lead victims of such losses to join the ranks. Such recruits seek vengeance, and are not bothered much by organisational direction.

Therefore, although the leadership might have changed from a group of pseudo-mercenaries to a combination of mercenaries and missionaries, not all foot soldiers subscribe to all the opinions prescribed by the high command. However, that does not translate to direct dissent either. There seems to be a comfortable working relationship between the upper echelons and the lower tiers, where the leaders pursue their agendas, and the foot soldiers fight for them so long as the retribution they seek is guaranteed. This does not deny the fact that many of these fighters do indeed agree with the leadership on several issues.

Domestic recruits to the militant ranks seldom flee following crackdowns, and are mostly, with an exception of some, interested in carrying out their jihads in Pakistan itself. In fact, joining militant groups appears to be a viable career option these days.

The foreign fighters, however, are a different story altogether. Their main goal is jihad, and they are not bound to any particular region. They will move on to different geographical areas to carry out their actions depending on the situation. In fact, reports suggest that several thousand foreign fighters, mainly Arabs, Chechens and Uzbeks, have moved on from Pakistan to Syria and other areas citing 'uncertainty'.

Dissent or Convenience?

These motivations and compromises, however, cannot be weighed on simple grounds such as consent and dissent. The retention of foot soldiers despite changes in the agendas cannot be seen as complete consent to the operations, and, simultaneously, cannot be interpreted as murmuring of dissent either. The likelihood of the co-existence of both phenomena is high.

The motivations are many and complex, and often, practicable solutions are chosen. Foreign fighters leaving Pakistan can definitely not be seen as deserters. It is a choice of convenience and affinity towards the urgency of the cause over geography.

Today, Syria is viewed as the most holy ground for carrying out jihad. Those moving on to Syria are viewed by the terrorist cells as moving on to fight a greater holy war. The void left behind by such fighters, are filled by new and unpredictable actors that prop up frequently in Pakistan.

This is ominous, for the next big surge in terrorist activities, especially in Pakistan, will not just be about Islamic law. It will be heavily sectarian in nature; more than it already is. Unless there is a genuine consensus on a policy to deal with the causes and outcomes of terrorism and violent radicalism, home-grown or otherwise, between Islamabad and Rawalpindi, one cannot expect better days in the country anytime soon.

IPCS Discussion: Talks with the Taliban: Endgame for the Military, Political Parties and the TTP in Pakistan Report

11 April 2014

Ayesha Khanyari (Rapporteur)

The Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) organised a panel discussion on the talks between the government in Pakistan and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

The discussion took place at the IPCS Conference Room, with participation from representatives of the Indian ministries, young scholars, academia, and members of the strategic community.

The dialogue was led by Ambassador TCA Rangachari, Rana Banerji, Sushant Sareen and D Suba Chandran.

Ambassador TCA Rangachari

Director, Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi

Till approximately three months ago, the common opinion was that talking to the TTP was pointless. Given that Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was elected on a campaign platform that included a promise to initiate the dialogue with the TTP, the failing dialogue process was given another chance.

Should a state even be talking to a non-state actor? What does Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif hope to achieve through this dialogue?

Rana Banerji

Former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, and currently Distinguished Fellow, IPCS

It has been ten years since the Pakistan army moved into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Ever since the army began to fight the Taliban, it has suffered large casualties, creating a peculiar security paradox which can be described as 'falling between the two stools'- of FOIN (Fomenting Insurgencies) and COIN (Countering Insurgencies). There were several selective and short-lived peace accords between the army and various factions of the TTP. Initially, in 2003-2004, the Army suffered losses and the morale of the forces dipped to an all-time low. However, the 2009 military action in Swat exhibited implementation of a more classical military response. Larger formations deployed on the eastern border to face the Indian threat, at least two/three divisions, were brought in to bolster COIN capabilities in the FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through 'Clear, Hold and Build' operations. When the tribal militias were confronted by superior forces, they retreated to the hills or across the border, into Afghanistan.

On the one hand, the army is conscious of the need to maintain its image as 'defender of Islam'. On the other, it has to enforce writ of State and sustain morale among its own troops.. There has been a shift or reorientation of approach in the Pakistani army after General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani retired; Under Raheel Sharif, the Army leadership has signalled they are prepared to cope militarily and hit back. There is better ISI intelligence sharing and ISI's penetration in pockets of Taliban influence has improved. While at present, the army appears content to let the politicians handle the peace talks with the TTP, these are unlikely to achieve a satisfactory outcome. As and when they fail, the Army will take on the TTP militarily but only after this is endorsed by the civilian political leaders.

Sushant Sareen

Senior Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation

On the political front in Pakistan, policies adopted by the State towards the Taliban meet with a 'national schizophrenia'. There is a political constituency that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has to cater to. Political compulsions like balancing the right wing, political Islam, and the army and its involvement in the political management of the country, are likely to play important roles. Simultaneously, Nawaz Sharif has to be mindful of his and his family's personal security.

Previous peace accords struck between the former government and insurgents have miserably failed in ushering peace. According to a potentially credible theory currently doing rounds, the Pakistani government is attempting to barter the western front of the country away to the Taliban in exchange of safeguarding the investment that flows into Punjab and Sindh.

Given the unavailability of options, the Pakistani government is attempting to temporarily settle with any solution. Nawaz Sharif is willing to bargain, but there is no logical consistency in his stand. The entire approach towards the Taliban question is futile and un-planned.

Additionally, the stances of the other political parties in Pakistan vis-à-vis the talks also need highlighting. While right-wing parties such as the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) are hopeful for the success of the talks, religious parties such as the Sunni Jamaat-e-Islami and other Shia and Bareilvi parties stand divided on ideological and sectarian lines, regarding ways to deal with the TTP.

D Suba Chandran

Director, IPCS

What does the TTP want vis-à-vis the state and the civil society? Today, the TTP, under Mullah Fazlullah is not the same as it was under the Mehsuds. With a change in the leadership, the endgame for the TTP has also changed. Until recently, the TTP only targeted the state, but now it has started taking over the society as well.

The TTP is not a monolithic organisation. It has evolved into multiple franchisees with multiple endgames. What does the withdrawal of the international forces from Afghanistan mean for the TTP? In terms of Afghanistan, the TTP is likely to look eastward and not westward of the Durand Line.

The TTP attacks on social institutions, women's education, and tribal jirgas are moves targeted to undermine social emancipation in Pakistan. What will the implications of the return of the Punjabi Taliban to Punjab be? India is particularly concerned about this trend given how both Pakistan and India's Punjab provinces share borders.

Politically, the TTP will pressurise both the military and the political parties to gain more legitimacy and put forth their demands. On the societal front, the TTP wants to undermine the role of political parties in the region to prevent them from openly dissenting against them.

The TTP views the peace talks as surrender talks. Until 2012, no one was ready to negotiate with the TTP, but today they are considered stake holders in the peace process.

Questions/ Inputs

- Is the TTP such a wandering aimless group that its functions keep changing, and agendas shifting, depending on the change in its leadership? How come there is no dissention among the members of the TTP? Why are they acting like mercenaries?
- Given the different factions of the TTP still carrying out attacks and the state unable to assert control, what are the chances of the talks being successful?
- How can the withdrawal of the international forces not have a significant impact on the TTP?
- One of the main issues the TTP is likely to raise is that of drone attacks. The TTP would want the drone attacks to stop. This demand is linked to the US-Pakistan relations and the crucial military and economic aid Pakistan receives from the US. In that context, how far is the State willing to go to meet the demands of the TTP?
- What was the primary objective for the creation of the TTP?
- If the TTP is split into various factions, what ties them together?
- Is the TTP trying to buy time by engaging the state in the dialogue process?
- Will the rising insurgency in Pakistan have a spillover effect on India? What would India's response be? Is it in a position to defend itself?
- Does considering TTP as a stakeholder in peace mean that it has a support base in the FATA?

Responses

- The future of the TTP is not linked to the situation in Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban would prefer to delink from the al-Qaeda and continue to attack the Pakistani establishment. The TTP and the Afghan Taliban might share similar ideologies but their agendas are not similar. There appears to be an evident divide between the two in terms of operational areas and targets.
- After General Kayani, the Pakistani army has been quick and firm in hitting back. This has been possible due to the reorientation in the army under General Raheel Sharif.
- The TTP is not a monolithic organization, but that does not mean it is divided. It has franchisees. This divide should not be exaggerated.
- The Pakistan Taliban was more a creation of the al-Qaeda than that of the Afghan Taliban under Mullah Omar. The TTP was founded to fight the Pakistani establishment. The primary target of the TTP remains Pakistan.

- Even if the military clears a particular area, the insurgents hit back swiftly. Swat was a great victory for the Pakistan military but only few such operations were actually successful.
- The TTP does not need a support base to rise. It uses violence. It is aware of the fact that the State is ready to listen to their demands. It does not need popular support to rise.
- The state will continue to denounce the drones in public and comply with the US backstage. The US will go for it and the army will enforce it.

Talks with the Taliban: Endgame for the TTP

2 April 2014

D Suba Chandran

Director, IPCS

What does the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) want in Pakistan? How far it will go? Is there a change in its endgame today as compared to its original founding objective?

TTP's Endgame: Four Objectives

In a conflict situation, especially while dealing with an armed non-State actor, it is not easy to identify and differentiate between the rhetoric and real objective. In order to gain legitimacy for their illegitimate means, any non-State actor is likely to exaggerate the rhetoric.

Though there has never been a comprehensive exposé of what it aims at and how it plans to achieve the same, the 15 points put forward during the February negotiations reveal the TTP's rhetoric and real demands. They could be classified under four major categories: Afghanistan, Pakistan-US relations, Military operations by the security forces, and a blue print for governing Pakistan, with an exclusive role for itself.

TTP and Afghanistan

The TTP's agenda and objectives vis-à-vis Afghanistan are more rhetorical in nature and do not have any substantial underlines. The TTP is more focussed on Pakistan, and prefers to leave the state of affairs in Afghanistan to Mullah Omar's Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network. The TTP fights the Pakistani security forces and goes after targets within Pakistan; there haven't been any substantial reports of the TTP and its fighters crossing the Durand Line for fighting the International Security Assistance Forces in Afghanistan.

While they have used the Afghan soil as a temporary hideout, and training grounds, the TTP is unlikely to go after the security forces in Afghanistan. The TTP's objective in Afghanistan would remain limited to provide the space for Mullah Omar and the Haqqanis, by being a cushion on the Eastern side of the Durand Line.

TTP, the US and US-Pakistan Relations

The TTP objects Pakistan-US relations for two reasons: first, ever since the TTP was formed with substantial support from the al Qaeda, it acted as a veritable arm of the latter, to ease military pressure within Pakistan. Since the start of the Global War on Terror in 2001, the Pakistani military carried out select strikes against the al Qaeda, arresting its top leaders and handing over them to the US. Though the military and its Inter-Services Intelligence hid Osama bin Laden, it proactively assisted the US in neutralising the second tier leadership of the al Qaeda.

Second, the TTP was, for most part, a creation of the al Qaeda, with fewer inputs from the Afghan Taliban. Though Mullah Omar was accepted as the supreme leader by successive TTP leaders, the Mehsud clan associated with the TTP was closer to the al Qaeda than the Afghan Taliban. In this context, the TTP has substantially failed in achieving its objectives. Today, the al Qaeda is neutralised within Pakistan and is in the process of migrating to other regions; perhaps, the process is closer to conclusion.

The Present and the Future: TTP's New Blueprint for Pakistan

The third and fourth major objectives of the TTP would remain the most crucial in determining the endgame for the Pakistani Taliban. It is hence essential to take into account two crucial factors: the change in Pakistani Taliban's leadership – from the Mehsuds to Mullah Fazlullah – and the objectives of the multiple franchisees of the TTP.

As mentioned earlier, until 2013, the TTP leadership was closer to the al Qaeda than to the Afghan Taliban. More importantly, despite the occasional emphasis on jihad, until now, the TTP leadership was devoid of any ideological base. The Mehsud leadership acted more as foot soldiers for the al Qaeda's military objectives, rather than presenting any coherent ideological programme, however warped. Mullah Fazlullah's elevation as the TTP chief with support from the Afghan Taliban is likely to change the endgame for the TTP. In an interview in early 2014, a Taliban spokesperson made a crucial comment: "Swat Taliban is TTP today."

In this context, one has to go back and trace what the Swat Taliban wanted and fought for in Malakand, and also analyse Mullah Fazlullah's personality. Unlike the TTP under the Mehsuds, the Swati Taliban (which can be traced back to the erstwhile Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi in the Malakand region, and which came into existence even before the Pakistani Taliban) had an ideological agenda and endgame, despite the comparatively limited geographical hold.

The TTP's demands for imposing Sharia law in Pakistan will have to be interpreted in this context. It is unlikely that the TTP wants to impose Sharia all over Pakistan at this juncture, but it would certainly like to start with the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the Provincially Administered Tribal Areas regions; and unfortunately, the State and its political parties are likely to yield to this proposition in a barter arrangement, further unravelling the FATA.

Finally, the multiple franchisees of the TTP, especially the Punjabi Taliban, are unlikely to stop with limited demands in the FATA or Pashtun areas. Their target would be the heartland of Pakistan, especially Punjab, vis-à-vis the minorities and non-Sunni communities.

The real war against Pakistan would begin once the US leaves Pakistan; and not by the TTP in FATA but by the Punjabi Taliban in the heart of Pakistan. There lies the greater threat for the future of Pakistan.

Talks with the Taliban: Endgame for the Military

1 April 2014

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The March 1 ceasefire announced by the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) holds somewhat tenuously in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) even as the Nawaz Sharif government shows extraordinary patience in continuing to engage with them.

TTP Tantrums Vs. Pakistani Army

The TTP was badly hit by the pinpointed air-strikes undertaken by the Pakistani army in February. The ceasefire resulted due to the TTP's weak position, as their current hide-outs stood revealed and they could not escape to higher mountain reaches immediately due to winter weather.

Though patience of the army leadership appeared to be wearing thin with the TTP's dilatory tactics, on March 12, a meeting chaired by Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Rashad Mahmood, reaffirmed "full preparedness and resolve of the armed forces to fight the menace of terrorism under a comprehensive strategy, within the policy parameters set by the political leadership."

The TTP Shura demanded direct talks with authorised government functionaries, including representatives of the army and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The army is against any such direct involvement. Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali has increasingly emerged in a frontal or nodal role. He presided over the March 25 meeting attended by the Director General of the ISI, Lieutenant General Zaheerul Islam, which authorised a committee of civilian bureaucrats, comprising Federal Ports & Shipping Secretary Habibullah Khattak, Additional Secretary of the FATA, Arbab Arif, former bureaucrat

Rustam Shah Mohmand, sole member of the Government's previous team of interlocutors which broke the ice, all three Pashtuns, and Fawad Hussan Fawad, Additional Secretary, Prime Minister's Office, to talk to the TTP at a secret venue in North Waziristan.

The success of the talks would depend on whether the civilian politicians can take the army along while tackling the main demands of TTP vis-à-vis the imposition of Sharia law, the withdrawal of the army from FATA, and the release of prisoners.

Ceasefire and Negotiations: Various Conundrums

The ceasefire would need to be extended after March 30. Any further extension could tactically redound to the army's disadvantage, helping the TTP militants regroup, and escape to the hills in better climatic conditions. However, a key risk in this regard would be the possibility of maverick actions by smaller militant groups perpetrating localised violence against security forces. Each such act of violence makes further negotiations with the TTP more difficult as it cannot cohesively control militants loosely adhering to its fold. The army has threatened firm retaliation against such incidents.

Demands have come from civil society that ceasefire extension be accompanied by release of kidnapped or arrested 'non-combatants', especially the long incarcerated sons of PPP politicians, Haider Gilani and Shahbaz Taseer and the Vice Chancellor of Peshawar University, Dr Ajmal Khan.

Release of prisoners remains a vexing issue. A list of 300 women and children 'prisoners' was given to a pro-TTP mediator, Professor Ibrahim, but the army denied holding any women or children. In the recent past, the execution of Dr Usman, the Punjabi Taliban mastermind of the 2010 attack on Army Headquarters was stayed by the Punjab government after the Taliban issued a threat.

Shahbaz Sharif too has been reluctant to act firmly against militants for fear of retaliation and collateral damage in Punjab. The army would balk at release of prisoners at this stage, especially those arrested or detained for specific terrorist incidents. Phased release of those who may not have committed heinous crimes could be considered later, provided binding progress for peace can be achieved through a longer term ceasefire accompanied by a surrender of weapons. Currently, agreement on this seems a far cry.

Demographic alterations

Whenever there is a military operation in FATA and KP or anticipation thereof, a large outflow of internally displaced persons (IDPs), mostly civilians, especially women and children occurs. IDPs from the 2009 Swat operation continue to live in abysmal conditions in the Jalozai relief camp and other less organised temporary settlements in Tank, Dera Ismail Khan. There is also a burgeoning Pashtun settlement in greater Karachi urban agglomeration. Any new military operation would require the civilian administration to gear up their preparedness to cope for a fresh influx of IDPs. This can be an emotive issue.

The Way Forward?

A withdrawal of army 'regulars' from FATA too seems unacceptable, even if the TTP couches this request with the proposal of restoring jurisdiction of Frontier Corps para-military personnel. Persistent infighting within the TTP would also need to be assessed. Mullah Fazlullah, the current TTP leader hails from Swat, and is disliked by the army leadership. Though his ascension may have been endorsed by the Afghan Taliban leadership (Mullah Omar), it is unclear if powerful local leaders like the Haqqanis, Mehsuds and the Wazirs fully accept him. The army/ISI could exploit these differences.

Though a 7 Infantry Division garrison is present in Miranshah, the writ of the State does not run in many areas of FATA. These areas can be used as 'launch pads' by insurgents supporting the Afghan Taliban (AT) in Afghanistan, as also against Pakistan's own security forces. The army's responses would have to be carefully calibrated, giving the TTP a sufficient 'bloody nose' yet not jeopardising the capacity of the Afghan Taliban to hold ground on the other side of the Af-Pak border.

While the civilian political leadership seems keen to continue the peaceful dialogue, the army sees this as ineffectual appeasement.

This dilemma is likely to intensify as Pakistan's politicians muddle through the current confusion on finding the right answers to curb the growing domestic threat of Islamic terrorism.

Talks with the Taliban: Endgame for the Political Parties

1 April 2014

Sushant Sareen

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The recent developments over the talks with the Pakistani Taliban have raised serious questions about what Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif realistically hopes to achieve through the dialogue. Furthermore, political parties in Pakistan have begun shedding some of their ambivalence on their opinions vis-à-vis the talks with the Taliban. Barring a few who stridently oppose having any truce with the Taliban, most political parties continue to pay lip service to the need for a dialogue, and in the same breath some of them speak about how far the government could or should go with the Taliban.

Right-wing Parties

Broadly, right-wing, conservative, mainstream parties like Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) are willing to go an extra mile to make the talks a success. Religious parties like the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam- Fazal-ur-Rehman (JUI-F), the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Sami ul Haq (JUI-S), Jamaat Islami, and other Shia or Barelvi parties like the Majlis-e Wahdat-e Muslimeen, the Sunni Ittehad Council, Sunni Tehreek etc. are divided on the basis of ideological, sectarian and doctrinal lines on how to deal with the Taliban. Political interests too influence the stances of some religious parties. The left-of-centre, 'secular' and progressive mainstream parties like the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the Search Results Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) and Awami National Party (ANP), currently either support or virulently oppose the talks.

The ruling PML-N has taken a risky political gamble by entering into talks with the Taliban, especially because the government was on the verge of launching an all-out military operation when it suddenly changed its mind. At one level, the PML-N's soft policy which detractors call appeasement will appeal to its core political constituency that is ambiguous towards the Taliban and other sundry Islamists and would like to see a negotiated end to the violence. An added benefit is that it robs PML-N's main challenger in Punjab, Imran Khan (of PTI), of a platform that he could use to dent Nawaz Sharif's vote bank. Given that Imran Khan was the most vocal advocate of dialoguing with the Taliban, Nawaz Sharif's inclusion of him in the peace talks has disarmed Khan. A major driver behind this decision is that he wants to keep Punjab safe from Taliban retaliation, which would be inevitable in the event of a military operation. On the flip side, if there is any substance in the reports that the Pakistani army is not pleased with the government's policy on the Taliban, one can expect a tense stand-off in civil-military relations if the talks were to break down and/or Sharif is seen as conceding too much.

Liberal Parties

Among the 'liberal' parties, the MQM has strongly opposed any concessions to the Taliban. This is partly due to ideological reasons and partly due reasons of self-preservation, given how the MQM bastion Karachi is constantly under attack. Simultaneously, the MQM is also taking efforts to get in the good books of the military, which it thinks is opposed to the talks.

Meanwhile, the PPP appears split over how far it should go in supporting or opposing the talks. The Party is making half-hearted efforts to recover lost political space by questioning the talks, but also fears coming out very strongly against the Taliban. While PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto has taken a strident anti-Taliban position (only on Twitter), the Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly, Khurshid Shah, has taken a more nuanced stand. The PPP is also bristling at not being kept in the loop by the government. The ANP made some noises against the talks, only to express faith in the talks in the next breath – but that is understandable, given how they've remained in the cross-hairs of the Taliban.

Parties of Minority Communities

The Shia and Barelvi parties are unequivocal in their opposition to the talks. They fear that any space conceded to the Taliban will produce an existential threat for them. The Jamaat-e-Islami has been in the

forefront to justify Taliban actions and sees them as warriors against the 'evil' US. It is in favour of continuing the dialogue even if they fail and opposes any military operation against them. Their support is not entirely altruistic and the Jamaat sees political benefit in the form of greater clout and perhaps a chance to come to power. However, the Taliban will have little use for the Jamaat if they do come to power.

More interesting is the tussle between the two main Deobandi parties – the JUI-F and the JUI-S. For decades, the latter has been worsted in the political field by the former. In fact, Haq had been reduced to a bit player until the Taliban talks, in which he was nominated as the head of the 'Taliban committee' to liaison with the government. His old links with terrorism and the Taliban have catapulted straight to the political centre-stage. Resultantly, JUI-F chief Fazal-ur-Rehman is displeased; what is more, Rehman has for long been trying to promote his own peace talks through the tribal jirgas. But despite his having joined the coalition government, Nawaz Sharif hasn't bought into Fazal's formula for peace. As a result, Rehman, though not opposed to the dialogue, has expressed his doubts over the talks yielding any result. Perhaps he is waiting for an opportunity – a breakdown in the talks – to make his next move.

Nawaz Sharif is essentially walking on the razor's edge and regardless of the outcome of the talks, he will face the brunt of the political fallout.

1 April 2014

And Now, They are Coming for Us

D Suba Chandran
Director, IPCS

The recent attack in Lahore on Raza Rumi, a noted journalist and a moderate voice in Pakistan, highlights the new trend in targeting the media, especially those who do not adhere to the views of the Taliban and its multiple franchisees.

Raza Rumi was fortunate to survive the attack; but not his driver. There have been a series of similar attacks against journalists in Pakistan; and according to a report by the Committee to Protect Journalists, over 50 media-persons have been killed in Pakistan over the last two decades. But Rumi was targeted, not because he is a journalist. He was attacked for his fearless expression of moderate and secular views vis-à-vis radicalism and minorities within the country. Outside Pakistan, he also believes in the shared history of India and Pakistan and has written at length about our Sufi past.

The State thinks these are random attacks by the militants that would dissipate eventually. Despite the targeted and high profile attacks on naval installations, the General Headquarters and others, the State seems to have a myopic belief that the only problem is the US presence in Afghanistan. The military and it's the Inter-Services Intelligence still think that they can strike deals with the Taliban and its franchisees. The political parties, despite losing leaders, are only keen to initiate negotiations with the Taliban.

The State in Pakistan is certainly not weak; it butchered and brutally targeted the Baloch nationalists in the recent years. Remember what happened to Akbar Bugti, a nationalist leader and former Governor of Balochistan Province?

Unfortunately, the State does not want to take on the Taliban. Perhaps there are other considerations vis-à-vis the Taliban, such as undermining the Pashtun nationalism, or using them as a trump-card against Afghanistan after 2014.

Back to the original question on why Rumi was targeted? Was it only because of his views? Immediately after the attack, he asked the same question. His initial response was: "I am a relatively small fry in the media and opinion industry. I am a recent entrant in the mass (electronic) media, but my views, I am told, are dangerous and invite trouble. So, I wish to ask my well-wishers the following questions: is raising the issue of minority rights unacceptable? Is demanding the inclusion of Jinnah's August 11 speech in our Constitution and state behaviour unacceptable?"

Were Rumi and the others, from Benazir Bhutto to Salman Taseer targeted because of their moderate views? Perhaps; but the bigger problem that makes "them" stronger and bolder is "our" muted and cowardly response to "their" onslaught.

What did we do after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, Salman Taseer, Shahbaz Bhatti and Ahmed Bilour? We just looked the other way.

What did we do when they targeted the minorities – the Shias, the Christians, the Ahmadiyyas, the Hindus and the Hazaras all over Pakistan? We wrote few commentaries and remained active in the social media for few days and moved on. In reality, we looked the other way.

Raza Rumi's outburst after the attack sums up the problem in Pakistan today: "A young man, who had been working as my driver for some time, was almost dead. I stood on a busy road asking for help and not a single car stopped. A crowd had gathered and I was seeking their assistance almost like someone in a hysterical sub-continental film. The nearest hospital was a private enterprise, which initially refused to treat all three of us. I had to protest, after begging on the street and then seeking emergency medical aid. Suddenly, all that afflicts Pakistan became clear: the violence, the impunity for murderers, the failing values of a society and privatisation of essential public services."

The problem is not "them;" it is "us" and our failure to respond and defend what we feel is right. As Edmund Burke said, "the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Not that they are winning. But we are losing, thanks to our criminal silence that speaks louder than their violence. We should not be worried about their guns; instead we should be afraid of our silence.

Remember Martin Niemöller's famous note he penned while in Nazi Germany:

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out - Because I was not a Socialist.
Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out - Because I was not a Trade Unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out - Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me-and there was no one left to speak for me.

They are not just coming for Benazir Bhutto, Salman Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti. They are coming for us. And New Delhi is not far from Lahore. The Taliban and its franchises have already breached the Indus. And the problem is just not the Taliban. Regardless of whether the roots lie in Kandahar or in Riyadh, we are not too far from their radical beliefs.

Even if "we" don't want to stand up against "them," at least, "we" should rally behind people like Raza Rumi, who stand for "us."

Raza Rumi, we are with you. March on. You are a Hero.

TTP under Mullah Fazlullah: What Next for the Pakistani Taliban?

14 February 2014

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Almost two months after the killing of Hakimullah Mehsud, the former head of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), by a drone attack in the Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, where does the TTP stand today? Is it demoralised, or renewed, under the leadership of the new head, Mullah Fazlullah? More importantly, how would the TTP evolve from here, under the leadership of its new leader, who is believed to have been personally chosen by Mullah Omar, the spiritual leader of the Taliban?

Will Fazlullah make the TTP a more "veritable arm" of the Afghan Taliban and fight for its political cause in Afghanistan? Or will he convert it into a jihadi organization, fighting for a religious cause within Pakistan?

TTP Today: Has it Become Weak after the Assassination of Hakimullah Mehsud?

On the first question, today, the TTP has certainly not been weakened. Despite losing several of its leaders (more due to drone attacks, instead of Pakistan's anti-militancy operations), the TTP remains a deadly organisation. Recent attacks, even after the assassination of Hakimullah Mehsud late last year, proves how active the TTP has remained.

Mullah Fazlullah's measured response to the Pakistani State's offer for talks also highlights the absence of panic and/or anxiety in the TTP ranks. In a calculated move, it has announced a committee consisting Maulana Abdul Aziz, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-S) leader Maulana Sami ul Haq, and Jamat-e-Islami (JI) leader Professor Mohammad Ibrahim; two more nominated members, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan and Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) leader Mufti Kifayatullah, refused to be a part of this committee.

The fact that the TTP has chosen leaders of political parties as its representatives illustrates the confidence it has. On the other hand, the political leadership in Pakistan has displayed a lot of angst and undertaken extensive preparation, cutting across party lines. The All Parties Meeting for the umpteenth time recommended initiating a talk about talks with the Pakistani Taliban, again. Clearly, the TTP still thinks it is not weakened vis-à-vis the State.

The second set of questions – on the implications of Mullah Fazlullah reportedly being chosen by Mullah Omar himself – warrants a larger discussion, not just in Pakistan, but also in Afghanistan, India, and the rest of international community.

Ever since its creation, the TTP's leadership remained with the Mehsuds in North and South Waziristan. Former leaders such as Baitullah and Hakimullah belonged to the Mehsud clan of the Pashtun ethnic group. They were chosen by the Shura, or imposed themselves over the latter, due to their clout and fighting power. Today, it is widely believed that the Mehsuds in general and the TTP leadership in Waziristan in particular, were supported by the al Qaeda and its affiliates such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

TTP Tomorrow: Will it Become Deadly Under Mullah Fazlullah?

Mullah Fazlullah, who has taken over as the new leader of the TTP is no ordinary militant. The previous leaders of the TTP – both Baitullah Mehsud and his successor Hakimullah Mehsud – were more aggressive in nature, using violence as a strategy against the Pakistani Establishment. Neither of them were trained in religious discourse; and nor did they use religion even in a crude form. They imposed their own version of Islam.

Mullah Fazlullah is completely different in this context. He is a 'Mullah'; in fact, he is referred as "Radio Mullah" for his effective use of FM to propagate his own version of Islam. As a leader of the Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi, (TNSM) which later became the Swat Taliban, he propagated his own version of Islam. Unlike Baitullah and Hakimullah, Fazlullah believed in a religious cause for implementing the Shariah. As a leader of the TNSM, one of his as well as his father-in-law and TNSM founder, Sufi Muhammad's, main demands has been to implement the Shariah law in Pakistan. Mullah Fazlullah has also been anti-women; he had girls' schools bulldozed and imposed a strict code on women, restricting their movements in public places in Swat. From polio vaccination to music CDs, he has had an extremely narrow interpretation of religion.

This is where one could expect the main difference in the TTP's focus under Fazlullah, as compared to that of the Mehsuds. Neither Baitullah nor Hakimullah Mehsud attempted to impose their version of Islam. In fact, it would not be wrong even to state that both the Mehsuds did not even have a version of Islam that they attempted to impose. They were ruthless more in carrying out a violent vendetta against the State of Pakistan, than attempting to change its society. The sectarian attacks were perpetrated by the TTP franchisees rather than the main group in Waziristan.

Operationally, Mullah Fazlullah is equally ruthless as the Mehsuds have been vis-à-vis the Pakistani Establishment. In fact the military had to fight a bloody battle to recapture Swat valley from Fazlullah.

Furthermore, under Fazlullah's leadership, the TTP is likely to undergo a major transformation in terms of its linkages with the Afghan Taliban and Mullah Omar. Since Fazlullah himself has been fighting in Afghanistan's Kunar Province, it is unlikely that his focus would remain focussed only against the Pakistani State.

The above suppositions need a deeper and wider analysis. More importantly, it is highly likely that Fazlullah might become a bridge between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban. What would that mean? To

use Admiral Mike Mullen's phrase, "will the TTP become a veritable arm of the Afghan Taliban?" What would be the implications if that happens?

Al-Qaeda-ISIL Split: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

11 February 2014

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In the first week of February 2014, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the commander-in-chief of the al-Qaeda made a statement disowning the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Al-Zawahiri, who took charge following former chief Osama bin Laden's death, announced (and jihadist websites quoted) that the ISIL "is not a branch of the al-Qaeda group [and al-Qaeda] does not have an organisational relationship with it and is not the group responsible for their actions."

The Good

While this in-fighting and the fragmentation of the world's most organised militant organisations is certainly good news, the split between al-Qaeda and its former Iraqi affiliate is not unprecedented.

There were tensions between the two groups and their then leaders Osama bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi even as early as 2006. However, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the current head of the ISIL, and Ayman al-Zawahiri have been sparring over conflicting views regarding their goals and the means used to achieve them, for the past several months.

Fissures appeared when the ISIL took measures to expand its scope by co-opting the al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra (alternately known as the al-Nusra Front) to fight Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime in the country. As soon as the merger was announced, al-Zawahiri rejected it and recognised al-Nusra as its sole affiliated entity in Syria. Abu Muhammad al-Julani, the leader of the al-Nusra Front too acknowledged only a relationship, and rejecting any merger with the then Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), confirmed their allegiance solely to al-Qaeda.

Since then, the ISIL and the al-Nusra have manifestly worked towards differing goals, and with different means. While the al-Nusra's main objective is to topple the Assad regime and at the same time maintain ties with fellow militant rebel groups, the ISIL's core focus appears to be towards territorial expansion for spreading and implementing its extremely draconian interpretations of Islamic law – and eventually establish an Islamic Caliphate in the region. The ISIL employs barbaric tactics on all, and are resented even by their fellow militant organisations. The al-Nusra Front on the other hand, although militant, tries not to alienate the civilian population with extreme brutality.

The ISIL's methods have driven the other militant factions in Syria, including the al-Nusra Front, to rebel against them. Given the fact that the Front has the widest reach and has proven to be most 'effective' in Syria, the decision to disown the ISIL is in al-Qaeda's interest. The actions of the ISIL have been garnering opposition from other rebel groups and civilians, and al-Zawahiri would not want to risk any clout that al-Qaeda and/or its affiliates enjoy in any region.

The Bad

Al-Baghdadi's resilience against al-Zawahiri's overtures and warnings indicates the existence of a graver reality. The former's motivation to stick to his ground originates from the fact that the ISIL has managed to break away from being solely funded by the al-Qaeda. His funding now flows in from individuals and organisations from various West Asian nations who have vested interests in Syria and Iraq. An example of this is the US Department of the Treasury designating Qatar-based Abd al-Rahman bin Umayr al-Nuaymi and Yemen-based Abd al-Wahhab Muhammad Abd al-Rahman al-Humayqani as 'Specially Designated Global Terrorists' for providing financial support to al-Qaeda, Asbat al-Ansar, al-Qaeda in Iraq, and the al-Shabaab, in December 2013 (US Department of the Treasury, Treasury designates al-Qaeda supporters in Qatar and Yemen, 2013).

Given the statistics and mounting evidence, it is likely that al-Baghdadi had breached the walls of the terrorist funding supply chain long before 2013, when he openly started rebelling against al-Zawahiri.

This, along with the establishment of an institutionalised and organised system of revenue collection in the areas controlled by the ISIL (then the Islamic State of Iraq), cemented their existence as a formidable force in the region.

The Ugly

While this disavowing by the al-Qaeda is essentially its attempt to assert and proclaim its role, authority, and influence in the Syrian civil war, the implications of this move will be many and far-reaching, and much beyond the Syrian question.

The ISIL, led by al-Baghdadi, is unlikely to become 'obedient' as al-Zawahiri would like it. On the contrary, they will likely dig in their heels and launch a more serious and savage offensive, especially since they now have to prove their worth and efficacy devoid of any association with the terrorist world's most organised outfit, the al-Qaeda.

Given the several vested interests West Asian nations have in the Syrian civil war, they will be dragged deeper into the complex quagmire. The Kurdish struggle for autonomy that has been palpitating for several decades and has found renewed momentum since the outbreak of the Arab Awakening will flare up, with revived clashes between the Syrian Kurds and the ISIL.

More importantly, this will eventually lead to a power struggle between several players from within and outside Syria, with grave economic, security (regional and international), and humanitarian consequences.

In the event of the ISIL managing to stand their ground, which seems likely – given their diverse funding and revenue sources, and since they control several resource-rich areas – there will be two formidable Islamist terrorist groups in the world, and a power struggle between the two will bring nothing short of worse days to come.

Talks with the TTP: How Far will the State Go?

7 February 2014

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The renewed attempts by the Pakistani State to initiate another round of dialogue with the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have gained momentum, and numerous measures are in place. The government has appointed a four-member committee to negotiate with the TTP; the TTP for its part has formed two committees – a political committee led by Maulana Samiul Haq, comprising people outside the TTP to negotiate with the government committee; and a second committee comprising TTP ideologues and fighters to operate as a link between the TTP leadership and the political committee.

Talking to the Taliban: What is the Endgame for the State?

It should be clear at the outset, it is not the TTP that was keen on negotiating with the State; rather, it is the State, especially this government, which is interested in initiating the talks.

What does the State want to achieve through this round of talks with the TTP? It is obvious, that the State would expect the TTP to cease violence and stop militancy. On this issue, the State has a wider consensus – supported by the Parliament, Military and the Civil Society. None within Pakistan (outside the TTP and its multiple franchisees all over the country) would like to see violence and mayhem perpetrated by the Taliban to continue.

Second, the State would expect the TTP to respect its writ, especially in non-tribal areas and the settled districts within KP and outside it. While the State would be willing to live with the TTP as a non-violent and non-State actor within the FATA, it certainly would not want the TTP to cross the tribal agencies.

Besides the above, is the State likely to demand that the TTP should give up its position on Afghanistan and imposition of Shariah within Pakistan? Is the State also likely to demand that the TTP should not

provide base for the Afghan Taliban and support them against the established government and the international security forces in Afghanistan?

Unlikely. For the State it is a secondary issue or worse not an issue at all. If the State in Pakistan and its security Establishment themselves are backing Afghan Taliban, it would not make sense that they ask the TTP not to do so.

Talking to the Taliban: Are there Redlines for the State?
How far is the State willing to go to achieve the above?

While there is a consensus at the political level (especially amongst the leading political parties both within and outside the Parliament) towards initiating a negotiation process with the TTP, there seems to be no threshold set by the State towards how far it could go to accommodate demands made by the TTP.

In the absence of open documents and/or policy outlines, any answer to the above questions will be conjectural.

One of the principal demands of the TTP is the release of Taliban internees who are currently in state captivity. While the State is likely to bargain on the specifics of the releases, one can expect it to yield to the TTP's demand. While the State would not release all Taliban prisoners, a few important members who are part of the leadership are likely to be freed. The State and the TTP would dub this as a goodwill gesture. For, ominous as it may sound, if the TTP has agreed to come to the negotiating table as a 'goodwill gesture,' the State will have to return the favour. After all, it is the State, and not the TTP, that has been keen on initiating the negotiation processes.

The TTP's second demand is likely to be vis-à-vis the US and Afghanistan. This would include the severing of all ties with the US and its support to the international security forces in Afghanistan, and an end to the drone strikes in the North-West Frontier Province. On this demand, the State will act in a pussyfooted manner. While there would be heavier emphasis on sovereignty and respecting Pakistan's internal peace processes, much would depend on the government's ability to cope with the US pressure on both accounts.

Depending on the value and significance of the targets, the US is likely to go ahead with the drone attacks. Perhaps, the number of attacks would reduce, but only for a brief while. The US is unlikely to abandon the campaign of drone attacks; neither would it stop pressurising Pakistan from doing more in Afghanistan. After all, this would be an intrinsic part of the US-Pakistan strategic dialogue, tied to crucial economic and military aid for Islamabad.

Another major demand of the TTP would be the imposition of Sharia law in the country. In fact, irrespective of what the TTP leadership wants, hard line members of the nominated team, such as Maulana Samiul Haq, are likely to insist on it. While the State would resist such a move in the rest of Pakistan, it would be willing to provide a space, perhaps within the FATA as the previous government attempted in Swat, few years ago.

In fact, while negotiating over the three aforementioned likely demands of the TTP – the release of Taliban internees, the severing of ties with the US and ending drone attacks, and the imposition of Sharia law – the State has little manoeuvring space. Perhaps, it is not strong enough to impose its will. At least for now.



COLUMNS



Column: Big Picture

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Understanding Democracy and Diversity in J&K

18 November 2014

As the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) goes to the polls to elect a State Assembly, it is an appropriate moment to reflect on how democracy, diversity and dissent are closely intertwined in the state. The last two state assembly elections, in 2002 and 2008, have by almost all accounts been free and fair. So have the general elections of 2004, 2009 and 2014 in the state. Perhaps most significantly, the Panchayat elections of 2011 were a resounding success, with an astounding 82 per cent voter turnout. There is no reason to expect that the forthcoming state assembly elections would be a departure from this

trend. Undoubtedly, J&K continues to have many democracy deficits, but these are no longer deficits of an electoral nature.

The other aspect the ongoing elections are once again highlighting is the sheer diversity of J&K. While the rest of India has been territorially made, unmade and remade, and almost always on socio-cultural lines in order to manage diversity, the territorial expanse of the former princely state of J&K has been altered not by internal reorganisation but by external aggression. This 'inside-outside' dynamic – external compulsions preventing internal rearrangement – has ensured that J&K will remain, well into the future, exactly as we encounter it today: as a political community of extraordinary diversity.

J&K is the only erstwhile princely state that has not been merged or amalgamated with neighbouring territory. J&K had only a few peers during the British Raj: the five Indian Princes entitled to the 21-gun salute were the Nizam of Hyderabad and Berar, the Maharaja of Mysore, the Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir, the Maharaja Gaekwad of Baroda, and the Maharaja Scindia of Gwalior. The territorial trajectories of these five states are fascinating. For instance, after Gwalior State acceded to India in 1947, it was merged with the states of the Central India Agency to form Madhya Bharat, which later became Madhya Pradesh, which was later further reorganised in 2000 with the creation of Chhattisgarh. Baroda State formally acceded to the Dominion of India in 1949 and was first merged with Bombay state. In 1960, when the two new states of Gujarat and Maharashtra were formed, Baroda became part of Gujarat.

What about Mysore State? As a result of the States Reorganisation Act, in 1956, the Kannada-speaking districts of Belgaum (except Chandgad taluk), Bijapur, Dharwar, and North Canara were transferred from Bombay State to Mysore State. Bellary, South Canara and Udupi districts were transferred from Madras State and the Koppal, Raichur, Gulbarga and Bidar districts from Hyderabad State. Also, Coorg State was merged into Mysore, becoming a district of Mysore State. Those areas that spoke the Kannada language were thus unified into one state. As a large portion of this new state comprised the territory of Mysore, the name 'Mysore' was retained as the name of the newly created state until it was renamed to Karnataka in 1973.

But none of these territorial changes compare with the way in which Hyderabad State was reorganised. In September 1948, the Dominion of India invaded the State of Hyderabad and overthrew its Nizam, annexing the state into what would become the Indian Union. In 1956, during the Reorganisation of the Indian States based along linguistic lines, the Telugu-speaking region of the Hyderabad State was merged with Andhra State, the Marathi speaking region was merged with Bombay state and the Kannada speaking region with Mysore State. In a very real sense, Hyderabad state was not merely renamed or reorganised; it ceased to exist. In June 2014, Telangana re-emerged as a separate state, with Hyderabad City as the capital of both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana for 10 years.

These mergers, amalgamations and partitions are the story of independent India, as the open and democratic political system has catered to – and sometimes caved in the face of pressure to – popular demands emerging largely on socio-cultural and ethno-cultural grounds. The 'other four' 21-gun-salute states are a sample not only of all erstwhile princely states but also of all the territories in erstwhile British India. Apart from J&K, all other territories within India have been reconfigured by the operation of democratic politics, sometimes deliberative and sometimes agitational, but always seeking to diminish socio-cultural diversity.

Untouched by the 1956 Reorganisation of States, J&K is by far the most linguistically diverse state in India. Despite some agitational politics on this issue in recent years, the state cannot easily be reorganised, for two distinct reasons. The first pertains to the external shadows that have always hung upon the state. Analytically, experientially and existentially, J&K is bordered by two foreign powers, China and Pakistan that view its territory with hostile intent. No other state in the Indian Union faces these geostrategic challenges. Secondly, in its socio-cultural geography, J&K is a land of nested minorities. Thus, any international reorganisation of the state will always be a blunt instrument and many people and communities would feel the brunt of such reorganisation.

The unique form of dissent in J&K is inextricably linked to issues of democracy and diversity. This important topic will be explored in a later column.

When Xi Met Modi: Juxtaposing China and India

21 October 2014

During Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to India in September, much was made of the personal rapport and chemistry between him and his host, Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Chinese investment worth US\$20 billion, although a fraction of the figures (US\$100-300 billion) that had been touted before the visit, was nevertheless significant in the bilateral context. It was also noteworthy that the Indian leadership was forceful in highlighting India's concerns on such bilateral irritants as border incursions, stapled visas and river waters. The relaxed atmospherics and candid conversation presage a developing maturity in the bilateral relationship, which is important for the evolving power relationships across Asia and further afield.

One of the fascinating aspects of the visit and the Modi-Xi meeting was the way in which China and India can now be juxtaposed. When we juxtapose two entities, we place them close together for contrasting effect. From an International Relations (IR) perspective, what happens when we juxtapose the two Asian giants?

China and India can be juxtaposed across three distinct dimensions. The first of them is comparative. China is one of the few countries in the world with which India can sensibly be compared (Brazil is another). In any comparative exercise, the two cases being compared should be sufficiently similar for the comparison to be warranted, yet sufficiently dissimilar for the comparison to be fruitful. A China-India comparison can be undertaken from a multitude of disciplinary perspectives, focus on a wide variety of issue areas and encompass vast historical periods. Almost any sensible China-India comparison would yield fascinating results.

However, when Indian analysts attempt this comparison, it is usually in unidirectional, yardstick terms. By this one means that China is treated as the benchmark against which India is measured: 'Why cannot we be more like them?' The more 'policy relevant' the study is, the greater this line of speculation is in evidence. In India, China is very rarely studied qua China, in order to understand its dynamics, trends and complexities on its own terms. Much more often, Indian analytical treatments of China are as exemplar, allegory or metaphor.

The second dimension in which China and India can be juxtaposed is relational. Here, the focus is upon the factors that would bring the two countries together, as opposed to those that would set them apart. While conflict between states is relatively easy to explain, there is no single (or singular) explanation of why states decide to work in concert. In IR, different theoretical streams provide radically different answers to the question 'Why do states come together?' The three predominant explanations, to simplify theoretical propositions, are as follows. Realists argue that states make alliances to aggregate power. Liberals suggest that states cooperate to solve problems and thereby enhance their opportunities. Constructivists hold that states come together to build community. What is interesting is not only that each of these explanations rings true, but also that each is obviously incomplete and imperfect in the sense that it does not tell the whole story. Each of these - power aggregation, problem solving and community building - will probably play a role in China-India bilateral relations. For instance, the BRICS grouping that contains both China and India could be considered as an example of power aggregation.

If China and India working together seems far-fetched, we would do well to recall that China-India relations have spanned the security spectrum - war at one end, alliance at the other - during the twentieth century. While the two countries fought a war - brief and limited, but war nonetheless - against each other in 1962, they also were allies during the Second World War, before Indian Independence and the Chinese Revolution.

However, the most interesting dimension that emerges from juxtaposing China and India is the conceptual one. It has become quite trendy in IR to put both China and India in the same category of states, usually characterising both of them as rising powers. But doing so is tantamount to making a serious conceptual error. While China is rising, India is emerging.

Although China is an emerging economy, it is a rising power, not an emerging power. This is not a semantic distinction but a substantive one: unlike emerging powers, which could have a systemic impact sometime in the future, a rising power already has a systemic impact today.

Juxtaposing China and India brings out this conceptual point with clarity. It also leads to an important taxonomical insight: the difference between China and India today is not one of degree but of kind, thus making it analytically incorrect to place both China and India in the same category of states. Is there more at play here than the decade-plus lead that China has over India in terms of economic reform? What are the structural factors, domestic and external, that undergird this distinction? Can - and how can - India narrow the gap and become a rising power itself? Most important of all, is China's lead necessarily a problem for India? Perhaps it is worth reflecting that China's rise is masking India's emergence: while the world focuses on China, India has time to get its own act together, inside and out.

Pakistan's Tactical Nuclear Weapons: The Inevitability of Instability

22 September 2014

Hatf IX (Nasr) is a Pakistani ballistic missile which can deliver a sub-kiloton nuclear warhead over a range of 60 km, or 37.3 miles. It is supposed to have entered service in 2013 and is believed to be fully integrated into Pakistan's C3I (command, control, communications and intelligence). Its purported role is as a low-yield battlefield deterrent against mechanised columns. Should India - and the world - take Nasr seriously?

The development and deployment of Nasr by Pakistan was inevitable and the impact of this tactical nuclear weapon (tac nuke) on the emerging India-Pakistan deterrence relationship is inherently destabilising.

Defining Tactical Nuclear Weapons: The Pakistani Context

There are four different yardsticks by which tac nukes could be defined and classified. The first is the range of the missile: it must be short range that is less than 80-100 km. The second is yield of warhead, conventionally benchmarked at less than 5 kilotons (kT) with reference to a 1994 US Congressional definition prohibiting R&D in US nuclear weapons laboratories below this yield. The third is function - Pakistan would use its tactical nuclear weapons in an anti-armour role; bunker busting is the primary role envisaged by US proponents of research into low yield nuclear weapons. The fourth yardstick is impact, which in the case of tac nukes is limited to the immediate battlefield, or in other words, the sub-theatre.

Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Problem than a Solution?

Why are tac nukes usually seen as a problem rather than as a solution? In the first place, they lower the nuclear threshold by blurring the distinction between conventional and nuclear war. Secondly, tac nukes accentuate the 'always-never dilemma' inherent in all nuclear weapons: they must always work when you want them to, yet never be used when you do not want them to be used. The possibility of unauthorised or accidental use increases significantly with tac nukes: unlike ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), whose commanders have delegative control, in the case of tac nukes delegative control may go down to subaltern/NCO levels under battlefield conditions. Thirdly, battlefield deployment of tac nukes, especially in situations of rapid armour movement, creates an enormous pressure to 'use them or lose them'. Finally, there is a much greater possibility for tac nukes to fall into 'wrong hands' due to theft, pilferage or sabotage.

Given these problems, all of them well known for decades, why has Pakistan gone down the tac nuke route? In order to understand why, it is important to underline that Pakistan has, from even before South Asia's overt nuclearisation, signalled a nuclear doctrine of not only first use but also early use. This doctrine has created problems for Pakistan, whose nuclear planners have had to grapple with the issue of nuclear thresholds that is the point beyond which Pakistan would have no option but to use its nuclear weapons. As far back as 2002, the Landau Network-Centro Volta team (Cotta-Ramusino and Martellini) had identified four Pakistani thresholds: geographic (space threshold), military, political (domestic destabilisation) and even economic. Tac nukes are Pakistan's solution to the military threshold.

Pakistan's Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Here to Stay

There are three essential features of Pakistan that suggest that its tac nukes are here to stay. Firstly, as the weaker power in the India-Pakistan dyad, Pakistan faces significant conventional asymmetries. Only nuclear weapons provide Pakistan with a sense of strategic parity with India. Faced with the possibility of an Indian armoured thrust in the plains or desert sectors, Pakistan is signalling that it will use its tactical nuclear weapons despite their escalatory potential.

Secondly, Pakistan is a quintessential 'homeland state' with deep existential anxieties. Its entire national identity has been constructed as a homeland for an endangered people facing a historically implacable foe. No matter how many internal security challenges it faces, Pakistan will not drop its guard vis-à-vis India and will always give the external threat primacy. In such an identity construction, nuclear weapons give Pakistan and its people the assurance of national survival and civilizational certitude that they are second to none. Furthermore, they encapsulate the sense of 'we will all go together when we go' – akin to the Samson Option of that other nuclearised homeland state, Israel.

Finally, Pakistan is a revisionist power that has systematically pursued asymmetric strategies to overturn the territorial status quo. In this context, the nature of the 'Kashmir issue' comes into sharp focus. As a wise person once said of the Kashmir issue, 'Kashmir is with India, the issue is with Pakistan.' While admittedly a neat play on words, this observation identifies two core elements in the 'shadow of the future': (1) The Kashmir issue will be resolved only when Pakistan considers it resolved; (2) any change in the territorial status quo would be inimical to India. Pakistan's dilemma is the nuclear weapons give it strategic parity but also buttress the territorial status quo. This explains why Pakistan has no compunction in deliberately shortening its nuclear fuse vis-à-vis India by deploying tac nukes.

An arms control agreement between India and Pakistan over tac nukes is unlikely: there is no incentive for Pakistan to remove a redline that begins at the international border (IB) itself. The strategic challenges that Pakistan's tac nukes pose for India will be explored in a future column.

Column: Indus-tan

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Islamic State: Prospects in Pakistan

17 November 2014

In recent weeks, there has been a lot of activity taking place in various parts of Pakistan in the name of the abominable, but also ineluctable, Islamic State (IS). Apart from some senior commanders of the Mullah Fazlullah-led Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) faction who have announced their allegiance to the IS' Caliph Ibrahim a.k.a. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, there are reports of other smaller groups of militants who have cast their lot with the pestilential IS. Graffiti and posters of the IS have appeared in Karachi, Peshawar, Lahore, Bannu, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, Wah, Hangu, Kurram, Bhakkar, Dera Ismail Khan and other towns and cities of the country.

While these developments have caused a flutter in the media, official circles are quite nonchalant about the IS's presence in Pakistan at present, or even its potential for establishing a presence in the future. Despite a classified report of the Balochistan government about the 'growing footprint' of IS, Federal Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar has confidently claimed that the IS doesn't exist in Pakistan.

Considering that just a few days after Nisar declared that there was no danger of terrorism in Islamabad an attack was launched on Islamabad courts and the city's vegetable market, he shouldn't be taken seriously. Although there is no sign of a major presence of the IS in Pakistan, the threat of the IS establishing itself is very real. There are eerie parallels that can be drawn between how the IS is registering its presence in Pakistan with how the Taliban network was established in the country. In the mid-1990s, more so after the Taliban captured Kabul, there were a spate of gangs and groups, especially in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), who declared themselves local representatives or chapters of the Taliban movement.

The sort of graffiti that today proclaims the arrival of the IS had back then done the same for the Taliban. No one had imagined at that time that the Taliban would manage to establish such a robust presence in the country or attract so many fighters, supporters and sympathisers for its cause. More importantly, at that time, hardly anyone outside the liberal fringe in Pakistan believed that the Taliban would be able to occupy the mind space of Pakistanis the way they did. Today, there are people from all walks of life in Pakistan –traders, soldiers, politicians, journalists, doctors, teachers, labourers and techies – who identify with the Taliban. It is therefore not too farfetched to imagine that something similar may happen with the IS, more so given the manner in which this ghoulish outfit has managed to strike resonance among certain sections of Muslims around the world and become a magnet for them, much more than the Taliban or their predecessors in Afghanistan had managed to do ever since violent jihad became fashionable.

One big disadvantage that the IS will suffer in its quest to make Pakistan a province of its Caliphate is that, for now at least, it doesn't enjoy the support of the Pakistan Army which continues to back Mullah Omar, the other pretender to the title of Amir-ul-Momineen. On the flip side, the IS has advantages that the Taliban or their patrons in the GHQ Rawalpindi don't. Mullah Omar is nothing more than a medieval mullah who in the words of al-Baghdadi, is "an illiterate, ignorant warlord unworthy of spiritual or political respect." The IS on the other hand is a modern, tech-savvy outfit with ideological and propaganda machinery that strikes a chord among Muslim youth around the world. Second, the IS has resources and revenue stream that neither the Taliban nor their bankrupt patrons in Rawalpindi have. This allows them to buy and attract support as nothing else can. Third, unlike Omar who is an Afghan and as such unfit or unacceptable as a leader of the Islamic world as a Caliph or Amir-ul-Momineen, al-Baghdadi is an Arab who traces his roots to the Prophet's tribe and clan and as such is better-placed to assume leadership. Fourth, while Omar's vision doesn't extend beyond his donkey, al-Baghdadi talks of global domination of his Islamic caliphate. Omar's outreach to the global Islamists is through al Qaeda – that has already been pushed to the fringes of the jihadist narrative by the IS which now is in the vanguard of the international Islamist movement. The IS has started establishing a global footprint through its use of modern communication tools while the al Qaeda leadership remains stuck in their rabbit holes, unable to communicate or command their franchises.

Despite the fact that a bulk of the jihadists in Pakistan currently swear loyalty to Mullah Omar, the advantages that 'Caliph' Ibrahim enjoys does somewhat level the field in trying to win over Pakistan. Perhaps, the biggest advantage he will have is that he doesn't depend on the crutches of the Pakistan Army. This, coupled with the fact that Pakistan is a highly radicalised society, makes it a fertile ground for the IS to spread its poison. What is more, al-Baghdadi is believed to have heavily relied on Jamaat-e-Islami founder Abul Ala Maududi's writings in his first khutba as Caliph, something that will make it easy for him to connect to Pakistanis who have in one form or another been indoctrinated by the Maududi and his followers.

Clearly, Baghdadi would be smacking his lips at the prospect of a nuclear-armed Islamised Pakistan (part of the legendary Khorasan) becoming a province of his caliphate. For their part, many Pakistanis too would be looking forward to becoming a part of such an abomination because that would fulfil their quest for living in a pure Islamic caliphate. And given the sort of intolerance that exists in Pakistan, it is ideally suited to become a province of IS. All that remains is to get rid of that other pretender and then the path will be clear for 'Caliph' Ibrahim.

Pakistan: The Futility of Internationalising Kashmir

22 October 2014

Ideally, Pakistani efforts to internationalise the Kashmir issue should draw big yawns, not just from India but also the international community. After all this is a script that has played out before, and except for a

short period in the early 1990s, it hardly draws any traction in international forums. But because of the recent ceasefire violations along the Line of Control (LoC), the ratcheting-up of rhetoric from both sides, the Pakistani approach to the UN to intervene and now, the 'million man' march being planned in London, the issue of internationalisation of Kashmir has started drawing a little more than passing interest.

For India, Pakistani efforts to once again internationalise Kashmir is nothing more than a needless distraction. But instead of reacting either with fury or fluster, India should use this as an opportunity to show the world Pakistan's perfidy and puerility.

In a way, Pakistan might be doing India a favour by trying to internationalise Kashmir, more so at this point in time. To not put too fine a point on it, Pakistan is today all but an international pariah, not to mention an international migraine. India, on the other hand, is once again being looked at with great interest by the international community and is on the verge of becoming the toast of town. And yet, strangely enough, Pakistan is strutting with confidence that it will be able to gain by internationalising Kashmir, while India remains chary over the Pakistani ploy.

There is nothing new or novel in Pakistan's play this time that it hasn't tried in the past. Whether it is the nonsense about tensions between two nuclear weapon states, or about the exaggerated and mostly false accounts of human rights violations, the 'stifling' presence of the Indian security forces, or even allegations of India violating the ceasefire, it has all been done before. And unfortunately for Pakistan, the world has seen through its game of starting the fire and then running to the international community asking for intervention. The only new tack Pakistan is trying to sell this time is that while it is fighting to save the rest of the world from terrorism – via Operation Zarb-e-Azb – India is creating problems by responding with uncharacteristic ferocity to ceasefire violations.

But the world knows that more than being a victim of terrorism, Pakistan is like that arsonist who sets fire to his own establishment and then plays victim to claim insurance money. Of course, given its nuisance value, the world will lend it an ear (which as if their wont, Pakistan will misconstrue) and appeal to both sides to show restraint and start a dialogue. If this is the sum and substance of Pakistani efforts to internationalise Kashmir, then it won't be long before the very mention of the word Kashmir draws yawns once again.

Pakistan probably understands this and therefore it will try and further raise the temperature on the border, holding out thinly veiled threats of a possible nuclear conflagration. Normally when this happens, the world tends to lean upon India, which is seen as a nice and reasonable party, to back down and start some dialogue. But the last time this happened – Kargil – India dug in its heels and refused to let Pakistan get away with its blatant and brazen brinkmanship. This led to the pressure rebounding on Pakistan which was then forced to withdraw unceremoniously and with utter humiliation from the heights they had occupied.

For Pakistan, this is probably the last chance to internationalise Kashmir. They have a small window of opportunity till 2016 when the presence of US and other foreign forces give Pakistan some leverage as they control the logistic and supply routes. Pakistan would like to use this opportunity to get some concession on Kashmir because it knows things will be very different post 2016 and it won't be able to exercise the blackmail on Afghanistan anymore. This means Pakistan will do everything to stir the Kashmir pot – restart violence in the state, heat up the LoC, send delegations to Western capitals to drum up international support, and organise the marches, like the one in London, in which only Pakistanis will be in attendance.

India could react in two ways: first, ignore Pakistan with contempt and refuse to dignify their propaganda by responding to it forcefully. The problem in this option is that India will leave the field open for Pakistan to feed all sorts of self-serving lies to their western interlocutors. Worse, India could start being perceived as arrogant, haughty and with something to hide or embarrassed about something.

The second option is engaging the international community and taking the initiative to explain why whatever Pakistan says is a lie, pointing to Pakistan's past record of perfidy and worse, undertaking hectic public diplomacy to expose Pakistan – remember Ghulam Nabi Fai and his ISI-funded jamborees – and making it clear to all countries why their indulgence of Pakistan and/or any attempt on their part to either interfere or mediate in Kashmir will not be seen as a friendly act.

If India plays its cards well, then this internationalisation gambit of Pakistan could in fact work in India's favour because if, after having tried both open and proxy wars, Pakistan's internationalisation effort also comes a cropper, then there is an outside chance that Pakistan could become amenable to a lasting solution to this issue.

Pakistan: Why is Army against Nawaz Sharif?

15 September 2014

It appears Nawaz Sharif has managed to survive the first major attempt to oust him from office. A series of fortuitous developments – the whistle-blowing by Javed Hashmi about Imran Khan's links with the Pakistan Army stands at the top of the list – coupled with not just the uncharacteristic flexibility displayed in conceding most of the demands being raised by his adversaries but also the characteristic obstinacy in refusing to resign, have all helped Nawaz Sharif to come out on top in the latest round of Pakistan's unending, but also sinister, political drama.

While the 'establishment' might have failed to decapitate the Nawaz Sharif government, they have definitely succeeded in degrading it to a point where the Prime Minister is reduced to no more than a chairman of a municipality.

Even if Nawaz Sharif reconciles to a subordinate role to the military, it will not address the fundamental problem that the 'establishment' has with him. In other words, the army cannot reconcile to Nawaz Sharif's political primacy and prominence because his core constituency – Punjabi, right-wing, conservative, religiously inclined, business-trader community – is also the constituency that the army cultivates for pushing its own political and national agenda. This is a constituency that the army has consciously built and nurtured to gain political legitimacy and counter forces that it perceived as hostile to its interests.

Nawaz Sharif himself is a product of such a political engineering. Today, not only has he effectively split, nay captured, this natural constituency of the army, but has gone a step further with his anti-establishment stance – insistence on civilian supremacy. If Sharif is allowed to get away with this, it will have far reaching implications for civil-military relations. The clear and present danger for the Army is to allow the core constituency to turn against itself (in terms of its role and interference in politics). Then the balance of force will tilt against, which the army is simply not ready to accept.

Hence, the army wants to get rid of the Sharif brothers, which will create the space for retrieving control over its constituency. In many ways, the military's aversion to Sharif and PMLN is similar to its aversion to Zulfikar Bhutto and the PPP. The latter posed a threat to the army's political position but was countered by building up and strengthening the right-wing. With the right-wing now sliding out of control, the Army finds itself in a bit of a bind.

The tectonic shift taking place in Pakistan's politics has been sometime in the making. In fact, it can be traced back to the tussle between Sharif and the Army in the late 1990s. Although Nawaz Sharif has had problems with all army chiefs whenever he was in power, this tussle has steadily become institutionalised with the PMLN openly speaking against the military's role in politics and policy making. The 1999 coup stalled the core constituency's drift away from the military. Although Sharif continued to enjoy the support of this constituency during the Musharraf and Zardari years, it didn't matter much at that time because the governments were subservient to the army's demands. But the power equation changed drastically the moment Sharif became Prime Minister and that too with a clear majority.

During this latest crisis, a tactical withdrawal has been made by many senior leaders of the ruling party, but there is no sign as yet that the PMLN has made a strategic retreat from the principle of civilian supremacy. The army knows this and will not be comfortable with Sharif at the helm partly because it anticipates trouble.

For the army, there are no easy options. Imran Khan is an option and is also making a pitch for the same constituency. But propping up Imran Khan as an alternative is a minefield that the army would not like to venture beyond a point. Imran Khan is a maverick and his megalomania is hardly going to make the army

comfortable. For the army, Imran is a useful fool to fix Nawaz Sharif but dangerous to hand over the reins of government.

The second option is to destroy Sharif's credibility as a political leader by undermining his ability to deliver governance. This will only be possible at the cost of making the government completely dysfunctional which in turn will ensure that the economy doesn't recover. While Nawaz Sharif would undoubtedly be damaged in this option, it would not leave much for the army to rule. Third option for the army is to take over power directly and then build a new puppet who does its bidding. But this option will come with its own set of monumental problems.

Given the dearth of options, the army could well decide to enter into an uncomfortable co-habitation arrangement with Nawaz Sharif. Of course, on his part Nawaz Sharif could conclude that the lack of options for the army, opens up opportunities for him to keep pushing the envelope and slowly but steadily tilt the balance against the military. More than Nawaz Sharif's reduced powers it is this political tussle between him and the army that will decide the future of civil-military relations in Pakistan.

Pakistan: Degraded Democracy

18 August 2014

At the time this comment is being penned, the Imran Khan's 'Azadi' March and Tahirul Qadri's 'Inquilab' (revolution) March are besieging Islamabad. The former is demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif; accountability of all people involved in rigging the 2013 election in favour of the current ruling dispensation; electoral reforms; and a government of non-political persons to conduct fresh elections. The latter wants a complete overhaul of the current political system – hence revolution, though in a legal and constitutional way without resorting to violence, which is in itself a contradiction.

Even though the turnout of these two marches is nowhere close to the million or more that was being spoken about, Pakistan's capital city is on the tenterhooks. The fear is that if the crowds go out of control and large-scale violence erupts, it could well lead to the collapse of the government. Needless to say, such disturbances will bring neither Azadi nor Revolution. Quite to the contrary, it will stifle 'Azadi' and usher in a counter-revolution by that most reactionary of all forces in Pakistan – the Pakistan Army.

Perhaps when the Pakistan Army put Khan and Qadri to the job of destabilising Nawaz Sharif's government and bringing it under such immense pressure that it buckles and accepts its subservience to the military establishment, they never thought things would reach a point where they might have to step in and take over directly. But a series of administrative mishandlings and political miscalculations by the governments in Islamabad and Lahore, coupled with ever rising stridency in the positions of Khan and Qadri, have brought the situation to a point where an honourable exit for any of the main protagonists seems next to impossible.

This means while all the protagonists are going for broke – they believe they will either worst their adversary or suffer grievous and maybe even irrecoverable damage to their politics – none of them is going to emerge from this battle unscathed. The only winner will be the cat (read Pakistan Army) which made the monkeys (read Pakistan's political class) fight over the spoils of power. After all, Pakistan is a unique case where even the courts have upheld the legitimacy of military coups by calling them a revolution!

Clearly, neither Imran Khan nor Tahirul Qadri have thought through the logic of what they are demanding. This is hardly surprising considering that someone else has been doing the thinking for them. The dialectics of their demands is that unless Nawaz Sharif is ready to roll over and play dead – which is extremely unlikely – the only way they can get what they want is through an extra-constitutional takeover. Bizarrely, even as they both emphatically stand against any military intervention, they are pushing things in a direction where the political logjam can only be broken by such an intervention.

For his part, Nawaz Sharif is showing remarkable and uncharacteristic composure, and even a spirit of accommodation towards Khan's and Qadri's clearly illegitimate, illogical and illegal demands. But sooner or later, Sharif will dig in his heels. Already, some of his advisors are reported to be telling him that any big compromise on the demands of the agitationists will irretrievably damage the government and render it a virtual lame-duck in practically all important aspects of national policy making. If that happens, Sharif

might continue to enjoy the title of prime minister but will wield as much power as the head of a municipality. The trouble for the ruling party is that this is precisely what the army wants if Nawaz Sharif is to continue in office.

While the army has fixed Sharif nice and proper, and it is quite apparent by now that Sharif can only survive if he accepts subservience to the military, it is still unclear if the military has a plan to de-escalate the political crisis. Will Khan accept the military's diktat? What will be the quid pro quo which helps him keep his face among his supporters whom he has charged to an unsustainable level? Will the sop offered to Imran Khan be acceptable to Sharif, especially if it involves anything beyond electoral reforms? And if Khan refuses to back down, will the army force Sharif out of office? For the army, to cut Khan and Qadri down to size at this stage means losing a potent political tool to keep Sharif under pressure – something they would be averse to doing.

But deposing Sharif will also not solve the problem because that would set in motion the destabilising politics of the 1990s. Worse, even if Nawaz Sharif eats the humble pie and Khan backs down this time, the government will remain in crisis mode for the rest of its term, something that will seriously distract it from its ambitious economic agenda. Most importantly, if this round of the political slugfest ends in a draw, it will only set the stage for the next round of an even worse civil-military confrontation, which won't be long in coming. What this means is that all those singing hosannas for democracy having finally stuck roots in Pakistan need to start singing dirges.

Domestic Politicking in Pakistan: It's Not Cricket, Stupid!

21 July 2014

For someone whose understanding of politics is limited to drawing banal cricketing analogies, the phrase 'it's not cricket' aptly describes the sort of politics Imran Khan is indulging in these days. His threat of leading a 'Long March' (how Mao must be twisting in his grave over the Pakistani mutilation of the original Long March) to Islamabad to shake up the political system – he is himself isn't clear on what he actually wants – is not cricket because it brazenly violates the basic rules of the political game set in the constitution. It is also not cricket in the sense that a five year term in government is not the same as a five-day test match in which the two contending sides get to play two innings each.

That Khan isn't clear on what he hopes to get out of the 'Long March' (or is it Tsunami March or Azadi March?) is evident because he keeps shifting the goalposts depending on what catches his fancy at a particular time. He started with demanding a vote verification in four constituencies, went on to demand a mid-term election, retracted to demanding an audit of the entire election (inspired by Afghanistan). The end-game – how he hopes to get his demand met, what he will do if the government continues to stonewall, and what the consequences of any widespread disturbance in Islamabad could be, including the outside chance of a derailment of the democratic process – has obviously not been thought through by him. Not only is his timing wrong (barely a year after the general election he is demanding a mid-term poll), he has also not factored in the possibility that even if he managed to grab power, he would then be faced with similar efforts to overthrow him. In other words, it will be back to the sordid politics of the 1990s.

Imran Khan suddenly became hyperactive against the government after the military establishment seemed to get into a tussle with incumbent Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government leading many analysts to suspect that he had been put up to the task by the powers that be. Despite being seen as riding on the back of the military to queer the pitch for the Nawaz Sharif government, Imran Khan was careful to keep parroting his commitment to democracy, even though he is doing everything to undermine it. Even if he can't force the Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PMLN) out of office through his agitation, he would have weakened the civilian dispensation to a point where it would be forced to lean on the crutches of the military, or at least remain extremely diffident, before the military. That the PMLN government has come to such a pass with just about a year in office is a sorry statement on the fragility of the democratic process in Pakistan.

It is not just Imran Khan who is on the march against the government. The somewhat comical cleric from Canada, Tahirul Qadri, has also been on the warpath, selling an instant revolution to his acolytes as if it were some kind of instant coffee. Politically, Qadri is a non-entity. But like many other God-men, and such like in the subcontinent, Qadri has his following which probably runs into a million or more. His game is

even less nuanced than Khan's because he makes no bones about completely overthrowing the system. Ironically, he calls his 'revolution' legal and constitutional! Qadri has been given a leg up by the horribly botched strong-arm used by the PMLN government against Qadri's Lahore headquarters, killing around a dozen people and injuring some 100 in police firing.

Individually, however, neither Qadri nor Khan can oust the government. Hence, efforts by quintessential establishment flunkies and Tonga politicians (whose support base can fit on a horse-driven Tonga) like the Chaudaries of Gujarat and Sheikh Rasheed of Rawalpindi to bring them together. But this appears to be an uphill task because while Khan has some kind of a stake in the system, Qadri is a misguided missile seeking to destroy everything without any clear idea of how and what to replace it with. What is more, they have their problems on who will lead and their suspicions on who will retreat first leaving the other in the lurch. Meanwhile, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) which was fast becoming irrelevant and leaderless, with Asif Zardari in his bunker, Bilawal active only on twitter and the party is disarray, disunited (especially in Punjab) and directionless, has also started making noises against the government and in support of Khan. But even if the PPP joined the opposition ranks, unless the army casts its lot with the forces arraigned against the government, it is unlikely that Sharif would lose power anytime soon.

Despite its problems with the government, the army doesn't seem quite ready to either force mid-term elections, or usher in a medium-term interim government of technocrats, or even take over power directly. Even the praetorian Pakistan army knows that doing any such thing would tantamount to jumping from the frying pan into the fire. It would rather put up with a weak government that subordinates itself to the military than tempt fate or worse by destabilising the government or ousting it. Of course, if massive disturbances break out as a result of the agitations being planned by Khan, Qadri and Co. then all bets are off. If things come to such a pass, then Imran Khan will have to cool his heels in the pavilion, his dreams and delusions of leading Pakistan shattered.

The most remarkable thing in the unfolding political drama in Pakistan is the swiftness with which Nawaz Sharif has lost political capital and managed to box himself into a corner because of wrong political decisions. He could still recover lost ground, but that will require political cunning, coolness and compromise, none of the things he is known for.

India-Pakistan: The MFN-NDMARB Debacle

16 June 2014

In the irrational exuberance that is invariably on display in the media every time leaders of India and Pakistan meet, the subtlety of some of the signals that are sent out is often lost. Something similar happened after the Indian Foreign Secretary briefed the media about the meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his Pakistani counterpart who, along with other South Asian leaders, had been invited to the swearing-in ceremony of the new Indian government. The media latched on to the words 'the two countries could move immediately towards full trade normalisation...' and went overboard in talking about the prospects of Indo-Pak trade taking-off. But in the process they missed the significant rider that India had put, viz. '...on the basis of the September 2012 roadmap'. This rider effectively reopens the entire trade deal between India and Pakistan and nullifies the agreement that had been reached between the Manmohan Singh government and Nawaz Sharif government in February 2014. The message that the Modi government seemed to be sending was that it will not accept the constant shifting of the goalposts on the trade issue by Pakistan.

The first big breakthrough on the trade front came in 2011 after India withdrew its objection to the trade concessions offered by the EU to Pakistan as part of an aid package to help Pakistan get over the damage caused by the 2010 mega-flood.

Apparently, India's 'gesture' was part of a back room deal with Pakistan which, in return for India withdrawing its objections at WTO, agreed to a roadmap to open trade and grant India the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status in a time-bound manner. The way India looked at it, the damage caused to India's exports by the EU package for Pakistan would be adequately compensated, both politically and economically, by the fillip that India-Pakistan trade would receive as a result of a trade agreement between the two countries.

Following negotiations between the then Pakistan People's Party-led government in Pakistan and the United Progressive Alliance-2 government in India, a roadmap was agreed in 2012. Under this roadmap, in a time bound manner Pakistan would first replace the positive list of tradable items with a negative list. This would be followed by according full MFN status to India. Some items would remain on the sensitive list and this list would steadily be pared down. Pakistan's concerns about non-tariff barriers and trade access were also addressed and three trade-related agreements were struck. But Pakistan reneged on the roadmap and apart from replacing the positive list with a negative list, there was no further movement.

After the Nawaz Sharif government assumed office, a new round of negotiations commenced between the two countries. By February 2014, a new deal was worked out which significantly altered the terms of trade engagement. Instead of the MFN status, Pakistan now offered a 'Non-Discriminatory Market Access on Reciprocal Basis' (NDMARB). While this new arrangement gave everything that India would get under MFN, it was not quite MFN. This was a bilateral trading arrangement as opposed to MFN which is a multilateral arrangement under the WTO. Because this was a bilateral arrangement, Pakistan was free to walk out of it if it felt it did not serve its interests or if the gains it anticipated from trading with India were not according to expectation. Pakistan's commerce minister said so in a number of interviews he gave after striking this agreement with his then Indian counterpart, Anand Sharma. Since it was a bilateral arrangement, the dispute resolution mechanism under this arrangement would not be under WTO rules, which in turn meant that whims and fancies of Pakistan's real rulers (who thankfully scuttled this deal) would continue to impinge and impose themselves on the bilateral trade.

Frankly, the February 2014 deal was an unequal bargain loaded almost entirely in Pakistan's favour. Sectors in which India enjoyed a comparative advantage were blocked while those which were of interest to Pakistan were made part of the deal. There was no give by Pakistan on other issues of interest to India, such as transit rights to Afghanistan and beyond. While Pakistan agreed to opening up trade via Wagah, this again served Pakistan more than India. After all, if Pakistan expected to increase its exports to India by an estimated \$ 2 billion and wanted its Punjab to benefit from trade with India, then opening Wagah was a no brainer. Additionally, Pakistan wanted India to open banking channels and liberalise visas but was unwilling to address India's serious concerns on export of terrorism into India. The unkindest cut of all was that, in spite of the fact that on practically every issue, it was India and not Pakistan that has made concessions, Pakistan waved the trade deal as a major concession that they have given to India to kick-start the normalisation process!

While negotiating the trade deal with Pakistan, the India probably forgot that political or diplomatic dividend that accrues on account of trade between two countries that don't share the best of relations is, or should be, at best a by-product and not the primary motive of normalising trade. When concessions are given which tend to introduce distortions by undermining the comparative and competitive advantage of one country to protect the inefficient sectors of another country then the logic of trade is turned on its head. India's biggest is that it mixed politics with trade; and that was hardly a sensible thing to do especially since the political benefit remained iffy and the trade benefit was marginal. Even if trade with Pakistan increased by 100%, it would be less than 1% of India's total foreign trade. Fortunately, despite the extremely favourable terms offered by India, the Pakistan army prevented the Nawaz Sharif government from grabbing the deal.

With a new government in India, it appears that the best possible deal that Pakistani could get is no longer on offer, and trade negotiations will have to restart, practically from square one.

Modi-fying India-Pakistan Relations

19 May 2014

Given the decades of hostility between India and Pakistan, animosity and prejudice is entirely understandable; even natural; but the sheer ignorance about each other never ceases to surprise. The Pakistani reaction to the victory of Narendra Modi in the Indian general elections, and the rather ill-informed and mostly pedestrian analysis about the political change that has swept India left little doubt that not only can the two countries not have friendly relations, they don't even make good enemies. Forget about understanding the forces of change, people across the Radcliffe line cannot even correctly pronounce names of Indian politicians and organisations.

True to their form, Pakistani TV channels fielded either fossilised ex-diplomats, soldiers and even some journalist-turned-politicians, or neo-lunatics (like the Man with a Red Beret) to discuss what Modi's ascendancy means for Pakistan. There was a lot of hot air and intemperate language used against the Prime Minister-designate, but very little light. This was not entirely unexpected because most of these characters are unabashed, if also informal, spokesmen of the military establishment.

In that sense, their rants gave a fairly good idea of the thinking in Rawalpindi. The official response (i.e. of the de jure government) was more sober – Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif congratulated Narendra Modi and invited him to Pakistan, and other senior members of the government let it be known that Pakistan looks forward to engaging with the new Indian government. The High Commissioner of Pakistan in New Delhi, perhaps inadvertently, chose words that seemed to convey a message contrary to that of the government and more in keeping with the military.

In almost all Pakistani analyses, there was the inevitable reference to the Gujarat riots and Modi's alleged role in them. This was held up as a marker of his credentials as a Hindu hard-liner. Extrapolating from this, he was painted as someone who was inveterately anti-Pakistan. That Pakistan has given no reason to any sensible Indian to be pro-Pakistan was conveniently ignored.

What is more, the constant reference to the Gujarat riots glossed over the fact that this was neither the first nor the worst riot in India – worse things had happened under the watch of so-called 'secular' parties.

There was the comparison with Atal Behari Vajpayee and the conclusion that while Vajpayee was a soft and reasonable person, Modi was completely the opposite. Once again, the Pakistanis seemed to forget that when Vajpayee became Prime Minister, there was great disquiet in Pakistan that a 'Hindu hard-liner' had come to power. If it is Gujarat riots in Modi's case, it was the demolition of Babri Masjid that was held against Vajpayee. This disquiet turned into hysteria after the 1998 nuclear tests. But subsequent events – the Lahore bus diplomacy, the Agra summit, and finally the start of the Composite Dialogue process in 2004 – made the Pakistanis see Vajpayee in a different light.

To be sure, Modi is no Vajpayee; at least that is the impression he gives. However, this doesn't mean that he will be looking for a fight. All it means is that if Pakistan seeks a fight, he will not back down. What it also means is that the pusillanimous approach of the previous governments to ceaseless provocations from Pakistan will probably change.

In this sense, if there is some amount of apprehension and concern in Islamabad, it is all for the good and could form the basis of a more fruitful and cooperative engagement between the two countries. But the portents are not good. Already there is a sense in New Delhi that sooner rather than later the Pakistanis will test the Modi Sarkar, either through a terrorist attack or an incident along the Line of Control/International Border. How the new Indian government responds will determine the future trajectory of relations between India and Pakistan.

The optimists in Pakistan who are hoping for a Nixonian moment with Modi coming to power are likely to be disappointed. The reason is that Nawaz Sharif is no Mao and General Raheel Sharif is no Lin Biao; nor is the Pakistan Army the People's Liberation Army which falls in line to the orders of the political authority.

In the past couple of weeks, the Pakistani prime minister has been boxed into a corner by the military and like in the case of the previous regime, speculations have begun in the Pakistani media about when he might be toppled. Even if nothing of that sort happens, the very fact that this is the talk in Islamabad is enough to disabuse Nawaz Sharif of any notion he may have had about normalising relations with India. With his space getting increasingly constricted, Sharif is in no position to offer India what it wants on issues such as export of terrorism into India.

On the other side of the great divide, it is highly unlikely that Modi will be inclined to give Pakistan what it wants on issues such as Siachen, Sir Creek and Kashmir. Perhaps, the best hope in these circumstances is that the two countries do their own thing and avoid stepping on each other's toes and wait for another time and opportunity. Any misplaced optimism is likely to blow up in their faces and create a situation far worse than what obtains at present.

Column: Strategic Space

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India-Russia Nuclear Vision Statement: See that it Delivers

15 December 2014

As expected, Russian President Valdimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi covered all the usual areas of cooperation during the former's visit to New Delhi on 11 December, 2014. Russia has been India's close partner over decades and the latter has reiterated the importance of the relationship in contemporary times too. The Druzhba Dosti Vision Statement (VS) covers the period of the next decade, anchored in a special strategic partnership.

Obviously, the nuclear component of this relationship, which traverses the entire range of activities from fuel fabrication to plant decommissioning, is especially noteworthy. Building on the agreements signed by both in 2008 and 2010, the 2014 Strategic Vision for Strengthening Atomic Energy Cooperation envisages the construction of a dozen nuclear power reactors over the next 20 years. It may be recalled that Kudankulam (KK) 1, India's first Russian reactor, attained full-rated power in 2014, and KK 2 is nearly ready too. Meanwhile, a General Framework Agreement was signed in April 2014 for the construction of KK 3 and 4 at the same site.

The next tranche of Russian nuclear reactors will require fresh site(s). The 2014 nuclear cooperation VS mentions that the construction of future nuclear plants would take into account "India's demand for power, the then available nuclear technologies including those that may be developed jointly, mutually acceptable technical and commercial terms, and the prevalent electricity tariffs." Evidently and wisely, a lot has been left to the consideration of factors prevalent in the future.

The Agreement also emphasises the involvement of Indian suppliers of manufacturing equipment, fuel assemblies and spares for Russian reactors to be constructed in India. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of India's decision to import reactors from the international nuclear market has been the insistence on including a large local component into their construction. Even before Modi vocalised 'Make in India', the nuclear sector has always been bound by this dictum. In fact, until 2008, it did not have the option of foreign material, technology or components. Retaining that focus while realising the ambitious national nuclear expansion plans would certainly open employment opportunities for the millions of young engineers and technicians passing out of the Indian education system annually. In fact, another important aspect of the VS in this context is the prospect of exploring "opportunities for sourcing materials, equipment and services from Indian industry for the construction of the Russian-designed nuclear power plants in third countries."

Given that the Russian nuclear industry is keen on exports, this would enhance the capability and capacity of the Indian nuclear industry through necessary transfer of technology.

The Statement also mentions joint extraction of natural uranium through technical cooperation in mining activities, "within their own territories and in third countries." This would be significant for India if it is to fulfill its nuclear expansion ambitions without having to worry about the availability of fuel. At the same time, collaboration on radioactive waste management, research and development on fusion reactors etc. are all forward-looking aspects of the VS.

So, what stands in the way of realising the potential of the vision of the statement? A few issues must be given due consideration. First, the identification of fresh site(s) for the new Russian reactors may not be as easy as it sounds. Given that public acceptance issues have acquired a worrisome dimension in the post-Fukushima environment, the acquisition of necessary land will call for much greater investment, and not just monetary, by the nuclear establishment to reach out to the constituencies to inform and educate them with the objective of winning them over.

Second, the Indian nuclear liability law will require amendments to become palatable to the nuclear industry anywhere, at home or abroad. While rather cryptically, Russian government officials have "in principle" agreed to the Indian nuclear liability law, this has been done after factoring in the costs

involved in the process. According to some reports, the first and second units of the Kudankulam nuclear power plants had cost India \$1 billion each, but new units will cost triple the amount in view of India's nuclear liability law. Even if this may be an exaggeration, it must not be forgotten that any nuclear industry, including Russian, is in the business of doing business. The cost will be handed down to India only.

In such a situation, critics of nuclear power will jump at the opportunity to drum up opposition to construction of new nuclear plants on the ground of the high costs. Economics of nuclear reactors has always been a matter of concern. In the past, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. has contended that its Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors have been comparable in cost to other sources of electricity. But, a high cost of imported reactors, owing to the nuclear liability law imposing a huge burden on any nuclear industry, would put a black mark against nuclear power.

Therefore, it would be a good idea to take a fresh look at the issue so as to be able to make use of the opportunities that have opened up for India in the field of international nuclear commerce. Amendment of the law is not to appease outsiders but to make nuclear power an implementable viable option for India itself.

AVS may be crafted when the decision-makers see potential, but it can only be realised when they also see and address the challenges that stand in the way.

Global Nuclear Disarmament: The Humanitarian Consequences Route

17 November 2014

The tenacity of nuclear weapons to continue to exist is evident. At the end of the Cold War, many wrote obituaries claiming that these weapons would soon be the "detritus of the Cold War." Nothing however, could have been further from the truth. Half a century later, the weapons are still around in large enough numbers to pose dangerous risks to humanity.

It is in this context that it is interesting to examine a two-year old development that has taken a new approach to the challenge of ridding the world of nuclear weapons. This is the initiative that was primarily spearheaded by Norway, Mexico, Austria, Ireland, Switzerland and New Zealand. It hit headlines in March 2013 when the first conference on humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons was held in Oslo. It focused on the impact of nuclear weapons on human life. Based on testimonies of the hibakushas (survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), and presentations from factual studies on effects of nuclear explosions, 128 countries reached the conclusion that effects of the use of nuclear weapons were not constrained by borders and that no single nation or international body had the resources or the capability to deal with the consequences. Interestingly, India and Pakistan were the only nuclear-armed states that chose to participate in the conference. The five NPT nuclear weapon states, and Israel and North Korea, ignored the congregation.

Eleven months later, in March 2014, an even larger number of nations, 146 this time (though still not the NWS) came together in Mexico to further highlight the humanitarian challenges of nuclear weapon explosions. More and detailed studies were presented on the long term socio-economic impact of use of nuclear weapons. It was established that reconstruction of infrastructure and regeneration of the socio-economic parameters on which we today measure quality of life would take decades to rebuild if the world were to witness a nuclear exchange. However, the only possessors in the Conference were from India and Pakistan. Seven other nuclear-armed states, two of which own more than 90 per cent of the global nuclear stockpile, evinced no interest in the subject!

Ten months from then, on 8-9 December this year, a third Conference on the subject is being hosted by the government of Austria in Vienna. It proposes to specifically focus on the impact of nuclear explosions on human health, climate, food security and infrastructure. Also included are sessions on inadvertent nuclear use as a result of human and technical factors such as error, negligence, miscalculations, miscommunications, cyber interference, technical faults etc.

The US has expressed a willingness to participate in this third conference, though none of the other nuclear weapon states has yet joined in. The presence of the US would be welcome, but it is likely that the decision has been made with an eye on the forthcoming NPT RevCon which is less than six months away

now. The three preparatory committee meetings over the last three years have not made any major breakthroughs that herald well for the outcome in 2015. Rather, the RevCon will have to bear the additional burden of vitiated US-Russia relations. Though the two have traditionally made common cause in upholding non-proliferation through the NPT (which was crafted at the height of the Cold War in 1967), the present day dynamics will make it interesting to track the RevCon.

Compared to the entrenched national positions in the NPT and its divisive nature, the more inclusive humanitarian consequences approach to universal nuclear disarmament is indeed fresh and more appealing. In fact, it is critical that the Conference continues to remain a platform that has the ability to reach across old formulations that box nations into different categories with different rights and responsibilities. It will be a challenge for the Conference to retain this distinctive character from the NPT or it could end up replicating the same divisive national mind-sets. Humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, however, would make no such distinctions. It is high time that nations come together as human congregations to address serious and urgent challenges in an inclusive and collective fashion.

Given that India believes that its national security interests are best served in a world free of nuclear weapons, it must remain engaged with the process with an open mind. No quick results are in the offing and neither should these be expected. But to the extent that the Conference can galvanise action that may incrementally lead to universal nuclear disarmament, it would be useful. In this context, the Indian intervention in the last conference for measures that reduce the salience of nuclear weapons should be actively pursued. India has long argued for delegitimisation of nuclear weapons as one way to get to disarmament. Given that Austria, the host country, has a similar view, Vienna should support India's position for its larger good instead of sticking to its NPT oriented mind-set that has not allowed it, up till now, to accept India's resolutions on the subject in the UN.

The country has a unique perspective on the issue. Unlike in any other nuclear-armed state, India's nuclear doctrine, which is meant to operationalise its nuclear strategy, begins and ends with reiterating the country's desire for nuclear disarmament. India must push for steps that make nuclear weapons lose their perceived utility. Human nature does not permit the discarding of anything that it considers to be of value. Therefore, a devaluation strategy that deprives the weapons of utility coupled with a focus on the catastrophic humanitarian consequences if they ever were to be used can prepare the ground for their eventual elimination.

Nasr: Dangers of Pakistan's Short Range Ballistic Missile

20 October 2014

In April 2011, Pakistan tested a 60 km very short-range ballistic missile called Nasr and claimed it to be nuclear capable. This has since been publicised as the tactical nuclear weapon (TNW) meant to deter India from mounting a conventional military response to any act of terrorism found to be sponsored from Pakistan. By doing so, Rawalpindi has signalled that its nuclear threshold is so low that any military action by India would compel it to escalate straight to the nuclear level since it does not have the capacity to fight a conventional war. The message, therefore, to India is to exercise caution even in the face of provocation since the escalation could quickly spin out of control. This is indeed a well thought out move by Pakistan to reclaim the space that India claims exists for it to undertake punitive action against a Pakistan-abetted proxy war.

However, if Pakistan is to make its TNW a credible component of its first use nuclear strategy, then it must build and deploy them in large enough numbers to have a substantial impact on the battlefield. Whether Pakistan has the fissile material and the technological capacity to do that is immaterial. Even if it does not have this today, it could well acquire it over time since there is no non-proliferation instrument that prohibits it from doing so. But the essential point of concern, not just to India, but to the larger international community as well, should be the existential risks that Pakistan is spreading through its TNW. For these weapons to be militarily meaningful, pre-delegation of their command and control is inevitable. This will bring in issues related to their safety and security. The chances of these weapons being seized by the proliferating and increasingly anti-establishment terrorist organisations are being ignored by Pakistan at its own peril.

Even more alarming are reports that have recently appeared that Pakistan is now moving out into the sea with its short-range nuclear-tipped ballistic and cruise missiles. Late last month a report in *The*

Washington Post claimed that Pakistan was getting ready to operationalise its sea-based deterrent. Considering that China embarked on this path more than three decades ago and is yet to carry out the first patrol of a nuclear-powered submarine armed with nuclear capable missiles, and that India too is yet to send its first SSBN for sea trials, leave alone operational patrols, Pakistan through its trademark jugaad strategy seems to have beaten both with its own version of sea-based deterrence.

It may be recalled that Pakistan had inaugurated its naval SFC (it has one for each one of the wings of the armed forces) in 2012. At the time, it could claim no naval assets in the strategic role. Many in the West dismissed this development as inconsequential since Pakistan's indigenous military capability was perceived as being unable of building and operationalising an SSBN over the next two decades. But, the country has shown that it could achieve 'sea-based deterrence' without having to take the beaten path. Instead of waiting for its SSBNs to be acquired/developed, Pakistan has chosen to equip its surface vessels and diesel electric-powered submarines with nuclear-armed ballistic and cruise missiles.

The intention of doing so is to carry the aspect of TNW deterrence out to sea in order to further reduce India's manoeuvrability on the conventional plane. Yet again, Pakistan has displayed nuclear brinkmanship. The message once again to India, and to the Western South Asia watchers, is that the stakes are going to be too high in case of any break-out of hostilities. It assumes that India would be deterred from all action in view of the higher cost that it would suffer from any escalation. This, however, may prove to be a very costly assumption for Pakistan since the current mood in India does not appear to be one to silently absorb a terrorist provocation.

Meanwhile, the move to deploy nuclear-capable missiles on vessels that are not particularly survivable is an extremely destabilising act that leaves itself dangerously open to inadvertent escalation. An encounter of the surface or sub-surface assets of the two countries, which is not unusual, could result in a situation that quickly spins out of control.

Even scarier are scenarios regarding the security of the nuclear assets at sea. Only last month there was a "near successful hijacking" of a Pakistani missile frigate, PNS Aslat, by al Qaeda with the intention of attacking Indian warships. The possibility of a Pakistani warship that is armed with nuclear-tipped missiles falling into jihadi hands is a threat of a new kind with very alarming dimensions. By spreading its strategic assets on relatively vulnerable ships at sea, Pakistan is repeating the mistake it makes with TNWs on land. The dangers of their safety and security are being multiplied manifold. Unfortunately, Pakistan appears blind to the dangers it is creating for itself in the process.

The latest buzzword in Pakistani nuclear strategy is "full spectrum deterrence against all forms of aggression." The deployment of nuclear weapons on surface ships and submarines is being touted as acquisition of second strike capability. But, a second strike capability comes from delivery systems that are survivable because they are exceptionally mobile, hidden or stealthy to escape a first strike and mount a retaliatory strike. Pakistan is claiming second strike capability by distributing its nuclear assets on visible, traceable, dual-use platforms that brings in an ambiguity that could trigger mistaken, unauthorised and inadvertent escalation. This version of sea-based deterrence is certainly not conducive to regional or international stability.

Uranium and Nuclear Power: Three Indian Stories

15 September 2014

In one of his short stories entitled "Higher Mathematics", written during the period 1935-1950, R K Narayanan had jocularly written "Any news that mentions the atom becomes suspect these days". Nothing much has changed in the many decades since then. News about the atom still evinces much interest. Three stories related to nuclear energy dominated the Indian media during the first two weeks of September. It is worth examining the import of the three, individually and collectively, to understand the big picture pertaining to the nuclear energy programme in India.

The first news that broke early in September was the decision by Australia to sell uranium to India. This is big deal considering the hard line view that this possessor of nearly 31% of the world's uranium has traditionally taken against supplying uranium to non-NPT countries. Though India was granted a waiver by the NSG (of which Australia is a member) in 2008 itself, it has taken six long years since then, and long-

winded bilateral negotiations since 2011, for the domestic politics in Australia to come around to acknowledging that India could be trusted with its uranium.

Meanwhile, for India the good news is not just the availability of uranium for its operational and planned reactors, but even more importantly, the availability of good quality uranium. Dr Kakodkar, former Chairman DAE, once mentioned that the quality of Indian uranium is so poor that it is akin to the tailings that are thrown away by the Australian mining industry. The input of high quality fuel, soon from Australia besides Canada, Mongolia, France and Kazakhstan, would expectedly enhance the capacity factors of Indian reactors.

The second news, on 6 Sept, related to the record established by the indigenous nuclear power plant at Rawatbhatta, Rajasthan, RAPS-5, by operating in an uninterrupted manner over a period of 765 days. This 220 MW plant first became operational in 2010. It is to the credit of the good maintenance of the plant by the operator, NPCIL that enabled this record performance. According to the DAE, during the period of the continuous operation of the plant, the NPCIL earned a revenue of Rs 1225 crores which practically redeemed the total cost of Rs 1200 crores that had been spent on the construction of the plant. The plant, given proper maintenance and safety checks, yet has a life of nearly 30 - 40 years. And even more importantly, it produces this electricity that lights an estimated 2.5 million homes in Rajasthan and UP without adding any greenhouse gases to the environment. This is no mean achievement and certainly worthy of being emulated so that nuclear energy can meaningfully add to India's energy mix.

However, this can only be possible if there is a favourable public opinion that supports the ambitious nuclear expansion plans of the government. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had announced a high target of 63,000 MWe of nuclear energy generation by 2030. He did work towards making this possible through obtaining the exceptionalisation of India and thereby enabling its entry into international nuclear commerce. Consequently, India today has nuclear agreements/MoUs with nearly a dozen countries that will bring in uranium, equipment and reactors into the country.

However, the chance of India being able to exploit the promise held in these agreements is adversely impacted by news of the kind that appeared in Indian press on 7 September -- a day after DAE proudly announced its record achievement and less than a week after the Australian decision to supply uranium to India on the basis of its confidence in its nuclear safety and non-proliferation credentials. This story, claimed to be based on an RTI reply obtained by an activist, ascribes 70% of the deaths in India's atomic energy hubs to cancer. A headline of this nature in a prominent national daily calls for a response from the DAE if it is to address public concern in a transparent manner. Non-availability of credible information from authentic sources, and more importantly in a language that is not easily understandable to the common man, provides room for mischief by opponents of nuclear power. Silence of the DAE on a report such as this does even more harm than the report itself. DAE needs to counter this with credible data provided loud and clear.

It is noteworthy that India is currently in the process of year long celebrations of the Diamond Jubilee of the DAE. On his first visit to the DAE in July this year, Prime Minister Modi exhorted the organisation to place special focus on human and developmental dimensions of atomic science, with special outreach to the youth in schools and colleges, in order to present a human face to its achievements. This is indeed the need of the hour. If India is to encash its many years of safe reactor operating experience, build on a record of the kind made by RAPS 5, make use of the opportunity of tapping into the international commercial opportunities, then it must handle domestic public concerns of nuclear safety with transparency, sensitivity and understanding.

A Strategic Review for India

18 August 2014

All major nuclear weapon states periodically issue official statements in the form of a Review or a White Paper to provide a peep into their threat assessments and response priorities. The US Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) is well known. Russia too periodically announces a military doctrine and has used it to signal change in the circumstances of the use of nuclear weapons. Since 1998, China has been bringing out a White Paper on National Defence (WPND) mostly every two years to indicate how it conceptualises its national defence, threat perceptions and security goals, including in the nuclear domain. So do the UK and France.

Most such documents provide general indications on the nation's assessment of its threat environment and the kind of capability that it wishes to build. For instance, the US NPR of 2010 identified nuclear terrorism and proliferation as the topmost threats facing the country. Accordingly, Washington put its focus on global efforts aimed at securing nuclear materials. It also articulated that countries found guilty of sponsoring terrorists could face US military strikes. Since the threat from near nuclear peers was found of a second order, the US downgraded its nuclear readiness posture by removing its nuclear bombers from 24 hour alert and also de-MIRVing its missiles.

Similarly, the Chinese WPND explains the country's threat perceptions and national security goals. It provides generic references to the growing advancements in national ability to conduct joint operations with precision, informationised strikes etc. Over the last three White Papers, China has devoted complete sub-sections to explaining the role and capabilities of its nuclear force or the Second Artillery Corps (SAC). While the 2008 Paper had called upon the SAC to "build a streamlined and effective strategic force by raising the informationisation of its weaponry and equipment systems, build an agile and efficient operational command and control and increase capabilities of land-based strategic nuclear counter-strikes and precision strikes with conventional missiles," the 2010 Paper stressed modernisation of "capabilities in rapid reaction, penetration, precision strike, damage infliction, protection and survivability."

Given that the SAC has the responsibility for both conventional and nuclear missiles, the Paper also reveals how China continues to "improve the conditions of on-base, simulated and networked training" including in conduct of "trans-regional manoeuvres" and in "complex electromagnetic environments." Such disclosures on posture are meant to buttress deterrence.

Crafted along similar lines, an Indian Strategic Review - ISR (or whatever else it may be called: Strategic Policy Review, or a White Paper) - would be particularly helpful in addressing some of the concerns that have been raised in recent times on the credibility of the Indian nuclear deterrent. Of course, the ISR would traverse a range of security issues. But in the nuclear dimension, besides a reiteration of the basic doctrinal attributes of India's nuclear deterrence, it could highlight some specific issues. Two examples by way of an illustration could be mentioned.

