

USI Strategic Year Book

2023

United Service Institution of India

Strategic Year Book

2023

Editor-in-Chief

Major General BK Sharma, AVSM, SM & Bar (Retd)
Director General, USI of India

Editors

Lieutenant General GS Katoch, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)

Group Captain Sharad Tewari, VM (Retd)

Dr Jyoti Yadav



(Established 1870)

United Service Institution of India
New Delhi



Vij Books

New Delhi (India)

United Service Institution of India

Strategic Year Book 2023

Published in 2023

Copyright © United Service Institution of India

The United Service Institution of India

Rao Tularam Marg,

Post Bag No. 8

Vasant Vihar P.O.,

New Delhi – 110 057

Phone (O) 91-11-2086 2316, 2086 2324

Website: www.usiofindia.org

ISBN : 978-93-95675-87-1 (Hardback)

ISBN : 978-93-95675-86-4 (ebook)

Price : ₹ 2250/-

Published by

Vij Books

(Publishers, Distributors & Importers)

4836/24, Ansari Road

Delhi – 110 002

Phones: 91-11-43596460

Mob: 98110 94883

e-mail: contact@vijpublishing.com

web : www.vijbooks.in

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the written permission of the Copyright owner.

Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the organisation that he belongs to or of the USI.

Design and layout by

Team Vij Books

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	ix	
The Year Book 2023 – At a Glance	xi	
Section I	India’s National Security Overview	1
1.	Evolving Geopolitical Scenario: Strategic Implications for India	3
	<i>Major General BK Sharma, AVSM, SM & Bar (Retd)</i>	
2.	India’s Strategic Autonomy in an Age of Strategic Uncertainty	10
	<i>Shri DB Venkatesh Varma, IFS (Retd)</i>	
Section II	Internal Security Issues	15
3.	Security Challenges of Managing the India-Myanmar Borders	17
	<i>Lieutenant General Shakti Gurung, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)</i>	
4.	Enhancing Coastal Security through Synergy: 2022 in Review	25
	<i>Captain Himadri Das & Ms Uma Kabe</i>	
Section III	Pakistan-China Nexus	35
5.	20th National Congress - ‘Communist Party of China’ Salient Facets - Key Take Aways and Ramifications	37
	<i>Major General (Dr) GG Dwivedi, SM, VSM & Bar (Retd)</i>	
6.	Strategic Dimensions of Sino-Pak Nexus	43
	<i>Shri Sharat Sabharwal, IFS (Retd)</i>	
Section IV	India’s Strategic Neighbourhood	51
7.	Managing India-Afghanistan Relations under the Taliban Regime	53
	<i>Shri Jayant Prasad, IFS (Retd)</i>	
8.	Appraisal of Indo-Indonesia Relations	59
	<i>Commodore Anil Jai Singh (Retd)</i>	

9.	Developments in the Gulf and its Environs and India's Role	67
	<i>Sbri Sanjay Singh, IFS (Retd)</i>	
10.	Decodifying Taliban and ISKP in Afghanistan	74
	<i>Dr Adil Rasheed</i>	
Section V	Global Issues	81
11.	The Ukraine Conflict: Implications for International Peace and Security	83
	<i>Sbri Asoke Mukerji, IFS (Retd)</i>	
12.	Geopolitics of the Arctic	94
	<i>Vice Admiral Satish Soni, PVSM, AVSM, NM (Retd)</i>	
13.	The Geopolitics and Geo-economics of the Ukraine War Related Economic Sanctions: Implications for India	102
	<i>Dr Sanjaya Baru</i>	
14.	Blue Helmets: Looking into the Future	110
	<i>Major General (Dr) AK Bardalai (Retd)</i>	
15.	Nuclear Sabre Rattling in Ukrain-Russia Conflict: Global Implications	117
	<i>Dr Roshan Khanijo</i>	
16.	Ukraine Conflict: Long Term Global Economic Impact and Strategic Repercussions	123
	<i>Dr Rajan Katoch, LAS (Retd)</i>	
17.	The Collaborative Potential of the I2U2 Group	131
	<i>Dr Ghazala Shabbana</i>	
18.	ChatGPT: An Emerging Digital Disruption	138
	<i>Brigadier Pawan Bhardwaj, YSM & Mr Mohamed Zaid</i>	
Section VI	National Security Capacity Building	149
19.	Transformation Imperatives for the Indian Military: Talks by the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) and the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) at the USI of India in 2022	151
	<i>USI Editorial Team</i>	
20.	Russia's Ukraine War: Lessons for Indian Warfighting	160
	<i>Lieutenant General (Dr) Rakesh Sharma, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)</i>	

21	Leveraging Soft Power to Achieve India’s National Security Objectives <i>Lieutenant General Ghanshyam Singh Katoch, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)</i>	167
22.	Breaching the Dragon’s A2AD: Strategic Targeting is the Key <i>Air Marshal (Dr) Diptendu Choudhury, PVSM, AVSM, VM, VSM (Retd)</i>	176
23.	Theaterisation of the Indian Armed Forces: A Maritime Perspective <i>Vice Admiral AK Chawla, PVSM, AVSM, NM, VSM (Retd)</i>	186
24.	Energy Security of India <i>Major General AK Chaturvedi, AVSM, VSM (Retd)</i>	193
25.	Atmanirbhar Bharat: A Reality Check <i>Air Marshal (Dr) Rajeev Sachdeva, AVSM (PhD) (Retd)</i>	201
26.	The Air Battlespace: Present and Future Technologies for Dominance <i>Air Vice Marshal Anil Golani (Retd)</i>	210
27.	Theaterisation — Needs a Realistic Approach <i>Major General RS Yadav, VSM (Retd)</i>	216

Foreword

The United Service Institution (USI) of India first published its flagship Strategic Year Book in 2016, based on the overarching theme of comprehensive national security, with contributions from India's noted strategic experts. The publication was widely appreciated by the policymakers, strategic community, and academia for its quality, content, and relevance. Over the years, this signature publication has evoked immense interest among the strategic community, both in India and abroad.

It gives us immense pleasure to bring to the readers the USI Strategic Year Book 2023. The issue highlights national security overview and seeks to provide the reader an insight into India's internal security issues, response to Pakistan–China strategic nexus, geopolitical developments in the strategic neighbourhood, and globally, and thrust areas for national security capacity building.

India has entered 2023 with challenges and opportunities staring at it on the diplomatic and military fronts with the Russia-Ukraine war and China's belligerence at India's doorstep. Amidst a geopolitical scenario that is rapidly changing in a manner that destabilises the 'rules-based' hegemonic world order, a new 'Great Game' is manifesting in Eurasia and the Asia-Pacific spheres. Internally, peace and stability in North East Region (NER) is very important for India's security and also as a window to the countries of South East Asia as part of the Act East Policy.

India continues to face collusive hybrid threats from the Pakistan-China nexus and is also affected by mounting politico-economic instability in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. India's strategic security neighbourhood too is in ferment with happenings in Afghanistan as well as developments in West Asia.

In Europe, the conflict in Ukraine, which has now entered its second year, appears to be a proxy war between the western powers and Russia or even China. The war has led to an adverse global economic impact and a realignment of power blocs. The war in Ukraine and US-China tensions pose the most significant risk to the global economy in 2023 and beyond. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has rapidly inflated energy and food prices, leading to cost issues for businesses and soaring living costs for consumers in 2022. With de-escalation unlikely anytime soon, uncertainty about broadening of the war and its consequences, particularly on the global commodity markets, remains. To this end, a major strategic uncertainty looming large is that of contestation over Taiwan.

Many countries in the 'Global South' seek to insulate their interests from big power competition. This new form of non-alignment is motivated by practical concerns, including leveraging market access to and support from the West and China for investment, technology, and debt. Three major developing countries will chair the G20 in 2023, 2024, and 2025: India, Brazil, and South Africa, allowing them to influence the geopolitical agenda at the world stage. As the Chair, India is looking forward to shaping conversations on issues confronting the world. India has already positioned itself as the 'voice of the Global South' — a reference to the developing and the less-developed countries — and will seek to put its priorities on the global forum.