The first could be an articulation of the role of ballistic missile defence (BMD) in India's nuclear strategy. Going by the recent technological developments, India seems to be surely and steadily moving towards the development and eventual deployment of some kind of a BMD capability. However, if India is to ensure that this capability does not destabilise nuclear deterrence equations with Pakistan and China, it is imperative that certain clarity be brought to the nature and type of BMD that India plans to have. It is evident that perceiving it as eroding its deterrence, Islamabad has begun investing in cruise missiles and other counter-measures to defeat an Indian BMD. In case India is to escape being pulled into an offence-defence spiral, it is necessary that the logic and scope of the Indian BMD is explained as a measure for enhancing survivability of its retaliatory capability (warheads, delivery systems and C2) in view of India's no first use (NFU). Given India's missile threat environment, it is virtually impossible to protect its cities unless the BMD is technologically of a very high order and that obviously means expending large amounts of money. But, by explaining the rationale of the BMD for protecting India's counter-strike capability, its destabilising effects can be arrested. And, the ISR could be one means of such communication.

Yet another issue that could do with some clarity is India's response to an act of nuclear terrorism. Given India's experience of Pak-sponsored terrorism, this is a threat that looms large. It would be worthwhile for New Delhi to express its assessment of such a threat and its likely responses. This would showcase resolve that no such act would go unpunished. Doing so through the ISR would enhance deterrence.

Opacity and ambiguity in nuclear numbers and postures has been an attribute of the Indian nuclear strategy. However, an ISR can perform the crucial task of clearing misperceptions through a certain amount of transparency without going into specifics of the arsenal. This is critical given that misperceptions and miscalculations can result in an inadvertent nuclear escalation especially between nuclear neighbours that share border disputes and are prone to border skirmishes.

Such a document would actually be of immense value for two reasons. One, it would aid strategy formulation and action prioritisation within the country while providing assurance to the domestic

public. Simultaneously, it would communicate with the adversary, and its content and tenor could create the atmospherics to help stabilise nuclear equations.

Indian Ratification of the Additional Protocol: Mischievous Reports Miss its Significance

21 July 2014

On 26-27 June 2014, the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) held its plenary meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The discussion on India's membership was reportedly on the agenda. Meanwhile, on 23 June, India announced its decision to ratify the Protocol Additional to the Agreement between the Government of India and the IAEA for the application of safeguards to Civilian Nuclear Facilities (AP). India has been progressively, and on schedule, been implementing the Separation Plan accepted in 2006 as part of the process of India's exceptionalisation and conclusion of the India-United States Civil Nuclear Agreement. Ratification of the AP was one of the last few major commitments, even though the document itself had been expeditiously concluded in July 2009. The conclusion of this formality too now marks the end of India's fulfillment of its promises in exchange for its entry into international nuclear commerce.

The idea and logic of India's exceptionalisation, however, has still not been accepted by many non-proliferation hardliners in the US and other Western capitals, irrespective of the myriad steps that have been taken by India. Not surprisingly, therefore, mischievous reports on India's nuclear activities surface at opportune times. Expectedly, just before the NSG meeting that was to consider India's membership, IHS Jane's sprung an article alleging that India was "expanding a covert uranium enrichment plant that could potentially support the development of thermonuclear weapons."

The timing and content of the report was mischievous on two fronts: first, from the point of view of the impending consideration of India's NSG membership; and second, from the point of view of drawing attention away from the import of the ratification of the AP by India.

India's uranium enrichment plant at Rattenhalli, Mysore, is not covert. It has been well known for decades and is meant to meet the low enriched uranium fuel requirements of nuclear powered submarines. India's nuclear doctrine, based as it is on the threat of assured retaliation, requires a sea-based deterrent capability to support a credible no first use. This, in fact, is a requirement much greater than the need for a large arsenal of thermonuclear weapons. It is the assuredness of retaliation to cause unacceptable damage that is necessary to deter, and even non-thermonuclear weapons can wreak such damage given the density of population in this part of the world. Therefore, India's enriched uranium requirements are of greater criticality for assuring survivability through a credible SSBN fleet, than for building an arsenal of thermonuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, the Indian ratification of the AP is not an insignificant development. Since 1997, when the AP was first concluded as a tool for strengthening the IAEA safeguards system in the wake of the suspected weapons programmes in states of proliferation concern, the AP has been ratified by 123 countries. It is considered a necessary confidence building measure in providing assurance on the exclusively peaceful nature of a national nuclear programme. The US has been amongst the forerunners seeking its universalisation as a pre-condition for civilian nuclear cooperation.

There are three types of APs - the Model AP with Non-nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) that accept comprehensive safeguards; Voluntary Offer Agreements with Nuclear Weapon States (NWS); and a version of the Model AP with other States prepared to accept measures provided for in the Model AP. India is the only 'other State' that has offered to accept an AP tailored to its specificities but that would pursue safeguards effectiveness and efficiency.

In the case of India, not only does the AP grant special rights to the IAEA to conduct inspections (such as the right to declare any Agency official as an inspector, grant of multiple entry visas to facilitate short-notice/surprise inspections, and unrestricted unattended monitoring on civilian designated sites), but also reinforces India's commitment to ensure that its export controls conform to the best international standards. Of course, there are some provisions of the Model AP that are applicable to the NNWS that do not form a part of the Indian AP. But this is hardly surprising given India's particular circumstances. Critics forget India's exceptional circumstances which necessitated the exceptionalisation in the first place. This in no way undermines India's intention of placing its declared facilities under IAEA oversight.

Of course, there will be others that remain outside the IAEA purview, just as there are in other states with nuclear weapons. The APs of all NWS have conditioned access on the basis of national security exclusions.

However, fears that India will use/expand these to indulge in an arms race or for accumulating a large arsenal belie a complete lack of understanding of India's concept of nuclear deterrence. Credible minimum deterrence and no first use are the basic attributes of the Indian nuclear doctrine. These are alien to most Western analysts who cannot understand that India has no need to indulge in a foolhardy exercise of warhead accumulation seeking parity or superiority.

As a believer in the security benefits of non-proliferation, even as a Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) non-member, India has displayed more conformity with the letter and spirit of the NPT than many of its subscribers. Its participation in the IAEA safeguards regime by extending enhanced safeguards on an expanding nuclear programme, and committing India to export controls as also international safety and security standards only adds to this.

Time for India-China Nuclear-speak

16 June 2014

It is significant that the first international call that Narendra Modi received soon after taking oath as Prime Minister was from Premier Li Keqiang of China. This has been quickly followed up with the visit of the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, within weeks of the new government assuming charge in New Delhi. While there is no denying that such visits are planned well ahead and would have taken place irrespective of the government in power, the tone and tenor of the meeting has been distinct. The nuclear issue did not come up for discussion, but the implications of how India-China relations develop under the new Indian government will be felt in the nuclear domain too.

The installation of every new government provides an opportunity for a productive new beginning in inter-State relations. Of course, India has since independence largely followed a broadly pre-set foreign policy that has never seen major swings or deviations. Changes have largely been confined to shifts in focus and priorities. But, as Mr Wang Yi said during his visit to India, China wanted to "cement our existing friendship and explore further cooperation."

The exploration of this further cooperation must include the nuclear dimension too. Until now China has been closed to this idea on the ground that India is an illegitimate nuclear weapons power. However, over the last sixteen years, now that India has consolidated and operationalised its nuclear strategy, its 'legal' status is really a non-issue. Slowly, India will have to 'chip away' at traditional Chinese objections on this front and convince it of the benefits of starting a nuclear dialogue that can gradually explore the possibilities of nuclear confidence-building measures and even arms control at a later date.

Of course, India would first have to convince itself of the need for these. As a State under denial from Western-crafted arms control regimes, India is itself wary of this concept. However, it would be foolish to eschew the possibility of India being in the driver's seat on nuclear CBMs and arms control. These are effective tools that are used by nuclear-armed countries to stabilise their deterrent relations and avoid situations of crisis and arms race instability. India should find ways of doing the same. Prime Minister Modi made a statement in a completely different context when he said, "If India has to compete with China, the focus should be on skill, scale and speed." The same could be equally applied to the nuclear context too. We need to skilfully find areas of nuclear CBMs and arms control (a joint no-first use agreement, an anti-ballistic missile treaty, control over multiple independently retargetable vehicles could be some ideas worthy of being explored) and do it with speed. It would be in India's interest to find ways of avoiding being sucked into an offence-defence nuclear arms race.

It has been evident for a while that a relatively well-armed and economically powerful China is in an increasingly assertive mood and is looking to play a larger role in Asia. India is well conscious of this. However, it is essential that India shows assertion of its own on issues that are of supreme national interest. Unfortunately, the previous government, despite the many good tasks that it undertook in strengthening India's nuclear capability and position, suffered from the perception of being low in resolve. Modi's personality type is different and it reflects positively on the aspect of political resolve, at least in case of India's foreign policy. China respects this and it is not surprising that the Chinese Foreign

Minister praised Prime Minister Modi for showing the world “resolve and courage” by setting an agenda to push reforms and development and for injecting “vigour and vitality” immediately after taking charge.

India has many issues that can serve as useful leverages in its relations with China. The consistent upswing in bilateral trade, totalling close to US\$70 billion, is a positive development even though New Delhi has to work towards reducing its trade deficit with China. Terrorist incidents in China have exposed the dangers of extremist radicalism that continue to brew in the country that Beijing claims as its close friend. It would be naïve to believe that China will let go of its special friendship with Pakistan, given that both perceive this relationship as useful to keep India unsettled. But, it would still be in India's interest to try and expose the nuclear dangers for all if Pakistan continues down the path of sponsoring and supporting terrorism and China continues to shield its misbehaviour. China must be 'made to understand' that it cannot escape from existential nuclear dangers such as an unauthorised or mistaken nuclear launch or one caused by miscalculation.

Wang Yi was consistent in reminding India to follow a "one-China" policy. Sushma Swaraj nattily retorted with the need for China to respect a "one-India" policy. Both, however, must equally recognise the fact that nuclear dangers bring another kind of one-ness to the neighbourhood that we would all ignore at our own peril. It behoves the two largest nuclear armed countries of Asia to join hands in reducing nuclear dangers to the extent they can. The new government must seize the opportunity to initiate nuclear-speak with China.

India and No First Use: Preventing Deterrence Breakdown

21 April 2014

Several recent writings, including in the context of a possible revision of the Indian nuclear doctrine as mentioned in the BJP manifesto, have mentioned the need for a reconsideration of the no first use (NFU) principle. Many argue that India's 'retaliation only' strategy may no longer be an effective deterrent in the wake of the recent developments in nuclear capabilities of its adversaries. The allegations against the NFU are that it is a pacifist, idealist, Gandhian strategy that has no role to play in the modern context.

Is this really true? Is a first use nuclear doctrine more credible and better at deterrence than NFU? Would the adoption of first use doctrine by India deter Pakistan more and better?

Militaries like to function according to standard operating procedures (SOPs) – whether in peace or war. This inclines them towards offensive doctrines where they can stay with a pre-deliberated course of action while denying the adversary the advantage of playing out his moves. With conventional weapons, this may be a prudent approach, since the military can concentrate on the first phase of offense, thereby increasing its chance of victory. But the equation gets skewed with the entry of nuclear weapons.

In a situation where both sides have secure second strike nuclear capabilities, a first use of nuclear weapons, even in the form of a splendid first strike, cannot rule out the possibility of nuclear retaliation. Hence, the calculation of the first user cannot be limited to the damage it causes, but must also factor in the damage it will suffer from the response. Therefore, despite an offensive nuclear strategy, neither can victory be assured, nor the extent of damage (owing to the very nature of the weapon) be considered acceptable. Is it then useful, or even credible, to threaten first use of nuclear weapons?

In fact, even though conventional wisdom has us believe that first use is more liberating than a counter-strike strategy, serious thought to the actual execution of first use reveals the complexities involved in doing so. After all, the purpose of first use should be to deter by communicating that such use would substantially improve the situation of the user, making him emerge from the crisis looking better after use. This can only happen if there is no riposte to his action because if there is, then he can hardly 'look better' after suffering nuclear damage. Therefore, the essential question that the first user has to ask and answer is whether in a state of mutual vulnerability, the initiator can ever be in a better position?

An NFU strategy, on the other hand, concedes the onus of escalation to the adversary and surprisingly, becomes more liberating. Firstly, the military is not straining the nuclear leash on hair trigger alert that can easily fall prey to misadventure. Neither is there a need to perfect the logistics of first use, which is not easy considering that it requires coordinating a nuclear attack with speed and surprise to hit the adversary's forces before they can be launched or dispersed. Secondly, the political leadership is freed

from the psychological pressure of having to decide when, at what stage of war, to use the weapon - a decision that is sure to weigh on him/her personally for the damage caused, opprobrium earned, and retaliation invited and suffered.

First use postures based on projection of nuclear war-fighting require large arsenals of first strike weapons (such as accurate missiles with multiple independently re-targetable vehicles), nuclear superiority to carry out counter-force attacks, elaborate and delegated command and control structures to handle trigger readiness and coordinate simultaneous nuclear attacks from dispersed forces. None of this is easy. It is, rather, dangerous; raising the possibility of an accidental nuclear war based on a miscalculation, and also lowering the threshold of nuclear war in a crisis situation.

If Pakistan is going down this route, it is raising dangers for itself too. The answer to this from India does not have to be adoption of first use, but to enhance the credibility of its NFU, through better communication of survivability measures that ensure retaliation. It will be the threat of punishment that far outweighs any advantages that Pakistan reaps from its first use that will stay its hand on the trigger.

Meanwhile, by continuing with a stabilising posture of NFU, India is only helping itself since such a strategy alleviates the adversary's insecurity that may tempt him towards a pre-emptive strike. By taking the 'use or lose' pressure off the adversary, India is helping its own cause of preventing deterrence breakdown.

By letting the adversary make the difficult decision, while communicating punitive nuclear retaliation, India has wisely steered away from nuclear brinkmanship. And, by establishing the nuclear weapon as an instrument of punishment, it has encouraged the possibility of 'no use' instead of 'sure use' of the nuclear weapon.

Nuclear Security Summit 2014: Shared Risk, Shared Responsibility

17 March 2014

In just a few days, heads of governments of about four dozen nations will assemble in the Hague, Netherlands, for the third Nuclear Security Summit. An initiative started by President Obama in 2010 in Washington, the Summit travelled to Seoul in 2012 and Obama will host the next one again in 2016. What is the significance of this Summit process and has it been of any specific benefit to India?

The most important gain from these Summits is that they have brought global attention to nuclear terrorism. President Obama initiated the effort after having realized that the risk of nuclear terrorism was real and urgent. However, India's experience with cross-border terrorism well predates the US awakening to the threat. Since the end of 1990s, India has faced terrorism, sponsored and executed from Pakistan. Obviously, the threat of nuclear terrorism has been of utmost concern given that nuclear weapons (and an increasing stockpile of highly enriched uranium and plutonium) and terrorism co-exist in Pakistan.

Given this threat perception, a Summit process that demands national action and responsibility for securing nuclear and radiological materials has universalised a threat that India was fighting a lonely battle against. Attention to these issues at the highest political level has ensured their inclusion in national priorities and the accordance of necessary resources to turn commitments into reality. Heads of governments at the Summits have individually and collectively committed to taking measures to secure nuclear material on their territory according to accepted international benchmarks.

Amongst the international agreements that are relevant to this subject, two are worthy of mention. The Convention on Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM) was crafted to regulate international transportation of nuclear material. It came into force in 1987. However, through an amendment in 2005, its ambit was expanded to protection of nuclear material in domestic use, storage and transport too. It enhanced mechanisms for cooperation to locate and recover stolen/smuggled nuclear material and to mitigate radiological consequences of sabotage. However, the amendment is not yet operative since it awaits ratification by 2/3d of the member states. The other instrument, the International Convention on Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (ICSANT), meanwhile, came into force in 2007 mandating national laws for imposition of punitive action on those involved in nuclear terrorism. Unfortunately, neither of these instruments is universal and in fact, many of the countries that are known to harbor terrorists have not joined in, including Pakistan. However, the presence of political leaders at the Summit does exert political and moral pressure on outliers. Indeed, the number of countries joining the two

Conventions has increased over the last six years, and a few more are expected to bring their decision to join in as a 'house gift' in 2014 too.

Some positive results notwithstanding, the Summit process does suffer from the shortcoming that it cannot impose uniformity in recognition of threat, or the same rigour in implementation of national efforts. Nations do perceive the threat differently. In any case, there is no punishment for non-compliance and many smaller nations have railed against the increase in need for reporting as burdensome and distracting from other national priorities.

In order to maintain the momentum on nuclear security and get nations to recognize the enormity of the risk, and hence the responsibility they share, it is necessary that a sense of stake-hood be felt by all. One way of doing so would be to foster greater sharing in two dimensions. The first would be information on best practices, for instance, on how countries practice enforcement such as training of security guards, crafting of personnel reliability programmes, tools used for data storage and mining, including on tracking of orphaned radiological sources, etc. The second would be the sharing of technologies, for instance, on manufacture of detection equipment such as scanners at ports, decontamination materials, medical countermeasures etc.

Transfer of such technologies to countries where these could be manufactured at relatively lesser cost would not only make the manufacturing hubs a stakeholder in nuclear security but also make the detection equipment available at low prices thereby relieving nations of burdensome expenditure to deploy expensive machinery or systems.

Nuclear security is not the requirement or demand of one nation. The fact that a country as militarily capable as the USA has felt the need for collective effort in this direction proves that it is a shared risk and hence a shared responsibility that must be carried by all if we are to minimize, if not obviate, an unfortunate act of nuclear terrorism. India's participation in the Nuclear Security Summit is indeed an opportunity to seek a collective redressal of a threat it faces, and also a contribution to international security – a win-win proposition either way.

US, China and the South Asian Nuclear Construct

17 February 2014

Most Western writings/conferences on India-Pakistan nuclear deterrence tend to try and understand this dyad in a narrow regional box of South Asia. This is not only stifling and restricting but also not a useful formulation. Rather, the India-Pakistan nuclear entanglement has roots beyond this geographical construct since no consideration of this relationship is meaningful without bringing China into the picture. China, however, brings along its own set of strategic equations with Russia and the US, thereby making the nuclear issue global.

The reason that the Indo-Pak nuclear entanglement cannot be divorced from China is because Beijing impinges on the region in two ways. The first one pertains to the close relationship that China has had with its all-weather friend, Pakistan. It was with generous Chinese help that Pakistan built its nuclear weapons. The transfer of 50 kg highly enriched uranium, weapon designs, providing delivery vectors, including the setting up of a missile factory, are well known facts today. To quote Gary Milhollin, an American non-proliferation expert, "If you subtract China's help from Pakistan's nuclear programme, there is no nuclear programme." Having created a nuclear weapons state, China uses it effectively as a proxy to complicate India's security.

The second shadow is cast by China's ongoing nuclear modernization. While China is doing so with its eyes on US capabilities and their impact on its own nuclear deterrence, India suffers the downstream effect of these developments. Indian responses, in turn, have an impact across its western border. Therefore, strategic deterrence and stability in the 21st century has to be considered in a more global construct. No current dyadic nuclear relationship has the luxury of bipolar equation of the Cold War. Rather, regional deterrence is complicated by the inevitability of each nation's response to its threat perceptions in a sort of a chain reaction, oblivious to, or perhaps unable to address the fact that its own responses have further implications.

One good illustration of this is the ongoing march of ballistic missile defence (BMD). The US set the tone for this by abandoning the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty in 1972 and expressing a resolve to pursue defence along with deterrence to deal with a range of new threats that could not be deterred and hence had to be defended against. As the US has steadily gone about developing and deploying requisite capabilities over the last decade or so, it has repeatedly tried to reassure Russia and China that its BMD is not meant to upset strategic stability with them. But, that is not how Moscow and Beijing read American intentions. Fearing the worst, both are engaged in developing their own hedging strategies, which include building their own BMD, as well as counter-measures, to address their threat perceptions as emerging from the US BMD.

Chinese efforts in this direction, in turn, raise threat perceptions in India. Even though India harbours a sense of nuclear stability with China owing to a consonance in their nuclear doctrines and the fact that neither brandishes the weapon as a war-fighting tool for easy or early use, and also because neither country is interested in digressing from the trajectory of economic growth and development, there is no denying the existence of a long-term threat perception. This is exacerbated by China's conventional and nuclear build-up, given that territorial disputes persist between India and China. The possibility of a BMD-protected China subjecting India to nuclear coercion compels India to develop necessary responses of its own. India has demonstrated a limited BMD capability, which, in turn, has raised concerns in Pakistan, who has responded with increasing its own nuclear arsenal and demonstrating a desire to develop tactical nuclear weapons.

So, what started in Washington as the pursuit of the BMD to meet changed American threat perceptions has ended up providing the logic and justification for Pakistan to increase its arsenal. Pakistan's fast growing stockpile, however, has implications not just for regional but international security. Existential risks from nuclear weapons – that of unauthorised launch, miscalculation, accident – are dangers that accompany nuclear weapons. During the Cold War, the US and USSR, and by extension, the rest of the world, lived with these dangers. But these risks are exacerbated when a country that has nuclear weapons also cohabits with non-state actors – some that it nurtures to meet its foreign policy objectives and others that have slipped beyond its control. In either case, the possibility of a meeting between terrorism and nuclear weapons/material is not a sanguine development.

Unfortunately, as Pakistan moves further down the road towards tactical nuclear weapons and delegates command and control to maintain a credible first use nuclear doctrine, the existential risks can only increase. This is a matter of global, not just South Asian concern. Therefore, attempts to understand/constrain/resolve the Indo-Pak nuclear deterrence equation through the narrow geographical confines of South Asia are meaningless.

Responding to Pakistan's Tactical Nuclear Weapons: A Strategy for India

18 January 2014

In Pakistan's nuclear strategy, the primary task of its nuclear weapons is not to deter India's nuclear weapons, but to avoid an engagement with a superior military capability. Rawalpindi is aware of the risk of having to confront India till such time as it supports terrorism. But, it believes that its nuclear weapons constrain India from militarily punishing it. India has responded to this strategy by suggesting and illustrating (with Kargil) that there is space to fight a conventional war even in the presence of nuclear weapons. Over time, India has also tweaked its military doctrine to make this viable. This has obviously disturbed Pakistan. If an Indian conventional response could still be tailored to remain below Pakistani redlines, then its nuclear weapons become useless.

Pakistan cannot afford this. It has to keep its nuclear weapons relevant and in-the-face of India, and the world, if it has to prevent a military offensive provoked by self-sponsored terrorism. It is in this context that the tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) – small yield nuclear weapons delivered by very short range ballistic missiles over military targets -- come in handy. The objective is to reclaim the space that India maintains exists for a conventional war even in the presence of nuclear weapons.

In playing this game, Pakistan is not seeking to exploit the military utility of the TNW. It has no illusions about the military effectiveness of the weapon on the battlefield. And, it is aware that by using them, it would invoke a nuclear response triggering tragic consequences. But, in its plan, it would not really have to use the TNW because the inherent risk of nuclear escalation would deter.

The threat implied by Pakistan's TNWs is based on two assumptions. One, Pakistan believes that the use of TNW would bring about such a material and psychological shift in hostilities as to stun India into a halt. Confronted with the prospect of further escalation, the nature of Indian polity and the 'softness of the state' would make India choose war-termination over escalation. So, Pakistan believes that India would be deterred from using its superior military capability since it would not have the will or the motivation to act. He doubts whether India, with a strategic culture of military restraint, would find it prudent to inflict damage (and risk more on itself) in response to a threat that is not itself mortal. Second, Pakistan assumes that the battlefield use of a small nuclear weapon would not be seen as provocation enough by India, or the rest of the world, to merit massive retaliation. It tends to assume that the international community will stop India from continuing its conventional campaign or undertaking nuclear retaliation. Therefore, in Pakistani perception, the TNW is a deterrent at best, and a war termination weapon at worst.

India's response to Pakistan's TNW must address these assumptions. In fact, India does not need to develop TNW of its own, but to focus on measures that convince Pakistan of an inevitability of nuclear retaliation to any nuclear use, irrespective of yield, target or damage. Having based its deterrence on the threat of punishment, it is imperative that the certainty of retaliation to inflict unacceptable damage be credibly conveyed.

This could be achieved by raising the public profile of the nuclear command and control at both the military and the political levels. There is need for greater transparency of knowledge of structures and processes that ensure nuclear retaliation. Measures being taken to guarantee survivability of the chain of command at the primary and secondary levels, as well as of the communication systems, should be more visible. In this context, strengthening the profile of the Strategic Forces Command in public perception is necessary. The knowledge of the existence of the organization and a level of transparency on its role and mandate would send a signal of intent and purpose to the adversary.

Secondly, it should also be widely known that Indian troops have the ability to fight through tactical nuclear use. This would send a message of preparedness to handle battlefield use of nuclear weapons without bringing conventional operations to a halt or even confronting the political leadership with the choice of war termination, as assumed by Rawalpindi.

Thirdly, better evidence and communication of political resolve to undertake retaliation is necessary. Periodic statements from authoritative levels like the National Security Advisor or Commander-in-Chief, SFC, or even occasional news reports about meetings of the National Command Authority would signal the seriousness of government's attention to the nuclear backdrop that confronts India.

Pakistan may have introduced a new element with TNW, but India must let it be known that it would play the nuclear game according to its own rules.

Column: Eagle Eye

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India-US: Significance of the Second Modi-Obama Meet

11 December 2014

In less than four months, the new Prime Minister of India and US President Barack Obama will meet for their second summit in New Delhi. The first summit was the outcome of Obama's initiative when he called the newly elected Prime Minister of India and invited him to visit the US. Modi, who was denied a visa for about a decade by the US State Department, promptly and positively responded to Obama's invitation. The result was the first summit between the two leaders in late September 2014.

The planned second summit between Modi and Obama is the result of an innovative initiative by Prime Minister Modi who invited the US President to be the Chief Guest at the Republic Day celebration in India on 26 January 2015. This time it was Obama's turn to swiftly accept Modi's invitation.

The first Modi-Obama summit was indeed an event that broke the frozen ice in the diplomatic ties between the two countries. No bilateral relationship in international relations is without political and economic frictions. But the diplomatic discord that resulted from the Devyani Khobragade episode had threatened to stall the fast moving strategic partnership between India and the US and a summit between the leadership of the two countries was essential to restore the momentum.

It is admitted on all hands that the first Modi-Obama Summit turned out to be highly successful step in renewing the cordial ties between New Delhi and Washington. Firstly, Very rarely countries issue joint vision statements before the summit and in this case the issuance of a joint Indo-US vision statement raised expectations that the final outcome of the summit would be a positive one. Secondly, President Obama and Prime Minister Modi co-authored an article that was published in the influential Washington Post that hinted at better days to come in the diplomatic ties between the two countries. After the summit, a joint statement issued by the two leaders, moreover, contained language that indicated India's boldness in taking clear positions and the determination of the two leaders to address certain crucial issues in the current global scenario. The first one was related to the need to tackle the menace created by the ISIS the West Asian region and the second one was about political turbulence in the South China Sea raising uncertainties over freedom of navigation.

Modi's announcement of his government's plan to provide visas on arrival to American citizens was a master diplomatic stroke in the backdrop of the history of US visa denial to him. Significantly, Modi's first meeting with President Obama took place after his summit meetings with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Chinese President Xi Jinping - the two most powerful Asian powers. Modi had also met Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Brazil.

All these signalled the new Indian government's foreign policy goals to develop cordial and constructive ties with all major powers of the world. Modi's visit to the US was not meant to put all eggs in the American basket. In fact, Japan's commitment of US\$35 billion dollars and China's commitment US\$20 billion foreign investment in India had encouraged Modi to draw a substantial amount of FDI from the US. It is true that the American system of economy would not permit President Obama to compete with Japan and China in promoting foreign investment in India. But Modi was well aware of the American situation and he held separate meeting with the CEOs of many topnotch American companies. And, according to an estimate, the total potential US investment that Modi could attract could be the tune of more than US\$40 billion.

None, however, could foresee that Modi and Obama would be ready so soon to have a second summit. They met each other on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in Myanmar and on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Australia and appear to have hit it off.

The resilience and expansion of the ISIS influence, the resurgence of the Taliban threat in Afghanistan, instability in nuclear-armed Pakistan and China's apparently unstoppable assertiveness provide a significant rationale for the second Indo-US summit.

On the other hand, Modi's economic vision for India, his robust economic diplomacy and the value of the Indian market for US companies provide the required pull-factor for President Obama's visit to India in January 2015. It is only appropriate to say that an American President's presence in the Republic Day celebration in India has been long-awaited necessity, and it is better late than ever! It will be an inspiration for other democracies and add value to role of democracy in world affairs. In the world of diplomacy, symbols are as important as substance.

Has President Obama Turned Lame Duck?

10 November 2014

The US' mid-term Congressional election result was, in the perception of the Republican Party – that came to control the US Congress for the first time in last eight years – a referendum on incumbent President Barack Obama's presidency.

If the American voters' verdict was overwhelmingly against the Democratic Party, some analysts argue, Obama is a lame duck president. Given how Obama could not effectively promote his political agenda when the Democratic Party held majority in the powerful Upper House of the Congress, how can he expect to do so now, when both Houses of the US Congress have come under Republican majority?

It is understandable that Obama will have to cope with tremendous challenges to his domestic political agenda in the next two years of his presidency. The gridlock in Washington, the temporary government shutdown and the sequestration that affected even the Pentagon occurred when the Republican-controlled House of Representatives stonewalled Obama's political agenda. If history repeats again, Obama will certainly be called a lame duck president.

But history is very unlikely to repeat itself in Washington's beltway. First of all, encouraged by the recent electoral victory, the Republican Party will try to project itself as a responsible political party that cares for its constituents and the country's political stability and economic growth. Its image has taken quite a beating due to its behavior in the recent past and the Party, keeping its eyes on 2016 presidential election, cannot afford to retain a negative image among the voters.

Second, there are some issues, such as corporate tax reforms, where Obama and the Republican Party bosses appear to be on the same page. In fact, the Democratic Party, failed to capitalise on Obama's oratory skills and back his policies during the election campaign and thus had to face consequences. Obama's desire to leave a noteworthy legacy will induce him to make compromises even if his own party leaders take contrary views on certain legislations.

Third, all said and done, the Republican Party has not got a veto-proof majority in the Congress or a filibuster-proof majority in the US Senate. President Obama will retain his right to veto legislations he opposes and some of his party men can be persuaded to filibuster a Republican legislative measure, if it is perceived to be against the principal party line.

All these do not signify that there is going to be trouble free Obama administration until 2016. Key issues related to energy, environment, immigration, healthcare and public debt will encounter sharp political debates and divisions, and may even create an image of a drastically divided nation over the coming months. But the Republican leadership will be mindful of the 2016 election and Obama will strive to put in place a respectable legacy and hence political processes in the country's capital may actually witness more restrained dynamics and controlled temper than in the recent past.

Mid-term elections in the US are generally local affairs and do not draw much attention abroad. But the 2014 election is conspicuously different. The world watched it with intense curiosity in view of the ongoing disorder in the world. Russia and China have been flexing muscles in their respective regions and the Obama administration's response is regarded by the US allies as either weak or lackluster. The Syrian civil war, the spread of the Islamic State's (IS) influence in West Asia, and the difficulties of finding a workable solution to Iran's nuclear questions demand a kind of engagement and leadership that the Obama administration has not been able to provide.

The international community does not want to witness the unfolding of a cold war-type equation between the US and Russia and/or between Washington and Beijing. International concerns over the inability of the US-led air strikes to contain the IS are also palpable.

Will Obama act like a lame duck president on foreign affairs? Frankly, under the US constitutional provisions of separation of powers and checks and balances, the president enjoys enormous privilege and leeway to conduct the country's foreign relations and safeguard national security. The Congress has the power over the purse and it can create hurdles for the White House in matters of implementation. But significantly, the Republican Party desires a more robust use of force in the conduct of foreign policy and has criticised Obama for lack of leadership, growing anti-Americanism in the world and less than weighty means to confront Russia on the Ukraine issue and the IS and Syria in West Asia.

One has to watch how far the Republican Congress can persuade, encourage, back and induce the Obama White House to restore the US' primacy in global affairs. In other words, the Republican Congress will desire President Obama to be more proactive and not a lame duck in conducting world affairs and addressing national security threats.

Modi-Obama Summit: Criticism for Criticism's Sake?

13 October 2014

India's hyperactive Prime Minister Narendra Modi is now widely known for his magic - the Modi Magic. His charisma made him popular ever since he began his tour of India to campaign for the parliamentary election and his charm became more widespread going beyond the borders of India soon after he became the Indian Prime Minister.

In one month, Prime Minister Modi has held three summit level meetings with three world leaders - Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Chinese President Xi Jinping and the US President Barack Obama. The Chinese leader announced an investment of US\$20 billion to develop infrastructure in India; the Japanese leader declared an amount of US\$35 billion and, while the American leader could make no such commitment, the US-Indian Business Council estimated that Modi's visit to the US would bring about US\$41 billion of investment to India.

Why the US president was not able to make an open commitment on investing in India is not unknown. It is the private corporate sector in the US that can make investment commitments and not the US administration. And, investment, after all, is not aid!

There is no doubt that Modi's summit meeting with the US President was the most important among the three summits, not only because the US is a superpower, but because Washington's approach towards the new government in Delhi would considerably impact China's attitude and Japanese engagement vis-à-vis India.

Critics point out that Modi's US visit was high on symbolism and low on substance. Some pointed out that the grand reception he received in New York was the handiwork of the Gujarati community in the US. It has also been argued that there was a big media hype in India about Modi's US visit, but there was nothing of significant importance in the coverage by the US media. Still others complain that no new agreement was signed during the Modi-Obama summit, no big ticket item was proclaimed, and that there was nothing original in the joint statement issued by the two leaders.

These are actually criticisms for criticism's sake. First of all, Modi's address at the Madison Square was clearly aimed at the Indian American community and not just the Gujarati community. In fact, the short cultural programme before the Prime Minister's arrival had an India flavour and the Rajasthani dance performance by Gujarati dancers symbolised the unity of India in diversity! The Prime Minister's announcement of life time visas for overseas Indians (PIO and CIO) was not meant for the Gujarati community alone.

Secondly, American newspapers rarely give wide coverage to any one foreign leader, and Prime Minister Modi's meeting with the US President in view of this fact was like such meetings in the White House, that is, almost a daily affair. Moreover, an article by the PM in The Wall Street Journal, a major voice of corporate America, and a joint article by President Obama and Prime Minister Modi in the influential The Washington Post were quite uncommon feats.

Finally, a pair of eagle eyes is needed to discover the novel elements in the US-India joint statement. First, the statement clearly and strongly sends signals to Pakistan to rope in its home-grown terrorist networks and to China to follow international law in handling maritime disputes in the South China Sea. No diplomatic nicety was shown, unlike earlier joint statements, in matters of tackling terrorism and managing freedom of the seas.

Secondly, the need to robustly tackle the IS and D-Company, among other terrorist outfits, and their safe heavens, was a significant part of the joint statement and the mark of the Modi Government on this issue was crystal clear.

Thirdly, the concord between the two leaders to clean up the logjam in the implementation of the civil nuclear cooperation agreement was an important declaration. The UPA government failed to implement years after the declaration of the nuclear deal and six years after signing the 123 agreement.

Significantly, Modi's summit with President Obama preceded his unprecedented corporate diplomacy marked by his meetings with the CEOs of a large number of American Big Business houses and his public diplomacy with the influential Indian American community. In both these initiatives, the Prime Minister's goal was to allure American investments into India to create smart cities, modernise the country's infrastructure and turn India into a manufacturing hub of the world.

Modi was neither selling dreams nor making populist remarks. He had done his home work. Based on his understanding of India's strengths - democracy, demography and demands - he tried to convince the American public and the government the benefit of doing business in and with India. Neither his corporate diplomacy nor his public diplomacy was anathema to the White House.

Modi has planted many seeds in the US. The road to success, however, is long and not without hurdles.

Changing Global Balance of Power: Obama's Response

8 September 2014

The term 'unipolar world order' has slowly been erased from the lexicon of current debates on world affairs. While the Obama Administration appears determined to keep the flag of Pax Americana flying around the world, events in Latin America, Europe, Asia and West Asia have begun to challenge the US-led global order.

China and Russia have successfully penetrated Latin America by spreading their economic and military presence hitherto completely dominated by the US. While Japan has been seeking in vain to chase the Chinese into Latin America, the Obama Administration has been accused of neglecting its own backyard.

Many analysts raised eyebrows when US President Barack Obama promised considerable assistance to Africa last month but had little to offer to Latin America. China already has a robust presence in Africa and has replaced the US as the principal trading partner of many Latin American countries. The US financial assistance has always been conditional to protection of human rights or promotion of democracy, but China imposes no strings; and thus, an increasing number of countries in Africa and Latin America are looking up to Beijing for assistance.

Notably, China has little to offer to strife-torn West Asia. It has taken a back seat in the game of diplomacy and has not even attempted to restore order in Libya, Egypt, Palestine, Syria or Iraq. The US on the other hand has directly or indirectly remained a high profile actor in this region. The reigning superpower, however, has failed to contain, manage, and let alone resolve, the ongoing violence in West Asia.

The credibility of the US as a world leader has been questioned in view of Washington's alleged mishandling of the Syrian civil war; the delayed response to the threat posed by the Islamic State (IS); the lack of satisfactory steps to re-establish order in the post-Gaddafi Libya; and the inability to arrive at an agreeable solution to the Iranian nuclear issue.

Critics have pointed to the US' hasty withdrawal from Iraq before restoration of socio-political stability and its planned exit from Afghanistan despite the resurgence of the Taliban as indicative of the US' diminished ability and willingness to sustain its hegemonic world order. While some argue that the US is on the march to become energy independent and hence cares little about the West Asian muddle, the

region remains critical to global energy security. Can the US economy sustain itself, if there is instability in the global energy market?

The US' recent decision to seek NATO assistance in addressing the threat from the IS is but one among several examples that testify the US' declining power to maintain world order on its own. There was little doubt that the US dominated the NATO during the Cold War. However, this domination ended after the collapse of the Soviet Union and despite NATO's geographical expansion.

The support received by the US from NATO in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in 2001 vanished in 2003 when the Bush Administration prepared to militarily intervene in Iraq. In the recent NATO summit in Poland, Obama persuaded some NATO members to expand its activities to other parts of the world with the creation of rapid deployment force. The first such step would be to tackle the terror threat from IS. However, it signifies the US' weakness than strength in managing the IS threat.

The jerky balance of power in today's world, however, is more discernible in Europe and the Asia Pacific where the resurgence of Russian power and the emergence of China as a potential global power has put to the test the resilience of the US-led global order. American threats, sanctions, and/or even diplomacy failed to prevent Russia from spreading its control over to Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014. Over the past several months, Ukraine has emerged as a new cold war battleground between the Obama and the Putin administrations.

After Putin brandished his nuclear arsenal, his proposal for a cease-fire became effective in Eastern Ukraine.

Similarly, the US seems ineffective in stemming the expansion of Beijing's influence in the Asia Pacific both due to China's rising military prowess and vast economic muscle. China has occupied several islands in the South China Sea, harassed smaller neighbours, challenged the US' naval vessels and surveillance ships risking potential confrontation, declared Air Defence Identification Zones and patrolled in waters close to the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in East China Sea. The US has issued statements warning China and assuring its allies, but there is no manifestation of its effect.

Significantly, China and Russia have been forging closer economic and military ties to alter the global power structure, making it difficult for the US to stop the erosion of its global influence.

Obama Administration: Re-engaging India

11 August 2014

After months of downgrading its engagement with the Indian government, US President Barack Obama's administration has woken up to the new reality of a transformed political profile in New Delhi, and has managed to alter its diplomatic course.

The Devyani Khobragade episode had cast a shadow over the much-trumpeted US-India strategic partnership. It was followed by disturbing headlines on the bilateral, when the May 2014 national election catapulted Narendra Modi and his party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), to the centre-stage of Indian politics. The massive popular mandate to the BJP has meant a stable central government for next five years in India that effectively replaces decades-long coalition politics and a recent tendency towards federalisation of Indian foreign policy making.

The difficulty for the US was to begin dialoguing with the new Indian strongman who was, for years, denied a US visa. There is no parallel in the US history to the denial of a visa to a three-time chief minister of a democratic country.

However, the US' pragmatism has always been legendary. Soon after it was clear that Narendra Modi would lead the next government in India, Obama dialled 'M' for Modi, congratulated him and invited him

to visit Washington at an agreeable time. Modi's pragmatism has been equally legendary and he promptly concurred.

Modi, nonetheless, gave no impression whatsoever that he was too eager to make a trip to a country that refused him access for an alleged violation of human rights that had been cleared by the Supreme Court of India. His decision to invite the SAARC heads of states to his inauguration; choosing Bhutan for his first foreign visit; postpone a planned visit to Tokyo; but miss no chance to meet with the Chinese and Russian leaders at the BRICS summit; and to ask his External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj to choose Bangladesh for her first foreign visit; signalled that Modi would maintain relationships with the US, and its allies on his own terms.

The Obama Administration, on the other hand, did not take things lying down. The US' persistence is reflected in the fact that thirteen officials from Washington have already visited New Delhi to establish contacts with their counterparts at various levels. Three cabinet level officers, the US Secretary of State, the US Commerce Secretary and the US Secretary of Defense visited India and met Prime Minister Modi, along with others, to kick-start the momentum in the bilateral relations.

Next month, Modi will head to Washington for his first summit with Obama. While the US cabinet level officials visited Delhi to prepare for the Obama-Modi summit in September, surprisingly, none at the cabinet level from India has visited Washington yet.

It appears that more than New Delhi, it is Washington that is keen to bury the past and move ahead to repair the relationship and build further. Significantly, US Secretary of State John Kerry stated during his visit that he would not like to dig the past and that, in any case, Modi was denied visa by the previous Republican Administration. In fact, a post on Twitter mentioned that President Obama was unaware of the denial of visa to Modi.

Similarly, one could make the point that the US-India differences over airline security, pharmaceutical business, solar panel manufacturing, Indian steel and several other issues that constituted headline news should not be allowed to affect Indo-US ties in other areas.

In fact, Kerry came to India like a diplomatic sales-executive to promote cooperation in the energy sector; Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker came to impress upon India the importance of signing the Trade Facilitation Act (TFA) at the World Trade Organisation and Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, during his visit, sought to discuss defence deals worth billions of dollars.

Clearly, India's civil nuclear liability act is a road block to fulfil Secretary Kerry's desire for full-fledged energy cooperation and the Modi government's firm decision to not sacrifice India's food security policy at the TFA's altar is a disappointment for Secretary Penny.

While the Kerry-Penny visit to India coincided with the vote on the FTA at the WTO, and India's refusal to lend its support overshadowed their visit, Hagel's visit to India pumped some positive energy into the bilateral relationship. Compared to the India-US economic and diplomatic ties, defence ties between the two countries appear more cooperative and less controversial. Despite differences over pricing, technology transfer, the Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement, and end-user agreement, India was the largest market for US weapons last year, and has already purchased \$10 billion worth of defence equipment over the past decade.

Unlike the recent US initiatives towards India, the Modi government's plans and proposals to better ties with Washington still has a veil of secrecy. The government is still in its infancy, though. Nonetheless, one expects clarity of Modi's moves towards the US during his September summit with Obama.

US in South Asia: Declining Influence

14 July 2014

The US' influence in South Asia is fast diminishing and this trend is likely to continue deep into the future. In the aftermath of World War II, South Asia was considered a strategic backwater by the US policymakers. Additionally, South Asia offered little economic opportunities to the US corporate sector. With the solitary exception of turning Pakistan into an alliance partner, the US cared little about this region.

Even in the realm of alliance politics, the US had little to offer Pakistan. Pakistan's membership in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization and the Central Treaty Organization, and the US' military assistance to Pakistan was ineffective during Pakistan's military misadventures against India. It was only after the late 1970s' Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan that Washington got critically involved in South Asia.

The US' interest in South Asia deepened in the post-Cold War era in view of Indian economic reforms, nuclearisation of the region and the pivotal role Afghanistan played in the terrorist attack on the US in September 2001. As the US once again turned Pakistan into an alliance partner in the war against terrorism and established an extraordinary strategic understanding with India, South Asia occupied substantial priority in the US national security agenda.

The US' war in Afghanistan that began in 2001 is about to come to a close. The US troop withdrawal from this country is indisputable. Irrespective of debates over the probable level of US engagement in Afghan affairs post 2014, it is almost certain that the closure of billions of dollars worth of war in Afghanistan will trim Washington's influence in South Asia. The resilience of the Afghan Taliban and limitation of a superpower's abilities to confront non-state-actors will question the US' credibility in the region.

Secondly, the US leverage over Pakistan in the post-Afghan war phase will dry down with an almost automatic cut in the US military and economic assistance to Islamabad. History will unquestionably repeat and the US-Pakistan alliance will terminate, as was the case after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989.

Thirdly, the US' influence over India, resulting from an innovative "strategic partnership" project during former US President George Bush's era may not survive his successor Barack Obama's administration. The enthusiasm of the first Obama administration to further elevate this partnership was short-lived and the second Obama administration has paid less than modest attention to India.

There is no doubt that the election victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party under the leadership of now Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with a strong popular mandate, has generated sizeable excitement in Washington. Hope of revival of the earlier impetus in the Indo-US strategic partnership has been rekindled. Obama's invitation to Modi to visit Washington, Assistant Secretary of State Nisha Biswal Desai's trip to India soon after the new government assumed office, visits by influential Senator John McCain and Deputy Secretary of State William J Burns to prepare the ground for the Indo-US strategic dialogue between Secretary of State John Kerry and Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj are all signals of Obama's renewed interest in India.

But Prime Minister Modi appears less animated to visit the US, more involved in constructing a peaceful neighbourhood, more focused on reviving the national economy and less enthralled to project India as a global leader. About ten months have passed since the Devyani Khobragade episode begot a psychological divide in the New Delhi-Washington bond. Repairing the mind-set is not going to be easy even for the new Indian government.

The Obama administration's relationships with other smaller South Asian countries – especially Bangladesh and Sri Lanka – have also soured in the recent years. Washington was hesitant to do business with the Awami League government after the January 2014 elections, criticised Dhaka's handling of human trafficking problems, and reduced import of garments after a deadly fire in a garment factory.

The US' efforts to hold the Sri Lankan government responsible for severe human rights violations during the closing weeks of anti-Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam operations have widened the political divide between Colombo and Washington. The Sri Lankan government has demonstrated bitterness over the US double standard in combating terrorism—one standard for itself and another for other countries.

Significantly, India's smaller South Asian neighbours are fast moving towards developing closer relationships with China. Although this is generally perceived as an anti-India phenomenon, the reality is that Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are looking up to China as a new guarantor of help in the face of the US' heavy-handed approach towards them.

It is also a fact that the US has enhanced its engagement with Nepal in response to fast growing Chinese economic presence and political influence in that country. But compared to China, Washington's influence in Nepal is minimal. It is almost certain that the drop in Washington's political weight will further augment Chinese leverage over Islamabad as well. It is time to ponder over the diminished US and rising Chinese profile in the region.

US Foreign Policy: Rehashing Old Stances

9 June 2014

The foreign policy community's anxious wait to hear US President Barack Obama make his foreign policy speech at the West Point Military Academy finally came to an end on 28 May, 2014. In his commencement address to the graduating military officers, President Obama outlined his foreign policy views and approaches that stunned some analysts, and pleased many ruling elites abroad.

Some saw a new foreign policy approach in the US president's speech, but those who keenly follow US foreign policy, saw very little in the content that could be described as new.

What was striking in the presidential address was Obama's strong articulation of liberal institutionalism at a time when the potential military and economic rivals of the US are busy flexing their muscles in parts of Europe and Asia.

Highlighting the importance of observing international norms and rules, President Obama said, "American influence is always stronger when we lead by example. We cannot exempt ourselves from the rules that apply to everyone else.... What makes us exceptional is not our ability to flout international norms and the rule of law; it's our willingness to affirm them through our actions."

The decision to affirm the importance of international law, norms and institutions by a US president in the backdrop of one military intervention every 17 months between 1991 and 2001 is certainly a refreshing development to believers in multilateralism. Obama chided "a lot of sceptics who downplay the effectiveness of multilateral action," and said, "working through international institutions, like the U.N. or respecting international law" was not a sign of "weakness."

While many would contest his own approach to the UN in executing his war against terror in Afghanistan by use of Drones, championing liberal institutionalism at a time of planned withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan is understandable.

President Obama, moreover, has shown utmost restraint in dealing with difficult situations, such as the ones in Syrian civil war, Russia's annexation of Crimea and the Chinese occupations of islands and atolls in South China Sea. His difficulty in handling violence and lawlessness in Iraq post the US withdrawal; in Egypt after the Arab Spring; and in Libya after the overthrow of Col. Muammar Gaddafi's regime gives ample reason to sing the praise of liberal approach to international politics as opposed to the neoconservative penchant for frequent use of military and coercive diplomacy in dealing with international crises.

Obama coded his policy of using soft power instead of military means in this address by saying, "...U.S. military action cannot be the only, or even primary, component of our leadership in every instance. Just because we have the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail."

Advocates multilateralism would certainly draw inspiration from Obama's liberal approach to world affairs, but it is important note the traditional US foreign policy approach, cutting across the political divide that wasn't missing in Obama's speech. He made it loud and clear: "Let me repeat a principle... The United States will use military force, unilaterally if necessary, when our core interests demand it." And the US will obviously determine what that "core interests" would be. Does it mean his advocacy of liberalism is mere opportunism?

In any case, Obama has come under fire from many critics who say his foreign policy is just a "hedging strategy" and devoid of any "grand strategy." Many Republicans and some Democrats have criticised his foreign policy as "global retrenchment" of the US that has shaken the confidence of allies and pleased the adversaries.

Some have lamented that he said little about meeting the emerging Russian challenge in Europe and the Chinese effort to dominate Asia. Newspaper editorials in the US carried no praise for Obama's new foreign policy. Lawmakers in the US too remained unhappy. One Senator made a caustic remark on Obama's speech: "The President's speech was just another great example of his disastrous foreign policy. The reset and the pivots have all failed. All you have to do is look at Syria, Iran, Libya, Ukraine, or the South China Sea to see where this foreign policy gets us in the world."

President Obama has approximately one and a half years before he leaves the White House. Many citizens of the US were expecting the president to spell out his foreign policy plans in coming months, but failed to get any satisfaction from the West Point speech. The rest of the world always carefully listens when an US president speaks.

The fact that there was hardly any adverse reaction to his speech from the rest of the world signals that Obama was actually speaking to his own people at West Point. One key new suggestion that needs more clarification is his proposal to set up \$5billion worth structure to combat terrorism with willing partners around the world.

US' Frantic Effort to Make the Rebalancing Strategy Work

12 May 2014

Since late 2011, the Obama administration has been repeatedly trumpeting a new strategy to sustain and strengthen the US's interests in the Asia-Pacific.

First, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton published an article highlighting the need for Washington to "pivot to Asia" and then the President himself said so while addressing the Australian parliamentarians.

In the face of China's ferocious warning against any new containment strategy to prevent its rise, the Obama administration promptly rechristened the strategy as "rebalancing" that would engage China, strengthen allies and befriend new strategic partners. The rebalancing, moreover, would consist of military, economic and political dimensions. The US push for a Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement was touted as the economic leg of rebalancing.

But traditional allies of the US in Europe and West Asia too were critical and suspicious of this new strategy. The Europeans thought it would dent the Trans-Atlantic alliance and the West Asians felt that the US would abandon them after the end of the Iraq War, planned withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the discovery of shale gas reserves the country.

Significantly, the Asian allies of the US drew little comfort from the rebalancing strategy. Most of them today find in China an attractive economic partner and the US economic attractiveness has lost the

competitive edge. When the Bush and the Obama administrations got preoccupied with tackling other problems since 2001, the Asian allies started feeling neglected.

However, when Washington woke up to the new reality of the expanding Chinese hegemony in the Asia-Pacific and strategised to set a new balance that would not corrode its traditional influence in the region, the 'pivot to Asia' or 'Asia rebalancing' doctrine saw the light of the day.

But to the US' dismay and its allies' distress, China buried its concept of 'peaceful rise' and began to use measured force to retaliate against the US' strategy. Beijing's naval assertiveness in the East and South China Seas should be examined in the light of its anger against the new Obama doctrine.

Tension along the Sino-Indian border; the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute; the Scarborough Shoal issue; Beijing's declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone; the reassertion of Chinese claim of sovereignty over almost whole of the South China Sea; and the Sino-Vietnamese spat over maritime boundaries are among the many developments have resulted in cold confrontation between China and the US.

The aforementioned examples indicate a clear pattern of Chinese leadership picking up issues with either traditional US allies, such as Japan and the Philippines, or new strategic partners like India and Vietnam. Cold confrontation between the reigning superpower and the challenger is not confined to these events alone. China has built a robust navy with an anti-access and area-denial capability, and the US has instated new Air-Sea battle capability.

The fundamental challenge to this emerging security scenario lies in the fact that both the US and its allies and strategic partners have substantive economic relations with China. Accordingly, the US appears less confident on the prospects of its allies standing by their expected commitments in its differences with China, and vice versa.

When President Obama failed to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and the East Asia Summits in October 2013 due to domestic political constraints, Washington's ability to implement the rebalancing strategy came to be questioned in Asia. Obama's failure to stand up to his promise when Syrian President crossed the so-called "Red Line" and the US' perceived feeble response to developments in Ukraine further raised doubts about Washington's willingness to sternly deal with an assertive China.

Asian allies began to feel that, despite statements and proclamations, Washington's attention has been confined to developments in Europe and West Asia. In order to reassert the US influence in the Asia-Pacific, recently, Obama spent eight days visiting four Asian countries.

In Tokyo, the US president made it clear that he would invoke the alliance treaty with Japan in an event of Sino-Japanese armed conflict over island disputes. In Seoul, he assured the South Koreans that the US would "protect" the country from any North Korean invasion. In Manila, Obama succeeded in inking an agreement that would make Filipino military facilities accessible to the US forces and military machines. In Kuala Lumpur, Obama became the first US President to set foot in Malaysia in five decades, and his charm worked to some extent.

However, the expected US-Japan positive statement on TPP did not materialise; and the US military commitment can be tested only when there is a contingency. Just days after Obama returned to the US, China promptly sent a message by placing oil rigs near Paracel Islands and ramming Vietnamese ships. Clearly, the US rebalancing will keep encountering cold confrontation with China in years to come.

US, Ukraine and the End of Unipolarity

14 April 2014

When Ukraine became a sovereign independent republic following the Soviet disintegration, a unipolar world order was born. Now with Crimea's secession from Ukraine and the annexation to Russia, the death of the unipolar world seems certain.

US unilateralism during the era of a unipolar world order remained unchallenged.

There was no one to question then US President Bill Clinton's decision to rain missiles on Afghanistan as a response to the bombing of two US embassies in Africa; no one could challenge then US President George Bush's decision to unilaterally abrogate the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, withdraw from Kyoto Protocol, invade Iraq, and overthrow Saddam Hussein from power.

Incumbent US President Barack Obama promised to promote a liberal world order; employ more diplomacy and less force; end occupation of Iraq; talk Iran out of a suspected nuclear weapon programme; bring North Korea back to the Non-Proliferation Treaty; positively engage the Islamic world; strive for establishment of a nuclear weapon free world; reach out to the largest democracy of the world; make China a responsible stakeholder; make Russia a partner for peace; and many more.

However, project Obama, although partially successful, it has largely failed. President Obama can be given credit for Iran's decision to accept the détente with the US, Syria's willingness to destroy its chemical weapons, US Navy Seal's spectacular assassination of Osama bin Laden, and his successful approach to stemming the country's downward economic spiral.

Nevertheless, his foreign policy flops appear more stunning. The Arab world is clearly on fire with dangerous political upheavals and unrelenting violence. The White House will have to accept a fair share of the blame for the Libyan chaos, Egyptian instability, the interminable civil war in Syria, and the North Korean nuclear tenacity.

Additionally, the US is not in a position to inspire confidence among its Asian allies at the time of growing Chinese assertiveness. All goodwill between India and the US appears to have become a thing of the past following the fierce diplomatic discord sparked by the arrest and perceived mistreatment of an Indian consular officer by the New York Police Department. The Marshall Plan aid to Europe in the post World War II period remains in the history books, and the present day US is simply incapable of instituting a similar assistance programme to rescue Europe from its current economic calamity.

In other words, the unipolar world order was already facing the risk of extinction, when Russia's response to the political turbulence in Ukraine threatened to alter that order. During the period of Soviet disintegration, pundits could not predict the final outcome of events in Moscow. Similarly, in the case of the Ukrainian political turmoil, no one could imagine the speed with which Russian President Vladimir Putin would be able to dismantle Ukrainian political geography and annex Crimea.

The Obama administration's response was slow and meek. Along with the EU, it imposed sanctions against some Russian individuals. Although Russia's membership from the G8 and its voting rights in the Council of Europe was suspended, no sanctions could be imposed on critical sectors of the Russian economy, and nor could any military measure be contemplated. High rhetoric and docile measures highlight Washington's response.

All these are the result of the resilience of a resurgent Russia and the relative decline of the US. The US military presence in Europe is far less today compared to that during the height of the Cold War. There are no US aircraft carrier groups in the Mediterranean; US navy personnel numbers in Europe have reduced to 7000 from 40,000; and army personnel numbers have been reduced to 66,000 from over several hundred thousand in the recent past.

Reduction in the US military presence has coincided with the increased Russian leverage in Europe, especially in the energy sector. Germany purchases one-third of Moscow's gas; Russia accounts for over half of Austria's gas imports; and Finland imports all of its gas from Russia. Germany's exports to Russia stand at \$40 billion a year; France's banks have over \$50 billion claims from Russia; and UK reaps billions of dollars of profit from the indulgences of Russian Oligarch in London.

How can the US and the EU unite to resist expansion of Russian sway over Ukraine?

While the European allies have developed mistrust in the US since the Snowden episode, Asian allies lack credibility in the US in the wake of Chinese muscle flexing. Brazil is upset with the US's eavesdropping activities and India is more than offended by the State Department's handling of the Devyani Khobragade incident.

President Obama managed his relations with US allies, strategic partners and emerging powers shoddily, and finds it difficult to deal with Russian advances in Ukraine. South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Crimea have fallen into Russian hands, and three provinces in Eastern Ukraine seem to be in the queue. As the dominoes fall, the unipolar global order also appears to be breaking down.

US-China Cold Confrontation: New Paradigm of Asian Security

10 March 2014

The US Secretary of State John Kerry's recent visit to China exemplified a complex dynamics of relations between the existing superpower and an aspiring one.

The US' "Manifest Destiny" and China's "Middle Kingdom Mentality" appear ready to accelerate cold confrontation between the US and China. Both the US and Chinese officials reject the theory of "Great Power Transition" that stipulate armed conflict between the departing hegemonic power and the new hegemon.

Former Chinese President Hu Jintao was of the opinion that war was not inevitable between a declining power and a rising power. His successor, Xi Jinping, is pushing for a new kind of Great Power relations.

On the eve of Kerry's trip to China, Evan Madeiros, a senior US National Security Council official, remarked, "We're aware of the historical predictions that a rising power and an established power are destined for rivalry and confrontation. We simply reject that premise."

Although a military clash between the US and China is progressively becoming improbable, a kind of cold confrontation between them has been quietly developing in the Asian theatre.

The Sino-US cold confrontation is the result of an altered geopolitical order in the Asia Pacific from the early years of 21st century. As the US stayed engaged in warring against the Afghan insurgents and the Al Qaeda activists; indulged in misplaced military intervention in Iraq; and experienced a faltering economy, Chinese economic influence in Asia sky-rocketed, and its military modernisation perceptually began to threaten US hegemonic presence in the region.

The People's Liberation Army of China developed anti-access and area-denial capability, threatening the hitherto uninterrupted movement of the US naval vessels in the region. The wide-ranging debate over the relative decline of the US influence and China's drive towards a superpower status reflected an indisputable contest for influence in the Asia Pacific.

Currently, the US consternation that China may surface as an Asian hegemon, and the Chinese angst that the US intends to restrict the growth of the Chinese power, will shape strategic landscape in Asia in coming years.

The current Sino-US cold confrontation has taken the shape of a passionate competition for regional influence, an occasional show of force, and conflicting positions on bilateral and regional disputes.

Instances of the Sino-US cold confrontation are discernible in critical differences between Washington and Beijing on the North Korean and Iranian nuclear issues; the Syrian civil war; the Sino-Japanese disputes over the Shenkaku/Diaoyu islands; the Sino-Filipino disputes over Mischief Reef and the

Scharborough shoal; and the Chinese declaration of a nine-dash-line encompassing its sovereignty in the South China Sea.

China's muscle flexing in the region has bamboozled the Obama Administration. In 2012, Chinese ships occupied a reef 125 miles off the coast of the Philippines and blocked access to Filipino ships. In November 2013, China declared an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in East China Sea and in December 2013, a Chinese ship, by design, came close to a US-guided missile destroyer Cowpens, and risked dangerous collision.

In January 2014, China's Hainan Province announced a new law requiring "all foreigners or foreign ships" to get approval before they could fish in the two million square kilometer of the sea. More recently, in February 2014, China parked three ships on a disputed reef, about fifty miles from the Malaysian coast and reportedly held a ceremony to "safeguard sovereignty and territorial interests."

The US reacted to China's declaration of ADIZ by flying two B-52 bombers and endorsing similar moves by Japan and South Korea. The US has called for a multilateral approach to resolve territorial disputes in the South China Sea and considers the Chinese nine-dash-lines as "inconsistent with international law."

China's anger is actually its response to Obama's strategy of the Asian rebalance. China has since picked fights with most US allies and strategic partners in the region. Notwithstanding the voluminous explanations from the US officials, the Chinese leadership reads a new containment strategy in the Asia rebalance strategy.

China fumed, when, during his visit to China, Secretary Kerry cautioned the Chinese against declaring any ADIZ in South China Sea. It advised the US to be mindful of Chinese sovereignty and stressed that "no one can shake" China's determination to safeguard its national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Asian security will indubitably hinge upon the nature of the US-China relations in coming years. The US allies have found in China a constructive economic partner, but they continue to rely upon Washington's security commitments.

China realises the importance of economic cooperation with the US to sustain its economic growth, but it has issues with the US hegemony in Asia. Its military modernisation is aimed at stimulating Chinese influence and constraining the US' hegemony in the Asia Pacific. A Sino-US bipolar cold confrontation will thus be the dominant paradigm of the Asian security discourse in the coming future.

Cold confrontation, nonetheless, will remain within limits and will not escalate to armed confrontation. The complex Sino-US economic interdependence will preclude a Cold War.

US in Asia: A 'Non-Alignment' Strategy?

10 February 2014

As territorial and maritime disputes in Asia have sparked regional cold wars, the United States appears to have adopted a non-aligned strategy to navigate in troubled political space of the continent.

George Washington and Non-Alignment

Non-alignment as a diplomatic instrument of state craft has been known to American Administrations for centuries. Although the term "non-alignment" was not used, the need of such a strategy was first articulated by first President of the United States—George Washington. In his farewell address, Washington warned against the folly of getting involved in the European entanglements.

In order to keep the US out of European quarrels, controversies and collisions, he pleaded that "Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none; or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence,

therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities.”

Three centuries later, as the US recognizes the economic and strategic significance of Asia for its national interests, it encounters myriad Asian quarrels and controversies over “sovereignty” issues. Such disputes are “essentially foreign” to American “concerns”.

Asia Pacific Today and the American Non-Alignment

Turbulence in the Asia Pacific is discernible in Sino-Japanese rivalry over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. The spat over the islands, islets and reefs in the South China Sea between China and five other claimants, such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Brunei threatens to contaminate the cooperative ties of China with these countries. China-Taiwan conflict remains unresolved despite a series of confidence building measures and rising trade and investment ties.

During the Cold War days, Washington shunned the non-alignment foreign policy championed by India and many others. But the strategic compulsions and economic imperatives of the post-Cold War era have tempted the US policy makers to innovate “non-alignment” strategy and apply in the mini-Cold Wars of Asia.

The US political support to the idea of creation of a “Palestinian State” in the post-9/11 incident and building of pressure on Israel to seriously negotiate peace; Washington’s policy of making India a “strategic partner”, while elevating Pakistan’s status as “major non-NATO ally” during the anti-terror operations in Afghanistan; constructing a rock-solid economic partnership with China, while maintaining defence and security ties with Taiwan; giving lip service to multilateral dialogue for resolution of South China Sea disputes, yet conducting joint research with China for oil exploration in the waters of this sea; refraining from backing Japanese claim of sovereignty over Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, but standing by the US-Japan bilateral alliance treaty are some of the prominent illustrations of American non-alignment.

It is true that non-alignment emerged out of a bipolar power structure in the international system. The two poles, represented by capitalist USA and communist USSR, made it difficult for a large number of newly independent countries to take sides in the Cold War. The enlightened self-interest compelled them to pick out a stratagem that would enable them to seek cooperation with both the rival power blocs. The hostility to the idea of non-alignment by both Washington and Moscow often posed acute dilemmas for the non-aligned countries. Since non-alignment was not maintenance of equidistance from the two poles, non-aligned countries’ stances on various cold war related issues were sometimes sympathetic to Moscow and sometimes supportive of Washington. For example, India appeared to have appreciated the US position on the Suez crisis, but sympathized with Moscow’s approach to the Hungarian crisis in 1956.

The United States in the post-Cold War era has no die-hard adversary. Although there is visible decline of the US influence in world affairs and relative rise of the Chinese power, the PRC is no USSR. Up-and-coming superpower China perceives an emerging new containment strategy of the established superpower, the USA.

American strategic community, on the other hand, senses a Chinese project to push US out of the Asia Pacific. Such mutual mistrust has, nevertheless, not sparked a new cold war. Complex economic interdependence is almost certain to preclude a Sino-US Cold War, though cold confrontation seems to be mounting between the two.

China has responded to America’s Asia rebalance strategy by picking up squabbles with most American allies, such as Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and others. But the non-aligned approach adopted by Washington has resulted in growing Chinese assertiveness and dwindling credibility in the US as a security provider. The Asian allies of the US doubt, if Washington would protect their interests at the cost of losing business in China. American non-alignment makes China fear less and America’s allies doubt more about the efficacy of alliance treaties.

Indo-US Strategic Partnership Post Khobragade: The Long Shadow

13 January 2014

The Devyani Khobragade episode that took place in the backdrop of a strong strategic cooperation between the two countries has terribly hurt the Indian government and the people alike. The diplomatic discord between India and the US over the indictment, arrest, strip and cavity search of the Deputy Consul General of Indian Consulate in New York has cast a long shadow over the burgeoning strategic partnership between the two countries.

Both New Delhi and Washington officials in charge of their diplomatic affairs swore by the need to preserve and promote strategic cooperation and not allow any single incident to adversely affect the relationship in the midst of the diplomatic row. However, such pledges only exemplify the fear that this episode has cast a long shadow and will take a slow and long process to finally be erased. Promoters and stakeholders in the Indo-US friendship question as to why such an incident took place at all and why it took so long to partially resolve the issue and that too in a distasteful manner. Khobragade was asked to leave the US and not return unless to face the charges in the American court. Wayne May, a US diplomat accused of colluding in the clandestine evacuation of Indian citizens (family members of Sangeeta Richard, the alleged victim in the case) was asked to leave the country by the Indian government within forty-eight hours. The Indian external affairs ministry felt that the US could have avoided this 'mini crisis', and the US State Department regretted that Wayne May was asked to leave the country by India.

While the two governments have expressed the desire to get back to business, it is doubtful if it is going to be business as usual. Certain wounds do not heal well and keep resurfacing periodically to prevent the robust growth of mutual trust even after considerable investment of political and diplomatic capital. How long did it take for India to manage its psychological hurt over Washington dispatching the USS Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal during the 1971 War? It was not until President George Bush signed a civil nuclear cooperation agreement with India that the Indian strategic community could address the issue of US nuclear threat to India. Indians have also not forgotten the Bhopal Gas tragedy that directly shaped the debate in the Indian parliament over the nuclear liability bill.

The issues of American disregard for India's sovereignty (as reflected in the clandestine evacuation of Richard's family members), American disrespect for the Indian judicial system (as indicated by overlooking the Delhi High Court's injunction against Sangeeta Richard), the US State Department's unwillingness to share information about the impending arrest of Khobragade with the visiting foreign secretary of India, all raise questions of mutual distrust, and the ending of one phase of the diplomatic discord by expelling each other's foreign service officers will almost certainly haunt future diplomatic interactions.

Early indications of the impact of this episode can be found in the postponement of visits to India by the new Assistant Secretary of State Nisha Desai Biswal and US Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz. These two officials were, of course, aware that a visiting Congressional delegation could not meet the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, National Security Advisor Shiv Shankar Menon, and other senior officials in India.

Practitioners of diplomacy will no doubt avoid looking at history and instead seek to move ahead with the relationship. Both the State Department and the Indian Ministry of External Affairs may try hard to put in place a series of 'damage limitation' exercises and new initiatives may be launched to prove that the 'strategic partnership' is alive and kicking.

But none of these efforts will take off the ground until an agreeable solution to the Khobragade episode is found. In addition, the current diplomatic spat is only the latest in a series of developments that signal numerous glitches in the Indo-US strategic partnership. Bilateral differences over climate and trade issues; American disappointment over the slow pace of implementation of the civil nuclear cooperation agreement, Indian displeasure over the pending Immigration Bill in the US Congress, American frustration over the slow pace of Indian economic reforms, particularly foreign investment in the retail

sector and Indian discontent over the Obama administration's over-emphasis on curtailing outsourcing are some examples.

However, the real challenge of diplomacy is removing hurdles and facilitating cooperation for mutual prosperity and national security. Besides, the regional security challenges in the wake of the US decision to end military operations in Afghanistan and the Chinese decision to open a new chapter in their concept of 'peaceful rise' and adopt a muscular approach to territorial and maritime disputes should alert New Delhi and Washington not to miss the broader picture, while resolving bilateral differences!

Column: Dateline Colombo

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Sri Lanka: Making a Case for Change

3 December 2014

The final month of the year 2014 began with the news of Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak. He was found not guilty of the massacre of civilians who protested for his overthrow in the 2011 Arab Spring. Society's expectation for a total change in political culture was proven difficult to materialise due to numerous issues, of which Egypt is an example.

In the political landscape of Sri Lanka, as previously predicted, the presidential race begins on the road to the polls with a decision to be taken on 8 January 2015. Senior party member Maithreepala Sirisena, a member of the President's own party, crossed over to challenge him as the opposition common candidate. The common candidacy presents a grand coalition of political forces. The joint opposition coalition harnesses the support of former President Chandrika Bandaranayake and the opposition leader Ranil Wickramasinghe. It promises an overhaul of contemporary political culture within a 100 days of assuming Presidency. The centre of this change lies in the abolition of the Executive Presidency.

A total change of the system is still to be implemented and its possibility remains curtailed due to the strength of the present Executive Presidential system. In implementing total system change, it is necessary to foresee its consequences and evaluate the practical aspects of the new system being implemented. To curtail or minimise the existing powers of the Presidency rather than going for a total system change is an option. Total system change is a gamble. It may be beneficial or could dismantle the development process and weaken existing political systems. The Executive Presidency has helped defeat terrorism; however, it is arguable that the very reason for the emergence of the conflict were these same Executive Powers. The 1982 extension of the parliamentary term without election is an example of the danger of this Presidency at play.

At the foothills of the Himalayas, the 18th SAARC summit showcased heated geopolitics. Pakistan's bid to invite China as a full member caused much speculation from neighbouring India. Reflecting on the words of former President JR Jayawardena at the inception of SAARC summit: "We are setting this ship afloat today. There may be mutiny on board, I hope not. The sea may be stormy but the ship must sail in and enter the ports of poverty, hunger, unemployment, malnutrition, disease and seek to bring comfort to those who need it." SAARC should focus on improving living standards of the poorest in the region. Focus should lie on economic prosperity to the bottom of the pyramid, improving trade and infrastructure. In its thirty year history SAARC summits have been convened eleven times. Rivalry between member nations such as India and Pakistan limit the regional integration SAARC represents.

In this backdrop, Sino-South Asian engagement intensifies. AIIB projects such as the Maritime Silk Road continue on a budget of thirty billion dollars. During the summit, South Asian infrastructure development was promised by China's Vice Foreign Minister, Madam Fu Ying. Chinese presence strengthens in regions such as the Middle East and Africa. Dubai is home to over 4,000 Chinese companies with trade without oil trade reaching \$40 billion. Both partake in a bilateral strategic relationship. An ongoing African railway

project through Chinese investments extends from Nairobi to Mombasa with plans to extend to Burundi, Rwanda and South Sudan. It is estimated to reach \$100 billion Chinese investment by 2020. Such economic moves by China align with its target to become the world's largest economy by 2025. Despite waves of Chinese political history shutting the nation out of the global sphere, China has made a giant comeback. Moving three hundred million Chinese citizens from a state of poverty to the middle income bracket is a remarkable domestic achievement. Domestic reform was not the result of sudden action but steady consistent reforms over time.

Democracy is necessary in order to preserve individual freedom and expand a nation's power through free thought. Sri Lanka comes from a rich democratic culture and is progressing from being an economy that was factor-driven to being efficiency-driven. It should focus its strategy over the next three decades on graduating towards an innovation-driven economy. The people lie at the core of this economic shift. Outstanding political manifestos and rhetoric limited to a handful are redundant in the long term. 40 per cent students failing at GCE O/L is a warning for strategic investment in improving education quality and increasing budgets for R&D as it is connected. In a simple example, the investment in scientist engineers' education will pave the way for future innovation. The economy is not a slot machine. Investments in casino projects are short-term, however investments in education, innovation and human resources to facilitate an innovation-driven economy is for the long-term. With developed human capital we will be able to tap few areas in the global value chain.

Blaise Pascal says "Man's grandeur is that he knows himself to be miserable, grandeur must be abandoned to be appreciated. Continuity in everything is unpleasant." Between grandeur and misery people aspire for betterment and continue the struggle to retain the richness left in democracy.

Connecting Sri Lanka: Train to Jaffna

4 November 2014

On 09 November, the world will remember the fall of the Iron Curtain. Twenty five years from this date the Berlin Wall was dismantled; this iconic moment triggered the end of the Cold War. One may wonder what journey a contemporary super power such as the US has navigated for the last twenty five years and if this same process will occur in the case of China emerging as the next super power. The Economist indicators support that Asia's export share has doubled from 18 per cent in 1980 to 36 per cent in 2013. The month of November will also commence with an important discussion on the re-emergence of the ancient Chinese Maritime Silk Road. This seminar on the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR)" with Sri Lankan and Chinese scholars will be held in Sri Lanka. The Chinese President's proposal on the revival of the ancient Maritime Silk Road was fully supported by the Sri Lankan President several months ago. MSR is of importance to the island of Sri Lanka, due to its geo-strategic position at the centre of the Silk Road. It is important to ponder on the balancing role Sri Lanka plays between China and India, as within the scope of development in this country, China is heavily present in the South and India present in the North.

On the note of development within the country, the Yal Devi (Queen of Jaffna) Train resumed operations from Colombo to Jaffna after 24 years. Re-starting on 13 October, it marked a landmark in railway links between South and North of Sri Lanka. This rail link was constructed in 1905 under British colonial rule. On the present day the India Railway Construction International (IRCON), an Indian railway subsidiary, completed the restoration of the railway lines with a cost of Rupees 58 billion, on the basis of financial assistance from India. President Mahinda Rajapaksa inaugurated the new railway line. When speaking to the media at the event, the President said, "This effort will connect hearts of the people in south and north and this was the main aim of the new railway to the north after liberating north from the LTTE control." The LTTE bombed the Yal Devi train at Kokavil on 19 January 1985 killing 34 people and destroying train tracks, which disrupted connectivity. Providing transport to the North is a good deed; however one may question how far physical infrastructure helps in connecting the hearts and minds of the people. Infrastructure development to create access to different parts of the island could provide economic benefits to those localities that were deprived of development due to the three-decade war. However, there are many other factors apart from physical infrastructure that could help to connect on a mental

and humane level as citizens of a single nation. Strengthening the reconciliation process, implementing the LLRC (Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission) recommendations and working towards fully implementing the 13th amendment devolution of powers to other parts are important areas to focus on. While you may need one set of values to succeed in war, it takes another set of values for the post war scenario. The values the government possesses in the post war context from 2009 to the present day are debatable.

In matters of governance, incidents such as the Aluthgama riot with the Muslim community and the recent diplomatic chaos in New York will definitely create a negative impact, and does not create a positive image outside the country. Outside the boundaries of the nation yet directly affecting it, the ban against the LTTE was lifted in European Union. The late Lakshman Kadirgamar, was an astute foreign minister who worked tirelessly to ban the LTTE in many nations. One of the greatest achievements during President Chandrika Bandaranayake's administration was this ban on the LTTE. In lifting the ban on this ruthless terrorist group that assassinated many innocent people indiscriminately, the future consequences of this act towards the country and the entire world should be evaluated.

Closer to the day-to-day lives of Sri Lankans; the government budget proposal was presented to parliament a week ago. The considerable increase in expenditure and inadequate evidence to increase revenue is evident. The projected fiscal deficit of 4.2 per cent of GDP is unlikely to be realised with the rise of expenditure. One of the key areas that budget does not focus on is research and development of the country, a primary area towards the five-hub strategy. The Rupees 500 million budget for research and development is insufficient in the serious development of an important sector. Staying focused on maintaining power seems in this case more important than policy matters, as judging by the latest budget proposals. The election budget and accelerated development in the North such as the new train line could be due to plans for early presidential elections in January 2015.

Connecting to win the hearts and minds of all communities of the Island will be challenging after three decades of war but this is achievable with the right strategies and processes by the government.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not reflect those of the government of Sri Lanka or the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies (LKIIRSS), Sri Lanka.

Stronger Democratic Values for a Better Tomorrow

6 October 2014

In the last few months, geopolitical instability has resurfaced in Eurasia and the Middle East. The Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan addressing the World Economic Forum special meeting on Unlocking Resources for Regional Development in Istanbul stated: "Terrorism is not regional its global now and it has threaten the entire global peace." He strongly condemned the ISIS for the current tumorous situation in Iraq and Syria.

Moussa Mara, Prime Minister of Mali said, "Islam is a religion of peace and must not be seen as an instrument of terror." Calling for a concerted international response to the global cancer of terrorism, he urged for greater efforts by Islamic countries to explain Islam's underlying precepts. Many speakers emphasised the importance of creating a stable and peaceful region. The author of this article was a participant at this important regional forum.

The battle against ISIS is escalating with aerial bombing by the US forces in Iraq and Syria. According to the Turkish President nearly 1.5 million refugees have entered the Turkish border for shelter and protection. Turkey with its geostrategic location surrounded by Europe, Middle East, North Africa and Eurasia has been experiencing significant growth over the past decade of about 5 per cent annually despite the global financial crisis. Structural reforms and macroeconomic stability have sustained the growth and the rising living standards. Additionally, the Turkey will be the forthcoming G20 Chair. The ongoing ISIS crisis in Middle East region could affect its economy and impact global trade. The ISIS threat

is a serious threat to world peace. The international community needs to support the campaign against this extremist group.

Terrorism in any part of the world should be considered a serious threat. The Sri Lankan military battled for three-decades with one of the most brutal terrorist organisations, the LTTE, and was successful in defeating them. The country has lived through the threat of terrorism and has felt the bitter pain of dealing with the terrorist issue. The Sri Lankan economy has grown since 2009, which is when the war ended. The growth of GDP and new infrastructure such as highways, ports and airports could be seen. However the individual per capita increase is a cause for concern among the public who have not experienced it due to a rise in the cost of living.

In the last few months in Sri Lanka several provincial elections were held and the entire nation focused on elections and political talk shows, but the voter turn-out at was less than 50 per cent; in some provinces an even lower percentage was evident. This indicates the trust deficit between the public and the politicians or the lack of interest in the overall system, which could surface to become a serious issue. According to the 2014 Edelman trust barometer there is rise in trust towards NGOs and decrease in trust towards the government. In South Asia, with rising political corruption due to the lack of good governance, trust has decreased between the public and governments. Punishing corrupt politicians as done in India, such as the powerful South Indian Chief Minister Ms Jayalalitha, is a good example of the strong anti-corruption institutions and mechanisms prevalent in India. Such action could restore the trust deficit between elected representatives and the public. It is important that the South Asian region should try to end this generation of corrupt politicians.

Now the political discussion has begun on the next presidential election in Sri Lanka, as many believe the government will go for an early election beginning of next year. The process and the legitimacy for President Rajapaksa to contest for the third term has been questioned and a discussion forum called "Mahinda can" was created by a few intellectuals. One should realise the repercussions of constitutional amendments to extend term limits and the benefits that could bring to the nation. Sri Lanka's image as a rich democratic nation in the rest of the world could be questioned, but some may argue that it is better to have the third term as it provides political stability. The 18th Amendment has further strengthened executive power and made checks and balances weak. One may wonder as to what the other coalition political parties under the government would say. Even in the Philippines a recent survey was conducted to extend President Aquino's term limit; around six in ten Filipinos are not in favour to amend the 1987 Constitution. This may be due to the fear of creating another autocratic leader such as Ferdinand Marcos.

The three-pronged approach discussed - fighting terrorism, establishing good governance and constitutional reform - is to secure or restore the rights of people, not to take away what was given. Through good governance, extremism, which leads to terrorism, can be minimised. As the world celebrates global dignity day on the 15 October, it would be important to respect different communities to create a peaceful dignified world with stronger democratic institutions to preserve and secure liberty.

Sri Lanka and China: Towards Innovation Driven Economies

1 September 2014

September begins with summer Davos in Tianjin, China, themed, 'Creating Value through Innovation'; and over 1,500 participants from 90 countries will be in attendance. The discussion will be on how innovation can generate more and better value for all stakeholders of our society. China has given top priority for innovation. Last year too, the theme for the same conference was on innovation. Recently, presiding over a meeting of the Central Politburo of the Communist Party of China, President Xi Jinping said the Chinese military must make great leaps in development and innovation so as to close the gap with its better-developed peers in the world. He urged the military to innovate in military strategies and management. This statement is a clear indication of China's development of its military strength. Growth in innovation, research and development has become a top priority for the Chinese economy.

Last week, at the National IT conference, this author spoke on a similar topic: Sri Lanka's journey towards an innovation driven economy. The topic was discussed along with talks on the bottlenecks, such as low budget allocation for research and development, plaguing the industry. In Sri Lanka, a very nominal amount of annual expenditure – 0.5 per cent – is allocated for research and development purposes. There are many research institutes in the country without proper funding. While the country is moving towards a five hub development strategy, it is important to focus on improving the research and development sector.

According to Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa's policy statement, it has been envisaged to make the country a regional hub in five areas. This will transform Sri Lanka into a strategically important economic center. The five hubs are: knowledge hub, commercial hub, maritime hub, aviation hub and an energy hub. The idea is to use the geographically strategic position of the country as an advantage to achieve the five hub status. Sri Lanka's post war economic growth rate is positive and the country is moving from a factor driven economy to an efficiency driven economy.

On this journey it is important to concentrate on strengthening the second layer that includes institutions of the society. Government institutions and administration has to be strengthened to achieve results from the five hub development strategy. There are issues such as corruption, governance problems and the need to transform loss-making public institutions into profit-making ones. These are only some of the challenges the government has to overcome.

To achieve the status of a knowledge hub, Colombo needs to improve its education sector, especially at a university level. 40 per cent of high school students fail mathematics, and we need to improve the quality of teachers and facilities required for schools. Many students are unable to enroll in universities owing to lack of seats; this needs to change.

If Sri Lanka continues with its present growth rate for the next two decades, the country could become a high income nation. It's important to develop the five hubs. Many regional nations promote the hub concept as well, and, as a result, the competition for this status will be very high.

Hambantota port, being developed with Chinese assistance, will play a pivotal role owing to its location at the center of the Maritime Silk Road.. As the aviation hub, Sri Lanka has already developed the second International Airport in the south of the Island. The significant increase of tourist inflows, from 200,000 to a 10, 00,000 within few years after the war is a major achievement.

The Chinese president's historical visit with 150 top officials and business leaders will be another significant event in September. The Sri Lanka-China Free Trade Agreement, to be signed during the president's visit will be an iconic moment and a leap forward for the relationship of both nations in over 60 years. The agreement is supposed to cover wide areas such as trade, services, tariffs, market access in China, diversifying Sri Lanka's exports and overall enhancement of the country's export potential. China is the 18th export market for Sri Lanka, with \$121 million in exports and imports worth \$3 billion. To Sri Lanka, this is an extremely unfavorable trade deficit that needs to be addressed.

Sri Lanka is moving towards becoming a higher income nation by 2040 with a per capita estimation of above \$22,000. China and Sri Lanka with their close strategic collaborations should work towards moving from efficiency driven economies to an innovation driven economies. As the entire focus is on economic development, it is also important to focus on reconciliation to create a harmonious society in Sri Lanka. The government could consider initiating a new ministry for reconciliation and diaspora affairs to undertake the new mandate of promoting, designing and implementing reconciliation efforts. The development of strategies to re-engage with the disconnected Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora will be another important area the new ministry could work on.

India-Sri Lanka: Strengthening Regional Cooperation

4 August 2014

August marks the death anniversary of the late Lakshman Kadirgamar, a remarkable Foreign Minister brutally assassinated by the LTTE. He once said, "India and Sri Lanka relationship is lost in the mist of time," which signifies the deep bond that the two nations share. The gift of Buddhism is perhaps the most enduring of all ties and lays the foundation for this long-rooted friendship. The most sacred symbols of Buddhism - the Sacred Tooth, a relic of Lord Buddha gifted by King Guhaseeva, and the sapling of Sri Maha Bo tree in Anuradhapura, which is believed to be from the same tree under which the Buddha attained Nirvana - were gifted from India. South Indian kings ruled the island nation from time to time. The last few kings who ruled the Island were Nayakkar kings. Yet, they protected the Sacred Tooth relic and respected Buddhist values and Sinhalese culture.

Despite the shared history, culture and religion, India-Sri Lanka relations in the present context is discussed with regard to three key areas: the India's position on the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka, its stand with regard to the UNHRC resolution against Sri Lanka, and the fishermen issue in Tamil Nadu. One of the main topics of discussion between President Rajapaksa and the newly appointed Prime Minister of India Mr Narendra Modi was the 13th Amendment. Sri Lanka was advised to fully implement the 13th Amendment.

Among the many challenges that the Sri Lanka-India relationship faces at present, the Tamil Nadu fishermen issue has gained widespread attention. When Indian fishermen illegally violate the maritime boundary of Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan Navy arrests and detains them. A few days ago, 50 such fishermen were arrested. According to news reports, 93 fishermen are currently under arrest and detention in Sri Lanka. In a context in which territorial boundaries are located in close proximity, these types of issues can happen. Failure to agree on a suitable solution by both countries will only result in continuation of this problem.

In finding a solution to the fishermen issue neither Sri Lanka nor the Government of India can ignore South India. During his recent visit to Colombo, Dr Subramaniam Swamy, one of the most influential policy advisors to the BJP Government said, "One weakness in India's policy towards Sri Lanka is the veto power Tamil Nadu has." Explaining further, he suggested that this situation will not remain the same under the current government. Even though this is a positive remark for Sri Lanka, one cannot ignore the fact that South India is Sri Lanka's closest neighbour.

As the tension between South India and Sri Lanka heightened after the war, strong remarks were made by both sides. This affected the Sri Lanka-India relationship. In order to avoid such a situation in the future, it is important to count the concerns of Tamil Nadu in finding a solution to the fishermen issue.

One technical way of mitigating and minimising this issue could be by introducing strict regulations on fisheries' practices such as having a vessel monitoring system (VMS) with transponders on board all the vessels. That gives the ability for the coast guards from both nations to monitor the path of the vessels. Geo fencing to determine the boundary between the two nations can also be used. This would help in preventing any illegal vessel from entering each other's territorial water. This in turn will help to identify and minimise bottom trawling to protect the marine environment. Declaring the maximum amount of fish to catch would control excessive over fishing (Quota Management System). There are many technical measures that could ease tensions between the two countries.

India should have strong and close relations with all its neighbours to achieve its goal as a regional economic power. The SAARC meeting due in November would be a good opportunity for the newly appointed Indian Government to strengthen its bond and take some important decisions beneficial to both India and to the South Asian region as a whole.

In terms of the future goals of SAARC, it has been discussed that its future progress depends heavily on bordering countries such as Pakistan and India overcoming deep-rooted ethnic conflict. SAARC does have the potential to be a platform for increased communication and engagement over these issues. Prime Minister Modi's proposal of having a common satellite for the SAARC region would be one initial step. As a Nepalese newspaper recently reported, the reduction in the soap industry ingredient import tariff in

India would flood the Nepalese market with Indian soap, which could destroy the Nepalese soap manufacturers. While trade is one of the areas in which SAARC can strengthen its ties, it should be done in a way that is mutually beneficial and helpful to all the SAARC countries.

The behaviour of South Asian countries clearly indicate that they are derived more from a nationalistic agenda. While looking inward is important for a country, it should also note that improving and strengthening regional cooperation among the South Asian Nations is equally important in this globalised world.

Sri Lanka: A New Melody for Nation-building

7 July 2014

The month of June marked the first International Seminar on South Asia Development organised by the Xinhua news agency in Hong Kong, where this author was invited to speak on the topic of Sri Lanka at the centre of the Maritime Silk Road (MSR). On the same day of the seminar, Pakistan suffered a terrorist attack on Karachi Airport. Sri Lanka's international airport was attacked in 2001 by LTTE terrorists in a similar manner. After three decades of combat with one of the world's worst terrorist organisations, Sri Lanka can share its experience in fighting terrorism. The importance of fighting terrorism together with the nations of the Maritime Silk Road cannot be ignored.

In the current context of a very uncertain global stage, many parts of the world are being targeted by organised terrorist groups. In Tikrit and Mosul for example, thousands have been massacred by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi's militants from the Islam State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). More than 150 children have been kidnapped, many others have been recruited as child soldiers, and the ISIS has appointed its own administration. The rise of the non-state actor is clear. The national security threat is spreading to many regional nations due to militant groups such as the ISIS. States should work together to combat such threats rather than evade the situation.

In the south of Sri Lanka, Buddhists and Muslims have clashed due to extremism within the society. While the majority of the society focuses on building a harmonious community with space for ethnic and religious reconciliation, this incident has created a negative image of Sri Lanka on a local and global scale. With all positive economic indicators and a record growth in the tourism industry, a negative image globally could have adverse consequences on the country. As reconciliation is essential to the progress and development of Sri Lanka, other non-violent ways to address societal issues must be found. Terrorism cannot be answered by terrorism. Instead, the government must work towards curbing extremist elements that give prominence to nationalistic ideas, which disturb the county's social fabric. Nationalism is used to guard and protect one's own identity.

Sri Lanka should use the influence of nationalism to address serious issues such as the decline in the use of Sinhala and Tamil languages in younger and future generations. With approximately 40,000 students enrolled, 90 per cent of whom are Sri Lankans, the international schools in the country have become a popular choice for schooling. Sinhala or Tamil, however, are only offered as an optional language taught once a week and not calculated into the grade point average. Without proper incentives to learn the language, the outcome is that most children from these schools are unable to read or write in their own dialect: Sinhala or Tamil. Language has the power to provide a connection to a culture and loyalty to a nation. Without it, people are not as tied to the country, and are not afraid to leave for work. The lack of knowledge of one's own language is a directly related to the growth of the brain drain. This should be looked at as a serious issue. Nationalism should focus on cultural aspects such as protection of the language instead of concentrating on creating disharmony among different groups within society.

While the government faces many internal challenges such as the southern riots, it also faces external issues from the UNHRC. The high level committee was appointed and will advise the team set up to conduct a comprehensive investigation of alleged human rights violations in Sri Lanka. The question is, will the government cooperate and allow the team to enter the country to proceed with the investigation?

After the announcement of the experts by UNHRC, the Finnish President was talked about on the front page of a local newspaper as “Bribe-taker Ahtisaari to probe SL.” This is not a positive note. The next Presidential election marks the third round of President Rajapaksa. The news that Rajapaksa will be the first Executive President to contest for the third time was also discussed in the political columns.

In order to assist the reconciliation process, the government of Sri Lanka has invited Special Envoy Cyril Ramaphosa from South Africa. Some groups inside the government coalition, however, are against outside assistance. It is seen in a negative light by some in the government and public. Furthermore, the USAID program for Citizen Education on voting was stopped by the government as it was seen as a threat to the sovereignty of the nation. The tension is high with the accumulation of internal and external pressure. Amidst this tension, President Rajapaksa invited President Xi Jinping to visit the country as a move towards strengthening bilateral relations with China.

As Rabindranath Tagore says “When old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart; and where the old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders.” Sri Lanka could find a better and new melody in the post war era, which will create a better society.

Asia Pacific: Reset for Qualitative Change

3 June 2014

Permeated by many turbulent events in May 2014, East Asia served as the milieu for events from the coup d'état in Thailand, to maritime cooperation for the Indonesia-Vietnam boundary between President Susilo and the Prime Minister of Vietnam, all on the backdrop of the World Economic Forum in East Asia in Manila. Indonesia, the largest Muslim democracy in Southeast Asia, was at the center stage. During the forum, outgoing President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono received the Statesmanship Award, and many of his achievements during his decade of Presidency were discussed. During his speech, President Susilo made direct reference to China regarding the East China Sea emphasising that “...any disputes including maritime border tension can be resolved peacefully - not with the use of military might which [may] endanger stability and peace in our region.”

East Asia, with a population of 600 million, which is roughly double the size of the US, is planning to build a US\$4.3 trillion economy with a single market in the next several years. The challenges to achieve these targets, however, are many. The infrastructure to link many ASEAN countries is weak, poverty rates are high, and rates of corruption are staggering. It is important to move away from the present culture of high corruption, to a better culture that fosters development of regional framework to fight corruption. Countries should not confine to their own boundaries but work collaboratively. The point of intersection between countries has to be improved. President Benigno Aquino in his remarks stated his leadership to introduce good governance to Philippines to dismantle corruption is commendable with the improving positive economic indicators.

In the Eurasian region, a Sino-Russian partnership for US\$400 billion for energy for the next three decades has been signed, and the sophisticated Russian military missile system has been given to the Chinese government. There are signs of China and Russia moving towards a strategic relationship in the very near future.

There is now a tripolar world with US, Russia, and China in the new equation. The Maritime Silk Road (MSR) to the South China Sea, disputes with Japan, and the placement of a Chinese oil rig in Vietnamese waters, are a few of the events that have raised many eyebrows.

According to geopolitical analyst Robert Kaplan, “This is a region that’s going to be on the boil for years and years to come. Seas crowded with warships, submarines, merchant shipping, fifth generation fighter jets – that can easily create incidents that in turn could enable a crisis.” In Seoul during his Asia visit, President Obama said that China “has to abide by certain norms” when it comes to its quarrels with neighbours. With all the notable events that have taken place in this part of the region, the US pivot to Southeast Asia cannot be negated.

In India, Narendra Modi of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been sworn in as the new Prime Minister. The Indian public believes that he can deliver rapid growth in the country as he did in his 13-year tenure as Chief Minister of Gujrat. However, India has many internal challenges to consider first. Nearly half the country's households lack basic access to electricity. Modern infrastructure is underdeveloped. Creation of job opportunities through a large manufacturing sector, especially for its young population aged 15-34 – which is around 400 million people making up one-third of the population – amidst rising corruption, is an obstacle. These are some of the major challenges for the new government. The question is, does India need a total reset on its many internal and external challenges?

Sri Lanka, with whom India's has had a love affair since the days of the Mahabharata, always sends a tiny ripple towards India. A line in an Indian newspaper before the Geneva HR Council vote on Sri Lanka was, "Will Ceylon become a Cyclone to India?" The Sri Lankan President's visit for the swearing-in ceremony created certain political turmoil in South India and Sri Lanka's Northern Province Chief Minister Vigneswaran. Despite the stormy atmosphere, both leaders, PM Modi and President Rajapaksa, held successful talks as both possess high resilience levels when facing challenges. Hopefully, an improved and stronger relationship between both countries is on the cards in the coming years, not cyclones.

All of these episodes, however, have failed to address one fundamental issue: bringing qualitative change to the people living around the world. How can one thrive in a world where 1 billion people go to bed hungry each night? Can progress be made in a global community where 1.2 billion of the poorest people on the planet account for just 1 per cent of global consumption? 1 billion people are without food and 1 billion who are obese. 85 of the richest people in the world have as much wealth as 3.5 billion of the poorest. The inequality gap is widening every day. So, is a world of 9 billion people to be catered to in the future? This is a topic that should be looked at seriously. World leaders must look to improve points of intersection between countries, rather than focus on internal boundaries with nationalism or hubris. Does every country need to reset its strategies to bring that qualitative change?

Ethnic Reconciliation: Learning from the Rwandan Experience

5 May 2014

In May 2014, the nation of Rwanda commemorates the twentieth year of its brutal massacre.

In one of the most cruel and inhumane moments of history to date, the Hutus massacred 800,000 to 1 million Tutsis as well as moderate Hutus within a hundred days. President Clinton publicly apologised to the Rwandan government on a visit to the Rwandan capital, Kigali, in 1998, for not acting quickly enough and for not immediately identifying the crime of genocide. Furthermore, in what was widely seen as an attempt to diminish his responsibility, he said: "It may seem strange to you here, especially the many of you who lost members of your family, but all over the world there were people like me sitting in offices, day after day after day, who did not fully appreciate the depth and speed with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror."

Today, yet another brutal episode in Syria is underway, where barrel bombs are being dropped on innocent civilians, and where haunting images of brutality, death and suffering are constantly circulating through social media. It is known that one Syrian dies every ten minutes, refugees are fleeing the country at an astonishing rate, and like in Rwanda, many of the most eminent world leaders are once more watching with little or no intervention.

No matter how often the interconnectedness of a globalised world is articulated, the question remains: is the anguish of another nation really felt? It is important to note that the sovereignty of individual nations is not and should not be used as a shield of protection, especially when the global community attempts to alleviate crimes of this nature and magnitude.

The Rwandan government has chosen the path of reconciliation to forgive the perpetrators and move forward. Yet, the situation proves difficult. For instance, the 1000 women who were raped by HIV-

infected people still live with the pain and agony of that traumatic experience and are unable to move on. Hence, the steps Rwanda has taken towards supporting and strengthening the reconciliation process stands as a commendable example to the rest of the international community.

Sri Lanka faces a different situation. Thirty years of brutal terrorism wreaked havoc on the country and destroyed the lives of countless innocent Sri Lankans. Today, there is a need to strengthen the reconciliation process and build mechanisms to heal the wounds of ethnic conflict in such a way that it will never return.

While development is an important element, building a wholesome relationship with the Sri Lankan diaspora community is also essential. The tremendous work done by the Tamil and Sinhalese diaspora members should be recognised and spoken proudly of. It is important to consider a Ministry for Reconciliation and Diaspora Affairs with a mandate to work together with the international community. Currently, Sri Lankan migrants are handled by the Ministry of Foreign Employment. This ministry has so many migrant issues to attend to due to the many unskilled migrant workers seeking economic benefits overseas that it scarcely has time to prepare or plan diaspora re-engagement strategies. The proposed ministry could work on the processes of reconciliation and implement the LLRC recommendations on reconciliation. It could also bring in external partners such as Interpeace who have vast experience in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Israel, Liberia, Libya, Palestine, Rwanda, Somali Region and Timor-Leste. They could get involved with mutually agreed terms of reference (TOR) from both parties and work towards national reconciliation with the aid of expert advice.

Many stories of national disharmony in Sri Lankan society, especially after the war, are often heard. Some organisations create religious disharmony and this should be immediately addressed by the government, without which there would be complete and utter chaos. A religious harmony act that prohibits one religious group from disrespecting another could be formulated based on an existing model from a country like Singapore. Under this act, a religious group promoting hate speech against another could be arrested.

Rwanda, with its bitter past, is building a better future with many positive economic indicators. During this author's visit to South Africa in 2013 for the World Economic Forum on Africa, it was learnt that it is now possible to study for a Carnegie Mellon degree from Rwanda. Under the leadership and vision of President Paul Kagame, Rwanda has established many cogent symbols to remember the past and educate its society. One such place is the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre established in 2004, a decade after the brutal massacre, and which more than 100, 000 visitors visit every year. In the words of President Kagame, "We cannot turn the clock back nor can we undo the harm caused, but we have the power to determine the future and to ensure that what happened never happens again." It is important to determine the future of many post-conflict nations and nations that are already going through conflict, whilst reflecting on and remembering the horrors that took place in Rwanda two decades ago.

Column: Dateline Kabul

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Af-Pak: A Fresh Start

18 November 2014

Afghanistan's newly elected President, Dr. Ashraf Ghani, arrived in Islamabad on 14 November 2014, marking his first official trip to Pakistan since assuming office. Officials from both countries have underscored the unique opportunity this meeting presented for genuine efforts to be taken towards building bilateral relations.

Ghani's two-day visit marked his government's third official trip abroad and perhaps the most significant, following his earlier visits to Saudi Arabia and China; the two countries signed various agreements on

economics, expanding existing areas of cooperation, and simultaneously made new pledges to improve relations to tackle insurgency and to ensure a successful Afghan peace process. Similarly, by charting a new era of bilateral relations reinforced by the two countries' common needs for economic development and political stability, Ghani hopes to draw concrete results from his visit to Pakistan.

During his visit, Ghani met Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Pakistani Army Chief General Raheel Sharif. Unlike his predecessor Hamid Karzai, Ghani focused his talks with military and intelligence officials instead of just the civilian leadership. Discussions ranged from issues such as ways to improve economic cooperation to finding ways to ensure better border security and facilitating joint counter-terrorism efforts after the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014.

Economy

Transforming the Afghan economy is one of Ghani administrations' ultimate objectives. "Our goal is to transform Afghanistan into transit hub for the region and that means we have to create the conditions for that" asserted Ghani during an interview with *The Diplomat*.

As part of this vision, opening up new avenues for trade and economic cooperation with Pakistan is considered a key facilitating factor. While in Islamabad, Ghani was accompanied by an army of 150 officials, including businessmen, civil society representatives, and members of the parliament. He also took along with him a high-level business delegation led by Chief Economic Advisor to the President, Omar Zakhilwal. A day before Ghani reached Islamabad, Zakhilwal and his Pakistani counterpart, Mohammad Ishaq Dar, agreed on concerted efforts to enhance bilateral trade from the existing \$2.5 billion to 5 billion in the next two to three years. One way of achieving this, as stressed by the Afghan delegates, is to have Pakistan take the necessary steps in providing easy access for Afghan goods to Pakistan's main port in Karachi and through the Wagah land-border with India.

Additionally, officials from both countries also mentioned that more exchanges of high-level delegations and mutual discussions, particularly on issues related to energy, road and rail links, were needed to ensure greater cooperation. Moreover, the two countries also agreed to employ better measures for visa facilitation, particularly for businesses.

Political

The general sentiment in Afghanistan and among many in Pakistan is that Ashraf Ghani's presidency will lead to a fresh new page in Af-Pak relations. During Karzai's period, tensions were rife between the two countries and their trust deficit tested all issues from counter-terrorism to security cooperation and the Afghan peace process. However, as Ghani himself stated, "The region has changed," explaining that with this change an opportunity has emerged to transform once hostile relations into a symbiotic partnership. "This new government (Pakistan) realizes the deep economic problem that the country faces. It also realizes that extremism cannot be bounded in a neighbor or used against a neighbor and that it is a threat to all of us."

Thus, Ghani utilised his visit to Pakistan to harness "a[n] honest partner in peace talks with the Taliban" and revive the stagnant Afghan peace process. Ghani hopes that Pakistan will assist Afghans in persuading insurgents to reconcile and reintegrate. In his last meeting with Pakistani officials, Ghani "set a 90-day deadline for implementation of commitments from both sides regarding peace talks with the Taliban."

Conclusion

Optimism has certainly increased over better bilateral cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan after Ashraf Ghani's visit. However, there still remains a great deal of uncertainty as to how the leaders of both nations will transform the rhetoric of 'enhanced and genuine cooperation' into practice? It will be

interesting to see how Ghani's approach towards Pakistan will differ from that of Karzai's. And, whether he too will face the same, or perhaps different, challenges from Pakistan in the years ahead of his presidency.

Can Afghanistan Become a "Perfect Place?"

18 August 2014

With the anticipated withdrawal of NATO-led International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) troops from Afghanistan by the end 2014, the country will leave behind its decade of transition (2001-2014) and enter the decade of transformation (2015-2024).

The key question on everyone's minds is about the nature of post-ISAF Afghanistan. There are two dominant views towards this question. Analysts, who take the optimistic view, contend that the post-2014 Afghanistan will continue to witness economic growth through the extraction of its mineral resources which will enable it to regain its position as a regional hub for trade and transit. They also cite achievements in the security transition process – citing the growing capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) – to lead security matters throughout the country. On the other hand, analysts with a less optimistic perspective argue that without continued US and NATO support, the conflict will protract as the ANSF lack the capabilities, professionalism and weaponry to fight defiant insurgents. They argue that a reduction in aid levels will deepen the country's fiscal gap and sub-national spoilers in the face of rampant lawless and poor governance will exploit its mineral industry. Consequently, this will make Afghanistan, once again, highly vulnerable to interference from its neighbours, which will only deepen regional mistrust.

Both arguments paint scenarios that are equally plausible. But in an effort to prevent Afghanistan's deterioration post-2014, the government and its international and regional partners committed to helping guide the country through the decade of transformation as stipulated in the International Conference on Afghanistan held in Bonn, the Chicago Summit on Afghanistan and the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan. However, as it has been witnessed in the past, these commitments have not always translated into adequate actions.

Do Afghans Have the Capacity to Assume Ownership?

Speaking in the White House Rose Garden, US President Barack Obama confirmed that the US would consider leaving behind 9,800 troops after 2014, to help train the ANSF. However, he was quick to caution that "Afghanistan will not be a perfect place" and that it was not America's responsibility to make it one." This is an interesting statement considering that it was the US and its NATO partners who assumed full ownership of Afghanistan's state-building process from 2001 with little space offered to Afghans to influence the process. But, now with the economic recession capturing the West, it seems the international community is ready to cut its losses in Afghanistan hence its irresponsibly rapid withdrawal deadline. Suddenly, by mid-2014, under the scheme of local ownership, Afghans found themselves being handed state-building responsibilities they were never fully prepared for by the international community.

External state-builders often intervene in conflict zones with the aim of "building functioning and self-sustaining state structures" which they can leave behind when they withdraw. However, in Afghanistan such structures have not been created. The international community's top-down and elite-oriented approach at building local ownership set in motion a centrifugal process that exacerbated internal cleaves, led to the re-emergence of old patronage networks and fragmented the UN mission in Afghanistan. This eventually stifled "the sense of ownership, the growth of local capacity and local accountability structures." Therefore, with no self-sustaining structures in place after the withdrawal of the international community, the country faces a real risk of exasperating its current challenges and falling back into a potential civil conflict.

The Way Forward

Realising this, the Afghan government and its international partners adopted several strategies to help foster peace and stability in post-2014 Afghanistan. The 2011 Bonn Conference, which marked the 10th anniversary of the first Bonn Agreement (2001), reaffirmed that the international community would not abandon Afghanistan after withdrawal. At the 2012 Chicago Summit, the international community agreed to end their combat role by mid-2013 and assume an advisory and training role as Afghan forces would begin to assume the lead for nation-wide security. The Summit also highlighted the costs associated in sustaining the ANSF and committed to raising funds of 4.1 billion dollars to support Afghan forces till such time the Afghan government's revenues could take over these costs. At the 2012 Tokyo Conference, the international community made their financial commitments to Afghanistan in the sum of 16 billion dollars through to 2017. This was intended to plug Afghanistan's fiscal gaps and support Afghanistan 'Towards Self-Reliance', strategy for sustainable growth and development.

Sadly these commitments and pledges are insufficient to sustain Afghanistan's economy or to ensure the irreversibility of its modest security gains. In the face of scarce local capacities, insecurity, widespread corruption and rising public spending and declining government revenues, these pledges will only provide short-term solutions. These pledges are unable to address the disparity between growing Afghan expenditures and the international expectations of significant but declining aid. With the US-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) yet to be signed, there is no official framework for the US and NATO troops beyond 2014. The Afghans may be eager to assume ownership of their future but in reality they are ill-equipped to deal with the cornucopia of economic and security challenges that will rise when the international limelight on Afghanistan dims. Nevertheless, if Afghanistan, along with its neighbours and international partners takes stock of these realities and evaluates economic, security and political issues in regional terms and thus create regional responses to these challenges, then perhaps a more promising scenario could emerge.

Afghanistan: Political Crises after the Presidential Run-off

16 June 2014

The second round of the Afghan presidential elections held on 4 June saw Afghans returning to the polling stations in large numbers with no regard for Taliban threats.

Unfortunately, instead of resulting in a successful end to a long and uncertain political transition, the run-off has left Afghans fearing the worst. The runoff has been bogged down by corruption charges against the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). Questions have been raised over Karzai's neutrality, a spurious 7 million-voter turnout forecast, and threats by Dr. Abdullah Abdullah's team to derail the elections. These issues have also combined to bring Afghanistan to the brink of political crises. To understand how Afghanistan went from a successful election to a troubled political process, it is important to examine how the two elections differed from one another.

Voter Turn-out

The voter turnout was expected to be lower in the second round primarily because of the absence of provincial elections which provoked higher turn outs the first time round. Observers and local media channels affirmed this on Election Day. However they were quickly contradicted by the IEC that claimed there were potentially over 7 million votes casted, with 38 per cent female turn out – a figure that left many in Kabul scratching their heads.

Thomas Ruttig, an analyst, stated that the number of distributed voter cards is "so botched that no reliable, consolidated voter registry exists." Thus, if we go by the the IEC Chairman Yusuf Nouristani's, claims of approximately 7 million out of the 13.5 million eligible voters and 58 per cent votes on 14 June, the figures do not match. Nuristani's "absolute figures (number of voters who turned out) does not match the relative figures (percentages)," Ruttig further stated. First, considering that the IEC had 23,136 polling stations open and each station had been approved for 600 ballot papers, this would mean there were 13,881,600 ballot papers. Therefore, 58 per cent of the total printed ballot papers would mean that there were over 8 million voters and not 7 million as suggested by the IEC. Moreover there are approximately

21 million voter cards floating around, which means if the maximum number of eligible voters is put at 13.5 million then 7.5 million of these are illegal. The crux of the voter turnout issue being contested by Abdullah lies with the country's outdated population statistics which last conducted a census in 1979. Hence, any claims concerning population statistics stands on shaky grounds.

Ethnicisation

Some international media reports have claimed that the influence of ethnic loyalties as a determining factor in Afghan politics has declined over the years. However, while this may hold some truth, it is still not enough to suggest a real change in local attitudes. Ethnicity is still a determining factor in Afghan politics regardless of these truths.

There have been innumerable instances in the 2014 elections where Ashraf Ghani's Pashtun and Abdullah's mujahiddin- Jamiat party rhetoric's have espoused ethnicisation. The New York Times' Mathew Rosenberg recalls that in Afghanistan, winners of elections "are populists who cut deals with their enemies, win support from their rivals and appeal to Afghan national pride." A reality, Rosenberg correctly argues, Ghani has "embraced" well after years of "inhibiting the role of pro-western intellect" he added – a quality, Abdullah, a veteran of Afghan politicking has not been known to shy away from either. Similarly, senior supporters in both camps have also done much to bank on the ethnicity card. Atta Muhammad Noor, Governor, Balkh province, and a Jamiat commander and supporter of Abdullah, took to the media when the ECC accused his province of producing fraudulent votes. He said both the bodies [ECC and IEC] should "avoid telling lies and bringing themselves under question." He also went further to state that he would not partake in the new government if Ghani wins. On the other hand, a senior Ghani supporter, Juma Khan Hamdaar, Governor, Paktia province, during a rally in Balkh called on Pashtuns and Uzbeks to display their loyalties to their tribes and vote for Ghani.

Corruption

Unlike the first round, this time, the campaign tones have been far more accusatory as both the candidates entered a fierce dispute over early tallies showing Ghani with a lead of almost one million.

In the first round of elections, the ECC audited 1964 polling sites out of 20,561, resulting in the disqualification of 525 polling stations. While the disqualified polling sites were kept out of the preliminary results, an additional 444 sites deemed problematic were kept out to avoid further delay in the announcement of the preliminary results. As a result, it was only later that 291 of these 444 sites were audited and considered acceptable and then added to the final count. The process of disqualifying votes while simultaneously adding new votes not counted earlier made the final results exceedingly ambiguous.

Additionally, according to analysts, the IEC did not audit all the 444 polling stations. The Afghan Analyst Network's Martine van Bijlert argues that "in most cases only one or a few, of the polling stations were audited." This suggests that the IEC's auditing framework was far too constricted, "strictly following indicators rather than trying to ascertain and address the total level of fraud" in the first round of elections.

Consequently, the outcome of the first round of votes had both clean and dirty ballots counted. Yet both candidates accepted the final results and prepared for the second round.

The international community has urged both the presidential candidates to discuss their concerns with the electoral commissions – a key reason why these bodies exist in the first place. However, Abdullah's halting of the IEC's process means abandonment of the legal process and framework. A shift away from this framework and appealing directly to the public can put the political transition process in jeopardy and may provoke further instability.

Now, the UN has the daunting task of mediating between the two candidates in an effort to determine Afghanistan's political future. So far the UN has been very cautious by maintaining that whatever role is

given for it to play it is with the consensus of all parties involved, avoiding any possible inferences of interfering in Afghan affairs. At the current juncture, Afghans can only hope that a solution arises, and quickly, to mitigate the political crises Afghanistan finds itself in and ensure people's faith remains strong in the democratic process.

Taliban's Spring Offensive: Are the ANSF Prepared?

19 May 2014

On 12 May, the Taliban commenced their annual spring offensive with a series of attacks that left over a dozen killed and many more injured in the Afghan provinces of Helmand, Ghazni, Nangarhar, Parwan and Kabul. Calling it 'Khaibar', after the Battle of Khaibar – that took place in Islamic year 629 (Gregorian year 1231) where Muslim forces, under the Muhammad's leadership, attacked and defeated the Jews living in Khaibar oasis – the Taliban stated that they chose Khaibar because of the "significance of this juncture in this current era" which we can infer as a remark on the security transition process and the looming withdrawal of foreign troops by the end of year.

Intersecting with the Afghan presidential elections, this year's spring offensive could prove to be the most difficult fighting season yet. Moreover, adding to local contentions will be an overstretched Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) that will struggle to cope with the added responsibilities that have been transitioned to them while also having to secure the presidential elections for a second round that will take place on 14 June.

According to the UN, in the first 3 months of 2014, "more than 4,600 security incidents" occurred across Afghanistan. This "represented a 24 percent increase in violence compared to the same period last year." Thus, the spring offensive will see this trend continue and will pose a major test for the ANSF, the political transition, and the last phase of the security transition.

The Taliban describe their spring offensive as being "against the invaders and their spineless backers." The target of the offensive has remained largely the same as in the previous years. The Taliban have targeted foreigners whom they broadly classify as "spies, military and civilian contractors" and locals such as "high ranking government officials, cabinet ministers, members of Parliament, security officials, officers in the Interior and Foreign Ministries, attorneys and judges that prosecute Mujahideen as well as agents in the National Directorate."

In line with these targets, the start of the Taliban offensive saw attacks on both government officials (including ministers), and ISAF troops.

Though the attacks were aimed at soft targets, they did not go unnoticed. In fact, it sent a clear message to the Afghan government, the NATO-led ISAF forces, and the Afghan forces that they were ready and prepared for the summer fighting season. Moreover, in this year's spring offensive the Taliban have tried to differentiate this spring's operation from previous years indicating that this year's fighting season will be the most challenging yet. The Taliban have claimed that they "will exert extra efforts and utilize complex military techniques in planning their current year spring operations."

The Taliban have pledged to use "various modern military techniques" such as "Back-breaking martyrdom strikes, infiltrator operations (insider attacks), targeting large and well fortified enemy bases with heavy weapons and missiles as well as carrying out head-on offensive operations."

The Taliban say they will use these techniques on primary targets such as military bases, diplomatic centers, military and civilian convoys and all other facilities belonging to foreigners, ministry of interior and national directorate of security. While it will be difficult for the Taliban to cause huge losses to ISAF forces given that they are no longer in a combat role but advisory ones, the ANSF are still highly vulnerable to insurgent attacks. Of the 13,729 casualties incurred by the ANSF in the past 13 years, most have taken place in the last three years when local forces began assuming security responsibilities from foreign troops.

While the ANSF have shown progress in holding “their own against the insurgency” and preventing them from making any territorial or kinetic gains, they still continue to face grim obstacles in becoming an enduring and sustainable force. The annual Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan by the US Department of Defense, prepared by a division of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff reveals that despite ISAF efforts to develop ANSF capabilities, they still “require more time and effort to close four key high-end capability gaps.” These gaps are “air support, intelligence enterprise, special operations, and Afghan security ministry capacity.” At present, the ANSF are said to be “fully fielded and show improvement in combined arms employment, utilization of indirect fire systems and organised evacuation.”

However, whether this will be enough to disrupt insurgent activities this spring, and especially when the ANSF’s resources will be overly extended to protect the election run-off, remains to be seen.

The US Department of Defense report claims that in 2013, “several violence indicators” were lower than in 2012. Enemy-initiated attacks were said to have declined by two per cent; complex attacks having declined by eight per cent; and the use of improvised explosive devices having declined by 24 per cent. Yet, last year’s spring fighting season witnessed the Afghan National Army’s (ANA) and Afghan National Police’s (ANP) inability to disrupt Taliban activities, a claim also made by the same report. In actuality, the ANSF and civilian casualties had increased to unprecedented levels in 2013 – a trend that could possibly increase, making this year’s spring offensive more daunting.

Additionally, the spring fighting season could also cause a setback to the ISAF’s security transition plans and its ability to fill the remaining gaps in the ANSF, which is considered critical to overall development. Furthermore, as the existing government is preoccupied with preparations to transfer power to a new leader, it has rendered its functionaries ill-prepared to properly execute its responsibilities and services, thus making it, and the public, susceptible to any instability in the coming months.

However, if local forces could, with the help of NATO-led ISAF forces, scramble to ensure “joint coordination in support of the political transition” and is able to “assure that Afghans are postured for the 2014 fighting seasons,” they could possibly change the odds in their favour.

Presidential Elections 2014: Afghan-Owned, Afghan-Led

21 April 2014

The third Presidential elections in Afghanistan marked a historical and triumphant day for all Afghans. Defying Taliban death threats and sporadic firefights, approximately 7.5 million voters were estimated to have turned out at polling stations across the country, potentially doubling the turn out as compared to previous elections. Moreover, this time around the elections ensured several long-lasting impressions that will invariably keep Afghanistan on the path to democratisation, both during this taxing period of transition and when the country enters its decade of transformation in the post-2014 era.

The elections signified not only that power in Afghanistan was being democratically transferred, but also, as prominent Afghan analyst Davood Moradian connoted, Afghanistan’s “third attempt at democratization.” The readiness of voters and the actions of local media channels, civil society organisations and government functionaries on election day also challenged the assumptions held by some in the West and those in the region who questioned the “cultural compatibility” of Afghan traditions, values and Islamic society with democracy. The inability of the Taliban to disrupt the elections also marked a significant achievement for local Afghan forces while causing a severe blow to the insurgency. It also addressed regional fears concerning the ability of local forces to protect its territory in the aftermath of US and NATO withdrawal at the end of 2014. But most importantly, this election gave Afghans something previous elections had not, and that is the belief that they truly owned this democratic process and as such can now build their futures on it.

When a few Afghans were asked what the elections meant to them, the responses were inspiring to say the least. Sameem, 22, represents the largest segment of the Afghan population, the youth, and for him the election was a determining factor for his future. He said, "It gave us a platform to select a suitable candidate and based on this we can now plan our future." Sara, aged 30, was amongst the millions of courageous women who turned out to vote, and she felt that "the election was more valuable than previous elections." She asserted, "This time around people needed change and expected change, and this expectation was reinforced by the extraordinary turn out of voters." Farid, aged 33, felt that the election was a "good democratic exercise" pointing to the "diversity amongst candidates and people's willingness to go to polling stations despite all attacks." Khalid, aged 50, said, "The elections showed that our politicians do not revert to guns and force anymore to bring change but rather follow democracy and brotherhood to bring peaceful change." He stressed that the election was most meaningful because it showed the international community that despite "the foreign lives lost and the money spent rebuilding Afghanistan, its people, are now, to a degree, beginning to accept democracy."

Nonetheless, two weeks post the election day, and the level of optimism and excitement is slowly declining as news of mass corruption and protests against the preliminary election results have surfaced. The Election Complaints Commission (ECC) identified 870 cases of fraud that they classified as "serious enough to affect the outcome" of the elections. Moreover, the IEC came under fire by candidates and voters alike who questioned the logic behind its 49.67 per cent partial vote count announced on 20 April, which consisted of the initial 10 per cent vote count announced on 13 April. The partial results, representing roughly 3.5 million votes, showed Abdullah Abdullah leading with 44.4 per cent while Ashraf Ghani was trailing with 33.2 per cent. This announcement received immediate backlash from Ghani's team who protested that the results were ambiguous, preliminary and due to "change once all complaints have been addressed by the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC)." His team also called on the IEC to announce the total number of votes nationwide, which would help clarify the partial results so far announced. The final tally of the preliminary votes will be announced on 24 April and if a run-off is determined, which is most likely, it would be held as early as 28 May.

According to locals, the partial election results are not cause for worry. Both Sameem and Balkhi felt that the success of the election process was now dependent on the performance of the IEC and ECC, and as long as this process was transparent, they found no reason to object the results. Sara stated that she was ready to head back to the polling booths if the elections went to a second round but contended that if her preferred candidate did not win she would find it difficult to accept the results. Farid, on the other hand, was optimistic about the partial election results and felt they were 'fair' but also contended that for him the real concern was not whether "the people of Afghanistan would accept the results" but whether "the powerbrokers would accept the results."

Despite the irregularities, and whatever the eventual outcome maybe, the 2014 Afghan Presidential elections have been impressive, and has exceeded all expectations. But most noteworthy of all, it has reinforced the notion that Afghans are prepared to assume ownership of their political future.

Afghan Elections 2014: What to Expect?

17 March 2014

Afghan President Hamid Karzai, in his final speech to the Wolesi Jirga (Parliament) on 15 March 2014, took a strong stance warning foreign countries against interfering in the upcoming presidential elections, asserting that local electoral bodies and Afghan Security Forces were fully capable of ensuring the safety and integrity of the election. However, with the elections set for 5 April 2014, Karzai's reassurances have done little to help growing fears about the security, and ultimately, the legitimacy of the elections.

In order for elections to be considered free and fair they require inclusivity, transparency, credibility and legitimacy. In Afghanistan, the challenges of state-building have been paramount and the country continues to grapple with inefficient government institutions, particularly those at the sub-national level, weak rule of law in the majority of the provinces, growing poverty and lack of sustainable development, and rising levels of violence. To guarantee that the presidential elections in Afghanistan will be free and

fair under these conditions is naive to say the least. How can inclusivity be expected in the elections when there are only 12 million registered voters out of approximately 27 million citizens? And when registration of voters in remote and insecure districts has remained well below those living in major city centres?

How can transparency be ensured in the elections when public officials have been seen directly supporting and rallying for candidates, even allocating government resources to their preferred candidates? How can the credibility of the elections be ensured when the majority of the population continues to lack basic knowledge of their civic rights as the Independent Election Commission has lagged in extending its civic education activities to all parts of the country? Moreover, how can credibility be expected when the majority of voters remain uninformed of candidate platforms since campaign offices and activities have been kept out of supposed high risk areas in provinces such as Helmand, Nuristan, Kunar, Zabul, Oruzgan, Paktika and Khost? These issues will undoubtedly culminate and call into question the legitimacy of the upcoming elections if they continue unmitigated.

Ensuring security is also a critical determinant. The Ministry of Interior recently reported that 408 polling centres, out of 7,168, have come under significant security threats. So far, there are reportedly 62 districts in 15 provinces that face increased levels of violence. According to the Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA), districts in Balkh, Nuristan, Nangarhar, Parwan, Kapisa, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Khost, MaidanWardak, Jawzjan, Sari Pul, Kunduz, Paktia, Takhar and Faryab are considered high security risks. TEFA fears that such threats will prevent residents from casting their ballots ('Insecurity to bar voters in 62 districts: TEFA', Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 March 2014). Moreover, The Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan (FEFA), which is the largest institution observing the elections, reported in its 'First Observation Report on Campaign Process of 2014 Presidential Election' that insecurity, at the hands of the insurgency, has been the main worry amongst campaign workers.

The Taliban have warned that they will 'use all force' to disrupt the elections. In a statement released to the media on 10 March, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid called the elections 'an American conspiracy' and told all Afghans to reject the elections and stay away from polling. Since the commencement of election activities, camping-related attacks have become common, with several attacks and assassinations carried out. How then can the ANSF be expected to guarantee the safety of voters, candidates, election observers, election personnel and polling stations? Most importantly, how they be expected to ensure the integrity of the elections? In the absence of security, polling stations will not only become vulnerable to insurgency attacks but also to rigging and ballot-box stuffing, as was witnessed in the 2009 presidential elections.

The upcoming presidential election and its potential to establish a legitimate government hold paramount importance to Afghans from all ethnic, religious and professional backgrounds. As such, all eyes are on the elections, with many acknowledging that it is improbable to expect a completely free and fair process. Yet they hope that its results would at least reflect the aspirations of the majority. This for Afghans denotes a successful election which would mark the first peaceful transfer of power from an incumbent to an elected successor and ensure continued international support and aid. On the other hand, an unsuccessful election would be one that sees the majority of the population rejecting election results and opposing the new government which would then lead to a loss of international support, threaten the future of democracy in the country and potentially give way to internal violence.

With the withdrawal of foreign troops drawing nearer, and the transition of security and economic responsibilities falling on Afghan shoulders, the absence of a political consensus around the election will invariably cloud the future of the country.

Afghanistan, US and the Peace Process: A Deal with the Taliban in 2014?

28 January 2014

If the rise in violence this month is any mark of the year that is to be, then we can conclude that 2014 will turn out be an ominous year for Afghans. The winter season in Afghanistan, which tends to witness a

reduction in fighting, has in fact faced a sharp rise in violence, shocking many in Afghanistan. In Kabul alone there have been several attacks, in and around the fortified diplomatic enclave, targeting both local and foreign security personnel, government and military installations. Many believe this to be a glimpse of what is yet to come, as Afghanistan gets ready to hold its third Presidential elections in April 2014.

US Lt General Mark Milley has predicted that this trend is likely to continue into 2014 with insurgents targeting. For many locals, this scenario has reinforced their anxieties concerning the prospects for 2014 being a pivotal year, marking the end of the security transition process, withdrawal of international troops, and handover of all political, security and development responsibilities to the Afghan leadership. While the challenges to peace and security are many, the solutions however are extremely limited and difficult to reach in the time-lines that have been set. One such mechanism has been the Afghan peace and reconciliation programme (or peace process) which was launched in 2010. This process envisioned political means to facilitate military measures for reconciliation and reintegration of insurgents through talks and negotiations. This process was to assist the security transition process and set the stage for the handover of all responsibilities from international to Afghan ownership by the end of 2014. However, the lack of achievements coupled with consistent setbacks and growing obstacles have done little to set the foundation needed to ensuring peace and stability post-2014. With the prospects for reaching a peace deal with the insurgency almost next to none, many are left wondering what to expect from it in the post-2014 period.

The Afghan peace process is a two-tiered initiative with a reintegration and a reconciliation pillar, both of which have been implemented simultaneously. The reintegration pillar has been implemented at the sub-national level where foot soldiers are enticed to reintegrate and take advantages of the financial incentives provided by the 'Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme'. The reconciliation pillar on the other hand has been implemented at the national and regional levels where the Taliban leadership has been approached to participate in official channels of communication with the Afghan government in the hopes of starting a negotiation process that could lead to a peace deal. Thus far the Afghan government has been able to reintegrate 7,375 foot soldiers and local commanders, making reintegration a relatively successful programme, whereas reconciliation efforts have consistently hit roadblocks with no major achievements to date.

The Afghan government and its international partners have tried to win over the top tier of the insurgency by employing several trust-building mechanisms. These include the release of Taliban prisoners by the Afghan government, removal of UN sanctions and blacklist against former Taliban members, the creation of a political address for senior-level Taliban commanders for their participation in mainstream politics, allowing representatives of the insurgency to participate in track II meetings abroad, offering Taliban and other armed groups non-elected positions and opportunities to be included into the power structure of the state. In response, the Taliban have increased their attacks across Afghanistan, continued to engage in indiscriminate killings of civilians as reflected in the spike in civilian casualties observed in 2013 which marked the second highest recorded year since 2001, targeted killings of Afghan government officials including the High Peace Council members, parliamentarians, and Afghan National Security Forces, continued implementation of their draconian laws in areas under their influence, refusal to enter peace talks with the Afghan government whom they still refer to as a puppet regime which has sustained their inflexibility in accepting the 'red-lines' for entering negotiations (which include accepting the Afghan Constitution and breaking ties with international terrorists groups including al Qaeda). While many experts will argue that the Taliban have shown a steady willingness to negotiate over the years, their actions however continue to denote another tone.

It remains highly doubtful that the Afghan government and its international backers will strike a peace deal with the Taliban before 2014 or even in the immediate post-2014 environment for that matter. This is not surprising considering that in the past five years the Afghan government and the international community have been largely unsuccessful, and that such efforts have become ever more daunting as the security transition process enters its last tranche and the international community is set to withdraw by the end of 2014 irrespective of the scenario that emerges between the Afghan government and the insurgency by the end of this year. At the current juncture, ground realities continue to display the

Taliban to be in a position of strength, a trend that has been strengthened, instead of weakened, by the peace process.

Column: Dhaka Discourse

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18th SAARC Summit: A Perspective from Bangladesh

15 December 2014

After a three-year gap, leaders of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) met in a Summit held in Kathmandu, Nepal, on 26-27 November 2014. It was an occasion to assess SAARC's efforts to consolidate regionalism in South Asia, and Bangladesh's role in the context. SAARC as the premier South Asian regional organisation has completed the 29th year of its establishment and has already witnessed 18 summits with declarations and programs of action of far reaching significance for approximately 1.4 billion people living in the region (1/5th of the world's population).

SAARC was born and developed via the adoption of a 'functional approach' of cooperation in non-controversial areas like society and culture. Since 1985, SAARC has evolved slowly but continuously both in terms of institutions and programs. That the organisation has provided a sense of regional identity within South Asia and beyond may be celebrated as its major contribution.

While the 17th SAARC Summit was held with the slogan of "Building Bridges," the 18th Summit was themed on "Deeper Integration for Peace and Prosperity." It gives a clear indication of the resolution and vision for effective regional cooperation in South Asia. There were high hopes and expectations vis-à-vis the 18th SAARC Summit, particularly for the prospect of signing three important agreements: two on regional transport connectivity, and one on energy cooperation. Despite the clarity on the first day of the Summit that no agreement was going to be signed due to reservations of some SAARC members who cited incomplete 'internal processes', Bangladesh kept hope and pressed for signing the agreements.

Dhaka maintained its diplomatic maneuver to salvage the Summit by signing at least one deal if not all. Bangladeshi Foreign Minister AH Mahmud Ali confirmed that Dhaka initiated a hectic effort during the summit to sign the energy cooperation agreement at the least. Finally, the foreign ministers of the eight SAARC countries signed the SAARC Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation (Electricity) in the presence of their heads of state and governments during the concluding ceremony of the Summit.

Perhaps as the lone member, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina categorically stated in her speech that, "Bangladesh will appreciate the early signing of the Regional Motor Vehicles Agreement and the Regional Railways Agreement." Overall, Hasina's speech at the Summit reflects Dhaka's strong determination to move ahead with South Asian regional integration. She has emphatically called upon the member states to go for more realistic, result-oriented and mutually beneficial partnership for cooperation to prosper together. She has also appealed to the SAARC members to move forward, leaving behind all discords. In her words, "What is needed is to set aside our differences and work on collective strength for bringing real progress to the people in the region."

The 36-point Kathmandu Declaration 2014 has accommodated Bangladesh's new vision for collective development in the region bounded by the waters of the Bay of Bengal. According to the 15th point in the Declaration, the SAARC leaders recognised "the manifold contributions of ocean-based Blue Economy in the SAARC Region and the need for collaboration and partnership in this area." It may be emphasised here that the current government in Dhaka has been pushing this idea of establishing a 'blue economy' in the backdrop of peaceful resolution of bilateral maritime disputes with Myanmar and India.

Bangladesh has taken the full advantage of corridor diplomacy of the SAARC Summit which is a major feature of SAARC's role in improving bilateral relations via a multilateral forum. While SAARC is

constrained by its Charter from discuss bilateral disputes and contentious issues, the Forum has contributed significantly to diffuse tensions and improve bilateral relations through informal meetings between the leaders. In this context, Hasina has scored diplomatic gains both for her government and the state. She met all SAARC leaders, including representatives from some observer members. Hasina's meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is critical as the two leaders met for the second time in three months – which is a rare occurrence. Both the leaders exchanged highly positive views on further strengthening the bilateral relations and, more importantly, the ratification of Land Boundary Agreement by the Indian Parliament and conclusion of the Teesta Water Sharing Agreement. Sheikh Hasina's brief meeting with her Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif and other leaders boosted the image of her government in the South Asian neighborhood.

While it is true that skeptics and optimists are equally unhappy with the SAARC's performance, one has also to reckon with the reality that today, South Asia observes multiple processes and dimensions of regionalism. However, the fact remains that one can hardly think of the future of regional cooperation in South Asia, or for that matter regionalism, without SAARC. The new vision of SAARC to promote regional cooperation and solidarity in South Asia must start with a concrete plan of the restructuring of the organisation and implementation of the decisions of SAARC.

Bangladesh in Global Forums: Diplomacy vs. Domestic Politics

17 November 2014

Perhaps for the first time Bangladesh has achieved a new feat in the conduct of its diplomacy. This time it is not successful bilateral visits to major powers such as Russia or China neither the pursuit of Look East Policy, nor the Dhaka-Washington Security Dialogue. Bangladesh has been elected to the top leadership of two highly reputed multilateral bodies - the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU). These two global parliamentary bodies that exchange knowledge and practices of parliamentary democracy in the member assemblies and encourage parliamentary dialogue worldwide are very influential in the global arena.

Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury, the Speaker of the National Parliament of Bangladesh, was elected as the Chairperson of the 35-member strong executive committee of the CPA that promotes parliamentary democracy in the former British colonies. She has become the first Bangladeshi to be elected to this office. She defeated her lone opponent Julianna O'Connor-Connolly, Speaker of the Cayman Islands Legislative Assembly. The Cayman Islands are a British overseas territory. It has a 20-seat legislative assembly elected by the people. The election to the Chairperson of the executive committee of the CPA was highly competitive as reflected in the voting pattern. Bangladesh's candidate got 70 votes while Julianna bagged 67.

Within a week of the diplomatic success in the CPA, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, a member of the National Parliament, made a significant achievement. He was elected as the President of the IPU, an international organisation of parliaments, by defeating his opponents in a fierce battle of ballots. He defeated three other candidates: the Speaker of Australia's House of Representatives Bronwyn Bishop, Indonesian MP Nurhayati Ali Assegaf, and former Speaker of Maldives' Parliament Abdulla Shahid, in an election held on the concluding day of the 131st IPU Assembly in Geneva. Saber got 169 votes while his nearest rival Bishop managed to secure 95 votes. IPU was established in 1889 and has emerged as the focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue and works for peace and cooperation among people and for the firm establishment of representative democracy.

Shirin and Saber both defeated their opponents in ballots to win the chairs of the CPA and IPU. The government has not wasted a single moment to celebrate these two victories and has suggested that the victory is a response to those who have been criticising the 05 January general elections in Bangladesh. To the government, it is a demonstration of global recognition.

While this success is celebrated by the government, unlike in other countries, the opposition in Bangladesh has shied away from congratulating the two Bangladeshi politicians who have brought laurels

to the country. The opposition has termed the achievements as events where voters (member countries) cast their votes independently, which does not mean that the international community had accepted the 05 January polls. There has been every attempt from the opposition to put down the diplomatic success of the government.

In another diplomatic accomplishment, Bangladesh has become a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) for the period 2015-17. In an election held on 21 October in New York, Bangladesh won by 149 votes to become a member. Bangladesh contested for the post from the Asia Pacific region. Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Thailand and Qatar were the candidates for four member posts reserved for the Asia Pacific region in the election. India came out on top with the most votes in the group, followed by Indonesia. Bangladesh secured 149 votes - the third highest votes in the group - while Thailand was eliminated. Within a few days, Bangladesh was elected to another international organisation. Bangladesh has become an executive member of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) for the second time. A total of 17 countries took part to elect members of the 13-member union for the Asia and Oceania zone of the ITU. Bangladesh got 115 votes - 176 votes were cast out of a total of 193.

That Bangladesh has been elected to four global bodies through secret votes by member nations is undoubtedly a rare diplomatic success in the country's history. It becomes more critical at a time when the government is apparently struggling for international recognition of its leadership. This becomes evident in the words of the ruling political leaders. Following the victory in the UNHRC elections, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Mahmud Ali, declared, "This win again proves that Bangladesh is absolutely on the right track under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina." According to the foreign minister, Bangladesh won the elections against the aggressive campaign of some international human rights organisations. The prime minister of Bangladesh termed it a success in creating global leadership. She attributed these achievements to the global recognition of Bangladesh as a role model, based on its stunning success in socioeconomic development.

The proactive role of Bangladesh in global forums and its achievement of global support could boost the image of the country abroad, which is critical for national development, particularly for attracting foreign investors. But the attempts by the government to celebrate this success for narrow regime interests and the opposition's move to undermine it are puzzling. Perhaps, the international community would also observe with surprise how confrontational domestic politics can belittle major successes in the global diplomatic arena when it matters for national interest.

Bangladesh: Diplomatic Manoeuvres at the UNGA

20 October 2014

The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina led a 184-member delegation to the 69th UN General Assembly (UNGA) meeting. Significantly, this year has marked the 40th anniversary of Bangladesh's membership at the UN. Bangladesh was admitted into the UN in its second attempt on 17 September 1974 as its 136th member. Dhaka's UN membership practically silenced all opponents of the country that was born in 1971 against the backdrop of the Cold War. It was a turning point for the statehood of Bangladesh in the global arena. So the UNGA always bears a special significance for Bangladeshi foreign policy.

Apart from partaking in the UNGA and the Climate Summit at the UN, Hasina participated in a number of other meetings and events – including ones with heads of governments and states of various UN member states and chiefs of various international organisations on the side-lines. Among those she met were UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Commonwealth Secretary General Kamalesh Sharma, US President Barack Obama, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg, Belarusian Prime Minister Mikhail V. Myasnikov and Nepalese Prime Minister Sushil Koirala. Additionally, Hasina also joined a discussion of the Commonwealth Heads of Government and attended a

high-level summit on 'UN Peacekeeping' at the UN headquarters. Furthermore, met US business leaders and finally, attended a reception accorded by expatriate Bangladeshis in the country.

Hasina also discussed bilateral issues during the meeting with her Norwegian counterpart and sought the latter's investment in the booming ICT sector in Bangladesh. Bilateral issues were also discussed with her Nepalese counterpart to promote Bangladesh-Nepal relations. During the meeting with US investors, Hasina urged them to take advantage of the liberal investment policy in Bangladesh and to invest in the country.

There are mixed interpretations of the outcomes of this visit in Bangladesh. While one group claims that the Bangladesh's UN Summit diplomacy was highly successful, the other group claims it was more ceremonial and does not bring about much substance to national interests. The UN Summit diplomacy has a number of implications. However, reportedly the Belarusian prime minister has expressed interest in providing \$15 million to Bangladesh as long-term assistance for the development of country's readymade garment sector, including the training for the workers. Belarus also expressed interest in importing pharmaceuticals and agricultural products from Bangladesh and export Potash to Bangladesh.

Another important issue is the strong voice of Bangladesh in the UN Peacekeeping Summit and UN Climate Change summit. Bangladesh has been championing the cause of global climate change for the least developed countries (LDCs). Issues of global funding and adaptation have been highlighted in Bangladesh's global efforts. Besides, Dhaka's role in peacekeeping missions was strongly reflected in her participation in the 'UN Peacekeeping' Summit. Significantly, Bangladesh was able to emphasise the graduation of its role to a leadership position due to the enhanced capacity of the country's peacekeepers given their experience and skills.

The Hasina-Modi meeting on the side lines of the UNGA is the most significant achievement of Bangladesh's UN diplomacy. It was important for two major reasons: first, it was much-awaited against the backdrop of several high-level contacts between the two friendly nations in the recent days. Second, this was the first ever meeting between the two leaders. It was important to get to know each other to promote their bilateral relations further in the upcoming days. During the talks, Modi lauded the Bangladesh government's fight against terrorism and said, "Bangladesh is a model for fighting terrorism."

Notably, they discussed the issues of ratifying the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) and the Teesta Water Sharing Treaty. Regarding the ratification of the LBA, Modi emphasised that it is just a matter of time before it happens. This is a positive gesture towards a resolution on this outstanding bilateral issue. Regarding the Teesta water-sharing issue, Modi assured of a serious pursuit of the consensus-building-process that must have a positive impact on the improvement of India-Bangladesh relations. Needless to say, there is no alternative but to promote Bangladesh-India relations based on mutual understanding and respect for mutual interests. Thus, Dhaka's UN Summit diplomacy was an occasion to bolster the country's image as well as to strengthen its role in the global fora. Bangladesh has demonstrated strong determination to project its achievements to the world.

However, the critical issue is to actualise the diplomatic gains via concrete efforts on the domestic front where the government has been struggling to win over the hearts and minds of people after the 2014 general elections.

Abe's Successful Visit to Dhaka: Two Political Challenges

15 September 2014

In a span of three months, the Japanese Prime Minister and his Bangladeshi counterpart met twice, first in Tokyo (May 2014) and recently in Dhaka (September 2014).

This commentary analyses the nature of bilateral visit and the extent of Japanese investments in Bangladesh; and two political challenges facing the two countries on further cooperation.

Expanding Japanese Investment in Bangladesh

In general, both the countries have emphasized the visit for building a 'comprehensive partnership' with a promise of boosting bilateral ties. On the economic front, Japan has come forward with a new level of commitment unlike the past. Japan has committed to pump US \$6 billion in the next four to five years for infrastructure development in Bangladesh. The number of business delegates in Abe's entourage is a significant indication of Japan's serious thought about her investment in Bangladesh.

Although the number of Japanese companies investing in Bangladesh has increased over the years, it requires a jump to match with development of Bangladesh economy as well as Japan's plan for relocation of its industries. Therefore, Japanese investment in Bangladesh was widely discussed. Another significant issue was the opening of Japanese market for readymade garments (RMG) products from Bangladesh which would provide a huge financial boost; this would also reduce Bangladesh's dependence on foreign assistance.

Other projects such as the financing for mega projects such as Padma Barrage, multi-modal tunnel under river Jamuna, dedicated Railway Bridge over river Jamuna, multi-modal Dhaka Eastern Bypass, and ecological restoration of four rivers around Dhaka - are concrete issues of cooperation in economic arena of Bangladesh-Japan relations, both the leaders have developed solid understanding of diplomatic and political issues.

Bangladesh and Japan: Two Political Challenges

Two issues are particularly critical. First, during Abe's visit Bangladesh declared the withdrawal of candidacy from the race to vie for a seat as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council from the Asia Pacific Group for 2016-2017. The decision of Bangladesh has been extremely significant given its history. Bangladesh has never withdrawn its candidature from such a global body; it rather defeated Japan in its bid to become the non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the first time in 1979-1980. Understandably, it has sparked a debate in Bangladesh about the pros and cons of this diplomatic decision.

The issue of 'give and take' has been raised in the sense that Bangladesh took the crucial decision without any concrete gains from Japan. It has generally been argued that the decision reflects more of momentous and strong urge for deeper relations. Without pointing out directly to domestic politics in Bangladesh some analysts argued that this decision demonstrated 'governance and credibility crisis' of the government of Bangladesh. What surprised people in Bangladesh is that the opposition parties particularly the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami have shown a lukewarm disagreement, if not indifference, to the decision by the government. One may argue that Bangladesh's decision for withdrawal of its candidature has met a favorable time for the current government. Besides, Japan enjoys largely a bipartisan acceptability in otherwise strongly polarized political culture in Bangladesh.

Second critical issue is the idea of the "Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt" (BIG-B) launched by Japan. The Government of Japan has been promoting the concept of BIG-B as a program for Bangladesh to help achieve economic development of both countries arguing that it would help bring prosperity of the two nations. To the Abe Government BIG-B can be the "centrepiece" of Japanese cooperation in Bangladesh. Improvement of infrastructure for industrial development, the creation of better environment for investments and the promotion of regional connectivity were the three dimensions of BIG-B. In elaborating the idea further, the Japanese Ambassador in Bangladesh, Shiro Sadoshima argues that Japan has a grand design of combining the two oceanic regions - Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean - for more geo-political space to boost its economy. The largest Bay in the world, Bay of Bengal forms the north-eastern part of the Indian Ocean. Bangladesh is located in the north of this Bay.

The idea of BIG-B brings to the center stage other ideas such as China supported 'Silk Road' and Bangladesh supported 'blue economy' in the recent years. The idea of 'Maritime Silk-Road' recently

coined by the Chinese Premier and foreign policy makers is based on the historic “Silk-Road” of trade and cultural routes in Central, South and East Asia. Starting from Han Dynasty about 200 BC, China had played a key role to maintain these important and strategic trade and cultural routes, which connected countries from Asia, Middle East and Europe.

Specifically, China is pursuing Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) cooperation in its bid to revive the ancient silk-road. On the other hand, Bangladesh organized an international workshop on blue economy on 1-2 September 2014 in Dhaka. Bangladesh hosted this workshop for the first time bringing together more than 30 experts and representatives of 20 countries. About the vision of blue economy Bangladesh Foreign Minister states that it must be inclusive and people-centric. Amid new ideas of cooperation frameworks Abe’s visit to Dhaka leaves a strong imprint of partnership between the two unequal, but long trusted friendly nations.

Girl Summit Diplomacy and Bangladesh-UK Relations

18 August 2014

The first ever Girl Summit took place on 22 July 2014 in London, UK. The event was co-hosted by the government of UK and the UNICEF, and the summit was dedicated to confronting child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) and female genital mutilation (FGM) in the UK and across the world. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, attended the summit on a special invitation from her British counterpart, David Cameron, and Anthony Lake, Executive Director, UNICEF. The UNICEF’s figures indicate that around one in three married women globally – aged between 20 and 24 – were child brides, with the highest rates of child marriage found in South Asia – a region where nearly half the girls are married before they turn 18. The summit also focused on FGM, a procedure that can trigger horrific long term implications for girls’ health, child-bearing prospects, and psychological states. It is estimated that 125 million women and girls worldwide have suffered FGM, with 66,000 in England and Wales alone.

The Girl Summit was a truly significant event to mobilise global public opinion and resources in combating the two major social evils against girl children around the world. The event drew together some 700 participants – ranging from heads of state, NGOs, and victims – who represented 60 countries. Speakers at the Summit included the Prime Minister of UK, David Cameron; the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina; the Deputy Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Demeke Mekonnen; the first lady of Burkina Faso, Chantal Compaoré; activist Malala Yousafzai; and numerous ministers of health, social affairs and international development, as well as civil society advocates and campaigners. Cameron made a strong case for ending these evil practices in the society. He described FGM and CEFM as a violation of girls’ rights and “preventable evil” that calls for a “global movement.” The charter adopted at the Summit affirms that “these practices violate the fundamental rights of all girls and women to live free from violence and discrimination” and sets out ten actions to end them, ranging from legislation and policies to data, research and investment in education and health.

Bangladesh’s participation in the Summit has been particularly significant, considering the fact that Hasina was the only head of the government other than that of the host nation who was present at the event. She led a 57-member high powered delegation to the UK on this occasion. Hasina reported on a full set of measures, from strong legislation, free textbooks, stipends for girls through secondary school and beyond and community based innovations to fight early marriage. Bangladesh has widely been praised by the international community for its achievements in improving the conditions of women and children despite being a least developed country. Over the past two decades, Bangladesh has significantly increased the primary school enrolment of girls to 95%. More girls than boys complete primary education in the country now. The country has introduced employment opportunities for high-school girl graduates whereby 60% of our primary school teachers are now young girls – giving them a choice of livelihood.

However, one may raise the question as to whether such a high profile visit by Bangladesh Prime Minister was executed merely to attend the Girl Summit or to use the occasion for diplomatic gains for the government suffering strong criticism from the West following the 5th January 2014 elections in Bangladesh. The UK is one of the front line EU members expressing disappointment over the process and

the conduct of the last general elections and hence propagating dialogue for holding new elections – which is always a matter of embarrassment for the incumbent government. The British minister of State for International Development, Alan Duncan, during a visit, once termed the January 5 general elections in Bangladesh as ‘unusual’ but ‘legitimate’. The Girl Summit has created another occasion for the Bangladeshi prime minister to meet her British counterpart and to reach out the British political elite to embolden the image of her government. The bilateral meeting with David Cameron was a big success for the Sheikh Hasina, given the distance created with the Western countries earlier this year.

The number of delegates and the range of meetings the Bangladeshi prime minister took part in clearly reflect that Sheikh Hasina made full use of her visit for diplomatic gains. More significantly, it was the Hasina’ first visit to any Western country after the 2014 elections. It also came against the backdrop of her recent back-to-back successful visits to China and Japan. While discussing bilateral relations, David Cameron said, “We want to look at the future and continue working as a development partner.” Upon her return from the UK, Hasina emphasised the Bangladesh-UK bilateral relations to explain the positive outcomes of her participation in the Girl Summit. Interestingly enough, the Bangladeshi prime minister highlighted her government’s legitimacy to the UK government in her post-London visit press conference in Dhaka, making it a major gain from Girl Summit diplomacy.

India-Bangladesh: After Sushma Swaraj’s Visit

21 July 2014

Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj made an official visit to Bangladesh as her maiden standalone overseas tour from 25 to 27 June, 2014 – which was termed by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) as “extremely fruitful and satisfying.” The spokesperson of the MEA added that Swaraj was returning with an understanding that “it is an excellent beginning in addressing each others’ concerns and work together with the spirit of good neighbourliness.” It was one of the rare comprehensive visits by any Indian External Affairs Minister to Bangladesh.

There was an extraordinary effort to reach out to the people of Bangladesh. Swaraj held a series of meetings with the top leadership in Bangladesh including the President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the Leader of the Opposition, Raushan Ershad, and the former leader of the opposition and the President of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Khaleda Zia, and held delegation-level talks with her Bangladeshi counterpart A. H. Mahmud Ali. Her meeting with Khaleda Zia has been a notable event considering the troubled nature of domestic politics in Bangladesh.

Despite her high profile official meetings and engagement, what has become extremely significant during her visit was her speech to the civil society audience organised by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS). It drew attention of the elite across the sections of society in Bangladesh. She was able to communicate with the people about the new Indian government’s view on Bangladesh. The people of Bangladesh have enormous interests about the perspectives and strategies of the new Indian government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Quite rightly so the current Bangladesh government has worked with India’s Dr. Manmohan Singh administration in its last term when both Dhaka and New Delhi went an extra mile to reduce gaps and embark upon new and bold initiatives to strengthen bilateral relations. The people of Bangladesh want to see a smooth journey to stronger ties between the two nations based on the existing friendly relations.

Political circles in Bangladesh are sharply divided on the impact of Sushma Swaraj’s visit on domestic politics of the country. Experts and activists leaning towards the opposition parties termed the visit as a paradigm shift in India’s role in the matrix of political forces in Bangladesh. One analyst argued that the visit outlined the parameters within which the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government will conduct bilateral relations with Bangladesh. It is marked by a major step away from the way the Congress did. He further adds that New Delhi will not play any favorites and relations will be between country-to-country and government-to-government.

Conversely, pro-government elites claim that the visit was hugely positive for the current government. The emphasis on government-to-government relations or focus on building strong institutions and promoting a culture of tolerance, inclusion and respect for differences strengthen the ruling political regime's positions. More importantly, in the realm of foreign policy it is not the priority of any government to influence domestic politics for the sake of domestic politics. Instead, it is national interests that dictate terms. Therefore, the visit rightly prioritised on the issue of boosting bilateral ties where both the government and the opposition have stakes.

Swaraj's speech on "India-Bangladesh Relations: A Framework for Cooperation" at the BISS gathering has been widely discussed in Bangladesh's civil society. In her speech, Swaraj emphasised on comprehensive and equitable partnership, mutually beneficial relations, youth development and youth-led development, people-to-people to contact, and inter-linkages to move forward in South Asia. She referred to the fact that both India and Bangladesh shed blood together in 1971 and she did not forget to mention Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the architect of Bangladesh. The Minister enthralled the audience in Dhaka as she spoke, "I come to Bangladesh with a message of friendship and goodwill from the newly elected Government in India. I come with the goal of enhancing our relationship and mutual understanding. I come with the belief that the potential of our partnership is vast. I come with the faith that the people of both our countries desire and deserve closer relations and concrete results.... Our desire is that India and Bangladesh should flourish together as two equal partners. We share not just our past but also our future."

It is less than a month since Swaraj visited Bangladesh. Meanwhile, the two nations witnessed another game changing moment in their bilateral relations when a verdict from the UN's Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) based in The Hague was delivered on 7 July 2014. The verdict resolved the long standing maritime dispute between Dhaka and New Delhi. The sharing of the disputed maritime region has been the essence of the verdict which both the nations have already identified as a new step towards building strong partnership between the two countries. However, a section of people in Bangladesh have been out to malign the verdict by raising the issue of the South Talpatti Island. They argue that Bangladesh has lost its claim on this historic island that was quickly dismissed by the maritime law experts in the country. Following Swaraj's visit, the PCA verdict on maritime boundary dispute is another milestone in consolidating Bangladesh-India bilateral relations.

Bangladesh: A New Thrust towards East Asia

16 June 2014

The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina's back-to-back visits to Japan and China provide a diplomatic bonanza to the government bedeviled by legitimacy crisis at home and abroad following the 5 January general elections this year. Hasina took the opportunity to silence her critics by making substantive gains in bilateral relations with the two East Asian countries. Japan is generally known as a committed development partner of South Asian countries – as reflected in volumes of official development assistance (ODA) pumped into the region every year. Japanese investment and bilateral trade volume between Tokyo and Dhaka have been seen a rise, especially over the past decade. Japan has remained the largest bilateral donor to Bangladesh for the past fifteen years. Both countries have developed a strong development partnership with growing activity by Japanese investors in Bangladesh.

The 21 point Japan-Bangladesh Comprehensive Partnership signed by the respective prime ministers during Hasina's May 2014 visit is a demonstration of strong commitment to engage Japan more substantively in Bangladesh's development process. In the past seven years, the number of Japanese companies operating in Bangladesh has nearly tripled – from 61 in 2007 to 176 in 2013; and the total grants and aid from Japan stood at \$11 billion in 2013. Japan's strategic intention was to combine two oceanic regions – the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean – for what the Japanese ambassador in Dhaka called a larger space for Japan's economic activities.

He added that it looks like a "butterfly" in which Bangladesh and Myanmar occupies the "lynchpin position" to connect these oceanic regions. Apart from appreciating the strategic importance of

Bangladesh, Tokyo would also be happy to receive Dhaka's support in its bid for a permanent seat at the UNSC – and also to the issue of the abduction of Japanese nationals by North Korea. Recently, the Bangladeshi government recognised a number of foreign friends, including a few Japanese, for their contribution during the Bangladesh Liberation War.

As a result, the prime minister's Japan visit has contributed to an agreement on a range of specific projects vis-à-vis, inter alia, the construction of Ganges Barrage, a multi-modal tunnel under Jamuna River, a dedicated Railway Bridge over Jamuna River, a multi-modal Dhaka Eastern Bypass, and the ecological restoration of four rivers around Dhaka. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Japan External Trade Organization and the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority that reserves important facilities in 5 EPZs in Bangladesh for Japanese investors. Japan has also committed its support for capacity building in nuclear safety and security. In an unprecedented gesture, Japan committed an ODA of \$6 billion over the next five years that is crucial for infrastructure development in Bangladesh.

In a rare show of diplomatic moves, Hasina made a six-day official visit to China in early June with a 70-member business delegation immediately after she visited Japan. With these back to back visits, Hasina scored high points in diplomatic maneuvering both for her new government and the state. The much discussed China visit resulted in five deals, including Chinese assistance in the construction of a power plant in Patuakhali and building a multi-lane road tunnel under the Karnaphuli River. Chinese President Xi Jinping described Bangladesh as an important country along the maritime Silk Road project that he has been championing, and which envisages enhancing connectivities, building ports and free trade zones, and boosting trade with littoral countries in the Indian Ocean region and in Southeast Asia. China made it clear that it attaches great importance to the Beijing-Dhaka relationship and regards Bangladesh as an important development partner and cooperative partner in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region.

Bangladesh is an important country along the Maritime Silk Road for China, and Beijing welcomes Dhaka's participation in the development of the cooperation initiatives of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The issue of constructing the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor also garnered the interest of both leaders as part of efforts towards enhancing connectivity between China and eastern South Asia. However, the absence of any deal on construction of the Sonadia deep sea port was conspicuous. The diplomatic circles in both countries had widely expected a deal on this mega project. As revealed by Bangladesh's State Minister of Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, "Bangladesh has decided to take time to pick the best offer over the construction of a deep seaport at Sonadia in Cox's Bazar as a number of countries have shown interest in the lucrative mega project."

High level visits often turn out ceremonial and declaratory in substance. But these two visits of Bangladesh's prime minister have been a diplomatic breakthrough for Dhaka in cementing its foreign policy thrust towards the east. The diplomatic overtures by Japan and China have emboldened the Hasina government in Bangladesh to strengthen her position domestically and internationally. Although Japan and China are traditional friends of Bangladesh, there has always been a gap in their economic engagement, particularly in the context of Bangladesh's growing economic and social performance. The outcomes of the recent visits might lead to reduction in the gap, especially amid the new matrix of external roles in Dhaka's domestic politics.

Bangladesh-US: Towards New Engagements?

19 May 2014

The third round of the 2014 Bangladesh-US security dialogue was held in Dhaka on 22 April. It focused on issues such as peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, disaster-management, maritime security and regional security. The security dialogue is part of a larger dialogue process that encompasses defence-to-defence dialogue; military-to-military dialogue; security dialogue; and partnership dialogue between Dhaka and Washington. This security dialogue has been taking place annually since 2012.

The first two-day meeting to bolster bilateral and regional cooperation between the two countries under the Joint Declaration of the Bangladesh-US Partnership Dialogue took place in Washington, in September 2012. On the economic front, the first meeting of Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum Agreement (TICFA) between Bangladesh and the US was held in April 2014. The TICFA seeks to further bolster the annual bilateral trade – that exceeded \$6 billion in 2013 – between the Dhaka and Washington.

Amid conflicting positions of Bangladesh and the US over several domestic, bilateral and global issues, one may interpret these meetings as puzzling developments. In the post-election period, at the bilateral level, both the countries have continued with old discords on issues such as labour rights, the Yunus factor, the duty-free, quota-free market access, and the suspension of Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) facilities to Bangladesh, among others. From a Bangladeshi perspective, the US' stance on domestic political changes in the former is a major irritant to smooth bilateral relations. The US' insistence on holding credible and inclusive general elections in Bangladesh afresh – after the January 2014 elections – has created a diplomatic challenge for the incumbent Sheikh Hasina government. Globally, the Kosovo and the Crimea questions clearly demonstrate Bangladesh's different foreign policy priorities.

However, despite the continuing discord, Bangladesh and the US have remained engaged – as demonstrated via the dialogue process and the maiden meeting of TICFA. A strong view prevails in the policy community that these meetings will put US –Bangladesh relations on the path to recovery. Unlike in the past, the US has made it clear that preventing the spread of global terrorism and strategic understanding are its foremost agendas vis-à-vis Bangladesh. Both countries have developed three structured fora for mutual engagement. They are: the US-Bangladesh Dialogue on Security Issues; the Bangladesh-US Partnership Dialogue; and the US–Bangladesh TICFA. The US recognises that Bangladesh has a vital role in ensuring security and stability regionally and globally.

As the head of the US delegation to the Security Dialogue, Tom Kelly, observes, “A strong bilateral partnership and improved defense ties between Bangladesh and the United States are in both of our interests.... In a broader perspective US values Bangladesh's geographical location. It sees an important role for Bangladesh in the overall security context of the Middle East, and Indian-Pacific-Oceans region. This is why US wants Bangladesh by its side in its strategic pursuits.” Thus, for the US, geostrategic developments in the South Asian and the Asia Pacific regions have accorded Bangladesh a degree of importance. This is also linked to the shift of the 2010 US defence strategy, that the US cannot go solo, and in its attempt to address primary security issues, countries like Bangladesh matter.

Interestingly, Bangladesh appeared to be shy of expressing much optimism and enthusiasm, specifically regarding the outcomes of the meetings, and on bilateral ties in general. The head of the Bangladesh delegation mentioned that the dialogue was “very fruitful” and appreciated the US for the institutionalisation of the process of talks for intensive bilateral cooperation. The apparent lack of buoyant attitude on Bangladesh's part reflects frustration about the US for its continuing emphasis on holding fresh elections in Bangladesh. It is also a reflection of Washington's denial of the GSP facilities and duty free-quota free access. However, in reality Bangladesh shows a degree of pragmatism while dealing with the US in the current context. The benefits of Bangladesh-US bilateral ties – from trade to investment, and from culture to development – are substantive for both the nations.

Although the rules of engagement for Dhaka and Washington have been crafted in a new regional environment in South Asia, the issue of the security dialogue may generate disquiet among regional powers such as China and India. Simultaneously, the US may also find it little troubling when Bangladesh joined the naval exercise with China along with India and Pakistan. In April 2014, ships from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India reached the Chinese port of Qingdao to partake in a rare naval exercise. On the Sino-Bangladesh naval cooperation, Tom Kelly asserts that the US fully respects Bangladesh's sovereign right to establish cooperation with any other country. Similarly, the Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Pankaj Saran, maintains that “It is up to you [Bangladesh] to choose a strategic partner. India has nothing to say in the matter.”

The first TICFA meeting may vindicate the critics that the US would use the platform to create a new regime for protecting its economic interests in Bangladesh, thereby undermining the latter's development needs. Bangladesh's opposition to form a women's economic empowerment committee and a labour affairs committee in the first Meeting is an example. The TICFA and/or the Security Dialogue may open new avenues of bilateral talks, but Dhaka and Washington need to deal with major issues of mutual discord. Under the Westphalian order, attempts to use domestic politics as a diplomatic instrument may undermine gains of bilateral cooperation between the two nations.

India-Bangladesh: Enhancing Ties through a 'Power Corridor'

21 April 2014

The issue of a 'power corridor' has sparked a new debate in Bangladesh-India bilateral relations. Bangladesh has agreed in principle to provide India a 'power corridor' to help its neighbour link its north eastern and north western parts with electricity transmission lines passing through Bangladeshi territory. Bangladesh and India reached agreements on this issue during the seventh meeting of the Joint Steering Committee on Power Sector Cooperation between the two countries. It is expected that India would transmit around 6000 MW of hydro-electricity from Arunachal Pradesh to Bihar.

This is the third concrete step between the two nations to strengthen energy cooperation since the Awami League-led Grand Alliance government came to power in January in 2009 in its last term. The first inter-country power grid in South Asia was commissioned in October 2013 between Baharampur (India) and Bheramara (Bangladesh) to facilitate the transmission of 500 MW electricity from India to power-deficit Bangladesh. The second initiative came in 2013 when under a joint venture, Bangladesh and India set up a 1320 MW coal-fired power plant at Rampal Upazila in Bagerhat district. The Rampal project was opposed by different sections in Bangladesh particularly the environmental activists who argued that the project would inflict permanent damage to the forests of Sundarbans in the nearby area.

Now with the announcement of a 'power corridor', Bangladesh and India have taken the issue of bilateral energy cooperation to a new level. Though it will take time to implement the project, the rationale behind the decision has been questioned in different circles. Why has Bangladesh agreed to sign this agreement? There has not been any official statement from the government about the need for signing the agreement. The Bangladeshi Power Secretary mentioned that the electricity transmission is a part of the government's plan of promoting regional connectivity. Besides, as a proposed concrete gain for Bangladesh, India has agreed to provide 30 MW of additional electricity to ensure the import of 500 MW of electricity from India – currently, Bangladesh is able to get only 470 MW due to transmission losses under the current contract. India has also agreed to provide 100 MW of electricity to Bangladesh from Paltana power project in Tripura. It may be mentioned that Bangladesh facilitated the transportation of heavy equipment to build the Paltana plant. A 450 metre-long embankment-cum-road across the Titas River was erected to dispatch over-dimensional cargo (ODC) carrying heavy equipment to Paltana power station in Tripura from Kolkata via Brahmanbaria. It vertically cut across the river, navigation through the point snapped and a serious decline in the river flow caused silting. This caused a huge hue and cry in Bangladesh leading the matter to the apex court of Bangladesh.

One can certainly belittle Bangladeshi gains from the proposed power corridor project by comparing them to the total volume of transmission of electricity through the corridor. It is reported that the network will be able to transmit some 6,000-7,000 MW of electricity to India with huge potential for the future. As the Indian Power Secretary asserts, "Arunachal Pradesh alone has a 50,000 MW of hydroelectricity potential." Considering the growing demand for electricity India needs to tap the unexplored natural resources of its Northeast. Bangladesh has the potential to offer multiple electricity corridors for transmission. It is highly unlikely that the government of Bangladesh would be able to justify its stance on the deal with the possibility of buying only 130 MW of electricity, which may jeopardise the entire project.

Predictably, the opposition political parties particularly the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamat-e-Islami criticised the initiative. In a senior BNP leader's words, "The government's actions show

that it is incapable of negotiating with India to protect the interests of the country.” He demanded that the basis of the agreement be made public. Another senior leader of BNP argued that India would deploy its army in Bangladesh in the name of guarding its power corridor. The acting Secretary General of Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami called upon the government to reassess its decision. The BNP and its 19-party alliance have staged protests against the decision and termed it a ‘self-suicidal move’. There is a mixed reaction in civil society. Some argue that the idea suffers from the lack of India’s political will to resolve the outstanding bilateral disputes with Bangladesh, notably water and border conflicts. It touches upon the bilateral trust deficit despite a significant improvement in relations under the Hasina regime in Bangladesh and Dr Manmohan Singh’s government in India.

Despite the reservations of the opposition political parties and flaws in the deal, the issue of a ‘power corridor’ opens up a new vista of cooperation between Bangladesh and India. The possibility of sub-regional energy cooperation could also become a reality given that a joint meeting between India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan would be held in New Delhi in May 2014. It can be a genuine step towards regional connectivity in the power sector. It also clearly demonstrates that India’s Look East Policy in its true sense would cause fault-lines with adverse consequences on the bilateral and regional fronts without having Bangladesh on board.

East Meets West: Bangladesh and the BIMSTEC Summit

17 March 2014

The third Summit of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), held in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw from 3-4 March ended with the call to achieve collective prosperity for the region. BIMSTEC was expanded into a new transnational structure of cooperation following the inclusion of Nepal and Bhutan in 2004. It now encompasses states from both South and Southeast Asia, with over 22 per cent of the world population and a collective GDP of nearly \$2 trillion.

The group commands enormous geopolitical and geoeconomic significance for regional and extra-regional powers. Although the Summit was held belatedly, the organization demands attention owing to its overwhelming thrust on trade, energy and agriculture. Notably, it offers an opportunity for inter-regional cooperation as a vital ingredient of new regionalism in the age of globalisation.

The Summit was particularly significant to Bangladesh and the current Government for both bilateral and multilateral tracks of diplomacy. As one of the founding members of the group, Bangladesh has always supported the BIMSTEC. This year’s summit was the first occasion where the recently re-elected government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina marked a strong diplomatic presence. Hasina led a 54-member delegation to the Summit.

On the multilateral front, Bangladesh actively participated in the BIMSTEC proceedings to advance the goal of regional development, peace and stability. During this Summit, the Bangladeshi Prime Minister strongly pushed for advancement on issues such as regional security, prosperity and counter-terrorism. Bangladesh identified poverty as the “main and common enemy” of the region and stressed the need for inter-state connectivity for the development of the people of the region.

Another major achievement was the decision to establish the permanent secretariat of BIMSTEC in Bangladesh, with all member-countries sharing costs – and India will be the biggest contributor, footing 32 per cent of the costs. Although the decision to establish the secretariat in Dhaka was taken in January 2011, the process was put in place this year, and according to the 14th ministerial meeting, the permanent secretariat would start functioning in Dhaka from May 2014.

On the bilateral front, the Summit had been an occasion of intensive diplomatic efforts to strengthen ties with Myanmar and India. The Bangladeshi prime minister met the heads of governments of Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan. It was a pleasant occasion for Sheikh Hasina to meet Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Bangladesh and India have come a long way over the past five years, in improving and then

strengthening bilateral ties. Both prime ministers met twice at summit level meetings in their respective countries resulting in them developing a strong mutual understanding.

Sheikh Hasina and Manmohan Singh met on the sidelines of this year's BIMSTEC Summit and the two prime ministers discussed issues of bilateral interests including cooperation in the areas of the power sector, trade, investment, and the implementation of the previously agreed decisions between the two countries. Both the leaders held discussions in an environment of fraternity and termed their bilateral relations as a "tested friendship."

However, despite the camaraderie, it was a huge disappointment for Bangladesh, for the country could not ensure progress on the two key agreements – the Land Boundary Agreement and the Teesta Water Sharing Agreement. Sheikh Hasina raised these issues in her talks with the high-powered Indian delegation and emphasised on more balanced and equitable bilateral relations. Bangladesh also made a much-needed and genuine observation that Bangladesh, India, Bhutan and Nepal could resolve their domestic electricity demands via joint endeavours by constructing hydropower plants. Though the current Indian government is at the end of its term, these issues remain critical for a genuine bilateral friendship.

Furthermore, India and Bangladesh presented their respective 'look east policies' to achieve goals of mutual interest. Bangladesh demonstrated substantive engagement with the Myanmar leadership at this Summit. Sheikh Hasina met the President of Myanmar, Thein Sein, the Speaker of the Parliament of Myanmar, Thura U Shwe Mann, and the Chair of the National League for Democracy and Member of the Parliament, Aung Saan Suu Kyi, on the sidelines. The two leaders identified the importance of connectivity via land, water and air to pave way for increased trade and investment and people-to-people contacts. President Thein Sein offered the use of Myanmar's port facilities to Bangladesh, if required. He apprised Sheikh Hasina of her government's initiative of constructing a seaport in Sittwe and Kyakpyu.

At present, the Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral trade stands at \$100 million, and both the nations hope to reach a \$500 million mark by introducing the shipping line. The Bangladesh-Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and Industry predicts that the trade volume between the two neighbors may reach \$1 billion by 2020.

Both nations emphasised road connectivity as a key element. Myanmar proposed that Bangladesh could become a partner of an Indian initiative of connecting, Thailand and Myanmar by establishing road connectivity. Sheikh Hasina also added that the Bangladesh-Myanmar-Kunming road could be critical for improving road connectivity. Bangladesh raised the Rohingya refugee issue, which has remained unsettled for nearly three decades. The absence of any concrete promise or effort from Myanmar to repatriate the Rohingya people not only causes endless sufferings to them, but also creates irritants for bilateral ties. Predictably, both sides agreed to resolve the Rohingya problem through peaceful and amicable talks between the two countries.

The meeting with Aung Saan Suu Kyi was crucial in view of the ongoing democratisation process in Myanmar, for Suu Kyi will have a major stake in the future leadership of the new Myanmar.

The BIMSTEC summit offered a real opportunity to combine the 'look east' and 'look west' policies of South Asian and Southeast Asian countries in a spirit of new regionalism. In all respects, Bangladesh is well placed to advance this process through bilateral and multilateral initiatives. The country is a natural partner for any initiative in the direction of deepening cooperation on trade, energy and connectivity. Ironically, bilateral irritants pose roadblocks to these much-needed multilateral initiatives at sub-regional and inter-regional levels. At the BIMSTEC level, the member nations are in advantageous positions to resolve bilateral disputes efficiently and amicably.

The establishment of the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka will contribute in bringing the East and the West together for mutual benefit in the region.

Bangladesh: Domestic Politics and External Actors

17 February 2014

A new government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has started functioning in Bangladesh following the general elections held on 5 January 2014. The new cabinet has received positive responses from different groups in Bangladesh for inducting veteran politicians. As many as 30 members of the outgoing cabinet were dropped, allegedly for their linkages with corruption or poor performance. The first session of the 10th National Parliament was called on 29 January 2014 in a new political environment. The parliamentary democracy of Bangladesh has entered its third phase. In the first phase, immediately after the Liberation War in 1971 Bangladesh adopted the Westminster system of government. The first Constitution, known as the 1972 Constitution, is still lauded by the centre, centre left, centre right and left elements of Bangladeshi politics. In 1975, the country was brought under the the presidential form of government which lasted until the fall of the Ershad regime on 6 December 1990.

The twelfth Amendment to the Constitution on 6 August 1991 re-introduced the parliamentary form of government in Bangladesh. The introduction of the Caretaker Government system through the 13th Amendment in 1996 added a new dimension to parliamentary democracy in Bangladesh. After more than two decades, the parliamentary system witnessed a new phase marked by the absence of the Caretaker Government system, and more importantly, absence of a major political party, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), in the Parliament. BNP ruled the country for more than 14 years. Now the main opposition party in the 10th Parliament is the Ershad-led Jatiya Party. Understandably, BNP with its allies will remain engaged in street politics while in the parliament the government will face its former ally as the main opposition party.

This is a script not written by any pundit or by any political astronomer - rather it is the inevitable outcome of the high stakes zero-sum-game in in Bangladeshi politics. The main players are obviously the two main alliances - the BNP led 18-party (now 19- party) alliance and the Awami League-led grand alliance. The people continue to be disillusioned and disappointed. The political process moved in its own course, paving the way for formal democracy to continue as the last resort for a stable and peaceful society. The constitution has been upheld. Bangladesh with its high performing economy, growing middle class and promising social development cannot remain hostage to confrontational and violent politics. It is an abiding reality that gives a strong message to political actors in the country and their friends and well-wishers at home and abroad.

A major feature of post-poll Bangladeshi politics has been the role of external powers. Unquestionably, these external powers are friends and development partners of Bangladesh. It is a common trend today that development partners, known as the diplomatic community, tend to get involved in domestic politics in the developing world. In South Asia, Nepal, Maldives, and Pakistan have faced this in different degrees. Bangladesh is no exception. It is generally perceived that parties in opposition often invite active involvement of the diplomatic community in domestic politics, making it part of their anti-government movement. While the diplomatic community could not resolve any single violent political dispute between the two major political parties in Bangladesh, there is no sign of their diminishing role. In 2013, it reached in its peak when the UN-supported Taranco mission made several attempts to strike a deal between the warring political parties.

This time, surprisingly, almost all major development partners attempted to get involved in the unfolding political situation in Bangladesh. The US, EU, India, the UN, China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Canada, and Australia all played a role. Of course, some were more visible than others. What is interesting is their common spirit - one of idealism for holding credible and inclusive elections. No doubt, every state has their national interest to serve in the foreign policy arena. Diplomats from all these countries and groups are to defend their national interests, and they have been doing so. Yet, it appears that many of these external players were guided by ideals rather than the reality in Bangladesh. The diplomatic community was solely concerned with the electoral process without giving much consideration to the evolving political dynamics in Bangladesh.

However, in the post poll context, the same actors have been demonstrating a better understanding of domestic politics in Bangladesh. Issues of war crimes trials, rise of political violence, militancy, threat of fundamentalist politics, and vulnerability of minority communities to vested quarters matter for democracy and governance in Bangladesh. They matter seriously against the backdrop of massive destruction and heinous attacks on the lives and properties of common people as seen before and after the polls. The post-poll European Parliament resolution (16 January 2014), the Hearing on Bangladesh by the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (11 February 2014), and statements of several development partners of Bangladesh show a pragmatic view of the political situation in Bangladesh. Any misperception or subjective view of Bangladeshi politics would not be of any help to the 160 million people of Bangladesh nor democracy in the country.

Bangladesh Post Elections 2014: Redefining Domestic Politics?

16 January 2014

The 10th Parliamentary elections were held in Bangladesh on 5 January 2014 against the backdrop of the opposition alliance's boycott and blockade programme, amidst a whirl of apprehensions, tension and violence. The boycott of the major opposition party, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its allies, particularly Jamaat-e-Islami, has emerged as the key determinant of election outcomes and its aftermath.

Three views are particularly discernible about this boycott. According to one view, this boycott was self-imposed and was part of a larger strategic move by the opposition parties. Riding on popular support and ascendancy of hard-line leadership in parties, they took an unyielding stance on elections. Another view is that it was inevitable due to the lack of a conducive environment for participation since the caretaker government (CTG) system was scrapped by the 15th amendment of the Constitution of Bangladesh. They believe that no elections could be acceptable to them without CTG. The third view is focused on the process of holding elections under the current system, but with a new poll-time administration and a bigger and more substantive role of the Election Commission. Of course, this has to be based on political settlement by the two major political parties – the Awami League (AL) and BNP. The United Nations-brokered initiative led by Oscar Fernandez Taranco emphasised the third view to resolve the impasse. Ironically, no political settlement was reached. Both the ruling and opposition alliances opted for absolute gains.

Having no option as per the constitutional provision as well as political 'common sense', the government and the Election Commission organised the elections. In fact, the unique political environment in the country has produced an unprecedented election both in its process and outcome. A total number of 153 members of Parliament were elected uncontested and the remaining 147 were up for voting. With a poor voter turnout (40 per cent by the Election Commission) by Bangladesh standards (87 per cent in the December 2008 elections), the ruling Awami League bagged 232 seats. The Jatiya Party, made up of former military dictator Ershad, won 33 seats, becoming the second largest party in Parliament. Members of Parliament have already sworn in and a new Cabinet has been formed with Sheikh Hasina as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. Despite some reservations, the international community has recognised the government. The US and EU are continuing their diplomatic parleys to bring all political parties to a dialogue, and are working on the possibility of a mid-term election.

Although the elections have been questioned by various quarters in Bangladesh and beyond due to non-participation of the main opposition parties, a critical aspect of this election is the unleashing of widespread violence before, during, and after the polls. Since the early 1990s Bangladesh witnessed four general elections held under a caretaker (CTG) system. Interestingly, all defeated political parties and alliances seriously questioned the credibility of these elections too. A short-lived election was held in February 1996 under the party-run administration which lasted for about forty five days. In 2014, for the second time, an election was held under a non-caretaker government (officially known as an all-party government) in the post-mass upsurge era. Unlike the past, the main opposition party was invited to join the poll-time government, but it was rejected. It became clear at the end of 2011 that politics in Bangladesh was turning into a 'zero-sum-game' primarily on the question of 'election administration', which was changed by the ruling alliance with their brute majority in the national Parliament.

While the quality of the 10th Parliamentary elections has been questioned in terms of credibility, inclusivity and participation, domestic politics demands special mention to understand the elections and its outcome. Domestic politics in Bangladesh started to transform into a new and difficult shape when the ruling alliance announced the trial of war criminals. The International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) was set up in 2009 as a war crimes tribunal in Bangladesh to investigate and prosecute suspects for the genocide and crimes against humanity committed in 1971 by the Pakistani Army and their local collaborators, Razakars, Al-Badr and Al-Shams. The formation of ICT jolted the opposition camp. The second largest party in the opposition camp, Jamaat-e-Islam is directly linked with war crimes during the Liberation War in 1971. Top leaders of Jamaat have been charged with war crimes over the past four decades. The triggering incident was the verdict against a central leader of Jamaat, Moulana Delwar Hossain Sayedee. Following the verdict in February 2013, the Party unleashed massive violence throughout the country especially in their strongholds – mainly border districts.

Violence has become a political weapon of opposition politics, spearheaded by the war crimes-charged party. The subsequent Hefazat phenomenon has added impetus to this rising spree of political violence. The intermingling of extremist violence and the political movement led by the opposition alliance has emerged as the body blow to Bangladesh's nascent democracy. With capital punishment being awarded to one of the leading war criminals – Abdul Kader Mollah - politics in Bangladesh needs to be redefined and re-conceptualised. The 10th Parliamentary elections were held in the evolving parameters of Bangladeshi politics, where political stability and democratic governance have been traded with violence and extremism for absolute political gains.

Column: Indo-Pacific

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Indonesia's Pacific Identity: What Jakarta Must Do in West Papua

17 December 2014

The Indo-Pacific is a term gaining wider acceptance as a geopolitical reality. If any country has the advantage of being at the centre of this emerging identity, it is Indonesia. This vast archipelagic region strides the two oceans – Indian and the Pacific – lending credence to the idea of the confluence of the two oceans, which was critical to the formulation of this concept.

Over the past month, Indonesia has been making greater claims to its Pacific identity in order to meet the challenges in its easternmost province, West Papua.

One of the aspects of this new shift in its thinking is that Jakarta has begun to project itself as the rightful representative of the Melanesian population living within its boundaries. This position, which the Indonesian government is seeking to assert, is fraught with difficulties, especially since the Melanesian ethnic identity is clearly associated with the region of West Papua.

West Papua has been a highly debated issue in the Indonesian political history. West Papua forms the western part of the island of New Guinea, which, during the colonial period, was divided among three colonial powers. The Dutch expansion in the East Indies extended to this area that was initially called the Dutch New Guinea. The Indonesian nationalist movement was unable to wrest control of this region from the Dutch and till 1969, the region remained a contested area. When the Dutch granted independence to Indonesia, the region became known as Irian Barat (West Irian) and then Irian Jaya, before it was changed to the current West Papua. The eastern part of the island forms the independent nation-state of Papua New Guinea, which had been colonised by the Germans and the British.

Dutch attempts to quell the Indonesian freedom struggle led to the region being marked as a special region that was to be kept under Dutch influence. However, the leaders of the newly-independent state categorically supported the fact that the province was a critical part of the Indonesian state's territorial extent.

In the early 1960s there were minor skirmishes between the Dutch and the Indonesian armed forces in an effort to gain control of the region. In 1962, the region was placed under the UN as an administered territory and was officially transferred to Indonesia in 1963. This transfer mandated that a referendum would be held to allow the Papuans to decide their own destiny. In 1969, the Act of Free Choice was initiated using a consensus method of decision making in which 1054 elders of the Papuan community cast their vote to remain with Indonesia.

During the New Order period, from 1965-1998, the region witnessed several conflicts. Since 1969, separatist groups like the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM) or the Free Papua Movement rebelled against the Indonesian state. Added to this was the role of conglomerates like the Freeport McMoran Mines that have been involved in the exploitation of the region's resources. Till 1999, the level of central control was extremely high. The government actively encouraged demographic changes in the region through its policy of transmigration that altered the ethnic balance in the region in an attempt to dilute the separatist conflict. Following the country's transition to democracy, the implementation of the 2001 Special Autonomy Laws in the cases of Aceh and Papua have been welcome steps through which the government tried to address the issue of decentralisation and devolution of powers.

Furthermore, the law seeks to address granting a share of the natural resources and fiscal sharing in the region.

Since 2011, Indonesia has used its diplomacy to defend its claims of having the largest Melanesian population – 11 million – in the region. In fact, the country sought membership to the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) on the strength of this claim. There have been several critiques of this move, especially since it was seen as an effort to hijack the attention of other members of the MSG from the separatism demands in West Papua. In the 2013 summit of the MSG, a group supporting separatism – the West Papuan National Coalition for Liberation – was to be allowed observer status, but flurried diplomatic activity by the Indonesian government led to a dilution of the issue. While this meeting initially sought to support the West Papuans' right to self-determination, it was later reversed, especially in the January 2014 meeting where it was decided that the other members of the MSG would not interfere in Indonesia's internal affairs.

The recent electoral shift in Indonesia, which marks a critical phase of democratic consolidation, allows for the creation of a necessary space to address the issues that plague the West Papuan region. Indonesia's pitch as a home for the Melanesian ethnic community needs to be translated into action where special autonomy laws go further so as to allow separatist political groups to be part of the political space.

Modi in Myanmar: From 'Look East' to 'Act East'

17 November 2014

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to the Myanmar endorses that all is well with India's policy to the countries that lie to the east. Since he took office in May 2014, there were some views among observers that India's Look East Policy (LEP) was not receiving the merit it should. Much of this was centered on the debate as to why Myanmar, a close and significant neighbour was not invited to the swearing-in ceremony of the prime minister. However, given the fact that the invitation was extended to the South Asian countries, Myanmar technically did not fit into this category. Another view was that the invitation was extended only to full democracies, which would then explain why Pakistan was present, given that there is currently a democratic intermission in the country.

But Modi's three-day visit to Myanmar this month changed the perceptions and brought the ASEAN region back into the centre-stage with the focus shifting from the LEP to the Act East Policy (AEP). While this does not really signal a departure from the LEP, it does highlight a more nuanced position of acknowledging the need to 'act' or to 'get one's act together', to move ahead on the implementation of projects and proposals that have been initiated in principle but are lagging in practice. So the shift to the AEP should be viewed as an attempt to provide an impetus to the regional integration that India has with its eastern neighbours. The ASEAN countries have often expressed a lot of concern on the slow pace of reform in India. Added to this is the issues of the signing of several agreements that need to come into force to hasten the implementation. These are the critical areas that drive policy into the action-oriented phase.

The highlight of the visit was the focus given to the three C's: culture, commerce and connectivity. In this context, India's cultural ties with Southeast Asia are being considered as a significant one that will help push critical ties forward. The recent opening of the Nalanda University is an example of this dynamic. Furthermore, an emphasis on tourism too was made. Tourism is a vital component of relations and the industry needs to be revamped in order to make India a tourist destination for Southeast Asian visitors and vice versa. The Open Skies Agreement is therefore among the key areas to focus on, to provide any momentum to the tourism industry. At present, even direct flights from India to all ten Southeast Asian countries and vice versa are unavailable.

Complementary to boosting tourism, there is also a potential to integrate cities that can be linked as sibling cities. In this context, one of the options could be to link Bodhgaya, Lumbini and Yangon, Shwedagon Pagoda together as the Buddhist circuit. Another potential option would be the linking of cities like Jogjakarta, Siam Reap and Thanjavur together as potential tourist hubs. This would make a critical impact in terms of revitalising the tourism sector and would also act as a boost in bringing about greater people-to-people contact between the regions.

The second focus, on commerce, is already an area India has made considerable strides in; and that is expected to progress even further. Projecting a new economic environment in which India has embarked upon targeted attracting investments into the country under the banner of the Make in India slogan. Currently the India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement in (FTA) in goods has been operationalised, and the FTA in services and investments, though signed with all but one (the Philippines) country, is expected to be ratified by the respective countries' parliaments soon. This is one area where India has an advantage since, globally, it ranks 9th in the services sector.

As the move to integrate with the region is further enhanced through regionally driven initiatives like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), there is likelihood of widening linkages across the region. The RCEP links the ASEAN and its dialogue partners into a regional economic grouping that will be critical since it will bring the three Asian economic giants – China, Japan and India – together. The Chinese move to enhance regional integration via the Asian Infrastructural Investment Bank and the enhancement of the Maritime Silk Route to link the Indian and the Pacific Oceans into an economic chain are clearly moving the commercial side of the regional agreements forward.

Finally, on the issue of connectivity, there is an urgent need to move forward with the plans that have been in the pipeline. Projects such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway and the Imphal-Mandalay road are extremely important towards linking the region via land, and opening up the border areas to facilitate the easy movement of people and goods. While both Myanmar and India are focusing on the development of the border regions, these projects will act as vital catalysts to deliver on the proposed outcomes.

Over nearly a decade, the concept of the Indo-Pacific has been gaining ground as a term that gives credence to a strategic perspective rather than a well-defined geographic entity. When Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe spoke about the 'confluence of the two seas, where the Indian and Pacific Oceans are to be viewed as a single strategic maritime unit', it was based on the understanding of a geopolitical reality rather than a geographic one.

While there is a debate on the exact contours of the boundaries of the Indo-Pacific region, the common understanding is that it is a triangular region that connects the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. This region is identified as having Japan on its northern boundary, Australia forming the southeastern parts, and as India lying in the southwestern end. Much of Southeast Asia falls within the triangular boundaries of the Indo-Pacific, making the claim of its centrality to this region extremely significant.

Historically, there has been an understanding that Southeast Asia lies between two great civilisational worlds, India and China. Southeast Asian historian Reginald LeMay has described the region as the bamboo curtain that shifts with the changing cultural impacts of both India and China. While these two great civilisations influenced the region in the period prior to colonialism, even today, the involvement of major powers in the region is an issue that remains critical. For the regional countries, potentially, there are both risks and possibilities of greater integration.

Being in the center of the Indo-Pacific region creates stress for the ASEAN countries regarding the way they relate to major powers. The ASEAN has always looked at the involvement of major powers as a measure of the region's importance.

However, China's rise and the individual states' response to it alters this view, particularly at the bilateral level. Among the key issues in this context is the ongoing tensions in South China Sea (SCS). The logic of extending the Indo-Pacific to include the SCS and the East China Sea reiterates the importance of maintaining the freedom of navigation in the seas and also does not entitle any single nation to claim the waters as their own.

One of the advantages for the ASEAN countries is that all the current institutional mechanisms in the region are being driven by the ASEAN's processes. For this to be successful, the ASEAN needs to be united and cohesive and this itself is a challenge. Over the past two years, there have been attempts to address the question of reviving ASEAN unity, particularly after the polarisation of the organisation during the 2012 summit over the SCS dispute. Differences over the manner in which individual countries relate and respond to China's rise are pushing countries out of their comfort zones and is threatening the pillars of consensus and consultation that have been critical for the ASEAN. As a result, the focus on security issues in the region may not remain ASEAN-centric but is likely to get overshadowed by other factors. While the ASEAN may seek to maintain itself as the core of the Indo-Pacific, there are varying opinions on the manner in which the region's politico-security relations are being shaped, and it has been unable to provide the leadership for addressing some of the challenges that have emerged in the region.

Another area of significant gain for the ASEAN relates to its potential for economic growth. The economic success of the region, galvanised by China, Japan and India, remain critical factors that drive forward the centrality of this region. The ASEAN-initiated Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) will bring these three Asian giants under one common umbrella – that will be a significant step towards the economic integration of the region. The RCEP is a critical element in keeping the centrality of the focus on the ASEAN countries as it seeks to coordinate the ASEAN and its dialogue partners into a common economic platform that will address issues of tariff reductions and will move towards a wide-ranging regional Free Trade Area. The inclusion of South Korea, Australia and New Zealand increases the economic stakes in the Indo-Pacific further, making this one of the credible areas for further integration.

Finally, while the ASEAN may see itself as the link or corridor that connects the Indian and the Pacific oceans through a gamut of security-driven institutional norms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Defence Minister's Meeting Plus, it has to look beyond preliminary initiatives. While the initiatives seek to address the need for confidence-building, they fall short on the

areas of preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution. The current arrangements fall way below expectation on these areas. For the ASEAN, the centrality of its position can be more consolidated if it can address and strengthen these aspects of regional cooperation.

In fact Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa's proposal for an Indo-Pacific Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation would be a key step in this direction. His call to address the trust deficit and the need to promote a common sense of responsibility will need to be kept at the forefront of the ASEAN initiatives in the region.

Myanmar's Political Transition: Challenges of the 2015 Election

8 September 2014

Recent changes shaping Myanmar's transition process have highlighted the tenuousness of the Process in that country. Even as the upcoming 2015 election is set to be one of the most important indicators of this democratic transition, events transpiring in the country are worrisome. The gains made over the past four years – since the reform process began in 2011 – may be affected by several recent developments that have raised anxieties vis-à-vis the trajectory the transition will follow.

What are the indicators of changes shaping Myanmar? What is their significance in the context of the 2015 elections?

Since the 2010 elections and the announcement of the reform process in 2011, Myanmar has seen some credible changes that have altered the perceptions of both regional countries and the international community. The 2012 by-election – where the National League for Democracy (NLD) won 43 seats of 45 seats – was seen as a watershed moment in the Process and was heralded as a marker of the shift shaping Myanmar. However, the past few months have seen challenges to the reform process. They highlight the complex issues that need to be resolved to ensure the free-ness and fairness of the 2015 elections. They include constitutional reforms; greater freedom and space for the media; management of ethnic conflicts and communal violence; and viable political space for all minorities within Myanmar.

The Constitution Conundrum

First on the list is the debate for the amendment of Myanmar's 2008 Constitution – that has ensued for the past few years. This Constitution strongly endorses a role for the military through the implementation of the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) – that clearly visualises a role for the armed forces in two capacities:

- a. in the administration of the country via reservations in the parliament, and
- b. in the protection and preservation of the state

This allows for one fourth of the parliamentary seats to be reserved for the armed forces – and is seen as crucial to the stability of the state. Additionally, there exists a provision under Article 436 that currently demands over 75 per cent votes in the parliament to make amends to the Constitution – an impossible task given that 25 per cent of seats reserved for the military allows for the right to veto any move to reframe the charter. In July 2014, Aung San Suu Kyi led a signature campaign towards amending this caveat; it still shows no signs of progress.

The second debate relates directly to Suu Kyi's role with regards to Article 59 (f) that debars any person from the presidency on account of being related to foreigners. This directly impinges on Suu Kyi's chances to lead her party to victory in the 2015 elections. Given how the NLD does not have a second rung of leadership to carry on the party mantle in the absence of Suu Kyi's influential and charismatic guidance, this directly undermines the party's effectiveness in the upcoming elections.

The Tense State-Media Relationship

Furthermore, there exists the challenge of managing relations with the media. Last month there were reports that five journalists had been arrested and charged with violation of the 1923 Burma State Secrets Act for allegedly leaking sensitive information in the press. In another incident, journalists were booked under violation of the 1950 Emergency Act for allegedly giving unverified statements in the media. One visible indicator of change since the announcement of the reform process was the lifting of restrictions that had been imposed on the press. The aforementioned incidents have once again highlighted the tenuousness of State-media relations.

In the aftermath of these two incidents, President Thein Sein's resolve to meet with the Press Council was a sound move; and the media was asked to play the role of a stronger stakeholder in the reform process, and to show greater responsibility in its approach towards reporting of incidents that were sensitive.

Ethnic Conflict and Reconciliation Efforts

A key challenge facing the country is the nature of shape the peace process with ethnic minorities will take. Today, after nearly 60 years of armed conflict between the state and its ethnic nationalities, there is a move towards a National Ceasefire Agreement that is being coordinated by the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team. While individual ethnic groups have already signed ceasefire agreements, most of them are very fragile and have been unable to move towards any political resolution. More importantly, political negotiations that will follow the ceasefire will be the crux of any resolution. Bringing major changes to both sides' perceptions will be a greater challenge. Compounding the ethnic challenge is the levels of religious violence that have been evident in recent times. Although, lately, there has been some discussion on moving towards some form of a federal structure, the discourse is still vague and undefined.

The Thein Sein government has made credible headway on the roadmap to a democratic transition, in the past four years. The challenge to any transitional phase is more evident when it comes to issues of institutional change and consolidation. This will be a critical phase Naypyidaw will have to address in the coming days.

South China Sea: Intransigence Over Troubled Waters

18 August 2014

Last week, the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN and its dialogue partners gathered at Naypyidaw, Myanmar, for the 47th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting followed by the 21st ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and 4th East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers Meetings (EAS). One of the recurrent aspects of these meetings was the focus on the developments that have shaped the South China Sea (SCS) conflict. As divergent opinions arise and positions hard-line into deeper divides, the issues relating to the stand-off in the SCS are likely to emerge as the key challenge for the ASEAN countries, particularly in managing their relations and engagement with major powers in the region.

Almost from 2010, the SCS issue has been at the forefront of the challenges in the wider region. China's posturing in the region has been increasing with its belligerence at critical intervals to find where the weakest link in the region lies. From April 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident and the July 2012 situation when the ASEAN did not issue a joint communique, till the more recent tirade over China's installation of the HYSY981 oil rig close to Paracel islands, incidents in the SCS have been major red flags. Chinese posturing in the latest stand-off in May included the moving of its oil rig to what it sees as part of the nine-dash line territorial claims, while Vietnam identifies the Paracels as part of its own Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). With this latest altercation between China and Vietnam, this issue has emerged as the core of the ASEAN's challenges.

Much of this is related to the US re-engagement with the region. The US' interpretation on China's of China, particularly in light of its own close relations with the Philippines in particular and Southeast Asia in general, critically re-alter the dynamics of the SCS dispute. The US' emphasis on its national interest in preserving the rights of freedom of navigation is critical and has been gaining some support over the past

four years. Furthermore, smaller ASEAN countries are still trying to engage with regional major powers via different strategies that will allow them to maximise their own interests in the possible event of a stand-off among the bigger powers.

The US' recent call for a freeze on China's construction activities in terms of expansion via dredging clearly indicates the heightened tensions. China has been carrying out these activities particularly in the territories that fall under Beijing's sovereign claims. Over the course of last week's meetings, the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, proposed freezing of activities – like seizing uninhabited islands and dredging activities – that change the status quo in the SCS. This found support from the US' long standing ally in the region – the Philippines. Simultaneously, other ASEAN countries who are claimants to the dispute have also supported this initiative even though China has not agreed to these demands.

The ASEAN for its part seems to be divided on the question of the SCS issue where claimants such as the Philippines and Vietnam are looking for stronger support within multilateral bodies such as the EAS and the ARF, while other members such as Cambodia and Myanmar simply prefer to keep mum on the matter. Among other ASEAN countries, Indonesia has actively been advocating the need for a more concerted effort to address issues of rival claims to the territorial extents of the SCS. Indonesia supports the move towards a more binding Code of Conduct (CoC) which needs to be addressed, since the decision to have a non-binding Declaration on the Code of Conduct was made in November 2002.

China for its part has been clear that the move towards a resolution of the SCS issue will be dependent upon the claimant countries and not on the good offices of any outside power. This is clearly seen as targeting the 'intent' of the US. China's preference for the use of bilateral mechanisms that are in place, instead of using multilateral mechanisms to arrive at a solution, clearly tips its balance towards a more Sino-centric solution to the problem. Additionally, China has also agreed to negotiation via the ASEAN to effectively resolve the issue, which could indicate its preference for keeping the US outside this debate.

Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's assertions on the need to resolve the matter through the use of international arbitration is critical for the member countries of the ASEAN. The relevance of endorsing a solution that abides by the UNCLOS will critically impact the dispute. China and the US' varying interpretations on the UNCLOS will have deeper implications for the region. China's relations with the region – which has, since the 1990s, been carefully built towards greater integration with the ASEAN as a credible partner for its economic growth – should not be held hostage to the growing tensions in the SCS. China's posturing in the region is a critical factor that has pushed forward the agenda of looking for a credible resolution to this conflict.

Indonesia: 2014 Presidential Election Explained

28 July 2014

Indonesia's presidential election has heralded a change in the old guard, with Joko Widodo emerging as the winner of the mandate that took place on 9 July. The election, that took place 16 years after Indonesia's transition to democracy and the overthrow of the Suharto regime, indicates the consolidation of the democratic structures within this nascent democracy. Interestingly in this election, Jokowi, as he is popularly known, represents a change from the older leadership in Indonesia – that has often been associated with political families and the military leadership. In that context, he is a newcomer on the national political scene – with his earlier avatar in politics as the governor of Jakarta and as the mayor of Solo. What is significant about his victory is that his opponent was Prabowo Subianto – Suharto's son-in-law, and has been implicated for human rights violations. This is also indicative of the degree of discomfort the linkages to the past regime brings among the population, despite Prabowo Subianto being likely to allege the results to be fraudulent.

This has been an election year for Indonesia. In the May 2014 elections to the Indonesian parliament, citizens cast their votes for four councils. Additionally, elections to local councils – created as a result of the decentralisation process that is critical to Indonesia's democratic consolidation – too were held. The Provincial and Regency elections too were held, on 9 April. The Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan

(PDI-P) or the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, the opposition party in the last government, won the elections with 18.95 per cent of the vote. This was followed by the Golongan Karya (Golkar), the former party of the military functional groups that secured 14.75 per cent of the votes. The third largest party, the Great Indonesian Movement Party (Gerinda) that was led by Prabowo Subianto, won 11.81 per cent of the votes.

While the aforementioned groups emerged as the leading parties in the legislative elections, neither could qualify to nominate a candidate for the presidential elections on their own. Therefore, in order to nominate a candidate, the parties had to secure coalitions with other parties in the DPR to propose a presidential candidate for direct presidential elections – that Indonesia has been following since 2004. According to the laws governing the Presidential elections, a political party must officially secure a minimum of 25 per cent of the popular vote or 20 per cent of seats in the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (DPR), the lower house of the parliament, to be eligible to nominate a presidential candidate.

Following the legislative elections in April 2014, the need for coalitions to secure the necessary percentage of seats and votes prompted Jokowi to request the former Vice President of Indonesia, Jusuf Kalla, to be his running mate. This combination was critical to Jokowi's victory because Kalla is a former Chairman of the Golkar party that came in second in the legislative election. The tie-up with Kalla was potentially the trump card for Jokowi as this was seen as a critical factor in splitting the Golkar votes – given Kalla's considerable influence among supporters. Interestingly Aburizal Bakrie, the current Chairman of the Golkar, had, during one of the Party's national meetings, stated that the party actually backed the combination of Prabowo Subianto and his running mate, Hatta Rajasa. In fact, a split in the Golkar was a clear sign that Prabowo Subianto may not be acceptable to many due to his views on Indonesian nationalism and the human rights violations that he has been associated with under the Suharto regime.