The hosting of the G20 summit is one of the biggest portrayals of India's rise at the global stage. In the evolving VUCA scenario, stable and growing India at the helm of the multilateral grouping of G20 offers hope and optimism to address the issues that put together impact the collective interests of the Global South. It goes without saying that India ought to be a pre-eminent player in its strategic neighbourhood and a major stakeholder in shaping geopolitical developments in Eurasia and Indo-Pacific Regions.

Geopolitical instability will continue in 2023 and has become a key driver of policy development. Geopolitical developments are directly leading to, at times rapid, policy changes in energy, digital, tech, trade, and defence areas as well as to investment rules. Corporates and investors need to anticipate and analyse these trends and understand how they will impact governments' priorities. From the strategic security perspective, it is imperative for India to take a hard look at the strategic balance in Asia, clearly elucidate its strategic interests, and develop sustainable capacities to navigate India's strategic interests in an otherwise choppy landscape. Of particular importance in this regard is the transformation of Indian military to make it a future ready joint force capable of rendering military outcomes across the spectrum of conflict and up the escalation ladder.

The theme of this current volume is laid out in the aforesaid backdrop. As in the past, our distinguished writers have clearly articulated their views on important strategic issues. It is hoped that this book will generate informed debate leading to cross-fertilisation of varied perspectives. We hope that along with our growing readership, we would also see more contributions to future issues.

Happy reading!!!



New Delhi
20 May 2023

Maj Gen BK Sharma, AVSM, SM** (Retd)
Director General, USI

The Year Book 2023 – At a Glance

It gives us great pleasure to present the United Service Institution (USI) of India's Strategic Year Book 2023. Over the past seven years the USI Yearbook has carved a place for itself in the sphere of strategic discourse. It continues to be valued for its incisive articles written by subject matter experts on diverse current and future security issues. The articles cover global, regional, and internal issues which have a bearing on our national security, and recommend policies, strategies, organisation and equipment for dealing with them. It goes without saying that those dealing with internal and external security affairs require to have a regional and global strategic vision which the Yearbook provides. Besides empowering strategists and leaders to take considered decisions, the Yearbook also helps researchers, post graduate students, and those preparing for competitive examinations where current security and international affairs matter.

The Strategic Year Book 2023 is divided into six sections which enable the reader to link related issues to obtain a holistic strategic view. These sections and their contents are summarised in the succeeding paragraphs.

Section I: India's National Security Overview

This section has an article titled *Evolving Geopolitical Scenario: Strategic Implications for India* by Major General BK Sharma, AVSM, SM & Bar (Retd), the Director General USI of India. The article provides the base for the following sections by a roundup of the evolving strategic scenario and its impact on India's strategic interests and positioning. It goes without saying that India ought to be a pre-eminent player in its strategic neighbourhood and a major stakeholder in shaping geopolitical developments in Eurasia and Indo-Pacific regions. To this end a clear understanding of strategic challenges and opportunities becomes imperative, which is the aim of this article. The second article is *India's Strategic Autonomy in an Age of Strategic Uncertainty* by Shri DB Venkatesh Varma, IFS (Retd). He carries out an analysis of the "rules-based order", the impact of the Ukraine war and countering of the China threat in the best security interest of India, in order to help maintain its strategic autonomy while continuing with measures to strive towards prosperity.

Section II: Internal Security Issues

There are two articles in this section. The first article is *Security Challenges of Managing the India-Myanmar Border* by Lieutenant General Shakti Gurung, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) who has extensive experience of guarding this border. The author brings out the difficulty and importance of the security of this border. The second article is *Enhancing Coastal Security through Synergy: 2022 in Review* by Captain Himadri Das & Ms Uma Kabe. The article throws light on the fact that coastal security and internal security are synonymous for India because of its long coastline. The authors write that cooperation and synergy amongst the multitude of coastal security stakeholders is an essential prerequisite for effective maritime and coastal security.

Section III: Pakistan-China Nexus

The first article in this section is *20th National Congress - 'Communist Party of China' Salient Facets — Key Take Aways and Ramifications* by Major General (Dr) GG Dwivedi, SM, VSM & Bar (Retd) who has vast experience of having stayed in China and in studying China. He writes that Xi Jinping has signalled a major shift in priorities from economic to

security. Hence, China is expected to be even more assertive in pursuit of its ideological and national interests. The next article in this section is by Shri Sharat Sabharwal, IFS (Retd), former India's High Commissioner to Pakistan. Writing on *Strategic Dimensions of Sino-Pak Nexus*, he brings out that forging a partnership with like-minded countries and exploiting Pakistan's growing economic and other compulsions to exercise tactical restraint vis-à-vis India are possible answers for India to mitigate the adverse impact of this nexus.

Section IV: India's Strategic Neighbourhood

This section commences with an article *Managing India-Afghanistan Relations under the Taliban Regime* by Shri Jayant Prasad, IFS (Retd). He brings out that to impart greater resonance to the Indian Government's emphasis in its public pronouncements that it is pursuing a people-centric policy in Afghanistan, India needs to exert more to restore the people-to-people link between Indians and Afghans. The next article is *An Appraisal of Indo-Indonesia Relations* by Commodore Anil Jai Singh (Retd), an accomplished writer on strategic affairs. He brings out that India and Indonesia should leverage their strengths as medium maritime powers to develop an inclusive security architecture, particularly in the maritime domain. The next article, *Developments in the Gulf and its Environs and India's Role* by Shri Sanjay Singh, IFS (Retd) covers how loosening of the US embrace of the Middle East, the expanding presence of Russia and China, and other global developments are leading to fundamental realignments in the West Asian Region and the Gulf. The final article in this section is *Decodifying Taliban and ISKP in Afghanistan* by Dr Adil Rasheed of the MP-IDSA. In his very informative article, he writes about the ideological/theological discourses of the main groups in Afghanistan to gain insight into the strategic behaviour of violent extremist groups because the cognitive domain is now the new centre of gravity in hybrid warfare.

Section V: Global Issues

The prime global issue continues to be the war in Ukraine which is straining the global architecture. Hence, rightly four of eight articles in this section are about the Ukraine war or about issues in light of it. The first article is *The Ukraine Conflict: Implications for International Peace and Security* by Shri Asoke Mukerji, IFS (Retd). He writes that a resolution of the conflict requires a review of existing frameworks of regional and international security to ensure that this will not be "an era of war". The second article in this section is *Geo Politics of the Arctic* by Vice Admiral Satish Soni, PVSM, AVSM, NM (Retd). The article brings out that as cooperation in the Arctic metamorphoses into contestation, India is evolving a mature response in accordance with the Indian philosophy of '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*', meaning that the world is one family. The next article is *The Geopolitics and Geo-economics of the Ukraine War Related Economic Sanctions: Implications for India* by Dr Sanjaya Baru which examines the geopolitics and geo-economics of the Ukraine war-related economic sanctions and how India should manage them. It recommends some steps that should be taken to minimise the adverse impact. In the article *Blue Helmets: Looking into the Future*, the UN studies expert Major General (Dr) AK Bardalai (Retd) writes that the Ukraine conflict has once again brought to the fore the relevance of traditional peace operations as a tool for conflict management and their infirmities. This is followed by *Nuclear Sabre Rattling in Ukraine-Russia Conflict: Global Implications* by Dr Roshan Khanijo who writes about the Russian state policy on nuclear deterrence, its nuclear posture and the global implications of the Ukraine conflict in terms of the danger of a nuclear war. The economic affairs strategic expert Dr Rajan Katoch, IAS (Retd) writes on *Ukraine Conflict: Long Term Global Economic Impact and Strategic Repercussions*. He brings out that the conflict may presage the beginning of a period of major churning of the world economy and may well end up leading to a decline in the strategic influence of the countries that dominate the existing global order. Dr Ghazzala Shabbana of Delhi University writing on *The Collaborative Potential of the I2U2 Group* brings out that this different and modest 'Quad', composed of India, Israel, the UAE and the United States, referred to as I2U2, is progressive, avoids confrontation, and is likely to continue, albeit in baby steps. OpenAI's GPT 4 is the most advanced natural language processing model currently available, with unmatched language finesse and the ability to analyse charts and evaluate

its own performance. The article titled *ChatGPT: An Emerging Digital Disruptions* by Brigadier Pawan Bhardwaj, YSM and Mr Mohamed Zaid analyses its vast potential for military applications, including data curation, information and cognitive warfare, simplifying complex issues and connecting various aspects of HR, training and operations.