In the final tally, the Jokowi-Kalla combination won 53.16 per cent of the votes while the Prabowo-Rajasa combination won 46.48 per cent of the votes in what emerged as the most closely contested elections since Indonesia's transition. With the victory of the Jokowi-Kalla group, Golkar may throw its full weight behind the new team, wanting to be on the right side of the political fault-line.

Of the electoral promises Jokowi made, the creation of ten million new jobs and continued economic reforms are the most significant challenges. Jusuf Kalla brings with him the experience in economic reforms, which also needs to translate into the much promised subsidies to assist in poverty alleviation. Agrarian land reforms need to be addressed, as does the crucial question of environmental conservation policies – that have to be implemented to counter detrimental effects of deforestation Indonesia has been facing. Rampant corruption and nepotism are critical factors that undermine the democratic consolidation in Indonesia. These are also crucial challenges which the new president and his team will have to tackle.

Column: Looking East

Columnist: Wasbir Hussain

Executive Director, CDPS, Guwahati, and Visiting Fellow, IPCS

India-China: Securitising Water

1 December 2014

A day after China commissioned the biggest hydro-power plant in Tibet on 23 November 2014, India named National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval as its Special Representative on the boundary talks with Beijing. This means the boundary dialogue between the two Asian giants is set to resume. But today, very few would tend to believe that India and China could go to another war over issues like the boundary. Economic ties or compulsions are perhaps far too big for China to embark on another military adventure or misadventure against India. Therefore, a war over the border dispute may look remote, but that cannot be said about escalation of tensions over the securitisation of water.

The operationalisation of the first generating unit of the USD 1.5 billion Zangmu plant, located 3,300 metres above sea level, before the scheduled 2015 start date, indicates that Beijing means business in tapping the resources of the Yarlung Tsangpo, as the Brahmaputra is called in China. Five other generating units of the plant will be operational by next year.

The event was celebrated by China with the official news agency Xinhua reporting the commissioning in detail. "The huge project, which straddles the middle reaches of the roaring Yarlung Tsangpo, will have a total installed capacity of 510,000 KW upon completion. It is designed to generate 2.5 billion kilowatt hours of electricity annually."

New Delhi, so far, does not seem to be unduly perturbed by the development because it appears to believe Beijing's assurance that the Zangmu dam is a run-of-the-river project that will not involve either diversion of the river's waters nor have a major impact on downstream flows. What needs to be factored in, however, is China's approval to the building of 27 other dams on the river.

Beijing last year cleared the construction of three new dams on the Yarlung Tsangpo. A 640 MW dam, obviously bigger than the Zangmu project, is to come up at Dagu, around 20 km upstream of Zangmu. Two smaller dams are on the cards at Jiacha and Jiexu, also on the middle reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo. China has made it clear it would "vigorously" push hydropower projects in Tibet in its current Five Year Plan (2011-15) to reduce the energy shortfall in the region.

China's massive plan to dam the Yarlung Tsangpo has raised serious concerns in India, particularly in the Northeast, besides other lower riparian states like Bangladesh. Green groups at home are already demanding intervention by the Indian Government to prevent building of more dams on the Yarlung Tsangpo by China. They fear reduction in the water flow on the Brahmaputra and other disasters like massive siltation.

But the absence of a water treaty between the two nations will make New Delhi's task all the more difficult in dealing with the issue. The only agreement that the two nations have on the subject is over hydrological data sharing. One of the agreements India and China signed during the Indian Vice President Hamid Ansari's five-day visit to Beijing concerned the sharing of hydrological data of Brahmaputra River during monsoons. There had been a similar agreement but in the new one signed on 30 June - in the presence of Indian Vice President Ansari and his Chinese counterpart Li Yuanchao - Beijing agreed to provide 15 days' additional hydrological data - from 15 May to 15 October each year.

Bluntly put, the latest MoU on the Brahmaputra flood data means nothing as an additional 15 days worth of hydrological information will not enable India to deal with the flood problem any differently. What India needs is input from the Chinese side on dams and other projects Beijing is pursuing or intends to pursue based on the waters of the Yarlung Tsangpo. Even a commitment on that is not forthcoming thus far from the Chinese side.

With an unprecedented mandate and a demonstrated policy to improve ties with its neighbours, the Narendra Modi government in New Delhi can initiate the setting up of something like a South Asia Shared Rivers Commission or Authority by bringing Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan and Nepal on board. Once such a commission emerges and a cooperative framework on the shared rivers is agreed upon by the concerned states, it can engage with China and try to bring Beijing on board to adopt a reasonable approach on its mega dam projects on the Yarlung Tsangpo and allay apprehensions in the lower riparian areas, including Bangladesh.

There is added concern because China also apparently has plans to divert the Yarlung Tsangpo at the Great Bend, located just before where the river enters India, also known as the Shoumatan Point, to provide water to its arid northern areas. The diversion plan is part of a larger hydro-engineering project, the South-North water diversion scheme, which involves three man-made rivers carrying water to its northern parts. If the water is diverted, the water levels of the Brahmaputra will drop significantly, affecting India's Northeastern region and Bangladesh. Estimates suggest that the total water flow will fall

by roughly 60 per cent if China successfully diverts the Brahmaputra. Besides, it will severely impact agriculture and fishing as the salinity of water will increase, as will silting in the downstream area.

India's response on the subject is awaited, and until then, speculations about the impact of the Chinese dams on the river will continue to haunt everyone in Northeast India and Bangladesh.

Column: Middle Kingdom

Columnist: Prof Srikanth Kondapalli

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China and Japan: Will the Twain Never Meet?

20 October 2014

With prospects for a bilateral meeting between Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and China's President Xi Jinping at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit at Beijing in November brightening, the East Asian security situation may after the war of words and deeds in East China Sea over the past four years. Already, both the foreign ministers met at Naypyidaw in August. However, China Daily's survey found that nearly 53 per cent Chinese believe that war is imminent, although Genron's Japanese survey indicated that only 29 per cent Japanese see conflict emerging between the two. The rise in tensions between the two since the nationalisation of the Senkaku Islands by the central government in Tokyo made China's Ambassador to Japan Cheng Yonghua state in mid-June 2014 that bilateral relations are "suffering the toughest-ever situation." However, it is not clear whether Japan would accept the two conditions of Beijing, viz., not to visit the Yasukuni Shrine again (PM Abe visited in December 2013) and Japan should consider that there is indeed a dispute in the East China Sea over the islands.

Bilateral Tensions

Tensions have been mounting for a long time now despite economic interdependence. Recently, these were triggered by the intrusion of a 15-member crew led by Zhan Qixiong of the trawler *Minjinyu 5179* on 07 September 2010 at the Senkaku Islands administered by Japan, but claimed by China. Later, such incidents continued to test the bilateral relations. On 24 August 2011, for instance, a Chinese vessel marched past the Japan Coast Guard patrol boat. On 13 December 2012, two months after the Japanese government purchased the islands, a Chinese surveillance airplane entered Japanese airspace near the Senkaku Islands. China was also critical of PM Abe's visit to Yasukuni Shrine in 2013, the first by a serving Japanese prime minister since 2006.

A series of incidents in the last few months indicate that both Japan and China have not reached equilibrium in their bilateral relations but have fanned out into a bilateral war of words that has spilled over into regional security domains. On 04 June, the G-7 Summit meeting at Brussels declared that it is opposed to "any unilateral attempt by any party to assert its territorial or maritime claims through the use of intimidation, coercion or force," with reference to the tensions in the East China Sea. This statement was not explicit about either Japan or China, indicating China's back-channel diplomacy with UK, France and Germany. The next day, the Lower House of the Japanese Diet decided to pass a resolution critical of Chinese air intrusions into Japanese airspace.

The Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said on 11 June that his government had lodged a protest over China's application to register the historic records of Japan's wartime sex slaves and the Nanjing Massacre with UNESCO. He asked China to withdraw it, but in vain. On the same day, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Japanese House of Representatives passed a resolution condemning China's Haiyang Shiyou 981 drilling activities in the disputed South China Sea (also opposed by Vietnam). Again, on the same day, China sent aircraft as close as 30 metres from Japanese defense aircraft in the East China Sea. To recall, on 24 May, a similar incident was reported by the Japanese. China said that two Japanese airplanes, OP-3C and YS-11EB, intruded in the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone on 24 May to scout and interfere with China-Russia naval drills. On 29 May, a Chinese frigate locked its fire-control

radar on the Japanese destroyer JS Sawagiri near a gas field in the disputed East China Sea in addition to targeting a P3C aircraft. Later, Japan's Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera protested against these incidents. Japanese defence ministry reports stated that the Japanese fighter jets were scrambled in response to foreign aircraft 810 times in 2013, more than half of them Chinese. A Chinese patrol boat was spotted in the Japanese EEZ on 13 June. Later, on 27 June, a Chinese boat sank north of the Senkaku Islands, sinking a number of personnel.

On 31 June, the Japanese cabinet passed a resolution that allows Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense and take military action to defend other countries even though the country itself is not under attack. In the backdrop of the Philippines' struggle against China's march in the South China Sea, Japan's decision meant that it could offer at least non-combat assistance.

That the war of words is expanding the ambit is also indicated by China's foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying when she criticised Japan for under-reporting its nuclear materials. She said that Japan should "address the imbalance between its demand and supply of sensitive nuclear materials." The Japanese government had not declared about 640 kg of unused plutonium in its annual report for the IAEA in 2012 and 2013, an amount enough to make 80 nuclear bombs. Japan claims to own 44 tons of plutonium, while the actual amount is 45 tons, said Japan's Kyodo News Agency. The unreported plutonium is part of the plutonium-uranium mixed oxide (MOX) fuel placed at an offline reactor in a nuclear plant in Saga Prefecture, southern Japan.

The consequences of the above are spilling over into the economic domain. For instance, foreign direct investment from Japan into China slumped 42.2 per cent in 2013 from the previous year. So did bilateral trade figures, with Japan choosing to expand trade and investments with Vietnam other Southeast Asian countries and India.

Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping: Building a Closer Developmental Partnership

22 September 2014

President Xi Jinping's visit to India from September 17-19 provided a chance for both the leaderships to know each other's concerns and aspirations better and made incremental progress in the bilateral relations, specifically in the economic field while opening up several areas in the social sector.

The joint statement issued at the end of Xi's visit was termed as "building a closer developmental partnership", unlike the previous such statements as "vision" document (as in October 2013) or a "shared vision" (in 2008) or "principles for relations" (in 2003). The 2005 formulation on "strategic and cooperative partnership" has now been extended in today's statement to include "strategic and cooperative partnership for peace and prosperity". Semantics apart, this reflects the desire of the two leaderships to work in an atmosphere of peace and stability for achieving economic developmental goals each had visualized for their respective countries.

However, there are no radical departures in the current joint statement from the previous understandings between the two. Panchsheel principles were re-iterated twice. One China policy entered the joint statement through back door with the observation that both sides will "abide by the principles and consensus both had agreed to" in the previous engagements.

Major Achievements

There are some significant achievements during this round of discussions and the joint statement enlists these. In the economic field, two industrial parks will be set up with an investment from China to the tune of \$20 billion in the next five years. After four years of high level interactions in which the unsustainability of trade imbalance had been outlined by the Indian side, China finally relented with this measure, although scaled down the amount from the initial \$100 billion estimate. India's cumulative trade deficit from 2007 to 2013 stood at \$169 billion with China. Related to this is the agreement to develop further railway projects in India. The Strategic and Economic Dialogue – which was concluded three times between India and China and designed to discuss macro-economic issues – is set to intensify

bilateral cooperation. Interestingly, the Bank of China was allowed to open a branch in Mumbai although the rupee-to-renminbi currency swap issues are yet to be discussed in a formal way.

Secondly, at the broader diplomatic level, the bilateral consultations on Afghanistan, West Asia, Africa, Central Asia and Counter-terrorism are acknowledged and it appeared that – in the light of the gradual withdrawal of the US-led forces from Afghanistan both New Delhi and Beijing are poised to enhance counter-terror missions in the region.

Another aspect is the revival of the idea of cooperating on civil nuclear issues, a sticking point after China backed the US 1172 Resolution in the Security Council criticising the Indian nuclear tests of 1998. While the 2006 joint statement of Manmohan Singh-Hu Jintao mentioned for the first time the possibility of engaging in civil nuclear programme, nothing concrete took place between the two so far. The current joint statement stated that both “will carry out bilateral cooperation in civil nuclear energy in line with their respective international commitments”.

At a broader strategic level, both reiterated their support to the multipolar world and vowed to cooperate on climate change, Doha Development Round of WTO, energy and food security, reform of the international financial institutions and global governance. Interestingly, the joint statement stated that they uphold freedom of navigation and the Asia-Pacific region will uphold an “open, transparent, equal and inclusive framework of security and cooperation based on the observance of the basic principles of international law.” In the light of the South China Sea disputes, this statement is significant.

India and China: New Balance of Power?

Overall, the meetings between Modi and Xi and the recent events indicate to a balance of power element in bilateral relations, despite references to ancient civilisational wisdom and the like. Both were trying hard to reconcile with mutual security concerns over Tibet, Indian Ocean Region, India-Japan-US relations, China’s nuclear cooperation with Pakistan and investments in the Pakistan occupied Kashmir, trade deficits and the like to the enduring mutual interests on counter-terrorism, sustainable economic development (manufacture sector vs services) and the like.

Moreover, the kind of media coverage – more positive than negative – for China’s President and his entourage at Ahmadabad and New Delhi – is unprecedented. The Indian media did contribute to the expansion of China’s soft power in the region with live publicity given to the Chinese delegation. However, it is doubtful if a similar treatment will be given to Prime Minister Modi whenever he makes the official visit next. It is instructive to note that in 2009, the US President Obama wanted a live coverage of his speech in Shanghai, but was denied by the Chinese side.

There were as well polite but firm responses from either side indicating that neither wishes to cross a certain limit in the bilateral relations, although it is difficult to say whether a Cold war kind of situation prevails between them. These are in relation to the build-up on the disputed border areas at Chumar.

Column: Nuke Street

Columnist: Amb Sheel Kant Sharma

Former Permanent Representative to UN Offices in Vienna & the IAEA

US-Russia and Global Nuclear Security: Under a Frosty Spell?

20 November 2014

It is twenty years since acute concern about unauthorised and malevolent access to sensitive nuclear material and radioactive substances, particularly from successor states to the former Soviet Union, roused the international community in 1994. Nuclear security has since remained at the centre of post-Cold War cooperation between the US and Russia over these past two decades - till that cooperation was given severe body blows by the chill that has set in the relations between Putin’s Russia and the West. While the immediate root of this frosty development lies in Ukraine and Crimea, President Putin’s Sochi

speech last month seemed to lay down a new manifesto for a Cold War redux. The APEC summit in China and the G20 meeting in Australia earlier this month failed to dispel the frost and, on the contrary, hardened it as the Russian president was cold shouldered and treated with concerted tough talk by his Western interlocutors.

Even prior to these summits Russia had put an end to the twenty year process begun by the famous Nunn-Lugar team in the US to salvage nuclear material, technology and installations in Russia and its Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), as Moscow used to describe them. This programme championed by the Nunn-Lugar team has been a success story that now risks being burnt up by the exacerbating diplomatic fracas with Russia. Even someone as committed to the transformation of East-West relations as Gorbachev has voiced fears about a renewed Cold War.

The Nuclear Security Summit process which has been the high point of Barack Obama's presidency, and supported widely by 59 states, is not spared anymore by an irate Russia which has advised US and all concerned that it would only work for nuclear security within the IAEA framework. Russia announced it would not join the Sherpas' meetings for the next NSS which is going to be hosted by US in 2016. There has been in addition a whole slew of international initiatives geared to securing nuclear materials, facilities and the enterprise in general from threats of terrorism. In all of these Russia had been an active and willing partner. Since its nuclear enterprise remains vast and as diversified as that of the US it is hard to visualise the future of all those initiatives without a well disposed Russia.

Fear of nuclear terrorism has gone up a few more notches in the past year due to the unmitigated horrors disseminated by the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and its propensity to stop at nothing. Among the elaborate action points deliberated and recommended by the Nuclear Security Summits so far, not all are limited to the IAEA even though its centrality has been progressively underscored. The principal requirement in grappling with threats to nuclear security is the combined unbroken pressure from moral, diplomatic, civil society and legal angles. The existing legal instruments and the Security Council edicts are still in the formative stage of enforcement. Undiminished support and cooperation of all major countries with nuclear materials and technology is the sine qua non. It remains to be seen how Russia will play ball in diverse forums.

There have been critiques of the post-Cold War world order, some of them quite harsh too, but to leverage such critiques to a particular situation of conflict and tension, it is important not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. This applies to both sides of the tense situation in Ukraine just as it does to the ongoing talks about Iran's nuclear future. A relapse to a Cold War-like division of the world would benefit no one just as it did not help even during the heady years of the last Cold War. Neither the triumphalism that marked the 1990s nor a panicked reassertion of destructive power as witnessed in recent months can help in stabilising international nuclear diplomacy, be that in regard to non-proliferation or strategic arms reduction or nuclear security. The edifice created over the past two decades in regard to each of these spheres merits preserving.

Absence of negotiated agreements has also presaged a host of sub-legal or voluntary arrangements to fix the problems posed by inadequate controls on nuclear material - these voluntary arrangements ought not to be interrupted in pique or partisan parsimony as in budget cuts in the US Congress on valuable nuclear security programmes. As regards the centrality of the IAEA, that has also been a result of the growing common understanding about a range of voluntary steps that have been generally supported over the past two decades such as peer reviews, advisory services or collation of related data banks or coordination of intelligence and forensics among different organisations.

Prime Minister Modi stated in Canberra this week that we do not "have the luxury to choose who we work with and who we don't." This sentiment remains key to strengthening and sustaining a norms-based order to cope with new age threats like nuclear terrorism. The Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT) and the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism are two significant examples in this regard. The entry into force of the 2005 Amendment to the Convention on

Physical Protection of Nuclear Material can be a big step forward where cooperation of major players remains crucial.

It is to be hoped that the tough talk possibly conceals quiet diplomacy to restore balance and stability in great power relations and pave the way forward. Until there is progress in that direction a climate of suspicion is unlikely to help global endeavour towards greater nuclear security.

India's Nuclear Capable Cruise Missile: The Nirbhay Test

22 October 2014

India's test of the nuclear capable cruise missile Nirbhay last week was immensely significant in two ways. First, it marked the culmination of DRDO's efforts of not only the past decade but also the ambitions of its heads. It was in 1987 that the then DRDO Chief Arunachalam is reported to have said that he was launching a study towards making a cruise missile like the then famous Tomahawk. The then Soviet Union had agreed with the US in 1987 to the historic INF Treaty; eliminating, inter alia, a whole class of medium range missiles including the nuclear capable ground launched cruise missiles of range 500-5000 km. The INF treaty then was the high point of interest for disarmament and armament aficionados going all the way up to then PM Rajiv Gandhi and therefore it was smart to want to study how the Tomahawk came into being. Even so, 37 years is a rather long time. However, given the enormous constraints and challenges under which the DRDO works in India the successful test is certainly "better late than never." This is especially so since China savvy Pakistanis have already tested the Babur missile several times and like to brandish it to silence any tough talk by India about their transgressions across the border or trans-border terror outfits functioning from Pakistani soil.

Second, a cruise missile like Nirbhay has two main components, namely, the rocket launching it into space and the propulsion system that kicks in after the missile separates, brings out its wings and flies like an aircraft. The second component has been advanced in several stages from the original cruise missile that the Germans toyed with almost seven decades ago during World War II. Its latest version uses supersonic propulsion, not subsonic, and the scramjet engine for that purpose is also in its second if not third decade, ever since the Russians tested a cruise missile with supersonic speeds around 1994. The Indian technology elite must come up to the table to be counted. That India still tests an indigenous cruise missile with turbofan engine and can claim all parameters working to copybook precision is more on the side of contentment than resolve to really make it to the big league. If the Maruti 800 of 1980s vintage is surpassed today by much better Indian cars, why should India remain satisfied with claiming success about a strategic system that belongs well in the last century?

As regards encouragement to Indian scientists and engineers, a comparison with the subcontinental rival may be instructive: the maker of the Pakistani bomb had to suffer only the optics of incarceration by a military regime despite serious allegations and pressure from donors and allies, whereas a top DRDO scientist in democratic India has to suffer post-retirement for due diligence demanded by compulsions of jurisprudence in regard to dismissal of a lower-echelon employee, unconnected with acquisition of cutting edge technologies or state of the art missiles.

The problem that the defence institutions face in India today must not be suppressed by patriotic pride about the accomplishment, which is justified at all times, but must be addressed head on. Why is India not able to make the engine fly the state- of-the-art aircraft? The Light Combat Aircraft is a project going apace with DRDO but with an imported engine with attendant restrictions. The Brahmos missile is supersonic but its range is MTCR compliant under 300 km and its engine is Russian. Former President Abdul Kalam is on record talking about the hypersonic missiles in his time as DRDO head as he propounded a 2020 vision. That was at a time when India had just emerged post 1998, shattering global misperceptions about its inherent strength and external powers' erroneous complacency about India's timidity (that it would not dare to cross the Rubicon). However, the DRDO has had to languish in the past decade plus with sub-critical progress on the technology front even when the only superpower recognised Indian prowess and appeared well disposed to see India's rise, particularly in the technology arena.

The pace of the global march of advanced technology is far too quick for our establishment's glacial responses and capricious working environment. Just let us look at the present controversy between the US and Russia about the latter's alleged violation of the INF Treaty by testing advanced cruise missiles supposedly proscribed by the Treaty, and the Russian counter-allegation about the US testing and deployment of systems covered by the Treaty's remit. Regardless of how Moscow and Washington settle this issue or fail to do so, the current reports have a Cold War ring about them, are becoming voluminous, and show the sheer sweep of new technologies that are in the works. The world is on the cusp of a veritable new age of weapon systems for long and short range strikes, with or without nuclear weapons. These technologies are as usual dual purpose and subject to controls - but such controls were also in vogue twenty years ago when, for instance, the Chinese weapon systems were still of much older vintage and were struggling to come of age. Nonetheless, the hype about China, then as now, would remain hard to fathom - then about its impending irresistible rise and now about its having arrived with real strength and considerable clout over today's technology. So, the lesson is to plan for at least two decades hence, provide the scientists clear policy guidance, required support and protection from systemic infirmities, and an atmosphere for perseverance and striving.

Just in case this emphasis is mistaken for trite arms race enthusiasm, it must be stated that the arms race is in any case already thrust upon India, either from behind or from the front by its colluding neighbours. An action like the testing of an older missile system like Nirbhay too might bring the moral high priests against it and it would not be a surprise if old hat clamour surfaces about destabilisation in South Asia. But in the end it is the prowess that is recognised and cutting edge ability that is respected. DRDO has miles to go before it can have a justified - and overdue - boast in that regard.

India-Australia Nuclear Agreement: Bespeaking of a New Age

8 September 2014

The conclusion of a nuclear cooperation agreement between India and Australia last week is indeed a landmark achievement for their bilateral relations. Before leaving for his India visit, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott was confident of reaching an agreement with India as he stated in Canberra that "We ought to be prepared to provide uranium to India under suitable safeguards." Considering the chasm that separated their positions twenty years ago on the main issues in the global nuclear mainstream, Abbot's statement bespeaks of a coming of age. He declared in India that "...there is a very high level of trust between us, and that is why we are signing this agreement." Australia has provided full assurance that it will be a long-term reliable supplier of uranium to India. Australia also supports India's joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) as a member.

The agreement will also cover other key areas in nuclear technology such as supply of isotopes and cooperation in regard to nuclear safety. Although Australia does not run nuclear power plants, it has an extensive nuclear enterprise comprising not only mining but also research in diverse areas including, for example, on making the safeguards system more effective. It is to the credit of India's nuclear program that it receives recognition from Australia in unequivocal terms, like "trust" and scrupulous adherence to international laws "regardless of the ups and downs of the political situation in New Delhi." This level of understanding and confluence of mutual interest takes the relationship to a truly strategic scale of cooperation; energy being central to it.

Looking at Australia's immense natural resources and the vast unpolluted continent that lies at its disposal, Canberra's role and profile in international arena in the coming decades will certainly grow much bigger. So far, it has played a modest role in the Asia Pacific compared to its potential albeit as a dependable and steadfast US ally and a robust economic partner for ASEAN and China. India and Australia, as the Joint Statement issued after the prime minister's visit demonstrates, are set to do a whole lot of things together for mutual benefit. The nuclear accord encapsulates and symbolises that coming together just as the seminal agreement between India and the US did in 2006. In recent years, a definitive sense has emerged in the Australian worldview that a strong and prosperous India will be a factor for peace and stability in Asia and the world.

Coming to the uranium metal, its fortunes fluctuate wildly depending on the temperamental swings of the mass psychosis about “radiation” on the one hand and the inexorable push of nuclear power as a relatively cleaner and sustainable energy option for the energy hungry planet. From its highs in the short years of nuclear renaissance in the middle of last decade, uranium prices have come down to nearly half that peak post the Fukushima disaster and subsequent sharp retardation in nuclear power prospect – not only in Japan and Germany but also in liability-obsessed India. India’s vacillation on nuclear power projects is particularly shocking since its power needs today exceed its production by figures that approach a 100000 Megawatt and even coal fired thermal plant capacity languishing in shortfalls as big as 90000 Megawatt due to fuel crunch, according to some estimates. It is significant that Australia has come forward as a reliable supplier not only for nuclear fuel but also for coal.

An uninterrupted supply of uranium and its augmentation to meet the requirements in Indian nuclear power plants will also raise their capacity factors to record highs.

As it is the global openings since the US deal have brought enormous improvements in fuel situation and the Rawatbhata nuclear power plant units today can boast of achieving a global peak in continuous, unbroken running of a plant.

Australia has, along with its neighbour, New Zealand, considerable moral clout in the realm of global nuclear and advanced technology. India should benefit from the Australian leverage for its entry in the NSG – Australia has kept the nuclear option out for meeting its power needs despite its vast uranium resources.

So, its support may hopefully carry greater clout with conscientious objectors of nuclear power like New Zealand, Austria and Ireland that are not easily persuaded to relax the rules for India. The commercial factor in uranium deals, while important for the Australian mining industry, is hardly so big as to be accused of driving its government’s stance in the energy debate. The environmentalists, as Prime Minister Abbott has stated, are a highly significant lobby in Australia – that constantly oversees the mining industry to ensure that the green standards are observed to the utmost level of satisfaction.

It now remains for the company representatives from both sides to thrash out the details of contract terms for supply of uranium. India’s Nuclear Power Cooperation Limited has been keen to build lifetime inventories for suitably safeguarded nuclear plants and would naturally want to obtain long-term supply guarantees. This should not pose a problem to arrive at, given the India’s record commitment to its safeguards obligations.

Remembering Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Musings on the Bomb

21 August 2014

August is the month of remembrance of the ghastly tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Such remembrance is far from a mere annual routine of some ritual happenings – there is no dearth of moral, ethical, legal or humanitarian condemnation of those two atomic bombings. Even at the risk of being repetitious, these occasions merit every word uttered, every gesture shown, every action demanded and visions invoked, inspired by the memories of those towns and their people who were eviscerated. The contrived relief of non-repetition of that horror falls flat when the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists displays its doomsday clock close to midnight.

The best and brightest of the last century who took part in that Manhattan Project before 1945 had serious qualms as the days progressed in July 1945 to the Trinity Test at Alamogordo, New Mexico, which would turn the ‘gadget’ into a ‘bomb’. They were, most of them, opposed to its use against Japan; and their revulsion has been detailed in numerous books.

As for India, it is a peculiar coincidence of history that even though it was trapped in the chains of a dominion struggling for independence in 1945, lacking its formal say in the then comity of nations, an

ardent scholar in the person of the father of the atomic bomb, Robert Oppenheimer, invoked India's cultural heritage of the millennia past. Oppenheimer, as is widely known, recited a shloka from the Bhagavad Geeta on seeing the 'gadget' explode in the Trinity test in July 1945: 'brighter than a thousand suns' was the metaphor from the Bhagavad Geeta; and a science historian, Robert Jungk, titled his account of the Manhattan Project with this metaphor. "I am become Death, the destroyer of the worlds" recited Oppenheimer from the Bhagavad Gita.

There is another quote from Indian scriptures in Sanskrit which Oppenheimer translated and read to another physicist on 11 July (five days before the Trinity Test):

"In Battle, in forest, at the precipice in the mountains
On the dark great sea, in the midst of javelins and arrows
In sleep, in confusion, in the depths of shame,
The good deeds a man has done before defend him."

This was reflective of the inner torment of the scientist who, nine years later, would pay for his sanity and sincerity in the McCarthy era; when he was humiliated and incarcerated as a security risk. Those times are recalled to point out how uncertain and unfounded the claims were of those who came to justify the bombing of Japanese towns in the face of revulsion from the great scientists. In fact, as the history of that period shows, practically every danger that is attached to nuclear weapons today, including nuclear terror, was visualised even in that period just after World War II.

It has become conventional wisdom to speak about deterrence theories in the context of nuclear weapons. It is taken as almost a given that nuclear weapons deter nuclear weapons because resorting to their use has not been repeated since 1945. Study and analysis of deterrence doctrines and theories has generally proceeded basically from a rational, game theoretic process, the provenance of which can also be traced to military procurement, deployments, logistics and inventory control during World War II that preceded nuclear bombs, and such provenance is rooted in the technology of that era. On the other hand, the unravelling of the nuclear age has brought to the fore a difficult diversity about approaches, technologies, compulsions and purposes for acquisition and amassing of nuclear weapons. This diversity is not amenable to simplistic norms, understandings or solutions.

In the disarmament lexicon enormous weight is placed on 'universalisation' or universal acceptability. However, a reality check tends to show that among various nuclear-armed states, both existing and potential, the underpinnings of nuclear deterrence theories are scarcely universal. They vary according to countries, regions and situations. In fact the march of history in recent decades has catapulted well-worn concepts and theories of deterrence into an expanding universe, as it were, where the seekers find convergence progressively more and more elusive. Theory therefore faces today big challenges and severe limitations in the actual realm of various nuclear deterrents. The spectre of deterrence failure persists and cannot be banished until nuclear weapons are abolished.

Even after acquiring nuclear weapons, for example, a State need not automatically achieve autonomy of decision-making because the security contexts, stakes and inter-play of diverse priorities that are inherent to its international situation and its political economy may differ substantially from what may be applicable to others. On the one hand there is the original war-time motivation and military exigency of developing a weapon - to end all wars - which lay behind the advent of the nuclear age. On the other hand, the subsequent evolution of the pursuits of that deadly weapon by multiple nations lacked that war-time exigency. The more the nuclear age sank into the great divide between East and West, and thence to MAD doctrines of 'total war' and extermination of the enemy, the more it moved away from the acute and intense phase of conventional war-fighting (eg in the Pacific after April 1945). The theoretical constructs to justify nuclear weapons after the war delved into conflict planning and management, crisis prevention, escalation control, and gaming consoles, and thus a whole architecture of national nuclear deterrents. In each of these dimensions closure on complex issues got more and more rooted in the political economy of the States concerned, thereby eluding the tight grasp, say, as was held by the military leaders at the inception of nuclear armament. The scientists, historians, economists, business, industry, political parties,

and a whole spectrum of interest groups inevitably developed direct stakes and came to influence decision-making. This, as records coming out of the former Soviet Union also show, applied even behind the Iron Curtain, albeit with far less transparency. While the Cold War still offered an overarching compulsion to downplay and hide divergences within each block, the end of the Cold War and the fall of the USSR had taken away that overarching and compelling force from the dynamic of deterrence planning, notwithstanding the continuance and expansion of NATO.

Latter day theoretical constructs and inventions such as discriminate deterrence, or the 'war on terror', struggled to lend a semblance of totalisation to an inherently uncontrollable universe of deterrence discourse and arms competition. Technology has played its role in confusing the picture and offering illusions of breakthroughs via the pursuit of invincibility. But each such illusion has led to more complex and interactive competition and theoretical abstractions. Missile defence is the most prominent example of this complexity, but the push of technology does not stop at missile defence alone and an entire range of futuristic options, such as cyber warfare or hypersonic missiles or global prompt delivery vectors are jostling for the attention of the most advanced economies. However, at a different level of technological advance and in an altogether different setting, this evolution mutates in other forms.

Take the subcontinent. Its main arms competitors a decade ago were approaching nuclear stockpiles of roughly 45-60 according to some estimates. Were they less secure than today when that magic figure may be over 100? In what way has that figure of 100 granted more operational manoeuvrability or control on the use of the oft-parroted strategic assets to further essential national interests or defend them? Regardless of the received wisdom of deterrence theories from older nuclear weapon States, the inherent features of the political economy of newer weapon States render their weapons in varying shades of purpose or uselessness. In the case of Pakistan, the politico-military elite may struggle to view its assets in triumphal terms and may, as is widely believed, treat them as a certain guarantee under which it seeks to pursue and promote jihad. This is entirely different from India's case where its domestic challenges of poverty and comprehensive economic development, and of transcending social tensions and exclusion within a democratic polity find no panacea in nuclear weapons - which remain a categorical imperative rooted in the vulnerability flowing from its external security environment. The dialogue between the two remains mired in a hopeless predicament given the elusive grasp of each other's motivations and compulsions. Moreover, this predicament belongs to a universe orthogonal to or detached from the space within which they articulate their deterrent doctrine or posture and justify their build-up.

In human history, wars, weapons and their exigencies came and went over time but nuclear weapons have created powerful illusions of permanent presence and need - the sustenance of which hardly squares up with the political economies of the States involved. Hence, probably, the quest for non-proliferation sometimes mutates into a desperate quest for 'regime change' as part of strategies for non-proliferation. This is also because the idealists and rationalists find no rationale for the pursuit of nuclear weapon capability except as obsessions of particular political groups or regimes. Be that as it may, so long as nuclear arsenals are in the possession of powerful countries, there will always be others who would aspire to possess them - alas!

The Second Nuclear Age in the Asia Pacific

9 June 2014

President Obama's West Point speech in 2014 reflected a qualified fatigue with internationalist causes. The recent Chinese comment on North Korean threats about an impending test had an interesting term in cautioning its difficult but important neighbour: that there is no justification for a new nuclear test and that North Korea should not do it. It implies some kind of acceptance of the status quo. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi during his Seoul visit continued to press for all in the six party talks to persevere peacefully towards a denuclearised peninsula. Visits and parleys among key members of the six nations, with a focus on North Korea, including Japan and North Korea, indicate chances of a reactivation of the process. Meanwhile, Russian anger against US and the G7 is being cited as reason for Moscow's new look at expanding relations with Pyongyang. Russian support has expanded over the past one year and particularly since the onset of the crisis in Ukraine.

Russia has waved huge loans (US\$10 billion) owed by North Korea since the Soviet times and has offered US\$1 billion for a trans-Siberian railway project through North to South Korea, received North Korean president at the Sochi winter Olympics and sent a ministerial delegation on a visit to Pyongyang to sign up on important economic and trade cooperation. This refashioning of ties between the Cold War allies might add heft to Pyongyang's hard stance for resumption of the six party talks without preconditions. The G7 brandishing to Putin more sanctions for Russian actions in Ukraine may have the effect of diminishing Russian interest in tighter sanctions on North Korea. As for Japan, a distinct possibility of Prime Minister Abe making a visit to North Korea is being seen in the announcement in the Diet by his foreign minister about an upcoming official visit. Some headway has been made in a meeting in Sweden in the direction of the return of the Japanese kidnapped in North Korea and Japan's provision in turn for food supplies. This may also be helpful to resume the six party talks.

The growing tensions in Southeast and East Asia between China on one side and Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines on the other are giving rise to new ways to deal with China, but possibly without disturbing the existing non-weapon status of the highly developed Japanese and South Korean nuclear enterprises. The so called break out fears, much talked about in the context of Iran, do not come to fore because of the impeccable record of Seoul and Tokyo with the IAEA. However, China has begun to raise questions about the high plutonium holdings of Japan. The reason advanced by Japan, namely, plutonium to meet fuel requirements for its breeder programme, may be less credible in the wake of Fukushima-induced anti-nuclear sentiment. As for Seoul, it appears inclined to try non-nuclear options like building its own ground-based mid-course missile defence to cope with nuclear threats from the North, instead of contemplating any deterrent route.

Within US too there are the long-held views being reinforced by profound thinking that foresees far more problems for strategic stability in case new allies develop their own deterrent. Hence the reinforcing of US rebalancing and commitment to the Asia-Pacific allies as witnessed in the annual Shangri-La dialogue in Singapore in end-May 2014. US Defense Secretary Hagel was so candid in voicing concern about China's threatening actions in the South China Sea that the Chinese reacted equally forcefully and virtually told Hagel to lay off.

These are the facets of diverse approaches for the management of the second nuclear age in the Asia-Pacific and do not provide much reassurance. The latest Pentagon reports show that China is underreporting its defence expenditure by 20 per cent and suggest that the correct annual figure should be US\$145 billion, almost four times that of India and ahead of Japan. China's air force is said to be growing at an alarming rate, including with development of advanced drones and testing of hypersonic missiles, which when combined with earlier stories about its SSBNs and improvements in its strategic forces, send unmistakable messages about where China is headed. The recent US Justice Department's charges against Chinese generals about cyber attacks against US businesses and China's strong reaction and counter-charges against the US demonstrate an escalation of the Cold War-like rhetoric in Asia.

Putin's closeness to China as reflected in the conclusion of a US\$400 billion, thirty year, gas deal and a host of others including about defence procurements as well as Russian-Chinese joint veto in the UN Security Council are indications of emerging new configurations in geopolitics. These will call in to question what was suggested even as recently as 2012 by the Yale Professor Paul Bracken about an abiding common interest of the existing great powers in managing the second nuclear age (ie the age when new proliferating States emerge). If anything, China and Russia appear to be set to devising ways to mount a concerted challenge to what the Chinese openly call US hegemony.

This is the short take from the dynamic that is evolving in Asia. The news story about Russian arms to Pakistan in this setting should raise Delhi's heckles – the new fangled diplomacy of Kerry and Hagel to woo Pakistan (propensity of US think-tanks to reward Pakistan with a nuclear deal), Russia's indulgence, and China's all-weather friendship firmly backing its trusted ally compounds the strategic scenario for India. A perceptive remark by a former Indian Ambassador to Russia is poignant to the US-India situation: "The US has been looking to cooperate with an India that is strong enough to be a balancer of China but

(should not be strong) enough to cause concern to Pakistan.” Talking of paradoxes, the US is not alone. China’s position for continued peaceful engagement and diplomacy about North Korea, and its consistent reluctance to put Pakistan or its terror outfits on the spot is in contrast with the increasing severity with which it reacts to Japan and bristles over outsiders counsel on maritime disputes with Japan and in the South China Sea.

China has generally refused dialogue with India as a nuclear weapon state invoking what it called the international mainstream (eg NPT) whereas on Japan and South China Sea it rejects anything that differs from its own national hard line regardless of the weight of international mainstream, eg, UN Convention on the Law of the Seas, freedom of navigation and security of the sea lanes.

In short, rules are less and less likely to govern the evolving uncertainties in Asia except the inherent strength and might of nations, or a concert thereof, backing whoever takes a stand. This is the setting for the first high level Sino-Indian diplomatic engagement which begins over this weekend. As a special envoy of Chinese president Xi, Foreign Minister Wang Ye is set to meet the new government in Delhi with a message comprising all the right and reassuring points.

Iran Nuclear Deal: Regional Shadows

14 April 2014

There are indications of further substantive progress in P5 plus Germany’s negotiations with Iran in the latest round in Vienna. Iran has shown readiness and given plans to change the design of the Arak research reactor to drastically reduce plutonium in its spent fuel. While Iran has no reprocessing plant and the Arak reactor is still under construction, the plutonium production risk has been one of the main sticking points about Iran’s nuclear programme. The comprehensive agreement which the negotiators hope to achieve by July 2014 looks distant still. It will need considerable hard work and has 50-60 per cent chance of happening by the deadline; going by the comments of the Chinese and Russian negotiators after the latest round.

Iran’s stance as revealed in statements by the Iranian foreign minister Javad Zarif remains consistent with its line since November 2013, that it will take steps to reduce the enrichment level, output and stocks at both locations alongside agreed improvement in transparency and access required for IAEA’s close monitoring. While the Iranian part of the deal is focused on its nuclear programme the other side, particularly the US academics, congressmen and the Israelis have shown differing views of what should constitute an acceptable agreement to reward Iran with lifting of sanctions. On the one hand, despite the heightened tensions about Ukraine, Russian negotiators seem to show that there is no impact on their (constructive) role in the P5-plus-one process. On the other, there is a rising domestic chorus in the US putting pressure on its negotiators about the full range of demands from Iran in these negotiations.

In recent weeks, more and more concern has come up front that mere nuclear concessions by Iran should not earn it the desired sanctions relief. The regional impact of Iran’s role and policies has loomed large in recent weeks as evident in commentaries about the visit of President Obama to Saudi Arabia, the Middle East shuttle diplomacy of Kerry, the role of Hizbullah and the situation in Syria since the failure of Geneva II.

An article in the Washington Post co-authored by Gen Petraeus on 10 April about these negotiations with Iran goes to the extent of putting the clock back on the entire contour of the Iran imbroglio over the past two decades. Petraeus and his co-author stress that “a successful nuclear deal with Iran could result in the United States and its partners in the Middle East facing a better-resourced and, in some respects, more dangerous adversary”. This, they argue, is ‘because sanctions relief would bolster Tehran’s capability to train, finance and equip its terrorist proxies’ and therefore ‘sanctions related to terrorism should remain in place’ and should even be enhanced. Another very exhaustive paper by well known US non-proliferation scholar, Robert Einhorn, spells out the strict requirements of a comprehensive nuclear deal with Iran – while stating at the outset that he does not at all address the sanctions relief part of the bargain. Israel’s position on the accords since November 2013 has been of stout negation of anything

good in this process since it would only relax the hold of tight sanctions on Iran and remove its isolation – and with no sight of reliable nuclear guarantees.

Ironically, if such arguments receive greater credence, they would reinforce Iran's innate fears from the very beginning that the whole nuclear issue has been raked up with ulterior regional aims. This line was probably felt in Tehran particularly starkly in 2002-03 in the context of a similar case against Iraq. Hence perhaps the concessions that Iran was offering in its talks with the European-3 (Germany, France and UK) in October 2003. The whole point of the relaxation of the situation after Rouhani's election in 2013 and subsequent back channel progress between the US and Iran was to reach a breakthrough with a limited focus on Iran's nuclear programme and sanctions relief. Iran is on record stating that the deal will be dead if sanctions persist.

In a worsening situation, if these talks founder, Iran's regional concerns too might come to the fore and pull back its leadership from the statesmanship demonstrated over the past year. The reports about Saudi Arabia's mounting unease with prospects of Iran emerging from the cold and speculations about Riyadh's drastic review of its strategic posture are significant. Mutual apprehension between Iran and Saudi Arabia and suspicions about the likely Saudi nuclear outsourcing to Pakistan are likely to enormously complicate the situation. Iran-Pakistan strains have been skillfully managed so far despite provocations arising out of sectarian strife in the region, the reported role of Pakistani regular or retired troops in Bahrain, and recent stories about Pakistani jihadis having joined the opposition in Syria.

Sartaj Aziz has hinted at Pakistan's mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and going by past history of Pakistan's deft and uncanny ways in this regard, it might be difficult to rule such stuff out in the unfolding scenario of leverages and diplomacy. Is nuclear-armed Pakistan thus again on the threshold of a big role post the US exit from Afghanistan, with its human resources deployed in Syria and who knows where else, and go-between diplomacy elsewhere? Are the straws in the wind about the likely relaxation of US (and NSG) strictures on nuclear Pakistan integral to any larger pattern, overlooking the terrorism angle?

Ukraine: Implications for Global Nuclear Diplomacy

10 March 2014

The news stories of the past week are a powerful throwback to an era to which we thought the world bid goodbye in the 1990s – the mutually opposing stance of Russia and the West on the developments in Ukraine, Russian troops in Crimea and the US-Europe combined talk of sanctions against Russia are heating up the theatre. The attack on President Putin by the US State Department through a point-by-point rebuttal and Moscow's repartee thereto are vintage Cold War stuff. Still, John Kerry and Lavrov have held meetings in Paris and Rome and the US and EU are working on exploring diplomacy alongside threats of visa refusals to Russians, sanctions, and even skipping the G8 meet in Sochi - the list is growing by the hour. The problem can be characterised in a number of ways. It is bilateral between Russia and Ukraine, European because of Ukraine being under Russian coercion against joining the EU, transatlantic because of the 1994 agreement about Ukraine between the US and Russia, and multilateral in view of its shadow over the G8 summit.

This puts paid to the hope that came to life in September 2013 with a breakthrough on Syria between the US and Russia and the successful launching of chemical disarmament of Syria under OPCW, the historic November 2013 agreement in Geneva of Iran with the Group of 6 i.e. US, EU, France, Germany, Russia and China – which hinges on the removal of Iran. It is anybody's guess how Russia could endorse continued sanctions on Iran by the same powers who are threatening it with sanctions about actions which Russia considers dictated by its legitimate interests. China, which has been building a closer and closer partnership with Russia over the past decade has suddenly lapsed into its Cold War style equivocation of 'be good', 'be peaceful' advice to both sides without any word to show its understanding with the Russian position on Ukraine. To Iran's credit so far, its team in Vienna and Paris are carrying on the positive track set by the November agreement and subsequent arrangements worked out in January this year. Iran has even stated that Ukraine would have no influence on its continued work with its interlocutors.

While the resolution of the Iran imbroglio seems like work in progress, questions arise about a full-range of bilateral, regional as well as multilateral agendas. What will happen to bilateral nuclear accords between US and Russia? This is not only about reduction in strategic arms but also important processes like the Megatons to Megawatts programme whereby Russian-origin HEU is down-blended and burned in nuclear power plants to produce power, which is substantial and earns revenue for Moscow up to as much as USD 25 billion. Will sanctions under consideration in the US derail this process that started in 1995 around the same time that newly independent Ukraine surrendered the strategic weapons on its territory to Russia and acceded to the NPT? Even the burning of excess plutonium as MOX has been part of the US-Russia cooperative threat reduction programme.

The process which has since continued over the past two decades comprises valuable assets in diplomacy. Russia has worked with US and its Western allies on practically all disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation initiatives. President Obama's Prague speech and subsequent launch of the biennial Nuclear Security Summits has so far received Russian cooperation with participation at the summit level in Washington and Seoul. Will warnings issued now from Washington and others from the G7 to skip the Sochi Summit in June affect Putin's approach to the Hague Summit later this month? That seems more and more likely as the East-West contention over Ukraine gets worse. The NSS with the participation of 53 countries has meant a lot in a time of multilateral paralysis on nuclear disarmament and arms control. Without Russia, it will be much less credible.

The actions of both sides seem to come in a time warp – the Russian missile test of last week and possibly another to come soon, the invoking of NATO's article IV by some US allies led by Poland for consultations, the hard-liners in Washington making reckless demands (including expulsion of Russia from the Security Council?) on a president they consider weak and indecisive, Secretary of State John Kerry's tough warnings despite continued contacts with his Russian counterpart, talk about Russian troops in Crimea implying end of diplomacy are ominous pointers to what might go wrong. With all unresolved tensions still festering in Asia and the Middle East, the entrenchment of a Cold War mentality is bound to be for no one's gain. Putin may show military muscle to drum up nationalism and brandish Russian strategic systems but will he gain anything? The Europeans are still looking for saner options and seeking to dispel tensions by cooperation with Russia and Ukraine but Russian refusal to meet the new leadership in Kiev is like Western refusal to do anything with the besieged ruler of Syria. Will money from the EU, IMF and other institutions to Ukraine uplift its sinking economy; especially if the worsening situation in Crimea can derail Russian economic interdependence with the rest of Europe? There is too much at stake and even if Europeans succeed in defusing the crisis, chances for which seem fainter than ever before, the taste of bitterness may persist and would virtually stall all forums engaged in diplomacy based on global coordination among great powers and emerging countries. Non-proliferation and arms control will be just the thin end of such a cold war redux.

Nuclear Security Summit 2014 and the NTI Index

10 February 2014

President Obama's major initiative launched in Washington in 2010 will enter its next stage with the convening of the third Nuclear Security Summit in the Hague. The fourth one is set for Washington in 2016. This process of Nuclear Security Summits is unique in many ways. It has brought together Heads of States/Governments from over fifty nations to discuss, define and put in action a concerted global campaign to deal with the challenges posed by nuclear terrorism by addressing threats to nuclear enterprises from theft, sabotage, unauthorised access with malevolent intent, subversion of personnel and terrorism in general.

The heightened concern about certain aspects of security of nuclear enterprises, that is, of nuclear material including uranium and plutonium and radioactive substances involved in various nuclear facilities, reactors and nuclear fuel cycle, has been there since the break-up of the Soviet Union. The US took the lead in 1994 in getting the IAEA to commence a whole spectrum of activities to prevent and combat illicit nuclear trafficking and to enhance physical protection of nuclear material and facilities. In

parallel, the hugely successful Nunn-Lugar programme was also launched bilaterally with Russia to salvage nuclear material in the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union.

Initially the effort was driven by fear of proliferation but it assumed a magnified threat perception after 9/11 since it was felt that suicide-bands of non-State actors could lay hands on nuclear material or dangerous radioactive substances to create mass panic or attack nuclear reactors to release radioactivity. While the responsibility to comprehensively enhance protection of nuclear enterprises to avert, prevent and combat such menace lay squarely on the governments concerned, support has steadily grown for international response through cooperation and assistance including through provision of equipment and advisor services, sharing of best practices and broad awareness raising about danger of nuclear terrorism.

The IAEA has completed several five-year action plans to help its member states, on request, in diverse aspects of nuclear security in the same way as it has put in place a systematic programme for assisting countries regarding nuclear safety. While safety-concerned public health implications of the phenomenon of radiation is inherent to peaceful uses of nuclear energy and has received funding from the regular budget, the security-related programme has generally been funded by extra-budgetary contributions led by generous US funding.

The Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) process raised the level of international action and concern to the highest and gave a significant political profile to all related programmes in nuclear security, whether bilateral or multilateral. Participating governments have been sensitised and spurred to act owing to a high level interest in the Summit process, preceded by preparatory 'sherpa' meetings and careful drafting of declarations and recommendations for action. The impact of these summits is comprehensive in that all facets of the menace are addressed, such as reducing nuclear materials (usable for bomb-making) in reactors by converting them to fuelling with lower levels of enriched uranium, eliminating surplus stocks of such material as was the case with several successor states of the former Soviet Union, adopting measures for greater security and control such as on-site physical protection, better accounting and control, prevention of threats from insiders and capability for effective response to any security-related event.

Global norms have been emphasised in terms of legal commitments internationally, such as adherence to the twelve terrorism-related legal instruments and voluntary commitments following internationally recognised IAEA recommendations and guidelines. However, global commitments in this regard being limited in scope, the NSS process also stressed voluntary building of domestic capacity to address challenges to nuclear security, for example, by strict regulations and an effective regulatory body, legislating domestic laws for security of nuclear material, and legally effective controls on non-State actors in keeping with landmark UN Security Council resolution 1540. In addition, since the IAEA's safeguards system provided an effective route, in particular, to keep track of and account for nuclear materials, adherence to proper safeguards was also part of the slew of recommendations from the Summits. The overall purpose of these summits will be served in assembling the full set of building blocks for nuclear security architecture to be adopted by states concerned in appropriate ways by international legal instruments, domestic legislation, assurances through invited peer review mechanisms and a widely accepted security culture.

Since this entire gamut of actions can be seen by different states in different perspectives of non-proliferation or nuclear disarmament, the NSS process has been inclusive while respecting sensitivities of states that are parties to cardinal nuclear treaties such as the NPT and bilateral and multilateral accords and arrangements. In this sense the Obama initiative on NSS might serve to alleviate to some extent the effects of the current void in international negotiations aimed at effective nuclear arms control; the credibility of the initiative being bolstered by Obama's Prague and Berlin speeches for a nuclear weapons-free world.

It is a no-brainer that no approach today would be perfect to address safety, security and proliferation challenges posed by nuclear enterprises the world over, diverse purposes of which range from limitless

deterrence credibility to clean and safe energy for sustainable development. However, it is to the credit of the NSS Summits that more or less all countries with capabilities in nuclear technology are encouraged to join and invited, notable exceptions like North Korea notwithstanding.

Since the time India has been welcomed into the global nuclear mainstream with the historic nuclear cooperation agreements with the US, France and other key countries, it has become natural for India to be expected to play its due contributory role. As a developing country it was unprecedented for India, for instance, to announce a million dollar voluntary funding to IAEA's nuclear security programme, and it reflected preference to IAEA's central role which was also underlined by the NSS process. The long standing standard-bearers of the global nuclear order have their preferences and practices, at the same time, to which India's approach need not be of an outsider. In keeping with its long-term plans for exploitation of nuclear energy as a critical part of a right energy mix, India's association with the global mainstream has to be consistent and forward-looking. Hence, the association of India with the NSS process to the fullest and continued participation in it.

An off-shoot of the NSS process has been a narrowly focused civil society project by the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) which has sought to create a template to observe and gauge the state of global nuclear materials security readiness through a NTI Index. It attempts to present a biennial snapshot of how weapons-usable nuclear material is secured worldwide. The second issue of the NTI Index is out but it is yet to make a desirable impact, perhaps due to grading of countries on a set of criteria that have shades of prescriptive 'one size fits all'. It needs to respect government sensitivities and predispositions to preferred national approaches to nuclear materials security. The tricky part may be how to provide due weight to areas to which particular governments attach priority given their specific situation.

A process of realistic assessment of international preparedness would have benefited from giving, at least, space for self-assessment of countries alongside the NTI team's view of them. The goal of global nuclear security is too critical to brook contributions which risk being seen, arguably, as one-sided, and no matter how rigorously done internally, the test of any endeavour to nuclear- materials security mapping should be coherence with the main NSS process. The grading by the Index, despite its limited focus on nuclear materials, may lead some to gloating on a good score card ascribing overall national prestige while in other cases it may be viewed as an affront.

Nuclear Power: An Annual Report Card

13 January 2014

The global nuclear power scenario showed signs in 2013 of gradually emerging from the post-Fukushima freeze. The impact of Fukushima remained still formidable in Japan as the year saw the trickle of persistent bad news from the Daichi units in Japan and TEPCO struggling to cope with the problems. Prime Minister Abe, however, has made concerted effort to bring some traction to the Japanese nuclear industry. As the year ended, sixteen Japanese nuclear power units had filed applications to the Nuclear Regulatory Authority for restarting the power production. Globally, the diminishing trend in both capacity and output witnessed in 2011-12 due to Fukushima induced shut-downs in Japan and Germany seems to have stopped in 2013. While four reactors were permanently shut down in the US, new reactors were connected to the grid elsewhere, three in China and one in India (Kudankulam). Thus, the total number of operating reactors worldwide remained the same. Nuclear power's share of world electricity production also remained around 11 per cent.

For the first time since 1974, construction commenced of two new reactors at two sites in the US. These new reactor projects were among ten that started worldwide, including one in UAE. Who in the 1970s would have imagined that the Emirates too would launch nuclear power projects?

The US posted the best global figures so far regarding the actual generation of power from existing nuclear plants. The US achieved through steady improvements high load factors and its best performing reactors now make up nearly half of the global top 50 performers – even as the four reactors that were shut down were reported to have diverse insurmountable problems that had plagued their continuation.

At the other extreme, the Philippines, which had mothballed its 621 MW nuclear power reactor, built by the Westinghouse in the 1980s, was actively considering restarting it - the IAEA in a study done in 2008 had concluded that the plant could be run safely and would be economical too if suitable upgrades were done. The Korea Electric Power Company which was hired to conduct a feasibility study for the Philippines government had recommended that the plant be refurbished.

In the context of the rising power demand, it is yet to be seen whether the severe winter storms that have raged in North America and Europe would reinitiate the skepticism about nuclear power's role in the energy mix; skepticism that was spawned by the Fukushima aftermath. It is not wind nor solar that could provide an assured base load in such emergencies.

As for new reactor designs, while the fast reactors still remain promising for the future, the SMR (Small Modular Reactor), also made headlines during the year, with the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission giving it a nod. As the US Secretary of Energy stated "Small modular reactors represent a new generation of safe, reliable, low-carbon nuclear energy technology and provide a strong opportunity for America to lead this emerging global industry." The US Department of Energy also authorised funding for SMR and reflected the drive in the US for new technological options for future energy challenges. It is relevant to quote the US Secretary of Energy in this context - "We think these technologies, and there are a multiplicity of them, as you know, (and) are very, very, very promising. Very interesting features, passive safety features, nice security features, underground siting, factory production, hopefully driving down costs, more flexibility, including flexibility in financing inherent to the scale, but of course we won't really know about the cost performance until we get small modular reactors out there." In the light of these clear positions it would not be correct to underestimate, as some anti-nuclear campaigners in India persist in doing, the true potential of India-US nuclear cooperation in diverse ways.

China remained the leader in new constructions even though in terms of global power outputs so far China figures near the bottom of the graph where lead entries are from Russia and the OECD countries such as US, France, UK, OECD Europe and South Korea. While China's agreement to supply four nuclear power reactors to Pakistan has been in the news, what is not examined carefully is whether China may bid to emerge as a major exporter of nuclear power plants in the coming decades. According to a US energy analyst the International Marketing Head for China Nuclear Power Engineering Company - China's largest nuclear plant builder - plans to dominate the nuclear power market worldwide, just with present technology. Thus while others debate about the Generation 4 technology and explore options to effectively answer nuclear power critics on safety, security, non-proliferation and waste management, not to mention public perceptions, the Chinese nuclear juggernaut might be heading its own way on just what China has. If such perceptions are valid, the sheer size of Chinese nuclear enterprise might cast a different spell on NSG proceedings. Who would in the suppliers' cartel cross-examine China? India's place is almost invisible in the global capacity graph for nuclear electricity with less than 5000 MW out of the global total of 375000 MW. So much for the realisation of promises articulated ten years ago.

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Maoist Attack on the CRPF: Time for New Counter-strategies

15 December 2014

The 1 December 2014 killing of 14 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district by the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) should invariably go down as one of the country's worst security force operations in recent times. In terms of the killing of trained personnel, looting of their weapons, and the follow up response of a well established security establishment in the state, the attack surpasses even the far bigger extremist attacks of the past in which the force had lost far larger number of personnel. The incident further gives rise to the question whether a victory over the Maoists is at all possible under a CRPF-State police force combination formula?

The attack took place as over 2000 personnel of the CRPF were conducting a four-phase operation against the extremists in the district. As expressed by the involved personnel to the media, without much of intelligence to back these initiatives, there was little objective behind the operations rather than what broadly is described as area domination exercises. During the end of the third phase of the operation, a section of the force, variously described as consisting of 200 to 700 personnel came under attack by the Maoists – who apparently used civilian villagers as shields. There was little resistance from the forces, who as reports suggest got away only 14 fatalities. While 12 perished in the combat, two personnel died while being shifted. Had the Maoists persisted and continued their attacks, the toll could have been much higher, perilously close to the 2010 Dantewada attack in which the CRPF lost 76 troopers. The attack has led to an early conclusion of the area domination exercise in Sukma.

The attack raises several questions regarding the ability of the force that has been designated as the country's lead counter-insurgent force after the Kargil attack, vis-a-vis the Maoists. There are issues of leadership, logistics, intelligence and coordination with the state police force. However, none of these concerns are new. Each investigation following a major attack has unravelled the same ills affecting the force that has been fighting the extremists for nearly a decade and whose battalion strength in the conflict theater has grown manifold over the years. While some incremental improvements in the way operations have been conducted are natural and are there for everybody to see, fundamental issues such as the CRPF leadership's strategy of fighting the war with well-motivated and adequately supported personnel have been chronically absent.

This explains why the transient successes that have pushed the 10-year old CPI-Maoist arguably to its weakest state notwithstanding, the CRPF's own history of engagement with the extremists is replete with mistakes, setbacks, and a perennial search for the right principles of operational accomplishment. The force's projects to generate intelligence by setting up an dedicated wing; its initiatives of developing bonds with the tribal population by providing them with gifts, medical facilities, and organising sports and cultural events; and its efforts to narrow down the differences with the state police forces have all achieved marginal results. Even the 10-battalion strong Combat Battalion for Resolute Action (COBRA), raised with the specific objective of fighting the Maoists, which has since been diluted to make them deal with the insurgents of all denominations in the northeast, have minor achievements to demonstrate, in the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)'s own assessments.

The uncomfortable conclusion one can derive from the state-of-affairs is that the CRPF, in its present state, is not the force that can deliver significant successes in the Maoist conflict theaters. Even with an ever-expanding budget of Rs. 12,169.51 crores for the current financial year - amounting to almost 1/5th of the MHA's entire budget – the successive chiefs of the force have failed to provide its fighting troops even the basic of the provisions. Media narratives indicate soldiers keeping themselves operationally fit with rice, lentils and Maggi noodles. Worse still, seen in combination with poor condition of the state police forces and their virtual irrelevance to the conflict resolution project, it points at an ignominious future of a permanent state of conflict in a sizeable geographical expanse of the country.

In response to the Sukma attack, the MHA plans to induct more forces into Chhattisgarh. Such a move, in the pipeline since the new government assumed power in New Delhi in May 2014, is based on the premise that more boots on the ground would be able to reverse the success of the Maoists. Nothing can be farther from truth. The CRPF's failure needs to be seen in the context of the overall lack of imagination among the country's policy makers in dealing with the Maoist threat. Ever since the CPI-Maoist emerged as a major challenge, lackadaisical, reactionary, and adhoc-ish measures have been passed off as official policies. Even as such experimentation continues, the soldiers, among others, are paying with their blood and lives in conflicts mainland Indians are completely oblivious to.

Naxal Violence: Challenges to Jharkhand Polls

17 November 2014

As electorates in Jharkhand start casting their ballot on 25 November, marking the beginning of the five-phase assembly elections spanning almost a month, the threat of left-wing extremism hangs heavy over

the poll process. However, while the elections may pass without much violence, addressing the issue of extremism would remain important for the party assuming power.

Statistics reveal an improved security scenario since the last assembly elections. From 208 civilian and security force fatalities in 742 violent incidents recorded in 2009, 152 deaths in 387 incidents took place in 2013. This year, till the first week of November, less than 60 deaths have been reported. Police claim that the Maoists have retreated from the majority of their strongholds, leading to the return of normalcy in several areas.

However, media personnel covering the elections portray a different picture of a lacklustre campaign under a pervading regime of fear. In districts like Latehar, Gumla and Khunti, police personnel bury themselves under barricaded and fortified police stations advising civilians not to venture into the interior areas. The candidates and their supporters, as a result, have indulged in isolated efforts to seek support among the people. Rallies and open canvassing of votes have remained predominantly urban affairs. Prominent journalists from the state like Dayamani Barla have indicated that the results of the polls in several districts of the state are indeed being decided by the power of the gun, wielded by the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) and another three dozen splinter criminal groups, some of whom have been courted by the political parties.

Several incidents of recoveries of arms have given further credence to the fact that the CPI-Maoist that has been announcing the boycott of the polls through pamphlets and posters is determined to carry out some acts of violence targetting the security forces and political activists. Over 400 kilograms of local explosives and 1,740 detonators were among the items recovered in Latehar district on 10 November. On 15 November, an improvised explosive device (IED) weighing 40 kilograms was found dug under a road in Khunti district.

On 15 November, a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel was injured in an encounter with the Maoists in Gumla district. The apparent Maoist strategy before the polls has been to use forested areas such as Kumari and Saranda to launch attacks on the security forces and poll officials. These are indications that the reduced violence of the past months, mostly due to the monsoon rains, may not serve as a parameter of state success any longer. The general secretary of CPI-Maoist's Bihar Jharkhand special area committee (BJSAC) Rupesh has indeed warned that the relative silence of the Maoists should not be confused with the disenchantment of the militia. "It could be a part of our strategy that we are not willing to waste our energy, forces and weapons but apt reply would be given to the security forces if they continue with their repression," he said in a media interview published on 15 November. Thus, some attacks can be expected both during the polling process and also in the days following the exercise, when levels of preparedness decline.

However, sporadic acts of violence are not likely to disrupt the polls in a significant manner. The percentage of voters casting their ballot in the past elections indicate both a popular yearning to take part in the democratic exercise and also the ability of the forces to provide a reliable security cover. Latehar, for example, recorded over 55 per cent of voting in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections and 58 per cent during the 2009 assembly elections. Tribal-dominated Khunti district recorded 61 per cent voter turnout in the Lok Sabha elections, whereas Singhbhum recorded a 63 per cent turnout. Over 40,000 security forces were on duty during the Lok Sabha elections. This time, the election commission has promised to treble the number of forces.

A violence-free election ensured by force saturation can only be the first step towards addressing the problem of left-wing extremism. The newly elected government must evolve a credible policy to address the problem. The manifesto and other political pronouncements of the main political parties, however, portray a gross lack of imagination on how to solve the problem. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) broadly promises in four sentences in its 56-page manifesto that it will "try to combine social as well as developmental solutions for extremism." The JMM's 16-page flaws-marred manifesto did not even mention the issue.

Given the state of left-wing extremism that assumes additional complexity in states like Bihar and Jharkhand owing to the caste dynamics as well as factionalism among outfits, an immediate solution to the extremism problem is unforeseeable. While its own police force has been found wanting, Jharkhand's reputation of under-utilising the central forces has remained a matter of serious concern. The least the young state with 40 per cent of the national mineral wealth can hope for is to take forward steps towards the containment of the threat. The past has been disappointing. The future, one hopes, would be different.

Naxalites and the Might of a Fragile Revolution

20 October 2014

On the morning of 18 October 2014, Shiv Kumar, a personnel belonging to the Chhattisgarh Armed Police was pulled out of a passenger bus in Sukma district by a group of Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) cadres and killed. Kumar was ill and was on his way to the hospital when the bus he had boarded was waylaid by extremists. On the previous day, Raghunath Kisku, Founder Member, Nagarik Suraksha Samity (NSS), an anti-Maoist organisation, was killed by Maoists in Ghatshila sub-division of Jharkhand's East Singhbhum district.

Kumar was the 69th security force personnel and Kisku, the 164th civilian, to be killed by Maoists in 2014. Other activities perpetrated by the Maoists till 15 September include 125 attacks on the police; 40 occasions of snatching of weapons from the security forces; and holding of 25 arms training camps and 46 jan adalats in areas under their influence. While the occurrence of larger attacks have substantially decreased, the number of extremism-related incidents roughly remain the same compared to the corresponding period in 2013 – indicating the continuation of the challenge.

And yet it is a hard time for the Maoists. Till 15 September, 1129 CPI-Maoist cadres were neutralised, including 49 who were killed in encounters, and 1080 cadres, arrested. While the outfit can take pride from the sacrifices made by these men and women, what continues to trouble it is the perpetual desolation creeping into its ranks and files, leading to a large number of surrender of its leaders and cadres.

Among the 395 who have surrendered till 30 September are leaders like Gumudavelli Venkatakrishna Prasad alias Gudsa Usendi, Secretary, Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee (DKSZC), arguably the outfit's most potent military division based in Bastar and his wife Raji; GP Reddy, Member, the DKSZC, and his wife Vatti Adime; and Bhagat Jade and his wife Vanoja. According to the Chhattisgarh police, over 140 cadres have surrendered between June and September 2014 in Bastar alone, partly due to the disillusion with the outfit's ideology and partly convinced by the police's method of highlighting the discrimination suffered by the local Chhattisgarh cadres at the hands of those drawn from Andhra Pradesh.

Press statements of the CPI-Maoist, while condemning these surrenders as demonstration of opportunism and desertion of the movement by corrupt and politically degenerated persons, admit that the revolution is currently undergoing its most difficult phase. The CPI-Maoist has accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government in New Delhi of launching the third phase of Operation Green Hunt, a ruthless war aimed at annihilating the Maoists who are the "biggest threat" to its "pro-reform" policies. Asserting that it has merely only engaged in a "war of self defence," the outfit has called for a "widespread struggle to fight back the threat by uniting all the revolutionary and democratic forces."

Its progressively declining capacity to annihilate enemies since 2010 – in spite of the ability to pull off some of the most spectacular attacks on security forces and politicians in recent years – has remained a matter of worry for the CPI-Maoist. Its failure to disrupt the parliamentary and state assembly elections coupled with a regular desertion of its cadres has descended as an existential threat on the outfit that once controlled one-third of the country's geographical area. Even with the persisting bureaucratic inertia and unimaginative security force operations, most of the affected states have gained in their fight against the extremists.

However, the outfit's domination over large swathes of area in Chhattiagr, Odisha and Jharkhand with significant presence in states like Bihar provides it with the ability to continue with its small ambushes. Its recruitment and fund raising ability appears to have shrunk. And yet, the outfit harps about a people's militia "now in thousands" united by apathy of the state and carefully calibrated image of the government being a representative of the exploitative industrial houses. Hence, a scenario in which surrenders and killings of the Maoists would push the outfit into oblivion is remote.

The Indian Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), after months of deliberation, is now armed with a new policy to counter the Maoists. The policy, subject to cabinet approval, would remain open to use "any element of national power" against the extremists. Although it does not rule out peace talks with the extremists, it makes the peace process conditional to the CPI-Maoist renouncing violence. It plans to make the state police the lead counter-insurgent force against the extremists while assigning the central forces, especially the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the responsibility of holding the counter-insurgency grid together "like a glue." While impressive in its nuances, the approach is guided by the belief that it is possible to wipe out the Maoists by force alone.

The impact of the new official counter-Maoist policy remains to be seen. However, in the clash between a militarily 'down-and-not-yet-out' CPI-Maoist and the official security apparatus that has its own set of serious problems, little more than persistence of the logjam can be expected.

Six Thousand Plus Killed: The Naxal Ideology of Violence

15 September 2014

How does one analyse the killings of 6105 civilians and security forces in incidents related to left-wing extremism between 2005 and 2013?

Given that the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist), since its formation in 2004, has been responsible for majority of these killings, conventional analyses have mostly focused on big and small incidents that produced these victims. While such methods are useful in terms of attempting to grasp the growing or declining capacity of the outfit, it is also useful to analyse the unceasing violence as upshot of an ideology that has for decades underlined the necessity to shed the enemy's blood to bring about a change in social and political order.

Three leaders – Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Kondapalli Seetharamaiah – dominate the discourse on Naxalism, which began in the 1960s. Mazumdar, in his 'Eight Documents' in 1965, exhorted the workers of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) to take up armed struggle against the state. He underlined that action and not politics was the need of the hour. Such calls resulted in a number of incidents in which the CPI-M workers started seizing arms and acquiring land forcibly on behalf of the peasants from the big landholders in Darjeeling. These incidents went on to provide the spark for the 1967 peasant uprising.

Following the formation of the All India Coordination Committee of Revolutionaries (AICCR), that emerged out of the CPI-M in November 1967 and was renamed as All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) in May 1968, Mazumdar further reiterated his idea of khatam or annihilation of class enemies. Although incidents of individual assassinations influenced by khatam resulted in repressive state action targeting the naxalite cadres, the Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML), which was formed in 1969 breaking away from the CPI-Marxist, continued professing violence as the key tool of revolution.

While Mazumdar's preference for using violence to overthrow existing social order and seizing state power remained the CPI-ML's mode of operation till 1972, a counter ideology with a stress on agrarian consolidation preceding an armed struggle was reiterated by Kanu Sanyal following Mazumdar's death. Sanyal was not against the idea of an armed struggle per se. However, he opposed Mazumdar's advocacy of targeted assassination.

In the subsequent years, the CPI-ML split into several factions. Although Sanyal himself headed a faction, he gradually grew redundant to the extreme left movement and committed suicide in 2010. Towards the last years of his life, Sanyal maintained that the CPI-Maoist's reliance on excessive violence does not conform to original revolutionary objectives of the Naxalite movement. On more than one occasion, Sanyal denounced the "wanton killing of innocent villagers". In a 2009 interview, Sanyal accused the CPI-Maoist of exploiting the situation in West Bengal's Lalgarh "by using the Adivasis as stooges to carry forward their agenda of individual terrorism."

In Andhra Pradesh, since the 'Spring Thunder' of Srikakulam in 1970, Kondapalli Seetharamaiah, was responsible for the growth of the Naxalite movement under the aegis of the CPI-ML. After leading a faction of the CPI-ML and forming the People's War Group (PWG) in 1980 Seetharamaiah oversaw a regime of intense violence, thus, earning the outfit the description of "the deadliest of all Naxal groups". Even after the expulsion of Seetharamaiah in 1991, the PWG and its factions remained the source of extreme violence targeting politicians and security forces in the state.

Kanu Sanyal's reluctant support for armed violence was, thus, somewhat an aberration. Playing down the importance of mindless bloodshed remained a peripheral of the Naxalite movement. Each transformation of the movement thereafter in terms of splits, mergers, and formation of new identities escalated the ingrained proclivity to use violence as an instrument of expansion and influence. The CPI-Maoist represented a natural progression of this trend. And as the fatalities data reveal, each passing year, since its 2004 formation through a merger of the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and the PWG, it became more and more reliant on violence, rationalising the strategy as a defensive mechanism essential to its existence.

In 2009 Koteswar Rao alias Kishenji, who led the outfit in West Bengal termed the violence as a "struggle for independence". Ganapathy, the CPI-Maoist general secretary, reiterated in his February 2010 interview that the violence is only a "war of self-defence" or a "counter-violence" in response to a "brutal military campaign unleashed by the state". Maoist Spokesperson Azad, who was later killed in controversial circumstances, rejected the appeal for abjuring violence by then Home Minister P Chidambaram in April 2010 indicating that such a move would allow the "lawless" security forces "continue their rampage". Azad also maintained that while the outfit generally avoids attacking the non-combatants, "the intelligence officials and police informers who cause immense damage to the movement" can not be spared.

Thus understood, few conclusions can be drawn, in contrast to beliefs that a peaceful resolution of the conflict could be possible. Its current frailty notwithstanding, regaining capacities to maximise violence would be a priority for the CPI-Maoist. It will continue to reject other methods of social and political change and maintain an unwavering faith in the utility of violence. Even while realising that a total victory vis-a-vis the state is unattainable, the outfit would remain an agent of extreme violence in its own spheres of influence.

Anti-Naxal Operations: Seeking Refuge in Symbolism

18 August 2014

The day Prime Minister Narendra Modi unfurled the national flag from the precincts of the historic Red Fort to mark India's 68th Independence Day, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) authorities in Chhattisgarh unfurled the tri-colour at Tadmetla in Sukma district. Flag hoisting at the site of the bloodiest massacre that claimed the lives of 75 CRPF personnel four years ago was apparently to make a statement that the forces have reclaimed the territory from the extremists and are asserting their authority over the piece of land. This avoidable symbolism, in the backdrop of apparent extremist domination over the area, in a way, sums up the country's stagnated approach towards the Naxal problem.

The 2010 attack at Tadmetla (then in Dantewada district which was bifurcated in 2012 to create the Sukma district) still counts as the worst attack ever to have been carried out on the central forces by the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist). The loss of an entire company of the CRPF cast a pall of gloom, and more importantly, pushed the forces into a defensive mindset. It also brought New Delhi's attempts to subdue the extremists through a multi-theatre military offensive to an abrupt halt. Subsequent inquiry by a retired police official revealed serious command and control lapses among the forces. The CRPF has not suffered a loss of that magnitude thereafter. Whether this has been achieved by addressing the weaknesses exposed by the attack or merely by becoming more defensive in its approach is debatable.

Behind the 'successful' flag hoisting at Tadmetla, however, were painstaking preparations. A CRPF contingent consisting of the specialised Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (COBRA) commandos and led by an Inspector General, camped in the area for several days. A detailed sanitisation exercise was carried out in the area during which a CRPF personnel was injured in an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) explosion and had to be air lifted for treatment. A senior official told the media that the ceremony was essential "to mark the domination of this area."

Extremism related incidents reported in 2014, however, do not indicate any security force domination over the area. Sukma continues to be among the worst extremism-affected districts in Chhattisgarh. On 9 February, two CRPF personnel, including a Deputy Commandant, were killed and 12 others injured in a landmine blast carried out by the CPI-Maoist. Not far from the site where the tri-colour was hoisted, three COBRA personnel were killed and three others injured in a Naxal ambush on 9 April. And on 11 May, extremists killed 15 security force personnel at Jeerum Nullah in the district. Several other incidents of ambush, attack and explosion have been reported from the district. In fact, the domination of the extremists has forced the CRPF to take upon itself the task of building a seven km road stretch as no private contractor has agreed to take up the job.

In October 2013, Union Home Secretary Anil Goswami had pulled up the central armed police force organisations including the CRPF operating in Chhattisgarh for their "defensive strategy." Goswami regretted the fact that there was a lull in the action by the security forces despite New Delhi's directive to engage in result-oriented operations. The forces were not just reluctant to carry out sustained offensive operations against the extremists, even the routine area domination exercises were avoided. It is not clear whether the flag hoisting in Tadmetla, with significant sanitising preparations, marks the beginning of a change in the tactic of the forces and is demonstrative of a newfound vision.

It is unfair to blame the CRPF personnel deployed in Chhattisgarh for the lull in action, for the current state of affairs emanates from a policy stagnation that marks the anti-Naxal initiative. Apart from their own internal problems and the continuing confusion whether to remain a supporting or lead counter-Naxal force, lack of coordination with the state forces, lack of adequate progress in state police modernisation, inertia at the level of bureaucracy, and lack of a national consensus with regard to solving the Naxal issue, have affected the performance of the central forces. This could be pushing them to find refuge in symbolic events rather than attempting decisive gains.

At one level, such policy stagnation is strange especially when the CPI-Maoist has lost several senior leaders across states and has failed to maintain a level of violence necessary to keep its own internal mechanism alive and kicking. At the other level, however, it underlines the country's predominantly reactionary counter-insurgency doctrine, which does relatively well in responding to extremist violence, but dithers when violence dips, either due to the setbacks suffered by the extremist outfits or because of the latter's tactical retreat decision.

The task for New Delhi, thus, is well cut out. It has to find a way to instill a sense of purpose among the state as well as the central forces. It has to ensure that the bureaucracy and grass root politics works in tandem with the security forces. And it must ensure that the acts of symbolism come to a grand halt.

A 'New' Counter-Naxal Action Plan

21 July 2014

Days after the formation of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in New Delhi, contours of a new policy vis-a-vis Left Wing Extremism (LWE) remained a matter of speculation. Whether tough measures would replace the ad hoc ones and clarity would substitute confusion were commented upon. Some of the statements of the Home Minister and the Ministry officials in the early days following the formation of the government raised hopes that a policy change, if not the prospect of an immediate solution to the problem could be on the anvil. However, the new 29-point Action Plan evolved by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) for addressing the LWE challenge point towards the continuation of the past policies and does not indicate a radical departure from the approach pursued by the previous government.

Three principal assumptions mark the new counter-LWE policy:

- a. Security force operations must precede developmental initiatives
- b. The Communist Party of India-Maoist's (CPI-M) military capacities can be crippled by targeting its top leadership
- c. Security force operations, with modest gains so far can be made effective by additional force deployment and augmenting intelligence collection.

While each of these assumptions are relevant, whether such measures can be implemented without broad-based security and governance sector reforms, remains a matter of debate.

Ruling out negotiations with the CPI-M has been one of the most highlighted aspects of Home Minister Rajnath Singh's statements in recent times. Speaking on 27 June, Singh, at the meeting of chief secretaries and Directors General of Police (DGPs) of 10 Naxal-affected states said, "There is no question of any talks now. We will take a balanced approach. But the forces will give a befitting reply if the Naxals launch attacks." Given that several past offers for negotiations have been rebuffed by the CPI-M, Singh's statement aims to serve as a foundation for a primarily force-based approach to the LWE challenge.

The new action plan involves a directive to the Intelligence Bureau to "infiltrate into Maoist ranks" and follow a specific policy of targeting the top leadership for neutralisation. The Naxal-affected states have been advised to raise commando forces similar to the Greyhounds of Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, 10 additional battalions of central armed police personnel are being deployed in Chattisgarh's Bastar region by the end of 2014 for a renewed offensive against the extremists. The new policy further speaks of creating a series of incentives for "good officers" to serve in Maoist-affected areas by offering them monetary incentives and career benefits.

All these measures, incidentally, have remained the MHA's counter-LWE approach in the past. None, however, achieved much success due to a range of deficiencies that include lack of ability as well as coordination between the central as well as state security forces and the intelligence agencies. Years since the LWE emerged as a major security threat to the country, both technical intelligence (TECHINT) as well as human intelligence (HUMINT) gathering mechanisms continue to suffer from serious shortcomings. There is an acute lack of enthusiastic participation of the state police forces in New Delhi's overall design that neither supplements nor aims to replace the central forces in countering the extremists. The new plan is silent on the ways to remove such loopholes and make operations a principally state police-led initiative. Given the fact that state bureaucracy has remained mostly apathetic to restart governance in areas cleared by the security forces, policies need to go beyond the rhetoric of 'posting of good officers' in naxal-affected areas.

In the previous years, evolving a national policy consensus on a challenge that affects at least 10 states has remained one of the main challenges for New Delhi. The 29-point Action Plan falls short of addressing the problem. It merely exhorts the affected states to appoint nodal officers to increase coordination at the centre and asks the chief ministers and home ministers to visit the affected areas in their respective states to develop a favourable image of the government among the tribal population. In the absence of a reward

system to make the non-conforming states fall in line with a central approach, such measures of improving coordination are likely to be met with lack of enthusiasm, if not resistance by the states ruled by non-Bharatiya Janata Party parties.

The current LWE situation is marked by scaled down violence by the extremists who understandably are into a consolidation mode after suffering some reversals. Recruitment activities still continue, so do the efforts to ideologically reshape the movement that seems to have deviated significantly from its original objectives and strategies. A tactical retreat of this nature often creates the illusion of victory among the policy makers. At the same time, low level violence creates significant opportunities for the government to revisit its own strategies, make inroads into the extremist areas, and prepare for future escalations. Whether the MHA would use the time well is something to watch out for.

Tackling Naxal Violence: An Agenda for the New Indian Government

16 June 2014

In a way the challenge of left-wing extremism the new National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in New Delhi faces bears close resemblance to the situation that confronted the United Progressive Alliance regime in its second tenure in 2009. However, given that the Congress party-led government failed to contain the threat, the incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party government needs to revisit the overall approach and not repeat the past policies that contributed to the survival of the extremist outfit.

In 2009, the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) was in the upswing with a dramatic spike in the deaths of civilians and security forces. Extremism-related incidents and fatalities among the civilians and the security forces increased by 41 per cent and 25 per cent respectively, in 2008. States such as Maharashtra and West Bengal contributed significantly to this upswing, with the eastern Indian state becoming the third most extremism-affected state of the country, in 2009, with 255 incidents and 158 fatalities. The CPI-Maoist was indeed looking at expanding its sphere of influence.

The UPA government sought to tame the rise of extremism with an iron hand.. The change of guards in the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) following the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks led to a series of brain storming sessions, and a new policy aiming to annihilate the CPI-Maoist, titled 'Operation Green Hunt' took shape. However, hope expressed by the then Home Secretary that security forces would be able to liberate the areas quickly and the civil administration would kick-start development work in those areas met an early end in 2010 with the Central Reserve Police Force receiving a series of setbacks at the hands of the extremists.

Over the next four years, the UPA government experimented with a cocktail of force-centric and development-oriented approach. However, even with improvements in the overall situation, the CPI-Maoist continues to remain a formidable adversary. As per the official data, each day of the year recorded over three Maoist-related violent incidents resulting in the death of at least one civilian or a security force personnel, in 2013. An identical situation has prevailed over the first six months of 2014 as well. Maoists might have been prevented from expanding their area of operations into newer territories, but the old theatres such as Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, parts of Odisha and Maharashtra continue to report significant violence. The number of attacks carried out by the CPI-Maoist and close to 50 deaths in the days preceding and following the parliamentary elections underlines the military capacities of the extremists.

Three significant deficiencies, among many, that have marked India's response to the challenge of left-wing extremism are: first, there is no national consensus on ways to meet the challenge. States and ministries have debated on whether to pursue a social development or a force-centric model of conflict resolution. Second, although the security forces have made some advances vis-à-vis the extremists, the civil administration continues to be a reluctant partner in reintegrating the former Naxal hotbeds through development administration. Third, there is an acute leadership crisis at the political as well as the security establishment levels, hindering success. These deficiencies must be addressed by the new government in New Delhi in order to make a substantial impact in the extremist-dominated areas.

Policy Prescriptions to Deal with the Red Menace

First, the unity of purpose is a key element for success in any counter-insurgency campaign. The lack of success vis-à-vis the Naxals is predominantly rooted in the diverse as well as conflicting prescriptions made not just by the states, but also by the various departments within the UPA government. Annual meetings of the chief ministers organised by the government merely provided platforms for airing diverse opinions, but made little progress in terms of arriving at a common approach. The new government must find a way to bridge the divide between the prescriptions. The prime minister as well as the home minister must not be seen as detached actors expressing helplessness at the state-of-affairs, but should lead from the front.

Second, contrary to the common perception that periodic military setbacks suffered by the security forces are the primary reasons for the continuing extremist domination, the lack of enthusiasm of the civil administration is a bigger reason for areas freed from the extremists relapsing into chaos. Development projects planned for the Saranda region in Jharkhand is an example of this malaise. A solution must be found to make the bureaucracy both at the centre as well as in the states sensitive and participatory in the development projects.

Third, small achievements would remain critical for the state's campaign against the CPI-Maoist. A leaf must be taken from the book of the Maoists, who persevered for years to find support among the tribal population and subsequently dominate the areas. The state must attempt incremental and non-reversible progress against the extremists.

Naxalism: The Insufficiency of a Force-Centric Approach

19 May 2014

In the first week of May 2014, security forces launched a fresh anti-Naxal operation at the Saranda forests in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district. The operation was started following intelligence inputs that a squad of armed Maoists had entered the forests. Few days into the operation, the state police Director General of Police (DGP) led a contingent of troops and spent a night deep inside the forests. The motive was to make a point. The media personnel were told by an assertive DGP, "We have conquered Saranda and nobody can dispute it now."

It was, however, strange for the DGP to affirm the success of his forces, for Saranda had reportedly been conquered three years back. Considered to be a Maoist liberated zone, which housed the Communist Party of India (CPI-Maoist)'s Eastern Regional Bureau (ERB) headquarters and also a large number of arms training camps, the impregnability of Saranda had been shattered in 2011.

Between July and September 2011, about 10 battalions of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel conducted Operation Anaconda seeking to liberate the area. Not many encounters took place during the operations, probably due to fact that the Maoists had decided to desert the area rather than to put up a fight. The state duly claimed victory. The domination of the security forces over the 855-square kilometre area had apparently been established.

The recovery of Saranda was important for two reasons. Firstly, it came after the failure and subsequent abandonment of Operation Green Hunt, the multi-theatre counter-Maoist operation which was launched in 2010. The OGH's failure, following a series of Maoist attacks on security forces, had convinced the MHA of the criticality of small area operations as opposed to a nation-wide blitzkrieg against the extremists. The recovery of Saranda through a focussed area approach, thus, became a reaffirmation of the fact that an incremental approach is key to ultimately defeat the extremists.

Secondly, for the Union Ministry of Rural Development, Saranda became a test case for a development-led solution to the Maoist problem. Under Minister Jairam Ramesh, support was extended to Jharkhand's 'Saranda Development Plan' that sought all round development for its inhabitants. It was hoped that the

establishment of the civil administration's writ over the area would provide a bulwark against the relapse of the area into extremism. Among the schemes sought to be implemented in the area were housing, connectivity, forest rights, watershed development, drinking water, and employment as well as free distribution of solar lanterns, bicycles and transistors.

Under ideal circumstances, the retreat of the extremists from the area and intervention of the development administration would have been able to make wonders. However, the government's ambitious plans of seeking loyal citizens among the tribal population were nullified to a large extent due to the lack of enthusiastic participation by the civil administration. A prominent newspaper's op-ed piece summed up the developments in Saranda, nine months after the SDP came into being. "Nine months on, police camps sole development in Saranda Plan", the piece appearing in *The Hindu*, June 2012, read. Other reports detailed how bicycles procured for distribution were rusting in the government offices, solely because no official was prepared to do the ground work of preparing a list of beneficiaries.

Over the passing months, even as Minister Ramesh pleaded to the media to give SDP a "second chance", Saranda saw only a haphazard development initiative, providing enough opportunity for the extremists to attempt a come back. Although the area has not seen much violence in recent times, the necessity for re-launching a security force operation to dominate an area that had already been cleared, underlines the reversal of gains made by the state.

In the near decade-long endeavour of conquest vis-à-vis the CPI-Maoist, a realisation has dawned over the policy-makers that the extremists cannot be defeated through military means alone. Therefore, in spite of what appears to the human rights and civil society organisations to be a predominantly military effort against the Maoists, a number of developmental as well as perception management initiatives have been undertaken by the government. However, this strategy of "clear, hold and develop" has not been able to make much headway mostly due to the fact that the civil administration has remained somewhat reluctant to build upon the accomplishments of the security forces.

For the new government in New Delhi, ways to make the bureaucracy an enthusiastic partner in the counter-Naxal endeavours would remain a key challenge. The political leadership both in New Delhi as well as in the affected states would have to make extra effort to inject vigour into what till now remains a mostly a sluggish civil administrative establishment. In fact, Jharkhand DGP's victory speech on 6 May underlined the key steps required to avoid relapse of recovered areas into extremism. "The villagers now require immediate administrative attention", he said.

Naxal Violence: Old Challenges for the New Government

21 April 2014

That the Communist Party of India-Maoist (Maoist) does not believe in democratic principles and electoral processes is too well known. The 2014 Lok Sabha elections provided the extremist outfit with yet another opportunity to reassert its vision for the country. In words and as well as with accompanied violence, it proved once more that the probability of a negotiated settlement to the long-standing conflict is rather low.

The CPI-Maoist released three sets of somewhat contradictory statements in March 2014, two signed by the spokesperson of the outfit's Central Committee (CC) and one on behalf of the outfit's Eastern Regional Bureau. Dated 24 March, the CC released its customary boycott of elections calling the affair "another huge financial burden on the people", which can not transform the "present exploitative system." Critiquing all the political parties for their dishonest policies towards the tribals, the statement termed the government's peace proposals "deceptive."

Interestingly, another 19-page document was released by the CC on the same day, which contained answers to 11 questions posed by the media persons to the outfit. Responding to a question on the outlook of the outfit on peace talks with the government, the spokesperson stated that while the outfit is "not against Peace Talks with the government", since talks are "an integral part of the political struggle."

However, five demands were outlined which the government must fulfil before a peace process could begin. These included declaring the CPI-Maoist a political movement; de-proscribing the outfit and its front organisations; initiating judicial inquiries into the killings of its senior leaders; stopping of security force operations; and releasing arrested leaders/cadres of the outfit.

The statement surprisingly was hailed as the outfit's declaration for peace by the media, ignoring the fact that the conditions outlined have remained an integral part of the outfit's statements in the past. While the outfit expects the government to fulfil some of its most impious demands, the outfit itself has rebuffed the minimum condition laid down by the home ministry to "stop violence for 72 hours" as the lone condition for starting of a peace process.

Few days prior to the release of the twin CC statements, the CPI-Maoist's Eastern Regional Bureau had issued a four-page 'short-term vision document' appealing the masses to choose between "real democracy" or a "pseudo-democratic system." This document, which effectively constituted a manifesto of the outfit, reiterated the need for a "new constitution" including provisions for "equal socio-economic rights to women" and "death penalty compulsory for molestation and rape." It further called for "freedom of speech and expression, right to congregate and protest, form an organisation, primary health care, access to primary education, primary and minimum employment and compulsory participation in daily governance system." The outfit additionally promised not to suppress the separatist movements with the power of the gun, but to "honour nationalist movements and self-decision to allow them dignified and peaceful co-existence (sic)."

Neither the proclamation of intent for peace nor the declaration of its own manifesto, however, stopped the outfit from carrying out a series of attacks on security force personnel, poll officials as well as civilians in the affected states that went to polls. Compared to the 2009 Lok Sabha polls, during which 19 people were killed by the outfit, till the writing of the article, at least 20 civilians and security forces had been killed in Maoist attacks.

These contrasting signals emanating from the outfit signify two possibilities. One, peace negotiation as an instrument of conflict resolution does not figure in the imagination of the extremist outfit and its utterances on a peace process are merely rhetorical. Two, the outfit intends to use violence as a bargaining tool in case a peace process with the government comes to fruition.

Faced with this deceptive extremist strategy, the action plans of the political class to deal with the challenge, remains highly fractured. Going by the manifestos of the political parties, the probability that the new government in New Delhi would be able to address the anomalies of the past and chart a new course looks blurry.

While the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) promise to deal with the problem with a "firm hand" and a policy of "zero tolerance" respectively, the Aam Admi Party (AAP) prefers a "multi-lateral dialogue." The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) opines in favour of "specific measures to tackle the socio-economic problems" faced "particularly by the tribal people." The BJP insists that "talks with the insurgent groups will be conditional and within the framework of the constitution." The Congress, on the other hand, is silent on the process of dialogue and prefers to pursue "a development agenda to empower people" in the affected areas. While the CPI-M insists that left-wing extremism is "not just a security issue," the AAP reiterates that "socio-economic development and effective political de-centralisation" hold the key.

A project that attempts to reconcile these stark differences is not only difficult, but is likely to produce a compromised and ineffective policy. Thus, in all probability, left-wing extremism will continue to be a challenge, inhibiting growth, development and governance, in the foreseeable future.

Combating Naxal Violence: Transient and Permanent Success

17 March 2014

Would the Maoists continue to carry out intermittent attacks targetting the state in the foreseeable future? Or would they eventually disintegrate and disappear owing to a leadership crisis because the state has been able to neutralise some of their top leaders while the remaining are too old for a continuous fight? The answers would shape the response to what has been the most potent case of extremism in India.

Commentary on the activities of the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) has been in a state of flux in recent years. Commentators have shifted their positions along with incidents and with rising or diminishing death tolls. Two recent instances can be cited. Neutralisation of seven Maoists in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra on 17 February, for instance, underlined that advancement of the state and weakening of the Maoists. However, following two Maoist attacks within a fortnight in Chhattisgarh that killed 20 security force personnel in February and March 2014 in Dantewada and Suka districts, the narrative shifted and the potency of the extremists was reconfirmed. The Maoists, who appeared to have previously weakened, have resurfaced as a real threat to the 2014 Lok Sabha elections in certain states.

Much of these fluctuations in analyses owe their origin to the states' claims of success against the extremists. There is no denying the fact that the security forces have indeed made some advances in the Maoist-affected theatres. The most usual parameter to judge this is the dip in violence in recent years. Compared to 2010, when 1,005 civilians and security forces were killed in extremist attacks, 394 deaths occurred in 2013. Additionally, combined with figures of killings of Maoist cadres, the number of surrenders as well as occasional confirmations from the outfit, the CPI-Maoist's capacity to orchestrate violence has been interpreted as having declined.

If these conclusions are true, how does one interpret the 28 February and 11 March attacks in Chhattisgarh? Are these attacks only aberrations and constitute desperate attempts by the extremists to reiterate their presence, more so before the elections? Or do they indicate that the success of the state was more of a tactical favour granted by the extremists and hence, the lull in violence was merely temporary?

While the assertion that Maoists have indeed killed less civilians and security forces in recent years is sustainable, whether this decline in extremist violence is demonstrative of augmented capacities of the state remains a relevant question. With particular reference to the 11 March attack, the security force establishment has argued in defence of the ambushed Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) team, vouching for its bravery. While some arguments have tried to locate Maoist successes in the violation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) by the security force personnel, the CRPF chief has stated that SOPs are not sacrosanct and can be improvised if situations demand. Similarly, criticisms regarding lack of intelligence and coordination between the central and the state police have all been rebuffed.

If all is well with the mode of operations, why are the security forces regularly falling prey to attacks by a so called weak and demoralised extremist outfit? The answer to this seemingly complicated question is relatively simple. The state, with all its instrumentalities of power, has failed to dominate the extremism-affected territory under question. Blame it either on the lack of adequate strength of security force personnel or a cohesive strategy to dislodge the extremists, the fact remains that much of the territory which report incidents of violence continues to remain under the grip of the extremists.

Either the state's success of neutralising key Maoist leaders through encounters, arrests and surrenders or its inflicting of losses through disruption of means of communication and logistics has not enlarged its writ into the ungoverned territories. As a result, security force raids into extremist-held territories, while making impressive media headlines, have not converted those areas into state-only areas. The lack of a strategy to gradually expand the state's domination is also the reason why the development initiatives of the state have failed to win over the tribals. One cannot expect to have loyalists in areas that are controlled by one's adversary. And in such areas under extremist domination, the losses undergone by the outfit are recovered fairly rapidly. This is precisely the reason why the statement of the Union Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde that the state will 'take revenge' for the 11 March attack in Chhattisgarh appears hollow.

A few hours after the 11 March attack, a social network page, ostensibly supportive of the extremists, uploaded a picture of a bloodied Indian map along with a gun totting rebel. "Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed," Mao Zedong's famous line, was scribbled across the picture. The picture is a pointer towards the future. The Maoist war against the state, as long as it lasts, will be bloody. The least that the state can do is to embark upon a strategy to ensure that the areas in which the Maoists launch these bloody wars are shrunk on a gradual basis.

Maoists in the Northeast: Reality and Myth-Making

17 February 2014

On 9 June 2013, just before the clock struck midnight, a police contingent in Assam's Tinsukia district boarded the Chennai-Egmore Express, minutes before its three-day long journey, and pulled out 66 youths. A critical intelligence input received by the police had indicated that these youths from tea gardens, Ahom and Moran communities were going to join the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist). Following two days of interrogation and confirmation from the employers of the youths in Chennai, all were released. To cover up a major embarrassment, the police establishment forced the parents of the youths to sign undertakings that they would produce their wards before the police whenever asked for. The incident in a way summed the mindset of the security establishment in Assam, which for the past couple of years, has been pursuing a non-existent enemy, invariably under political orders.

Media reports on the alleged inroads made by the CPI-Maoist into the Northeast in general and Assam in particular have produced alarming narratives comprising encounters, arrests, shadowy extremist game plans, and a vision for taking over the region. While few of these incidents are real, most, like the incident narrated earlier, are unsustainable.

Arrested Maoist cadres identified as central committee members, training instructors, and key leaders of the outfit's eastern wing have been found to be old men in the age group of 65 to 70 years, a clear departure from the mainstream Maoist movement whose leaders and cadres are much younger. Post-arrest, the so called high profile cadres like Aditya Bora have been given instant bail by the courts in view of the weak and unsubstantiated charges brought against them. The so called extortion notes recovered in upper Assam districts contain expressions such as 'Maubadi 147' and symbols of a rising sun, indicating the involvement of petty criminals posing as Maoists or even cadres of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), whose party symbol is the rising sun. The 'disappearance' of 300 youths from various Assam districts has been described as a successful recruitment drive by the CPI-Maoist. The Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border region has been described as the new hotbed of Maoist activity. Hundreds of kilometres separate the area from the nearest Maoist area of activity in West Bengal, violates the principle of contiguity, which the CPI-Maoist steadfastly hold on to in its expansion drive.

Such disquieting narratives, as a result, coexist with saner assessments, incidentally by some of the senior police officials in Assam. They in fact, insist that there is no constituency in Assam which the Maoists can exploit to spread their ideology. In January 2014, Assam's director general of police confirmed that "Maoists have also not yet been able to make strong inroads into Assam."

The purpose of this column here is not to argue that Maoists have no plans for the Northeast. They do. However, that is not a near or medium-term plan for sabotage, armed struggle and carving out of liberated zones in the region, but a more rational and realistic stratagem for using the region's weaknesses and vulnerabilities for weapons procurement and services of the insurgent outfits for training purposes. The joint declaration between the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Manipur and the CPI-Maoist goes back to October 2008. As part of the declaration, the PLA in 2010 organised arms training camps for the Maoist cadres in Jharkhand. Maoist leader Kishenji (who was killed in November 2011) travelled to the PLA and National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) camps in Manipur and Nagaland respectively to deepen partnership and explore arms purchase and joint training opportunities. The NSCN-IM purchased arms from a Chinese company intended for the Maoists. ULFA

chief Paresh Baruah has congratulated the Maoists for their successful ambushes in Chhattisgarh and sent condolence messages following the killing of Maoists in encounters.

However, none of the outfits in the Northeast have ever expressed any desire to let the Maoists operate in what they consider to be their exclusive playing field. The CPI-Maoist has indeed attracted some youths from the region. But those journeys from the Northeast to Maoist camps in the Indian mainland in some ways resemble those undertaken by Muslim youths from all nooks and corners of the world to join the anti-Soviet Mujahideen in Afghanistan in the 1980s. The objectives of those cadres are certainly not to wage a guerrilla war inside the Northeast but to enforce the ranks of the CPI-Maoist, conforming to their personal ideological affiliation.

This, however, has not stopped Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi from repeatedly demanding the 'Maoist-affected' status for Assam's nine districts, which would entitle the affected districts to Rupees 30 crore additional developmental funds every year. Notwithstanding New Delhi's rejection of the demand, Gogoi continues to label civil rights groups and anti-dam movements as Maoist-backed and calls for deployment of additional security forces. If acceded, Assam, which has not reported a single civilian and security force fatality in Maoist violence, would rank along with some of the worst extremist affected states of the country.

Surrender of Gudsa Usendi: Ominous beginning for the Naxals?

19 January 2014

Beginning of 2014 could not have been any worse for the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist). The outfit lost one of its trusted lieutenants. On 13 January, spokesperson of Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee, GVK Prasad alias Gudsa Usendi, who not only was in charge of issuing press statements on behalf of the outfit, but was also responsible for some of its military successes in Chhattisgarh, surrendered to the Andhra Pradesh police. He complained of ill health and disillusionment with the outfit's excessive reliance on violence. He would receive the Rupees 20 lakh which was the bounty on his head. Usendi's surrender was followed by few other surrenders of low and middle ranking cadres in Chhattisgarh.

The CPI-Maoist came out with an audio statement trivializing the impact of Usendi's surrender. Calling him a 'traitor', a 'morally flawed' individual; criticising his ways with the women cadres and the fact that Usendi chose to abandon his wife and surrender with another woman cadre, the statement noted that such surrenders, which is 'not a new phenomenon for the revolutionary movement' would have no impact on the revolution that the Maoists are waging.

At one level, the statement appears to be a natural reaction of the outfit, which has suffered from a series of splits and surrenders, and has also lost a number of senior leaders to arrests and killings in the past years. While deaths and arrests are unavoidable parts of its military campaign, the outfit is most perturbed by the possible impact of the public denouncement of its ideology by its erstwhile lieutenants. By criticising the surrendering cadres and idolising the ones who got killed in encounters with the security forces, the Maoists want to keep their flock together.

Recent history of left-wing extremism in India bears testimony to the damaging impact of neutralisation of key leaders on the outfit's overall activity. Kishenji's killing in November 2011 led to the marginalisation of the Maoists in West Bengal. Sabyasachi Panda's August 2012 rebellion in Odisha was a serious setback for the outfit's plan of expansion in that state. The September 2009 arrest of Kobad Ghandy and the July 2010 killing of Cherikuri Rajkumar alias Azad constituted blows to the outfit's policy making apparatus as well as to its expansion strategy in southern India. Usendi's sudden departure from the scene would certainly affect the outfit. That the outfit would find a leader to replace him and would eventually overcome his loss is, however, a different debate.

At the other level, the satisfaction expressed in the official circles, post Usendi's surrender that the CPI-Moist would eventually crumble because of its excessive reliance on violence and disenchantment of its cadres from the party's ideology, may be misplaced. That Usendi's surrender and fair treatment accorded to him by the state would lead to a stream of surrenders of top cadres is far fetched. That Maoist violence would die a natural death without any substantial effort from the state is an unreal expectation.

Ground reality in the Maoist conflict theatres may be different. While the level of violence orchestrated in 2010, so far the worst year of Maoist violence, resulting in the deaths of over 900 civilians and security forces would possibly remain unmatched, an upswing in violence, albeit marginal, was recorded in 2013 over the previous year. 270 civilians and security forces were killed in 2013 in various states compared to 250 deaths in 2012. In spite of the killing of 151 Maoist cadres in 2013, the outfit's level of violence did not show much signs of abatement. States like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar and Odisha remained affected by significant amount of extremist mobilisation as well as violence.

Although deployment of about 150 companies of security forces minimised violence during the state assembly elections in Chhattisgarh, there was little to suggest that the state is in the process of developing its wherewithal to replicate the Andhra Pradesh success on its soil. Bihar's unique approach towards the problem has merely translated into its diminishing ability to neutralise the Maoists, where as the extremists continue to kill, abduct and snatch weapons. While Maoist inroads into the northeast remains mostly an exaggerated claim by the Assam government, the CPI-Maoist appears to have made concerted efforts for expansion into the southern states.

In 2013, small victories were scored by the security forces against the Maoists. But the year also witnessed setbacks in the form of the Darbha attack in Chhattisgarh in which 27 people including some senior politicians were killed and the killing of an Superintendent of Police in Jharkhand. Moreover, the security forces in Chhattisgarh were also involved in at least two encounters in which civilians rather than extremists were killed, highlighting the persistence of intelligence collection problems. It is the continuing ability to inflict damages on the state, which would keep the CPI-Maoist relevant in the eyes of its sympathisers.

Usendi's surrender is an ominous beginning for the CPI-Maoist, but certainly not the end game.

Column: Regional Economy

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South Asia: Rupee Regionalisation and Intra-regional Trade Enhancement

23 December 2014

The year 2014 is likely to close with the Indian rupee among the best performing major emerging market currencies against the US dollar. The fall in rupee value over the year has been marginal even while some of the other emerging market currencies have seen a free fall. Improved macro fundamentals including the current account deficit, domestic inflation along with prospects of positive and stable growth have helped contain capital outflows from India even as expectations of higher interest rates in the US draw money back from other emerging markets. It may be time therefore to consider using the rupee as the regional currency, a move that can contribute to enhancement of intra regional trade in South Asia. In neighbouring East Asia, China initiated the process in 2009 and is well on its way to internationalising the renminbi. India formed a task force for the purpose in 2013 with little progress thereafter.

Currency internationalisation involves the use of a currency instead of national currencies, by residents and non-residents, for all international transactions whether they be purchases in goods, services or financial assets and requires full capital account convertibility and a flexible monetary management framework. As seen appropriate for South Asia, a limited version of the concept that involves the currency usage, in this case, of the rupee, in trade invoicing and settlement within the region, could be useful. Rupee regionalisation in this manner will help enhance regional and bilateral trade through reduced

transaction costs and exchange rate risk, the latter having been significantly brought forth vis-à-vis advanced market currencies during the global financial crisis. Countries with a trade surplus can maintain rupee receipts as rupee bank deposits which can subsequently be invested in rupee denominated financial assets through offshore/onshore markets. In case of a trade deficit, bilateral rupee-local currency swap lines between the Reserve Bank of India and the central bank of a regional economy can be negotiated to enhance their liquidity position. Additionally, South Asian economies can maintain smaller dollar reserves or allow for greater currency diversification in reserve accumulation. This will imply lower risk exposure and hence costs given that 'store of value' properties of advanced economies' currencies are increasingly being questioned.

Some facilitating factors in this regard such as India's centrality to regional trade, its economic size, macroeconomic stability and use of rupee in cross-border trade with Nepal and Bhutan already exist. Further, India has already assumed the role of liquidity provider with its regional swap arrangements. India and Bhutan have a currency swap agreement signed between the Reserve Bank of India and the Royal Monetary Authority of Bhutan (RMAB) for US\$100 million. It enables RMAB to make withdrawals of US dollar, euro or Indian rupee in multiple tranches up to a maximum of US\$100 million or its equivalent. In May 2012, RBI had announced it would offer swap facilities aggregating US\$2 billion, both in foreign currency and Indian rupee, to SAARC member countries. The arrangement would be for a three-year period and would help bring financial stability in the region. However, these swaps are denominated in dollars and earmarked only as a line of reserve for partner countries during a balance-of-payment crisis; it is not for enabling trade payment.

India is also in the process of developing local currency offshore bond markets. The International Finance Corporation (IFC), an arm of the World Bank Group, in 2013 launched a US\$1 billion off shore rupee linked bond programme. The bonds to be bought and sold in dollars are denominated in rupees and offer returns linked to rupee interest and exchange rates. They have a triple-A rating guaranteed by the IFC. A series of these bonds are to be issued by the IFC and proceeds will be invested in government and corporate bonds. The bilateral swap arrangements and the offshore market activity are both indicators of the strength and credibility of the Indian rupee.

China has a far more ambitious programme and aims at internationalisation of its currency with regionalisation as only a step in the process. The centrality of China in the regional trade and production networks has been at the base of the expanding ease and use of its currency in trade settlements throughout East Asia. China initiated a pilot program for renminbi internationalisation in 2009 with renminbi (RMB) settlement of cross-border trade in a limited number of cities and regions that was later expanded in geographical coverage and scope of eligible transactions. Linkages between offshore market and onshore market have been set up. Onshore financial markets have been steadily opened to foreign investors. Banks outside mainland China participating in cross-border trade settlement transactions can invest their RMB funds in the interbank bond market in mainland China. China has also signed bilateral RMB-local currency swap agreements with central banks or monetary authorities of 23 countries. Even while negotiating FTAs with regional partners, China has been vigorous in elevating the status of its currency, the renminbi (RMB), to a regional unit of accounting and exchange.

While internationalisation of Chinese currency would need to be supported by large scale domestic financial sector reforms and call for some serious pondering on its implications for international currency and reserve mechanisms, India can move ahead with regionalisation of the rupee with the available financial infrastructure in its limited task of trade enhancement in a region specific context.

18th SAARC Summit: An Economic Agenda

11 November 2014

The 18th SAARC summit is scheduled to be held in Kathmandu, Nepal, in a little less than three weeks from now. The theme of the summit is 'deeper integration for peace and prosperity'. Deeper integration, in addition to the creation of a free trade area, entails liberalisation of services, investment, elimination of non-tariff barriers, and in general, going beyond traditional market access issues.

The theme is appropriately timed, given that the neighbouring ASEAN bloc is expected to achieve the formulation of an economic community by 2015 and the larger region of the ASEAN+3 (China, Japan, Korea) +3 (Australia, New Zealand, India) is negotiating a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), also to be finalised by 2015. Compelling regional forces therefore exist for South Asia to accelerate towards deeper integration.

What could be a possible agenda for the SAARC to take forward the idea of deeper integration in South Asia?

First, evaluate the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) for its continued relevance in the region. There are overlapping trade agreements and unilateral policy announcements among member countries that undermine the regional agreement. The bilateral agreement between India and Sri Lanka is operating successfully with both sides desirous of its elevation to a CEPA. India has a preferential trade agreement with Afghanistan, and trade treaties operating like de facto free trade agreements with Bhutan and Nepal. Exports of all Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are allowed to enter India free of duty and quota restrictions.

A major proportion of regional trade is thus covered by preferential terms of trade, independent of the SAFTA. India-Pakistan trade will remain below potential as a natural outcome of traders' risk-return calculations in an atmosphere of constant friction, and Pakistan's continued hesitation to grant India the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status (euphemistically termed as Non Discriminatory Market Access). Eight years of implementation of the SAFTA have not led to intra-regional trade expanding beyond 6 per cent of the region's total trade.

The 2010 SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services (SATIS) has made less than impressive progress. Resource-constrained South Asian economies must therefore make future calculations with due recognition of existing conditions and past performance of regional agreements.

Second, focus on factors that could facilitate trade in South Asia. An aspect that has drawn relatively less attention but is of critical importance is the lack of financial connectivity in the region. As banking channels are limited in many areas, financial support measures for trade capacity build-up could be of major assistance. Local currency swap arrangements, with assistance from central banks for settling payments in local currencies of cross-border charges and fee for cross-border movement of goods could be a feasible option in the near future. India and Bhutan signed a currency swap arrangement whereby the Royal Monetary Authority of Bhutan (RMAB) is enabled to make withdrawals of US dollars, Euros or Indian rupees in multiple tranches up to a maximum of \$100 million or its equivalent.

In 2012, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced it would offer swap facilities aggregating \$2 billion in both foreign currencies and Indian rupees to SAARC member countries for a three-year period to help bring financial stability in the region. However, these swaps are denominated in dollars and earmarked only as a line of reserve for partner countries during a balance-of-payment crisis and not for enabling trade payment. India's Exim Bank could also extend operations in context-suitable trade finance instruments, provide export credit insurance and undertake risk assessment of small producers and exporters. Countries could also evolve ways and means of joint information access and exchange for better risk assessment of individual traders and general financial environment.

Lack of financial connectivity is a particularly severe constraint for border trade that therefore remains confined to a limited number of commodities and barter systems. Border regions and communities are amongst the poorest in South Asia. Setting up a regional fund or a bilateral fund for border trade could be taken up for consideration at the SAARC summit. Trade finance could help border regions develop in a manner such that they become channels of absorbing and transmitting economic dynamism of neighbouring countries rather than being solely dependent on their own countries.

The last item on my agenda for the upcoming SAARC summit is to review the involvement of the nine SAARC observer nations. Do we share a common agenda? Could we involve these states to strengthen the regional voice at international fora? There must be a broader vision to utilise the expertise of these nations to build a more substantive association on a regional basis – given that some of these observer nations are our co-participants in emerging regional economic formulations – as also their expertise in achieving peaceful co-existence via economic integration in their respective regions.

Regional Economic Architecture: Is India Ready?

20 October 2014

Two mega regional trade agreements – the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) – are currently under negotiation in Asia. The RCEP, launched at the East Asia Summit in November 2012, is a comprehensive goods, services and investment agreement among the 10-member ASEAN and its six Free Trade Agreement (FTA) partners, namely Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, Korea, and India. Aimed at deeper integration, the RCEP is accommodative of developmental differentials among the member economies and allows for open accession according to the level of preparation.

The ASEAN is central to the RCEP process. The TPP that began as a four-member FTA with Brunei, Chile, New Zealand and Singapore now includes eight more countries: the US, Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru and Vietnam. The TPP is a far more ambitious agreement with an agenda beyond liberalisation to include regulatory compatibility and facilitating investment and business climate. The initiative, now in its final rounds of negotiations is aimed at achieving 'WTO plus provisions' in areas like goods, services, investment, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), competition, dispute resolution, trade remedies, customs procedures, government procurement, labour standards and environment. India is a member of the RCEP but not of the TPP. The RCEP will hold its fifth round of negotiations in New Delhi in December 2014, preceded by the India-ASEAN and East Asia Summits in November 2014 in Myanmar.

The RCEP will help India integrate into the regional production networks. This is a significant advantage as global trade patterns are changing in response to production fragmentation across borders and India's parts and components trade, that is integral to regional production networks, is currently less than 10 per cent of its total trade with the ASEAN. Also, as the ASEAN moves closer to achieving its vision of an economic community and becoming a globally integrated, highly competitive, single market and production base by 2015, India will gain through its membership of the mega-regional agreement. The 2010 ASEAN-India FTA will further contribute to this process of economic integration.

There are, however, the following concerns regarding India's preparedness to take on the challenges of participation in the evolving regional economic architecture:

First is the challenge that overlapping members of the RCEP and TPP will pose for India. Notwithstanding the large-scale differences in the agenda of the two agreements, the spill-over effects of the TPP on the RCEP will be evident in terms of the higher liberalisation and regulatory standards that the common members having accepted in the TPP, would demand of their RCEP partners. This would imply necessary cost-bearing reforms in the non-TPP member economies of the RCEP like India. In the past, New Delhi has put up a stiff resistance or found it difficult to negotiate regulatory issues in agreements at both global and regional levels. In that context, the stance that has been evident on issues involving IPR may not be sustainable once the mega regional agreements conclude. Vis-à-vis customs procedures, the World Bank's 2014 global logistics performance index shows India with the lowest score among all common members across the RCEP and the TPP. While India may have concrete reasons to not accept the WTO trade facilitation deal, credible domestic reforms on this front cannot be deferred for too long.

Second, is the inevitability of giving preferential market access to China under the RCEP, a prospect that India, fearing an import surge, has otherwise resisted. In 2014, India had a \$ 36.2 billion with China, even as bilateral trade stood at \$66 billion. While India's proposed 'safeguard duty' on Chinese imports can

only be a short-term corrective measure, China's offer to take up tariff cuts for some products under the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA) may not even happen. The APTA has been a slow-moving agreement with less than satisfactory performance in terms of goods coverage and consequent trade enhancement. Its fourth round of product negotiations that started in 2007 is yet to be concluded. It may be a far better strategy for India to aim at export diversification through enhanced domestic manufacturing capabilities.

Third, the success of the RCEP would to a large extent be a function of the credibility of the ASEAN objective of creating an integrated economic community by 2015 and the reconciliation among its FTAs with the other RCEP members. While the former involves further liberalisation in the services and FDI sectors alongside overcoming the internal development differentials among ASEAN member nations, the latter demands grappling with the not-so-easy task of overlapping rules and differential rates and timing of tariff elimination of the 'plus one' FTAs. For India, that has among the lowest tariff coverage relative to the ASEAN's other FTA partners, this will require a rationalising of its tariff structure beyond the current ASEAN-India FTA levels. Again, the domestic manufacturing sector needs to be prepared to face the outcome of the thus-increased competition.

India must therefore take its membership of the RCEP as an opportunity to lock in domestic reforms that will then make it more capable of benefiting from the evolving regional economic architecture in Asia.

Column: South Asian Dialectic

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Defence Management in India: An Agenda for Parrikar

20 November 2014

Being a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) mukhya pracharak (chief preacher) endeared Manohar Parrikar to Modi and earned him the Defence portfolio. Parrikar is a modern man. He graduated in Metallurgical Engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai, and has proven his administrative capabilities as a two-term Chief Minister of Goa. Parrikar's shift to New Delhi resembles that of YB Chavan, the highly regarded Chief Minister of Maharashtra, who was brought to New Delhi by Jawaharlal Nehru following India's traumatic defeat in the Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962.

Parrikar would need to display the same acumen as YB Chavan did when he joined the Union Cabinet. India's defeat in the border conflict had left the prestige of the defence apparatus in tatters. What was the situation obtaining? I have noticed elsewhere that "A blame game started with the political, civilian and military establishments accusing each other of incompetence, naïveté and worse. Civil-military relations had, in fact, crumbled..." Chavan sought initially to assuage the bruised egos in South Block, adjudicate between mutual accusations, and restore a semblance of normality in the higher echelons of the defence apparatus. The very first change effected was to start the institution of Morning Meetings that provided an informal setting for interactions between the Ministers in the MoD, Chiefs of the three Services, Secretaries in the Ministry of Defence, and the Financial Adviser. The unstated purpose of these meetings was to develop a rapport between the estranged segments of the higher defence apparatus and persuade them to work together harmoniously.

Civil-military relations have again reached a new low in New Delhi following the date of birth controversy raised by the former Chief of Army Staff, General VK Singh. His approaching the Supreme Court and later, prosecution for criminal defamation, are unprecedented. Charges and counter-charges of malfeasance made against the highest officials in the military hierarchy have also been unprecedented, taking a huge toll on the armed forces' morale. The Modi Government, in its wisdom, gave a ticket to General VK Singh, got him elected, and inducted him into the Council of Ministers. How will these actions heal the wounds inflicted on Army morale and civil-military relations? This problem needs to be faced head on by the new Defence Minister.

Parikkar would have been well advised to make soundings and develop cogent views on the defence apparatus before indulging in policy declarations. But, he has opined that user trials and commercial negotiations must be completed quickly to expedite procurement decisions. Thereby, equipment would be delivered quickly, greater transparency would be ensured, and costs reduced, since suppliers do inflate costs to allow for delays. Coming to maintenance of advanced weapon systems, Parikkar felt that “the best solution is to ask the company to manufacture in India,” which raises several awkward negative issues like the general state of the economy, technical education standards and skill sets available in the country.

However, there are three other supervening and conceptual issues that he should address in the interests of higher defence management.

- First, a realistic effort is needed to recognise the variegated threats to national security that require countering by the Services. In future, internal security challenges would multiply beyond the capacity of the paramilitary forces to handle them. This is already occurring with Left Wing Extremism in Central India. The Army and Air Force have steadily expanded their roles here, despite their reservations. A clear policy in this matter will enable appropriate decisions being taken on future armed forces’ training, equipment and force structures.
- Second, personnel management requires urgent attention for two major reasons. Parikkar should get details of the litigation that has rocked the Ministry of Defence and Services Headquarters over the years, analyse their content, and take pre-emptive steps to mitigate the underlying grievances. Apart from the time and energy involved in dealing with a huge volume of litigation, their numbers is a sad reflection of the dissatisfaction in the armed forces. Another aspect of personnel management relates to retention of officers, especially at the cutting edge level of Captains/Majors in the Army and the two other Services, which has become a serious issue.
- Third, the ubiquitous subject of economy in defence expenditure cannot be ignored. Governments are notoriously remiss in controlling their own expenses and Defence establishments lead this insouciance. A serious exercise to address waste could provide some surprises. For instance, it would be found that different units using the same equipment, eg. MiG-21 aircraft, have different manning patterns. More serious thought is also required on whether units like radar stations or electrical and mechanical workshops could be managed by civilian personnel. Currently, they are manned by uniformed personnel who cost some three times as their civilian counterparts, without any commensurate improvement in efficiency or reliability.

These issues and examples could be multiplied, highlighting the value of bringing a fresh mind to bear on old issues.

Pakistani Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan: Implications for Asian Security

20 October 2014

Months of deadlock followed a hard fought election in Afghanistan after which both principal contenders - Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah - claimed victory, and a uniquely Afghan solution was found. Ghani will be President with Abdullah being the de facto Prime Minister. This solution is designed to reconcile the conflicting interests of several warring ethnicities and tribes in an essentially pre-Westphalian state. Ashraf Ghani, a former Finance Minister and World Bank official, is a Pashtun. Abdullah Abdullah is of mixed Pashtun-Tajik extraction, and is closer to the Tajiks. But the Pashtun-Central Asian divide subsumes deeper tribal loyalties in Afghanistan that have excoriated this country over the past decades.

Ghani and Abdullah have pledged to work together to address the multitude of problems plaguing Afghanistan which, notably, includes fighting the resurgent Taliban and al Qaeda factions operating in the country that find support and refuge in Pakistan. The duo also faces an immediate financial crisis with the October salaries of government servants remaining to be paid. Already heavily indebted to foreign

donors, especially the US, Kabul has needed to plead again with the Obama administration to provide further accommodation.

Both Ghani and Abdullah were agreed, however, that Afghanistan should sign the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) sought by the Obama Administration to enable continuance of the American military presence in Afghanistan. This has been promptly done. Their predecessor, President Karzai, had delayed signing the BSA for personal reasons. With the BSA signed the US plans to thin out its troops in Afghanistan from some 24,000 at present to around 9,800 by the end of 2014, with all US troops moving out by 2017. Kabul, Islamabad and New Delhi are distressed with this American decision for different reasons. Their angst arises from the course of recent events that are still unfolding in Iraq following the ill-advised American entry into Iraq, and, now, its hasty withdrawal from that country. A similar tragedy is likely to unfold in Afghanistan should US troops effect a precipitate withdrawal.

This contention derives from the inadequacy of the US forces being left behind to defend the Afghan state. They would be located in Kabul and the Bagram Airbase to function as trainers and advisers to the Afghan Army by conducting air and drone attacks against the insurgents. It is apparent, however, that although these airstrikes might deplete the insurgent ranks and leadership, they cannot gain or hold territory. After US troops withdraw, moreover, these Afghan forces will be on their own in the battlefield. The Afghan Army currently suffers from the lack of relevant weapon systems, especially armour and attack helicopters. Consequently, it has suffered heavy casualties in its counter-militancy and counter-terrorism operations, estimated between 7,000 and 9,000 soldiers killed or wounded this year alone. The likelihood of mass scale desertions is a distinct possibility, especially if the Afghan Army splits along ethnic lines. It should be added that the Afghan Army is a young force without any compelling history or military traditions. Hence, the possibility of a geo-political partition of Afghanistan along Pashtun-non-Pashtun lines, predicted by Selig Harrison, could become an ugly reality.

The security imperative apart, are the US and its Western allies likely to continue funding Afghanistan after 2014? And, despite their strategic priorities shifting to address the Islamic resurgence in the Middle East, the imbroglio in Ukraine, and the US pivot towards the Asia-Pacific region? But, if Kabul's economic lifeline is cut, the collapse of the Afghan state is certain. Could a consortium of Asian powers like Iran, India, China and, perhaps, Russia, bail out Kabul and the Afghan economy? If this, too, does not appear feasible, the climate would be propitious for the Taliban-e-Pakistan and al Qaeda to contest the domination of Afghanistan with the local Taliban and other militant groups. They have already accelerated their disruptive strikes against American, ISAF and Afghan forces to highlight their own strength, and the lack of political will and military capacity in their adversaries. Moreover, the proximity of the Pak Taliban and al Qaeda leadership to the Islamic forces in the Middle East - the Pak Taliban has recently announced its allegiance to them - has serious implications for the rest of South Asia.

Clearly, a civil war and instability in Afghanistan and the prospects of Islamic extremism radiating out into Pakistan, Iran, and the Central Asian Republics, besides India, Saudi Arabia, and China, has grave implications for Asian security. The question of the moment is what India could do to ensure its national interests. Continuance of its economic and developmental assistance to Afghanistan, which is an investment in the country's stability, should be enhanced. India could also enhance its training of the Afghan armed forces for which it has the capacity. How to address the security threat from the Pak Taliban and al Qaeda to Afghanistan remains the critical question. Ruling out boots-on-the-ground the other option available is close consultations to derive a common approach with other countries affected.

Is it unthinkable that India should coordinate its efforts with Pakistan by reviving its interrupted dialogue with Islamabad?

Obama's New Strategy towards the Islamic State: Implications for India

15 September 2014

In his widely anticipated 15th anniversary address on the 9/11 attacks, President Obama has clarified his objectives in the Middle East: "We will degrade, and ultimately destroy, [the Islamic State] through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy."

Its contours are taking shape, but the new strategy would involve airstrikes against militants and training the moderate opposition fighters in Syria. The US will wage war against the Islamic extremists and the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad. Wary of domestic opposition to getting mired in another overseas conflict after Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama emphasized that he would seek Congressional approval and international support from America's Middle East and NATO allies.

Could American air power and the ground forces of its partners destroy the Islamic State? There is enough realism around to appreciate that al Qaeda, ISIS and similar extremist organizations propagate beguiling ideals of equality, freedom, religious purity and so on to confront the Western alliance, headed by the United States. It is difficult to defeat an ideal, but its baneful effects can certainly be contained. This understanding, is currently informing Obama's rejuvenated counter-insurgency strategy premised on assured domestic support and the cooperation of allies, but restricting military action to airstrikes and leaving ground action to allies.

Only a modest augmentation of US troops in Iraq is envisaged, raising their total number to around 1500 for performing advisory functions by manning tactical operations centers, protecting American personnel and helping local security forces. An important, though unstated, component of this revised strategy is human intelligence to pinpoint the location of individual militant leaders for elimination by air and ground action. Jordan is critical here.

The new Obama strategy envisages training the Free Syrian Army. Saudi Arabia has apparently agreed to provide facilities in its territory for their training and turning them around to combat the Islamic extremists and the Assad regime. The dangers of this radical policy are two-fold. First, the US and its allies, including Saudi Arabia, would be getting embroiled in an enlarging Shia- Sunni sectarian conflict, with the lines of division getting increasingly blurred. Thus Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United States are becoming uneasy partners to confront the ISIS and al Qaeda. But, Iran, alongside remnants of the Iraqi and Assad regime still feel obligated to support Hamas against Israel. How Obama's revised Middle East strategy will sidestep these land mines of Middle East politics remains to be seen.

So, what do these developments signify for India?

First, Obama's 9/11 strategy is designed to ensure the continued American presence in the Middle East; its vestigial continuance would, hopefully, protect US national interests. It can similarly be adduced that the US will not leave Afghanistan altogether after 2014, but elements will remain in Bagram and other secure bases to enable air- and drone-strikes against identified militant forces. Air-strikes do not win wars, but they can seriously degrade the morale of rebel forces and weaken them by decapitating their leadership. It would be in India's interests to support the US presence in Afghanistan, especially with the al Qaeda threatening to turn its attention against India. A dialogue with the US to firm up greater cooperation in this regard is called for.

Second, it has been wryly observed that one assured supply source for ready weapons in ISIS's brutal efforts to overrun Iraq and Syria is the US taxpayer. Significant numbers of semi-automatic rifles have been captured by ISIS from military stockpiles in Iraq and Syria, apart from heavier weapons like anti-tank HEAT (High-Explosive Anti-Tank) and shoulder-fired anti-tank rockets that can destroy armored vehicles. Much the same situation might arise in Afghanistan after the departure of US and ISAF forces. According to reports significant numbers of vehicles, small arms and ammunition will be left behind as they are prohibitively costly to ship back to the United States. Much of this materiel might find its way into India via terrorist groups operating in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, but with interests in Kashmir. How this menace should be thwarted requires urgent consultations with the United States.

Third, the growth of sectarianism in the Middle East crisis should concern India. Extremists in the Middle East have targeted Christians and other ethnic minorities, but also rival schisms within Islam. The Shia-Sunni divide has become corrosive, which is also excoriating South Asia, especially Pakistan and Afghanistan, but also India. This rapid growth in sectarianism has to be guarded against, especially with the coming into power in New Delhi of a political party with militant Hindu roots. Concerns here are not ill-founded.

Obama's newly minted Middle East policy will therefore have much wider repercussions, including the US pivot towards Asia that concerns India; further developments here will require India's vigilant attention.

Modi's Tryst with Abe

18 August 2014

Modi's first foray outside South Asia was to Brazil to attend the sixth BRICS Summit on 15-16 July. This gave him the opportunity to meet President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin. Incidentally, he was to visit Japan in early July. But he postponed his visit ostensibly due to his compulsions with remaining in Parliament for the budget presentation, which created some unhappiness in Tokyo. Its sensitivities were ruffled by the unfortunate impression created that Modi wished to converse with Xi Jinping before meeting Abe, who had been the chief guest at India's Republic Day Parade this year.

India chooses its guest country after much deliberation each year taking into consideration its strategic, economic and political interests. Now, Modi is expected to visit Japan in August before proceeding to New York for the UN General Assembly session starting in the third week of September. He is scheduled to visit Washington thereafter to meet President Obama. What should one make of these complex manoeuvres to evaluate the present state of India-Japan relations?

On the economic front, Japan is India's third largest foreign direct investment (FDI) investor. Japan's Bank for International Co-operation rates India as a valuable FDI destination over the longer term. Currently, Japan is assisting the progression of the Delhi Metro Rail Project. Discussions are afoot on a Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, and dedicated Mumbai-Delhi and Delhi-Howrah Industrial Corridors. A similar dedicated freight corridor project is contemplated between Bangalore and Chennai. Trade between the two countries has risen from a modest US\$ 4.1 billion (two-way) in 2001 to US\$ 18.51 in 2012-13, which is largely in Japan's favour at present.

On the military front, Japan and India have joined in the Malabar series of naval exercises. Their maritime forces are maintaining cordial and cooperative relations in pursuit of their compulsion to protect their commerce through the Pacific and Indian Oceans. They have a common interest also in battling terrorism, maritime piracy, and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction. The totality of their strategic partnership needs fuller appreciation.

Shinzo Abe is conscious of its significance and has strongly advocated closer security cooperation with India to counter rising tensions in East and Southeast Asia, aggravated by China's territorial expansionist policies in these regions. Japan is acutely conscious of this reality of a non-peacefully rising China, which is also of concern to India. Indubitably, moreover, the central focus of the American 'pivot' or 'rebalance' towards Asia is China, which requires Japan and India to shape their foreign and security policies around this basic reality. Neither country needs to frontally challenge China, but it is apparent in which direction they will turn if China threatens their supreme national interests. Indeed, China has enhanced the relevance of the US 'pivot' or 'rebalance' towards Asia by encouraging the regional countries to coordinate their security efforts and seek the countervailing power of the US.

These circumstances are unlikely to change because China is afflicted by its Middle Kingdom syndrome, and can only conceptualise a hierarchical international system, not one based on the premises of coordination, trust and mutual respect. The problem with the rising China model is that it also embeds an incipient confrontation with the US and, by logical extension, confrontation with a rising India. India is

strengthening its land and maritime defenses. But, India also needs to deepen its relations with Japan that faces a similar predicament. Japan has buttressed its long-standing alliance with the US by entering a security agreement with India in 2008. For its part, the US finds Chinese behaviour in the East and South China Seas deeply problematical, since it must protect US allies while eschewing any overt containment of China.

But, are there any persisting tensions between Japan and India? Indeed, yes, and they pertain to the nuclear arena. Japan had strongly disapproved of India's Pokharan-II nuclear tests in 1998, and imposed sanctions on India. These were lifted three years later. Japan has always wished that India joined the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to embody its pledge that it would not conduct any more nuclear tests. But India has diligently refused. Currently, India's Civil Liability for Nuclear Damages Act (2010) is excoriating their relations and discouraging Japan from entering India's atomic energy market. Why? India does not permit foreign countries to enter the atomic energy area for strategic reasons, but allows them to become suppliers of nuclear equipment.

The problem lies in Section 17(b) of the impugned Act, which permits the Indian Atomic Energy Commission to exercise a 'right to recourse' and claim compensation from the supplier for any fault of its employees, apart from supplying defective equipment or spare parts, and for any problems arising from their usage. Japan is leery of entering a contract with such uncertain liabilities, which is greatly inhibiting its nuclear commerce with India.

Can Modi resolve this complex issue before reaching Tokyo? He also needs to bring greater clarity into India's 'Look East' policy to serve its larger national interests. These are prerequisites for improving Indo-Japanese relations.

Thinking the Unthinkable: Promoting Nuclear Disarmament

21 July 2014

In a barely noticed event, forty bishops, scholars and activists had gathered in the Catholic University of Notre Dame in end-April to explore how the world could eliminate nuclear weapons. University President Rev Jenkins cited Pope John XIII's message after the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) that "nuclear weapons are morally tolerable only for the purpose of nuclear deterrence, and even then, only as a step on the way toward progressive disarmament."

Apropos, non-proliferation advocates had met in New York in May 2014 for a two-week Preparatory Committee meeting to pave the way for the NPT Review Conference in 2015. The bland statement issued by them after their confabulations urged the nuclear weapon states (NWS) to hasten their efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament in an "irreversible, transparent and verifiable manner," as envisaged in Article VI of the NPT. However, the preparatory meeting also expressed its disappointment that a conference to discuss the establishment of a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East, visualised at the last NPT Review Conference in 2010, has not yet been held. It is no secret that this proposal is directed against Israel's undeclared nuclear weapons arsenal, which has motivated its regional neighbours to stockpile chemical and biological weapons to deter Israel. More distressingly, the Preparatory Committee meeting could not even negotiate a final document for being placed before the 2015 NPT Review Conference.

In other negative developments, India, though not a NPT signatory, has revealed that it had tested an intermediate-range ballistic missile from an underwater platform. They are planned to equip its nuclear submarine INS Arihant. North Korea has declared that it means to carry out a fourth nuclear test. Analysts believe this would accelerate Pyongyang's development of a miniaturised warhead to be delivered by a ballistic missile. South Korea's President Park Geun-hye warned that another nuclear test by Pyongyang would trigger a "nuclear domino" effect, since both South Korea and Japan would be under great domestic pressure from their alarmed people to develop and deploy nuclear weapons to deter North Korea. Neither country is believed to be very far from becoming a nuclear weapon power if they so choose in view of

their advanced atomic energy programmes. Efforts to rein in Iran's nuclear progress by bringing its uranium enrichment programme under safeguards have received a setback with the rise of Islamic (Sunni) forces in Syria and Iraq. Iran is needed to balance these disruptive forces. Its ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons might, therefore, get placed on the backburner. Should Iran go nuclear a "nuclear domino" effect could ensue in the Gulf and Middle East regions with many regional countries seeking nuclear weapons to deter Iran. Further, the technological abilities of several developing countries have been growing rapidly. Non-proliferation efforts cannot succeed much longer by gating the spread of technology, but require the difficult political issues driving nuclear proliferation to be addressed.

In its latest Annual Report on Armament and Disarmament the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has assessed the total number of nuclear weapons worldwide to be around 16,300, with 93 per cent being held by the US and Russia. The remaining are held by the seven other NWS viz. UK, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea. SIPRI has noted that India and Pakistan continue to increase their nuclear stockpiles, and that there is no "genuine willingness to work toward complete dismantlement of their nuclear arsenals. The long term modernization programs under way in these states suggest that nuclear weapons will remain deeply embedded elements of their strategic calculus." The modernisation of the nuclear arsenals held by the US and Russia like in the sphere of missile defense has gained much attention, but the steady efforts being made by other NWS to improve their arsenals proceed under the radar screen. Naturally, the non-nuclear adherents to the NPT view these developments askance, and their resentments could surface in the 2015 Review Conference with threats to withdraw from the NPT.

The question now arises whether nuclear non-proliferation is a lost cause and whether nuclear disarmament remains a desirable but elusive goal? The simple answer to this despairing question is "No." Why? Nuclear weapons are different in that they can effect global destruction in very short time frames; the consequent radiation effects would last for centuries. And, this massive devastation could occur, not by deliberate use, but by accident. The nuclear age is replete with examples of near-misses that could have led to the use of nuclear weapons by misapprehension or inadvertence. Nuclear theology urges that these weapons are irreplaceable to provide deterrence against adversaries. But reliance on nuclear weapons is hazardous and is becoming less effective with the passing years.

Again, why? There is little controversy that, at present, the main security threat to nations arises from terrorism and non-military threats like climate change or migration. Nuclear weapons have no utility to meet them.

The Enigmatic Case of Bowe Bergdahl

16 June 2014

Sgt Bowe Bergdahl was serving with the US Army in Afghanistan's Paktika province when he was captured on 30 June 2009 by the Taliban's Haqqani faction. After protracted negotiations, Bergdahl was released on 31 May 2014 in a deal brokered with the Taliban by the governments of the US, Afghanistan and Qatar. In terms of this deal, five Taliban detainees, currently incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay (Cuba), were transferred to Qatari custody for one year, after which they would be free to go wherever they wished. Bergdahl was treated after his release at a Regional Medical Centre in Germany, and has now been transferred to a medical facility in Texas for further physical and psychological treatment. Incidentally, the five Taliban detainees exchanged to secure Bergdahl's liberty include the former Taliban army chief of staff, a Taliban deputy minister of intelligence, a former Taliban interior minister, and two other senior Taliban figures. Eyebrows have been raised in the US political and military establishments, especially among Republicans and conservative Democrats, apart from the veterans' community, over whether too high a price has been paid to secure Bergdahl's release. These hardened terrorists, their argument goes, are bound to return to active duty, and complicate the on-going war on terror by the US.

President Obama, who took the decision to proceed with this exchange, has justified it on humanitarian grounds, citing the American tradition of not leaving anyone behind on the battlefield. A further wrinkle was added because the prior approval of Congress had not been sought before the release of the

Guantanamo Bay detainees, which is a procedural and statutory necessity under American law. But the Obama administration has justified its bypassing of Congress by claiming that the window of opportunity to obtain Bergdahl's release was limited and dilatory procedures could have endangered his life. There is also the legal argument that the Presidential system of governance in the US gives absolute discretion to the Chief Executive to take appropriate decisions in matters involving the supreme national interests. Detractors, however, have found these justificatory arguments unconvincing, if not glib.

Some versions of Berghdahl's capture have also become controversial. He had confessed to being captured when he fell behind on a patrol. The Taliban alleged that Bergdahl was ambushed after he got drunk off base. Other sources said that Berghdahl walked off the base after his shift. The US Defense Department had attributed his disappearance to his walking off his base with three Afghans when he was taken prisoner. Critics allege that Bergdahl was a deserter, and swapping him for notorious Taliban leaders was most unwise, especially since general American policy eschews bargaining with militants for freeing hostages.

Why then did President Obama - an intensely political leader - undertake this manoeuvre? Obviously, he wanted to bolster his sagging political image, which has been severely dented in the recent past. Clearly, the American economy is showing no signs of recovery, unemployment has reached historical heights, and the Obamacare health programme is going nowhere. Furthermore, foreign policy disasters centering on Ukraine, Syria and, now, Iraq are staring Obama in the face. He might have calculated that securing the release of Bowe Bergdahl would deflect attention from these depressing realities. Unfortunately, this affair became hugely controversial and divisive. Apropos, the latest Obama public approval ratings have dropped to an all-time low of 44 per cent.

What are the lessons to be learnt from this episode that have universal applicability? No doubt, domestic political realities like the strength of the government, importance of the hostage, or even their numbers are relevant considerations for deciding on how to deal with hostage crises. But, the most obvious lesson to be learnt is that nations should have a hostage policy. Should they negotiate with abductors and hijackers to secure the release of citizens? Or, pursue a firm policy of not dealing with abductors and hijackers? The worst policy would, of course, be to have a hostage policy and make exceptions when crises arise, which is the choice preferred by President Obama.

India's experience is instructive here. The abduction of the Sukma Collector in Chattisgarh in 2012 by Naxalites led to a high-level official team of interlocutors being set up; it negotiated his release after 12 days in captivity. No Naxalites, it seems, were released in return. But a high-level review of all pending cases was promised and the release of all arrested Naxal suspects against whom no specific charges had been levelled. The Chief Minister had made an impassioned plea at that time requesting a national hostage policy being devised for the guidance of the states. That policy has not yet been drafted, and the states remain adrift on how to handle such hostage cases if they occur in future.

Perhaps the Modi government, which has emphasised governance, should devise a hostage policy before the next crisis occurs. Even deciding on not having a policy and proceeding in an ad hoc fashion requires a policy decision.

India-Pakistan Relations: Modi's Options

19 May 2014

How will Prime Minister designate Narendra Modi deal with Pakistan? He made a passing reference to China when he visited Arunachal Pradesh during the election campaign. An uncomplimentary mention of Bangladesh was also made as the major originating source of illegal immigrants, who will be speedily sent back home if the BJP came to power. But no reference to Pakistan was made, which is intriguing, given Modi's RSS roots and earlier rhetoric lambasting "Miya Musharraf." The BJP's election manifesto, too, offers no clues. It commends a foreign policy based on pursuing friendly relations [with nations] "in our neighborhood... [and that] India shall remain a natural home for persecuted Hindus and they shall be welcome to seek refuge here." Surprisingly, there is no evidence to discern Modi's likely Pakistan policy.

It would be the understatement of the year to notice that Modi's coming to power in New Delhi has caused great anxiety in Pakistan's ruling elite. Modi has repeatedly stressed that the need for development and reviving the economy are his main priorities. Foreign policy, one suspects, will be tailored to promoting these objectives. But, he is also seen as a primordial nationalist, and naturally hawkish towards Pakistan and China. Modi has sidelined practically all the senior leaders in the BJP, but praised Atal Behari Vajpayee for adopting a foreign policy that sought "peace and strength." Still, this additional information is not very helpful in discovering Modi's Pakistan policy.

It would therefore be useful to lay out India's abiding apprehensions regarding Pakistan. The US State Department has noted in its Country Reports on Terrorism 2013 (April 2014) that: "Continued allegations of violations of the Line of Control between India and Pakistan, Pakistan's failure to bring the perpetrators of the 2008 Mumbai attacks to justice, and activities of Pakistan-based terrorist groups remained serious concerns for the Indian government." We can reasonably conclude that India's major security concern with Pakistan arises from its support to cross-border militancy and terrorism.

The other threat from Pakistan arises from its testing the 60-km nuclear-capable short-range Hatf IX (NASR) missile, identified as a tactical nuclear weapon for battlefield use. Pakistan claims it would provide "full spectrum deterrence" by lowering the nuclear threshold. What it signals is that if New Delhi should launch a conventional attack against Pakistan, say in response to a major terrorist strike, Islamabad could threaten a response with tactical nuclear weapons. India, thereafter, would need to mull over whether to proceed up the ladder of nuclear conflict, or restrict its response to the verbal level. How Modi will deal with this nuclear blackmail will be his earliest challenge.

Relations with Pakistan will have to cater for the inclinations of the RSS, which had massively deployed its manpower for Modi's election campaign. Will they quietly withdraw into the background? Their minimum expectations would include "non-appeasement" of minorities inside India, and not making "concessions" to Islamic countries abroad. So, what are Modi's options? Three are discernible:

- First, take seriously Pakistan's professions that it wants to transform India-Pakistan relations from conflict to cooperation, invigorate the composite dialogue, and improve trade and people-to-people relations. More nuclear CBMs like Risk Reduction Centres could come on the table, apart from hardy perennials like the Siachen and Sir Creek disputes. But, these negotiations could only succeed if Pakistan is pressed by Washington and Beijing. They need to be convinced that Pakistan harbours the world's major security problems - terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, nuclear proliferation and state failure.
- Second, proceed on the assumption that dealing with Pakistan is futile until it sets its own house in order. Demonstrably, Nawaz Sharif has no control over the Pakistani Army, or elements of Pakistan's foreign policy, like relations with India, Kashmir or nuclear weapons. The Pakistani Army and the mullahs are the chief patrons of the Lashkar-e-Toiba, which they believe to be a strategic asset for use against India. They also, alongside Pakistan's terrorist groups, disfavour trade with India since it disrupts their basic agenda. Modi could undertake a cost-benefit analysis to see what are the opportunity costs in sidelining Pakistan while promoting other aspects of South Asian integration.
- Third, proceed on the basis of strict reciprocity, and deal with Pakistan exactly as it deals with India. Be friendly when Pakistan is friendly, and nasty when it acts nasty. And, if Pakistan says one thing and does the opposite, do exactly the same. India has accommodated Pakistan far too long, for example in the Simla Agreement (1972), by initiating the Lahore Agreement (1992), and entering the Sharm-el Sheikh arrangement (2009) with its snide reference, "Pakistan has some information on threats in Balochistan and other areas." In all these cases Pakistan pursued its own self-interests taking advantage of India's good faith. How Modi will react to cross-border provocations needs an early and clear policy enunciation.

Speculation is rife about who will be included in Modi's Cabinet, and be his key bureaucrats, especially the next National Security Adviser. But, the buck stops with Modi. Which option will he choose in dealing with Pakistan?

India and No First Use: The Doctrinal Conundrum

21 April 2014

One can only be bemused by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's exhortation while inaugurating a recent conference on nuclear disarmament that the need was to establish a global no-first-use convention relating to nuclear weapons. His relevant remarks are:

"More and more voices are speaking out today that the sole function of nuclear weapons, while they exist, should be to deter a nuclear attack. If all states possessing nuclear weapons recognise that this is so and are prepared to declare it, we can quickly move to the establishment of a global no-first-use norm. In many ways, this can open the way to gradual reductions and, finally, elimination through a Nuclear Weapons Convention. Such a Convention would require necessary verification measures. It would also require political measures to ensure that stability is maintained as the level of nuclear arsenals approaches zero."

Why Manmohan Singh chose to make this radical declaration in the twilight days of the UPA government after its insouciance over the last ten years can only be speculated upon, especially when all bets are off about its returning to power after the forthcoming elections. It is also unfortunate that, shortly thereafter, two kiss-and-tell-all biographies published by former aides of Manmohan Singh have further dented his soiled image. Moreover, the historical record informs that India's 'no-first-use' policy owes, not to the Congress and UPA, but to the BJP party and NDA government that took the decision to conduct the nuclear tests in May 1998. Shortly thereafter, the incumbent Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, declared that India would pursue a no-first-use policy in regard to employing nuclear weapons, which was later reaffirmed in a statement before Parliament in December 1998. This pledge was reiterated in the draft nuclear doctrine issued for public discussion in August 1999, and later incorporated into the decisions of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) promulgated in January 2003.

This potted history of how India's 'no-first-use' policy evolved clarifies that it was a BJP innovation; it was adopted by the Congress Party, which is now seeking its global remit. However, India's pledge not to be the first to use nuclear weapons was severely qualified. It is thus unclear whether Manmohan Singh was promoting the Indian version or a 'no-first-use' pledge in its pristine purity. This conundrum needs an explanation.

- First, the CCS decision of January 2003 made clear that India would not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states, which left open the question how India would respond if a nuclear weapon state positioned its nuclear weapons in a non-nuclear weapon state for and utilisation against India. Very conceivably, Afghanistan could host nuclear weapons belonging to China or Pakistan that could target India.
- Second, the CCS decision also mentions that "in the event of a major attack against India, or Indian forces anywhere, by biological or chemical weapons, India will retain the option of retaliating with nuclear weapons." A host of problems arise here. How does one define 'major'? Would a cross-border raid or air attack qualify? Would a Mumbai-type attack be considered 'major'? Or, would 'major' only include a full-scale conventional attack employing all arms and services of the national armed forces? Does that rule out sub-conventional warfare and attacks by non-state actors which constitutes the present and imminent danger?
- Third, this problem gets more complex when applied to chemical and biological weapons, since the tricky question of forensics enters the equation. How can a nation ascertain with certainty the identity of the attacker, which could be either a non-state or state actor? Or, a non-state actor promoted by a state actor. Current happenings in Syria underline this dilemma of identifying the attacker.

To contextualise these issues is germane: How do China and Pakistan treat the 'no-first-use' issue? China declared its 'no-first-use' pledge immediately after conducting its first nuclear test in October 1964. But, it later excluded its own territories from the ambit of this declaration. The catch here is that China believes Taiwan and Arunachal Pradesh are parts of its territory, the implication being that, if the conflict extended into these 'disputed' territories, China was entitled to use nuclear weapons. Pakistan, of course, has never countenanced the 'no-first-use' doctrine urging that the weaker conventionally armed power

has to rely on nuclear weapons to assure its security. Incidentally, the NATO powers had steadfastly abjured a 'no-first-use' declaration during the Cold War years, despite the Soviet Union making this pledge, on the premise that the Warsaw Pact powers possessed superior conventional forces that could overrun Europe. No doubt, this example also informs Pakistan's decision to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in a battlefield mode to counter India's Cold Start strategy.

Many loose ends must be tied up before proceeding with Manmohan Singh's fervent plea to establish a global no-first-use convention. More thought would need to be bestowed by New Delhi's next rulers to decide whether and how to review this 'no-first-use' pledge in the broader context of India's nuclear doctrine that has remained unvisited since 2003.

India and Nuclear Terrorism: Meeting the Threat

17 March 2014

Nuclear Terrorism: Is the threat exaggerated?

To play the devil's advocate, it is not easy for unauthorised persons to acquire nuclear weapons or nuclear materials. Being crown jewels, they would be closely guarded by trusted cohorts. Even if they are subverted, the terrorists would have to overcome many other problems. Nuclear warheads are maintained in an unarmed state, and armed using electronic codes to ensure against accidental detonation. These codes are kept secret by the 'release authority', obviously the Chief Executive in the nation. Further, in the case of India and Pakistan, nuclear cores are kept separate from the warheads and delivery vehicles, hence several steps have to be taken by different bodies to arm these weapons. Could all these hurdles be surmounted by a terrorist group?

Second, the problems faced to acquire nuclear materials is no less acute. Arrangements for their protection would be equally stringent. Should a terrorist group somehow gain access to weapons-usable nuclear materials, fashioning it into a deliverable nuclear weapon is not a trivial task.

Third, scenario builders have also visualised terrorist organisations gaining control over the nation, and accessing its military nuclear program and nuclear weapons. But the probability of all these events occurring must be rated low.

Nuclear Terrorism: Low Probability, but High Consequence

Despite the above, it is known that senior Pakistani scientists were in touch with Osama bin Laden. The CIA has highlighted al Qaeda's general interest in weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. Al Qaeda's branches and franchisees span the world. Moreover, several instances are known of missing nuclear materials being recovered. More alarmingly, nuclear materials have been found to be missing after they were recovered. Nuclear terrorism remains a discrete possibility, hence it should be designated a low probability high consequence event.

An imperative need consequently for the upcoming Netherlands Nuclear Security Summit to work towards establishing tighter international controls over nuclear materials; seeking greater transparency on national measures to enhance nuclear security; gaining more adherents for international agreements pertaining to the physical protection of nuclear materials; reducing the use of highly enriched uranium (HEU) and plutonium in national nuclear programmes; registering the sources of radioactive materials that have extensive medical, educational and research applications; and strengthening the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

India and Nuclear Security

India's contribution to these objectives has been considerable. It has joined the Convention on Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials, with its 2005 Amendment, and the International Convention for Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism. Further, India's execution of UN Security Council Resolution

1540 (April 2004) has been exemplary; it casts a legally binding obligation on UN Member States to enforce effective measures against the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons (WMDs), and their delivery systems. It is especially intended to prevent terrorists and criminal organisations from obtaining the world's most dangerous weapons. Towards this end States need to prohibit support to non-state actors seeking WMDs; adopt effective laws prohibiting activities involving the proliferation of WMDs to non-state actors; and, enforce effective measures to reduce the vulnerability of many legitimate activities to misuse and the proliferation of WMDs to non-state actors. These are essentially reactive measures.

Meeting the threat of nuclear terrorism proactively, however, requires a holistic programme that can be framed within a matrix of four 'Ds' viz. Detection, Deterrence, Defense and Disaster Management. Clearly, detection is an intelligence function, which requires high level attention, constant vigilance, and technical competence and so on. The deterrence option requires the country sheltering potential nuclear terrorists to be placed on notice, and threatened with condign punishment if any act of nuclear terrorism is perpetrated by its terrorists-in-residence. The problem here is that an organisation like al Qaeda has branches in several countries. How can a deterrent relationship be established vis-à-vis such an organisation? Defence against a nuclear attack is not feasible. Hence it must be sought within the defence and deterrence matrix. Finally, disaster management in the post-attack aftermath must comprise a mix of immediate and longer-term relief, medical assistance, and evacuation and rehabilitation measures. Special measures would be needed to deal with radiation casualties. There are many grey areas here such as the first responders getting incapacitated, and the sociological impact on affected societies, of which we have no knowledge or previous experience.

India, Nuclear Security and NSS 2014

There is much that India can contribute to the Netherlands Security Summit. It could do more to meet the criticism that its nuclear programme is opaque, and become more forthcoming about its emergency response systems. It must also explain why it has not been able to fulfill its earlier commitments to establish an independent nuclear regulatory authority and a Centre of Excellence to train personnel in nuclear safety and security matters. It had contributed US\$ 1 million to strengthen the IAEA as the focal entity to ensure nuclear security. India could add to this contribution, and offer training facilities to IAEA personnel in its Centre of Excellence.

But, India should also suggest the extension of nuclear security measures by promoting pro-active measures to ensure nuclear security through a four 'Ds' programme.

Federalism: Centre as Coordinator and Adjudicator

17 February 2014

Some verities about federalism in the context of regionalism in South Asia are becoming clearer. The proposition that "the (changing) political map of South Asian countries must reflect its social and cultural diversities" is unarguable. How, then, should the inescapable contentions between the peripheral and central federating entities be managed, apart from differences between the federating units themselves that are "yielding contrary trends and mixed conclusions"? I argue that, while respecting regional aspirations, the Centre must function effectively as a coordinating and adjudicatory authority for the whole nation to remain viable.

One is fortified here by the lessons of history. The role of village republics in Buddhist times, their tradition of democratic functioning with all decisions being taken by consensus, and the local administration being under the village assemblies has been deified. The larger lesson of history is that these village republics were easily overrun by the Mauryan rulers and incorporated into their empire, since these purely local regional units could neither defend their integrity nor implement a common foreign policy.

Coming to British India, Sir Charles Metcalfe, acting governor-general of India had minuted in 1830: "This union of the village communities, each one forming a separate little state in itself, has, I conceive, contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the peoples of India." Metcalfe was speaking to local government. He did not appreciate the interplay between centrifugal and centripetal forces in Indian history with empires being born, flourishing, reaching their zenith, declining and finally disintegrating over and over again. This process also revealed the underlying tension between the federal (integrative) and regional (disintegrative) forces within Indian polity. The balance of power must favour the central authority if the federal entity is to survive.

These issues have been dramatised by the regional Aam Admi Party's confronting the Union Government in Delhi. It would be recollected that Delhi became the capital of British India in 1912 after excising it from the Punjab Province. It was designated a Chief Commissioner's Province, and was directly administered by the Centre. Later, it was designated a Part C state, and, still later, pursuant to the recommendations of the State Reorganisation Committee, Delhi was designated a Union Territory. Under Article 239 of the Constitution, Union Territories are to be administered by the President through an Administrator (Lt Governor).

But, there has been a clamour over the years for granting Delhi full Statehood, which is being echoed by the Aam Admi Party, but is resolutely opposed by the Union Government. In truth, any scheme for the administration of Delhi must appreciate its urban character, and the need for the Union Government to exercise close supervision and control over the capital city. The Sarkaria Committee, appointed in end 1987 to examine this issue, studied the set-up in other national capitals of the world having a federal set-up; it finally recommended after extensive consultations that Delhi should remain a Union Territory with a Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers responsible to this Assembly. However, matters relating to the police, land and public order were reserved for the Centre. The Committee further recommended that to ensure stability and permanence to these arrangements, the Constitution should incorporate provisions to accord a special status for the national capital among the other Union territories, which was effected by a Constitutional Amendment in end-1991, and the insertion of new Articles 239AA and 239AB.

The major reason why the Committee (I was its Member-Secretary) recommended these arrangements was that it anticipated contingencies where the Central and Delhi governments might come into conflict, as is currently occurring, leading to practical difficulties in the governance of the national capital. For instance, the Delhi government could bring the working of the Union Government to a standstill by populist agitations and boycott movements or even organising gheraos of Parliament, North and South Block and other Central Government offices. For this reason, the vital subjects of public order and the police, were excluded from the purview of the Delhi government and reserved for the Centre.

This long digression has been undertaken to highlight a special problem of Indian federalism, pertaining to the administration of its national capital, and draws pointed attention to the need for privileging the central authority to counter sub-national populism in Delhi, but also other parts of the country. Regrettably, regional parties have, thus far, shown little interest in participating in the governance of the country or helping in the process of consensus-building, which further strengthens the argument for having a strong centralising authority, especially to execute foreign policy and provide national security.

How the increasingly uneasy power equations between the federal and regional authorities will work themselves out in future remains to be seen, but great maturity and restraint will be required on all sides. A hopeful sign is that Article 356 is falling into disuse in contrast to its misuse in the earlier years of one-party and central dominance.

Limits of Federalism

20 January 2014

The Indian Constitution distributes political, financial and legislative authority between New Delhi and the States, with the centre enjoying primacy due to its control over finance, defense, trade,

telecommunications and foreign investment. But the states, too, have wide authority on vital issues that have significance for India's investment climate, like power, agriculture, land, domestic investment and police. The system works well when the Center and the States are in synch, which is by no means assured when narrow parochial interests supersede the demands of national interests.

India remained a centralized democracy while the Congress, in the initial few decades ruled the Centre and the states, which changed radically in later years. It is arguable that the federalization of India's polity has enabled its conversion into a true democracy, with the unexpected result that the regional parties have now become more assertive in several of the larger states. They will increasingly decide who will govern New Delhi in future. A hodgepodge of regional parties seems likely, therefore, to shape the structure of the new Government in New Delhi and guide its security beliefs, with distressing implications for peace and conflict in South Asia.

Domestic and electoral politics, incidentally gained ascendancy in 2013, and this process seems likely to continue into 2014 with the flawed Bangladesh elections of January 5 bidding fair to create more problems for the region that what they were designed to resolve. India will go to the polls in mid-2014; presentiments are that neither the Congress Party, nor the Bharatiya Janata Party will reach within striking distance of crafting a stable Government. The Aam Admi Party, for its part, had too little time to organize itself on a national scale; all that could be expected of it is some presence being registered in the metropolitan centers of India. All realistic analyses points to New Delhi being ruled post- elections by a coalition of parties owing allegiance either to the Modi-brand nationalist Right or the Rahul-Sonia led left-centrist party. These developments have serious implications for India's internal and external security.

Several of these security challenges arise for conceptual reasons. The workings, for instance, of the federal principle in South Asia have revealed how parochial interests have acquired disproportionate influence on national security and foreign policy. Instances of the periphery and core coming into contention were visible all over South Asia in 2013, as, for instance, between the Madhes and Kathmandu, Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunwa provinces with Islamabad, Jaffna and the Eastern province with Colombo. In Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka the national interests as discerned by their respective central Governments clashed with the regional interests of their federating units (states/ provinces). Local perceptions of the need for greater autonomy and even independence have informed dissent, which came into conflict with the Centre's need to maintain national unity.

Significantly, the political support available within the federating units has made it difficult for the Center to peremptorily reject their demands; indeed, the elections held in 2013 revealed an aggressive provincialism developing in the region. The growth of regionalism is inevitable appreciating that the political map of South Asian countries must reflect its social and cultural diversities, yielding contrary trends and mixed conclusions. In Nepal, the Madhes parties failed to muster any great support, which strengthened the hands of Kathmandu in dealing with their constant threats of secession. But, in Jaffna, the success of the Tamil National Alliance highlighted the unresolved problem of Tamil disaffection, which the Rajapaksha government in Colombo seems determined to ignore. The situation in Khyber-Pakhtunwa remains delicate with the prospect of its provincial parties making common cause with either the tribal elements in the FATA region or the warlords in Afghanistan or with both to loosen their ties to Islamabad.

Another example. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's tame acquiescence to DMK pressure in November 2013 by not joining the CHOGM summit in Colombo can be variously interpreted. Some 6 entries in the Union List under the Indian Constitution embed foreign policy firmly within the exclusive authority of the Union Government. Apparently, the PMO and MEA had strongly favored the Prime Minister joining this meeting. A brief visit to Jaffna was also planned to promote India's relations with the Tamil-dominated Northern Province. Tamilnadu's success in swaying New Delhi's foreign policy decision would be anathema to federal purists. But, this incident illustrates how parochial considerations acted to the detriment of India's federal and national interests.

Earlier, New Delhi's decision to enter an agreement for sharing the Teesta river waters was given up under pressure from Ms. Mamata Banerjee and the West Bengal government. Further, India could not

finalize the Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh that envisioned the transfer of enclaves and straightening out portions of the border that was concluded in September 2011, and ratified by the Indian Parliament. Hardliners in Bangladesh have already raised the pitch against India on these issues, which is egregious since it was with the help of Sheikh Hasina government that India was able to neutralize the terror outfits operating against India from Bangladesh soil.

Column: The Strategist

Columnist: Vice Adm Vijay Shankar

Former Commander-in-Chief, Strategic Forces Command of India

Maritime Combat Power in the Indo-Pacific

08 December 2014

Instantaneous Intimidation

Both Julian Corbett and Admiral of the Fleet Sergei Goroshkov had an astute perspective of the importance of a theory for the application of Combat Power. Theory, as Julian Corbett put it, "...be regarded not as a substitute for judgment and experience, but as a means to fertilise both".

India's armed forces have traditionally evolved to cope with operational scenarios. Whether this orientation was by instinct or a deep-seated misplaced trepidation of the power of the military is really not germane to our study. However, its impact was to stunt the development of Combat Power to the operational canvas. So it is that the inspiration of the instantaneous intimidation was and continues to be the pretender that fills strategic space.

Strategic Approach

The strategic approach derives from two characteristics of the international system. First, the endemic instability of protagonists involved in the system; whether it is their politics, national interests, alliances or historical antagonisms. Second is the function of a state as a sovereign entity charged with guardianship of a unique set of values often contrary to the larger system.

It is interesting to examine the Chinese case. Two events of the 1990s shaped their military strategy. The assembly of coalition forces in preparation for the Gulf War of 1991, they believed, constituted first firing and justified strategic pre-emption. Second, the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1995-1996 was a humiliating experience of Chinese sovereignty being violated when two American carrier groups deployed in the Straits with impunity. These two events caused them to develop the 'Anti Access and Area Denial' strategy and structure Combat Power to enable it.

Combat Power

Combat Power in a given operational situation is defined as the ability to achieve a decisive outcome, mindful of the principles of war, through the application of leadership that coalesces the various elements of military capability. It harnesses the total impact of destructive and disruptive forces that can be applied. This fundamental process provides the conceptual framework for execution of operational tasks.

Leyte Gulf: Flawed Application of Combat Power

The Battle of Leyte Gulf (22-26 October 1944) was the largest naval battle that was ever fought. It proved decisive to the war and yet provides a study of the failure to apply full Combat Power.

By October 1944 Japan had long passed Clausewitz's 'culminating point of the offensive'; it was strategically distended and materially exhausted. In contrast US Navy air power dominated the skies; its ships controlled the Pacific, severing energy lines and isolating millions of Japanese soldiers in China; its

armies were rampaging northward towards the Philippines. Under these circumstances the Japanese Navy decided to launch a last ditch naval offensive.

The plan hailed back to a pre-First World War concept of operations; it envisaged a complex multi-pronged gun attack on the US Seventh Fleet covering the Leyte landings while a diversionary was to lure the US Third Fleet with its heavy carrier groups away from the Leyte. The Third Fleet took the bait and abandoned its primary task. Just as Japan was on the point of success, a lightly armed defending force attained their limited armament range by radar and dealt a crippling blow on the Japanese attackers.

Japanese losses at Leyte completed the extinction of their maritime combat power, underwrote the fall of the Philippines and opened the home islands to the final phase of the Pacific Campaign. The battle had been won and lost through a combination of poor intelligence, presence of superior technology and blunders of leadership on both sides inhibiting application of full Combat Power.

Strategic Maritime Space

What bearing the current shift in global power, to Asia in general and China and India in particular, will have on the larger security environment in the region must now be recognised. It begins by defining the geography within which the power shift will be most felt and maritime strategy operate. This characterisation factors area of origin of trade, energy lines, sea lines of communication, narrows contained which could be dominated or denied and location of potential allies. The Indian Ocean and the South China Sea (IOSCS) dominated by ten choke points provides the strategic context in general to trade passing through and in particular to maritime forces that would seek to surveil, deny or control.

Policy, Power and Oceanic Vision

Declarations such as the 'Look East Policy', the 'India Africa Forum Summit' or indeed Prime Ministers Modi and Abbot's more recent Strategic Security Framework (SSF) in the Indo-Pacific provide the necessary stimulus for developing a strategic orientation.

The expansion of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the creation of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) are suggestive of the littoral's aspirations to counter-balance the looming presence of China. Indeed, the India Africa Forum Summit is yet to articulate a security perspective, but clearly this is on the cards. As far as the more recent SSF in the Indo-Pacific is concerned; the players involved and their shared interest would have to be identified, objectives defined and collective control and decision-making would need to be fleshed out and made to harmonise with the American "re-balancing" act in the region. Notwithstanding, contemporary challenges in the IOSCS are dominated by three currents:

- The Challenge of a rising China that seeks to rewrite the rule book.
- Whether existing dispensations will tolerate distress to the 'status-quo'.
- The mixed blessings of globalisation that endows disproportionate destructive power to lesser states.

Force Planning and Missions

Force planning must be driven by three considerations: first, understanding of what the articulated national policy is; second, what challenges may arise in the short and long-term to this policy; lastly, an estimate of potential harm that may occur to our interests if Combat Power were not developed to address the first two.

The Mahanian logic of being able to provide "unity of objectives directed upon the sea" must drive major infrastructural centres in the Andaman Sea, support facilities in Australia, Indonesia, Vietnam; and to the west in the Indian Ocean littorals of South Africa, Malagasy, Tanzania, Mauritius and Seychelles. Military maritime missions that the Navy may be tasked with in the IOSCS include:

- War fighting which includes Sea Control, Access Denial and littoral warfare.
- Surveillance in all dimensions.
- Strategic deterrence.
- Coercive maritime deployments including marking.
- Co-operative missions.
- Diplomatic missions, policing and benign role.

Forces that would be required at all times to fulfill these missions would comprise of one carrier group for control tasks with an amphibious brigade group attached. Suitable airborne anti-submarine and seabed surveillance assets and units for marking high value opposition forces. Nuclear attack submarines for denial operations and the nuclear deterrent would be on patrol at all times.

Conclusion

Contemporary challenges are marked by a China that has lost the power-bashfulness of the Deng era and replaced it with a cockiness that aims at revising the status-quo. There is an invitation to a contest that India cannot refuse; to take the next step to establish a strategic security framework with the US, Japan, Australia and the littorals is logical. The security construct will necessarily have to be centred on deployed Combat Power, all of which will serve to 'contend, control and deny'.

Of Lawrence, Sykes-Picot and al-Baghdadi

10 November 2014

Islamic State's Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in a July 2014 speech at the Great Mosque of al-Nuri in Mosul vowed that "this blessed advance will not stop until we hit the last nail in the coffin of the Sykes-Picot conspiracy."

At the start of the First World War a curious informal group took shape in Egypt. It called itself the 'Intrusive Group' comprising surveyors and archaeologists; it was headed by the Director of Civilian and Military Intelligence, Cairo. Sensing the rot in the Ottoman Empire, the Group saw in the vitality of the Arab desert tribes a latent power that could upend the Turks in the Hejaz, Syria, Mesopotamia and Kurdistan; if they banded together, were motivated by the belief in a Pan-Arabic State and led by the British. Amongst the adherents was a diminutive British archaeologist Lt Col TE Lawrence, better known as Lawrence-of-Arabia. Patrons of the idea included Kitchener, Wingate and McMahon.

The British foreign office would have none of it as the campaign against the Ottoman Empire was being waged vigorously and very successfully, till the Dardanelles Campaign came along and by end-1915 the British were facing a wretched defeat. The idea of raising the Arabs in revolt Northward from the Hejaz became more palatable.

By early 1916 the Arab bureau was created in Cairo to foster and whip up the revolt. The remarkable guerrilla campaign against the Turks led by Lawrence brought victories to the Arab Army and conquest of Syria and Palestine. At the peace conference Lawrence pleaded the Arab cause, but unbeknownst to him and the Arab Bureau was the machination of Foreign Office which had other plans for war termination. This took the form of the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement, an Anglo-French Pact hatched as early as May 1916 to carve the Middle East into British and French spheres of control and influence (Czarist Russia played an undermined part in the Pact). The rest is history as the League of Nations awarded the Palestine mandate to the British and French and ratified their spheres of control.

Lawrence was the first to recognise the difficulties of the Arab estate on the one hand while on the other, their readiness to follow to the ends. One could never answer, with any conviction, a fundamental civilisational question: "Who were the Arabs if not 'manufactured' people whose names were ever changing in sense year-by-year?" (Seven Pillars of Wisdom). He further noted that the harshness of both climate and terrain made the tribes desert wanderers circulating them between the Hejaz, Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia with neither attachment to lands nor systems that inspired settlement; what established fanatic bonds was their character that despised doubts and the disbeliever; found ease in the extremes, and pursued the logic of several incompatible opinions to absurd ends carrying their beliefs from "asymptote to asymptote." They were people to whom convictions were by instinct and activities intuitional so they required a prophet to lead and set them forth; and Arabs believed there had been forty thousand of them. To sum their mystique Lawrence notes most prophetically: "they were a people of spasms for whom the abstract was the strongest motive and were as unstable as water, and like water would perhaps finally prevail."

Kobani, a Syrian Kurdish town on the border with Turkey, is today under siege and under partial occupation by Baghdadi's Islamic State (IS). Already this lethal spasm which fuses 21st century American technology and equipment with Arab fanaticism has rolled across parts of Syria, Iraq and through dozens of Kurdish villages and towns in the region sending over 200,000 refugees fleeing for their lives across the border.

Predictably, the lightly armed Kurdish militias desperately holding out in Kobani are fighting and losing to the IS. So why has the American grand coalition not been able to relieve the town or why has air power not been able to destroy the rampaging forces of the Islamic State? And why, the question begs to be asked, has Turkey, not done anything substantial to relieve the hapless Kobani?

In what is a historically awkward irony, the very destruction of Saddam's Iraq has paved the way for fragmentation of the Sykes-Picot borders and the tri-furcation of Iraq into a Kurdish enclave in the northeast, a Shia enclave in the south and the IS running riot in the centre. The US delusion that it was building a new Iraq flies in the face of the current situation which tragically is more reminiscent of Lawrence's Arabia.

In the meantime Turkey's President Erdogan stated his nations position in unequivocal terms - "For us, IS and the (Kurdish) PKK are the same" - the crisis in Kobani is a case of terrorist fighting terrorist. The Kurdish fighters in Kobani are linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party or PKK which has long been considered Turkey's top security threat and has been officially classified as a 'terrorist' group by the US.

Further South, the Saudis want to destroy the Assad regime in Syria because it is allied with their Shiite enemy, Iran. Consequently, they see the fight against IS as essentially a pretext for escalating their war against Syria and show little interest in militarily engaging the Islamic State. The Emirates appear content to show token participation in the 'Grand Coalition' while at the same time seeking economic opportunities that Islamic State may offer.

Indeed it would appear that neither does the US have the resolve to confront and neutralise the Islamic State that is having a free run in the Levant, Syria and Iraq; nor does the coalition share common purpose. The situation in the region is evocative of the appreciation made by the "Intrusive Group," a fading imperial power waging a strategically irrelevant war amidst the rise of the IS led by one more prophet driven by a fanatic belief. Lawrence, in the circumstance, would have suggested, demolish the belief, dry up the water and attack the prophet.

All the while, the esoteric call for Jihad and the establishment of a Pan-Islamic Caliphate under al-Bakr Baghdadi that the IS has put out has not fallen on deaf ears particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Strategic Estrangement: An Odd Bedfellow to Economic Engagement

13 October 2014

The inextricable interdependence of survival of China's despotic leadership, its economic growth and stability of State-controlled Capitalism poses a curious dilemma when large democratic economies choose to expand and boost economic engagement. This is particularly so when there exists unresolved geo-strategic fissures. And yet, the overriding importance of political stability and economic growth (in that order) to China's Communist Party leadership presents an opportunity to best influence China.

Of the ten bloodiest massacres in history five of them occurred in China (Qing conquest of the Ming Dynasty 1618-83, casualties 25 million; Taiping rebellion 1850-64, casualties 20 million; An Lushan rebellion 755-63, casualties 13 million; Dungan Revolt 1862-77, casualties 10 million; Chinese Civil War 1927-50, casualties 7.5 million). It can hardly be accidental that all five were internal to China. Neither is it coincidental that this part of their grisly past is an important determinant of their resolve to suppress uprisings whether in Mao's Cultural Revolution, Tiananmen Square or indeed in the current more-democracy protests in Hong Kong. The so called "Umbrella Revolution" has thus far resisted strong arm tactics; the State buying off local tycoons and using veiled threats of the use of disproportionate force. The underlying fear of encroachment of the Party's authoritarian values on Hong Kong's way of life is at the core of dissent. Nonetheless a vacillating leadership runs the risk of being perceived as weak when withholding the impulse to action. All the while an edgy mainland China watches uneasily. The Party knows full well that to loosen grip is the first step down the slippery slope to political instability.

On the growth front China is at that stage in development when expectations and standards of living of its citizens can no longer be nourished by the diminishing sheen of the "China Price." The IMF World Economic Outlook for 2014-15 marks a downward GDP growth forecast for China to under 7 per cent by 2015 as the economy attempts to make the transition to a more sustainable path along the service and technology sectors. This relative slow down puts a poser before Beijing: the only guarantee of the passivity of the masses is a satisfied populace; dissatisfaction amongst the citizenry animated by the urge to more democracy provides the recipe for mass upheavals, so how best can the current politico-economic situation be bridled?

In the meanwhile India finds itself fortuitously positioned. Politically, the Modi-dispensation's has a resounding mandate and economically, there is an avowed emphasis on development, prodding an upward growth trend (indicated by the same IMF report), reaching 7 per cent by 2015 - a combination of both factors provides the vehicle to not just influence Sino-Indian relations but also to resolve our prickly border predicament. According to a study by the PHD Chamber of Commerce, an industry trade group in New Delhi, China has become India's largest trading partner and in the wake of Premier Xi Jinping's recent visit to India, targeting bilateral trade of over US\$100 billion is not only achievable but also would make India amongst China's top five trading partners.

Economic intertwining comes with its own set of tilting levers which may be actuated to mutually settle the tricky border situation. It must be kept in perspective that the 3,225 km border (un-demarcated in the main) has been influenced historically by considerable cartographic jugglery. Significant to the boundary situation are the Johnson Line of 1865 which placed the Aksai Chin in Kashmir (which the British never took seriously); and the McCartney-MacDonald Line of 1899 which showed Aksai Chin as Chinese. China was not a signatory to either of these frontier delineations. However, by the second decade of the 20th century as both China and Russia lapsed into turmoil the Raj sensed a closure to the 'Great Game' and the border was redrawn to the original territorially favourable Johnson Line.

At the time of India's independence in 1947, the Johnson Line in the north and the McMahon Line in the east, also not ratified by China, were inheritances of the partition award. Both independent India and China harboured no apparent conflicting territorial claims. But the annexation of Tibet in 1950 and the consequent moves aimed at strategic consolidation of the Aksai Chin to conform to the McCartney-MacDonald Line presaged the coming armed clash of 1962. It is of some consequence to note that in 1960; Premier Zhou Enlai had 'unofficially' offered a quid pro quo in Aksai Chin and the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA); that India accept the McCartney Line while China would abandon its claims across the McMahon Line. The time for this 'grand bargain' has perhaps arrived.

Geopolitics and international relations are often greatly influenced by timing events to capitalise on circumstances. For India to consider on the one hand strategic estrangement of China while on the other intensify economic engagement, at a time when Beijing faces the prospects of a slow down in growth coupled with restiveness amongst its citizens is to miss the opportunity to bring about stability on our borders and indeed in relations. In turn this can only spur growth, which for both nations is currently most desirable. The time to resurrect Zhou's 'grand bargain' is at hand and as Mark Twain put it, "history doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme."

The Islamic State Caliphate: A Mirage of Resurrection

1 September 2014

The Universal State: The Last-Gasp Opportunism of Power

Belief in the immortality of a 'Universal State' has in history periodically evoked those very ghosts that had established the State's mortality causing their decay and expiry. The fall of the Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus at the hands of the Abbasids, only for the former to supplant itself on the Iberian peninsula and draw roots in Cordoba; the Abbasid Caliphates shock overthrow when Baghdad fell to the Mongols was resuscitated in the Fatamids Caliphs of Tunisia and the rise of the Ottoman Empire under whose suzerainty the Caliphate survived till its death at the hands of westernization are illustrative of the degeneration, reinvention and last-gasp opportunism of power.

The Flawed Revelation

While this selection has been uncovered from Islamic history, the truth is equally appropriate to other civilizations. To our study it is the causes of this rhythmic phenomenon that is of greater significance, even as our focus remains on the idea of the Caliphate. The first manifest reason is the ideological imprint that the founders of the Islamic Universal State cast on its adherents as contemporary historical truth was imposed on an overwhelming religious legend. The second branch of the root lay in the genius and impressiveness of its leaders. Lastly, the fact that the inspiration of the Universal State was built around past glories captivates the heart and minds as it embodies a rally from the rout of a 'time of troubles' (Toynbee, *A Study of History*). The universality of the state was therefore not just a geographical idea or a final impulse to brazen out decay of a civilisation but more a flawed revelation in the minds of the faithful.

The current turmoil in West Asia may be traced to the aberrant imposition of a Western order in the aftermath of the defeat and collapse of the Ottomans and the eventual denial of the idea of a Caliphate by its leadership. The Caliphate, which had lost its religious and civilizational magnetism, was substituted by a mosaic of states that was mandated more by the promise of colonial influence and economic profit. This led to a situation when the underlying antagonism and economic dispossession have erupted in aggression and a yearning for a return to the Universal State.

Disruptive Nature of the Islamic State

The Islamic State (IS, varyingly called the ISIS or the ISIL) has swept from Syria into Iraq in a maelstrom of destruction and has in a short but bloody campaign laid waste to the northern third of Iraq. No political Islam or civilizational impulse here, just rabid intolerance. In its wake it has disrupted the correlation of political forces in the region as the US seek a quick blocking entente with Iran; Syria sees in the situation an opportunity to settle scores with the insurgency raging within; Shia organisations find common cause to offset the IS; Sunni States carry a cloaked bias towards the IS to the extent that a recent New York Times report suggests funding by Turkey, Saudi and Qatar; terrorist organisations in Afghanistan and Pakistan welcome the new leadership that has displaced al-Qaeda and Kurdistan has been catapulted to the forefront of opposition to the IS.

Distressing Probability of Nuclear Reach

As the fanatical outburst of xenophobia stretches south and eastward the IS' influence will in due course manifest in the fertile Jihadist breeding grounds of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Pakistan today, as many perceptive analysts have noted, represents a very dangerous condition as its establishment nurtures fundamentalist and terrorist organizations as instruments of their misshapen policies in Afghanistan and Kashmir. The essence of Pakistan's rogue links will, unmistakably, seduce the IS into the sub-continent underscoring the distressing probability of the IS extending its reach into a nuclear arsenal. The impending withdrawal of US forces from the region will only serve to catalyse such a calamitous scenario.

Sustaining the Richest Terrorist Group

Ideologically the IS is driven by little other than a deep rooted malevolence (towards the US in particular) for the near quarter century of armed turmoil and sectarian carnage that has visited the region without near term hopes for restoration. The fallout has been a demonizing of plurality and a fierce rejection of modernity. Resurgence of the banished Iraqi Republican Guard has provided muscle to the movement and the revival of the Baathist faction infused a much needed organisational framework to the IS. The feeble capitulation of the 350,000 US trained Iraqi security forces stands testimony to the vigour of the enterprise. The seizure of over 400,000 pieces of small arms, artillery munitions, the pillaging of USD \$430 million from the Central Bank of Mosul and the creation of a self sustaining financial flow to fuel the movement would suggest the work of trained minds and the organisational precision of professionals; besides it also makes the IS the richest militant group in West Asia.

Timing of the fierce advent of the IS and its leadership of the movement to establish a new Caliphate is distinctly ominous. The West in a state of economic exhaustion, militarily fatigued, geo-politically starved of ideas and facing the prospects of a world order being put in disarray by a revisionist China; neither has the stomach nor the resolve to block the onslaught. The only check on the abuse of unconventional and maleficent power has always consisted in opposition by an equally formidable rival, or of a combination of several countries forming a league of defence; unfortunately such an alliance has not been formed.

Conclusion: Development of a Strategy

When Toynbee suggested the emergence of a Universal State he saw in it disintegration of a civilization as it encountered disastrous 'time of troubles', such as wars within and without followed by the establishment of a universal state-an empire in the throes of decay. Ultimately the universal state collapses. The menacing feature of the Islamic State is that the end of a ruinous historical rhythm is synchronised today with the draw down of an external enforcing dynamic and the intolerable availability of weapons of mass destruction.

In such circumstances the prognosis can only be a universal catastrophe unless a three pronged strategy is put in place:

- Firstly arrest the rampage of the IS by a coalition of regional forces under UN aegis.
 - Secondly, choke the money flow both from patron States and the IS' financial dealings by targeting beneficiaries.
 - Thirdly, deny access to weapons of mass destruction through rigorous guardianship of known sources.
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A Covenant Sans Sword

11 August 2014

Power and Self-Preservation

Hobbes underscored the need to establish an aura of awe and visible power in order that men do not degenerate to their natural anarchic passions. He said, "And covenants without the sword are but words and are of no strength to secure a man at all." Yet, India forges a nuclear 'Sword' whose utility lies in its

non-use. However, intrinsic to the logic is a three-fold endowment – the Sword's unprecedented destructive promise, its influence, and its ability to deter conflict beyond the conventional.

Evolution of a Nuclear Doctrine

India's nuclear programme was driven by a techno-politico-bureaucratic nexus to the exclusion of the military. Whether this strategic orientation was by default or a deep-seated trepidation of the military is not germane; what it did was to create a muddled approach to the process of operationalising the deterrent. But to its acclaim go the separation of the nuclear from the conventional and distinction between the Controller of nuclear weapons and its Custodian.

Discerning that nuclear multilateralism introduces dynamics that are vastly dissimilar to the two-state confrontation of the past; exceptional faith was placed on a calculus where intentions rather than capability alone, weighed in with greater sway. Convinced that the use of nuclear weapons sets into motion an uncontrollable chain of mass destruction, response-proportionality and controlled escalation were rejected.

India's nuclear doctrine is rooted in three principles: no first use (NFU); massive retaliation to a first strike; and credible deterrence. There was a fourth unwritten faith; nuclear weapons would not be conventionalised, a principle that remained divorced from the belief that a nuclear war could be fought and won. The nuclear doctrine was made public on 04 January 2003. The first part deals with 'form'; nuclear war avoidance is the leit motif and NFU the canon. The logic of self-preservation demanded the arsenal be credible and response-ready. The second part of the doctrine deals with 'substance', operationalising the deterrent and command and control are the main themes.

China: Proliferation Policy

China beginning in the 1970s promoted an aggressive policy of transfer of nuclear weapon technology and missiles to reprobate States using North Korea as a clearing house. The policy has been continued unrelentingly. Reasons for such profligate leanings are a matter of conjecture. They may have originally reflected balance of power logic. However, proliferation in the Islamic world has implications that are sinister particularly since AQ Khan made known that nuclear chastity is a fable. Radical Islam perceives nuclear weapons as a means to destroy an order that has wilfully kept the Ummah under subjugation. In this frame of reference the singling out of the US, India and Israel for retribution attains new meaning. It also gives to China a heft up the power ladder.

The Unhinged Tri-Polar Deterrent Relationship

A deterrent relationship is founded on rationality. For the 'deterree' there is rationality in the conviction of disproportionate risks; and for the deterrer rationality in confirming the reality of risks. The exceptional feature is that roles are reversible provided the common interest is stability.

Unique to the deterrent relationship in the region is the tri-polar nature of linkages and an abiding symptom is Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. Conceived, designed and tested by Beijing, the programme has also rapidly created the means to stockpile fissile material. Under these circumstances any scheme to stabilise the situation must first address the duality of the Sino-Pak programme. Persistent collaboration and a breakneck build-up of nuclear infrastructure suggests doctrinal co-relation which any deterrent relationship overlooks at its peril.

Making Sense of Pakistan's Nuclear Strategy: The Nuclear Nightmare

The opacity of Pakistan's strategic nuclear underpinnings, descent to tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) and duplicity of policies has made it prickly for India to either understand nuclear thinking in Islamabad or to find coherence in the mania for parity, the rush for fissile material, and the loosening of controls over nuclear weapons. More puzzling is the strategic notion that the conventional imbalance between the two

countries may be offset by “either an assured second-strike capability or, a hair-trigger-arsenal” and as Feroz Khan’s bizarre argument goes, “TNWs provide another layer of deterrence designed to apply brakes on India’s conventional superiority” (ala NATO’s discredited formulation). On a perplexing note Khan concludes that likelihood of inadvertence is high, tenability of central control low, and the probability of Indian pre-emptive conventional attack a near certainty.

No scrutiny of the sub-continental situation can avoid looking at the internals of Pakistan. The country today is in perilous pass caused by the Establishment nurturing terrorist organisations as instruments of their misshapen policies. Pakistan’s radical links makes the status-quo unacceptable for the nuclear nightmare as a hair trigger, opaque deterrent embracing tactical use under military control steered by an ambiguous doctrine and guided by a military strategy that finds unity with terrorists is upon us.

The unbiased examiner is left bewildered that if imbalance in the power equation with India is so substantial and internals so anaemic, then why does Pakistan not seek rapprochement as a priority for policies?

Conclusion

In declaring her nuclear doctrine, India struck a covenant not just with her own citizens but with the global community. At its core was the renunciation of the first use of nuclear weapons. On the face of it such a disavowal defied conventional wisdom. To deliberately temper a sword and then to abjure its first use would appear to contradict sovereign morality, after all if the first duty of the State is to protect its citizens, then to open itself to the first strike would be a failing. And yet if there is belief in the changed nature of warfare that nuclear weapons have ushered, then humanity’s moral weight would be on the side of the covenant sans sword. Fatefully, till that moral weight finds strategic expression, it is the destructive promise of the NFU policy backed by pre-emptive conventional capabilities that will rein in a nuclear misadventure.

Strife on the Global Commons

14 July 2014

The run up to the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) was marked by a debate held in Sparta amongst the Peloponnesian allies to determine whether war against the aggressive seapower Athens and the maritime Delian League was to be waged. The leadership of the war-like alliance lay with the powerful yet reluctant Spartan king Archidamus, a man of both intelligence and moderation. He questioned, “What sort of a war, then, are we going to fight? If we can neither defeat them at sea nor control the resources on which their navy depends, we shall do ourselves more harm than good.” To Archidamus, clearly, the inability to access and control the Global Commons of his era presaged defeat.

Global Commons is a term typically used to describe international, supranational, and global common pool resource domains. Global Commons include the earth's shared resources, such as the oceans, the atmosphere, outer space and the Polar Regions. Cyberspace also meets the definition, but for this examination will focus on the hydrosphere. The parameters for enquiry necessarily include physical tangibles of height, width, depth and the awkward intangible of human history.

Mahan in “The Influence of Seapower upon History” underscored three prescient perspectives relating to the Commons. First, competition for materials and markets is intrinsic to an ever trussed global system. Second, the collaborative nature of commerce on the one hand deters war, while on the other engenders friction. Third, the Global Commons require to be secured against disruption and rapacious exploitation.

An understanding of the Commons must not suffer from any delusions that explicit and recognised conventions have evolved over the centuries. On the contrary, till the middle of the last century what passed for a principle was Hugo Grotius’ 1609 notion of *Mare Liberum*; freedom of the seas. The concept that the sea was international territory and all nations were free to use it. The free-for-all state of the Commons becomes evident in the fact of the seaward limit of national sovereignty being defined by the

cannon-shot decree which would suggest that it was the ability to control that defined dominion. By the middle of the twentieth century the collapse of colonial empires and the birth of new nations set into motion a dynamic that demanded a change from cannon-shot rules and lawlessness to equitability and responsibilities in the Commons along with demarcation of territorial and economic zones. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS I, II & III) met 1954 to 1982 to hammer out and define rights and responsibilities of nations in their use of the world's oceans. The deliberations concluded in 1982 and became functional in 1994. Recognising that the sea bed is the repository of vast and unguaged quantities of minerals, the Convention provided for a regime relating to minerals on the seabed outside any state's territorial waters or Exclusive Economic Zone. It established an International Seabed Authority to regulate seabed mining and control distribution of royalties. To date it has been ratified by 165 nations. Significantly, the US Senate has snubbed the UNCLOS. What critically mars the compact is its imprecision, its illusory demand for the supranational and the absence of a structure to secure the Global Commons against disruption and rapacious exploitation.

The current distressed state of the Commons is discernible by the impact that globalisation has had; strains of multi-polarity, anarchy of expectations and the increasing tensions between the demands for economic integration and the stresses of fractured political divisions are symptoms. Nations are persistently confronted by the need to reconcile internal pressures with intrusive external impulses at a time when the efficacy of Power to bring on political outcomes is in question. While most nations have sought resolution and correctives within the framework of the existing international order, China emerges as an irony that has angled for and conspired to re-write the rule book.

China's rising comprehensive power has generated an internal impulse to military growth and unilateral intervention in its immediate neighbourhood in the South and East China Sea and its extended regions of economic interests. It has developed and put in place strategies that target the Commons to assure a favourable consequence to what it perceives to be a strategic competition for resources and control of the seaways that enable movement. The consequences of China activating artifices such as the Anti-Access and Area Denial strategy and geo-political manoeuvres to establish the String of Pearls in the Indian Ocean Region evokes increasing shared anxieties and resistance by players in the same strategic milieu. Particularly at a time when the North Eastern Passage through the Arctic is emerging as receding ice cuts the Asia-Europe route via the Suez by half (from 23000 km to 11500 km) and technology opens the Antarctic to economic exploitation. The paradoxical effects of China's contrivances are to undermine its own strategic standing, hasten counter-balancing alignments and urge a global logic of cooperative politics over imperious strategies.

The Perils of Strategic Narcissism

9 June 2014

China's rise has powered an impulse to military growth and unilateral intervention which in turn evokes anxieties and resistance by players in the same strategic milieu. The paradoxical effect is to undermine its own strategic standing.

Historical Similitude

The Franco-German War of 1870 forms a watershed in strategic thought. After the annexation of the North German Confederacy in 1866, Bismarck sought the Southern German States. He deceived the French into believing that a Prussian Prince would rule from the throne of Spain as a larger strategy of encirclement. By July 1870, France was conned into a seemingly 'inevitable' war. Germany through superior military craft and technology inflicted a crushing defeat on the host. In the process the balance of power in Europe was upset. The War, from deception, to alliances, provocation of crisis and defeat of the enemy forcing a one-sided negotiation could well have been scripted by Kautilya or, more significant to this narrative, Sun Tzu.

German victory ushered a strategic orientation to compete with the principal imperial power, Britain. Three strategic objectives swayed the rivalry: military dominance over land and sea; global economic and

technological ascendancy in tandem with unimpeded access to primary resources; and thirdly, diplomatic and political pre-eminence. By 1890, Germany had established continental military dominance and a warship-build programme that would challenge British command of the seas. Economically, Germany had already overtaken Britain in heavy industries and innovation, capturing global markets and amassing capital. This in turn muscled influence and superiority in one sector after another.

A thirty-year projection in 1890 suggested that Germany, home to the most advanced industries having unimpeded access to resources of the earth, best universities, richest banks and a balanced society, would achieve her strategic goals and primacy. Yet precisely thirty years later, Germany lay in ruins, her economy in shambles, her people impoverished and her society fragmented. By 1920, her great power aspirations lay shamed between the pages of the Treaty of Versailles. The real lesson was that Germany's quest for comprehensive power brought about a transformation amongst the status-quo powers to align against, despite traditional hostility (Britain and France; Britain and Russia) to contain and defeat a rising Germany that sought to upset the existing global order.

China in Perspective

Historical analogies are notorious in their inability to stage encores, yet they serve as means to understand the present.

Contemporary fears of nations are driven by four vital traumas: perpetuation of the State; impact of internal and external stresses; reconciliation with the international system; lastly, the conundrum of whether military power produces political outcomes. The paradigm of the day is 'uncertainty' with the tensions of multi-polarity, tyranny of economics, anarchy of expectations and polarisation along religio-cultural lines all compacted by globalisation.

If globalisation is a leveller to the rest of the world, to China, globalisation is about State capitalism, central supremacy, controlled markets, managed currency and hegemony. The military was to resolve fundamental contradictions that threatened the Chinese State. Significantly, globalisation provided the opportunity to alter the status-quo. Against this backdrop is the politics of competitive resource access and denial, which rationalised the use of force. It is in this perspective that the rise of China must be gauged.

China's dazzling growth is set to overtake the US. Its rise has been accompanied by ambitions of global leadership. This has in turn spurred an unparalleled military growth. In this circumstance the race to garner resources by other major economies is fraught. But the real alarm is that China seeks to dominate international institutions without bringing about a change of her own morphology. China's claims on the South and East China Sea; handling of internal dissent; proliferatory carousing with North Korea and Pakistan are cases in point.

The emergence of China from its defensive maritime perimeters into the Indian Ocean is seen as the coming 'Third Security Chain'. Gone is Deng's 'power bashfulness'; in its place is the conviction that the-world-needs-China-more-than-China-the-world. Its insistence on a bilateral policy to settle disputes even denies the natural impulse of threatened States to seek power balance in collective security.

The Sense in Cooperative Security Strategies

The standpoint that provocation and intimidation can benefit China by persuading the victim to negotiate outstanding issues from a conciliatory position is a strategically mistaken one. India, Japan, Vietnam and the South China Sea Littorals have demonstrated so. Far from acquiescing they have chosen to resist, adopting (in trend) a cooperative security strategy. This includes deliberate negative response to favour Chinese economic monopoly even when the benefits are obvious. While individual action may be insignificant, the aggregate of combined action may impede China's growth which in turn question's strategic stability of dispensation.

The parallels with the rise and fall of Germany is complete when it is noted that China's Defence White Paper of April 2013 underscores the will to expand offensive military capability in pace with economic growth. Internationally, this can only be viewed as acutely threatening. The delusion that menaced States will not align to contend and defy China's grand design is a strategically misleading notion.

The Chilling Prospects of Nuclear Devices at Large

12 May 2014

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union produced over one thousand tons of weapon grade plutonium and highly enriched uranium. By 1986 its stockpile numbered 45,000 warheads; it was poorly inventoried; spread across the Republics with fissionable material salted away as reserve in shoddily secured warehouses (remembering that it was the nation that was secured). The post break-up Russian governments of Yeltsin and Putin through the nineties and into the new millennium managed to locate and harvest close to 99.9 per cent of the stash leaving 0.1 per cent unaccounted for, which translates to one thousand kilograms of weapon-grade fissile matter somewhere in limbo; adequate material to put together over one hundred, 20 kiloton yield explosive devices. It is not entirely clear what magnitude of unaccounted weapon-grade fissile matter is adrift from the US and NATO stockpile for at the height of the Cold War, they too had amassed a stockpile of over 30,000 warheads and an indefinite number of tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) deployed on the European front; and they are not telling. After all in the sample year of 1957 three US nuclear weapons were lost in the North Atlantic Ocean whilst ferrying them across in transport aircraft and remain so to date.

In the meantime, China's Premier Deng Xiaoping through the 1980s into the 1990s promoted and executed an aggressive policy of direct transfer of nuclear weapon technology and launch vectors to reprobate States (Pakistan, North Korea, Libya, Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia), using North Korea as a clearing house for the deals. The policy has been continued by his successors unrelentingly.

The reasons for this profligate orientation are a matter of conjecture and may have originally reflected balance of power logic in the sub-continental context; to offset and contain Indian comprehensive superiority. While in North Korea's case, to keep the US and the Pacific allies embroiled in a snare of insecurities. In the Islamic world the motivations have a far more sinister purpose and perilous fallout.

Radical Islam envisages a return to the purity of the Koran and sees the possession of a nuclear weapon not just as a symbol of power and an instrument of deterrence but as a means to destroy and dislocate an order that has so wilfully kept the faithful under political, economic and spiritual subjugation. In this frame of reference, nations that have been singled out for retribution are the US, India and Israel. It is here in these countries that the iniquitous probability of a nuclear device being detonated by radical Islamists looms large. Such an event gives to the non-state perpetrators an amorphous form that can neither be destroyed in armed retaliation nor their credo obliterated from the world of beliefs. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq stand in stark testimony to how rooted dogmas have a conviction of their own that deny change through force of arms. Rhetoric such as 'rogue States', 'war on terror' and 'failed States' raise more problems than provide solutions, for any rational interpretation of the terms will invariably indict the very nations that seek to drag out and drub.

Inquiry exposes the real enemy to be States and non-State actors that proliferate nuclear technologies with no other predisposition than to put the status-quo in disarray or driven by avarice. Global double standards and persistent tendentious views that exist on the subject has already brought selective legitimacy of such transactions and taken the world another step closer to a maverick nuclear detonation. Not only do current policies and attitudes to proliferation generate exceptionably high risks of a nuclear attack but there is an inevitability that is emerging if fissionable materials are globally not secured, retrieved and accounted.

The narrative thus far has suggested that global clashes have moved beyond State to State conflict into a realm where the real threat of apocalypse comes from nuclear weapons in the hands of anarchic groups. These amorphous factions are driven by an ideology that seeks the destruction of what it considers

antagonistic to its beliefs. The Nation State, on the other hand, is rationally driven by the will to survive. Perpetuation of the State is a national interest that is held supreme even if it means compromises that may cause profound changes. Radical Islam and its insurgents do not operate under such existential constraints; to them it is the constancy of an abstract idea, that of their interpretation of the Koran.

The awkward irony is that the militant Islamist is financed by the same ungoverned trade that has made billionaires out of dubious entrepreneurs. The case of the Glencore uranium mining corporation in Kitwe Zambia is a case in point. The sole owners of Glencore are the Marc Rich family now settled in Zug, Switzerland; the same Mr Rich who was indicted for illicit uranium trading with Iran, Israel and, one can only speculate, with which other entities. He also received a full and well-funded Presidential pardon on Clinton's last morning in office. The upshot is that the transfer of illicit wealth whether it is through the drug trade, uncontrolled resource access, sale of prohibited materials and technologies, illegal arms trade or as a deliberate policy eventually, in part, funnels its way to the nurturing of radical organisations. What we today stand witness to is the convergence of a parallel source of wealth and diffusing technologies together in the quest for weapon grade fissile materials. The means to dislocate and put in disarray the evolving world order is at hand.

It has been noted that the trio of the US, India and Israel have been declared by radical Islam as primary targets for reprisal and therefore it may be inferred for special nuclear treatment. Counter action must, for this reason alone, be spearheaded by the troika. Four concrete measures are suggested:

- Fissile material: All fissile material globally must be retrieved, inventoried and secured. This must be an obligatory international effort despite the current situation in the Ukraine. Scientists and technicians involved in nuclear weapon design and fabrication must be profiled and political control by respective nations exercised over their movements and affiliations.
- Inspection and safeguards: The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1970 along with the Additional Protocol, which gave the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) greater proliferation monitoring powers, was the designated instrument for safeguards. However the treaty has over the years been compromised by the inequities it represented, the discrimination that it promoted and the selective biases that it propagated. What it lacks is teeth to impartially enforce punitive measures against proliferators irrespective of nation. What is suggested is a retooling of the Treaty to make the IAEA the nodal proliferation control agency with mandatory surveillance, intelligence provisions and realistic controls on the production of fissionable material and movement of nuclear weapon technologies.
- Choking the money conduits: Intelligence sharing and coordinated action to shut down ungoverned trade and illicit financial transfers is the key to starving radical organisations. Financial institutions must be obliged to collaborate in the matter.
- China: As noted earlier, China has been the leading proliferator of nuclear weapon technologies and delivery systems. It has over the years transferred nuclear weapons design, provided testing facilities, passed on ballistic missiles along with production facilities and provided material, intellectual, logistic and doctrinal back up to client state nuclear weapon programmes. To some in Beijing the detonation of a nuclear device by Radical Islamists may even be seen as an effective route to upsetting the status-quo and opening the future to its hegemonic designs.