Section VI: National Security Capacity Building

The first article is an abridged transcript of talks given by the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) and the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) at the USI of India in 2022. This article, *Transformation Imperatives for the Indian Military: Talks by the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) and the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) at the USI of India in 2022*, brings out the future course, planning, and desires of the army and air force to bring about transformation for being better placed to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Lieutenant General (Dr) Rakesh Sharma, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) thereafter writes on a very relevant subject, *Russia's Ukraine War: Lessons for Indian Warfighting*. The next article is *Leveraging Soft Power to Achieve India's National Security Objectives* by Lieutenant General Ghanshyam Singh Katoch, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) who writes that we need to stop looking at 'Soft Power' in the traditional element of culture and we need to be more focussed doctrinally, organisationally, and with a plan to apply it. In the article *Breaching the Dragon's A2AD: Strategic Targeting is the Key*, Air Marshal (Dr) Diptendu Choudhury, PVSM, AVSM, VM, VSM (Retd) writes about why and how the Indian Air Force's offensive and integrated air defence capabilities must be exploited aggressively to bolster the surface campaign and interdict the enemy's deployed military and logistic capabilities behind the lines to achieve success. In the article *Theaterisation of the Indian Armed Forces: A Maritime Perspective*, Vice Admiral AK Chawla, PVSM, AVSM, NM, VSM (Retd) writes that unlike land threats which can be segregated into individual sectors, threats in the maritime domain are omnidirectional due to the seamlessness and freedom of navigation on the high seas. Hence theaterisation in the maritime sphere must keep this overriding factor in mind. The next article, titled *Energy Security of India*, is by Major General AK Chaturvedi, AVSM, VSM (Retd). He writes that energy is one of the most important resources contributing to the growth of a State but energy management in India has not been able to keep pace with the rising aspirations of people and the growing requirement of industrialisation. He then suggests the way ahead towards ensuring energy security. In the article *Atmanirbhar Bharat: A Reality Check*, Air Marshal (Dr) Rajeev Sachdeva, AVSM, (PhD) (Retd), who has been very closely associated with joint planning and capability building, carries out a hard hitting and pragmatic reality check of India's efforts for self-reliance in defence equipment. In the next article, Air Vice Marshal Anil Golani (Retd) writes about *The Air Battlespace: Present and Future Technologies for Dominance*. He explains that the use of disruptive technologies, including artificial intelligence and robotics, would need a clear and unambiguous understanding by the strategic leadership to influence the outcome of future conflicts. Lastly, in the article *'Theaterisation' — Needs a Realistic Approach*, the USI scholar and researcher in this subject, Major General RS Yadav, VSM (Retd), analyses all issues comprehensively, and suggests a way forward to facilitate a smooth transition.

The editorial team is grateful to the eminent writers for their valuable contributions. As always, we keenly look forward to our reader's valued reviews, feedback and suggestions for improving future editions of the USI Year Book.

Wish you happy reading!!!

Lieutenant General Ghanshyam Singh Katoch, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)

Group Captain Sharad Tewari, VM (Retd)

Dr Jyoti Yadav

Section I

India's National Security Overview

Evolving Geopolitical Scenario: Strategic Implications for India

Major General BK Sharma, AVSM, SM & Bar (Retd)[@]

Abstract

Amidst a geopolitical scenario that is rapidly changing in a manner that destabilises the 'rules-based' hegemonic world order, a new 'Great Game' is manifest in Eurasia and the Asia-Pacific spheres. In Europe, the conflict in Ukraine, which has now entered its second year, appears to be a proxy war between the Western powers and Russia. The war has led to an adverse global economic impact and a realignment of power blocs. The evolving strategic scenario, therefore, demands a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the strategic environment and its impact on India's strategic interests and positioning. It goes without saying that India ought to be a pre-eminent player in its strategic neighbourhood and a major stakeholder in shaping geopolitical developments in Eurasia and Indo-Pacific Regions. To this end, a clear understanding of strategic challenges and opportunities becomes imperative, which is the aim of this article.

Introduction

India is at the cusp of its transition from a balancing power to a leading power amidst a geopolitical scenario that is characterised by Volatility, Uncertainty, Ambiguity and Complexity (VUCA). A new 'Great Game' is manifest in Eurasia and Indo-Pacific with potential of its expansion to other strategic frontiers viz., the Arctic Region, cyberspace, outer space and the cognitive space. The new generation of warfare is quintessentially a multi-domain warfare that combines politics, economy, diplomacy, military, technology, and other elements of national power. It uses a multitude of means; state and non-state, military and non-military, linear and non-linear, kinetic and non-kinetic; applied seamlessly across the spectrum of conflict and up the escalation ladder. The classic state-to-state wars are blurred by grey zone conflicts. Amidst mounting contestation, we see the revamping of the Euro-Atlantic alliance, with NATO, East Asian security alliance, Quad and AUKUS on one hand, and China and Russia's strategic embrace on the other. In this milieu, the middle level and small powers are on the horns of a dilemma, causing them to hedge, align and rebalance their strategic interest vis-a-vis, the contending behemoths. Ironically, international institutions, particularly the UNSC, have become virtually dysfunctional in conflict prevention and management. Historical animosities, conflicting core interests, presence of volatile flashpoints, dangerous military posturing amid deepening strategic mistrust — in absence of conflict prevention mechanisms — heighten the chances of military confrontation at the peril of global peace. India's strategic security neighborhood too is in ferment. India continues to face collusive hybrid threats from the Pak-China nexus and is affected by mounting politico-economic instability in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. However, in the evolving dismal scenario, stable and growing India at the helm of the multilateral grouping of G20 offers hope and optimism to address the issues that put together impact the collective interests of the Global South. The evolving strategic scenario, therefore, demands a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the strategic environment and its impact on India's strategic interests and positioning. It goes without saying that India ought to be a pre-eminent player in its strategic neighbourhood and a major stakeholder in shaping geopolitical developments in Eurasia and Indo-Pacific regions. To this, end, a clear understanding of strategic challenges and opportunities becomes imperative.

[@] Major General BK Sharma, AVSM, SM & Bar (Retd) is the Director General of the United Service Institution of India. He specialises in Strategic Net Assessment, Scenario Building and Strategic Gaming.

Aspirational India

At the heart of India's national interests lie the well-being of its citizens, the development of comprehensive national power and its strategic configuration to serve India's expanding strategic interests. For accomplishing these lofty goals, it is heartening to note that the Indian leadership has clearly envisioned the idea of '*Viksit Bharat*' (Developed India) by 2047 based on three tenets viz., reform, perform and transform.¹ Our vision for the '*Amrit Kaal*' (Golden Era) includes a technology driven, knowledge-based economy with strong public finances and a robust financial sector. Its accomplishment is predicated on strong public participation through '*Sabka Saath, Sabka Prayas*' (Efforts by All). Delivering his speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort, the Prime Minister said, "The goal of '*Amrit Kaal*' is to ascend to new heights of prosperity for India", which inter alia implies reducing the urban-rural divide, implementing the concept of self-governance, and building modern infrastructure.

In sum, India strives to be a nation which is staunchly sovereign, strategically autonomous, economically robust, socially cohesive, militarily powerful, culturally vibrant, at the forefront of science and technology, pragmatic and influential in international relations and in pursuit of dignified peace and tranquility in a multipolar world. However, India's comprehensive national development is predicated on a stable internal and external strategic environment. It is in this context it becomes incumbent to examine India's strategic outlook; its challenges and prospects to make India a success story in an otherwise uncertain world.