Thus far, the global community has been blind to the dangers of untrammelled nuclear proliferation particularly by China as she supplies ready-to-use WMD technology along with delivery systems to States that are in the tightening grip of radical Islamists. The manner in which Pakistan received a nuclear weapon design package and material support to build nuclear weapons which was then conveyed to Iran, Libya and others is suggestive of a pattern that seeks to deliberately provoke a nuclear incident that can only serve China's interests. The time is nigh when the trio of US, India and Israel, which have been designated as primary targets of radical Islam, to band together to enforce a nuclear non-proliferation regime that reigns in China.

MH370 and China's Anti-Access Area Denial Strategy

14 April 2014

The mystery of the missing Malaysian Airlines MH 370 continues to confound. Was it a sudden catastrophic end to an ill-fated flight or was it a failure of surveillance that led to a controlled and purposeful disappearance of a marked commercial carrier?

The last reported position of the aircraft was on 08 March 2014 at 0119 hours (local time Malaysia) in the Gulf of Thailand at its first navigational way point IGARI, about 500 km north east of Kuala Lumpur at an altitude of 35,000 feet cruising at 872 km/h, well on its predetermined route to Beijing. This account was immediately followed by loss of all communications and a possible disabling of the secondary radar (transponder). MH 370 was now less than 200 km from the Vietnamese coast with orders to call up Ho Chi Min city Air Traffic Control (ATC). Normal procedures demand a positive overlap when control passes from one ATC to another; this would appear not to have occurred which in itself ought to have rung some alarm bells particularly in a dense airspace which accounts for nearly 16 per cent of global traffic (see Map 1, authors research suggests that there were at least 25 aircraft on international transit within 500 kms of MH 370 at that instant).

Leaving aside the initial bungling by Malaysian aviation authorities; conspiracy theories abound, from a terrorist attack to a suicidal cockpit to a US-sponsored clandestine seizure and strike to prevent high security cargo from falling into Chinese hands. However, more significant is the response of China's most recent Flight Information Region (FIR) Centre at Sanya and its integration into that nation's Air Defence network. The Sanya FIR (in Hainan) is responsible for managing traffic and maintaining continuous surveillance over the South China Sea. Its formal area of responsibility is a sea space of 280,000 square km which approximates a square of 530 km sides or a circle of diameter 600 km extending into the South China Sea. While China's claim to sovereignty over the entire South China Sea does not include the Gulf of Thailand; the last reported position of MH 370 was within 500 km of its claimed territorial sea and about 1200 km from Hainan. Also, had the flight stuck to its planned route, it would have over flown Vietnam and entered Chinese 'airspace' in the Sanya FIR by 0215 hrs. It did not and therefore the question arises, why was Sanya Air Control Centre at such a run-down state of alert and the Chinese Air Defence organisation wanting in alacrity? Given the current imbroglio in the South China Sea, the state of air surveillance would have demanded early tracking and far more credible situational awareness. Another consideration is the fact that Hainan is home to the Chinese South Sea Naval Fleet at Beihai and houses its strategic ballistic missile submarine force at Yulin; which must play some part in assuring domain wakefulness.

Map 2: Track of MH 370 from take-off to 1h 34m into flight

At 0215 hrs came a positive pick-up of MH 370 by Malaysian military radar fixing the aircraft 320 km north west of Penang at 12000 feet altitude on a westerly heading; having deviated 500 kms west of its intended track (see Map 2). This information had to have been passed to Sanya FIR since the aircraft was bound for Beijing. Two possibilities emerge: either the entire air space management organisation and air defence network in China were in deep slumber or the appreciation of China's Air Defence Surveillance is flawed. They just do not seem to have the essential surveillance capability - after all an overdue aircraft whether overdue at destination or any of its waypoints is no trifling matter from both the safety and security perspectives.

To the astute military analyst the 370 incident places the edifice of China's Anti-Access Area Denial (A2AD) strategy, upon which is predicated the emergence of the People's Liberation Army as a major player in the Asia Pacific region, as somewhat less than persuasive. The strategy is based on the marriage of the Dong-Feng 21D anti-surface ballistic missile as the 'aircraft carrier killer' with matching surveillance capability that could detect and target hostile aircraft carriers at ranges in excess of 2000 km. Critically, the kill chain begins with detection of the Carrier's flight operations. The entire episode must also have come as a dampener to the heady mixture of Chinese nationalism, its new found wealth and its urge to upset the status-quo that animates what may be called the 'China Arrival'.

If China touts the A2AD strategy as its existential future, it is clear that the credibility of such a scheme has taken a hammering. China's planners may argue that they had not used the full weight of their military surveillance capability for security reasons; but this contention does not hold much water for two reasons. Firstly, by 09 March Chinese remote-sensing satellites had been deployed with considerable operational alacrity (if not precision) to join the search effort. Secondly, the A2AD strategy is a deterrent strategy and the conditions were ideal to demonstrate its surveillance competence. Its satellite reported possible debris of the aircraft within 90 kms south of Vietnam's Tho Chu Island, about 150 kms north of the last known position reported at 0130 hrs on 08 March. The search centre moved to this new position; however the deployed scouts drew a blank. The fresh datum for the search diluted international exertions which only regrouped after an analysis of satellite communications' doppler shift to concentrate efforts nine days later in the south Indian Ocean about 6000 km southwest of the of the first report.

The search for the remains of the hapless MH370 continues. Meanwhile, China's quest for an existential strategy as a prelude to confronting the status-quo is convincing nobody.

India-Pakistan-China: Nuclear Policy and Deterrence Stability

10 March 2014

"Lift not the painted veil which those who live
Call life:.....behind, lurk Fear
And Hope..."

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Cold War Mantra

In September 1950, responding to a directive from the President of the US to re-examine objectives in peace and war with the emergence of the nuclear weapons capability of the Soviet Union; the Secretaries of Defense and State tabled a report titled NSC-68. This report was, in general terms, to become the mantra that guided world order till the end of the Cold War and in particular formed the source that defined and drove doctrines for the use and proliferation of nuclear weapons. As a founding policy document of contemporary world order the memorandum contrasted the fundamental design of the Authoritarian State with that of the Free State. Briefly put, the coming clash was seen as a life and death struggle between the powers of 'evil' with that of 'perfection'.

NSC-68 came at a time when the previous 35 years had witnessed some of the most cataclysmic events that history was subjected to; two devastating World Wars, two revolutions that mocked the global status quo (Russia and China), collapse of five empires and the decline and degeneration of two imperial powers. The dynamics that brought about these changes also wrought drastic transformation in power distribution with the elements of influence, weight and the means of mass nuclear destruction having decisively gravitated to the US and the USSR. The belief that the USSR was motivated by a fanatic communist faith antithetical to that of the West and driven by ambitions of world domination provided the logic and a verdict that conflict and violence would become endemic. And thus was presented to the world a choice to either watch helplessly the end of civilisation or take sides in a 'just cause' to confront the possibility of Armageddon. World order rested upon a division along ideological lines, and more importantly to our study, the formulation of a self-fulfilling logic for the use of nuclear weapons. The 1950s naissance of a nuclear theology was consequently cast in the mould of armed rivalry; its nature was characterised by friction and probing peripheral conflicts. The scheme that carved the world was Containment versus burgeoning Communism. In turn, rationality gave way to the threat of catastrophic force as the basis of stability.

Quest for a New Paradigm

The crumbling of the Soviet Union in the last decade of the twentieth century and the end of the Cold War killed this paradigm. In its wake, scholarly works suggested the emergence of one world and an end to the

turbulent history of man's ideological evolution. Some saw the emergence of a multi-polar order and the arrival of China. Yet others saw in the First Iraq War, the continuing war in the Levant, the admission of former Soviet satellite nations into NATO and the splintering of Yugoslavia, an emerging clash of civilisations marked by violent discord shaped by cultural and civilisational similitude. However, these illusions within a decade were dispelled and found little use in understanding and coming to grips with the realities of the post Cold War world as each of them represented a candour of its own. The paradigm of the day (if there is one) is the tensions of the multi-polar; the tyranny of economics; the anarchy of expectations; and a polarization along religio-cultural lines all compacted in the cauldron of globalisation in a state of continuous technology agitation.

China's Two-Faced Nuclear Policy

Uncertainties of contemporary times and rise of the irrational and the multilateral nature of nuclear relationships only served to enhance the role of nuclear weapons. What it did was to blur the lines between conventional and nuclear weapons, and at the same time, provided a warped incentive in asymmetric situations for the lesser State to reach first for the nuclear trigger. In dealing with fourth generation threats it underscored the significance of strategic non-nuclear weapons in adding pre-emptive teeth to a deterrent relationship.

The current situation has not left the Indian situation unimpaired. The two-faced nature of the Sino-Pak nuclear relationship has put pressure on the No First Use (NFU) doctrine that that has shaped India's policy and indeed its arsenal. For China's stated NFU policy hides the First Use intent of Pakistan that the former has so assiduously nurtured. Forgetting the actuality of an enfeebled Pakistani civilian leadership incapable of action to remove the military finger from the nuclear trigger; the active involvement of non-State actors in military strategy and an alarming posture of an intention-to-use have the makings of a global nuclear nightmare. The Pakistan proxy gives to China doctrinal flexibility, it unfortunately also makes the severance of the Nuclear from the Conventional, a thorny proposition that even China must know can boomerang on its aspirations.

Deterrent Stability: First Step to Transparency

We note thus far that nuclear relations in the region have been bedeviled by a persistent effort to combat the monsters that shrouds of covertness and perilous liaisons have cast; it has left us the unenviable task of, once again, permitting rationality to give way to the threat of catastrophic force as the basis of stability. It is time we saw the dangers of an Armageddon and embrace the opportunity that transparency presents as a first step towards deterrent stability and in the process to lift the precarious veil that is edging the Indo-Sino-Pak nuclear correlation to the precipice.

Strategic Non-Nuclear Weapons: An Essential Consort to a Doctrine of No First Use

13 January 2014

Politico-Military thought often harbours a puzzling phenomenon when it organises concepts and institutions in a mosaic of sometimes antithetical notions. Contrary ideas are indeed intrinsic to the art of political sagacity, but when form is defined by a belief, in apparent conflict with content, then there appear distortions more illusory than what logic would suggest. So it is with the emergence of strategic nuclear weapons. They are destructive to the extent that the purpose of warfare is itself obliterated, underscoring a compelling theory of war avoidance. By its side are strategic non-nuclear weapons whose intent is to target nuclear weapons that, ironically, seek a (precarious) stability.

Conventional savvy will first suggest that non-nuclear weapons can neither deliver the requisite high explosive payload to assume a counter-force role against silo-based or cavered nuclear systems; nor do they come with the probability of kill that is demanded with such a role. But just around the technological corner lurks high impact penetration and shaped charges that make a mockery of hitherto simple overpressure reckoning. Second, nuclear pundits will insinuate that a partially successful counter-force

strike may in point of fact catalyse escalation to a full blown nuclear exchange; both contain candour of their own.

But strange is our circumstance when on the one hand Pakistan presents us with a nuclear nightmare which when articulated is a hair-trigger, opaque deterrent conventionalised under military control, steered by a doctrine obscure in form, seeped in ambiguity, and guided by a military strategy that carouses and finds unity with non-state actors. The introduction of tactical nuclear weapons into the battle area further exacerbates credibility of their control. It does not take a great deal of intellectual exertions to declare that this nightmare is upon us. However, the very nature of the power equation on the subcontinent and the extent to which it is tilted in India's favour will imply that any attempt at bringing about conflict resolution through means other than peaceful is destined to fail. In this context it is amply clear that the threat of use of nuclear weapons promotes only one case and that is the Pakistani military establishment's hold on the nation. On the other hand is a Janus-faced China which, in collusion with Pakistan's nuclear weapon programme, has not just entrenched proliferatory links, but also doctrinal union that permits a duplicitous approach to the latter's declared No First Use (NFU) posture and an option to keep the South Asian nuclear cauldron on the boil. Also significant is the alliance bucks the existing global non-proliferation structure.

What may be derived from the current state of affairs, with any conviction, is the political and military unpredictability that prevails. This denies hope for stability and the expectation of fitting conditions into a convenient model, let alone providing for security guarantees. Governments faced with such a conundrum more readily prepare for a worst case scenario than try and reconcile the true dimensions that uncertainty introduces. It is preparedness, therefore, that endows the only tool that can deter possible confrontation of a nature that has earlier been designated as nightmarish.

India today is in a position to impress upon its adversaries a deterrent relationship based on nuclear war avoidance, with the proviso that the rationale of nuclear weapons as a political tool and a means to preclude a nuclear exchange are recognised and adhered to. China's galloping entwinement with the rest of the world makes this proposition a real probability; contingent upon our resolve and policies of seeking mutuality with like-minded nations to rally around the single point of preventing reactionary overturning of the status quo. This despite the unilateral tensions that China has precipitated in the East and South China Sea over sovereignty, air defence identification zones and the right to control fishing.

Pakistan is, however, a different cup of tea for it portrays a perilous uncertainty, as would any nation under military control that perceives in nuclear weapons the ultimate Brahmastra. As with that weapon of mass destruction, answers lay not just in the promise of disproportionate retaliation but also in the credible ability to preempt and counter its use. India has in place nuclear weapons driven by a doctrine of NFU and massive retaliation. What its strategic forces must now equip itself with is select conventional hardware that tracks and targets nuclear forces (all under political control). This would provide the preemptive teeth to a deterrent relationship that leans so heavily on NFU.

Column: Voice from America

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China's Global Ambition: Need to Emulate Germany

01 December 2014

In 1972, Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong signed the Shanghai communique that resulted in a simple but brilliant bargain between the US and China. The US agreed to recognise China and give up propping up the regime in Taipei as the legitimate government of China and Beijing agreed not to pursue hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region. The agreement, as Australian scholar Hugh White has argued, led to forty years of regional peace and prosperity with China eventually benefitting enough to become the second-largest economy in the world. The foundation of the Shanghai communique, however, has started to crack and led in part to the incumbent US President Barack Obama's government decision to pivot to Asia. But it

may well be a case of too little too late as Asia seeks to move to a new regional economic and political structure.

The Unravelling of the Cold War Order

For a number reasons the old Cold War order has begun to unravel in the Asia-Pacific region and, therefore, allowed China to challenge the status quo that was in the US' favour. First, China's military capabilities have improved to the extent that the US can no longer contain from a chain of nation states that extend from Japan to the Philippines. China's development of robust missile and anti-satellite capabilities have substantially raised Washington's costs to employ power in the region. That said, China is a long way from being in the position to launch a global military challenge the US. Therefore, it has instead sought to use the forces of globalisation to improve Beijing's global position while seeking to lessen that of Washington's. Thus, China has developed a set of regional economic interdependencies that have made the future prosperity of Asian countries dependent on the continued growth and prosperity of the Chinese economy.

Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Malaysia, among others, now have China as their largest trading partner despite, in some cases, having free trade agreements or strategic alliances with the US. This has led to the emergence of contradictory strategic objectives for some of these countries. Australia remains a major strategic ally of the US and was one of the countries that welcomed the pivot to Asia and the rotation of the US Marines via Darwin. But, simultaneously, Canberra is acutely aware that good economic relations with an economically robust China is vital to the Australian national interest. Australia escaped the great recession of 2008 because China ramped up its purchase of Australian natural resources, and, more recently, the Australian economy is in the doldrums because China has reduced its imports from Australia.

Additionally, China is now trying to create alternatives to the US dollar as the international reserve currency by engaging in currency swaps with some Southeast Asian countries and Australia.

Finally, Beijing has now become the largest provider of economic projects and investments across Asia and the fact that Chinese entrepreneurs are now engaging in serious innovation will only increase Beijing's ability to use its economic capabilities to gain regional clout. New Delhi, despite all the problems with China, actually expected a much larger foreign direct investment package to be offered by Xi Jinping during his visit earlier this year.

The problem for Beijing lies in the fact that while regional nations welcome its economic dynamism they worry about its political and military muscle flexing and that is why the US decision to pivot to Asia was tacitly welcomed by so many countries for it was seen as counter-balancing Beijing.

China's long-term objective is to create a post-American order in the region and for that aspiration to succeed it will have to tone down its bellicosity and strive for rapid economic development in Asia. The role model for Beijing in this case has to be Germany which gave up its imperial claims and military prowess after World War II to become the most influential economic actor in Europe - and some would argue that continent's banker. Beijing can bring about a similar economic structure in Asia if it starts to look forward economically while downplaying and eventually settling border disputes that do little to enhance China's security but do much to aggravate it.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the US Air Force or the Department of Defense.

Mid-Term Elections: So What If the US Swings Hard Right?

4 November 2014

The Republican party has won the US senate and added to its majority in the House of Representatives. Optimists think this will usher in a new era of cooperation between the White House and Congress much

as what happened when Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton were faced with majorities from the other party in both houses and actually modified their approaches to achieve compromise and get work done. This time round, the pessimists fear that an energised group of Republicans may just play hardball with President Obama and try to undo some of his pet projects like healthcare. While it remains to be seen which prediction comes true on the domestic front, in the international arena one can quite confidently say so what? US foreign policy is unlikely to change in any significant way. Nor is it likely to get a coherent strategy together to deal with global issues.

The new Congress like its predecessor is unlikely to hold the president's feet to the fire since it recognises that the Iraq war is deeply unpopular amongst the American public and that escalation would only lead to a backlash at the polls. Thus the President's recent demand from Congress for an additional US\$5.6 billion to send 1,500 troops to Iraq will not be met with much opposition. The last Congress, similarly, was happy to let Obama take the heat on how to prevent ISIS from gaining ground.

There is talk that Congress may push for the Obama Administration to hasten in bringing about the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) treaty that was being held up due to resistance from the Democrats who felt that the TPP would go against the interests of American labour. It is believed that the Republicans might agree to give the President a fast track authority to negotiate since the party favours increased trade. Skeptics feel, however, that the Tea Party faction of the Republican party which has been complaining about an imperial presidency is unlikely to give Barack Obama even greater authority. More importantly, free trade agreements are an anathema to the US working class so there may be a backlash that Republicans, looking to win the presidential election in 2016, may be leery of antagonising.

Which then leaves China, Iran, and Russia and in none of these cases is the US Congress interested in doing anything to radically shift these relationships. China cannot be dealt with through traditional security measures like an arms build-up or an attempt at containment - which by the way is how the Chinese perceive the Pivot to Asia. Instead it requires a combination of building up allies, increasing economic collaborations, and a judicious use of soft power, but that would require a degree of imagination and creativity that is not being displayed at present in the US foreign policy debate.

A new relationship with Iran could create new options for the US in both the Middle East and more importantly in Afghanistan. An opening through Iran would decrease US dependence on the supply routes through Pakistan while rapprochement with Tehran would also permit a coordination of policy between Iran and the US to counter the efforts of the Taliban. Yet for such a rapprochement to happen, Congress would have to work with the President to deliver a bipartisan consensus that would limit public criticism and convince the Iranians that the US means business. Again, Congress is unlikely to rise to the occasion given the negative reaction from Congressmen to the secret letter sent by President Obama to the supreme leader of Iran.

Which then leaves Russia and there the President has done what he can by slapping Moscow with a range of sanctions that have begun to bite. But no one in the US wants to go much further than that because not only is Russia a bit player - President Obama dismissed it as a regional power - but getting involved in Ukraine would only stretch the US' already overextended resources.

In the immortal words of David Byrne, "Same as it ever was, same as it ever was."

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Modi's US Visit: So Much Promise, Such Little Outcome

6 October 2014

September was an eventful month for Mr Modi since he met the leaders of the three countries that are most important to India's current security and economic calculations - China, the US, and Japan. The anticipation and results of all three meetings were the same: all three visits were hyped in the Indian

media; and all three led to less than hoped for results. Thus Japan agreed to invest US\$33 billion but the nuclear deal and the arms sales deal did not go through - and in this day and age when Goldman Sachs pays bigger fines to the US Justice Department, US\$6 billion a year in Japanese aid is not a big deal. Before Xi Jinping's visit the Chinese counsel in Mumbai had spoken about the Chinese possibly investing US\$100 billion in India but only a third of that amount was committed to by the Chinese president. And the Modi-Obama visit saw the usual discussions of strategic partnerships, democratic values, market opportunities, and now climate change and energy but ended with little in terms of economic results or a common grand strategic vision.

India's Foreign Policy Myopia

The last Indian prime ministers who had vision and were statesmen were Narasimha Rao and Atal Behari Vajpayee because they brought about structural changes in India's foreign, security, and economic policies. Rao pulled India out of the abyss of socialism while not throwing the baby out with the bath water (even today it is India's state-run organisations like ISRO, RBI, and IIT that give India a serious global presence). Vajpayee conducted the second round of nuclear tests and laid the groundwork for an opening to the US. Mr Modi needs to take a seminal step now to put India on the centre stage of world politics and the way to do it is to understand the economic and military-strategic concerns of the big three countries. Before addressing what the big three want one has to point out the perceived constraint on Indian foreign and economic policy. As Sisir Gupta wrote in the 1960s, India's foreign policy style was to engage in a commentary on international issues and to provide an alternative to the world views of the US and the Soviet Union. Enlightened commentary made sense when India was a poor country with few friends but now India - despite having the largest number of poor people in the world - is not a poor country but an influential one.

In this context the diffident foreign policy of South Block, which continues to use terms like "principled opposition" or "principled stand," does little to impress other nations in the world. Nor do so-called strategic partnerships that amount to little more than extended conversations on security (given how many strategic partnerships India has you have to feel sorry for the countries that do not have such a partnership with New Delhi). India, therefore, is seen as the country that talks a lot but when it comes to actually delivering its policy lacks substance. Similarly, in the military context, the Indian government keeps proclaiming how it has bought US\$10 billion worth of arms from the US and this makes it a valuable arms market. To put this in context, in 2010, Saudi Arabia bought US\$60 billion worth of weapons from the US after negotiating for just a few months. In contrast, India's arms procurement process moves at a glacial pace. British aerospace officials joke that 2003 marked 100 years of flight and it took one-fifth of that time to sell the Hawk to India. The billion-dollar sale of 12 C-130J aircraft to India took four years and is described by weary observers of the Indian arms market as a "quick sale."

In the case of the general economy, the Modi government has to date made incremental changes to economic policy that impress few foreign investors. Thus while the Indian Prime Minister met American CEOs and promised reforms, money will not move to India until corporations believe that India is actually serious about structural reforms. Given the continued disillusionment with India in the realms of foreign policy, economics, and the military, what then do major nations, particularly the US, want from India?

India does not have the same sort of emotional and historical ties that Britain and Israel have with the US. Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to the UN was broadcast live on American television while Mr Modi's was not. And while Mr Modi got 20,000 Indian Americans to show up in Madison Square Garden and wildly cheer him, the rest of America did not take notice. On the other hand, when William and Kate Middleton come to the US they are treated by the American public as rock stars and some Americans refer to Britain as the mother country. In this situation what India has to do is play to the one card that will attract the American corporations and earn the respect of the American government - rapidly open the Indian market and secure investments from the West.

Such investments have a security dimension because as they increase in size they will grant India greater foreign policy autonomy and work to further isolate Pakistan. As I have argued elsewhere, that may be

the only way that New Delhi can put pressure on Islamabad. For as more nations get connected to an Indian economy they will be more willing to accept the Indian view on the security situation in South Asia.

Further, the Modi government can rapidly open up parts of the economy where the US can readily and easily invest. These include tourism, aviation, higher education, alternative energy, and healthcare. Mr Modi does not need a national consensus or the support of parliament to open up these sectors and such reforms would make the US a major player in the Indian market and, therefore, a major stakeholder in a stable and secure India. Alternatively, if the Prime Minister's Office is happy with Bollywood style entertainment at Madison Square Garden and long-winded meetings with Barack Obama, then business as usual is a great policy.

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India and Australia: Beyond Curry, Cricket, and Commonwealth

1 September 2014

The Australians used to say that the India-Australia relationship was based on Curry, Cricket, and Commonwealth. While the first two are still relevant, India no longer needs Australia as a gateway to Western economic and political forums. Instead India is an Asian power with a pressing need to modernise its economy. In this context, Mr Abbott's visit should be about a lot more than the sale of uranium.

The uranium deal is important since India and Australia have been talking about it since the times of Prime Minister John Howard and it is finally coming to fruition (interestingly, Howard was upset that India did not support him for the vice-presidency of the International Cricket Council plaintively complaining on national television that he could not understand Indian opposition since he was in favour of selling uranium to India). For a power-starved India, nuclear energy will be one of multiple solutions to be thrown at solving this problem. The question is how quickly can this become operational? Or will it drag on in true Indian bureaucratic fashion?

There are, however, other areas where India should welcome Australian expertise with healthcare, tourism, security, and education being the main sectors where cooperation can be expanded. The Australians are good at delivering healthcare over long distances and this can be useful in an India where setting up hospitals in remote areas is a problem. Tourism is an area where the Australians excel and where India has enormous untapped potential. Creating a tourist-friendly India with a world class service industry is one of the easy areas for the Indian government to focus on. India's internal security sector has seen improvements since the November 2008 Mumbai terror attacks but a lot still needs to be done and the Australians have a fairly good record with internal security and the surveillance of their maritime borders. In this context, India has been seeking to purchase drones from the US but it should also be looking at a country like Australia to co-develop remotely piloted vehicles.

But one of the key areas in which the two countries could collaborate is education. As I have written elsewhere, Australia is an educational power that punches well above its weight in that it is one of the top five destinations for international students. Indian demographers keep stressing the fact that the country has a large dividend in the form of millions of young people. Youth is a necessary but not sufficient advantage in a globalised world because these young people have to be trained to be functional in the global market. India has a problem there because it has a shortage of young people with effective English skills to contribute effectively in a globalised work environment. Nor are most Indian universities educating well-grounded students with adequate critical thinking skills. Australia has reformed its education market by making it easier for genuine students to get visas and to give two years post-study employment to them - after all at its peak in 2009 there were 491,565 international students in Australia. In this new environment it may be easier to lure back the Indian students who moved away from Australia earlier in this decade.

Further, India also needs a growing workforce of electricians, plumbers, welders, and carpenters who can work to 21st century building standards - and this can only come through a serious investment in establishing community colleges in India that provide such vocational skills. This is an area where Australian investment and skills can be sought.

The low-hanging fruit for the Modi government may be to get the Australians to facilitate Indian investments in Australia. Tony Abbott's government has been pragmatic about this and has cleared the Adani Group's US\$15.5 billion investment in the Carmichael Coal Project in Queensland. Other investments are likely to follow.

But the most important thing Mr Modi can do is to signal to the Australians - and indeed to all other countries - that his government is moving away from bureaucratic inertia, a glacial decision-making process, corruption, and a swarm of red tape since these constraints make it difficult to invest in India. In fact, the term used to describe the view of global corporations on India now is India Fatigue. If Mr Modi wants to rapidly develop the country he has to correct this perception and let leaders like Mr Abbott know that he means business.

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And Then There is the Middle East: The Lack of an End-Game

4 August 2014

US' policy towards the turmoil in the Middle East, or the lack of it, is shaped by three factors: traditional ties and alliances that continue in the post-Cold War era; the complex regional environment that has emerged after the so-called "Arab Spring;" and the events of 9/11 and Iraq that have forged American opinion on the subject. Yet none of these factors are any help in resolving the current political turmoil in the Middle East.

The US' traditional ties in the Middle East have been with conservative Arab regimes, particularly in the Gulf, and with the state of Israel. Neither set of ties has changed much in the 21st century and if anything the ties with Israel have become even stronger since 9/11. International observers now, in fact, complain of an American media bias towards Israel in the current Gaza conflict that is much more marked than in past Arab-Israeli conflicts. The US is unlikely to change this relationship given the impact of the other two factors mentioned above.

The Arab Spring was a bombshell that policymakers, academics, and the American media were not expecting and a coherent American policy took some time to develop. What eventually emerged was a policy that supported a democratic transition with a preference for moderate political forces having their hands on the wheel. In none of the Arab countries did events play out the way policymakers expected. In Egypt, the military dismissed the legally elected president and was able to get its own candidate elected in a new election. In Tunisia, the nation which has seen the best potential transition to democracy, a conservative Islamic party came to power and has subsequently called for parliamentary and presidential elections in October/November 2014. In Libya, Colonel Gadhafi was removed from power but the country is now headed into a civil war and Western embassies, aid workers, and journalists are leaving the country en masse. In Bahrain, the fledgling movement for democracy was crushed by the authorities while in Yemen cosmetic changes were made to the regime. Iraq and Syria are engulfed in civil war and have seen the rise of ISIS - a group so brutal that even al Qaeda has had to disown them.

As for the Palestinians, the rise of Hamas was viewed with disquiet by Israel, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation on the West Bank, and by the conservative Arab states and even the new government in Egypt. The Arab countries' governments have remained by and large silent over the events in Gaza because of the turn the Arab Spring took. The elites and the middle class were stunned by the rise of extremist elements and voted instead for stability which in actual terms meant withdrawing support from

the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. Paradoxically, it is the non-Arab states - Turkey and Iran - that have been the most vocal supporters of Palestinian nationhood. Add to these concerns the fact that in the post-9/11 world the West is worried by the rise of radical groups in the Middle East, all these events only works to strengthen the relationship with Israel which is seen as a loyal ally. What then is the likely endgame for the US, if any, in the region?

Given the US' economic concerns, the bill for the Afghan and Iraq wars, and war fatigue in the general population, long-term military intervention will be difficult to achieve. At the same time, the chaos in the Middle East makes it likely that the global powers are going to have to adopt a wait-and-see approach on what type of political formations emerge from this volatile situation. The one threat which might prompt US-led intervention is if oil supplies from the Gulf were threatened especially from Saudi Arabia and the smaller Gulf states - although these states are as of now peaceful and in the case of the UAE and Qatar booming economically. Even in Iraq, despite the success of ISIS, oil exports continue since the insurgents are not targeting what could eventually be their cash cow - although this may lead to hard choices if ISIS continues to take over oil fields and thus impact on the international petroleum market. So wait-and-see becomes the narrative.

Israel-Palestine is more problematic since given Israeli domestic politics and security concerns, Palestinian political cleavages, and the fact that the US can do little to really pressure either side, it is likely that there will simply be more of the same. At some point of time both the Palestinians and the Israelis will agree to a ceasefire and it will be back to business as usual. Having said that, there are no realistic expectations of a political breakthrough in the near to medium-term. John Kerry, who has racked up more frequent flyer miles than Hillary Clinton, is seeing his carefully crafted peace solution crumble in the dust of Israeli air strikes and Palestinian missiles.

In conclusion, one should raise the point that in the digital age it is hard for the general public to focus on anything and, therefore, a consistent well-thought out American foreign policy becomes difficult. In this year American attention has wandered from the crisis in Crimea to Boko Haram kidnapping 300 schoolgirls to ISIS in Iraq to the Gaza strip. And there are still five months left in this year. Given this public attention deficit, expecting a long-term focus on any region is just not possible.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the US Air Force or the Department of Defense.

US and the World Cup: Nationalism without Football?

7 July 2014

Once every four years Americans discover football - or as they like to call it, soccer. Yet this temporary attraction to the game has little to do with a real understanding of the global sport but more with the ability to project sporting nationalism. So is soccer catching on in the US? The answer is no and yes and it reflects on the changing demographics and socioeconomic patterns of the US.

In the US, football comes in a distant fourth to the premier sports of American football, basketball, and baseball. These games have been around for over a 100 years and young Americans have been socialised to play and watch these sports. Thus when the US hosted the World Cup in 1994 it did not even have a domestic professional league. Further, there remains a belief that soccer is too foreign, too slow, too low-scoring, and if one is to go by the musings of the conservative commentator Ann Coulter, too socialist in its orientation. In her dismissal of soccer as being un-American, Ms. Coulter stated that in the game there, "are no heroes, no losers, no accountability, and no child's fragile self-esteem is bruised. There's a reason perpetually alarmed women are called "soccer moms," not "football moms." Not one to be pithy, Ms Coulter added that soccer was loved by The New York Times (a politically unsound newspaper to the lunatic faction of America's right), it was not liked by African-Americans, and not a serious game since men and women played together on the same field - and no serious game from kindergarten onwards was ever co-ed. She ended by stating, "If more "Americans" are watching soccer today, it's only because of the demographic switch effected by Teddy Kennedy's 1965 immigration law. I promise you: No American

whose great-grandfather was born here is watching soccer. One can only hope that, in addition to learning English, these new Americans will drop their soccer fetish with time." Such feelings of xenophobia, however, do not explain why 18.2 million viewers saw the US-Portugal game on ESPN.

Ms Coulter is partially correct when she states that most Americans are not interested in soccer but like any other nation they love the nationalistic sentiments and tribal behavior that the game stirs up. American sports are dubbed "world championships" but they only involve one American city playing another. In contrast, the World Cup is America against the world. So Americans want their national team to win even though many have trouble understanding soccer and are particularly troubled by the fact that the game is not full of technological solutions, time-outs (convenient for going to the bathroom), and legalese - the rules of an American sport like football or basketball read like an extensive contract for a corporate merger. The fact is that for the older American who has not played the game, it is as confusing and boring as cricket. Further, sports commentators, team owners in major professional sports, and even some players have an economic interest in denigrating soccer since it could threaten the established sporting hierarchy in the US. But things are not as gloomy as they seem because socioeconomic and demographic changes are making soccer assume a more prominent role in the US.

First, America's suburban white middle-class has embraced the game because it is easy and inexpensive to play, it is injury-free, and consequently the game is mainly played by children from middle class and affluent families. It is this educated, globalised class that is the future of the game in the US particularly since the sport is so participation-friendly for young women. And women, secondly, are slowly bringing about a socioeconomic and educational shift in America. Since 1980 the ratio of women to men going to college has been 3:2, in major metropolitan areas women in their twenties make more than their male counterparts and, according to the Pew Research Center, in nearly 40 per cent of American households, women are either the sole or primary breadwinner - and a lot of these women have played soccer. This is a major difference from the big American sports where women's participation has been reduced to being cheerleaders and earning minimum wage. In contrast, the US women's team has won the World Cup and it is a very common sight in urban areas to see twenty and thirty-somethings play co-ed pickup games. Soccer fits into the narrative of the urban, educated, environmentally conscious, globalised, and well to do person. It is these people who man the information technology giants like Apple, Facebook, Google, and Microsoft. They are the people who have well-paying jobs in hedge funds, too big to fail banks, Hollywood, and advertising. So soccer may not appeal to the gun-toting, NASCAR watching, rural to semi-rural population of America but it resonates extremely well with those who run the innovative America that is a world power. Thus soccer reflects broader class differences in America where the less educated treat the game, like other changes to American society, with suspicion while the better educated see it part of their lifestyle.

Lastly, as we witness the browning of America we are seeing more and more Latin migrants in the country and their family passions run to soccer. In the World Cup Americans have been cheering two teams: Team USA and the Mexican team, which has a large fan base in the country.

Soccer, therefore, will grow in America since it is now patronised by the educated and dynamic young people of the country - and America will be sucked into the global frenzy of football.

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India-US: Will Modi and Obama Come Together?

3 June 2014

After denying Mr Narendra Modi a visa for nearly a decade the US saw the writing on the wall and started changing its tune just before the 2014 elections were held. Mr Modi is now officially welcome in the Washington but it will be a long time before the US-India relationship will reach the same levels it was at during the second term of George Walker Bush.

Obama's Compulsions

The US, once again, has had its focus shifted from China to a series of brush fires around the world - Syria and Ukraine being the most prominent. The Bush administration when it came to power named China as a strategic competitor but was forced to shift its attention to Afghanistan because of the September 11 attacks. These traditional battlegrounds have their constituents in Washington. The bottom line is that quite a few American strategic analysts are obsessed with the Middle East and would like to revive the Cold War even though President Obama quite correctly dismissed Russia as a regional power. Because brush fires have overridden grand strategy in Washington, the Obama Administration's Pivot to Asia and enhanced ties that go with it have been put on the backburner and, instead, the focus is on regions that both present unsolvable problems and provide little reward to the US. The Middle East, after its flirtation with the so-called Arab Spring, has swung back to soft authoritarianism, and Russia will never be in the US camp. Nor will challenging Russia, a much diminished power, bring the sort of global rewards that the Cold War did to the US' position in world affairs. Now, challenging Russia does not lead to a rise in military budgets or in a national rejuvenation as happened with the race to the moon. But the Obama administration is likely to be caught up in putting out these brush fires till the end of its term.

Coupled with the shift from a strategic to a tactical focus is the fact that the three trends in the short to medium term are going to make US foreign policy take a less proactive role in world affairs. First, the country is tired of wars and, therefore, there is a real dislike for foreign intervention. President Obama recognised this when he put the Syrian issue in the hands of Congress knowing fully well that the legislature was unlikely to authorise American troop commitments. Secondly, at a time when the American economy has yet to fully recover from the economic crisis of 2008, it is difficult to tell the American people to spend more on defense and external military commitments. Third, the bills of the Iraq and Afghan wars are now starting to pile up with the need for new equipment as well as taking care of tens of thousands of walking wounded. Given these facts, the US is quite happy in pursuing a foreign policy where, as in Libya, it leads from behind unless its security interests are threatened (President Obama has argued that a terrorist attack remains the most direct threat to the US). President Obama's domestic critics see all this as a sign of weakness but he has made a more careful exercise of American military power as a centerpiece of the last two and a half years of his presidency as stated in his speech at West Point on 28 May 2014.

Along with this preoccupation with short term crises and the exhibition of caution in exercising military power is the fact that the Pivot to Asia has not been concretised in an economic plan of action for Asia. Consequently, it is China that is making major economic inroads in the region as some of the US' major allies - South Korea and Australia - now have China as their largest trading partner. The fact that the Trans Pacific Partnership - the Obama Administration's economic centerpiece for Asia - does not include China or India means in fact that it will have a limited impact on the US role in Asia.

All these trends should mean that the US takes the initiative to build a stronger relationship with Asia since as President Obama stated at West Point, "On the other hand, when issues of global concern do not pose a direct threat to the United States, when such issues are at stake -- when crises arise that stir our conscience or push the world in a more dangerous direction but do not directly threaten us -- then the threshold for military action must be higher. In such circumstances, we should not go it alone. Instead, we must mobilise allies and partners to take collective action. We have to broaden our tools to include diplomacy and development; sanctions and isolation; appeals to international law; and, if just, necessary and effective, multilateral military action. In such circumstances, we have to work with others because collective action in these circumstances is more likely to succeed, more likely to be sustained, less likely to lead to costly mistakes." Instead, for several reasons, the two countries will likely take some time to warm up to each other.

US businesses ranging from the commercial to the defense sectors, for example, now suffer from a bad case of India fatigue. The last five years of the UPA government saw Indian decision-making move at a glacial pace and simple attempts to open up the economy were stymied by corruption charges and coalitional infighting. The Modi government, therefore, will have to recreate the kind of excitement that

existed in business quarters about India in the early 2000s in order to generate renewed interest from Western and particularly US firms. Given the economic focus of the new Indian government, however, this is likely to happen sooner than later as witnessed by the move to allow 100 per cent foreign direct investment in the defense sector.

A more difficult issue will be to see if India and the US can develop complementary world views especially on the issue of the rise of China and how to balance Beijing with a pivot to Asia. While New Delhi sees the value of a US that balances China in Asia it is not keen on being part of an anti-Chinese alliance as some in the US and Asia would want it to be. This is especially the case with Mr Modi who has made several trips to China and quite clearly recognises the role Beijing could play in the economic development of India. Moreover, as long as the word expeditionary is taboo in New Delhi it is doubtful that the Indian government will agree to participate in coalitional efforts with the US (unless of course it is under the aegis of the United Nations).

And there is the simple fact of personalities. Mr Modi, in his years as chief minister, spent time cultivating the nations of East Asia because he was not permitted to visit the West. He is likely to use that friendship to bring quick investment to India, something that the West will not be willing to do. Consequently, an India that finally adopts a true Look East policy and for a while at least adopts a wait and see approach with the US may be seen.

Having said that, such an approach cannot be maintained in the long run since India's development will require technological inputs from the West and that means at some time either Mr Modi goes to Washington or Mr Obama comes to Delhi. It will happen but not any time soon.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the US Air Force or the Department of Defense.

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Constitution-making: Will Nepal Miss its Second Deadline?

15 December 2014

With just a few weeks left to meet the 22 January, 2015 deadline for the promulgation of the constitution, the President of Nepal, Ram Baran Yadav, is busy asking the lawmakers to fulfill their commitments.

Contentious Issues

The current Constituent Assembly (CA) that was elected in November 2013 has already taken the ownership of the progress made by the previous CA – which streamlined the tasks of writing a new constitution. Despite that, Nepalese political leaders made little effort to resolve the contentious issues of the constitution-making. They need to resolve four key contentious issues including federalism, forms of governance, electoral system and judiciary. Due to lack of intensive discussion among the political parties, they have failed to make any substantial progress.

Federalism remains one of the thorny issues major parties are sharply divided on. Among the crucial questions are the numbers of federal provinces, demarcation of boundaries, and names of the federal units. The future of the constitution also depends on how the political parties handle the issue of federalism. The Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (UCPN-Maoists) advocate for decentralised governance of 10 to 14 provinces based on ethnicity while the Nepali Congress (NC) and Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) call for centralised governance of a maximum seven provinces. The UCPN-Maoists and the Madhes-based parties are demanding more provinces in the hilly regions and less in the Madhes.

The UCPN-Maoist has proposed for a presidential form of government and envisage the directly-elected president as both the head of state and head of government while the NC proposed a reformed parliamentary form of government where the president is the head of the state and the prime minister is the executive chief. Vis-à-vis the electoral system, the UCPN-Maoists proposed a multiple-member, proportional, direct electoral system based on proportional inclusion, to be determined on the basis of the population, geography and socio-economic factors while the NC and CPN-UML proposed a mixed system, with half the members of parliament elected directly on First Past the Post (FPTP) voting and half elected proportionally (similar to the system applied in the CA elections). Regarding judiciary, the NC and the CPN-UML call for a supreme court while UCPN-Maoists demand a constitutional court.

Additionally, the parties of the ruling coalition, namely the NC and the CPN-UML, prefer all decisions to be taken in the plenary of the CA by majority vote while the oppositions (UCPN-Maoists and Madhes-based parties) prefers the consensus approach.

Polarisation among the Political Parties

Presently, the UCPN-Maoist is building alliances both within and outside the CA to counter the dominant position of the ruling coalition (NC and CPN-UML). Outside the CA, the UCPN-M is reaching out to splinter Maoist groups while within the CA, it has formed an alliance with pro identity-based federalism parties – mainly the Madhes and ethnicity-based parties — called the Federal Republic Alliance (FRA). The signature campaign by Madhesi leaders of the NC against the federal model proposed by the NC and CPN-UML has also foiled the chances of imposing constitution by majority vote.

Bleak Prospects

It seems unlikely that the newly-elected CA has learnt lessons from the past and would deliver a new constitution of Nepal within the stipulated timeframe. There has not been much change in the leadership of political parties and opportunities to discuss the numbers of provinces and identity issues, and the establishment of self-governance structures for smaller ethnic groups was missed. It is entirely possible that the same challenges that sunk the first CA will resurface.

In spite of all these challenges, one can hope that Nepal gets the constitution within the stipulated time. It is in the interest of all the political parties to fulfill their commitments. The NC can claim the successful promulgation of the constitution during their tenure while the CPN-UML should leave no stone unturned for timely constitution-making as they can claim to lead the next government. In February 2014, the NC and the CPN-UML signed a deal stating that former would hand over the leadership of the government to the latter in January 2015.

A failure to promulgate the constitution by January 22 might break the coalition between the two and destroy the CPN-UML's chances to lead the government. It might open the possibility for new alliances to be created. The UCPN-Maoists and Madhes-based parties would also like to consolidate their gains as they are pretty assured that Nepal would not go for the third CA election.

The Future of SAARC is Now

4 November 2014

The 18th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit is taking place in Kathmandu at the historic moment when South Asia is going through massive transformation. India elected Narendra Modi as its prime minister with an overwhelming majority. Nepal voted for the second Constituent Assembly after the first failed to deliver the constitution within the stipulated time. Afghanistan, the newly inducted member of SAARC voted for Ashraf Ghani as its president. Sheikh Hasina and Nawaz Sharif were elected to the prime minister's positions in Bangladesh and Pakistan respectively. The King of Bhutan devolved powers to his country-people who aspired for democracy.

Media reports suggest that three agreements – SAARC Railway Agreement, SAARC Motor Vehicle Agreement and SAARC Framework Agreement on Energy Cooperation – might be signed during the 18th SAARC Summit, scheduled for 26-27 November.

Formation of the SAARC

The SAARC was formed by Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to actualise their common goals, economic cooperation being one of them. Afghanistan was introduced as the newest member, in 2007.

Regionalism began and flourished around the world after World War II with the aim of liberalising trade among the member states of respective blocs. The end of the Cold War further strengthened their commitments towards greater economic cooperation via free trade agreements, such as in the European Union, the Arab Maghreb Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Caribbean Community, the Common Southern Market, and the Southern African Development Community. With the EU's success story, there has been a rise in the number of such regional organisations. Founded in 1985, SAARC was a late arrival in following the growing trend of regionalism.

Opportune Moment for SAARC

South Asia can have tremendous opportunity as the economy of the region has great impact on the global economy. The epicenter of global economy is gradually shifting towards the east with the emergence of China and India as the largest economies. Economic integration within South Asia region possesses great opportunity; China's inclusion can change the game altogether. It is possible that China applied for observer status in the SAARC due to this potential. The challenge facing the leaders of SAARC member countries is to materialise the enormous potential for the betterment of the people of the region. South Asia is the least integrated region in the world with the lowest intra-regional trade. There is a pressing need for a speedy implementation of the South Asian Free Trade Agreement.

Challenges

South Asian regionalism has been suffering due to bilateral tensions and differences between the member countries. The region has a long history of conflicts, especially between India and Pakistan – who have fought four wars since 1947. Though the India-Pakistan rivalry is often blamed for SAARC's failure, the reasons are in fact deeper and structural in nature. The geographical, ethnic, historical and political factors have gridlocked SAARC and will persist unless India adopts proactive confidence-building measures.

One of the major reasons for the failure of SAARC is that one of its members is much larger than all of its other members put together. India accounts for over 60 per cent of SAARC's geographical area, population, GDP, foreign exchange, gold reserves and armed forces. The huge resource and power imbalance generates an acute sense of insecurity among the member countries. Moreover, its relationship with the second largest member, Pakistan, causes polarisation instead of regional harmony owing to their historical conflict. Similarly, India shares boundaries (land and/or maritime) with all the member countries while they, (barring Pakistan and Afghanistan) do not share boundaries with each other. The existing unsettled border disputes and increasing conventional conflicts with India has increased a sense of insecurity among its neighbours.

Another important factor that hinders regional cooperation is the variation in their political beliefs. South Asia has witnessed all types of political systems – democracy, monarchy and dictatorship. India being the matured democracy and propagator of democracy in the region created asymmetry in political dealings among the member countries. Insecurity and distrust among the member countries forced smaller member countries to bandwagon with external powers (or other member countries) to balance India – thus hampering regional cooperation.

Modi's invitation to the heads of governments of the SAARC member-states to his swearing-in ceremony was perhaps a signal that under his tenure as the prime minister, India would prioritise its neighbourhood. He visited Bhutan and Nepal and shared India's desire to establish a SAARC satellite. One has to wait and watch if Modi would be able to fulfill those promises.

In order to revive the SAARC, one or more member countries can take initiatives to reduce distrust and insecurities among the member countries. Similarly, like-minded SAARC countries can form a sub-regional group and enjoy the benefits of regional cooperation. But cooperation in the sub-regional group which includes India will have limited cooperation within SAARC, while a sub-regional group that does not include India will suffer from a lack of contiguity and capacity constraints. India, being the largest economy of South Asia should show its benevolence and bear the cost of rejuvenating the SAARC for promoting regional cooperation in the region. Despite of the discouraging past, there is optimism among the member countries as all the South Asian countries have adopted democracy and are realising the benefits of regionalism.

China in Nepal: Increasing Connectivity Via Railways

6 October 2014

China is steadily extending its reach into South Asia with its growing economic and strategic influence in the region. It has huge trade surpluses with all South Asian countries and it reciprocates these surpluses with massive investment in infrastructural development, socio-economic needs and energy production in those countries. It also provides them with low-cost financial capital. The largest beneficiaries of such economic assistance are Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

Due to China's rising interest and influence in South Asia, India appears perplexed. Hence, it has changed its foreign policy gesturing. With the election of Narendra Modi as the Indian prime minister, New Delhi has given highest priority to its South Asian neighbours. Inviting the heads of the South Asian countries during his swearing-in ceremony and making his first foreign visit to Bhutan and later to Nepal are the clear indications in those directions.

China's Inroads in Nepal

Given the claims that Nepal may be used by the US for its larger strategy of encircling China, Beijing is concerned about Kathmandu being manipulated by other external powers. Security experts on China state that Beijing increased its interest in Kathmandu due to the perceived threat to Tibet via Nepalese territory – particularly due to the prolonged state of instability and transition in Nepal.

Ever since the March 2008 uprising, when the Tibetans strongly started the global anti-China protests on the eve of the Beijing Olympic Games, there has been a major shift in China's policy towards Nepal.

The Nepalese King, the then Commander-in-Chief of the Nepalese army, used to be China's trustworthy partner and served Beijing's security interests. However, after Nepal became a republic in 2008, China found it expedient to cultivate the Maoists to do the same. They wanted to curb underground activities of the approximately 20,000 Tibetan refugees settled in Nepal. Ideological affinities made Maoists in Nepal cast sympathetic eyes on China. China accepted the friendly hand extended by the Maoists when they were in dire need of support from a strong power. The former Prime Minister of Nepal, Prachanda's, acceptance of China's invitation to attend the closing ceremony of the Beijing Olympics not only made him the first prime minister to break the tradition of making India the destination for the first foreign visit following assuming office, but also proved his inclination towards China.

Maoists view India and the US as 'imperialist powers' and have stated that they were fighting against their interference in Nepalese politics.

India expressed serious concern over Prachanda's action. The Indian media went overboard stating that India has lost Nepal from its sphere of influence and that it would affect India's security in the long run.

Interestingly, China supported the Maoist Party only after they emerged as the single largest party in the Constituent Assembly election of April 2008, while, it was the only country to supply arms to King Gyanendra to suppress the Maoist insurgents at a time when India, the US and the UK had refused to provide help of such nature.

Linking Via Railways

China is planning to extend the Qinghai-Tibet Railway to Nepal by 2020. The rail link is expected to be extended to the borders of India and Bhutan as well. Through Qinghai-Tibet Railway, China connected its existing railway system to Tibet's capital Lhasa in 2006 – which passes through challenging peaks on the Tibetan highlands, touching altitudes as high as 5,000 meters as part of government efforts to boost economic development in the neglected region. In August 2008, six additional rail lines were proposed to connect to Qinghai-Tibet railway – such as the Lhasa-Nyingchi and Lhasa-Shigatse in the Tibet Autonomous Region, the Golmud (Qinghai province)-Chengdu (Sichuan province), Dunhuang (Gansu province)-Korla (Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region), and the Xining (Qinghai Province)-Zhangye (Gansu). The project is expected to be completed before 2020 while the Lhasa-Shigatse segment was completed in August 2014.

The Lhasa-Shigatse segment extends over 253 kilometers, carrying trains at 120 kmph through valleys and over three bridges that run across the Brahmaputra River. The opening of this segment has reduced the travel time from Lhasa to the remote border towns of Tibet by half. This particular railway line is to be extended to Rasuwagadhi in Nepal via the Shigatse-Kerung stretch. Rasuwagadhi is about 500 kilometers from Shigatse. It is also reported that the link will have two separate extension points, one with the Nepal border and the other with the borders of India and Bhutan.

Shigatse is an important monastery town, home to the Tashilhunpo monastery that has been the seat of the Panchen Lamas, and is an important centre of pilgrimage for many Tibetans.

In response to the Chinese attempt to extend the railway link from Tibet to the Nepalese border, Kathmandu has drafted a plan to extend its railway links to Nepal. Simultaneously, India has announced assistance worth Rs. 10.88 billion for the expansion of railway services in five places along the India-Nepal border.

Though Chinese claims that the rail network expansion will be crucial in economic, cultural, and tourism promotion in South Asia, it has alarmed New Delhi because of its strategic implications. While Nepal is shares a common dream of extending the railway line to Lumbini, the birth place of Lord Buddha, through Kathmandu, there is sign of nervousness among the Indian government due to the possible threat. Such fear might gradually fade after Modi's invitation to the Chinese to fulfill his ambitious bullet train plan.

India-Nepal Hydroelectricity Deal: Making it Count

10 September 2014

With just two weeks left to seal the deal, the government of Nepal has formed a seven-member task force headed by Energy Secretary of Nepal to finalise the Power Trade Agreement (PTA) with India, and the Project Development Agreement (PDA) with Indian company GMR for Upper Karnali. The meeting of the Council of Ministers has authorised the team to hold dialogues with political parties of Nepal and forge consensus on the issue. The team has the drafts of the agreement presented by both the sides, as well as their reservations. The final agreement will be prepared after considering both drafts. The authorised team arrived New Delhi for negotiations on 3 September.

The PTA and PDA were expected to be signed during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official visit to Nepal from 3-4 August. Citing the lack of enough deliberation, Nepal and India bilaterally decided to finalise the deals within 45 days. Unfortunately, not much progress has been seen in last one month.

On 18 August, the Nepalese parliament's Water Resources Committee asked the Energy Ministry to produce every document related to PTA, together with Nepal government's June 2014 response to an earlier Indian proposal. The Committee also instructed the energy minister to present a progress report on the proposed agreement in the parliament. Media reports state that India had refused Nepal's proposal – in PTA draft – for allowing investors from Nepal, India and other countries to trade power without any obstruction in both India and Nepal, as well as the permission to sell electricity generated in Nepal to the third countries through India.

If the project is completed on time, the 900 MW Upper Karnali Hydroelectric Project would generate dividends worth approximately \$33 million from equity, royalty and free electricity throughout the concession period of 25 years. It is being constructed by the GMR Group, an Indian company, and will be handed over to the state-run Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) after 25 years. Since it is being constructed on BOOT (build, own, operate and transfer) basis, the NEA will not have to share the project's financial burdens.

The Investment Board Nepal, the government body overseeing the implementation of the Upper Karnali Project, has been negotiating the PDA with the GMR since April 2013. Additionally, a 13-member high-level committee that was formed under the National Planning Commission to deliberate on the draft PDA, raised two major concerns: First, the impact of the Upper Karnali project on the Rani-Jamara-Kuleriya and the Rajapur-Surya Patawa irrigation projects that are being constructed in Bardiya downstream of the project; and second, providing the cash incentive of approximately \$51000 for every megawatt of electricity the project generates.

The first issue was addressed after the committee members agreed to deploy a team to conduct a study within six months of signing the PDA. But there some of the members of the committee held apprehensions on the proposal of giving cash incentives to an export-oriented project like Upper Karnali. They opposed on the grounds that such incentive should only be given to projects that generate electricity for domestic consumption.

Nepal should not get entangled in the issue of whether any sort of incentive should be given to an export-oriented hydropower project. Even if such a one-time incentive of \$51000 is provided for every megawatt of electricity the Upper Karnali will produce, the government will lose only \$400 million – which is an insignificant amount compared to the huge benefits the project will bring by harnessing the country's water resources. The government must not waste time and energy on such minor issues that will ultimately be detrimental to the development of the Upper Karnali – and that will also set a precedent for other projects to be built with foreign direct investment.

Besides the PDA on the Upper Karnali, the government should also accelerate the process of signing a deal on the proposed PTA with India at the earliest, so that both Nepal and India can benefit mutually. Nepal has to sign this deal to send positive signals to the international market and to create an appropriate atmosphere to attract investments in the hydropower sector – crucial for the development of the country's energy sector. The PTA will allow Nepal to import as much electricity as it needs when production falls and export power when there is surplus. Similarly, the signing of the PDA would demonstrate Nepal's openness to investors who want to build export-oriented hydroelectric projects and pave the way for the government to generate income through royalties.

There are minor dissensions against the deal from the small leftist parties such as the CPN-Maoist. Reports also state that some senior leaders of the CPN-UML are against the deal but they have not made any comment – thereby giving tacit approval. India should also demonstrate a flexible approach to the deal. Signing immature deals in the past has not served any purpose. Hence, it should address Nepal's genuine concerns whereby a conducive atmosphere for such similar future deals is created. The formation of a taskforce headed by the energy secretary is a welcome step towards the signing of a power trade agreement with India.

Federalism and Nepal: Internal Differences

14 July 2014

The constitutional debate in Nepal has been caught up in peculiar twists and turns ever since late 1940s. So far, Nepal has had six constitutions, at different points in time, and the debate to get an acceptable constitution for long-term social peace and stability continues.

Why have constitution debates been unable to bring social peace and political stability in Nepal? Why have federalism debates in Nepal been so polarised that Constituent Assembly (CA) I was dissolved and elections to CA II were held to draft a constitution? There are two simple questions to deconstruct the question of federalism in Nepal. First, why do historically marginalised communities (Madhesis, Janjatis, dalits etc) that constitute almost 70 per cent of the Nepal's population strongly sympathise with federalism? Why are the Caste of High Hill Elites (CHHE) (Brahmins and Chettri etc) who are dominant in Kathmandu's power structure are oppose federalism in its true spirit and agreed on a federal model of governance only after the large-scale Madhesi movement in 2007?

Why is the Federalism Narrative So Dominant in Nepal?

Nepal has been monolithic, upper caste hill-centric dominance of one language, culture, and an extremely centralised power structure of governance throughout history. However, the diversity in languages, cultures and a sense of belongingness that exists in Nepal has not been given due recognition; and the State's discrimination and exclusionary policies triggered a sense of deep dissatisfaction among the historically marginalised community.

In this context, on the basis of 'unity in diversity', federalism narratives gained prominence to institutionalise self-rule, autonomy, and dignity in the country. This brings us to the debate of 'identity-based' federalism that is largely the politics for recognition of diversity in Nepal for these communities.

What are the Technicalities of the Federalism Debate?

The debate on federalism has become one of the most contentious issues in Nepal. This polarised debate is approached via various perspectives, such as: change (pro-identity based federalism) Vs. status quo forces (federalism on the basis of viability); pluralist Vs. Mono-culturalist; historically marginalised communities Vs. upper caste hill dominance; and political de-centralisation Vs. administrative de-centralisation. By and large, the new political forces that emerged in Nepal after the promulgation of the 1990 constitution – like Maoists and various political parties that arose from social movements of Madhesis, Janjatis etc. – associate themselves with the former while traditional parties like Nepali Congress and CPN-UML associate themselves with latter categories.

This brings us to the technical debate on federalism, that, on the basis of the 'Committee on State Restructuring and Allocation of State Powers' during CA I agreed upon – "Identity based Federalism" and "viability," i.e., on the basis of economic capability. There are five indicators for "Identity" – ethnicity, language, culture, geography and regional continuity, and historical identities (historically subjected to discrimination in various forms in their homeland). The "viability" has four indicators – economic interrelationships and capability; status and potential for infrastructural development; availability of natural resources; and administrative feasibility.

Complexities of the Federalism Issues in Nepal

The technical details are no less complex, adding complexities to the issues in the federalism debate. However, there exist battles of narratives regarding the debate on federalism. It is alleged that the status quo forces try to obfuscate the federalism debate to benefit the CHHE and curve out federal lines of a new Nepal in ways that give demographic advantage to ruling elites and maintain dominance in Kathmandu's power structures. Conversely, the status quo forces allege that the pro-identity-based federal forces support single identity ethnic based federalism. However, Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual nation and it is not possible to have a majority of any single ethnic group in any model of federalism. The only

difference that adds complexities is the devolution of power from dominant elite's high hill castes to pave Nepal's transition towards inclusive citizenship and recognition of marginalised communities, identities, culture and self-rule.

Perhaps, the buck stops at the top leaders of the political parties in Nepal who are all traditionally ruling high-caste Brahmins to strike constitutional agreement. And, the rationale choice has to be made on ways to delegate power from the hill upper caste elites to the people who have been historically marginalised and such choices are more difficult given how CA I winners are losers in CA II elections.

Is Nepal Postponing the Inevitable?

Nepali politics is in transition and fast-changing its state characteristics from a monarchy to a republic; a Hindu state to a secular one; and a unitary structure towards an inclusive federal model of governance. The CA I postponed federalism issues for the CA II despite marginalised communities united and had adequate support base of 2/3rd majority – that includes the aspiration of identity and viability model of federalism denouncing 14 state models of federal governance.

If Nepal postpones the identity criterion of federalism, the constitutional debate will be likely to be endless – merely postponing the social peace and stability. The constitution is the document of compromise and the debate to make the new Nepal inclusive must ensure the aspiration of historically marginalised people towards making the people equal, and simultaneously not making them unequal via federalism.

Modi and Nepal-India Relations

2 June 2014

Narendra Modi's thumping victory with 282 Lok Sabha constituencies, making him the Indian Prime Minister generated vibes throughout the region. His invitation to the heads of governments of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) member-states to his swearing-in ceremony was an unprecedented move – perhaps a signal that under his tenure as the prime minister, India will prioritise its neighbourhood. It would be interesting to observe what Modi's victory means for the region in general, and for Nepal in particular.

Modi's Neighbourhood Policy

The BJP, in their manifesto, assured that they would pursue friendly relations with all of India's neighbours but would not hesitate from taking firm stances and strong steps. It was a clear signal to neighbours that they would not compromise on issues of terrorism and national security. Modi's image as a decisive leader and his party's 'nationalist' stand indicates that Modi would be different from the previous governments India has had. However, his efforts would be visible only if he comes with proper homework, revive the SAARC and facilitate the implementation of the SAFTA – the regional free trade agreement, during the SAARC summit to be held in Kathmandu in November this year. Since its establishment in 1985, the SAARC has made no progress due to the perpetual disagreements between India and Pakistan – despite the fact that the SAARC charter forbids member-countries from bringing bilateral issues to the table.

Many experts predict that Modi's foreign policy priority would be South Asia (particularly improving relations with Pakistan) followed by China and the US, while others believe that China and South Asia would be lowest in his list of priorities as compared to the US, Japan and other strategic partners. After Modi's rise, some media called him the "Shinzo Abe of India" while the westerners fear him as the "Indian Putin." Many believe that he might emerge as the "Indian Deng Xiaoping." Time will tell which name plate matches Modi best. However, Modi will have a proactive foreign policy, possibly one driven by economy.

Modi and Nepal-India Relations

Nepal-India relations have always been cordial, strong, and have stood the test of time. The two countries are so inextricably intertwined by means of geography, history, culture, religion and tradition that a change in government in either country would not affect the warmth of their bilateral relations. Many believe that there would be no fundamental shift in India's policy towards Nepal under Modi's regime, but it is likely that Nepal will get more attention, and that interaction between New Delhi and Kathmandu will increase. Interestingly, his first public statement on foreign affairs was about Nepal, on Twitter, where he said he was committed to strengthen relations.

Modi's prime minister-ship has added anxiety among those Nepalese who stand for a secular and republic Nepal. They fear that Modi's government, whose leaders had openly expressed unhappiness after Nepal was declared a secular and republic country, might encourage the hard-line Hindu party and pro-Hindu forces of Nepal to fight for the Hindu Kingdom. However, many neglect such fears as Modi is the Prime Minister of a democratic India whose own constitution calls it a "Secular Democratic Republic." Thus, Modi's government would not try to fiddle with these aspirations of Nepalese; and instead it would concentrate on building stronger economic ties. He would refrain from supporting hard-line forces in Nepal, irrespective of their ideological and religious persuasions.

'Secular' and 'Republic' were the two demands agreed by the political parties of Nepal to bring Maoists in the peace process, and those which were later reaffirmed by the People's Movement of 2006. India facilitated the process as it was in its security interests. A small faction in Modi's party still believes that a 'Hindu Kingdom' can be brought about but they fear the revival of another armed conflict by the Maoists. Hence, India would not make attempts at such adventurism as it would hurt its prime concern – security. Moreover, during the bilateral meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Nepal's Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, the former assured the latter that New Delhi had no interest in interfering in the issue of secularism in Kathmandu; and that India would in fact help Nepal in its development.

Challenges

Modi promised 'development and governance' to the people of India during his campaign, which verifies his focus on economic development. The Nepalese economy too can reap the benefits because it is closely linked with the Indian economy. For this, Nepalese political parties need to sort out their differences; write the constitution on time; take meaningful steps towards political stability; and refrain from over-politicising its policy towards India by developing a national consensus, so that internal power struggle does not affect Nepal's foreign policy priorities.

Similarly, India must give greater political recognition and priority to its Nepal policy because of its unique relationship and security implications. The best way Modi could earn India some goodwill in Nepal is by letting the constitution-writing process take its own course and refrain from actively dictating terms, and/or micro-management, like the previous government did.

Nepal's Restful Prime Minister

7 April 2014

It has been over two months since Sushil Koirala took office as the Prime Minister's of Nepal. In last two months, Koirala promoted six joint secretaries to secretaries and appointed Damodar Prasad Sharma as the new Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Despite the election of the second Constituent Assembly (CA) in November 2013, the CA has not got its full house, as 26 CA members remains to be nominated. The CA committees that were formed to accelerate the constitution-making process still do not have chiefs, and are yet to start operations. of the rate of progress of the past two months has raised doubts regarding the timely delivery of the new constitution.

Koirala's slow pace has also raised serious doubts over the prospects of local elections that the governing parties had earlier vowed to conduct within six months of the CA elections. Since the election is now

virtually impossible in the said time-frame, the government might schedule it after the constitution is promulgated, and has been confirmed by Deputy Prime Minister Prakash Man Singh. This is in the interest of the country as the leaders can direct their focus completely on the constitution-making process.

Koirala's government is yet to get a definitive shape. He is struggling to appoint officials to the several important positions lying vacant in the administration, judiciary, foreign service, and security. Almost half a dozen ministries currently do not have ministers assigned, and eight slots for the position of Secretary remain vacant. The government is yet to appoint over a dozen ambassadors for different embassies around the world. According to media reports, 12 ambassadors will retire in the next five months. Even important missions, such as the Embassy of Nepal in New Delhi have been functioning without ambassadors, since December 2009.

Koirala has failed to appoint a complete team of advisors since he took office. He is also unable to orchestrate efficient coordination between the Prime Minister's Office and other ministries. Due to the long-standing delay in filling the vacant positions of the second-most powerful institution of the country's security force, the functioning of the Nepal Police has been badly affected. The government hasn't demonstrated any urgency to end the delay in promoting Deputy Inspector Generals of Police (DIG) to the vacant Additional Inspector General of Police (AIG) positions. There are several other issues the Koirala government needs to resolve immediately, for the delay has negatively affected the delivery of service to the people.

The snail's pace and indecisive behaviour of the prime minister has been criticised by all quarters. Such harsh criticism about Koirala been made both by external analysts as well as the members of his own party. Madhav Kumar Nepal, Senior Leader, Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), pointed towards Koirala's lack of experience in governance as the reason for the slow pace, and further stated that the latter is somebody who would easily get frustrated with the problems.

Before being elected as the Prime Minister, last February, Koirala served only for the party at various levels. He joined the Nepali congress in 1954 and spent 16 years in political exile in India after King Mahendra suspended the constitution, dissolved parliament, dismissed the cabinet, imposed direct rule and imprisoned then Prime Minister Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala and his closest government colleagues in December 1960. Koirala has also spent three years in Indian prisons for his involvement in a plane hijacking in 1973. He has been a member of the Central Working Committee of the party since 1979 and was appointed as the General Secretary of the party in 1996. He was promoted to Vice President position in 1998 and is has been the president of the party since 2010.

Undoubtedly, the 75-year-old Koirala is honest, sincere and known for his simple life. Last month, Koirala also got international coverage claiming him world's poorest head of state. According to the Office of the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers that disclosed the assets of top government officials including Koirala and the members of the Council of Ministers, the only assets of the prime minister are three mobile phones.

The past two months under Koirala's tenure has not been all that bad either. He managed to get all the parties agree to own up all the achievements and agreements of the last CA. The house also prepared a schedule for the constitution-making process. All he needs to do now is to enforce the schedule. He should change the functioning system of his office, and carry out all the appointments without delay. Instead of opening new doors of confrontations and obstacles, he needs to concentrate on ways that can give Nepal its constitution in a timely manner. The rescheduling of local election after the constitution promulgation is a positive move.

He has wasted enough time by visiting temples, traveling across the countries, visiting his own constituency, and leaving the major tasks aside. He cannot afford to lose anymore.

Chinese Inroads to Nepal

3 March 2014

Over the recent months, China, in an attempt to strengthen its relations with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), has been taking efforts to build a close-knit strategic alliance with Nepal. At a meeting with a visiting delegation of Nepali parliamentarians, Liu Zhenmin, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, China, stated that Nepal's role as the host of the upcoming SAARC summit will be instrumental in augmenting Chinese ties with the South Asian regional bloc.

Nepal and China also revised the bilateral Air Services Agreement (ASA), permitting the increase in the number of flights per week between the two countries to 56 from 14 –considered a major boost to the Nepal-China economic cooperation in various areas. Additionally, under the revised pact, an additional seven flights per week will be added annually to amount to 70 flights per week by 2016.

Ever since the March 2008 uprising, when the Tibetans strongly started the global anti-China protests on the eve of the Beijing Olympic Games, there has been a major shift in China's policy towards Nepal. The King of Nepal, a longstanding strategic partner of China, used to serve the Beijing's security interests. After Nepal became a republic, the unprecedented visits by Chinese government officials and members of the communist party have further grown, especially, in last few months. Nepal has hosted high ranking officials such as the Vice-Minister of the Communist Party of China's (CPC) International Department, Ai Ping, State Counsellor Yang Jiechi, and the Vice-Chairperson of the Standing Committee of the CPC, Yang Jungi, in the past five months alone. Media reports state that on an average, at least two Chinese delegations visit Nepal every month.

Given the claims that Nepal may be used by the US for its larger strategy of encircling China, Beijing is concerned about Kathmandu being manipulated by other external powers. Security experts on China state that Beijing increased its interest in Kathmandu due to the perceived threat to Tibet via Nepali territory – particularly due to the prolonged state of instability and transition in Nepal, and the recent change in China's neighbourhood policy following the accession of the new leadership.

However, after Nepal became a republic in 2008, China found it expedient to cultivate the Maoists to serve its security interests. They wanted to curb the underground activities of the approximately 20,000 Tibetan refugees settled in Nepal. Ideological affinities made Maoists in Nepal cast sympathetic eyes on China. China accepted the friendly hand extended by the Maoists when they were in dire need of support from a strong power. Former Prime Minister of Nepal, Prachanda's, acceptance of China's invitation to attend the closing ceremony of the Olympics not only made him the first Prime Minister to break the tradition of going to India as first foreign visit following assuming the office, but also proved his inclination towards China. Maoists view India and the US as 'imperialist powers' and stated that they were fighting against their interference in Nepalese politics.

India expressed serious concern over Prachanda's action. Indian media went overboard stating that India lost Nepal from its sphere of influence and that it would affect India's security in the long run. Interestingly, China supported the Maoist Party only after they emerged as the single largest party in the Constituent Assembly election of April 2008, while, it was the only country to supply arms to King Gyanendra to suppress the Maoist insurgents at a time when India, the US and the UK had refused to provide help of such nature.

India- China Competition and Rivalry

The competition for influence between China and India along the Nepal-China border is not a new story. The development assistance of Rs. 100 million provided by India for Nepal's remote hilly region of Mustang was followed by a financial assistance worth Rs. 10 million for the construction of a library, a science laboratory, and school building with computers in Chhoser village (adjacent to Tibet's Jhongwasen district), in the same region, by China. Subsequently, the ambassadors of both countries have visited the region.

There are reports of China funding and promoting China Study Centers, mostly along the India-Nepal border. In February 2009, China proposed and submitted the draft of a new 'Peace and Friendship Treaty' to Nepal. The then Prime Minister Prachanda was supposed to sign the treaty on his China visit, but was obliged to resign over the issue of the Chief of Army Staff, prior to his scheduled visit.

India, in response to the Chinese attempt to extend the railway link from Tibet to the Nepalese border, has drafted a plan to extend its railway links to Nepal. India has announced assistance worth Rs. 10.88 billion for the expansion of railway services in five places along the India – Nepal border. The first phase of expansion is scheduled to begin from Birgunj in Nepal which is about 350 kilometers south of Tatopani, the place which is to be connected by China via railway lines. The power-game between China and India is thus slowly unfolding in Nepal.

Conclusion

Nepal's position has become more strategically significant with the rise of a China that is aiming to be a superpower. Situated between the two regional powers who aspire to be global players, Nepal can grab the opportunities and become a center of geopolitical competition between the rising China and a defensive India. A stable Nepal is in the interest of both India and China as it serves their prime concerns – security.

Constituent Assembly-II: Rifts Emerging

3 February 2014

In the words of Aristotle, "Well begun is half done." However, the second Constituent Assembly (CA) of Nepal is getting hiccups right from the beginning. The political parties do not seem to have learned much from the past. Though almost all the political parties agree on readying the first draft of the constitution within a year, the hardening fact remains that the debate on the constitution is not likely to be deliberated for six months as it has taken almost a month to decide who can legitimately call the Assembly. Therefore, it is likely that another month will be taken for the formation of the Council of Ministers and nomination of twenty six members that will provide a fuller shape to the CA. Inter and intra-party differences are the major reasons that have handicapped constitution-writing.

Inter and Intra-Party Differences

In Nepali Congress, Sushil Koirala became the parliamentary party (PP) leader, defeating Sher Bahadur Deuba, as the party failed to forge an agreement even after several rounds of talks. Deuba had asked for the post of acting president of the party in order to support Koirala. Ram Chandra Paudel made the same claims. This unfolded the three-sided rift in the NC.

The CPN-UML is in a similar crisis where all four senior leaders are eying the post of party chairman in the next general convention, scheduled for April 2014. The standing committee meeting decided to elect its PP leader through vote as the party could not nominate one through consensus. Most likely, KP Oli will make the way for the PP leader by defeating Jhalanath Khanal as he is trying to get the support of Bamdev Gautam. Although Gautam has been a trusted partner of Khanal for the last five years, he will be a game-changer in this election.

After being dissatisfied with the proportionate candidate selection row, two senior leaders of UCPN-Maoists, Baburam Bhattarai and Narayankaji Shrestha, accused Prachanda for the election setback. Bhattarai even asked Prachanda to handover leadership to the younger generation. Ruling out the chances of power handover during a 'crisis', Prachanda announced the holding of conventions to restructure and shape the political ideology of the party.

However, the breakaway faction led by Mohan Baidya has threatened to launch protest programmes if the major political parties keep turning a deaf ear to his demand for the dissolution of the CA. There are some speculations that both the factions might merge.

After the humiliating defeat of Madhesi parties, the prime reason being multiple splits, three major parties are working for unification. Madhesi Janadhikar Forum-Nepal led by Upendra Yadav, Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party led by Mahanta Thakur and Sadhbhawana Party led by Rajendra Mahato are close to the unification process. The united alliance will be the fourth largest party in the new CA. Madhesi Janadhikar Forum-Loktantrik led by Bijaya Gachhadar is also inviting other Madhesi parties to join him to further polarise the political alliances.

Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal (RPP-N) barely escaped the sword of split. Tanka Dhakal and other dissenters accused the party chairman of putting the agenda of 'monarchy' on the back burner, neglecting the issues of nationalism, being pro-India, and promoting nepotism and favoritism during appointment of PR seats.

Differences on Constitution Issues

The three major political parties have agreed to have a draft of the constitution within a year. The previous CA had agreement on almost 85 per cent of the issues except the two major contentious ones - federalism and forms of government. However, these issues could not find a space in parliament in January 2014 due to the opposition by minor parties like RPP-Nepal.

The major parties should expand to include members from Madhesi and other smaller parties so that there can be broader support for the eventual agreements and at the same time face down the opposition. Effort should be made to have consensus on all the issues, but it would be a dream to expect actual consensus will be reached. It would also be futile to hope for the voices of resistance to die down if the motion is delayed. Not much progress has been made since December 2013 so the political parties should not waste much time if they are serious about a timely constitution. They should also try to avoid new fronts for confrontations such as elections of the president and vice-president. Even if it occurs, they should come up with appropriate solutions. Meanwhile, they should form the government urgently, preferably within the deadline given by the president. It is the need of the hour for all political parties to come together and forge consensus, failing which they must choose voting in order to ensure a timely constitution.

Nepal: The Crisis over Proportional Representation and the RPP Divide

6 January 2014

Last year (2013) was lucky for the Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal (RPP-N) led by Kamal Thapa as they emerged as the fourth largest party in the second Constituent Assembly (CA-II). But in 2014, the party seems to be sailing through rough waters.

The RPP: Through Splits and Mergers

Like all the political parties of Nepal, RPP also has witnessed splits and mergers. The RPP formed following the overthrow of the Panchayat system in 1990, was a party of the political elites of the Panchayat system who favors the revival of the royalty. Due to minor differences within, two separate organizations with identical name contested in 1991 elections. After the humiliating defeat both factions merged; in the 1994 election, united RPP secured 20 (out of 205) seats and emerged as the third largest party in the hung parliament. In 1997, the RPP faced another split after a faction led by Chand joined a coalition government with Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), with Chand as Prime Minister. The faction led by Thapa allied with Nepali Congress and toppled the UML-RPP government. RPP-Chand and RPP-Thapa were reunited after both factions fared badly in the 1998 election. In 1999 elections, the unified party won 11 seats.

The party split again in 2005 when Thapa, former party chairperson, broke away and formed Rastriya Janashakti Party (RJP). RPP then suffered another split, with Kamal Thapa forming his own party, RPP-Nepal. Rajeshwor Devkota had formed another Rastriya Prajatantra Party (Nationalist) which eventually

merged into RPP- Nepal in 2007. In the 2008 CA election, RPP won 8, RPP –Nepal won 4 and RJP won 3 seats out of 601. But just before the CA-II election of 2013, RJP merged again with RPP and got 10/601 seats.

Post 2013 Elections: RPP and the Nepali Rastriya Prajatantra Party

After 2013 elections, today all major political parties are facing a crisis on issues relating to the selection of candidates under the Proportionate Representation (PR). RPP-Nepal escaped from the verge of split but couldn't remain immune to stay intact. Tanka Dhakal along with 19 Central Committee members announced (in December 2013) to split and register a new party 'Nepali Rastriya Prajatantra Party'. 'Hindu State and Monarchy' as the prime agenda in their manifesto while ruling out federalism, RPP-N made a massive increase from mere four seats (in CA-I) to 24 (in CA-II).

RPP-Nepal is the only party in Nepal that wants to make Nepal a Hindu state again. Thapa stated, "Ethnic federalism, secularism and republicanism were the result of a conspiracy between the foreign powers and the country's extreme left and a part of their strategic alliance. The political parties, intellectuals and media all submitted under foreign pressure". He had emphasized that his party would be flexible on monarchy during constitution writing but would not sacrifice the fundamental elements of a Hindu nation.

Reasons behind the recent split within the RPP

The following could be put forward as reasons behind the recent split:

Agenda of Monarchy: Dhakal and other dissenters have accused Thapa of putting the agenda of 'monarchy' at the back burner. He was blamed for sidelining pro-monarchy supporters because of his remarks that election's mandate is for 'hindu state' and the issue of monarchy could be compromised on.

Issues of Nationalism: The dissenters have criticized Thapa for neglecting the issues of nationalism. With his frequent visits to Indian leaders, they further accuse him of changing into 'Pro-India' while he used to criticize the 'Indian interference' in Nepal's internal matters such as Indian involvement in facilitating the Comprehensive Peace Accord in Delhi which led to the end of Monarchy. The dissenters dubbed the party under Thapa as 'Indian RPP-N' and subsequently named their new party as 'Nepali RPP'.

Leadership: The disgruntled faction has serious differences over the appointment of candidates under the PR system. Thapa has been accused of being autocratic, horse trading, and promoting nepotism and favoritism during appointment. He was accused for giving PR seats to his family members, Non-Resident Nepali and selling the seats to businessmen.

Crisis over Proportional Representation: Implications for Constitution Making

Like RPP-N, serious differences have surfaced in Maoists as well on the issue of PR candidate selection. It is yet to be seen how politics unfold in the RPP-Nepal but it's clear that it will delay the constitution making process. Most likely, it will take time to convene the CA.

Will the political parties remain intact and continue with most of the agreements reached in the last assembly? RPP-Nepal has stated that they would demand a fresh beginning. They claim there is no relevance of the agreements on constitutional issues sorted out by the last CA.

It is in the best interest of all the political parties to accept the past agreements, hold parleys and forge new agreements on the remaining issues and promulgate the constitution within a year. Perhaps, it would be the most revered New Year gift for the Nepalese in 2015.

Column: Spotlight West Asia

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Rise of the Islamic State: Implications for the Arab World

15 December 2014

Though it is going to take a long time to defeat the Islamic State (IS), and it must be defeated, some silver linings of the very dark cloud the IS represents are beginning to be hazily visible over the horizon.

Since the proclamation of the IS, strange things have begun happening in West Asia. The IS is not only against the Shia governments of Iraq and Syria but also of Iran; it is even more against the Sunni governments of the Gulf monarchies, in particular, Saudi Arabia, apart from the US in particular and the West in general; it is also fighting against al Qaeda and its clones and affiliates. The IS is against everybody. It has no allies.

It has thus succeeded in bringing about a heretofore difficult to imagine scenario: countries, entities and regimes traditionally antagonistic and hostile to each other find themselves engaged in a common war against a common enemy. Thus, we have the rather strange spectacle of seeing the US and Iran; Saudi Arabia and Iran; Saudi Arabia and Shia-ruled Iraq; the Assad regime and those sworn to overthrow it – Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar and the US and assorted Islamist extremist groups, and, Kurdish factions perpetually at loggerheads with each other and with the governments of the nations they are part of – all of them in the same camp warring against the IS.

This could have some very positive consequences in a region where hostile and conflictual relationships are endemic:

First, after the fall of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein-ruled government, sectarian and ethnic fissures came to the fore in Iraq in a manner that had never been the case before. Sunnis have been the traditional ruling element in Iraq throughout history, but since 2003 they have not only been deeply alienated but also deliberately humiliated. Therefore, the involvement of Shias, Sunnis and Kurds in the common fight against the IS is very encouraging and could be cathartic and therapeutic. This bodes well for Iraq's future since it had begun to appear that its being partitioned along sectarian and ethnic divides was becoming inevitable.

This enforced togetherness may finally persuade regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia and their respective allies to work together in the common and shared interests of fighting to eliminate Islamist extremism and sectarianism.

A third potentially significant consequence is that this will ultimately help to promote disenchantment of the average Muslim, particularly in the Gulf region, whether he is Sunni or Shia, with sectarianism and Islamist extremism, and make them realize that these ideologies are very dangerous for all Muslims.

The fourth potential consequence is that as the war against the IS progresses well, combined with the possibility of a deal between Iran and the P5 on the nuclear issue, all this may lead to real possibilities of a negotiated political solution to the civil war in Syria, which otherwise seems impossible to envisage.

The fifth flows from the fact that the intense rivalry between the IS and al Qaeda for control of the global jihadist movement is already causing intra-jihadist infighting and this can be expected to escalate throughout the region and this augurs well for the defeat of pernicious extremist and jihadi groups.

One consequence of the derailing of the Arab Spring has been the enormous strain on GCC unity, primarily due to Qatar taking a very different stance as compared to other GCC countries in relation to various Islamist groups. This was hampering the fight against the IS. The GCC Summit held in Qatar last week appears to have resolved the differences.

The IS experience should also make Arab regimes and their Western patrons finally realise that pandering to religion for short-term geopolitical gains only creates Frankenstein monsters that devour

their own creators. The reality is that the leaders of the Arab world have long been in denial about their own responsibility for their problems; the outside world is constantly blamed. The fact is that in the post-World War II era more Muslims have been killed by Muslims than by all others put together. As per the Country Threat Index, among the 10 most dangerous countries in the world, 9 are Muslim countries and 6 of them are Arab countries.

These facts have to be squarely faced. Time has come for very serious introspection. The emergence of the IS has created that opportunity. Lasting peace in the Arab world will be possible only if an ideological battle is waged and won within Islam to change the poisonous mindsets that have enveloped much of the Arab world. Some positive indications are already evident in new approaches by GCC countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, both domestically and otherwise.

Arab countries being overwhelmingly Muslim countries, political Islam must be given space and legitimacy to function in domestic political processes; banning or prohibiting political Islam only leads to radicalisation of those elements of society that are more religiously inclined than others. Wide-ranging political reform processes must also start now, concomitantly with the execution of the war against the IS. Tunisia, where the Arab Spring started, has demonstrated that a new path is possible.

Islamic State: The Efficacy of Counter-strategies

4 November 2014

The efficacy of the US strategy to defeat the Islamic State (IS) can only be meaningfully evaluated in the context of the current regional and international geopolitical configurations. It should be self-evident that there is no possibility at all of any political approach to successfully confront and overcome the challenge posed by the IS. If the IS is not defeated, the whole system of nation states in West Asia will almost surely crumble. At the present critical juncture, given the ground realities in Iraq, Syria and the Arab world in general – and internal divisions amongst Arab states and between Arab states and non-Arab states such as Iran and Turkey – it should also be clear that there is no possibility of any regional military coalition being forged to take on the IS.

Therefore, countries of the region have little or no choice but to have the US lead the fight against the IS even though Washington's military entanglements in the Arab and Muslim worlds have greatly adversely affected its credibility, influence and standing in the region; and have in fact been one of the primary causes of the rise of Islamic extremism. After all, the US has been the preeminent regional security architect for the past several decades and remains the major weapons supplier to regional countries barring Iran and Syria.

No other Western or non-regional country can do it or will even be willing to attempt to do it by themselves; even their involvement is predicated only on the US leading the war. Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and UK too have joined in conducting airstrikes in Iraq. In a break from the traditional policy of not supplying arms to countries in zones of conflict, Germany will be supplying arms to the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq. Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have carried out airstrikes in Syria. There are varying accounts of Qatar's involvement. After doggedly refusing to allow any support for any military action in Iraq or Syria against the IS despite intense personal efforts by US President Barack Obama and the secretaries of state and defense, Turkey has reluctantly allowed the Free Syrian Army fighters and the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga to transit its territory en route to Kobani to dislodge the IS from there.

The central feature of the strategy is to carry out airstrikes both in Iraq and Syria initially to stop the heretofore irresistible advance of the IS and to degrade its capabilities. This has happened in many sectors if not everywhere. The US and its partners have by now carried out a few thousand airstrikes. However, Obama has made it clear that there will be no American boots on the ground, meaning Americans in the tens of thousands will not be there as in the past. Such involvement will only exacerbate extremism. Another caveat is that combat activity must absolutely include the active involvement of regional countries. This is what the US has been implementing. Even though it is clear that the war cannot

be won through via air strikes alone, the reality is that the world has no better alternative to this approach for the present.

So far, however, a Shiite coalition, of Iran, Hezbollah, Iraqi Shia militias and the Iraqi and Syrian governments, has been the main force arrayed against the IS on the ground apart from particularly valiant contributions by the Kurdish Peshmerga. Thus we have the strange scenario of seeing the US and Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iran, Saudi Arabia and Shia ruled Iraq, the Assad regime and those sworn to overthrow it – Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the US and assorted Islamist extremist groups, Kurds of different nationality groups and factions perpetually at loggerheads with each other, all in the same camp warring against the IS, tacitly cooperating with each other even if they more often than not publicly deny any open explicit collaboration. This is a part of the ground reality even if not a formal part of US strategy.

However, the fight against the IS cannot be compartmentalised. It occupies 2/5ths of the total territory of Syria and 2/5ths of the total territory of Iraq and is actually stronger in Syria; the border between the two countries has been erased. The IS cannot be defeated in Iraq without being defeated in Syria and therefore it will have to be confronted in Syria also. Despite recognising this as exhibited by the airstrikes in Syria, countries opposed to Assad are maintaining that they will not cooperate with Assad in fighting the IS and will continue supporting so called ‘moderate’ rebels by supplying arms. Such distinctions are completely arbitrary and subjective and have proved to be counterproductive. The US has promised \$500 million worth of arms and training is going to be provided to the rebels in Saudi Arabia. This will only exacerbate and prolong Syria’s civil war and undermine the dire need of a united response to the IS.

The coalition’s policy approach in Syria maybe alright as a temporary tactic, but strategically, it is completely counterproductive.

War against the Islamic State: Political and Military Responses from the Region

6 October 2014

Strange things are happening in West Asia. Those who created the modern jihad in an extremely misguided and immature tactical response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan are today at war with its most extremist manifestation, the Islamic State. The latter has also succeeded in bringing about the almost impossible - uniting countries and regimes deeply antagonistic and hostile to each other in a common war against a common enemy. The US and Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iran, Saudi Arabia and a Shia government in Iraq, the Assad regime and those sworn to overthrow it - Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the US and assorted Islamist groups, all in the same camp warring against the Islamic State.

The Islamic State (IS), an extremist Sunni entity, is a particularly serious existential threat to the regimes of the GCC countries, especially Saudi Arabia, as its religious roots and those of Wahhabism are broadly the same. The rulers of the GCC countries know that if the IS succeeds in Iraq, a spillover into their countries is inevitable. The IS is thus a direct, immediate and strong existential challenge to the continuing rule of these regimes, something that has not happened before. After agonizing for weeks they have become active participants in a war against a Sunni entity in Shia ruled states. This is unprecedented and something that simply could not have even been imagined only a few months ago.

The IS is fanatically anti Shia; it is also the most potent threat to the pro-Iranian regimes in Iraq and Syria and to the territorial integrity of Iraq and Syria. For these three reasons the IS is now the single most active and potent direct threat to Iran’s influence and standing throughout West Asia. Iran is Iraq’s ally and is the first and only regional country that has provided actual assistance on the ground.

The IS thus simultaneously poses the biggest strategic threat to both Iran and Saudi Arabia, though for entirely different reasons. For the first time since the Islamic Revolution in Iran these two countries face a common threat. They are the two key players if the war against the IS is to succeed. They have to find a way to cooperate. This is going to be difficult particularly as Saudi Arabia continues to attach priority to regime change in Syria which is absolutely unacceptable to Iran. A particularly important meeting was held between the Saudi and Iranian Foreign Ministers in New York on 21 September 2014. Statements

made by them indicate that both countries recognize that they have to work together to confront the common enemy.

The Iraqi central Government has been opposed to the Barzani run Kurdish regional government and Iran has traditionally been opposed to the Barzani faction of the Iraqi Kurds. Shia militias have been fighting against the Kurds. The Kurds in Iraq, Syria and Turkey have never managed to put up a single united overall Kurdish front; indeed in Iraq they are divided in two rival groups. But in recent weeks all of them are now fighting together in many theatres against the Islamic State.

On 22 September, the United States launched air strikes against the ISIL in Syria and aircraft from Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE also took part in the airstrikes while Qatar "played a supportive role". Arab states have continued to be involved in such air strikes since then. Iraq welcomed these airstrikes with great excitement and enthusiasm.

President Assad reacted by saying that Syria "supports any international effort in the fight against terrorism"; Syrian Foreign Minister was supportive saying that "Syria had been informed before the strikes by the United States". Analysts on Syrian State television said that these "air strikes did not constitute aggression as Syria was informed in advance." They have other reasons for feeling rather pleased because the US airstrikes inflicted significant casualties on the Khorasan group and the Jabhat Al Nusra, also fighting against the Syrian regime. Significantly, Syrian opposition National Coalition President Hadi Al Bahra said "tonight the international community has joined our fight against the ISIS in Syria."

Syria is very keen to be formally a part of the coalition against the IS but unfortunately the US and GCC countries are adamantly opposed to this even as they are tacitly cooperating with the regime directly and through Iran, in coordinating the airstrikes against the IS. Iran would have been happy to attend the meeting in Jeddah on September 11 and in Paris on September 15 to join the international coalition to fight the Islamic State but was not invited due to US opposition. There was no blistering condemnation from Iran which would have been the automatic reaction in the past. Iran has merely said that such actions do not have international legality.

After doggedly refusing to allow any support for any military action in Iraq or Syria against the Islamic State despite intense personal efforts by President Obama and the Secretaries of State and Defense, hours after the first airstrikes in Syria Erdogan said in New York that Turkey was now considering a role that "includes everything. Both military and political...Of course we will do our part." The next few days should see greater clarity about Turkey's involvement.

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India and the Conflict in Gaza

4 August 2014

The creation of Israel in Palestine was a Western venture to expiate their guilt for their historical ill treatment of the Jews, and, at the time it was finally done, also to implant a permanent base for safeguarding their own interests for the future in the vital West Asian region. The Western 'divide and

rule' policies and the arbitrary drawing of boundaries were at the heart of imperial control of colonised peoples and territories. The legacy thereof continues. Unfortunately, history and international relations are not about fairness but about the exercise of power in one's own interest.

Meanwhile, Israel has become fully integrated economically and politically into the international comity of nations. Many non-Western countries, including China and India, have developed a strong relationship with Israel. The leading Arab country, Egypt, and Jordan have had diplomatic and stronger than merely normal relations with Israel for decades; Turkey had exceptionally close relations with Israel until a few years ago; so did Iran under the Shah; Oman and Qatar have had quasi-diplomatic relations with Israel; Tunisia and Morocco have had interactions with Israel; several GCC countries, and Saudi Arabia in particular, have encouraged an increasingly close working relationship between their intelligence services and that of Israel's, especially over the past three-four years.

The current hostilities in Gaza are essentially a war between Hamas and Israel and not a war between Israel and Palestine; that is how governments of many Arab countries as well as the Palestinian National Authority are viewing the conflict; and they, not excluding Fatah, are also treating it as an intrinsic element of the current strong confrontation between the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas is an offshoot, and its Arab opponents. Egypt and Saudi Arabia consider Hamas a terrorist organisation. In strong contrast to each of the earlier such confrontations, except for Qatar's support, Hamas is politically isolated in the Arab world this time. Another stumbling block is that Hamas does not officially recognise the existence of Israel. The uncomfortable truth is that each of these parties, without exception, is cynically pursuing its own broader geopolitical agenda.

The minimum fundamental requirement for meaningful forward movement on the Palestinian issue, including the lifting of the Israeli economic blockade of Gaza, is substantive unity amongst the Arabs. The Arab world has enormous financial clout which has never been concertedly used for the Palestinian cause. In the absence of this, the rest of the non-Western world cannot meaningfully pressurise Israel.

It is all these factors that have made possible Israel getting away with the extreme brutality of its current onslaught on Gaza.

This broad brush backdrop must be kept in mind in evaluating India's policy in relation to ongoing events in Gaza.

What is the objective of a foreign policy? It should primarily be to promote and protect the country's national interests, national security and national welfare. An important guiding principle must be to avoid taking stances that will have zero impact on realities on the ground but which could adversely affect important bilateral relationships. Though difficult, emotion and ideological biases must be eschewed.

The establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992 was a right decision courageously taken by the Narasimha Rao Government as part of a sorely needed revamp of India's economic and foreign policies. Since then, Israel has emerged as a particularly important defence equipment supplier and a multi-sectoral hi-tech partner of vital strategic significance. However, this has not come in the way of India maintaining excellent relationships with Arab countries in general; and with the GCC countries, in particular, the latter developed mainly in the past decade and a half. This relationship is in fact India's most spectacular foreign policy success. Meanwhile, India continues its strong traditional support for the Palestinian cause consciously, deliberately and rightly. There is no contradiction in simultaneously pursuing these approaches that are politico-strategic imperatives for India.

In the context of the current crisis in Gaza, India has maintained complete continuity with past stances in relevant international fora and in statements made by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). Nevertheless, India's reactions and policies have come in for strong domestic criticism focused on two counts: first, regarding mention of the use of rockets by Hamas in the MEA spokesperson's statement of July 10. In 2008, when Israeli retaliatory actions killed 1417 Palestinians in a much shorter conflict, it was

mentioned in the MEA spokesperson's statement on 27 December, 2008. Both times, these statements accorded factually with observable ground realities.

Another reason for criticism is rejection of a demand for a Parliamentary Resolution; there was neither a demand nor any initiative for a resolution when the UPA government was in power. It is wrong to politicise issues of national interest. Adopting resolutions on foreign policy issues should be avoided as it does not promote solutions but only constrains governmental flexibility and options. However, discussions in the parliament should not be prevented.

There have been demands to stop buying military equipment from Israel. This would hurt Israel only marginally but will be an utterly devastating self-inflicted wound on ourselves; and no Indian government has or should consider such an utterly absurd and irresponsible proposal.

India's stance is highly unlikely to adversely affect relations with important Arab countries as these are based on symbiotic mutually beneficial pragmatism, not emotion.

India in Iraq: Need for Better Focus

7 July 2014

Though Iraq has been a particularly good and politically supportive friend and had episodically been the top oil supplier to India in the past, relations perforce started losing momentum in the wake of the US policies after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait; finally, India lost interest in Iraq after the US invaded it in 2003 – so much so that there was no Indian ambassador in Baghdad from 2005-2011.

Iraq has suddenly dominated Indian public attention for the past month with India's 24x7 TV news channels orchestrating a shrill campaign highlighting the woes of the families of 40 Indian construction workers abducted by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) after they took control of Mosul and of 46 Indian nurses posted in a hospital in Tikrit; and pillorying the government's alleged "failure" to protect and/or rescue its nationals.

The Indian public needs to be made aware of ground realities because of which these things happen.

The 39 construction workers are in a war zone and their exact whereabouts are not known. Since neither the territory, nor the captors, nor the evolution of developments are under Indian control or influence, the government is inevitably completely dependent on others – governments of friendly countries who may have local influence; central and regional governments in Iraq; national and international humanitarian and relief agencies; tribal leaders; militants themselves or other individuals or entities who have influence with the militants etc for their safety and return to India. Efforts have been continuing on a 24 hour basis with such entities – that is the best that any government can do. That is how the rescue of the nurses was secured. India and Indians have always enjoyed enormous goodwill in the Gulf region in particular and in the Arab world in general. This is one of the reasons why Indian nurses were not ill-treated and released. If, despite all efforts, the workers are harmed the government should not be blamed.

Not a single country, even those with extremely competent intelligence agencies and foreign ministries, and those that intensively interact with Iraq on a daily basis, had anticipated the blitzkrieg of the ISIL in taking over the Sunni provinces of Iraq. The consul general of Turkey in Mosul and 23 other consulate personnel were abducted and are yet to be rescued. 100 Kurdish school children have been missing for weeks. Numerous others of many nationalities are missing. Therefore, there was nothing that the Indian government or the embassy could have done to prevent the abduction of the Indian workers.

Suggestions that they could have been evacuated in anticipation of events made in hindsight completely ignore how the real world functions. They themselves would not have wanted to leave having made large payments to recruitment and travel agents in India. Suggestions that the commando operations can be mounted to rescue them are completely irresponsible.

Exactly 10 years ago something similar had happened. Three Indian truck drivers were kidnapped in Iraq in July 2004 while working for a Kuwaiti company that ferried supplies to the US military in Iraq. An Indian diplomatic team was sent to Baghdad and successfully negotiated their release – they had been captive for 41 days. While negotiations were underway, India witnessed similar frenetic TV coverage as now. However, within a few months of their release, the drivers were back in Kuwait. When interviewed on TV, the same family members who had earlier complained about and criticised the government aggressively said that the men had to earn a living for their family members!

This team had learnt to its great surprise that as many as 20,000 Indians were working in Iraq, many of them in various US military camps, the attraction obviously being the high salaries being paid for duty in war zones. In the context of the kidnapping of the drivers, the government banned the movement of Indians to Iraq for employment, which continued till May 2010. This was lifted after a public demand and hence the trouble now.

All this highlights the sad fact and national shame that 67 years after independence, millions of Indians have to go abroad to work in conditions that are conducive to their easy exploitation. In the short term, it is difficult to see how this can be prevented. However, one domestic issue needs to be addressed proactively with a sense of priority which unfortunately no government in the past has done: the nexus between the recruiting and travel agents in India and employment agents in the Gulf countries – the main reason for the exploitation of Indian workers. This unsavoury nexus must be broken and stricter regulations must be stringently enforced.

Last week the ISIL announced the establishment of an Islamic Emirate, which in due course, they hope, would include India. However, there is no reason for major concern because the ISIL is going to be extremely busy in Syria and Iraq to stave off defeat ultimately. However, the Caliphate could be an ideological beacon for misguided or unemployed Indian Muslim youth; however, ultimately causes and remedies thereof lie with the Indian government and civil society, not outside India.

Looking West: Bridging the Gulf with the GCC

2 June 2014

For a potential global power like India clearly relations with China and the US are exceedingly important. Relations with Japan have acquired great strategic significance. Israel is a very valuable defence and high technology partner and the relationship deserves high priority cultivation. Russia and the EU will remain important partners. Africa and ASEAN countries have their respective intrinsic importance. The new government has already exhibited phenomenal foresight in inviting the heads of State or government of SAARC countries to the Prime Minister's swearing in ceremony, thereby emphasising the primary importance of the immediate neighbourhood.

The media and think-tanks have been busy making recommendations. However, no mention has been made at all of the absolutely enormous strategic importance of the six GCC countries – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE - to India. In fact, if the baskets of strategic interests that India has vis-à-vis different regions of the world are compared, the GCC countries would be near the top of any theoretical hierarchy, ranking different regions from the perspective of India's national well-being and national interests for the immediate future. This region is also the heartland of Islam. The Western media and even many governments have deliberately projected a negative image of the new Prime Minister as being anti-Muslim. This falsity must be contested. This further underlines the importance of the relationship with the GCC countries. The Islamic dimension has acquired strategic significance from an altogether different context also arising from violence associated with Islamic extremism. Therefore, there can be no two views that India needs to have the best possible relations with the GCC countries; this is of the highest strategic importance. Every country has a list of priorities and clearly for India nurturing this relationship must rank amongst the very top. This is substantiated in the following paragraphs.

For India to become a global power it must grow at 8-10 per cent annually for the next three-four decades. The assured availability of adequate energy resources will be the key factor. Two-thirds of

India's total oil imports are from the Gulf region, with half of the total being from the GCC countries. Despite having a special relationship with Pakistan, none of the GCC countries ever stopped oil exports to India or even threatened to do so through the different Indo-Pakistani wars. They voluntarily stepped in to make up the shortfalls whenever supplies were temporarily disrupted, eg in 1990-91 and in 2003. Saudi Arabia is the largest supplier of oil and Qatar the largest supplier of gas to India.

India's total trade with the GCC countries in 2012-13 at US\$159.14 billion made them India's largest regional trading bloc by far. This has been India's fastest growing trade relationship. The UAE is India's largest trading partner – just India's exports to the UAE are more than India's total trade with each of the countries of the world except with China, the US and Saudi Arabia; Saudi Arabia is India's fourth largest trading partner and also the largest supplier of oil to India – just India's exports to Saudi Arabia are more than India's total trade with such important countries such as France, Thailand, Italy, Russia, Israel, etc.

The GCC countries are home to more than seven million Indian passport holders. They are the source of very substantial inward remittances, totaling about US\$30-35 billion last year. For a democracy, the domestic political implications of the safety and welfare of such a huge Indian passport-holding community being located abroad in a cohesive politico-geographical but a potentially volatile area, is, by itself standalone, an extremely important factor.

Despite Pakistan's strenuous efforts, anti-terrorism cooperation from Saudi Arabia and the UAE has been particularly noteworthy. Both these countries have made combating violent Islamic extremism a priority policy objective.

Some GCC countries have absolutely huge Sovereign Wealth Funds, some of which they wish to invest in India – but India needs to create an investment friendly environment which the new government is already committed to doing.

It merits mention that in the overall process, the potential hurdle of the special relationship that has existed between the GCC countries and Pakistan, particularly between Saudi Arabia and the UAE and Pakistan, has been skillfully bypassed. Neither has India's close defence relationship with Israel been a hurdle.

It is possible to create virtually irrevocable symbiotic strategic bonds with the GCC countries by India contributing to providing food security for the GCC countries - a preeminent strategic priority for them. GCC countries, flush with funds, could get strategically involved through large scale investment in India's agri-food economy. In return, India would benefit enormously in the food sector too apart from ensuring its energy security. A detailed proposal has been submitted to the Ministry of External Affairs.

When relations are excellent, there is an understandable tendency on the part of the political leadership to take the relationship for granted. The new government can ill-afford to do so. No Prime Ministerial visit to the UAE has taken place since 1982. This glaring lacuna must be set right in 2014. It is important that there should be a bilateral meeting with the Saudi King or head of delegation at the annual G20 meetings on a regular basis.

Elections in Iraq: Uncertain Prospects

5 May 2014

The US' unilateral invasion of Iraq in 2003, the subsequent overthrow and execution of then President Saddam Hussein, and the complete dismantling of the Ba'athist state apparatus left an already emaciated Iraq – to over a decade of Western sanctions – in complete shambles. The US military occupation and rule could not prevent Iraq from degenerating into a completely fractured country with deep ethnic, regional and sectarian fault lines. The death toll in sectarian conflict and terrorist attacks is consistently rising, and has reached its highest levels since the worst of the sectarian strifes in 2006 and 2007; UN estimates suggest that 8,868 people were killed in 2013. According to the Ministry of Interior of Iraq, 1,666 people

have died in the first quarter of 2014, and in April alone 1,009 people were killed. The figures might be higher given that data from the terrorism infested, Sunni controlled Anbar region haven't been included.

It was in this backdrop that the 29 April parliamentary elections – the first after the withdrawal of the US troops three years ago – were held. Given the grim, chaos infested aftermath of the so-called Arab Spring, it is a major accomplishment that the elections were held at all. Despite the aforementioned contexts, in many parts of the country and especially in Baghdad, violence was surprisingly low on the Election Day. According to Iraq's Independent Election Commission, there was a 60 per cent voter turnout and this should be considered a matter of considerable satisfaction, if not celebration.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, in power since 2006, is running for a third term. This year there was no Iranian push for a single Shiite coalition. Instead, there are at least three major Shiite lists, associated with Maliki, Ammar al-Hakim and the Sadrists respectively, apart from other smaller entities. There are many Sunni entities in the fray but they appear unable and unlikely to put up a united front. In fact, compared to the 2010 elections where there were 86 competing groups, there are 107 political groups in 2014. Also, contrary to 7,000 candidates in the 2010 elections, the 2014 elections have over 9,000 candidates. The increase in the number of candidates and lists can be attributed to defections and disintegrations among the bigger alliances. In 2010, Kurdish support finally tilted the scales in Maliki's favour but given the Maliki's steadily deteriorating personal relationship with the central government and the Kurdish Regional Government, this seems unlikely this time unless Maliki can pull off a magical eleventh hour coup. However, given Maliki's hold on various constitutional entities, he could manipulate events and entice support to stay in power.

Given the multiplicity of parties and factions in the country, it takes months to cobble together a government, and therefore, the world will have to wait for the final outcome; but it is difficult to envisage the wily Maliki being outwitted. Iraq needs a strong leader for the immediate short term and for all of Maliki's increasing authoritarianism and undoubted shortcomings as his many critics rightly contend, it's likely that no other contender would have done any better in the utterly chaotic situation the country was in. Regardless of what happens, there must be no foreign interference – the root cause of why the situation is so bad in the first place.

The US and Iran are the two most influential powers in contemporary Iraq. Though Maliki has not been the first choice of either party in the past, and he has shown that he is by no means a pawn of either; ironically both consider him an 'ally'. It is important that whoever emerges as the Prime Minister has the tacit approval of both the US and Iran; absent that, the situation within the country could become much worse. Having said this, it is not unlikely that this time around too, their backstage influence would likely be used ultimately in Maliki's favour.

Maliki successfully managed to hold an Arab League Summit in Baghdad in March 2012 – for the first time since 1990, and only the second time in the country's history. Significantly, the Emir of Kuwait personally attended the Summit, and was the only GCC leader to do so. Since then the relationship between the traditionally antagonistic countries has improved dramatically.

Earlier this year, Iran and Iraq announced that they have agreed to implement the historic 1975 Algiers Agreement to regulate their land and river borders and, most importantly, to dredge the Shatt-al-Arab river. Bilateral trade stood at \$12 billion in 2013, making Iraq one of Iran's s, and Iraq is the most significant export market for Iran's non-oil trade. Furthermore, Iraq had stepped forward proactively to fill the breach when India's imports from Iran significantly declined due to sanctions. This is pragmatism not subordination.

Saudi Arabia is and will remain antagonistic towards any Shia dispensation in Iraq. Turkey's relations with Iraq have deteriorated a great deal, partly due to its direct oil and other dealings with the Kurdish Regional Government and partly due to Iraq being perceived as a willing and cooperative conduit for men and arms to aid President Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Otherwise, Iraq has good relations with all other countries including India.

Nuclear Iran: Will Obama Succeed?

7 April 2014

Even though Iran had signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1967, it had been pursuing a clandestine nuclear programme since the mid-1980s, which became public knowledge in 2002 through defectors. The program was put on fast forward during President Ahmedinejad's period.

On-off negotiations with the IAEA and Western countries, an escalating sanctions regime particularly since 2006, Iran's economy sliding into deep depression rapidly, rising possibilities of Israeli military action, etc., failed to persuade the contending parties to reach any solution. A progressively deteriorating security scenario - post Arab Spring - in West Asia seemed poised to worsen further.

Oman as a Mediator

Oman has traditionally had a close relationship with Iran both during the Shah's time and after the 1979 Revolution and has acted as a conduit between the US and Iran. According to well founded speculation Oman had been mediating secret interaction between the US and Iran for several months before Rouhani's presidency. Sultan Qaboos visited Iran during 25-27 August 2013, three weeks after Rouhani became the President adding credence to reports that he had carried a communication from President Obama to Rouhani.

Developments under Rouhani

A moderate cleric, a quintessential insider and personally close to Supreme Leader Khamanei, Dr.Hassan Rouhani, with a more conciliatory approach to the world and greater transparency on the nuclear program, was elected Iran's President in June 2013 by an absolute majority after a 72% turnout.

Providing further reassurance to the US, Mohammad Javad Zarif, who spent 12 years studying in the US and is well known and liked in the West, was appointed Foreign Minister; he was made responsible for negotiations over Iran's nuclear program. The choice of new incumbents for the Head of the Atomic Energy Commission, Ambassador to the IAEA and to the UN reinforced the positive message.

Syria, US and Russia: The Iran Angle

Despite intense criticism both domestically and internationally, Obama held back from military intervention after the August 21, 2013 chemicals weapons attack in Syria. On 9 September 2013 Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov proposed that Syria should agree to place its chemical weapons under international control, dismantle them, and agree to the destruction of the entire stockpile. Syria immediately accepted the proposal and acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention on 12 September.

On 14 September, the US and Russia reached an agreement relating to the dismantling of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal. The implementation of the agreement is underway under the auspices of OPCW and monitoring of the United Nations. Since Syria is Iran's closest ally, Obama's commendable restraint was the absolutely essential reassurance that Iran needed at a critical juncture that the US is sincere in the overtures being made to reach a solution to the nuclear issue.

As Eisenhower after Korea and Nixon after Vietnam had done, Obama in his second term is determined to avoid new military engagements abroad and focus on rebuilding the nation's economy and international esteem. All American troops are likely to be withdrawn from Afghanistan before the end of this year. In his 2014 State of the Union address he said "In a world of complex threats, our security depends on all elements of our power ...including strong and principled diplomacy". The Obama Doctrine according priority to diplomacy bodes well for a troubled world and is also in sync with the American people's views.

Towards a geopolitical breakthrough?

All the above factors have made a substantive thaw between Iran and the West. There has been an unprecedented meaningful interaction between the two sides. On 26 September 2013, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif met the Foreign Ministers of the P-5+1 on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly. On 27 September, President Obama spoke on the phone with President Rouhani and discussed Iran's nuclear program and said that he was persuaded there was a basis for an agreement.

Significantly choosing to speak in English, Iran's Foreign Minister outlined a detailed proposal to representatives of the P 5 +1 on Oct 15-16 at Geneva. All parties declared they were very satisfied with these first formal negotiations since the Rouhani's election. After intense 4 day negotiations, on Nov 24th morning agreement on an interim framework toward reaching a long-term comprehensive solution to Iran's nuclear program was announced. This came into effect from 20 January and is valid for six months. Under this deal, the IAEA has confirmed that Iran began curbing uranium enrichment, suspended its most sensitive nuclear development work, and placed its nuclear sector under heretofore unprecedented international scrutiny.

In return the EU and the US have eased some sanctions allowing limited increases in exports of oil and petrochemicals and released \$4.20 billion of Iran's frozen oil assets. The atmospherics of negotiations during January-March have remained very positive. In the meantime the Iranian Foreign Minister had a rare and encouraging one-to-one meeting with the US Secretary of State and similar meetings with the other five Foreign Ministers at Munich on the sidelines of the annual Security Conference in early February. The UK has posted a CDA in Tehran; Foreign Ministers of Belgium, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the EU Foreign Policy chief Katherine Ashton have visited Iran.

Negotiations are going to be difficult and challenging and success cannot be assumed but the world is on the anvil of a spectacular geopolitical breakthrough.

Saudi Arabia-US Estrangement: Implications for the Indian Subcontinent

3 March 2014

The Arab Spring strongly compounded Saudi Arabia's progressively increasing disillusionment with the US when, to its utter consternation and deep anger, the US failed to prevent the overthrow of Mubarak, a faithful ally for more than three decades. US criticism of Gen Al Sissi's overthrowing of the Muslim Brotherhood government of President Morsy and cutting off economic and military assistance added fuel to the fire.

The West's holding back of arms supplies to rebels fighting against the Assad regime in Syria and the US decision not to take military action against it for breaching a publicly announced red-line, the use of chemical weapons, added to Saudi Arabia's growing anger. After these disappointments, the sudden opening of negotiations on the nuclear issue with Iran, the rapidity with which an interim agreement was reached and the continuing pursuit of a thaw in relations with Iran represent in Saudi eyes a willful disregard of its security concerns and sensitivities. Saudi Arabia has maintained that no agreement will constrain the nuclear programme and Iran would still be able to make the bomb very quickly should it finally decide to do so.

From 2009, Saudi Arabia started sending signals from the King downwards and has more than once since then stated publicly that in the event Iran acquires the capability to make nuclear weapons, Saudi Arabia will do so also.

Pakistan-Iran relations have been witnessing a serious downturn in the past few months – Iran has threatened military intervention to secure the release of its security personnel and in the context of the continuing killing of Shias; Iran has cancelled the much flaunted gas pipeline, etc. A flurry of exchange of visits between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are coincidentally taking place during this downturn. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud's sudden visit to Pakistan in January 2014 followed very soon thereafter by

the new Pakistani Army Chief's visit to Saudi Arabia and now Prince Salman choosing Pakistan as the first country to visit after becoming Crown Prince and Defence Minister has prompted a lot of speculative commentary in the Western strategic community. Those who closely follow Saudi Arabia's relations with South Asia believe that the Saudi Arabia-funded Pakistani nuclear programme and payback time may be approaching. Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan was given privileged and complete access to Pakistani nuclear installations in 1999 (and again in 2002) and soon thereafter Dr AQ Khan visited Saudi Arabia. US experts such as Bruce Reidel and Gary Saymore, who should know, say that a secret and long-standing agreement exists that Pakistan would provide the Kingdom with nuclear technology and weapons should Saudi Arabia feel threatened by a third party nuclear programme. This would inevitably invite strong reactions from the US and Iran and would also almost surely evoke strong opposition from China which would not want to jeopardise its overarching relationship with the US for an issue far removed from its core national interests. Both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have strongly denied any such intention and also reports that Pakistan will, at Saudi request, be supplying sophisticated weapons to rebels in Syria – this would greatly anger Iran but will hardly make a difference in Syria. However, both these contingencies are unlikely to happen.

It is far more likely that these visits are in the context of the domestic situation in Saudi Arabia. These are delicate and sensitive times in Saudi Arabia – Crown Prince Sultan and Crown Prince Nayef passed away in quick succession in October 2011 and June 2012 respectively; the King is in his mid-nineties and his health is fragile; Crown Prince Salman's health is not particularly robust; Saudi Arabia is approaching uncharted territory in relation to the succession to the throne. Massive unemployment, the popular appeal of the Arab Spring, Sunni Islamic extremism, Shia restiveness particularly in the oil-rich eastern provinces, are factors that present serious putative security concerns. Given the one-of-its-kind rather unique Saudi-Pakistan relationship, assertively Sunni Pakistan may be the perfect security partner to help meet internal threats. Western security partners cannot be used while Arabs will always be more problematic and risky.

Crown Prince Salman also paid a highly satisfying three-day visit to India during which an MoU on defence cooperation was amongst agreements signed which build upon the relationship spelt out in the Delhi Declaration of 2006 and the Riyadh Declaration of 2010, both landmark, path-breaking documents signed personally by King Abdullah with the Indian Prime Minister. These established a wide-ranging strategic partnership. An Indian defence minister had paid a first-ever visit to Saudi Arabia in 2012. In contrast to Pakistan, the interaction with India is in the context of tentative beginnings of a potential reorientation of Saudi foreign policy to move away from complete and total dependence on the US. Prince Saud Al-Faisal, the Saudi Foreign Minister, had given a thought provoking speech in Manama, Bahrain, on 5 December 2004. The subject was 'Towards a New Framework for Regional Security'. He said, inter alia, that "the international component of the suggested Gulf security framework should engage positively the emerging Asian powers as well, especially China and India." Since then, this theme is increasingly reiterated by leading Saudi personalities.

Syria Today: Is Regime Change the Answer?

3 February 2014

There are three aspects of the Syrian imbroglio: First, what was originally a political struggle has become a progressively more devastating civil war. Second, those fighting against the Assad regime have fragmented into several distinct and contending elements - the Western and Gulf countries' backed Syrian National Coalition, now the weakest of the opposition groups in terms of fighting ability; a large array of Islamist groups, many armed and funded by Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, significant numbers of whom have come together under two different Islamist fronts; the Nabhat Al Nusrah, an effective fighting unit largely composed of Syrians but an affiliate of Al Qaeda; and, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), an Al Qaeda outfit, consisting mainly of Iraqis, the most extremist, brutal and effective fighting unit, whose agenda goes much beyond the mere removal of Assad and is the establishment of a fundamentalist Islamist Emirate. The involvement of so many different groups makes the possibility of any solution very difficult. Third, the active involvement of foreign countries – France, Iran, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia,

Turkey, UK and the US; this has led directly to Syria getting to the point where it is now. The enormous complexity of the situation should be self evident.

Those advocating regime change need to seriously ponder over the fact that the internal situation today in both Iraq and Libya is far worse than it was when Saddam and Gaddhafi were in power. Intrusive military interventions by foreign countries in Libya and Iraq are not examples to be emulated but shunned. Indeed, externally encouraged efforts towards regime change in Arab countries must stop forthwith. Given the current ground realities in Syria and its diverse ethnic and sectarian makeup, regime change in Syria could lead to a much worse outcome than in those two countries, even the breakup of the country with deeply destabilizing consequences for the Levant as a whole.

In the past year Assad has regained a lot of lost ground. All other opposition rebels are now spending greater effort fighting the ISIL considering it a more detestable and dangerous enemy than the Assad regime. The very recent Turkish air strike on a convoy of the ISIL and Premier Erdogan's visit to Iran suggest that Turkey is rethinking its policy in Syria. There is increasing reluctance of Western countries' to aid rebels fearing that arms will fall into the hands of extremist groups. Thus, Assad is much stronger today vis-a-vis both his domestic and international adversaries than in June 2012 when the first Geneva conference "agreed on guidelines and principles for a political transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people". It is now increasingly highly unlikely that Assad can be defeated on the battleground. Therefore, he is hardly likely to agree to his handing over power in a conference room. Pursuing regime change now is a no brainer.

Humanitarian issues such as ensuring that aid should reach the millions in dire distress and urgently attending to the desperate conditions of the 4 million plus internally displaced should be accorded top priority. The second priority must be addressing the growing violence much of which, for all practical purposes, has now morphed into pure terrorism. Geneva II can be said to represent the beginning of a peace process and an encouraging sign is agreement that the next meeting will be held starting Feb 10th.

Another hopeful feature of Geneva II was, in the words of UN mediator Lakhdar Brahimi, "there is of course agreement (amongst the fighting entities) that terrorism ...is a very serious problem inside Syria but there's no agreement on how to deal with it". Another good omen is that both sides of internal Syrian conflict observed a minutes silence together to remember those killed. Now that a door has been opened, the warring parties within Syria need to pursue these two issues on a priority basis. However, the boycott of hard line extremists suggests that in the unlikely event of any agreement, its implementation would be sabotaged. This is a risk that will have to be taken and should not become an excuse for no action.

Iran was not represented even though the UN Secretary General had invited it; the invite had to be withdrawn due to strong US opposition. Iran commands the greatest influence with Assad; Iran and Russia acting in tandem are the only two countries that can persuade Assad to make meaningful compromises. Iran's participation therefore is absolutely vital to the success of any conference on Syria.

An agreement amongst the main players – the patrons of the different contending parties within Syria: the P- 5, EU, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey - on a common approach is a prerequisite. Therefore a separate conference involving them should be held soonest possible complementing a resumption of the Geneva II talks on February 10. A priority subject should be taking on the ISIL and similar extremist groups head on.

The Arab World: Trying Times Ahead

13 January 2014

Though the spotlight on West Asia is understandably focused currently on the unquestionably exciting prospect of a welcome and desirable reconciliation between the US and Iran, which is more than likely to happen, contemporary ground realities and trends in large sections of the Arab World increasingly suggest that Islamic extremism, personified by al Qaeda and its affiliates in West Asia, is potentially an even greater destabilising factor than the standoff vis-à-vis Iran had been.

Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen

Though four dictators were overthrown as a result of the revolutionary turmoil in the Arab World, except in tiny Tunisia which is the only success story, the current situation in Egypt, Libya and Yemen is far more unstable than when the dictators were ruling. In Libya, a large number of armed militias have carved out fiefdoms which they control, with the central government becoming a nominal entity with its writ being virtually non-existent in vast swathes of the country. Libya is a Somalia in the making.

The Muslim Brotherhood has been Egypt's and the Arab world's pre-eminent Islamic entity known for its outstanding social and welfare services to the poor and rural populations in particular. It was elected to form the government which, after only one year in power, was overthrown by the army, albeit demanded by a very large number of protestors against 'Islamic' rule. Since then, every week dozens of its supporters and many Egyptian army and police personnel have been killed in clashes between them.

The Brotherhood has been banned once again - dubbed a terrorist organisation; this does not augur well for the prospects of political Islam which is natural and fundamental to the success of democracy in the overwhelmingly Muslim Arab countries. It is very likely that Gen Sisi, the present Army Chief and architect of the hard line against the Brotherhood, is elected the next President. All this will encourage support for extremist groups as the only alternative to dictatorial and Army rule.

Iraq and Syria

Syria is engulfed by a particularly devastating and destructive civil war. More than 1,20,000 people have been killed. Almost four million Syrians are refugees in neighboring countries and five million have been internally displaced. The dismantling of the Saddam regime led to the border between Syria and Iraq becoming porous; in the last year it has become nonexistent for all practical purposes – huge spaces between Baghdad and Damascus are controlled by many different groups of Islamist fighters of various hues, pre-eminent among them being the Iraq-based Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), an al Qaeda outfit.

Amongst Islamist groups fighting the Assad regime, the ISIL is the best armed and most effective. Some weeks ago it had established control over most of Aleppo which is Syria's largest city and in the process routed not only government forces but also of other rebel groups, and of the Western and Gulf countries' backed Syrian National Coalition and Syrian National Army. The ISIL consists only of foreigners, mainly Iraqis, and its brutality and single-minded commitment to the establishment of an Islamic Emirate has now caused other rebel groups, in particular the recently formed Islamic Front, and the Syrian affiliate of the al Qaeda, the al Nusra Front, to treat the ISIL as the major enemy rather than the Assad regime. It is ironic that after so much bloodshed Assad is likely to remain in power, but of an anarchic and shattered Syria. Iraq is rapidly slipping back into the anarchy that prevailed during 2005 to 2008.

After Arab Spring: Is the Situation Better or Worse Today?

Politics within all these countries is increasingly determined by the gun. Thus, the singularly inappropriately termed 'Arab Spring', hailed as the belated 'Enlightenment Moment' for the Arab World, has left it in a far worse situation than before. Islam in the Arab World and West Asia is at war with itself - between moderates and extremists; between Shias and Sunnis; between pro-West Muslim countries (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE) and anti-West Muslim countries (Iran, Syria, Lebanon).

Today, several countries of the Arab world have become a blood soaked cauldron of bigotry and hate torn by sectarian violence. If this fratricidal conflict continues, significant portions of Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen could become like the Afghanistan of the 1980s and early 1990s – a safe-haven and breeding ground for terrorists.

Should South Asia, especially India, be worried?

Though the Arab countries themselves are the worst affected, adverse consequences for the US, Europe and the Indian subcontinent in particular, would also be very much on the cards. This is particularly so in the context of rising uncertainties as to what could happen in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of US troops. Pakistan has become a dangerous hotbed of extremism also. India needs to be particularly wary.

The world needs to proactively address the current mayhem in West Asia with a sense of urgency. The imperative need of the hour is that the United Nations takes the initiative to convene a conference of concerned countries and major powers to take on extremism in the Arab World and West Asia, including confronting the al Qaeda outfits headlong, militarily if need be.

Column: Dateline Islamabad

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India-Pakistan Relations in 2015: Through a Looking Glass

23 December 2014

The year is about to end, and keeping true to tradition, it is time for reflection and recollection. However bad the situation may become, the end of year holds an optimism that the coming year would prove better than the previous. 2014 began on a positive note despite the cross-border firings, as India headed for elections.

Although Narendra Modi's election as the Indian prime minister did not come as a surprise, his garnering of the massive mandate was beyond expectation. Ironically, the election was highly reminiscent of the 2013 Pakistan general elections that brought former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif back into power through a massive mandate. In both cases, the heavy mandates had a lot to do with absence of a strong alternative and the anti-incumbency sentiment more than anything else. Both elections also brought a daring third option, where in India's case, the Aam Aadmi Party couldn't defeat the established political vote base, and in Pakistan, the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf has been on a justice-seeking mission for the past several months, with sit-ins and marches across the country. However, in Pakistan, Modi's campaigning and election to office was closely watched, and has been interpreted differently by different stakeholders.

On one hand, he has been alleged to be the architect of the 2002 Gujarat riots and as a result of his personal beliefs, views, ideological and party affiliations, is not viewed as someone who can deliver peace. This viewpoint gains further credence with his election manifesto that was heavily anti-Pakistan; spoke of the revision of Article 370 of the Indian constitution pertaining to Kashmir's special status; reviewing of India's nuclear doctrine with the possibility of the adoption of no NFU clause.

The second school of thought, though cautious, was more amiable to the idea of Modi being voted in specifically due to his economic vision and development agenda – and thus interpreted that he would not disturb the economic cart by engaging in conflict; rather he may actually be able to offer trade and commercial cooperation.

A possible third group was the nonchalant, indifferent category that seems to have given up on the re-engagement option. They believe Modi is for India alone and his coming to power will have no effect on the India-Pakistan situation. Finally, there is the 'silver lining' category, comprising compulsive optimists. To them, if anyone can deliver peace, it's Narendra Modi, and this is the strategic window of opportunity available to both sides to make or break.

All four are partially correct. Without doubt, this definitely is the right time, and even if New Delhi finds this clichéd, in contrast to Islamabad, the former holds the potential to call the shots – both for the better or worse. A peace offering which is substantive enough to alter the conflict spectrum will not come cheap, and will definitely extract a price. However in comparison to Pakistan, India is relatively better-

positioned both domestically and otherwise to be in the driving seat. The window of opportunity is strategic, given how both Sharif and Modi have a common economic vision.

There is also a strong constituency that believes in economic engagement and increased connectivity and doing away with unnecessary red tapes vis-à-vis cross-border interaction. Modi enjoys a strong mandate and is not only opening to all countries (except Pakistan) but wants to create a legacy of his own. Can an amicable settlement of relatively minor disputes such as Siachen and Sir Creek help create that space?

Afghanistan too is, for the moment, enjoying a smooth transitional path, especially in terms of security, even if it is externally backed. How long does the “unity government” stay united depends on how prudently both Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah decide their nominees and team. Afghanistan may not be the best proxy field for its eastern neighbors to settle scores. Perhaps it is simplistic to state, but the resumption of cross LoC firing and its geographical scope expanding to the working boundary should be seen as a substitute and viable alternative to open conventional hostilities.

Many argue that these violations are routine and nothing extraordinary. While it's a true estimation, if contextualised under current circumstances, they represent an aggressive, dismissive and proactive India, which at the sub-conventional level, is sending appropriate signals to Islamabad. Will Islamabad adopt an alarmist approach to any and all anti-Pakistan statements issued by Modi and his team? Should the 44 plus formula and the revision of Article 370 not be dismissed as a paranoia, as the US insists? If there is a constitutional change in the status of Kashmir, can we afford to ignore the trigger-happy gun-toting non-state actors who are always on a look out for a new conflict?

Does this imply the proactive doctrine initiating in response to the proverbial Mumbai 2.0? If this be the case, then the pessimists have won. However, one thing is certain, that for the moment, Modi has not developed a policy to engage with Pakistan. One can only hope that that happens sooner than later, as the optimists feel that only the current set-up, given its strengths and capacity to implement change enjoys that strategic window of opportunity. Otherwise, not only will the peace process remain stalemated, but with passage of time, erode peace constituencies.

The recently-concluded SAARC summit demonstrated broad smiles, strong handshakes and applause from the interested audience. If taken seriously, through the looking glass of 2015, in the alternate universe, SAARC performs in real terms; South Asia is a prosperous region, with high development and growth rankings instead of dismal governance indicators. From Afghanistan to Bangladesh there is increased interconnectivity, and together, the leaders seek a vision of prosperity.

Burying the Past: A New Beginning for Pakistan and Afghanistan

18 November 2014

The newly-elected President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, while addressing a joint press conference at the end of his two-day visit to Pakistan, said “We must overcome the past...we will not permit the past to destroy the future.” It was indeed a very optimistic and pragmatic message for interested and watchful audiences not only in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but for all those keenly monitoring the transition Kabul is undergoing.

A three-pronged track that entails political, security and economic transition has already witnessed some progress on the political and security front, with the unity government finally coming into power after a months-long electoral impasse. On the security front, the signing of the US-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) has provided a sense of certainty and laid to rest the speculations that there would be a complete troop withdrawal post 2014. Though US President Barack Obama had stated that 9800 troops would remain in Afghanistan from December 2014 till the 2016 complete withdrawal deadline, the final decision was dependent on the signing of the BSA.

Pakistan had strived to stand by its pledge regarding non-intervention and non-interference in Afghan affairs, and would have whole-heartedly accepted and honoured whatever the election outcome. Yet, many considered Ashraf Ghani as a more favourable candidate, primarily due to his relatively apolitical stature and technocratic background. Now, with Ghani as the president and Abdullah Abdullah as the chief executive officer (CEO) of Afghanistan, the biggest political challenge Kabul faces is the successful power balance between the two. The entire success of Afghanistan's internal as well as external relations hinges on this single factor. Any crack in this relationship will strengthen the negative forces that are ever on a watch to exploit such opportunities.

Correspondingly, if there is political instability in Kabul, a factor the US has and will try its level best to prevent and secure, it will impact the physical security and economic situation – a scenario that neither Kabul nor any state party linked with Afghanistan can afford, least of them being Pakistan. A stable, secure and peaceful Afghanistan is as much in Islamabad's interest as militancy-free, secure Pakistan is in Kabul's.

The Afghan president's visit to Pakistan was preceded by the Pakistani Army Chief General Raheel Sharif's brief visit to Kabul, and Pakistani National Security Advisor Sartaj Aziz's day-long trip to Kabul, during which he extended Ghani an invitation to visit Pakistan. All three visits carried a similar tenor: overcoming the trust deficit, building positive relations and a common vision for a strong, enduring and comprehensive partnership between the two counties. These are not mere words but the key to the future of stability and peace between the two countries the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai termed as conjoined twins.

While there was a lot of talk regarding improving relations, an important factor that cannot be ignored is the pressing need to enhance cooperation in areas of counter-terrorism and other security issues. Both countries have long accused each other of lack of cooperation vis-à-vis terrorism, cross-border sanctuaries for terrorists as well as on border management. The Pakistani military's Operation Zarb-e-Azab has been declared successful in flushing out militants from the troubled North Waziristan agency, as well as in making the space uninhabitable for elements such as the Haqqani Network, which even the US military grudgingly acknowledged. However, with the security situation still fluid inside Afghanistan and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), despite years of training, not yet strong enough to address these pressing challenges, unless there is a coordinated approach to tackle terrorism and militancy, both countries will be at a loss; and it is by no means a simple task, given the many stakes involved.

With terror outfits now more adaptable and open to embracing emerging actors and trends such as the Islamic State whose ideology is more far lethal and destructive than all the previous non-state actors', there is very little time to lose and the need is for reducing the incentive for such elements to gain physical and ideological space. Pakistan's proposal to offer security and defence cooperation and training opportunities to Afghanistan have been received positively. As the two heads of governments together enjoyed Afghanistan win an exhibition cricket match, there also exists the realisation that better economic cooperation, joint ventures in energy and trade corridors and increased investment in infrastructural development leading to sustainable development and provides a viable alternative to conflict economy is the smart response to the poor governance indicators and the prolonging of conflict. For a prosperous and secure future, there is a need to not only overcome but also not revisit the past and work together to defeat the odds that are not only internal but have external sources as well.

India-Pakistan: Working Boundaries and Lines of Uncontrolled Fire

13 October 2014

After a much-deliberated stalemate, Afghanistan finally had a new democratic government with a power-sharing arrangement. The signing of the controversial Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) provides a false sense of security to many who felt that the US military must not pull out completely as the perceived regional proxies would turn Afghanistan into a complete proxy battlefield.

Though Pakistan has time and again reiterated its policy of non-interference and non-intervention in Afghan internal affairs, the same cannot be said about other regional actors. That will add to complicating the bilateral equation further. Another moot point is the Durand line, which always carries the potential to ignite fiery exchanges of passionate and politically loaded rhetorics and on rare instances, exchange of firepower. However, the more volatile of the “unofficial” boundaries has been the Line of Control (LoC) and working boundary on the eastern border, which has over the years, successfully become a testing field of India-Pakistan relations. Like any and all bilateral arrangements between the two neighbors, the 2003 ceasefire agreement regarding the LoC has also been blatantly violated in the past several years.

With both elected governments in Pakistan and India being driven by economics, the general perception was that even if there is no substantial progress on the bigger problem areas, at least both administrations will try and maintain congenial relations and move towards progressive engagement. However the first sign of trouble was the calling-off of the August 2014 foreign secretary level talks after Pakistan’s high commissioner to India met with the Kashmiri leadership.

Interestingly, anyone familiar with the New Delhi diplomatic setup and the grand receptions held would actually find a much greater number and variety of Kashmiri leadership in attendance, brushing shoulders with all and sundry.

Sensitivities aside, if seriously committed to the process, a better approach could have been registering a well-worded protest and allowing the talks to proceed as per schedule. However, several times in the past too, much investment has been made in holding a meeting than making it meaningful. What if the meeting had proceeded as per schedule? There is little doubt that nothing substantial would have resulted from the parleys. Despite a much clearer vision regarding what Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants regarding internal growth and development and a foreign policy to match with it, there was a somewhat vague gesturing vis-à-vis relations with Islamabad. Although, during his election campaigning Modi and his party had been vocally very anti-Pakistani, yet the very brief period of positive overturing soon after elections, gave space for optimism that perhaps things might be on the mend.

The recent round of cross-LoC fire resulting in substantial infrastructural damage as well as heavy civilian fatalities on either sides of the LoC and working boundary, has again brought out media histrionics seeking death to Pakistan and dealing the enemy (Islamabad) a crushing decisive blow. Where on one hand it makes the Modi government’s policy towards its neighbor clear, it also retards the process (whatever it may be) substantially.

A recent statement by the new-kid-on-the-block, Bilawal Bhutto, regarding wresting the entire Kashmir from India got a knee-jerk reaction from across the border. Interestingly, one set of replies was hacking of the Pakistan Peoples Party web site by an Indian group which posted propaganda stuff with inflammatory statements. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif too, much to New Delhi’s displeasure highlighted the plight of Kashmiris at the recently concluded UNGA session in New York. Immediately, conspiracy theorists hinted at a silent pledge between Sharif and Modi regarding silence over the K-word.

However, what has intentionally been forgotten in this entire conflict narrative is the plight of flood-affected Kashmiri population, which has suffered loss of lives and livelihood.

Cross-LoC fire has unfortunately become a barometer of India-Pakistan relations. Sooner or later the guns will fall silent, after claiming many lives both civilian and military, with unpleasant words exchanged and angry gesturing at the political level. In the worse-case scenario, it may require a higher level of deployment, but that is highly unlikely. What it will claim in its wake is a chunk of peace, and a window of opportunity to act wisely by either side and discuss the problem, rather than indulging in blind rage and provocative statements.

Although New Delhi does not accord the same status to UNMOGIP than Pakistan, the latter’s proposal of making this office more proactive may not be a bad idea. Apparently, sticking to bilateralism and seeking a third party’s role behind the curtains which results in crisis stability has become a norm for the two

neighbors. The current crossfire, while may apparently look like a good marketing strategy – with Modi allegedly approving an all-out assault – will further fracture the already fragile base on which “conditional” peace stands. If either side is genuinely interested in peace, there is a need for reviewing both policies and postures.

Of Inquilab and the Inquilabis

8 September 2014

Now-a-days, revolutions, like popular reality shows, have begun to appear in all fonts and colors. From the once classic connotation of Mao’s Long March, bloody revolutions such as the Bolshevik or Iranian that left deep imprints on global politics to the modern soft-paddled revolutions, stage-managed by the US, supporting colorful names such as velvets or springs, the choices are unlimited. But is it fair to term every popular uprising or civic unrest as a revolution? Is a revolution possible anywhere and everywhere?

The answer is no and this simplistic take of a very multifarious socio-political occurrence has made the “revolution” game all the more problematic and difficult to explain. When selling the concept of revolution or inquilab to an eager audience, often omitted is the fact that revolution in its pure and classic sense sought ultimate sacrifice and bloodshed. There never was a promise that a revolutionary change would occur without claiming is fair share of collateral.

Pakistan – after months of fascinating sneak peeks and good marketing strategy that really kept the public engaged and interested – has been experiencing its own political reality show for nearly the third marathon week. The plot was simple but convincing: two public figures with ample public support hold onto a convincing agenda and march onto the capital city. If things were to tamper down, a bit of real-time entertainment with media going ballistic with 24/7 coverage and breaking-news tickers do damage-control. But what makes such “revolutionaries” successful? First, a public that is more than willing to give chance to new people who empathise with the latter and/or understand their daily woes and are willing to offer an alternative. Second, the ruling party that after making tall promises while electioneering, very typically severs its connection with the same public that votes it to power.

If, as South Asians, we look around the neighborhood, we find similar symptoms. There is democracy, but used and abused at will by the democrats. The process of electioneering and the various attached institutions have been abused and corrupted and this is just the tip of the iceberg. The Tahirul Qadri-Imran Khan double-march into Islamabad came with a lot of hype. Supporting complimentary agendas, both the inquilabis had their loyal supporters. 20 days on, the siege stands strong, but so does the government. One demand put forth by Qadri regarding an FIR against the prime minister, the chief minister and many Punjab assembly influentials for the killing of 14 Minhaj workers was finally lodged after much delay – exposing the biases and laxities of the justice system. Demands for electoral and legislative reforms, though being given substantial lip-service, haven’t yet been given serious consideration by concerned quarters.

30 August-1 September proved to be the most happening, as not only were attempts made to clear the constitution avenue off the inquilabis who were egged-on by their imaginative leadership to march onto the parliament house – with the prime minister’s residence as the next stop – which resulted in tear-gas and rubber bullet shelling by an equally bored police force brought in great numbers from all over Punjab. Islamabad, which already sported a haunted look courtesy the umpteenth confiscated containers strategically blocking one third of the city’s main arteries (notwithstanding the other quarter dug-up for a mega transport project) became a battleground. Speculations of a “soft” military takeover facilitating an interim setup as well as alternate names for a new chief minister became rife. Adding spice to this political curry, alleged supporters of the two protesting parties staged a token takeover of the state television channel.

What happened next? Unfortunately for those seeking a repeat of distributing sweets when Pervez Musharraf staged a takeover, the military firmly exercised restraint, though correcting the political

government, if ever it tried to entangle the former in the mess, or misquote it. For the government, with open support from its allies and opposition in the parliament, it stands strong and seems to have regained the confidence it lacked before 30 August. As aptly stated by opposition leader Aitzaz Ahsan that one good outcome of this crisis was that the prime minister finally made an appearance in the national assembly. For Khan and Qadri, the longer the siege maintains, the lesser the chances for salvaging their parties and political ideals – unless the various interlocutors facilitate a win-win situation for all parties concerned.

Does this mean the government won? A timely battle yes, but the Sharifs who were famously voted in for their better governance and financial prowess today stand severely criticised by their one-time loyal constituents for not living up to their promises.

Investing in projects that have failed to bring short to long-term relief for the common man and the entire N-League maintaining an arrogant attitude towards everything only made them more unpopular. The general public, although not fully supportive of Khan and Qadri, are unhappy with the ruling class. Unfortunately, the siege has set a precedent for any political actor to garner sufficient support and camp in front of the parliament. The demands put forth by the protestors and their leaders are not unjust; but the interlocutors must facilitate a passage for genuine reforms and changes in the legislative and electoral process to check and prevent malpractices to ensure greater transparency as a necessary first step towards genuine democratic rule.

Pakistan: Of Messiahs and Marches

11 August 2014

It is both tragic and funny how the poor Pakistanis take anyone and everyone for the political messiah. All this proverbial messiah needs to do is say the right things with passion and fervour. Interestingly, the way Pakistani decision-makers run the country's daily affairs and take their subjects for fools, makes the messiahs' work easier and convenient. Whether these messiahs deliver what they promised is a matter of great debate.

The latest in this series are the not-so-new Imran Khan, and Tahir ul-Qadri. Both promise to bring revolution by leading long marches into the capital city to the added discomfort and misery of the general public – who are quite done with long marches, cordoned cities, road blocks, cellular services shut for days and the recent addition: gas stations running out of supplies. It is essentially like being in a state of emergency, with everyone anticipating the worse and wishing for stability. But there is always a segment of the population that is willing to march along.

In a way, this is all about democracy – people voicing their sentiment in a country that has not been famous for democratic traditions. The previous military rule paved way for a democratic government, albeit hinged on extremely fragile foundations. However, despite the inherent fragility, the Pakistan People's Party-led (PPP) government not only survived the promised five years but also instituted constitutional reforms that would, in the long run, strengthen the country's democratic foundations, and successfully concluded its tenure via a smooth and near-peaceful political transition. This happened despite the existence of a strong, belligerent opposition and a hyper active judiciary. However, the messiahs and marches haunted the PPP just as much, primarily because of the fact that they failed to perform on the governance meter – with a ready excuse that there was no space for them to perform.

For the current government led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, however, this excuse cannot work. Voted into power with control of the most powerful province in the country, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's (PML-N) strength has been its strong team of technocrats, its investor-friendly vision and unlike the PPP, that was often considered the rich and corrupt boys' club and passionately disliked by the kingmakers, the former has friends and protectors in the right places and enjoys a sizeable clout. Acting as a messiah themselves, the Sharifs and their team used the right language to a roaring success in the 2013 election; and followed closely by la capitain – Imran Khan – who was considered the best thing to happen to Pakistan in a long time. The PML-N voters were a steady traditional vote base who invariably cast their fate in their party's favour. The captain's voters were the first-timers, young, vibrant, and

holding onto the promise that their vote really matters, and they infused energy into skeptics to cast their votes as well.

Easily distinguishable from their youthful looks and sparkling eyes as if they were revolutionaries and not part of an evolutionary process. But this is the latest fad led by Uncle Sam, where the discourse on revolution has been reinvented and reinterpreted. So the TV-angelite Tahir ul-Qadri landed from Canada and marched into Islamabad after making strong “revolutionary” declarations at mammoth rallies across Punjab, with a large number of followers in January 2013. After a three-day sit-in seeking the end of injustice committed by the incumbent government in harsh weather, he went home in the comfort of his trailer with all promises frozen, making a mockery of everything.

Then, as now, Imran Khan was the other revolutionary torch-bearer, but not joining hands with Qadri. Once again, they will find blind followers, similar in their passion, but different in their outlook, carrying the same sentiment with which a majority of them went to vote: transforming the country into the promise these messiahs throw at them. Yet, these innocents fail to realise that these messiahs are independent in neither their thoughts nor actions. Indulging in conspiracy theories – that is a South Asian norm – their handlers have a different agenda to play. While the incumbent government’s mega transportation schemes will not change the lot and effect positive change in the lives of ordinary citizens suffering the daily brunt on gross mis-governance, these empty histrionics will too will not lead us to the promised land the public endlessly seeks.

At a time when the country is undergoing a tremendous security transformation and faces massive internal governance issues, the need is not for the rulers to act with paranoia and convert the country into a battlefield – which may, owing to their mishandling of the issue, push the country into civil unrest – but to show wisdom and insight and handle the problem at hand, manage the political crises that are much their own creation; and once settled, introspectively try and be democratic and govern the country in a manner befitting democrats; happily bid farewell to the Maulana to prepare for another march; and allow the public to lead our daily lives.

Zarb-e-Azb: The Decisive Strike

14 July 2014

Operation Zarb-e-Azb, launched against militants in North Waziristan by the Pakistani military on 15 June is now entering the second phase of clearing and reclaiming lost spaces. A few days ago, Miranshah, an important city, was 80% reclaimed and for the first time since the launch of the operation, the press corps was allowed a guided tour of the place. The Operation was on the cards for a very long time and a recent interview of the previous military spokesperson in which he hinted an intentional delay by the previous military chief, has added to the list of controversies as to why this decision took so long to be set into motion. The public sentiment was unanimously against the militants and terrorists and heavily in favour of a Sri Lanka type operation that brought down the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam, without realising the pros and cons of the problem. Simultaneously, a faction comprising the clergy, their supporters and empathisers as well as political parties pitched dialogue with the angry and disgruntled brethren as a means to appease and bring them back in the mainstream.

Though the collateral part couldn’t more be accurate, since the 1980s Afghan war, Pakistan has undergone a drastic transformation, which has affected the entire socio-political, economic and cultural fabric of the society. The decision-makers of the Cold War days, judging the geopolitical developments, made critical but misinformed decisions which served well in short term but proved disastrous in the long term. Resultantly, two generations have paid a heavy price for the militancy and terrorism that haunts their daily lives. Therefore, the argument that this is not our war is as far from the truth as the US’ initial claims of innocence over state failure in Afghanistan.

The elected leadership initially favoured and opted for an almost unconditional dialogue with the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) operating in the concerned area alone, against stiff public uproar and opposition from political parties and concerned quarters. In one sense, the offer and opening a channel for dialogue

was a good tactical measure; but it had two severe consequences: the military lost precious time and the militants gained advantage and crossed over to safer areas across border or any other place of choice, with their men and firepower. The militants, as they gained time, took the inaction and a general lack of consensus in the political ranks as a sign of weakness and inflicted heavy damages which included the mass killing of 26 captured security personnel, and mounted attacks on Karachi Airport.

Any harboured illusions have since been laid to rest and since mid-June, the Pakistani armed forces are engaged in the military operation. With 30,000 troops committed to clear militant sanctuaries, strongholds and hideouts from the two main areas of Miranshah and Mirali, the task at hand has been enormous. The timing was bad, given that summer could not be more unsuitable for the troops, compounded by the beginning of the Islamic month of Ramzan within a fortnight of the operation.

The herculean task of evacuation and safe passage to the local population, whose numbers according to the available data was around 500,000 but by now the authorities have a registered a figure around 833,274 people. Furthermore, Pakistani authorities, after repeated requests, managed to secure the Hamid Karzai government in Kabul's cooperation in sealing the border – especially in Nuristan and Kunar provinces, and also disallow sanctuaries to fleeing militants on Afghan soil; but this arrangement now appears in jeopardy after a fatal strike from the Afghan side on a Pakistani military patrol, claiming several lives.

The resolve with which the military is dealing this decisive blow is evident to all, but not without skeptics and criticism. The prime criticism is that the military strike occurred too late in the day, allowing an easy and timely escape to the main culprits. Yet, the zero tolerance policy towards the TTP and its local or foreign affiliates is what was long needed. In the absence of an embedded media, the only narrative available is the military's. In response, the military provided a guided tour of the 80% cleared town of Miranshah to the media. Will the military operation be sufficient in flushing out the militants and the larger issue of terrorism? Definitely not. This is just one aspect of the larger nationwide effort, which needs to tackle militant strongholds and nurseries in other parts of the country; check the inflow of money and support these actors receive from all quarters; maintain a zero tolerance approach, and strengthen governance, law and order as well as judicial protocols in handling such issues. This won't be easy, given how despite a public demand for stiffer security measures, the Protection of Pakistan ordinance (POPO) has met with enormous criticism. To date, the authorities remain indecisive over the placement of the National Counter-terrorism Authority.

At the moment, the greater challenge is the assistance and finally rehabilitation and resettlement of the Internally Displaced Persons, supplemented by developing infrastructure and self-sustaining institutional mechanisms for the affected population. It is high time the government breaks old great game buffer myths, abolish the British made FCR, and accord full provincial status to the seven agencies. The success of the Operation will carry positive dividends for both Pakistan and Afghanistan. There is a need to stand united for a sustained, stable and peaceful future that can help assure prosperity and better regional relations.

India-Pakistan: Faces in the Sand

9 June 2014

Given how the economics-savvy boys in India and Pakistan have initiated their cross-border relations, looking at the next five years skeptically would be unfair. It started with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif telephoning the then Indian Prime Minister-elect Narendra Modi, who impromptu asked him to visit Delhi, which was more than happily agreed to. The rest that followed was official and routine, with thumps on the backs to both leaders for putting the right step forward. Pakistan also released Indian fishermen – who are usually collateral damage, along with their Pakistani counterparts, in the India-Pakistan conflict – as a goodwill gesture.

Skeptics such as me, who after cynically observing the oft-tread pattern of South Asian politics, take lead in dismissing any massive breakthrough in unresolved conflicts, but concede over minor triumphs that

help improve the atmospherics. Conversely, the detractors completely dismiss the merits of dialogue or interaction as they consider it as selling out a national ideology. Wedged between these two negatives, any positive overture is not only welcomed but often merited beyond its own essence. This hype often proves counter-productive as not only does the public pin too much expectation from these overtures, but they also deeply micro-monitor the efforts to the extent of turning them into a political circus of sorts. Elsewhere, a summit level meeting will always claim major headlines, but with realist expectations and considered more of a norm. However in South Asia's case, many ordinary norm and codes of conduct do not apply.

One question that has often been asked of Pakistanis in the recent months is what do we think about Modi as a prime minister? My counter question is do we as neighbors get to choose who is elected to office in New Delhi or elsewhere? No; but what we can do is aim towards setting realistic goals instead of drawing rosy pictures or trying to thread the string from where the last Bharatiya Janata Government (BJP) government left it at: the Lahore Declaration or the much talked about Chenab river plan. Narendra Modi is not Atal Behari Vajpayee, and despite being elected from the platform and being Kar Sevaks of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the two could not be more different. They have very different visions and orientations, and are set almost a generation apart. In very realistic terms, we should not expect Modi to act like his predecessor, as Vajpayee had a vision, which was baptised by the hardcore realities that he himself was a participatory to, and wanted to leave a legacy of peace between the two neighbors despite stiff opposition from his party cadres and policy makers. Much has changed over the last decade, with more interest groups favoring the constituency of conflict than peace.

At best, what Pakistan would see is some positive movement on the economic front. At the micro level, this would prove beneficial and may indirectly strengthen the somewhat vocal trade and commerce constituency that has constantly pressed for enhanced bilateral trade. In fact, in December 2011, Modi, as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, was invited by a visiting delegation of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry to visit the city and showcase the successful "Gujarat Model." But the trip did not materialise for various reasons – one amongst them being, Modi's alleged role in the 2002 riots where several Muslims were killed.

If the two prime ministers come together on the economic front, there would be enhanced bilateral trade, and increased Afghan transit trade as well. The second benefit could be increased cooperation in the energy sector, as speculations point towards a potential 500 MW electricity transmission line from India to Pakistan – that would bring some respite to the energy-stressed country. However, on the economic front, Pakistan also needs to keep in mind that changing regional dynamics entail shifting politico-economic priorities, and with Modi being touted as South Asian Shinzo Abe, all the world powers would be keen to pursue better commercial relations with New Delhi.

Regretably, however, positive development towards resolving key contentious issues is unlikely. Those issues will remain stalemated, and when bilateral talks will finally be scheduled and rebooted, the pattern would be the same: talks for the sake of continuing with talks. However, the more concerning notion is the possibility of New Delhi revoking Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which accords special status to the Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir. Not only would such an action hold drastic consequences for the occupied valley and its relations with New Delhi, but across the Line of Control, it could trigger a similar move, creating a political compulsion for Pakistan to react in a similar fashion. In Pakistan, Kashmir's final legal status lay pending under Article 257 of the Pakistani Constitution. Although it would not be very easy to repeal Article 370, most of its provisions have already been violated over the years. Lastly and most dangerously, it will also give credence to right wing elements to oppose any bilateral ties, promote armed agitation and violence by militants and indigenous Kashmiri resistance groups.

As for other areas of discord, there would not be much beyond occasional releases of fishermen and prisoners. I am reminded of Sudarsan Pattnaik's beautiful sand sculpture of Modi and Sharif at Puri beach, Odisha, with the message that peace gets a chance, yet these remain faces in sand, that face the danger of being swept away by strong winds and water currents. For peace to really stand a chance, it should not be sculpted in sand but built on solid realistic grounds for mutual growth and benefit.

India-Pakistan: Nuclear Weapons and Crisis Diplomacy

12 May 2014

18 May, 2014, will mark the 40th anniversary of India going nuclear. 'Buddha smiled' mightily for the first time, in the scorching desert of Pokhran, India, in May 1974 and then again, in 1998. In reciprocation, Pakistan too entered the nuclear club with a series of tests that somewhat changed the destiny of the entire region.

The tests were hailed as a symbol of prestige and honour by domestic actors in both countries. Though the programs were initiated under different circumstances in either nation, one common motivation both countries had was the security threats originating from across the border – The 1962 Sino-India war for New Delhi, and the breakup of Pakistan for Islamabad. This motivation resulted in the creation of a security dilemma that had a singular answer: weaponising their nuclear programs. Although introduced as force-enablers and viable deterrents to a superior threat, the inclusion of nuclear weapons into the South Asian conflict trajectory thus transformed the dynamics of relations between the neighbours. Since then, intentionally or not, all forms of crisis between the two neighbours have been coloured by the nuclear dimension alone, regardless of whether the nuclear status is ambiguous or declared.

At the time of the creation of these two countries, flawed border demarcation and colonial biases resulted in many problems. Some of those problems got settled, while the others – such as the settlement of migrant population, distribution of pre-partition resources etc. – underwent transformation over the time.

Over the decades, there were several incidents that led to a war-like situation and even war, which took mutual belligerency up a notch. However, interestingly, external interventions were employed to mitigate all these hostile situations. Still, some larger issues – such as the Kashmir issue, unsettled border demarcations, and water sharing – still remain a moot point between the two neighbours.

Timely interventions, whether through silent or open signaling by either concerned party can be termed as successful examples of crisis diplomacy. According to a Princeton University project, “seemingly independent crises that evolve in a geographically confined space over a period of time have a propensity for mutual interaction, reinforcement and intensification. In a strategically important region already in upheaval and flux, such developments could clearly influence the international system and attract the intervention of neighboring and outside powers that might exploit the crises for the advantage of their respective interests.

Furthermore, great powers' interests can have the potential to aggravate the ramifications of such crises and to challenge regional and international crisis management capabilities and efficiency.” This situation is further affected by the domestic concerns and problems of the key actors, which have an adverse impact on both crisis diplomacy and stabilization efforts. A combination of time, costs, stakes and perceptions, which can lead to several scenario rising out of unintended consequences, wild cards, accidents and particular policy options can trigger inadvertent chain reaction that inevitably leads the belligerents to a downward spiraling syndrome.

Similarly, in case of India and Pakistan, none of the crises that have erupted from time to time have an independent origin. In fact, their roots lie deep in the conflict which dates back to the creation of these two states, and in certain respects, prior to it. So long as the main sources of conflict are not properly dealt with, crises and resulting diplomatic efforts will remain the norm. Many consider meaningful interventions towards crisis management by neighbouring or outside powers as a hallmark of success. However, such interventions, at best, only deal with the symptomatic occurrences, and instead of offering a permanent or lasting solution to the main problems, freeze the issue. This stalemate holds until the next crises surfaces in another shape, and with more intensity.

With the inclusion of nuclear weaponry, the India-Pakistan conflict equation has become more complicated and more intervention heavy, as each time both countries inch closer to a confrontation, external actors remain watchful and wary of the implications an inadvertent escalation could hold. Yet, once the crisis is settled through cooperative or coercive diplomacy, the focus shifts to other issues instead of deliberation on a permanent or lasting resolution to the underlying causes.

Instead of advocating for comprehensive nuclear disarmament, which is not possible, all concerned actors (domestic and international) need view South Asian conflicts and crises through a wider lens and not through the nuclear prism alone. Undoubtedly, these strategic assets have achieved the purpose they were created for: primarily to increase the cost of armed exchange and stakes involved to a level where deterrence ensures that war, even of a conventional nature, remains a least favorite option. However, crises still take place, limited conflicts have taken place, and the two countries have, over time, inched closer to more confrontational attitudes than cooperation.

Nuclear weapons are considered to be a source of problems and not force-multipliers and enablers which they actually are. Cooperative and meaningful diplomacy that brings positive dividends is always good and welcomed, but crisis diplomacy must not become a norm and/or a substitute for routine diplomacy and lasting conflict resolution measures.

Elections in India and Afghanistan: Perspective from Pakistan

14 April 2014

A recent trip to New Delhi brought forth some interesting trends and comparisons. Gripped with election fever, Indian voters appeared to be facing the same dilemma their Pakistani counterparts did a year ago. Reminiscent of the May 2013 Pakistan elections, like Pakistan People's Party (PPP) the incumbent Congress-led government in New Delhi performed poorly, appeared fractionalised, weak and unable to bring reforms, and most seriously charged with being responsible for inflation.

This has left the voters with an odd choice of opting not so much for the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) but Narendra Modi, who is controversial owing to his alleged role in the Gujarat pogrom. However, the Pakistani voters did not consider the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) very problematic. Finally, both countries witnessed the rise of a third alternative – in the form of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) and the Aam Admi Party (AAP) – that skeptics on both sides consider nothing more than a one-time fad and not a sustainable actor.

Yet, the rise and overnight successes of these Imran Khan and Arvind Kejriwal's parties in Pakistan and India has primarily come about owing to the people's rejection of age old problems of non-performance, corruption, poor governance, and largely domestic concerns. The PTI is already facing a litmus test in the Khyber Paktunkhwa province, which, given its highly complicated security profile and troubles in and across the border with Afghanistan, is not a bed of roses. The PTI's woes are compounded further by immature, populist and jingoistic politicking by its top brass – often resulting in detracting its gains on the micro-governance level.

The voters' sentiments varied from place to place. In the green pastoral fields of Punjab, BJP translated to better subsidies and micro-economic credits, whereas for many Muslims and other minority groups, the possibility of Narendra Modi becoming the future Indian prime minister could hold serious consequences. Of course, Pakistan's potential reaction to such an outcome was repeatedly asked.

First, it is likely that Narendra Modi's election rhetoric may not translate into reality; but if one takes the his fiery speeches seriously, it only spells further trouble and worsening of relations between the two neighbours; and that certainly does not bode well for the already stalemated peace process. Secondly, on an optimistic note, the only good news associated with Modi is his economic and investment friendly profile, which in itself is a strong counter-narrative to conflict and discord. It goes without saying that that the BJP led by Narendra Modi will be unable to pull off a Lahore 2.0 for only a personality like Atal Bihari Vajpayee could do so. Additionally, policy posturing, military investment, treatment of minority groups

and past history, will play a substantial role in defining the future terms of engagement between India and Pakistan.

Though difficult to prioritise, for Pakistan, besides India, developments in Afghanistan hold great significance. The presidential elections in Afghanistan took place at a critical juncture, with the deadline for the withdrawal of foreign troops inching closer, and the fear of a Taliban resurgence in an event of hiccups in democratic transition is something that worries both Islamabad and Kabul. Though the withdrawal scheme somewhat set in motion even prior to the re-election of US president Barack Obama in November 2012, solutions to many issues remained ambiguous. First, the much touted “Afghan owned and Afghan led,” process could not really translate into reality, making most of the “nation-building” exercise transient. More importantly, nation-building can never be a time-bound case study to be applied effectively on test cases. Secondly, in order to legitimise and secure the continued presence of US security forces post the drawdown, a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) was proposed by Washington, that, after much foot-dragging by the US’s very own poster boy Afghan President, Hamid Karzai, has been left to his successor to sign and implement. This deliberate delay in the ratification of the BSA has caused a loss of critical time for the US to set its post-transition strategy in motion, as well as adding to the climate of uncertainty and insecurity. Pakistan has been highly supportive of the successful democratic process and wishes to have improved relations with the new leadership in Kabul to build regional peace and stability.

Contrary to the generally held opinion that Pakistan wants a turbulent Afghanistan to ensure its grip on the country and fulfill the lofty ideals of strategic depth, a stable and secure neighbourhood is the only desired goal in the country. Taliban variants on both sides of the border often operate independently, but also have strong intra-group linkages; and the Pakistani Taliban, despite their autonomous status, consider Mullah Omar as their main leader. Both groups have a strong network of support systems that is actively used on need basis. At the governmental level, during the elections, security forces on both sides very effectively sealed the border, a practice that should be implemented more often, and especially when military operations are underfoot. What direction will the Kabul-Islamabad relationship head towards, post elections? The future of the bilateral depends on the leadership in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

At present, the most important issue is that of stability and security of the region – a mutually desired goal. Elections provide a chance for a fresh beginning. ‘Stakeholders’, interest groups and spoilers remain the same, but strong governments interested in sustainable peace and growth of their respective countries can go a long way in realising this dream, and join hands in defeating terrorism.

Afghanistan and Pakistan: Consequences of the American Exit

17 March 2014

The announcement of a drawdown timeline for US troops from Afghanistan predictably garnered mixed reactions. However, most of the issues that brought the US-led ISAF to the region still remain unresolved. Where on one hand Osama bin Laden’s killing is an ace for the US, the al Qaeda as an entity still remains. This leaves the second spoiler, the Afghan Taliban, as well as their faith brothers, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Both of them have the advantage of being sons of the soil. There is no timeline to chase, so they have the luxury to act as spoilers, keep the security profile turbulent in real time and wait for the ‘foreigners’ to exit. Though the Afghan Taliban has suffered significant losses, their structures, ability to recruit, and countrywide operations remain intact with new tactics and means to hold ground.

Afghanistan today is not the one left in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal and the faulty Geneva Accords. This is good news, as even in the worst-case future scenario, one cannot envision the international community leaving Kabul in the lurch. However it correspondingly gives rise to another problem: that too many actors with vested interests will turn Afghanistan into their proxy strategic playfield. For the moment, Afghans are happy with this international focus and seemingly positive attention, but the years to come may change this happy picture. A larger chunk of Afghan civil society, which is highly proactive in democratic nation-building, is drawn from the Afghan diaspora, who despite their best intentions may not be able to withstand a possible surge in militancy and violence in case a situation so arises. The law enforcement and security apparatus, ANSF, though much improved and stronger than before still has a

long way to go and its performance post transition would at best remain a mixed bag, which given Afghanistan's complex security dynamics, is not at all a good news. That leaves the 'Afghan-owned and Afghan-led' democratic and nation-building process, which like many of the 'Made in US' products leaves much to be desired. In a cross-section of Afghan nationals, there exists deep skepticism about the 'Afghan-owned' component largely missing from the frame, thus once again constructing a system that has very weak foundations.

Much depends on the results of the forthcoming elections. With all the presidential candidates and their affiliates minus incumbent president Karzai consenting to the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), Afghanistan requires a strong representative government with indigenous legitimacy and capacity to extend its writ outside Kabul without external props. Will the Taliban be willing to negotiate and agree to some non-violent power-sharing? There are serious doubts. What would be the impact of these developments on Pakistan? Though the Pakistani government is already in talks with the TTP (Pakhtun faction) and there is a temporary respite from the US drones, bombings and civilian killings have not reduced and nor has the US announced a complete termination of its drone attack policy. In fact most of the Taliban high shura has comfortably crossed over into Afghanistan and will remain there for as long as it suits them. Though the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban are pursuing their independent agenda, one must not forget their past links and the strength and resilience of their networks. In addition, the history of Pak-US relations is highly checkered, and even after eleven plus years, Pakistani society remains highly divided about whether this has been Pakistan's war.

In case the talks with the TTP fail and there is a breach in the security framework that would result as a part of the agreement, would post-2014 Afghanistan be able to provide security cooperation to Pakistan, mainly in the shape of border closure, hot pursuit into 'friendly' territory to capture militants, intelligence-sharing and perceivable joint operations? With divergent perspectives and a strong sense of the other side being the spoiler, there is doubt that such a cooperative security regime could work. However, for the Afghan and Pakistan Taliban, the post 2014 timeline would actually be a welcoming notion. So long as there is an American security interest and presence, there is optimism for a better security framework. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan can conveniently dump their bad diplomacy on the US. It also acts as a balancer against a stronger Indian presence.

Though Pakistani decision-makers have reinforced the point that they have no reservations with New Delhi's 'legitimate' interests in Afghanistan, they would always remain wary of any military or strategic role India has in Afghanistan. Realistically, every country, be it the US (Monroe doctrine) or India (Nepal, Bhutan), has similar concerns when it comes to its strategic interests. Afghanistan of the future holds increased economic and commercial activity and corresponding involvement of the international community, as well as pressure for increased transit and trilateral (India-Pakistan-Afghanistan) trade. Pakistan has to prepare itself for the changing trends and pressures. Ironically, the energy pipelines still remain somewhat elusive; a problematic profile for energy-stressed Pakistan specifically. The coming months are fraught with multiple challenges that need a sustainable, well-articulated and well thought-out approach. The 2014 exit timeline in fact heralds a new chapter in the region's strategic relations, which would largely shape future dynamics.

Pakistan and TTP: Dialogue or Military Action?

17 February 2014

The verdict is out: instead of supporting decisive military action to break the back of insurgents, the government chose to dialogue, with umpteenth committees to name, shame, blame and footdrag. Interestingly, where the dialogue option has halted government military action as a confidence-building and reconciliatory measure, not only are the Taliban carrying out their signature strikes (such as the latest at a cinema house in Peshawar and a direct attack against security forces) but are already picking on soft targets such as the peaceful Ismailia (Shia) population in Gilgit Baltistan area to convert or scare them into vacating their homeland. This is also being attempted against the harmless Kailash tribes, as are targeted strikes against government empathisers and Aman (peace) Jirga members, to further their reign of terror and convey the message that they are still in control.

What will be the implication of these talks? Will the talks be successful? Will they usher peace? Or will negotiating with the insurgents lead to the popularly dreaded Taliban interpreted Shariah? Some feel that it is the Taliban and not the government who are at a weaker wicket, and with time the former stands to lose more than gain. This is because such violent movements are inherently self-annihilating in nature, and usually, factionalism, power struggle, and their getting too big for their size will cause their eventual downfall. However, there is little comfort in this theory, as not only will such a scenario entail heavy collateral damages, but would end up substantially destroying critical infrastructure and distort the socio-political fabric before it ceases.

So what do the talks hold, and what is their measure of success? Would they result in bringing forth a pro-government or pro-Taliban stance or a win-win situation for both? Either of the options does not promise lasting peace. Allowing insurgents and anti-state elements a platform to voice their demands and form even the governmental committee with a few members that enjoy Taliban approval not only legitimises the insurgents but has already placed them on a superior footing. To date, except for supporting the option of dialogue and a chocked demand to remain within the constitutional framework, there is apparently no other governmental stance. Any demands and preconditions placed have been entirely by the TTP, whether it be an apparent unilateral ceasefire from the government's side, seeking the release of TTP prisoners, stay on executions as well as retaining their weapons.

Since the commencement of the negotiations, besides photo-ops and Taliban interlocutors enjoying joy rides on helicopters fueled by tax-payer money, the Taliban have not even been asked to give up their weapons or put a halt to the daily dose of select killings and terrorism, beyond lip service by the otherwise glib interior minister. Interestingly, none of the previous accords signed between insurgents and government forces such as Shakai (2004), Srarogha (2005) and Swat (2008), could convince the militants to disarm. And as common sense suggests, if there is no disarmament there is little logic and incentive to demobilise. And as expected, very soon after the conclusion of any of these accords, the militants found an excuse to violate the peace terms and became more lethal.

As armchair analysts, it is easy to support 'decisive' military action, with a similar stance taken by the media. However, one is reminded of 2008, when General Musharraf was urged by a majority of the people, among whom prominent media figures were the most vocal, to crush the Lal Masjid vigilante brigade. What happened next was what the General had apprehensively voiced. The security forces used their lethal might, and within minutes, the media-steered public opinion turned against the government. No one raised a question about why a holy place was stashed with weapons better-suited for a private army, and who had given the vigilantes and their handlers the permission to terrorise the people and hold the capital city hostage. What everyone focused on was how brutal the government was and that those killed inside the mosque were young Hafiz-e-Quran girls and boys. Besides this immediate and severe backlash, the biggest fallout of this operation was a chain of bombings across the country, insurgency in Swat and organised suicide attacks.

Prior to its commencement, most of the political parties supported dialogue, which has been duly initiated. Taking a cue from the TTP's actions, there is little hope for the promised peace that political actors ensure as a follow-up to dialogue. The talks will also not succeed in terms of TTP agreeing with the state perspective. In a way, the much criticised dialogue not only leaves no option unexplored but in the longer-run, also clears all doubts about what is the correct course of action to take. Usually such dialogues succeed only if the other party is at a relative disadvantage and perceives incentives in peace talks. Secondly, the call for Shariah also raises several questions: who would be the Amir ul Momineen - the elected prime minister or the head of TTP? If the TTP's version of the dialogue is successful, would it remain a Pakhtoon-dominated organisation or have the various ethnic 'chapter' lending the supreme commander their full support and allegiance? That is where one can optimistically presume the initiation of factionalism and infighting amongst the TTP cadres. But this remains a thought only. Finally, when the country's constitution is already drafted in accordance with the Islamic code, there is left not space for dissenting voices.

In case the talks fail, fully coordinated and crushing military action appears to be the only option left. There will be violations, collateral damage, killing of own population, deadly reprisal attacks and so on. Media-led debates and print analyses have a very short shelf life. Decisive military action would yield results only if there is a broad-based political consensus supplemented by public support. The military as a state institution has already paid a heavy price in this infighting, and cannot act alone unless the entire state machinery including judiciary and law enforcement agencies move in sync. The time for alternate options is closing in and the government has very tough decisions to make.

The Musharraf Trial & Beyond

20 January 2014

On January 2, General Musharraf ended up at the Armed forces institute of cardiology in Rawalpindi, a rather long detour from his residence to the court, which had made a third unsuccessful attempt to summon the ex-president on charges of treason.

With speculations ranging from whether there was a deliberate effort afoot to prevent the general from reaching the court to how smartly once gain a court appearance had been avoided, the General remains hospitalized. After the initial hoopla about the whys and whats of the event, it is just another news item, till the next big audience. However, one wonders what if instead of the quiet yet highly professional new chief justice Jilani, it was the media's darling Justice Chaudhry still holding the office, and could these deferments be possible? Every word uttered by the Chief Justice would make proverbial breaking news across the television channels, and for many the trial appeared more on the personal grid than its merit.

An unfortunate situation, as very often public weds itself to popular sentiments and opinions about what the truth should be, than what it actually is. Should Musharraf be handed out the guilty verdict on high treason? For some, the answer is in affirmative, as it would prove a deterrent for future khaki interventions and perhaps cosmetically redress the civil-military imbalance. Yet a review of the state of affairs, indicates problems where the military appears least zealous given the circumstances than civilian administrators, who need to do their necessary bit.

While the media remains preoccupied on providing situational updates on Musharraf, the most urgent and pressing concern in the first two weeks of the new year has been the rising number of terrorist bombings. Not less than fifty people, including civilians and law enforcement officials have perished as a result. Yet again, there has been a divided house when it comes to dealing with the non-state terrorist elements. Where the KPK provincial government under the PTI prefers dialogue with the "disillusioned brethren" over direct military action, the federal government appears totally ambivalent about how to tackle this critical and most pressing issue.

Both the provincial and federal governments seem to disregard the drawdown of foreign troops from Afghanistan and a different politico-military arrangement, which appears nightmarish for Pakistani security forces. The forces have been preoccupied domestically for more than a decade, and the non-state elements, have a bigger playfield and target practicing to carry out.

The social and traditional media cannot get enough out of the deaths of Aitzaz Ahmed a young school boy, who bravely lost his life by thwarting a suicide attack on his school mates and that of Chaudhry Aslam, a daredevil policeman, who for long led a charmed life and stood out as a symbol of defiance and destruction for terrorist elements in the troubled port city of Karachi. These two brave sons of the soil are not the only one lost in this brutal war against terrorism and militancy. There have been many who precede them and unfortunately many who would gladly follow their footsteps, but is this a fair price to pay.

What is required is an actual implementation of the anti-terrorism act, the draft bill already prepared by NACTA (the purpose built National Counter terrorism Agency), with a zero-tolerance approach and full inter-agential coordination as well as cooperation. Dialogue can only work, if the government and not the militants are at a superior footing with adequate deterring physical capacity. The latter is actually not a

problem, although the law enforcement agencies remain lacking in their capacity, but (at the cost of disregarding security sector balance) the military somehow fills the vacuum. It is the will and determination of the decision-makers that matters. At any religious festivity, a complete lockdown of major cities, with a total blockade of communication and road access can temporarily manage the problem, but is no way a long term to permanent solution to a menace, which cannot be addressed symptomatically alone.

The PML-N government emphasized on “3-E’s” during and after the elections, Energy, Extremism and Economics. With regards energy sector, the pipelines and alternate energy sources are being worked on, but it would take several years before a true relief is brought about. Extremism as mentioned above needs an iron fist approach with no appeasement and political patronizing of any sorts. With regards economics, unless there is adequate energy and safe environment, commercial and industrial output will be affected drastically. The PML-N, a party which comprises of feudal and industrialists more than any other should be aware of this.

As part of better economic opportunities, the government has in its traditional manner been more proactive on improving relations with New Delhi, the January 16-18 agreement between the trade ministers a positive indicator, but one can only hope that the relations between the two countries do not remain focused on one issue area alone, but equal investment and positive output be made on contentious issues without preconditions and time delaying tactics.

Column: Af-Pak Diary

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Resetting Kabul-Islamabad Relations: Three Key Issues

1 December 2014

In November 2014, the new President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, made his maiden visit to Pakistan, one that is being projected as a “breakthrough” in the bilateral relations between the two countries. Only recently, the renowned international research organization – the International Crisis Group (ICG) published a report on the need for Pakistan to reset its relationship with Afghanistan.

Today, after Ghani’s visit, is the Pak-Afghan relationship ready for a reset?

The visit of the new Afghan President to Pakistan was undertaken after a thorough homework by both sides. Ghani’s Pakistan visit was preceded by multiple visits from Pakistan to Afghanistan at the highest levels over recent weeks, that included the visits of the Pakistan Chief of Army Staff (COAS) (November 2014), the Director General of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (November 2014) and the Pakistani National Security Advisor (October 2014).

In return, the Afghan President received a red carpet welcome by Pakistan and had extensive discussions with the Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the COAS, and his Pakistani counterpart, Mamnoon Hussain. It is possible, there is a better expectation and even a euphoria within Pakistan about the new Afghan President; Ghani’s predecessor, Hamid Karzai, was not liked by many within the establishment. During Karzai’s period, bilateral relations between the two countries had hit a low, with accusations and counter-accusations. As a result, Pakistan now sees the new President from a different perspective. The fact that he had hosted the aforementioned Pakistani officials within two months of assuming office also highlights the Afghan response.

The joint discussions during the visit, though did not make any major breakthrough, touched upon two crucial aspects. First was on increasing the Kabul-Islamabad economic engagement; both countries agreed to expand trade relations and have set a target of 5 billion dollars by 2017. Both sides also agreed to work on joint projects on infrastructure. In that context, the recent developments on an electricity grid

linking Pakistan with Central Asia via Afghanistan – the CASA 1000 – holds new opportunities for both countries.

Second, the joint discussions also focussed on Afghanistan's security forces receiving military training from Pakistan. The same was discussed when Pakistan's COAS visited Afghanistan in November, during which he was reported to have volunteered to provide military training to the Afghan troops. Though Pakistan had offered the same earlier as well, Karzai was hesitant to accept, as, at that time, there was deep distrust in Kabul towards Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

Given the nature of civil-military relations within Pakistan, the offer to train Afghan security forces should have come from the establishment and not from the prime minister. What does the acceptance of military training by Pakistan mean for Afghanistan? Is there a greater trust in Kabul vis-à-vis the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi?

The above would also imply that there is an understanding between both sides on militant sanctuaries on either sides of the Durand Line. Karzai was apprehensive of the Pakistani establishment's support to the Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network; and the latter was suspicious of former's support to the Pakistani Taliban, especially Mullah Fazlullah. The fact that the joint discussions avoided discussing this issue in public does hint towards an understanding between the new leaderships in Kabul, and Islamabad.

These are good news for Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.

Is the Afghan-Pakistan Relationship Ready for a Reset?

Much will depend on three key issues: First, the establishment in Pakistan and its linkages with the Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network. The top leadership may have decided to reset the relationship, but does the entire structure, down to the operative in the field, perceive Afghanistan in the same way? The reported "sections" or "cells" within the establishment and their role whether in orchestrating a political conspiracy (as has been the case during the recent political protests by Tahirul Qadri and Imran Khan) or clandestinely supporting the multiple Taliban franchises have been reported sufficiently by the media within Pakistan itself.

Second, will the multiple franchisees of the Taliban – the Quetta Shura, the Haqqani Network and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) factions – agree to such a reset? How does one interpret the suicide bomb during the last week of November in Afghanistan's Paktika province that killed over 50 people during a volleyball match? And another attack on a British vehicle and foreign guest house in Kabul, killing six?

Finally, what would Pakistan expect from Afghanistan in return for the reset? And will Afghanistan be able to deliver the same? For example, what if the government in Kabul is unable to control its own provinces in eastern Afghanistan where the TTP finds sanctuary? And what if Islamabad expects Kabul to reduce the Indian footprint in Afghanistan?

The reset in bilateral relations should be welcome. It is timely and imperative. However, it is not going to be an easy task.

Can Pakistan Reset its Relations with Afghanistan?

4 November 2014

The recent International Crisis Group (ICG) report on the Af-Pak region, following its excellent previous reports on the same subject, now addresses a crucial question: Can Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan be reset?

The report focuses on three issues towards a reset: political imperatives, economic opportunities and constraints, and finally, Afghan refugees in Pakistan. This critique discusses the issues further.

What Shapes Pakistan's Afghan Policy?

According to the report, Pakistan's "Afghan policy is still shaped by the 'baggage of the past', namely the propensity to interfere in Afghanistan." This has been the crux of Pakistan's Kabul predicament and the related problems within Afghanistan.

Despite multiple debates in the public and within policy circles, including the Parliament, within Pakistan, there has been no credible alternate narrative on Afghanistan that is visible and convincing. To an extent, there is a widespread understanding and acceptance within civil society that there has to be a change in Islamabad's approach towards Kabul but this change is yet to be enunciated formally as a doctrine, and implemented at the ground level.

Until there is an alternate narrative and a new Afghan doctrine, the strategic community and civil society will be lulled by its own thinking of change, instead of actual change aimed at 'new' relations. Else, as shall be subsequently explained, it will be back to the old actors pursuing the same policies, using the same old actors and trump cards (or the proxies, as the report refers to).

Who Shapes Pakistan's Afghan Policy?

This is an equally important question that the report discusses under "civil-military relations." If Islamabad has to really reset its relations with Afghanistan, then there has to be a reset within Pakistan in terms of who formulates its Afghan policy.

The Establishment - the military and the ISI - are bound to be conservative and averse to risks in taking bold new steps and completely changing the policy outlook towards Afghanistan (and India as well). The ICG report hints about the inability of the Parliament to produce a coherent document/doctrine that would be seen as a viable alternative plan. If there are serious capacity problems within the Parliament along with delicate civil-military relations further complicating foreign policy decision-making by the elected leaders, there is little reset likely to happen in terms of Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan.

The real and hard question is whether both the Sharifs (the Prime Minister and the Chief of Army Staff) are in sync in terms of Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan. Or, is the civilian Sharif under the shadow of the khakis and has only limited influence in shaping an independent policy towards Afghanistan (and also vis-à-vis India)?

In the absence of a credible alternative narrative, the media debate is likely to influence and shape the civil society's thinking. If the media debates are well informed, without biases and not "planted", then it is bound to create a new narrative. However, if the media debate is influenced by 'embedded' and partisan inputs supporting the primary arguments of select State and non-State actors, there is little that the civil society can do in terms of advancing a new narrative.

Perhaps it is because of the above two factors, the failure of Parliament and the civil society to produce a strong alternate narrative, despite an intention to change Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan, that it has not transformed into a tangible doctrine. Or perhaps, those institutions that actually formulate and implement Pakistan's foreign policy are stronger in resisting the change.

Unless the 'intention to change' becomes 'evident in action', resetting Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan will stay on paper and as an idea.

...And Through What Strategies?

This should be the third related question along with 'what shapes' and 'who shapes' Pakistan's Afghan relations. The report talks about Pakistan's proxies and its own version of a Monroe Doctrine vis-a-vis Afghanistan; both will remain a crucial problem in resetting relations.

Of the four sets of non-State actors criss-crossing the Durand Line – the Afghan Taliban, Huqqani Network, TTP and other Pakistani groups (such as the Lashkar, Jaish, Punjabi Taliban) - any action by Pakistan supporting one and opposing another is less likely to yield positive responses. If the Pakistani Taliban provides sanctuary for their Afghan counterparts within FATA and KP, it is only natural that the latter extends the same to the former in Khost, Nuristan and other provinces across the Durand Line.

Fighting the TTP but supporting the Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network is unlikely help Pakistan to reset its relations with Afghanistan. There seems to be an illusion within Pakistan that their security forces are fighting the Taliban and hence the problem is being addressed. However, until there is a realisation that Pakistan's counter-terrorism approach is selective and counter-productive to its own larger national interests, the possibility of resetting Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan (and India) will remain a far cry.

As the attack on the Wagah post in Pakistan would highlight, today the militants based in Pakistan are no more the proxies of the Establishment. The non-State actors in Pakistan are clear and know what they want. Do the State actors have the same clarity?

The New Afghanistan: Four Major Challenges for President Ghani

13 October 2014

Will the new political arrangement (President and a Chief Executive Officer) in Afghanistan work, and more importantly, deliver? Though it looks simple in paper, given the recent history between the two contenders – Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah – will the power-sharing deal help Afghanistan stabilise?

One Country, Two Executives

The understanding simply means that there would be two Executives for Afghanistan – the President (Ashraf Ghani) and a Chief Executive Officer (either Abdullah Abdullah, or someone nominated by him). It does solve the electoral dispute that had been raging between the two contenders and threatening to derail the political process. However, will the arrangement address the challenges facing Afghanistan?

The first set of challenges includes providing a coherent administration, better governance and addressing the looming economic crisis. One will have all the powers entrusted by the Constitution, while the other is yet to have a legal sanction – either via a Grand Jirga or the Parliament.

Also, the situation in the Afghan power structure is not as simple as two leaders trying to share power. It involves two sets of diverse groups attempting to share power and run a country, with the divide running across the ethnic lines. Neither side is monolithic; both leaders will have to address their constituencies, that not only involve respective communities – be it the Pashtuns, Tajiks and Hazaras – but also power leaders including provincial governors, warlords and even military officials within the Afghan National Army.

The Shifting American Focus towards Iraq

The agreement is primarily due to the US' pressure. And that poses the second challenge for the new Afghan arrangement. How seriously committed will the US be, once the new Afghan structure is in place? Undoubtedly, the multiple visits by the US Secretary of State John Kerry and his constant dialogue with both parties have ensured that the electoral process has not been completely wasted. Abdullah was ready to leave the process and pursue a different political path. Thanks to Kerry, the two contestants could be brought together.

Will the US and Kerry have the same time and patience to continue their engagement with Afghanistan? The farewell speech is likely to leave a bad note in the Obama administration and the larger American nation. The US' Ambassador to Afghanistan James B. Cunningham's, remarks to outgoing Afghan

President Hamid Karzai's speech on 23 September will echo the larger American sentiment – ungrateful and ungracious. The new Afghan government have to work closely with the US government, and also address the prevailing sentiment about corruption and mis-governance, resulting in siphoning off the American tax payers' money.

However, there are two positives for the US, as Karzai's term ends. The US does not have to deal with him anymore and that should be a huge relief; the past year has been extremely bad and upsetting for the US. Second, the new president has already signed the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the US, followed by a similar one with the NATO.

Also, as it happened a decade ago, the US's attention has been already diverted to Iraq. The airstrikes-only approach means the US needs to work harder to stitch a collation in the region and get regional boots on the ground. The return of the US to West Asia to destroy the Islamic State (IS) also means allocating considerable funds to train the Syrian opposition and augment the Iraqi security forces. Both – the diplomatic engagement in West Asia and raising local forces to fight the IS means less diplomatic time and financial resources for Afghanistan.

Advantage Taliban-Pakistan

The third major challenge would be the resurgence of the Taliban, and their supporters across the Durand Line. Despite multiple efforts, negotiations with the Taliban have not succeeded until today. Moving ahead, the reasons behind the failure would factor heavily in the new government.

There is no evidence at the ground level to prove that the Taliban infrastructure is destroyed. While the al Qaeda network in Pakistan has been substantially neutralised, the Taliban network across the Durand Line remains intact, and has in fact expanded further. The recent announcement that the Pakistani Taliban in Punjab would fight in Afghanistan underlines the Afghan Taliban's strategic depth in the West. Mullah Omar has silently reversed the idea of "Strategic Depth" in the Af-Pak map; today the Afghan Taliban has enough safe havens, support structures and human resources deep inside Pakistan.

The new Afghan government with two executives would find it difficult to deal with such a complicated network that enjoys continuous support from across the Durand Line.

It's the Economy, Stupid

The economic situation and the human development indicators have been transformed dramatically over the last decade. There are more schools, roads, transmission lines etc., than has ever been in the history of Afghanistan. The Afghan economy is evolving slowly but steadily, as are the country's government structures and non-governmental institutions.

Herein lies the challenge. The above needs to be protected and expanded further, for which the new government would need strong financial support. Afghanistan is yet to become a regional economy and the much touted Heart of Asia. Though structures exist, there are no funds to support and finance the infrastructure and human resources that have been created during the last decade.

Securing what has been created so far itself will be a big challenge for the new president.

Pakistan: Crouching Democrats, Hidden Khakis

1 September 2014

It appears that the biggest threat to democracy in Pakistan is its democratic leadership, that too the elected ones. Ongoing developments in Islamabad clearly highlight the problem – all in the name of democracy and revolution, but through un-constitutional and violent means.

One can discount the politics of Tahirul Qadri; he is a “visiting” politician with a Canadian passport, whose politics and love for democracy and revolution in Pakistan is seasonal. How then must one describe Imran Khan’s politics? And Nawaz Sharif’s response (or the lack of it)?

Imran Khan and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf party (PTI) is no-longer amateurs; they have been in politics for over a decade; partaken in elections, and after the 2013 polls, have even formed a government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Why is he trying to wreck the political process?

One explanation could be his patience quotient. Perhaps, he now believes that his time has come to become the next prime minister of Pakistan. He appears to be on a ‘now or never’ approach and is unwilling to make any compromise. There has been a pattern to his demands since the beginning of this episode; what started as a rigging issue (in the 2013 general election in select constituencies) with a demand for recount of votes has slowly evolved into nothing but the resignation of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

One is unsure, whether Imran Khan would agree to Sharif stepping down at this moment. He would like nothing short of him being appointed as the next prime minister. This is politics of opportunism.

The second explanation could be the lack of intra-party democracy within the PTI and Khan’s leadership qualities to listen to dissent. Is there a consensus within the PTI in terms of pursuing a democratic approach to dethrone an elected government through sheer blackmail? The differences between Khan and his party President, Javed Hashmi, is a case in point. According to a Dawn news report, “He (Hashmi) said the core committee had unanimously decided not to march on the Prime Minister House, but Mr Khan bypassed the decision after receiving a message from ‘somewhere’ at a time when negotiators from the two sides were about to finalise an agreement.”

Personalised politics has been the bane of the politics in the sub-continent. Even within the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), which is now at the receiving end, and those outside the crisis – the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and the Pakistan People’s Party – have been driven by their leaders, with less or no consideration for their “core-committees.” To rephrase Louis XIV of France, many leaders believe and act with the same sentiment – “I’m the Party.”

The third explanation could be the space provided by Nawaz Sharif’s response, or the lack of it. As the prime minister and leader of the Parliament, armed with constitutional support, Sharif failed to evolve a coherent strategy from day one to deal with Khan’s threats. In retrospect, it appears that former Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari dealt with Khan and Qadri better, politically, by engaging them. Sharif seems to have isolated himself and avoided taking any decision. He appeared to be willing to abdicate the decision-making process to the Supreme Court, the parliament and later to the military, hoping that somehow the crisis would get resolved on its own.

A final explanation for Khan’s offensive is perhaps, he is playing to a script written elsewhere by the Establishment. A section – both in Pakistan and outside consider that Khan and Qadri are only playing a match that has been already fixed by the military. Two reasons could be projected supporting this explanation: first, Khan’s decision, almost after a year, to realize that 2013 election has been rigged; and second, Qadri would return to Pakistan to launch a revolution, and then join hands with Imran Khan.

Whatever be the reasons, the real question today (as on 1 September, 2014), is what next for Pakistan? The above explanations would easily explain what is in store. If the political leaders – ruling and opposition – would prefer not to play by democratic rules, remain opportunist and decide to blackmail the system with few thousand followers, it is setting a dangerous trend to the future of political process in Pakistan. Even if Sharif is dislodged and Khan made prime minister, it would be easier for the PML-N to return the favour.

Second, a section believes, that in fact a, coup has already taken place with the military striking a deal with Sharif that the Parliament would not interfere in shaping Pakistan’s foreign policy towards US,

Afghanistan and India. Soft coup, as it is referred to, the military wants a political process led by democratically elected leaders, but the decision making, retained by the former. Of course, the Parliament can deal with mundane matters of the State, discuss, debate and even legislate, but the main issues would be silently dealt with by the military.

Whether the military would take over as result of the present crisis, is immaterial. The democrats have already done enough damage to democracy in Pakistan.

Mullah Fazlullah: Challenges to the “Eliminate or Extradite” Approach
7 July 2014

Hundreds of militants have been killed ever since the military in Pakistan launched an offensive against the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in the country’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in June 2014. There have also been numerous reports that ever since the military operations began, there has been an exodus of militants and civilians from the FATA into Afghanistan cutting across the Durand Line.

As a headline in one of the leading news papers read, Pakistan today wants Afghanistan to either “extradite” Mullah Fazlullah, the leader of the TTP, or “eliminate” him. Will such an approach with Afghanistan succeed, given the large-scale differences between Kabul and Islamabad?

After innumerable deliberations within Pakistan and the chimera of a dialogue with the TTP, the military operations have begun only now. But the harsh reality for Pakistan is: there are no similar operations from the other side of the Durand Line, or even a basic security template in Afghanistan to deal with those who are currently crossing the border between the two.

General Asim Saleem Bajwa, in one of his Inter-Service Public Relations (ISPR) briefings in early July commented that “the leader of the TTP Mullah Fazlullah is sitting across the border in Kunar or Nuristan and Afghanistan needs to do something about it.” Perhaps he is, and perhaps Afghanistan should do something about it.

Is Fazlullah a priority for Kabul?

Despite complaints from Pakistan, the Afghan government could not deal with Pakistani militants who have been hiding in Paktia, Paktika, Kunar and Nuristan provinces adjoining the Durand Line. Perhaps, they were not the priority for the present Afghan government that is facing the exit of the US troops, national and provincial elections, and more importantly, its own security threats from the Afghan Taliban and its affiliates including the Haqqani Network.

Though a section within Pakistan believes that Kabul in fact colludes with Fazlullah (along with India and the US of course), it is a farfetched proposition. Fazlullah may not be a priority for Afghanistan, as Hafiz Saeed and Mullah Omar are not for Pakistan.

The politics of “trump cards” and “not our problem” approach have been played so far and will continue to play a crucial role in the role neighbours’ perceptions and subsequent actions against militancy and terrorism.

Across the Durand: Trust Deficit and Militancy

Second, there has been a huge trust deficit between Pakistan and Afghanistan in terms of providing support to militancy. Kabul has repeatedly complained that the roots and bases of Taliban militancy in Afghanistan are inside Pakistan; in particular, the Pakistani military’s reluctance to go after Mullah Omar’s Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network was viewed that way not only by the Afghan government, but also the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) leadership.

Similarly, a section within Pakistan even believes that the Afghan government secretly supports the TTP. Inherent tensions over the Durand Line between the two countries and the recent border clashes have created a huge gap between the Islamabad and Kabul. An added disadvantage for Pakistan is – many in Afghanistan do not trust Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), even if they find the political leadership sincere; and since the days of jihad against the Soviets, the Afghans believe that the ISI abused the relationship and would like to control Afghanistan rather than cooperating with them.

Neutralising the TTP: Is Pakistan Serious Now?

Islamabad and Rawalpindi, have, until recently, been reluctant to go after even the Pakistani Taliban. Islamabad (under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif now, and President Asif Ali Zardari earlier) had been attempting to initiate a dialogue with the TTP, as has been pointed out by the former Director General of the ISPR in a recent interview to the BBC, and Rawalpindi was hesitant to engage the militants through military operations. According to Maj Gen Athar Abbas, "it had been decided in principle that preparations for the operation would take place between 2010 and 2011, and that it would be launched in 2011 to rid North Waziristan of extremists once and for all... He (Gen Kayani) was very reluctant when it came to the North Waziristan operation. Kayani thought the decision to launch the operation would reflect on his personality and people would take it as his personal decision, which is why he kept delaying the operation."

Given the reluctance within the political and military leadership in Pakistan to go against even the TTP, it would be a Herculean task to convince them to neutralise the Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network.

Will Afghanistan prevent the movement of the TTP within its soil without a quid pro quo? Even if it wants to pursue the TTP in its border provinces, does Kabul have enough firepower to undertake a parallel operation across the Durand Line? No doubt, the militants belonging to the Afghan Taliban, or the TTP or the al Qaeda – are a threat to the entire region. But until now, despite the pressure from its own public, the leadership in Pakistan has not realised it.

This will pose a huge challenge for Pakistan to achieve any substantial success in Operation Zarb-e-Azb.

Taliban after Afghan Elections: Spring Offensive or the Last Stand?

2 June 2014

A series of attacks by the Taliban in Afghanistan during May 2014 resulted in a few media-persons calling it a Spring Offensive. Is it really a calculated and well planned offensive by the Taliban? Or is it merely the Last Stand of a terrorist organisation arising out of desperation and conceived over a fear of losing relevance in any future Afghan political framework?

Neither Spring, Nor Offensive; Mere Desperation

After failing to disrupt the first round of the successful presidential elections in Afghanistan – that were held all over the country on 5 April – a section reported the Taliban's plans to launch a massive surge. True, there were few attacks during the last month; for example, according to news reports, 18 people were killed in three attacks in Jalalabad, Ghazni and Helmand provinces. Later, on 23 May, there was a high profile attack on the Indian Consulate in Herat.

Except for those three coordinated assaults in the provinces and the attack on Indian Consulate in Herat, there have been no serious threats from the Taliban that challenge the Afghan security forces. A closer look into those three assaults would even reveal them as regular guerrilla attacks, using the classic sneaking in and opening fire strategy, than an open challenge or a military duel. Many in India suspect that the attack on its Consulate in Herat was in fact carried out by the proxies of Pakistan with an objective to scuttle Nawaz Sharif's proposed visit to India to partake in the recently-elected Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing-in ceremony.

It is entirely possible that the two sets of attacks in May were carried out by two different factions of the Afghan Taliban for two different objectives – the first set of attacks on the three provinces by the Afghan Taliban led by Mullah Omar to prove their relevance, and the attack on the Indian Consulate in Herat by the Haqqani Network, having been instigated by their masters from elsewhere in Pakistan.

Perhaps, what one sees in Afghanistan is not a surge by the Taliban but a desperate last attempt to make themselves relevant in Afghanistan's post-election political framework, using violence as a strategy.

Post-election Political Setup: Predicting the Taliban's Roadmap

Two significant developments might have rubbished the Taliban's calculations for a role for themselves in the future government in Kabul following the withdrawal of Western troops: the successful elections of 5 April, and the widespread popular participation.

By any standard of evaluation, the election was a huge success and an ultimate insult to the Taliban. Barring few provinces in southern regions of the country, Afghans turned out in substantial numbers, waited patiently in long, serpentine queues and cast their votes despite bad weather and shortage of ballot papers. Never in the history of Afghanistan has there been a political change of regime, supported by its people such as this.

Though the Taliban issued threats against partaking in the elections, except in few provinces, the people disregarded them. More importantly, there was a substantial participation of the youth and women in the elections. This completely negated the views that Afghan women are afraid of the Taliban, and the youth is eager to join militant ranks.

Furthermore, the elections have also seriously questioned another myth that the people of Afghanistan think in terms of ethnic lines while making major decisions. Before the elections, a section believed, and even continues to do so, that the ethnic factor would keep the democratic process and the future of Afghanistan polarised. It appears that there is a slow, but steady construction of an 'Afghan identity' over the ethnic identity. This does not mean a national identity would override their ethnic and tribal ones, but simply underlines the phenomenon that on larger national interests of the country, there could be a pan-Afghan identity. One could sense this larger national identity taking roots especially amongst the youth in Afghanistan.

In this context, what do the aforementioned developments mean for the future of Taliban following elections? First and foremost, the majority in Afghanistan prefer democratic politics through an electoral process, than an insurgent-led regime based on fatwas and religious edicts. Second, the political structure to be built gradually in Kabul will be Afghan in nature and not based or opposed on narrow ethnic and tribal lines. If this process continues, why would any government in Kabul even consider the Taliban as a stakeholder and negotiate with them? Instead, won't the future rulers, democratically elected directly by the Afghans, not consider the Taliban as an insurgent group and pursue strategies to combat it, than co-opting them?

Both the aforementioned developments, if allowed to evolve, would mean a death knell to the Taliban. The only way that the Taliban could remain relevant is what they are known for: using violence as a strategy to threaten the populace. As the Afghan National Security Forces prepares itself further, even this violent strategy of the Taliban would reap diminishing returns for the latter. The Taliban is running out of time to make any last stand; and perhaps, after 2014, it would be reduced to a force similar to the multiple other terrorist groups in South Asia – that might not disappear altogether, but the people and State will be able to live with it. And that is the larger threat for the Taliban.

Inside Pakistan: The Establishment's Two-Front War

5 May 2014

The Establishment in Pakistan may have worried about a two-front war bordering India and Afghanistan for a long time, but it never would have imagined a two-front war within the country itself, vis-à-vis the elected political leadership and the media. After enjoying a preponderant position within the power structure of Pakistan, it is not an easy situation for the leadership of the military and its ISI to handle.

From Impregnable to Vulnerable: Echoes of Iftikhar Chaudhry and Pervez Musharraf on GHQ

The factors that have made the military vulnerable within Pakistan have undoubtedly been caused by two individuals – Iftikhar Chaudhry and Pervez Musharraf.

Justice Chaudhry fired the first salvo when Musharraf was the President. It all started in March 2007 when Musharraf decided to suspend Justice Chaudhry, the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; worse, he summoned the Chief Justice, asking him to resign. The judge decided to take on the Commando - he refused to step down. Seven years earlier, almost to the day, he addressed a huge rally in Lahore, which he later repeated in Karachi in May 2007. The subsequent violence that led to the killing of more than 40 people was orchestrated by Musharraf and his supporters to prevent Chaudhry from entering Karachi.

What followed was a slow but steady movement - that was initially led by the legal community but later expanded to include a substantial section of the civil society - with the catchy slogan, 'Go Musharraf Go'. Ultimately, Musharraf had to reinstall Justice Chaudhry, but the ghosts of 2007 were to come back strongly and haunt Musharraf seven years later in 2014, with the judiciary opening up a treason case against the former president, who also happened to be a former military Chief of Pakistan.

It was the trial that exposed the chinks in the Pakistani military's internal armour. Though the previous Chief of Army Staff Gen Kayani, who was also Musharraf's successor, had reportedly advised Musharraf's against returning to Pakistan, the latter did not listen. Perhaps reasoning has never been Musharraf's forte. Not many even within Pakistan were able to comprehend Musharraf's decision to return.

Once Musharraf decided to return, he should have been prepared to face the consequences of a legal trial for acts of omission and commission as the former President. Iftikhar Chaudhry may have been less lenient towards Musharraf, but the trial continued even after his retirement. Nawaz Sharif, who had been thrown out by Musharraf in a military takeover, and later sentenced to exile, also did not have a stake in looking for a way out or a compromise.

What was essentially a trial against a former President snowballed into an issue between the civilian and military leaderships. The trial against Musharraf is being projected as a trial of the military as an institution by two other institutions – the Parliament and Judiciary.

The larger question here is regarding the role of Nawaz Sharif in attempting to undermine the military and its ISI as an institution and bring it under civilian control. Is this at the core of the differences between the two leaders and three institutions? Or is the issue about the izzat (honour) of a predominant institution within the political structure of Pakistan?

The Shahzads and Mirs: The Media's War against the ISI

In 2013, Syed Saleem Shahzad, one of Pakistan's leading journalists, who was working on al Qaeda and its links with the military, was allegedly killed by the intelligence agencies. His book, Inside Al-Qaeda and the Taliban: Beyond Bin Laden and 9/11, created an uproar within Pakistan and elsewhere. The ISI was believed to have been unhappy with the book's projections and findings; what was believed to be a warning shot ended up killing him. While there were murmurs about the killing of Shahzad and the ISI initially, it opened a Pandora's Box when Hamid Mir, another senior journalist and lead TV anchor was attacked, allegedly by the ISI.

Immediately after the attack, Hamid Mir's brother publicly accused the ISI for masterminding the attack against Hamid Mir. The TV channel he is associated with ran the show repeatedly with the ISI chief's photograph in the background, and several leading journalists and media people came out to openly in

support of Hamid Mir. For the first time, there seems to be an organised and systematic criticism of the ISI's activities within Pakistan, especially against the media.

The ISI is believed to be undertaking a damage control exercise by asking the Pakistan Electronic Media Regularity Authority (PEMRA) to file a case against Geo Television, for which Hamid Mir works. It has also apparently instigated a few journalists to write against Mir and organise a campaign against his group. It is clear that the ISI is no more the most powerful institution in Pakistan.

Whether the military and its ISI have managed the damage control or not, the crucial questions are – How vulnerable are these once powerful institutions? Where is the internal two-front war heading? Is this a temporary aberration or a new trend within Pakistan?

Presidential Election: Thus spoke the Afghans

7 April 2014

Given the security and political environment (including the weather and rains) within and outside Afghanistan, the recently held election to usher in their next president is perhaps the most significant democratic poll in the history of the country. The nature and extent of participation given the level political polarisation and the threats of violence from the Taliban, this election should be nothing but a watershed in Afghanistan's modern history.

Despite the multiple challenges ahead, this is an important milestone in the Afghan search for stability. The Afghans have spoken clearly. What does the vote signify, and what does it mean for the future of the country?

The size and the nature of the election were certainly historic and should set a benchmark for the future of any democratic means in Afghanistan. Despite complaints of fraud; the inability of the several voters to exercise their right due to weather (elections took place in cold and rainy weather); administrative issues (lack of adequate ballot sheets); and the Taliban's threats to punish those who participate, this election is a definite success.

A comparison with the 2009 presidential elections will indicate how far Afghanistan has come in the past five years. From Karzai to Obama, credit should go to many leaders within and outside Afghanistan, in making this election a success.

The Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan: A Promising Start

Complete credit should go to the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan (IEC), for organising such an election. Without formal training in democratic traditions or much experience, organising such a large-scale election in over 400 districts located in varying topographies and security situations, and addressing 13 million voters, would not have been an easy task for anybody. But the IEC performed that wonder – using donkeys, trucks, air support and a newly trained Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

This is a good beginning for the process of elections. Unlike the rest of South Asia, where election commissions have seen various phases since the 1940s, Afghanistan's IEC is totally new and has emerged out of nowhere. Any election commission would remain independent only if the political elite, and more importantly, the executive have the will; this is a good beginning for the IEC and a good omen for the future of democratic processes in Afghanistan.

The ANSF: Ready to Support Civilian Institutions

Credit should also go to the ANSF – the army and the police. Compared to the 2009 elections, where the ANSF contribution was minimal, security for the 2014 elections were ensured by the ANSF. There were 350,000 Afghan troops engaged in securing the election process, with hardly over 50,000 NATO troops. Providing statistical details of 2009 and 2014 elections may not do justice to the NATO troops then and

the ANSF now; however, this should not take the credit away from the ANSF in supporting an elections process.

Historically the militaries in Afghanistan, the current one in particular, is not built to assist civilian institutions in securing an election. Given the mandate and the pace at which the ANSF was built, their achievements are substantial, if not extraordinary.

The IEC would not have succeeded in conducting this election without substantial support from the ANSF. Perhaps, this election should be seen as a coming of age for the ANSF and their preparedness to support the civilian government and its institutions.

The Afghan Civil Society: Leading the Democratic Transition

Third, the credit should also go to the Afghans, for cutting across the ethnic lines. True, they may have voted along ethnic lines, but they voted for a new Afghanistan. They came out in huge numbers; and according to initial reports, over 60 per cent of voters showed up on the day of polling, waited in long queues to ink their fingers and make a statement. And they did make a statement. Not so loud perhaps, but clear as crystal. The vote should not be interpreted as against someone – the Taliban or Karzai's government – but as a positive vote for a new Afghanistan.

More importantly, the participation of women in the 2014 election was substantial. Multiple photographs and interviews of the women who have voted tell a new story of the Afghan women.

The Political Elite: Towards an Inclusive and Consensus Politics

Finally, the political elite of Afghanistan – though accused of corruption and war-lording – have also come a long way in deciding the outcome of this election. Consider the following: despite the fears of fraud, Karzai should be complimented for organising this election that was relatively free and fair. Though there were accusations of Karzai favouring Zalmay Rassoul and allowing the government machinery to support the latter, the other two leading contenders do share an optimism of the whole process so far.

The leading contestants – Ashraf Ghani, Abdullah Abdullah and Zalmay Rassoul also need to be complimented for ensuring inclusiveness in this election, and for addressing the concerns of every community, and not just the majority.

To conclude, the Afghans have spoken. Towards an Afghan-led Afghan-owned future. Loud and Clear.

Across the Durand Line: Who is in Control Now? Will That Change?

3 March 2014

Dr. Arvind Gupta, Director General, the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, India, at a recent conference, raised an important question while discussing the Af-Pak region: who is in control?

Given the recent developments on both sides of the Durand Line, and what is likely to occur over the course of 2014 – the Afghan presidential elections, and the signing/non-signing of the US-Afghanistan Bilateral Security agreement (BSA) – and by the end of this year, such as the complete withdrawal of international troops from the country, this question assumes even more significance.

The second question that warrants attention is: who among the multiple State and non-State actors across the Durand Line will gain an upper hand by the end of 2014?

Who is in Control: The Chaos Today

There are multiple State and non-State actors across the Durand Line, fighting to establish their political and social influence across the tribal regions. They are the Taliban, the al Qaeda, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its multiple franchisees, and the Pakistani military and the tribal militias/jirgas, among others.

The fact that these regions on both sides of the Line haven't remained under the total writ of the respective central governments in Kabul and Islamabad, makes it difficult to define 'control' and its 'nature'; since the time of Alexander the Great, there has never been absolute control of a single actor over the region. Second, given the nature of rhetoric and real objectives of the non-State actors and the actual capacities and the political will of State actors to make use of them, understanding what the actors aim to control would be a challenging task.

Control, in this context should not be narrowly defined as mere military control, or the ability of the State to exercise its writ, politically. It has to be viewed from a wider perspective.

Despite the aforementioned factors/issues, the fact that there is a prevailing uncertainty – in terms of social and political control over the Af-Pak region, especially across the Durand Line – is evident. Undoubtedly, the four major non-State actors in the region – the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, the al Qaeda, and the TTP – have a significant presence today; but one cannot consider this presence as control.

Be it Kabul or Islamabad, these non-State actors have the ability to inflict a high level of damage. A cursory look at the high profile attacks in the recent years would reveal that no place in Pakistan and/or Afghanistan is absolutely safe and secure. Via the use of Improvised Explosive Devices to human bombs, non-State actors have, so far, brought about extensive damages.

On the other hand, however, despite their ability to carry out attacks, none of the aforementioned non-State actors have been able to 'control' significant portions of the territory and/or enforce their 'writ' politically. The State actors – the ANSF, the ISAF and the Pakistani military – may not have succeeded in preventing the high profile militant attacks, in both the border regions as well in their respective national capitals, but have certainly prevented the non-State actors from taking 'control' of any geographical area across the Durand Line.

To conclude, the answer to the question on the current situation in terms of who controls the Af-Pak region is: nobody, in absolute terms. Given the sizes of the geographical areas the State holds sway over, perhaps, the State and its actors have control, in a relatively greater measure.

Who Will Take Control: The Perilous Future

How long will the State actors retain their upper hand in the region, given their current advantage in terms of political, military and social control over the Af-Pak region, especially across the Durand Line? What will the nature of 'control' be by the end of this year and from the beginning of 2015?

Drone attacks by the US have, to a large extent, neutralised the al Qaeda leadership across the Durand Line. Today, most of its top leadership is either decimated or has moved to other regions in West Asia and North Africa. The Al Qaeda is unlikely to establish its control in the region by the end of this year, or even early next year. That is not an objective of the al Qaeda and its Uzbek and Chechen franchisees; not anymore.

The Taliban in Afghanistan and the TTP in Pakistan, however, are neither decimated and nor have they moved out of the Af-Pak region. The drone attacks by the US primarily targeted the al Qaeda and not the Afghan Taliban leadership. As a result, the Afghan Taliban will remain an important actor in deciding the future course of stability in Afghanistan. This holds true for the Haqqani Network as well. The limited military offensive and the Pakistani State's charade of negotiations with the TTP have given a new lease to the Pakistan Taliban. Whether or not these actors would establish 'control' over the Af-Pak region by the end of this year will depend on the strength of the military.

More importantly, it would depend on the political will in Kabul and Islamabad, to make use of their militaries to impose the State's writ.

The future of the ownership of control on the Af-Pak region depends not on the strength of the non-State actors, but on the military strengths and political will of the governments in Afghanistan and Pakistan to employ it.

If the past experience is any basis, the future does not look too encouraging.

Taliban Talks and the Four Horsemen: Between Peace and Apocalypse

3 February 2014

The previous article in this column discussed the talks about talks with the Pakistani Taliban, and Sami-ul-Haq being projected as the interlocutor between the State and the Teherik-e-Taliban (TTP).

Since the previous column was written in early January 2014, three major developments have taken place. First was a short military campaign against the militants in Waziristan. Second was appointment of a 'four member committee' by the government to negotiate with the Taliban. Third was the acceptance of the TTP to negotiate with the State, along with nomination of a team from the Pakistani Taliban.

While the decision to negotiate with the TTP and the latter's response was itself a substantial achievement, the harsh reality is that the problems for the State have just begun. Given the issues and questions, this process is likely to be anything but easy.

From Sami-ul-Haq to the Four Horsemen: A Changed Strategy by the Government

During the last week of January 2014, the government appointed a four member committee to negotiate with the TTP, comprising of Rahimullah Yusufzai, Irfan Siddiqui, Rustam Shah and Major (Retd) Amir.

Rahimullah Yusufzai is a well-known and independent senior journalist. His writings in mainstream newspapers have been balanced and he his insights are respected. Irfan Siddiqui is also a senior journalist, but today he is known more as a pro-Nawaz person; he is also a Special Assistant to the Prime Minister. Major Amir has been reported as a former ISI officer who is close to Nawaz Sharif. According to Amir Mir, "Major (ret'd) Amir... has a murky past being the alleged architect of the infamous 'Operation Midnight Jackal' to topple the first government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 1989." (The News, 30 January 2014). Rustam Shah is a former diplomat who has served in Afghanistan and is known to be sympathetic to the Taliban.

In terms of the composition, it could be generally agreed that two of them (Irfan Siddiqui and Major Amir) are seen as closer to Nawaz Sharif. There is nothing wrong in Sharif choosing his confidantes, in fact, given the intricacies it is always useful for the Prime Minister to choose a team he has confidence in. However, as Fazlur Rehman has already criticised, they were not chosen on a consensus, nor they have a political background. The four horsemen are all professionals in one field or the other, but have never been politicians.

Will the four horsemen be able to deliver? Except for Fazlur Rehman, the rest of the political leadership, cutting across political lines at the national and regional levels, seems to have faith in the new initiative.

From Suicide Attacks to a Ten Member Committee: Understanding the Change in TTP

What has changed for the TTP in the last month that it has agreed to negotiate with the government?

Was it because of the military strikes in Waziristan? Given the nature of the attacks and the short duration, it appears that the military strikes were aimed more at convincing the US, where Sartaj Aziz was

attempting to revive the strategic dialogue between the two countries, rather than at bringing the Taliban down. Had the latter been the case, the strikes would have continued until the TTP begged for a dialogue. However, this was not the case.

Why did then the TTP agree to negotiate? Does it really believe in negotiating with the government? Or is the negotiation a strategy of its ongoing war with the State?

What would the TTP Demand?

Will this negotiation between the TTP and the government be without any preconditions? Unlikely. The TTP is likely to emphasise that there should be no military strikes in the first place. As a logical extension of that, it is likely to pressurise the State to tell US that the latter completely stop its drone programme. In fact, the TTP leadership should be more worried about the drone strikes than the military strikes. However indiscriminate the military strikes are likely to be, they can never be as precise as a drone attack. The TTP is also likely to demand the release of its top leadership, who have been arrested by the State and kept in different jails.

Politically, the TTP is likely to pressurise the government to sever ties with the US and ensure that the Durand Line becomes irrelevant for the Afghan militants.

Will the TTP also demand the imposition of shariah elsewhere in Pakistan, as it demanded in Swat? It may place that demand but is unlikely to carry it forward, given that the time is not ripe. Such a demand may perhaps be acceptable for the State in remote FATA or the Swat valley, but not acceptable in the rest of Pakistan. Not yet.

How Far will the State Go in Yielding to the TTP?

Clearly, the State is not keen in pursuing a military option vis-à-vis the militants. The TTP would not be satisfied with the status quo.

The primary question is not what the TTP wants. Rather, it is how far the State is willing to go to accommodate the TTP.

Pakistan: Talks about Talks with the Taliban, Again

6 January 2014

Talks about talks with the TTP seem to have become seasonal in Pakistan. There is another effort, this time to initiate a new round of talks with the Pakistani Taliban, now under the leadership of Mullah Fazlullah. This time, not only is Fazlullah in the picture, but there is also another player – Maulana Sami-ul-Haq, the leader of his faction of the JUI and also the chairperson of the Difa-e-Pakistan Council.

While this initiative is not the first one in the last two years, the issues and questions remain the same for Pakistan's leadership and civil society. Is the TTP monolithic, and serious about talks? While there is a larger consensus amongst the political leadership, are the military and the civil society on board? What would these talks be aimed at? And more importantly, are there lessons to be learnt from the previous initiatives and failures?

Broader Political Consensus

There seems to be a broader consensus cutting across party lines in initiating negotiations with the Pakistani Taliban. In fact, this latest round started in 2012 itself, when Hakimullah Mehsud was the leader of the TTP.

Imran Khan has always remained the most ardent supporter of this initiative. In fact, he even wants to provide an office to the Taliban in Peshawar and perhaps even in Islamabad! Despite the TTP not

announcing its support for Imran Khan (remember, they opposed his entry and the proposed march to Waziristan earlier in 2012, to protest against the drone attacks. Though the security forces stopped his march, it was believed there were threats of suicide attacks), he has remained a staunch supporter, favouring talks with Taliban. Nawaz Sharif and his PML-N have also supported such an initiative in public and it was even part of the election campaign in 2013. The Difa-e-Pakistan Council, a conglomerate of primarily right-wing groups, now led by Maulana Sami ul Haq, has also offered its support.

There were numerous all parties' conferences and discussions within Parliament during 2012 on the subject; at the last meeting of the all parties' conference held in September 2012, it was unanimously decided to initiate talks with the Taliban. Though couched in politically correct phrases such as 'sovereignty', 'peace', 'stability' and 'international law', the September resolution gave the final nod to Nawaz Sharif to initiate a formal negotiation with the TTP.

Multiple suicide attacks including the mayhem in All Saints' Church in Peshawar killing nearly 80 people and the assassination of Major General Sanaullah Niazi by the TTP during the same month, followed by the US drone attack killing Hakimullah Mehsud in early November resulted in the above initiative not taking off.

Enter Samiul Haq

After Mullah Fazlullah took over the as the chief of the TTP, the political leadership in Pakistan once again revived the talks, which had been on hold since September 2012.

A major development in this new round is a broad consensus amongst various political parties on making Malauna Samiul Haq the primary anchor in taking the talks with the Taliban forward. Apart from his ardent support of such an initiative' there seem to be a few more factors in Nawaz Sharif pitching Samiul Haq as the lead from the government side.

First, Samiul Haq, though not much of a political support (in terms of adequate seats either in the provincial legislature of the Khyber Paktunkwa or the national Parliament), is the leader of the Difa-e-Pakistan Council. As has been shown repeatedly, the Difa has a substantial presence in the streets and has been a lead actor in the anti-American protests within Pakistan.

Second, media reports from Pakistan also convey that Samiul may have the much needed link with the new TTP leadership. Khalid Haqqani, the Head of Taliban Shura, and currently, the deputy to Mullah Fazlullah is believed to have been educated at the Madrassa Darul Uloom Haqqania in Akora Khattak. This madrassa, where a substantial section of the Taliban leadership across the Durand Line was educated, including Mullah Omar, is owned by Samiul.

Perhaps, for Nawaz Sharif, bringing Samiul is a masterstroke. Bu, will he be able to deliver?

Military, Civil Society and Mullah Fazlullah: Are they on Board?

While there is consensus within the political leadership in talking to the Talban, is the same enthusiasm shared by the military and civil society? Especially since the TTP is now under Fazlullah, who was a on war path killing scores of military men and innocent civilians in his previous version as the leader of the Swat Taliban?

While the military has made several deals with the multiple TTP factions in the FATA, especially in North and South Waziristan, it has led a series of bloody operations against the Taliban in Swat since 2008-09. Is the new COAS, Gen Sharif, on board with a dialogue with Fazlullah? The civil society within Pakistan is divided, with the liberal section voicing its concerns publicly in the media.

Finally, are Fazlullah and the rest of the TTP factions interested in such a process? If it was the case, why did the TTP greet the announcement of APC in September 2012 with a series of suicide attacks?

Column: East Asia Compass

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Abe-Xinping Summit Meet: A Thaw in China-Japan Relations?

1 December 2014

After almost two years of the election of Shinzo Abe as the Prime Minister of Japan, he and Chinese President Xi Jinping met for the first time at a summit meet on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) gathering in Beijing on 10 November 2014. Shinzo Abe and Xi Jinping have deliberately avoided each other since coming to power. The rivalry between China and Japan over the islands in the East China Sea and other maritime and historical disputes have overshadowed huge economic exchanges and the dependence that both countries have on each other. Many have commented that if their foreign policy courses are not corrected, it would have a destabilising effect on the region. Thus, even though the meeting between Xi Jinping and Shinzo Abe lacked substance and was more symbolic, it has been appreciated as a positive gesture from both sides.

The second and third largest economies of the world have had strong disagreements on political, security and strategic issues for some time. In Asian politics, one is considered to be a rising power and the other also seeks to maintain its foothold and be more assertive. In an era when the Asian political landscape is a contested arena both for the countries (new and old regional powers) and for the models of inter-state relations (cooperative and balance of power), the bilateral relations between China and Japan have been and should be followed with keen interest.

The economic exchanges between the two countries have been one of the largest in the world but in the past few years, it has been a bit derailed by politics. It is said that the year 2010 was the turning point in their bilateral relations. This year, China replaced Japan as the second largest economy in the world and in September 2010 a crisis erupted when a Chinese trawler collided with Japanese patrol boats near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. It has also been said that the incident was blown out of proportion because of some disputes related to the export quotas of rare earth minerals. While this may or may not be true it was definitely a new moment in Asian politics in which Japanese economic superiority was surpassed by China.

For almost two and half decades, Japan found solace in being the number one economy in Asia and number two economy in the world, despite a stagnant economic growth. It might be claimed that China catching up with Japan in the economic sphere was hard for Japanese people to accept and it was one of the factors, along with rising nationalism, that provided Shinzo Abe with the support for his assertive policy. Japan was probably uncomfortable to coexist with an economic equal in the neighborhood. When the Japanese government decided to buy three islands of the Senkaku/Diaoyu in September 2012, it led to a huge political and diplomatic crisis between the two countries. Strong posturing and words were exchanged and it severely affected their bilateral economic exchanges. These events affected bilateral trade and the Japanese investment to China has since gone down by almost 50 per cent in the first nine months of 2014.

Meanwhile, China has also been negotiating its future course, both external and internal, and how a stronger China would stand in Asian politics. There was a consensus that China should work for its 'peaceful rise' or economic growth rather than overtly making political and strategic assertions. In 2010, when the Chinese economy became the second largest economy in the world, the hawkish forces in China started demanding a more assertive China. The aggressive Chinese behaviour in the trawler collision incident, Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands disputes, South China Sea disputes, and declaration of ADIZ could be linked with pressure from Chinese political hardliners who want a more assertive China as they believe that China now has enough economic clout to sustain it.

By recasting China-Japan relations in this manner, it can be said that the change in economic equations between the two made them aggressive and assertive - one because of over-confidence and another because of a sense of loss. A military conflict between China and Japan is hard to visualise and the economic implications of the present bilateral rivalry have been bad for both the countries.

Thus, the meeting between Xi Jinping and Shinzo Abe might be an important course correction for mutual coexistence with an acceptance of the new realities by both China and Japan. It does not mean that political and security rivalry related to the future of Asia and their roles in it would be resolved once and for all. The way both countries made claims and counter-claims about the 'agreed' issues of the summit meet make it clear that it would be premature to say that it is a thaw in their relations. But it is definitely a new beginning in the contest of 'who blinks first'.

South Korea's Foreign Policy: More Rhetoric, Less Content?

3 November 2014

South Korea's foreign relations especially in East Asia are in a state of impasse under the current President Park Geun-hye. During the last President Lee Myung-bak, it was clear that South Korea gave priority to its alliance with the US and resultantly drifted away from its closest economic partner, China. The current President Park Geun-hye from the very beginning wanted to balance this over tilt. She tried to implement a two-leg policy, and made her first 'official visit' to the US and first 'state visit' to China, emphasising the importance of both in the foreign policy calculus of the country. It was indeed a very perceptive move. Similarly, South Korea under the current administration declared the initiation of 'trust politik' towards North Korea, which was a correction to the unconstructive hard-line policy of the previous South Korea administration. It was considered to be the right choice to pacify North Korea and engage it in meaningful dialogue towards denuclearisation, economic reform, and ultimately, bringing about a peace regime on the Korean peninsula.

However, it seems that in both of these foreign policy objectives, South Korea has not been able to move forward as expected. South Korea appears to put more emphasis on rhetoric and showmanship and less on content. South Korea sought Chinese support in its dealings with North Korea, and as a quid-pro-quo, showed its agreement with Chinese objections to Japan's assertive behaviour. However, this was not considered sufficient by China. China expects more from South Korea based especially on Shinzo Abe's approach towards Japan's historical and territorial disputes with the former.

China was expecting South Korea to show restraint in the process of partnering with the US' strategic games in the region. South Korea has recently announced its part in the US THAAD missile defence system in East Asia and also declared that it would not take over the operational command (OPCON) of the joint forces during the war-time until 2020s, which was supposed to be taken over in 2015. There are reports that this has led China to re-contemplate its relations with North Korea. Reports also say that the Chinese Ambassador to North Korea has become more active in his engagement with North Korea.

The foreign policy objective of the current South Korean government might be different than the previous one, but it appears to be gradually but surely moving on the same path and towards the same destination. For the first time there have been confirmed reports that China was decisively unhappy with North Korea and was ready to work with South Korea to resolve the North Korean issue. If China drifts away from South Korea, it would be a huge loss for Seoul.

South Korea's North Korean policy has also been more rhetorical and less pragmatic. The 'trust politik' seems to have got the sequencing wrong as North Korea is expected to make a gesture first. There are lots of activities to begin inter-Korea talks, and South Korea has recently constituted the Presidential Committee for Unification Preparation. However, one of the two Vice-Presidents of the Committee states that South Korea should 'wait out' North Korea. Basically, the current South Korean government's emphasis on a 'principled engagement' with North Korea is not very different from the previous government's hard-line policy. So, the result of this 'trust politik' has also been a deadlock. Basically, it

seems that South Korea, rather than reaching out to North Korea and Japan, is making proclamations meant for its domestic audiences.

Regarding South Korea's estranged bilateral relations with Japan, the blame could largely be attributed to the 'indiscriminate' assertiveness Japan under Shinzo Abe. Japanese assertiveness vis-à-vis China does have some reasonable explanations but it does not make any sense to distance South Korea and push it towards China. However, South Korea has also been inflexible and the Park Geun-hye has deliberately avoided any meeting with Shinzo Abe. This gesture might be useful for evoking popular sentiment in South Korea but it cannot be called strategic in terms of foreign policy. It would definitely be more productive to talk and with Japan and try to persuade it to moderate its stand.

From the Indian perspective, it seems that South Korea's foreign policy is equally dissatisfactory. The previous South Korean administration under Lee Myung-bak had the 'New Asia Initiative' policy to reach out to the Asian neighbourhood including India in a more proactive manner. It was an important departure from the past when South Korea was more involved with big regional players such as China, Japan, the US and Russia. President Park Geun-hye tried to carry forward this policy and visited India in the very first year of her office. However, her attempts to reach out to Southeast Asia have been weak or at least inconsistent. For example, she decided to visit India at the wrong time: when the UPA government was about to end its term. More than anything else, Park Geun-hye has been too complacent in reaching out to the new Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India and Japan have forged several new ties and strengthened old ones in the past few months but there have not been enough proactive South Korean attempts to reach out to the new Indian government.

The Park Geun-hye administration still has more than three years of office. During this time, South Korea can learn from its non-achievements and become more comprehensive and strategic in its foreign policy making, and also detach itself from domestic political demonstrations.

India in East Asia: Modi's Three Summit Meets

6 October 2014

In September 2014, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had summit meets with the leaders of Japan, China and the US. The summit meets initiated the unfolding of India's policy towards the East Asian region. By choosing Japan as his first destination outside the Indian subcontinent and also by having an exclusive five-day programme for Japan, Modi gave clear signals about the preference and direction of his foreign policy. Further, he also referred to and expressed his disagreement with the 'tendency of expansionism', indicating China, suggesting that India is geared to more overtly confront China's 'growing assertiveness'. It seems that India considers Japan's strong response to China as basically a 'reaction' and appears to not only be in agreement with Japan in confronting China but also ready to join their efforts. It was therefore a very clear and strong Indian message to China.

The messages of the India-Japan summit meet cast its shadow over the Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to India in mid-September. In the beginning, it was expected that China would try to placate India by offering more Chinese investments in India. However, the summit meet was not satisfactory for either side. During the visit, the issue of Chinese 'incursions' made headlines in the Indian media and both countries could not release a joint statement after the summit meet. There could be various explanations and theories about China's behaviour, but even without any Chinese 'incursions' it would not have been a successful bilateral exchange as it happened in the context of India's very vocal support to Japan. Additionally, the Indian President concluded his visit to Vietnam just before the Xi Jinping's visit to India.

In another important development, Modi made a much anticipated visit to the US in late-September. The visit was important in the context of the misunderstanding between Modi and the US authorities on the issue of his visa in the past. Modi was able to transcend this old misunderstanding and move beyond it. The visit was also important for Indian policy towards East Asia as for the first time in history, the joint declaration by the US and India mentioned the South China Sea. The US has been eager for India to play a role in East Asia for some time, and it has referred in the past to a more active role by India in the Korean

problem and through the use of terms such as 'Indo-Pacific'. However, the reference to South China Sea in the joint statement with India has been the most direct one yet, which sends a significant message to China.

In a way, it seems that India's role in East Asian politics is growing through India's alignment with Shinzo Abe's Japan and the US. It is definitely going to put pressure on China, as it would not be easy for China to overlook Japan, India and the US trilateral understanding and common approach.

It must be emphasised that taking sides between Japan and China or the US and China has probably been the easiest foreign policy choice for India. However, this would also mean that India would be sucked into a vortex of the big powers' game, which is neither a wise option for India nor India is prepared for it. A much more challenging course for Indian foreign policy would be to lead regional politics by bringing in constructive, cooperative and innovative issues and ideas and by not leaning towards any of these two rival groups. The historical, ideational and material capital of India must be invested in such a futuristic vision for Asia rather than going back to the archaic concepts of balance of power and containment.

In the last three summit meets, the new Indian government made a strong statement to China against its 'assertive' and 'expansionist' tendencies. It could be said that a strong message to China was required, which has become more 'assertive' vis-à-vis Southeast Asian countries, Japan, and to an extent, India. However, it would be more prudent for the Modi government to avoid populist and easier options which might be counter-productive for India and the region in the long-term. The success of Indian foreign policy-making towards East Asia has been its principled engagement with all possible countries in an open manner. Having an overt alliance against China might look attractive in the near future but the unfolding of its repercussions would not be beneficial for the stakeholders. Thus, it would be better for India to continue its open, balanced, principle-based and futuristic approach towards friendly and not-so-friendly countries in the East Asian region.

Modi's Visit to Japan: Gauging Inter-State Relations in Asia

1 September 2014

It is remarkable that Prime Minister Narendra Modi decided to visit Japan for his first foreign visit outside the Indian subcontinent. The visit is based on the consistently growing partnership with Japan and as well as the annual summit meet between the top leaders of India and Japan. It must be also remembered that Shinzo Abe shows extra regard for Modi, and both Modi and Abe reportedly follow each other Twitter.

The visit is an important event in the inter-State relations of Asia. It may be an over-simplification to say that both the democracies are willing to work together against the rise of a China-centric Asia. It would instead be more proper for the Indian PM to keep in mind the complexities of the issues involved.

Shinzo Abe might be happy to receive Modi as a strong and aggressive leader from India and may like to convince the India PM about his future vision for Japan and regional politics. However, it would be pertinent to note that Japan's assertive behaviour has not gone down well with other regional countries such as South Korea and China. By approaching North Korea to have negotiations on the issue of Japanese abductees, Abe has defied international pressure to isolate North Korea. India must be informed about these complexities before embarking on any common vision for Asia with Japan. Modi has taken a constructive approach towards South Asian politics and is apparently working to set a futuristic agenda for all the neighbouring countries such as in the fight against poverty, on energy, Infrastructure and other developmental issues. He has probably been trying to minimise the space for disputes in the bilateral relations of these countries, and once a positive vibe and momentum is created, the face of South Asian politics might be very different than what it is today. Unfortunately, Abe has been doing quite the opposite in the East Asia. It must be conveyed by Modi to Japan that India would like to follow its own approach and would be happy if Japan joins India (rather than India following the Japanese approach).

India shares its concerns with Japan regarding the growing assertiveness of China in the region. Modi must reassure Abe about India's commitment to Japan and the bilateral partnership. At the same time, however, the Modi must also inform Japan that to contain or counter China through military power is not appropriate. Through diplomatic and other economic means, Japan and India could create disincentives for China in the context its assertive behaviour. If Modi is able to create this balance during his visit to Japan, other regional countries such as South Korea and China would not be alarmed and it would be easier for India to deal with them in the future. A very strong statement and aggressive intent would not go down well.

The PM must be aware of the need to coordinate India's regional policy rather than having bilateral relations in isolation, which may contradict one another and create structural limitations for India's bilateral gains. While India should be able to take its bilateral relations with Japan to a new level, it must be future peace-oriented and coordinated with India's bilateral relations with other countries in the region and beyond. The growing stature of India in the region and world has made it impossible for India to keep a low profile and work on bilateralism alone. There is keen interest across the world in Modi's visit to Japan as it may become one of the indicators of Asia's inter-State relations in the future, and Modi has to keep in mind these factors.

Modi would like to have defence cooperation with Japan as both countries share some common threats. But again rather than making it country-specific, defence cooperation must be issue-specific, broad-based and open. It would be a positive if Modi is able to get Japanese consent for the civil nuclear deal, and both countries could further diversify and deepen their security ties.

The Indian PM's visit and the extensive talks on economic cooperation would bring a lot of benefit to India. Japan is one of the most important sources of foreign direct investment in India, and Japan has provided remarkable help to India's infrastructural projects. Creating an atmosphere of trust and cooperation must further accelerate the process. Modi in all probability is also going to talk with the Japanese leader about the bullet train project. He has been accompanied by a huge contingent of Indian business leaders, which indicates that he would like to place significant emphasis on economic cooperation between the two countries.

Modi has been so far successful in bringing in 'out of the box' thinking in his approach towards foreign policy, especially in South Asia. His approach appears to bring in new positive agendas for mutual cooperation rather than being caught up in old confrontations. A similar approach during his visit to Japan would be a wonderful outcome for India and also for Asian politics.

North Korea: Seeking New Friends?

4 August 2014

North Korea appears to have become increasingly desperate in its behaviour. It executed its number two leader Jang Song-thaek in December 2013, called South Korean President Park Geun-hye a 'prostitute' and the US President a 'pimp' in April 2014, characterised China as 'spineless' in July 2014, and fired around one hundred short-range missiles in the East Sea in June-July 2014. North Korea's desperate behaviour has not been able to bring any change in the US and South Korean postures but it has definitely alienated China.

South Korea's tough posture, the US policy of 'strategic patience' and the growing economic and political hardships and isolation of North Korea have been problematic for the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. North Korea had tried to come out of the crisis by being tough and uncompromising as it did in the past. Through nuclear and missile tests in early 2013 and escalation of military tensions in mid-2013, it tried to show that pressure and sanctions would not work and South Korea and the US must go back to placating North Korea. However, North Korea miscalculated not only South Korean or American responses but also Chinese in the latest round of hostilities.

It is important to underline that China provided North Korea the strategic space in which it could independently deal with the US and South Korea, and China did not either intervene in it or find it discomforting. However, it seems that North Korea went beyond this strategic space. Military tension escalated in the region when North Korea loudly opposed - both in words and actions - the South Korea-US joint military exercise in April 2014. The North Korean justification was that the US had brought its more advanced weaponry in the region as well as installed a missile defence system in Guam. North Korea-China relations became estranged and China started cooperating more substantially with the international community in putting sanctions on North Korea. The execution of Jang Song-thaek was symbolic of the growing distance between North Korea and China as he was supposed to be close to China. Rather than amending its ways, North Korea in a way challenged or warned China not to expect any compromise from it. This growing distance can be understood from the fact that the new Chinese and South Korean Presidents have been able to have two summit meets in both countries but there has been no visit by China's top leaders to North Korea.

North Korea probably wants to convey to both its rivals and friends that it would not succumb to any pressure and the only way to deal with it is engagement. It wants to send this message by resorting to the escalation of military tension and rhetoric. But it seems that the new Chinese leadership is not in agreement with this North Korean strategy. China has also been looking at the broad regional equations in which it has to deal with an assertive Japan, ambivalent US and a possible partner in South Korea.

North Korea has also been looking to inculcate new partnerships and entertained a Japanese official delegation in Pyongyang for talks on the issue of Japanese abductees in April 2013. Japan and North Korea have been meeting to discuss this issue since May 2014. North Korea has been exploring in Japan a potential partner, which might be able to lessen the international isolation and pressure. North Korea thus appears to be utilising the Japanese isolation in the region in its own favour. Since 2013, North Korea has also been trying to reach out to Russia as its relations with China have not been smooth. In May 2014, Russia wrote off US\$10 billion in loans to North Korea and there have also been a few important bilateral visits from both sides.

In an unprecedented move in July 2014, the North Korean media called for the strengthening relations with Russia on the 11th anniversary of a summit between Kim Jong-il and Vladimir Putin. In the same context, there was no official statement on China-North Korea relations in on the 33rd anniversary of its Friendship Treaty with China. It has also been reported that North Korea's trade with Russia reached up to US \$104 million in 2013 with a rise of 37.3 per cent. To further the exploration of new relations, the North Korean foreign minister is to visit Vietnam, Laos, Singapore, Indonesia and Myanmar before he attends the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) meeting in Myanmar.

However, this search for new partners would not be able to compensate for its growing distance from China. There are still expectations that not everything is lost in China-North Korea relations and it is also not easy for China to fully abandon North Korea. However, Pyongyang's overture towards Japan is going to be the key and would be most keenly watched in Beijing. If North Korea crosses the Rubicon, China will have to seriously re-think its North Korea policy.

China-South Korea: Changing Dynamics of Regional Politics

7 July 2014

Chinese President Xi Jinping's two-day visit to South Korea on 3-4 July 2014 is symbolic of a nascent but important change in East Asian political equations. For the first time, a Chinese President visited South Korea before meeting with the North Korean leader. Many observers feel that this is an important shift in Chinese policy towards the Korean peninsula. The growing Chinese exchanges with South Korea in economic and other spheres are not new, but Beijing has always maintained that this does not mean a dilution of its relations with Pyongyang, which has until now been characterised as 'a special relation'. However, it seems that the recent North Korea behaviour has annoyed China decisively.

North Korea of late appears to not be listening to Chinese suggestions and seems to be creating problems for Chinese interests in regional politics. The third nuclear test, execution of Chang Seong-thaek and several missile tests might be seen as an embarrassing situation for China; China has thus been moving closer to South Korean position. Beijing stressed a “nuclear weapons-free Korean peninsula” during the summit meet with the South Korean President Park Geun-hye in Beijing in 2013. However, he was more direct during the recent visit to Seoul and expressed that China would not like “any development of nuclear weapons on the peninsula.” It is an important achievement for South Korea, which wanted China to be more direct in opposing the North Korean nuclear programme.

Xi Jinping has seemingly been trying to use the growing gap between the US and South Korea over the aggressive Japanese postures on territorial, history and security issues. The US has not been keen to stop Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s revisionist behaviour. China perceives it an important opportunity to reach out to South Korea, who is an important partner in the US-Japan-South Korea security partnership. The Chinese attempt to use South Korean discontent with the US over conceding to the aggressive Japanese postures would not be easy and immediate but in the long-term it may bring very important changes in the regional political equations. Xi Jinping’s visit to Seoul has challenged US foreign policy-makers to reconsider their generous concessions to Japan.

Xi Jinping’s visit also has to do with the growing assertiveness of Japan. China is aware that South Korea has been equally worried about the Japanese claim over the Dokdo/Takeshima Islands, the review of Kano’s statement, insensitive statements on the comfort women issue, and regular visits to Yasukuni shrine by Japanese leaders. One day before Xi Jinping’s visit to Seoul, Japan reinterpreted its constitutional provision and expressed that it has every right to keep defence forces. China is also interested in using South Korean anger against Japan for deciding to conduct a joint investigation with North Korea on the Japanese abductees who were abducted by North Korea in the late 1970s. Japan has relaxed some sanctions on North Korea in the context of this joint investigation.

Xi Jinping has been very subtle in his approach to reach out to South Korea. He has been trying to placate South Korea by indicating to Seoul that the US gives more priority to its alliance with Japan than South Korea. He is also sending a clear signal to South Korea that if Seoul reconsiders its alliance with the US, China is also ready to re-think its relations with North Korea. However, China is aware that South Korean connections with the US and Japan are strong and it would not be easy or straight forward for South Korea to change sides from the US to China. In the immediate future, China would be satisfied if South Korea takes up more autonomous foreign policy-making. Xi Jinping has been working to create a broader plan for an alternate Asian economic and security architecture in which he emphasises the notion of ‘Asia for Asians’, and any change in South Korean policy towards autonomy would be a welcome development for China.

From the South Korean perspective as well, its relationship with China is quite delicate. Economic cooperation between the two countries has been indispensable for Seoul. Furthermore, its most reliable partner (the US) is not doing enough to address its concern vis-à-vis Japan. There is a sense of betrayal in South Korea towards the recent American generosity towards Shinzo Abe. South Korea therefore wants to express its displeasure by dealing more closely with China. Moreover, South Korea sees a golden opportunity to break the close relations between China and North Korea, which would make North Korean survival more problematic. However, Seoul is still not prepared to give up its alliance with the US and the warm welcome to the Chinese President in Seoul is basically a political game to send messages to the US and Japan.

In brief, a chessboard in East Asian politics have been laid out on which both South Korea and China have been moving carefully, with the aware that it would be too early to trust each other at this point of time. However, the future course of East Asian relations would depend on how the US and Japan respond to these moves.

Looking Northeast: A Foreign Policy Agenda for the New Government

2 June 2014

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi started his term with a bold and positive move to invite all the SAARC leaders to his inaugural ceremony. These are positive vibes, and it would be great if the new government is able to achieve a breakthrough in the problematic quagmire of South Asia. Equally important would be the Modi administration's approach towards Northeast Asia, which includes China, Japan, South Korea and North Korea. It is interesting that Modi has not been a prisoner of the stance he took when he was in opposition and during his election campaign. He gave several sharp comments about China during his election campaign and it is good that he has shown a different outlook and approach after his inaugural.

China is also probably anxious to know more about his real position. On 29 May, Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang made a phone call to Modi to congratulate him and express China's desire to establish a robust partnership with the new government. It was an important move and Modi responded positively by bringing in civilisational links between the two countries. He mentioned the seventh century Chinese scholar Hiuen Tsang's visit to his village Vadnagar. Apart from the phone call, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is expected to visit India in the second week of June. The Chinese President Xi Jinping is also supposed to visit in the later part of 2014. The Indian approach towards China and vice versa is going to be one of the most important variables in the emerging Asian economic and security architecture.

There are many thorny bilateral issues between the two countries, however, there are also many important issues on which both countries could enrich and help each other. The opportunities for bilateral trade must definitely be articulated and widened. In addition, these bilateral relations are also important for the regional calculus. China's relations with Japan are quite bitter after the election of Shinzo Abe, and there are suggestions that China has become more assertive in regional politics in recent years. Chinese behaviour in the South China and East China Seas are quite instructive in this regard. It would be interesting to see how New Delhi takes up a stand on these bilateral and regional issues.

Modi has a strong personal fan in the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. It is reported that Abe sent a warm congratulatory note to Modi and expressed his desire to work with India. Personal relations apart, India has been able to forge a strong multifaceted partnership with Japan in recent times, and to carry forward the momentum and strengthen ties between the two countries more profoundly would not be a big challenge. However, bilateral relations between India and Japan would also have to take into account developments in Japan-China relations. It would be a challenge for the new government in India to coordinate its foreign policy towards China and Japan. India needs to bring in a constructive but restrained and careful intervention in the China-Japan rivalry and work for a multipolar, inclusive, rule-based Asian security and economic architecture. This would not be an easy task for the new government.

Japan recently concluded an agreement with North Korea for a joint investigation of the Japanese abductees, and this was seen as a Japanese step to move out of its current isolation in regional politics. Shinzo Abe's aggressive postures have not been appreciated by both China and South Korea. By reaching out to North Korea, Japan is taking a dangerous plunge, which would derail the collective sanctions put on Pyongyang because of its nuclear and missile programmes and human rights violations. The move might further distance South Korea and China from Japan, and the emerging scenario would be a big challenge for the new Indian government. India enjoys good relations with South Korea; President Park Geun-hye visited India in January 2014 to further consolidate and diversify India-South Korea cooperation. Any extra leaning towards Japan would certainly not send a positive message to South Korea.

Instead of bilateral policies, India needs to evolve a well-coordinated policy for the region. The policy also needs to take into account North Korea and its nuclear and missile programmes. India has enjoyed a low-key but sustained relationship with North Korea and there are expectations that India would play a more active and constructive role in reaching out to North Korea. During her visit to India, the South Korean President Park Geun-hye expressed her desire for an Indian role in inter-Korea relations.

India has emerged as an important player in Asia and it would be a litmus test to see how India conducts itself in Northeast Asia. India's Look East Policy has moved from phase-one to phase-two by bringing in

more issues and countries. India now needs to implement the next phase of the Look East Policy, which would introduce innovative and constructive elements in regional politics and be a boon for both India and the region.

Obama's Visit: Deciphering US' Regional Intentions

5 May 2014

The four-nation trip made by US President Barack Obama in April 2014 could be interpreted in many different ways. It was important as in October 2013, Obama was not able to participate in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit and many commentators read it as a dilution of the 'Asian pivot'. The recent visit had several objectives, and it seems that the US has been able to clearly convey most of its messages.

The first message was to China, and it conveyed that the US is not in agreement, at least at this point of time, with Xi Jinping's idea of a 'new type of great power relationship'. While the US commitment to the idea of its 'Asian pivot' could be debated, Washington seems to be serious about its commitment to its regional allies, Japan, South Korea, Philippines, and so on. Although Obama made it clear that the US did want to 'control' or 'contain' China, the message he sent across the region was loud and clear, and naturally, it created a big hue and cry in the Chinese media.

The second goal was to persuade Japan and South Korea to be more accommodating of each other. It was indeed a tough job, and the US President tried to demonstrate his full commitment to Japan while at the same time cited historical references and the issue of comfort women to soothe South Korean sentiments. He suggested that by being more 'honest' to the past, these issues could be resolved. He also said that more than the past, it is important to "also keep our eye to the future and possibilities of peace and prosperity." It was a clear message to its two closest allies that the US does not endorse their animosity and does not want to become a party to it. It would be interesting to see whether this message will be lost in the domestic politics of these two countries or will initiate a new phase in their bilateral relations.

The third message was the very inclusion of Malaysia in Obama's itinerary. Malaysia is considered to be a 'swing state' and the visit means that the US is interested in reaching out to more partners in Southeast Asia, apart from consolidating its relations with time-tested partners. However, Obama's attempt to forge a partnership with Malaysia has raised some tough questions regarding human rights and other issues. It could arguably be called the most discomfiting leg of Obama's visit. The only solace was that the itinerary was finalised and announced at least seven months in advance and China was aware that this was going to happen.

The fourth purpose of the visit was to send another resolute message to North Korea that the US is in no mood to change its tough but consistent policy of 'strategic patience', and is not ready to negotiate with a nuclear North Korea. This message was also conveyed during the Nuclear Security Summit in March 2014 in The Hague to Xi Jinping, when he proposed a renewal of the Six-Party Talks with North Korea. During Obama's visit to Seoul, there was speculation that North Korea might conduct a fourth nuclear test. However, Obama was not deterred by the shadow of a possible North Korean nuclear test and said that it would 'further isolate' North Korea and invite more 'biting sanctions'.

The fifth and most obvious message Obama gave to China during his visit was with regard to the Philippines. Although he did not name China, he said that sovereignty, territorial rights, international law, and freedom of navigation must be respected. He expressed the US' 'iron-clad' commitment to the Philippines' security, and emphasised that all disputes must be settled peacefully, and not by intimidation and force. It was a clear message to China regarding its behaviour in the South China Sea and territorial disputes with the Philippines. The US also has a defence deal with the Philippines which would bring back US troops to the country at a much larger scale.

The sixth and probably less discussed objective of the visit was canvassing for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The partnership is one of the most important economic negotiations currently

underway, one which seek to establish a free-trade regime for countries that constitute 40 per cent of the world's GDP. Most importantly, it excludes China.

Thus, Obama's visit to East Asia sent clear messages about the US' intentions to friend and foe alike. Now, the question is whether the US has the capacity to execute these intentions given the complex equations in regional politics and Chinese responses to the US' messages. It is said that clarity of intent and consistency of policy is not necessarily a merit of foreign policy in international relations, and an assessment of the visit at this point would be premature.

North Korean Peace Gestures and Inter-Korea Relations

3 March 2014

A lot has been happening in North Korean domestic politics as well as its relations with South Korea in recent months. Some of these happenings appear to indicate that there may be some improvement in the relationship between Pyongyang and Seoul. But some other events indicate that rivalry and hostility between them is not going to abate in the near future.

A day after North Korea threatened to wipe out South Korea, Kim Jong-un proposed to stop all slandering - in speech and in action - by both North Korea and South Korea, from 30 January 30 (beginning of the lunar new year). North Korea agreed to family reunions after seven years but kept postponing dates for one reason or another. The recent round of family reunions happened from 20 to 25 February. However, on 26 February, North Korea reportedly fired four missiles. These contradictory happenings pose serious challenges to our understanding about North Korean approach and intentions. North Korean peace gestures along with its contrary behaviour must be seen through a broad framework of inter-Korean rivalry.

At present, any North Korean reconciliation with South Korea will arise out of four important sources. First, North Korea may realise that the path of confrontation with South Korea is futile and their military and economic security would be better served if they cooperate with Seoul. Second, North Korea may respond to a sincere, sustained and long-term vision to co-exist as proposed by South Korea in its North Korea policy. Third, North Korea may have to address instability in its domestic political and economic domains and try to show its people that Kim Jong-un is the main driver in inter-Korean relations, which would provide legitimacy to him. Fourth, North Korea may be forced by external players, especially China, to cooperate and make peace gesture towards South Korea.

It seems that the recent North Korean peace gestures are driven not by the first two reasons, and domestic legitimacy and external pressure are the more probable reasons for its changed behaviour. Actually, North Korean survival strategy or intent towards South Korea has not changed much in these months and the execution of Jang Song-thaek means that reform and reconciliation with South Korea is not high on the North Korean agenda. Pyongyang is also sceptical about the South Korean trust politik as the policy seemingly demands trust from North Korea first and then promises to reciprocate. Thus, it is clear that North Korea has also not been responding to the South Korean trust-building process.

Basically, Pyongyang has been making peace gestures towards South Korea either to address its own domestic situation or to show the outside world, especially China, that it is positive and constructive in its rapprochement towards Seoul. The North Korean economy has been in bad shape for decades, and after another round of economic embargo following the Unha-3 rocket test in late-2012 and a third nuclear test in February 2013, economic conditions have further deteriorated. The much publicised execution of Jang Song-thaek also indicates that there are serious challenges to the political stability of the regime. By initiating a few peace gestures towards South Korea, Kim Jong-un wants to garner favourable international opinion and economic assistance. Moreover, if South Korea positively responds to North Korean gestures, it may be projected in North Korea as the result of the young leader's initiatives, thus providing him with domestic legitimacy.

The pressure of China on North Korea to abandon or minimise its provocative actions and behaviours is also significant, and has made it increasingly difficult for China to support North Korea in the context of international pressure not to do so. In March-April 2013, hostility on the Korean peninsula reached a dangerous level in the wake of a joint military exercise between South Korea and the US and almost daily power-assertions across the 38th parallel between North and South Korea. It provided an excuse to the US to bring high-tech weapons and aircraft to the region and establish a missile defence system at Guam military base. It was dangerous to Chinese interests and China has been trying to push North Korea against any such escalation in future. North Korean peace gestures could also be linked to the Chinese factor.

The contradictions in North Korean behaviour exist because of being less genuine. It wants to show its own people and the outside world that it is constructive and seeks peace with South Korea. Since the initiatives do not emanate from any fundamental shift in its perception about itself or South Korea, there is an in-built inconsistency in its behaviour. North Korea must realise that a genuine peace gesture entails more consistent rapprochement with South Korea and this would only bring positive results for its economic, political and legitimacy deficit. South Korea has also to show that its trust politik is fundamentally different from the previous South Korean administration's tough policy towards Pyongyang. It would be quite fruitful if Pyongyang makes more genuine peace gestures and Seoul responds more positively in dealing with North Korea.

Japan: Implications of Indiscriminate Assertiveness

3 February 2014

Shinzo Abe's unrelenting tough approach towards China is arguably the second most important development in recent years in East Asia after the growing military might of China. There is lots of support across the region for his policy of 'staring at China' on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands disputes, especially among those countries, which have been uncomfortable with growing 'Chinese assertiveness' in the region but unable to stop it. The US stance has also been overall supportive to the changed posture of Japan.

However, Abe's indiscriminate assertiveness, which hurts South Korea and other regional players, would be unable to achieve desired results. There are critiques of Japanese foreign policy, who point out that Japan has not been able to create trust in any of its neighboring countries such as South Korea, North Korea, Russia, and China. Thus, Japan needs to moderate its assertiveness and make it more nuanced to make it more palatable and wide-based.

The biggest problem in Shinzo Abe's approach is that it entirely disregards 'goodwill capital' of Japan, which has been accumulated in the post-World War-II period. Japan evokes a very different kind of state behaviour, which denounced use of force in resolving inter-state disputes and concentrated on welfare of people inside its own territory and beyond. The concept of official development assistance (ODA) became synonym of the Japanese economic assistance to many Asian, African and Latin American countries. Japan could and must utilize this 'capital' for creating a network of relations across the region along with economic interdependence and people-to-people contacts, which would make it costly for China or any other countries to becoming assertive. It does not mean that Japan could be complacent on its defense preparedness, however, it does need to be approached in a framework of cooperative security involving as many as possible like-minded countries of the region. Japan has been respected for its peace-constitution and enough deliberation must happen before abandoning the alternate model of Japan.

Even if, Japan decides to make a paradigm shift in its foreign policy approach, which seems to be the case under Shinzo Abe, it must be more careful in articulating it. First and foremost, it is advisable to Japan to work on its defense preparedness without too much rhetoric directed against one or other country. In 2013, Japanese defense budget was increased to Yen 4.77 trillion which was an increase first time after 2002. The increase in itself is enough to create suspicions in the minds of observers and any sharp words are further going to create mistrust in the regional countries. Probably, Japan could learn from China,

which continues augmenting its defense capabilities but keeps talking about 'peaceful rise' and 'harmonious development'.

Secondly, even if Shinzo Abe administration intends to be tough towards 'Chinese assertiveness', Japan needs to be more careful about its other neighboring countries including South Korea. In last one year of his term, South Korea-Japan relations have further deteriorated. It would not be enough to say that South Korean government has either been too much sentimental or playing the game of domestic populism. When Japanese ministers, members of parliament and Shinzo Abe himself visits Yasukuni shrine, it is well-known that South Korea would not take it easy. When, insensitive statements are given and confrontational actions are taken on the issues related to history disputes, comfort women and Dokdo/Takeshima islands disputes, it is going to affect South Korea's perception about Japan and its intentions. Rather than expecting South Korea to be more accommodative to the new posture of Japan, a more conciliatory approach must be adopted in dealing with South Korea. By using all possible channels of communication, it must be conveyed to South Korea in a credible manner that in the Japan's contest with China, Tokyo would seek cooperation from South Korea.

Thirdly, Japan also must re-emphasize that it would like to have more cooperation with the US and other democracies in the region such as South Korea, Australia and India. It would be a different paradigm for the Asian security architecture in which a multipolar, inclusive, open and rule-based structure is sought for. In case, Japan tries to counter 'Chinese assertiveness' by its own assertiveness, it might be considered no different than China. To have a different framework needs emphasis on involving all possible partners and creating regimes, institutions and structures rather than having a tit-for-tat approach.

The recent visit of Shinzo Abe to India probably could be used as the beginning for a more nuanced Japanese assertiveness in the regional politics, which would try to create network of multilateral partnerships. India, though has avoided to express any opinion on Japanese indiscriminate assertiveness, would be more comfortable if Japan tones down its rhetoric. Similarly, it would be easier for the US to keep both Japan and South Korea, two of its closest allies in the East Asia, together. The changed Japanese approach would also be in consonant with Australian foreign policy approach. Japan needs to realize that to contest with China on the turf created by China would not only be dangerous but also be an isolating exercise and it must be avoided.

China, Japan, Korea and the US: Region at Crossroads

6 January 2014

Japanese Prime Minister Shinjo Abe visited Yasukuni shrine on 26 December last year and the visit invited usual condemnations from China and South Korea. The US also reacted by saying it 'disappointing' and would lead to 'exacerbate tensions' in the region. However, Japanese posturing has been relentless and on the New Year day, Japanese Internal Affairs Minister Yoshitaka Shindo had another visit to the shrine. The tension and mistrust in East Asia has been escalating in recent years and Japan, China and North Korea have shown uncompromising intent to compete rather than concede and cooperate on the issues of mutual disagreements. China has recently declared its Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) unilaterally, which goes beyond its contest in East China Sea with Japan over Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. North Korea is also going through domestic power struggle and restructuring of equations with its closest ally China. In this problematic interstate relations in the region, the Japanese right-wing assertions in domestic politics and its impact on foreign policy has further complicated the security calculus of the region.

The East Asian region is closely connected in economic, educational and cultural spheres but there is a huge trust deficit in security arena and it poses a grave challenge for further economic exchanges and integration of the region. There are assurances that the tension among these countries would not move beyond a certain limit as economic interdependent would bring in moderation in their behaviours. However, the argument may not sustainable beyond a point. If the escalation of tension among these countries could not be checked, it may derail and disrupt their cooperation in every field.

The role of the US is considered to be important as it has leverage to pacify Japan and constructively engage China to make the region more stable. The US could also convey China to contain North Korean provocative behaviour as well as sock-observe any instability in North Korea. Washington has been trying to reach out Beijing through its diplomatic channel but there is no indication that it has been equally keen in pacifying Japan. The Japanese aggressive posturing, even if not openly appreciated by the US, has been granted silent consent by the US and it is quite unsettling for not only China but also South Korea. Japan has been cleverly silenced Washington by remaining fully committed to the US alliance and its interests in the regional politics. For example, the day after the Prime Minister Abe's visit to Yasukuni, Okinawa governor agreed to relocate the US military base at Futenma to near by Henoko. It was characterised as 'critical milestone' by the US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel. It appears that the US is more interested in its narrow national interests in the region and it does not have any serious objection with Japanese aggressive posturing. Probably, the US thinks that an assertive Japan would be a buffer against the rise of Chinese influence in the region. Many scholars relate American concession to Japan with its strategy of 'Asian pivot'. There are also speculations that probably the US does not have enough diplomatic leverage over Japan to stop its aggressive posturing and so it has decided to go along with Japanese plan of things rather than dictating its own terms.

Whatever be the reason, the complacency on the part of the US would definitely make it difficult for Washington have any credible and consequential engagement with China. China would not be satisfied by the use of words like 'disappointment' and it would definitely chart out its own course of actions, which might be detrimental for the regional security environment. The Chinese announcement to have its own ADIZ could be better understood in the light of above dynamics. Furthermore, the US conceding and accommodative behaviour vis-à-vis Japan poses a difficult question to South Korea, which is equally close ally of the US in the region. Even though, South Korea enjoys security guarantee from the US, it has to rethink about its own security equations in the neighbourhood. South Korea is challenged by a belligerent and 'unpredictable' North Korea as well as an aggressive and uncompromising Japan. Seoul tried to forge a cooperative relationship with China in variety of areas when South Korean President Park Geun-hye visited Beijing in mid-2013. Although, it does not mean that South Korea would abandon its old ally- the US, in near future but continuous Japanese aggressive posturing and insufficient American attempt to prohibit it, may force it to review its relations with the US.

Thus, the East Asian region is at a crossroad and a vicious cycle of threatening and uncompromising behaviours have been posing huge risk of conflict. No single country could be blamed for present escalations and there have been chains of actions and reactions. It would be pertinent to see how soon all the stakeholders realise that the process must be stopped collectively or it may lead to a point of no return.

Column: Maritime Matters

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India and Maritime Security: Do More

1 December 2014

Six years ago, in November 2008, a group of Pakistan-based terrorists landed at unsecured waterfronts in Mumbai, the financial capital of India, and attacked public places such as hotels, restaurants, and a railway station. Although the Indian security forces were quick to respond, the attack, popularly referred to as 26/11, exposed three significant gaps in India's maritime security apparatus: a. the porous nature of India's coastline; b. the poor surveillance of the maritime domain; and c. the lack of inter-agency coordination.

Post the 26/11 attacks, the Indian government undertook a number of proactive measures to restructure coastal security and push the defensive perimeter further away from the coast into the seas. The focus was on building national maritime domain awareness (NMDA) grid via a number of organisational, operational and technological changes. The Indian Navy has now set up the National Command Control

Communication Intelligence (NC3I) network that hosts the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC).

It connects 41 radar stations (20 Indian Navy and 31 Coast Guard) located along the coast and on the island territories, and helps collate, fuse and disseminate critical intelligence and information about 'unusual or suspicious movements and activities at sea'. There are plans for additional coastal radar stations to cover gap/shadow zones in the second phase; these are currently addressed through deployment of ships and aircraft of the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard.

The IMAC receives vital operational data from multiple sources such as the Automatic Identification System (AIS) and the long-range identification and tracking (LRIT), a satellite-based, real-time reporting mechanism for reporting the position of ships. This information is further supplemented by shore based electro-optical systems and high definition radars. Significantly, maritime domain awareness is also received through satellite data.

There are 74 AIS receivers along the Indian coast and these are capable of tracking 30,000 to 40,000 merchant ships transiting through the Indian Ocean. The AIS is mandatory for all merchant ships above 300 tons DWT and it helps monitoring agencies to keep track of shipping and detect suspicious ships. However the AIS is vulnerable to 'data manipulation'. According to a recent study, the international shipping manipulates AIS data for a number of reasons, and the trends are quite disturbing.

In the last two years, there has been 30 per cent increase in the number of ships reporting false identities. Nearly 40 per cent of the ships do not report their next port of call to prevent the commodity operators and to preclude speculation. Interestingly, there is growing tendency among merchant ships to shut down AIS, and 'go dark' and spoofing (generating false transmissions) is perhaps the most dangerous. It can potentially mislead the security forces who have to respond to such targets and on finding none, leads to loss and wastage of precious time and human effort which adversely affects operational efficiency of the maritime security forces.

At another level, small fishing boats can complicate maritime domain awareness; however, it is fair to say that they can also be the 'eyes and ears' of the security agencies. Indian authorities have undertaken a number of steps, including compulsory identity cards for fishermen; registration of over 200,000 fishing boats and tracking them through central database; security awareness programmes, etc. Furthermore, Marine Police Training Institutes have been established. They are coordinated by the apex National Committee for Strengthening Maritime and Coastal Security (NCSMCS) that is headed by the Cabinet Secretary.

The Indian government has also drawn plans to reinforce the NMDA via multilateral cooperation. It is in talks with at least 24 countries for exchanging information on shipping to ensure that the seas are safe and secure for global commerce. India has placed maritime security high on the agenda through active participation in the Indian Ocean Rim association (IORA), the Indian Ocean Naval symposium (IONS), the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) Plus. Additionally, it is in talks with other countries to institutionalise intelligence exchange among the respective security agencies.

The Indian Navy and the Coast Guard have been at the helm and have developed a sophisticated strategy that involves joint exercises, hot lines, exchange of intelligence and training with a number of navies. It will be useful to explore if the NC3I is suitably linked to the Singapore-based Information Fusion Centre (IFC) established at Changi Command and Control Centre (CC2C), which has received much acclaim as an effective MDA hub.

It is fair to argue that weak legislations can compromise maritime security. In this connection, it is important to point out that the Coastal Security Bill drafted in 2013 is yet to be tabled in the Indian Parliament. Unfortunately, the draft Piracy Bill placed before the law makers in 2012 lapsed due to priority given to other issues.

Indian Ocean and the IORA: Search and Rescue Operations

3 November 2014

The international efforts to locate the wreckage of Malaysian Airlines flight MH 370 which went missing over the southern Indian Ocean nearly seven months ago have continued unabated. Till such time the debris and the black box is located, the cause of the accident will remain a mystery; but the unfortunate incident brought to fore the challenges posed by the underwater domain and also the national, regional and global limitations of search and rescue (SAR). Post the MH 370 tragedy, a number of conferences, workshops and symposia have highlighted the gaps in SAR in the Indian Ocean and the issue has been high on the national agenda as also in multilateral organisations.

The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), a pan-Indian Ocean multilateral organisation, has highlighted the need for regional efforts to build SAR capacity and capability. The Perth Communiqué in October 2014 listed a number of maritime security issues, such as sea lane security, terrorism and piracy that require the attention of the member states, and has advocated enhanced cooperation. Significantly, the Communiqué highlights the need for 'greater coordination and cooperation among search and rescue services in the Indian Ocean region'. The document also makes reference to the IORA's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Search and Rescue to address this challenge and build capacity to respond to maritime and aviation related incidents. Australia, Comoros, Seychelles, Singapore and South Africa signed a MoU on SAR cooperation and Australia announced a \$ 2.6 million fund to support Sri Lanka, Mauritius and the Maldives – three countries bordering its SAR region – for building capacities to respond to SAR incidents.

In the Indian Ocean, each coastal state is allocated a Search and Rescue Region (SRR) and they have set up national systems and arrangements such as Rescue Co-ordination Centres (RCC) and Rescue Sub-Centres (RSC), SAR facilities and communications in the area, including detailed plans for conducting SAR operations. The Indian Ocean is also divided into a number of sea spaces called NAVAREAS (VII- South Africa; VIII S-Mauritius; VIII N- India; XI-Pakistan; and X-Australia). These are administered by the coordinator country that is responsible for providing vital navigation warnings, including weather data.

A number of international conventions on SAR such as the 1974 Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), 1979 International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR), 1982 LoS Convention, and the International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (IAMSAR) have been adopted by member states.

Similarly, there are regional agreements that support national commitments to develop and render SAR. For instance, the ASEAN countries have adopted the 1992 ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea which urges states to explore cooperation in the South China Sea for SAR operations. The 2002 Code of Conduct notes that "pending a comprehensive and durable settlement of the disputes, the Parties may explore or undertake cooperative activities such as search and rescue operation;" and the ADMM Plus encourages practical cooperation for maritime security and HADR.

The IORA initiative can potentially transform the Indian Ocean regional SAR response capabilities. At the core of such initiative would be capacity-building through technology and training. A successful SAR operation is dependent on surveillance assets such as ships, aircraft, satellites and underwater systems. It is important to mention that most Indian Ocean littorals lack surveillance assets and proper equipment to conduct SAR operations, and only a few can undertake deep sea rescue. Similarly, training and enhanced planning is critical for SAR. It involves detailed organisational structures and strategies for mobilisation of the SAR resources for a quick response.

The IORA initiative is a welcome development given that the Indian Ocean witnesses a number of natural occurrences such as cyclones and tsunamis, dense shipping and enormous fishing activity. Also, its turbid and opaque waters make underwater operations complex, resulting in immense challenges for SAR agencies.

The Indian Ocean cooperative multilateral arrangements include the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). The 2014 Perth Communiqué encourages a dialogue between IORA and IONS. It can be argued that if IORA is a politico-diplomatic arrangement for the regional states to formulate multilateral agenda and policy, the IONS is a tool for executing national commitment to IORA. In that context, the IONS charter of business, among other issues, is on 'concept-development and associated table-top and/or real-world exercises' on SAR including submarine rescue merit attention and further development.

It would be in fitness of things that IONS goes beyond dialogues, conferences and workshops to practical exercises at regional/sub-regional levels to respond to maritime insecurities in the Indian Ocean and develop common standard operating procedures to build interoperability among the various maritime agencies to address SAR.

Maritime Terrorism: Karachi as a Staging Point

6 October 2014

The recent attempt by the Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), the new wing of the Al Qaeda, to take control of PNS Zulfiqar, a Pakistan Navy frigate berthed in Karachi harbour and use it to attack US Navy warships has showcased the continued vulnerability of naval platforms to terrorists. The purported plan was to take control of the frigate and use other militants who would embark the ship by boat and stay onboard as 'stowaways' and sail out. When on the high seas, the ship would 'get close to the U.S. ships.....and then turn the shipboard weapon systems on the Americans.'

The unsuccessful AQIS raid left 10 terrorist dead including a former Pakistan Navy officer Awais Jakhrani, who is reported to have had links with Jihadi elements. Further interrogations have led to the arrest of three other Pakistan Navy personnel in Quetta in Baluchistan who were attempting to escape to Afghanistan.

The attack exposed chinks in Pakistan's naval defences particularly strategic infrastructure which host millions of dollars' worth of naval hardware such as ships, submarines and dockyards. It is important to mention that this is not the first time that terrorist groups have managed to penetrate Pakistan's naval defences. In the past there have been at least two other attacks on highly sensitive naval platforms and on foreign naval personnel. In 2002, 14 persons including 11 French naval engineers working on the submarine project were killed and 23 others were injured when an unidentified man blew himself up with his car after ramming it into a 46-seater Pakistan Navy bus outside the Karachi Sheraton Hotel.

The second attack was on Pakistan's naval air base Mehran and was the handiwork of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a coalition of militant groups based in the tribal areas of northwestern Pakistan. As many as 15 attackers from the 'Brigade 313' of the Al Qaeda-Harakat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami group led by Ilyas Kashmiri, took part in the operation which left 18 naval personnel killed, 16 wounded and two US built P-3C Orion maritime surveillance aircraft destroyed. Significantly, the attackers had good knowledge of the naval base including security arrangements, exit and entry points, and the details of the hangers and aircraft.

These attacks showcase that Karachi is a staging point for maritime terrorism particularly for those groups who have taken a liking for naval targets. In fact, Karachi has been labeled as the 'terror capital' and is a paradise for terrorists, gunrunners, and drug smugglers. The city is rife with ethnic strife and home to crime syndicates particularly Dawood Ibrahim who is wanted in India for a number of crimes including the 1993 Mumbai blasts. The city is also known for the 'point of departure' for the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks by the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) who sailed from Karachi on three boats and later hijacked the Kuber an Indian fishing off Porbandar, on the Gujarat coast and landed on unsecured waterfronts in south Mumbai.

Perhaps the most discomfiting issue of the attacks is that Jihadi groups have dared the Pakistan Navy and caused enormous damage to its reputation, morale and material. They have penetrated the rank and file of the Pakistan Navy and the attacks on PNS Mehran and PNS Zulfiqar were planned and executed

with the help of naval personnel. Referring to the PNS Zulfiqar attack, Pakistan Defence Minister Khawaja Asif made a statement in the Parliament that the attack could not have taken place “Without assistance from inside, these people could not have breached security,” The entry of Jihadi elements is sure to cause suspicion among the other multinational partners with whom the Pakistan Navy works closely, particularly the United States. It is believed that some elements in the Pakistan Navy were upset with the US its raid deep into Pakistan which led to the killing of Osama bin Laden.

The above attacks also have a bearing on the safety and security of Pakistan’s nuclear installations. In the absence of a nuclear submarine, the Pakistan Navy has drawn plans to build a rudimentary sea-leg of the nuclear triad with ships and conventional AIP-submarines fitted with nuclear weapons. Any attempt to attack or hijack these platforms and use them as ‘bargain chip’ for any Jihadi agenda would cause grave damage to global security.

However, it is fair to say that the Pakistan Navy is a responsible force and has taken part in a number of multinational operations in the Arabian Sea-Gulf of Aden fighting pirates and terrorists under the US led multinational coalition force TF-151. It has also been the force commander of the coalition forces during these operations and its professionalism has received accolades. The Pakistan naval authorities would have to sanitize the force and rebuild its image of a highly professional fighting force free of radical elements and jihadi thought with a strong commitment to serve national interests and Pakistan’s international commitments to ensure order at sea.

Maritime Silk Road: Can India Leverage It?

1 September 2014

It was the Maldives’s turn to receive a sermon on the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) from China. Chinese President Xi Jinping invited Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen to participate in the 21st Century MSR, expand cooperation in tourism, trade and infrastructure, and enhance maritime cooperation. Apparently Yameen assured Xi that his country would “respond to the Chinese initiative.” Ali Hameed, former vice foreign minister of the Maldives, too had stated that the MSR was of interest to the Maldives. Earlier, Xi had approached Sri Lanka to consider the MSR, and Colombo indicated that it would actively examine the proposal. The MSR was also raised during Indian Vice President Hamid Ansari’s visit to China a few months ago.

Unlike in Sri Lanka and the Maldives, the MSR has sent the Indian strategic community into a tizzy. A number of articles, commentaries, Op Eds, discussions and sound bites have concluded that the MSR is nothing but a Chinese ploy to get a naval ‘foothold’ in the Indian Ocean and reflects China’s creeping influence in the region. These reactions are quite natural given that China has aggressively pursued the agenda of building maritime infrastructure in friendly countries such as Pakistan (Gwadar), Sri Lanka (Hambantota) and now the Maldives – that are seen as bases/facilities to support People’s Liberation Army Navy’s future operations in the Indian Ocean and also the Chinese attempt to ‘encircle’ India.

However, it will be useful to examine the MSR through the prism of maritime infrastructure development and explore if India can leverage the MSR to its advantage. China has developed a sophisticated concept of marine economy that has been facilitated by its long coastline. Nearly 40 per cent of the Chinese population, 5 per cent of cities, 70 per cent of GDP, 84 per cent of direct foreign investment and export products are generated within 200 km of coast. In 1998, the Chinese government published a White Paper on marine economy which identified twenty different sectors for the development of the national economy. The China Ocean Information Center announced that the marine output in 2013 grew 7.6 per cent year on year to 5.43 trillion Yuan (\$ 876 billion) accounting for 9.5 per cent of the national economy. In essence, the coastal provinces have contributed substantially to the overall national strength in terms of economic growth and play an important role in developing an export-oriented economy.

Today, China figures among the top countries in shipbuilding, ports (particularly container cargo), shipping, development of offshore resources, inland waterways, marine leisure tourism, and not to forget it is one of the top suppliers of human resources who are employed by international shipping companies.

China's shipbuilding capacity is notable and is supported by plentiful of cheap labour and domestic ancillary industry which is endowed with exceptional engineering skills. Seven of the top ten global container ports are in China and the Chinese shipping fleet of 6,427 vessels ranks second behind Japan with 8,357 ships. Similar successes are seen in China's fisheries production which is projected to reach about 69 metric tonnes by 2022 and it will continue to be top world exporter with 10 metric tonnes by 2022. Likewise, China ranked third as a tourist destination in 2012. The coastal regions are dotted with marinas, water sport parks and beach resorts and Sanya, Qingdao and Xiamen are home to the growing yacht and luxury boating industry.

These capabilities have been built over the past few decades and has placed China among the major maritime powers of the world and top Asian maritime powers – beating both Japan and South Korea. China is leveraging these capabilities and offering to develop maritime infrastructure in friendly countries that are willing to accept the offer – which at times makes an attractive investment opportunity, and can help these exploit the seas to enhance economic growth, and ensure food and energy security.

There is a sea change in the maritime strategic thinking of China and India. While the former has harnessed the seas to build its power potential, the latter needs to undertake a strategic evaluation of its maritime potential. India needs to make major policy changes to develop maritime infrastructure, offshore resources and exploit these on a sustainable basis. Although India is pursuing the path of building a modern three-dimensional navy with nuclear submarines, a new appreciation of the multifaceted maritime economic activity needs New Delhi's attention.

India lacks maritime infrastructure and technology to exploit offshore marine organic, mineral and hydrocarbon resources that are critical to ensure sustained economic growth – which is high on the current government's agenda. It would therefore be prudent to understand the MSR through the prism of an opportunity.

BRICS: The Oceanic Connections

4 August 2014

At the 6th summit at Fortaleza in Brazil, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries announced a seed capital of US\$50 billion and US\$100 billion Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) for the New Development Bank which would support infrastructure and development projects of the developing world. This has attracted international attention and has been labelled as an attempt by the 'emerging economies' to challenge the well-established global financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) which are 'controlled' by the developed world.

These emerging economies are coastal states and the constants of geography endow them with enormous economic muscle. The Exclusive Economic Zones provide them with enormous quantities of living and non-living resources and the long coastlines are dotted with major ports. They have invested enormous capital to build maritime infrastructure and some of them are keen to support global projects such as the Maritime Silk Route mooted by China and the development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) through the Arctic by Russia. In essence, the BRICS countries are highly dependent on the seas and are connected with each other through the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian and the Arctic Oceans over which more than 90 per cent of global trade by volume is transported.

Maritime security has been high on the agenda of the BRICS nations and the respective leaders have supported cooperative security structures based on the belief that the benefits of cooperation must be enjoyed by the whole maritime community. Significantly, four of the five BRICS countries have been actively engaged in counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. They have worked closely to support UN resolutions and cooperated with other nations at bilateral and multilateral levels to fight piracy. However, they have not explored the possibility of operating under the BRICS banner. This does not preclude them from conceptualising programmes and exercises to respond to myriad maritime asymmetric threats and challenges faced by the international community. It will be useful to mention that

India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) are already engaged in trilateral maritime cooperation and have held exercises to address issues relating to maritime security. Such an arrangement can also be explored for the BRICS nations.

Geographically, the BRICS countries are located in different continents, yet have common interests in the Polar Regions i.e. the Arctic and the Antarctic. Till very recently, these nations had focused on scientific studies and established research stations in the Polar Regions. They have now expanded their interests to include resources and trade through the NSR. Among these, Russia is an Arctic country and climate-induced changes in the region directly affect it. Its other interests include routes through the Arctic which are navigable during summer months and offshore living and non-living resources particularly oil and gas which can now be exploited. China and India too have interests in the Arctic and have recently been inducted into the Arctic Council. Both countries have set up research stations to study climate, weather, geology and atmospheric sciences and are looking for opportunities to exploit the resources in the region. Brazil and South Africa have interests in Antarctica and send scientific expeditions to the region. Given the transnational and transoceanic nature of the impact of changes in the Polar Regions, BRICS countries are important stakeholders in any discourse, development and policy formulation for the Arctic and Antarctica. The BRICS countries are parties to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) and could develop common research programmes for the Polar Regions, undertake joint scientific expeditions, and share data.

One of the significant maritime projects currently under development by the BRICS countries involves the fiber optic cable from the Pacific to the Atlantic through the Indian Ocean. This 34,000 km long and 12.8 terabit capacity network, the third longest underwater cable in the world, connects Vladivostok in Russia, Shantou in China, Chennai in India, Cape Town in South Africa and Fortaleza in Brazil. This will help the BRICS to develop an exclusive and secure intranet and transact critical financial and security data. Apparently, the cable is meant to circumvent attempts to eavesdrop on the digital data sent through networks owned by IT companies which are alleged to have supplied information/records to the National Security Agency (NSA) of the US. It is important to mention that underwater cables are not free from the dangers of data interception and theft and the US possesses capabilities to undertake such covert operations.

In essence, the maritime domain offers the BRICS countries opportunities to develop common understanding on a host of issues that range from sustainable resource development, trade, safety and security of sea lanes, and ocean governance. These issues can potentially foster mutual trust and cooperation among the BRICS partners and contribute to global security.

India-EU: Exploring Maritime Convergences

7 July 2014

The much awaited European Union Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) was approved last month by the General Affairs Council of the European Union (EU). The document builds on the European Commission's Joint Communication, titled 'for an open and secure global maritime domain: elements for a European Union maritime security strategy', and is a link between the Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP) and the European Security Strategy (ESS). This paves the way for the 28 nations of the EU to identify and undertake concrete actions and projects to enhance the EU's maritime security.

To implement the strategy, a rolling action plan is expected to be in place by the end of 2014 – that will focus on pan-Europe maritime domain awareness, exchange of information among the EU member states, navies, civil and marine authorities; addresses issues of technology development, common training; and multinational research programmes.

In its geographic scope, the EUMSS covers the European sea basins (the Mediterranean, Baltic Sea, Black Sea, North Sea, Arctic waters, the Atlantic Ocean) and as far beyond as Asia, Africa and the Americas – thus giving it both an internal and external dimensions. The strategy aims to address a number of asymmetric threats and challenges, at home and overseas, that impact the freedom of navigation at sea.

These include piracy and armed robbery, maritime terrorism, trans-national organised crimes such as drug smuggling, gun-running, human trafficking, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, security of maritime infrastructure, cyber warfare and environmental risks.

The EUMSS action plan will also have to address the issue of material and human resources. This is likely to pose a major challenge for the EU since some member states have scaled down their defence spending resulting in significant reduction in inventories of the respective naval and maritime forces. Although France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, and the UK are major naval powers, possess significant capabilities, and are forward-deployed across the globe, there are others who can barely manage to protect their national waters.

One of the significant aspects of the EUMSS is maritime multilateralism. The strategy acknowledges that modern day maritime threats and challenges are complex and some of these may require 'international response' that would necessitate engagements with international partners and participation in regional and global forums. In that context, EU's engagement in the Indian Ocean through the EU Naval Force in Operation Atlanta in the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Somalia to counter piracy is significant. EU naval and air assets work closely with the US-led Task Force 150, NATO, and other Asian navies to fight piracy.

The EUMSS also notes that sea lanes between Asia and Europe are of critical importance to the EU. A huge proportion of EU commercial traffic passes through Asian waters and according to an assessment, the volume of trade is expected to increase by 121 per cent between 2006 and 2016. Therefore, the Indian Ocean is strategically important to the EU's economic vitality.

Among the Indian Ocean states, India is a major regional power with whom the EU signed a strategic partnership in 2004. The India-EU Strategic Partnership Joint Action Plans (2005 and 2008) offer the framework for dialogue and cooperation in maritime security domains such as counter-terrorism, organised crime, piracy, counter drug and illegal arms trafficking, cyber-terrorism, and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems.

The level of cooperation between India and the EU in the ongoing counter-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia is noteworthy and is a good example of a broader multilateral framework. It can be a model for future India-EU maritime cooperation under the EUMSS and can be leveraged in times of crisis. At the tactical level, interoperability will be essential for developing a common doctrine and establishing standard operating procedures for conducting operations with EU navies. This would not be a major problem given that the Indian Navy conducts naval exercises with a number of EU navies at a bilateral level; for instance, the Varuna series with the French Navy and the Konkan series with the British Royal Navy. These exercises have become more sophisticated in content and both sides field a number of advanced platforms including aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines. Besides the Spanish Navy and the Italian Navy, several other European navies have engaged in passage exercises with the Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean and Atlantic waters. Capacity building, particularly of the smaller states of the Indian Ocean Region such as Mauritius, Seychelles, the Maldives and Madagascar can be a substantive agenda for cooperation between India and the EU.

Finally, the EUMSS offers a number of opportunities for India and the EU to identify issues of cooperation and build synergies under its aegis to address complex maritime threats and challenges in the Indian Ocean.

Indian Ocean Navies: Lessons from the Pacific

2 June 2014

The Chinese naval base at Qingdao in Shandong Province was buzzing with naval activity a few weeks ago. Two significant events – International Fleet Review (IFR) to celebrate the 65th anniversary of China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and the 14th Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), a multilateral forum of western Pacific navies – had been planned. The former was cancelled due to PLAN's engagement in southern Indian Ocean for search and rescue operations of the ill-fated Malaysian Airlines

Flight MH 370, and the latter brought together naval delegates from twenty member-countries and three observers: Bangladesh, India and Mexico.

An important issue for discussion at the 14th WPNS was the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES), which seeks an agreement on procedures for 'conduct at sea' during un-alerted meetings/sightings between warships of member countries. The usefulness of the CUES was overwhelming, and was endorsed by the member navies, including China.

This development offers an opportunity for the navies in the Indian Ocean to explore a similar agreement. Before attempting that, it is important to raise at least two important questions: are there many flashpoints in the Indian Ocean? Do the navies in the Indian Ocean meet frequently at sea and require CUES? As regards the first question, it is fair to say that there are a few 'hot spots' in the Indian Ocean but these are limited to areas such as the Persian Gulf and the northern Arabian Sea.

As far as the second question is concerned, a number of regional and extra-regional powers have forward-deployed their navies in the Indian Ocean. These operate either independently (such as those of China, India, Iran, and Russia) or as part of various task forces such as the TF 150, TF 151, EUNAVFOR and the NATO in support of counter piracy operations, 'war on terror', treaty agreements, and other national strategic agendas.

In the past, there have been a number of military/naval accidents involving warships, submarines and even air crashes in the Persian Gulf and the northern Arabian Sea between the regional and extra-regional navies. Some of these have escalated into saber-rattling and politico-diplomatic stand-offs.

In the Persian Gulf, regional countries have not established the Incidents at Sea Agreement (INCSEA) and there have been instances when the powerful Iranian Navy has challenged its smaller neighbours. As far as extra-regional navies are concerned, the Iranian Navy has confronted the US Navy by conducting high speed naval maneuvers and missile firings, and has used drones to shadow US naval assets. In 2013, the Iranian Air Force shadowed a U.S. Predator drone over the Gulf of Oman but no shots were fired. However, in 2012, Iran fired at the U.S. Predator drone flying close to Iranian coast but without damage to the platform. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy has been quite active and in 2004 and 2007, it captured British Royal Navy sailors and marines in the disputed waters off the coast between Iraq and Iran.

Unlike the Persian Gulf, India and Pakistan have signed the INCSEA; and yet there have been several instances of buzzing and formatting by naval aircraft, shadowing and near-collision between the warships of the two navies. In one instance, there was a fatal incident involving the Pakistan Navy's Atlantique aircraft which was shot down by the Indian Air Force.

The Indian Ocean countries have established the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) which draws liberally from the WPNS. In fact it is a mirror image of its counterpart in the western Pacific Ocean. The IONS was started in 2008 at India's initiative and the chairmanship is rotated between four generic 'sub-regions' i.e. UAE (2010), South Africa (2012), Australia (2014), and the next Chair would be a South Asian country.

In their deliberations and discussions, the IONS member-navies have attempted to address common non-traditional maritime security threats and challenges such as piracy, terrorism, drug smuggling and gun-running, but have shied away from discussing hard security issues such as competitive naval modernisation, clandestine operations by underwater platforms, snooping and buzzing by aircraft etc. A discussion on measures to mitigate risks due to close encounters at sea between maritime forces has not been on the agenda. Furthermore, there is no dialogue between the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the IONS; and the two institutions appear to be working in silos.

The Indian Ocean is buzzing with naval activity and the CUES can be a potential issue of interest among the Indian Ocean navies. The key objective of the CUES in the Indian Ocean would also need to involve

extra-regional powers who should be willing to adopt regional guidelines to prevent incidents at sea, including unwarranted escalation and sabre-rattling. This would add to stability in the Indian Ocean and can be an agenda for confidence building measures among the Indian Ocean and the non-Indian Ocean naval powers.

Search and Rescue at Sea: Challenges and Chinese Capabilities

7 April 2014

The international search and rescue effort to locate the voice and data recorder referred as the 'black box', and debris of the Malaysian Airlines MH 370 have continued relentlessly for nearly four weeks now. The satellite data provided by the British company and inputs from the US Transportation Safety Board and the UK Air Accidents Investigation Branch indicated that MH 370 was last known to have been somewhere in the Indian Ocean. This led the Malaysian Prime Minister to announce that 'MH 370 ended in the southern Indian Ocean'.

Soon after the announcement of the disappearance of the MH 370, nearly two dozen countries dispatched their naval and coast guard ships and aircraft to South China Sea to locate the aircraft. Currently, 14 aircraft, nearly a dozen ships and one nuclear submarine from Australia, China, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, South Korea, United Kingdom and the United States are deployed in the southern Indian Ocean for air-sea search and are scouring nearly 223,000 square nautical miles to locate the debris and the 'black box' of the aircraft.

The search and rescue aircraft are staged from Perth in Australia and according to the Australian navy chief, "We are not searching for a needle in a haystack but still trying to define where the haystack is." It is also important to point out that the southern Indian Ocean is a very inhospitable and experiences bad weather, poor visibility, etc. The sailors refer to it as the 'Roaring Forties'

It was quite natural for China to dispatch its naval and maritime assets for search and rescue since majority of the 217 passengers onboard the MH 370 were Chinese. Soon after the incident, China deployed 14 ships, six marine police ships, and two aircraft in the South China Sea. This included destroyer Haikou, amphibious landing ship Jinggangshan which has a big flight deck and is capable of carrying several helicopters, and the amphibious assault ship Kunlunshan.

Currently, there are seven Chinese ships deployed west of Perth in the Southern Indian Ocean. The Jinggangshan has been on deployment for over three weeks now and has clocked over 7,500 nautical miles. The other ships of the PLA Navy include Dong Hai Jiu, China's largest patrol ship Hai Xun and Nan Hai Jiu. The PLA Navy has also redeployed its Task Force 525 from the Gulf of Aden to south of Australia's Christmas Island. Meanwhile, China has marshaled the services of its icebreaker Xue Long (Snow Dragon), which was in the Antarctica a few months ago and was in the news for the rescue of the Russian icebreaker Akademik Shokalskiy, is operating in the southern Indian Ocean.

As far as air and space assets are concerned, two Chinese IL-76 planes are deployed from Perth and they carry out regular air searches. Further, a number of Chinese satellites have supported search operations and Gaofen-1 has beamed high-resolution images that have been 'valuable and helpful in narrowing down the search area'.

Although the search and rescue operations have showcased China's maritime capability, it has also exposed several limitations. Does China lacks technology to carry out deep sea underwater operations? Only a few Chinese ships possess proper equipment and can conduct deep sea rescue. There is limited 'sea-probing equipment and telecommunications' available with the PLA Navy. Likewise, the IL-76 is a transport plane and lacks necessary equipment to conduct sub-surface operations. Also, Chinese satellites did not receive any signals from MH 370 unlike the western satellites. Interestingly, it has been noted that the Chinese media relied on Western sources and shared broken news with the Chinese public and for that China 'urgently needs to boost its international soft power'.

The tragic loss of MH 370 is a humanitarian issue and precious lives have been lost. Countries have set aside rivalries and differences and joined international efforts to search the missing plane. For instance, Vietnam allowed two PLA Navy ships to enter its waters and conduct search and rescue operations. This is a great gesture from Vietnam with whom China has consistently adopted an assertive stance. Likewise, the US and the historical foe Japan have set aside the diplomatic and military sensitivities, and are cooperating with the Chinese for rescue operations.

It is hoped that the unfortunate MH 370 incident would pave the way for future cooperation among the Asia Pacific countries that would be critically required to address similar challenges arising from natural calamities and disasters. Also, saber rattling by China against the claimants over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea may prove to be counterproductive; after all there is lot more beyond nationalism and sovereignty.

Increasing Maritime Competition: IORA, IONS, Milan and the Indian Ocean Networks

3 March 2014

The Indian Ocean rim countries have establishment a number of multilateral maritime mechanisms to address non-traditional security threats and challenges confronting the region. The Indian Ocean Rim-Association of Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), rechristened as Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), is the only pan Indian Ocean economic grouping and brings together countries straddling three continents i.e. Africa, Asia and Australia. In recent times it has begun to address maritime security issues.

The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) is a 35-member Indian Ocean security apparatus which facilitates exchange of views among the naval professionals to evolve common understanding of maritime security issues in the region. Likewise, Milan (confluence) is a gathering of navies from India's extended neighbourhood of Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand that aims to develop cooperative mechanisms. The 2014 Milan at Port Blair in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal was significant from the perspective that 17 navies participated including two from Africa (Kenya and Tanzania), three Indian Ocean island nations (Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles) and the navies of Philippines and Cambodia made their debut.

While IORA, IONS and Milan are successful models of maritime cooperation in their own right, they have shied from addressing hard security issues which appear in two forms; first, there is a gradual accretion of naval power by the Indian Ocean littorals; and second the continued presence of extra regional naval powers that are forward deployed in the Indian Ocean to support national strategic and economic interests. In essence, the Indian Ocean region emerges as an arena of cooperation and competition.

Among the Indian Ocean littorals, with over 140 vessels, the Indian Navy is the most powerful and its order of battle includes aircraft carriers, submarines, expeditionary platforms, long range maritime surveillance aircraft and these are supported by a sophisticated network centric capability including a dedicated military satellite. Like India, Australia is an important Indian Ocean power and is building its combat capabilities to include new submarines, air defence destroyers, fighter jets, and long range maritime patrol aircraft, etc. France has rejected the notion that it is an extra regional power in the Indian Ocean and its navy is forward deployed at Mayotte, Le Reunion, Djibouti and Abu Dhabi. Iran is an acknowledged regional military power in the Arabian Gulf and in recent times it has made forays deep into the Indian Ocean. Similarly, the Pakistan navy has an impressive array of air, surface and sub-surface capabilities, and has emerged into a powerful force.

Among the extra regional powers, the United States is the predominant military power in the Indian Ocean region and has several port access and basing agreements with Australia, Bahrain, India, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Thailand, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Yemen etc. The US Navy has been the primary component of projecting US military power in the Indian Ocean. The British Royal Navy is forward deployed in the Indian Ocean in support of the US led operations and on account of the 1971 Five Powers Defence Arrangement (FPDA). The European Union is a new entrant

in the Indian Ocean security dynamics and Operation Atlanta in the Gulf of Aden off Somalia to counter piracy which is its first ever naval operation.

Among the Asian powers, China's engagements in the Indian Ocean is through its naval task force (CTF 525) and since 2008, it has deployed 25 warships in 10 groups. Japan is another major Asian power which has forward deployed its maritime and air forces in the Indian Ocean that operate out of its military facilities in Djibouti. Russia too is interested in the security dynamics of the Indian Ocean and the Russian navy's show of 'flag' and 'presence' in the Indian Ocean reflects its ambition to engage in distant water operations. Likewise, the NATO has keenly observed the security dynamics in the Indian Ocean.

Although the Indian Ocean strategic milieu offers immense opportunities for maritime cooperation, the naval buildup by regional countries and the forward presence by extra regional powers showcase competitive dynamics. The US is the strategic anchor of the region and its presence is perceived both as coercive and also as a security provider. Interestingly, some regional countries have created legitimate space for the US naval presence in the Indian Ocean to correct security imbalances, challenge the hegemony of the dominant power and ensure regional stability. The US Navy conducts joint naval exercises and shares intelligence which assures the alliance partners of its political and diplomatic commitments. However, for some, the US is perceived as hegemonic reminiscent of the colonial period and adds to insecurity. Under the circumstances, it is important for IORA, IONS and Milan to also explore confidence building measures to preclude unwarranted naval standoffs.

China in the Indian Ocean: Deep Sea Forays

3 February 2014

China's maritime ambitions are expanding and it is making forays into the deep seas beyond its waters. The State Oceanic Administration (SOA) has drawn plans to build scientific research vessels and mother ships for submersibles. Further, the scientific agenda for 2014 includes the 30th scientific expedition to Antarctica and 6th expedition to the Arctic. China will also dispatch its research vessels to the northwest Pacific to monitor radioactivity in international waters and its foray into the Indian Ocean would involve seabed resource assessment including the deployment of the 22-ton Jiaolong, China's first indigenously built manned deep-sea submersible.

China's scientific urge had driven its attention to seabed exploration. In the 1970s, it actively participated in the UN led discussions on seabed resource exploitation regime. At that time it did not possess technological capability to exploit seabed resources. In the 1980s, it dispatched ships to undertake hydrographic surveys of the seabed. On 5 March 1991, China registered with the UN as a Pioneer Investor of deep seabed exploitation and was awarded 300,000 square kilometers in the Clarion-Clipperton area in the Pacific Ocean. Soon thereafter, China Ocean Mineral Resources R & D Association (COMRA), the nodal agency for seabed exploration and exploitation of resources was established. In 2001, China obtained mining rights for poly-metallic nodule and in 2002, poly-metallic sulfide deposits in the Southwestern Indian Ocean. In 2011, COMRA signed a 15-year exploration contract with the International Seabed Authority (ISA) that entrusted it with rights to develop ore deposit in future.

Although the Jiaolong has been built indigenously, it is useful to mention that the hull, advanced lights, cameras and manipulator arms of Jiaolong were imported and aquanauts had received training overseas. In August 2010, Jiaolong successfully positioned the Chinese flag at 3,700 meters under the sea in South China Sea and displayed China's technological prowess in deep sea operations. China also possesses an unmanned deep-sea submarine Qianlong 1 (without cable) which can dive to 6,000 meters and an unmanned submersible Hailong (with cable) that can take samples from the seabed. As early as 2005, six Chinese aquanauts (five pilots and one scientist) had undergone deep sea dive training in the US. Currently, China has eight deep-sea submersible operators including six trainees (four men and two women) being trained at State Deep Sea Base in Qingdao on a 2-year course.

China's plans to deploy the manned deep-sea submersible Jiaolong in the Indian Ocean merits attention. The primary task for Jiaolong is to gather geological data, carry out assessment of seabed resources,

record biodiversity for exploration and mining. However, China faces a number of technological challenges to develop undersea exploration and extraction systems and equipment. There are few external sources to obtain specialised equipment and a majority of the 'geophysical surveying instruments on the international market are not allowed to be sold to China' amidst fears that these highly sensitive sub-sea sensors could be used by the Chinese navy to develop underwater detection system particularly for the submarines.

It is not beyond the realm of imagination that Jiaolong can potentially monitor submarine cables which carry nearly 99 per cent of digital data and crisscross the Indian Ocean. It will be useful to mention that the undersea cables are prone to covert tapping and in the past, there have been a number of incidents when undersea cables were targeted. For instance in 1914, Great Britain dispatched a ship to cut Germany's five trans-Atlantic submarine telegraph cables, and in 1917 it eavesdropped on a German communication to the Mexican government. During the Cold War the US had undertaken tapping operation of the Soviet underwater cables and Operation Ivy Bell involved USS Halibut deployed in the Sea of Okhotsk to tap the Russian submarine communication cable between Petropavlovsk on the Kamchatka Peninsula to the Soviet Pacific Fleet headquarters at Vladivostok. The 'Five Eyes Alliance (United States, Canada, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand) is designed for eavesdropping on the network of cables which carry global phone calls and internet traffic.

Jiaolong can possibly monitor maritime and naval activity in the Indian Ocean. This fits well into China's Indian Ocean strategy where its shipping remains vulnerable to a number of asymmetric threats and challenges as also the regional navies that can disrupt the free flow of Chinese shipping from Africa and the Gulf region. Jiaolong can also monitor the US, UK, France and Indian nuclear submarine activity by trailing their radioactive signature. It is fair to argue that the deployment of the Jiaolong goes well beyond its scientific utility and supports the Chinese navy's maritime strategy.

Iran Navy: Developing Long Sea Legs

6 January 2014

Iran's suspected nuclear weapon programme, the associated economic sanctions, hardliner Iranian lawmakers' demand for uranium enrichment, and the inconclusive Geneva talks to urge Tehran to roll back its nuclear programme has attracted international attention and marked the headlines of the Middle East politico-diplomatic and security discourse in 2013. Amidst this debate, Iran also announced that it could enrich uranium to 50 per cent purity level for use in nuclear powered submarines but would limit it for now to 20 per cent purity for use in power generation.

During the last few years, Iranian naval power has grown and Tehran has unveiled new ships, submarines, UAVs, missiles etc at regular intervals aimed at deterrence and power projection. Iran's current naval order of battle is about 170 vessels and nearly 90 per cent are less than 500 tons displacement that engage in coastal/shallow water operation. These support the Iranian strategy of littoral warfare against the other Gulf navies and asymmetric strategy against the naval power of the United States and its allies that are forward deployed in the region. Interestingly, Iran has two parallel navies i.e. the regular Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) belonging to the traditional Iranian Armed forces i.e. the "Artesh," which undertakes distant water deployments and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Navy (IRGCN) which emerged after the Islamic revolution, operate closer to shores. Although the two naval arms have different role, area of operation, equipment, and operating philosophy, they complement each other.

It is noteworthy that the Iranian naval industrial complex is able to build a variety of platforms indigenously but Russia and China are known to be the major sources of technologies. Among these, the Iranian submarine fleet merits closer examination. Between 1992 and 1996 Iran commissioned three Russian origin 877 EKM Kilo-class diesel-electric submarines. In 2007, it developed the Ghadir-class midget submarines (believed to be based on North Korea's 90-ton Yogo-class submarine) which form the bulk of the underwater force. These are most difficult to detect particularly when resting on the seabed and this could be the possible tactics that the Iranian Navy could employ during hostilities. Further, given

their numbers, these could overwhelm enemy's technological superiority. Iran has often threatened to mine the Strait of Hormuz and block international shipping carrying oil and gas from the Gulf region. This had prompted the United States to deploy additional minesweeping ships.

In recent times, the IRIN has made a number of out of area deployments showcasing endurance and combat capabilities overcoming years of defensive operations in the Gulf waters. In November 2013, 'Younus', a Kilo class submarine, Alborz , Alvand class frigate and Bandar Abbas a light replenishment ship made port call to Mumbai, India and Colombo, Sri Lanka and latter's navy chief even visited the submarine.

The Iranian leadership has defined the Indian Ocean as the primary area of operation and to focus on the triangular sea space encompassing "the golden triangle of Malacca, Bab el-Mandeb and the Strait of Hormuz'. The IRIN now sails beyond this area as far as the South China Sea in the east and the Mediterranean in the west suggesting that 'sanctions against the Islamic Republic have neither hindered Iran's scientific progress nor decreased the country's military capability'. It undertakes port calls, sea training missions for cadets, and fights pirates in Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Gulf of Aden as also 'conveying the message of peace and friendship' and seeking navy cooperation.

There is also a belief that deployments towards South China Sea could be to secure Chinese military hardware shipments to Iran and an Iranian flotilla visited Zhangjiagang port in China in March 2013. Likewise, the Iranian Navy has undertaken deployments to the Red Sea and the Mediterranean and made calls at friendly ports in Sudan, Libya and Syria. Iranian naval leadership has plans to deploy the navy in the Atlantic (off the US coast) and the South Indian Ocean (Antarctica) in the future. These would certainly help the IRIN develop long sea legs.

The IRIN has regularly conducted naval exercises such as the annual joint services Velayat series and the IRGCN holds the Fajr and the Fath series of naval exercises. The IRIN also engages in bilateral naval exercises with the Azerbaijan Navy in the Caspian Sea and the Royal Oman Navy Rescue and Relief drills. However, it has no experience in multilateral operations other than participating as an observer in the Pakistan Navy's multinational exercises in Aman 07. This could be the reason that the IRIN operates independently in counter piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden where it has successfully thwarted several piracy attempts. It will be useful to see if India can engage Iran and Oman navies which could operate together to address a number of threats and challenges confronting the North Arabian Sea.