India's Strategic Outlook

India's world-view is rooted in its ancient philosophy of '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*'; a phrase found in ancient Sanskrit scripture implying that the 'World is One Family'. This philosophy was further elaborated by PM Modi by enunciating the concept of "One Earth, One Family, One Future", which is the slogan for India's G20 presidency.² On earlier occasions, the PM has articulated the idea of National Ambition and Regional Aspiration (NARA), to be implemented with the drive of '*Sabka Vikas, Sabke Saath, Sabka Vishwas*' (Participative Inclusive Growth). India is an adherent of strategic autonomy practised through a multi-vector foreign policy engagement. India advocates free access to global commons, non-discriminatory policies towards trade and technology, non-militarisation of space, and unilateral imposition of models of governance. Moreover, India is against strategic coercion, use of force to undermine sovereignty and territorial integrity, and Zero-sum Game politics.

India clearly is of the view that outcomes of conflicts have a limited shelf life and cannot lead to enduring changes in the World Order.

PM Modi reiterated, at the recently held Samarkand Summit and the G20 Bali Summit, the need for dialogue to end the conflict in Ukraine. Our Defence Minister has also stated, at the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meet, that India is not in favour of a hegemonic world order and genuinely believes in a polycentric world order. India's participation in QUAD, BRICS, RIC, SCO, ASEAN, I2U2 is indicative of India's policy of strategic balancing. India, on its own merit, strives to champion the cause of the middle and small powers, particularly the Global South. While at the helm of affairs of the G20 and the SCO, our focus will be on the resolution of conflicts through diplomacy, dialogue, and economic growth. India clearly is of the view that outcomes of conflicts have a limited shelf life and cannot lead to enduring changes in the World Order. It is for this purpose that India has expanded the scope of G20 summit to include areas that will serve the cause of dignified human existence.

Our strategic security and foreign policy goals are geared at upholding sovereignty, territorial integrity, socio-political stability, economic, resource, & environmental security, technological self-reliance and credible defence capabilities. All these are to be achieved by taking a 'whole of government' approach and building synergy between hard power, soft power, dispersed power (diaspora) and coordinated power — blending into sharp and smart power. The strategic guidelines articulated by our PM under Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) posits towards

inclusive and equitable growth. India aspires to develop into a 5 trillion-dollar economy in the next few years and become self-reliant in technology through *Atamirbhar Bharat* (Make in India) and Digital India programmes. India seeks to diversify its energy and technology imports, achieve a carbon neutral status by 2070 and promote an ‘International Solar Alliance’.³ India believes in the primacy of international institutions, their reforms, rule based international order, and multilateralism. India has shed off its pacificism and has become explicit and assertive in articulating and protecting its core interests. Its foreign policy focus manifests in its Neighborhood First Policy, Connect Central Asia Policy, Look West Policy, Act East Policy, becoming an important vector in the concert of middle-level powers, thus, balancing its interests between the contesting big powers and promoting multi-lateralism. However, we ought to be mindful of a very fluid and complex strategic environment so that as a nation we are suitably geared to navigate our national interests.

Deconstructing the Strategic Environment

Realpolitik suggests that the behaviour of states will continue to be driven by ‘Social Darwinism’, where the national interest will remain paramount and the contending hegemonic powers will jostle for influence; thus exacerbating the risk of falling into the Thucydides’ trap. The Covid pandemic, Talibanisation of Afghanistan, and the Ukraine crisis should have logically nudged the international community towards collaboration for prevention and resolution of conflict. Much to the contrary, what we are witnessing is a great power confrontation that, by some strategic pundits is described as the New Great Game of the 21st Century. Its key attributes are as under:

- There is contestation over ideology between the liberal democratic world vis-a-vis other models of governance. Powerful states are vying for domination of locations in the Indo-Pacific, Eurasia, Arctic, outer space, cyberspace and cognitive space. They are attempting to monopolise resources such as energy, water, food, rare-earth metals, semiconductors and microchips; using these as tools of strategic coercion.
- There is technology competition over Artificial Intelligence, 5G/6G, cyber, big data, block chains, robotics, autonomous vehicles, hypervelocity vehicles, space and counter-space technologies.
- The weaponisation of the economy has disrupted the global financial system leading to the rise of inflation, food crisis, creation of alternate economic blocs, trading system, and diversification of manufacturing hubs and supply chains.
- Multi-Domain wars and Grey Zone conflicts have become the new normal with lines between declared and undeclared wars becoming amorphous, thus, compounding security-insecurity dilemmas.
- The arms race, forward military posturing, and dangerous manoeuvres are fraught with risks of accidental flare-ups exacerbated by strategic mistrust and hyper-nationalism. A series of miscalculations or propensity to up the ante in the Ukraine conflict is fraught with risks of nuclear brinkmanship. Likewise, Taiwan is fast emerging as the most volatile flashpoint between the US and China, with the potential for escalating into a major war that will engulf other countries and damage global peace and security.
- The post-Cold War world order has seen significant transition. From bipolarity to unipolarity to a diffused polarity. Then came the asymmetric bipolarity which was followed by the current non-hegemonic multipolarity. Presently, the Russia and China strategic alignment in Eurasia has been formed to challenge a US led hegemonic world order. China, in 2022, held the 20th Party Congress where it harped on the development goals for 2021 to 2035 and 2035 to 2049⁴ and somewhat spelled out the means and ends for achieving its goals.

Realpolitik suggests that the behaviour of states will continue to be driven by ‘Social Darwinism’, where the national interest will remain paramount and the contending hegemonic powers will jostle for influence.

- The Russian Valdai Discussion Club, in their annual report enunciated “A World without Superpowers”⁵, the assertion was followed up in the Eastern Economic Forum, SCO, and the G20 Summit. The narrative of non-hegemonic world order includes the development of the Far Eastern Region and pivoting to Asia. These actions have led to the emergence of regional organisations albeit with fault lines and contradictions. While the Americans have been trying to send the message that the US is still in power by consolidating the Euro-Atlantic alliance, expanding the NATO, and tying up with Indo-Pacific democracies, its National Security Strategy (NSS) terms Russia as a serious threat to Europe and calls China as a long-term systematic threat. As a result, the Americans have been trying to expand the Quad, AUKUS, 5 Eyes and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. This has resulted in middle level powers like India, Brazil, Indonesia, and South Africa to hedge and balance the two power blocs. The G20 and the Global South have become resurgent.
- The world is closely watching India's rise with a hope that while being the pivot of global power shift, it will play its role as a responsible stakeholder in the balance of power.

Strategic Challenges and Opportunities

India's growth and development have been impacted by the Covid pandemic, inter alia due to lockdowns, disruption of supply chains, hike in fuel and food prices, and impediment in trade and FDI. Despite these encumbrances, India ranks as the 5th largest economy in the world and has an impressive GDP growth of 6.5 to 7 per cent.⁶ However, to achieve the mark of a 5 trillion US dollar economy, India has to grow at 9 per cent or more.⁷ Therefore, India needs to assiduously work to enhance its industrial output, boost its trade, and ensure unimpeded energy imports. On the positive side, India's huge consumer market makes it a favourite for foreign countries.

The Ukraine crisis has re-established that war is a necessary evil and all nations must prepare for collusive hybrid threats arising from a confluence of diplomatic, military, economic, and other means.

The Ukraine crisis has re-established that war is a necessary evil and all nations must prepare for collusive hybrid threats arising from a confluence of diplomatic, military, economic, and other means. The most formidable threat India faces today is from Pakistan-China strategic nexus that seeks to change the status quo at the contested borders and undermine India's strategic security. China's aggressive actions since May 2020 to change the status quo at the LAC have severely damaged Sino-Indian relations. Another area of concern for India is how to balance China's forays in South Asia and Indian Ocean Region. Under the rubric of China's much-touted BRI, with the northern corridor passing through Russia and Eastern Europe stymied, its focus lies in the middle and southern corridors. Hence, its increased fervour in India's strategic region. It is developing CPEC in Pakistan (through Indian territory in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir), building the China-Nepal Economic Corridor, China-Myanmar Economic Corridor and dual-use infrastructure in the littorals of the Indian Ocean. China, through its charm and chequebook diplomacy, seeks to induce a gravitational pull in India's strategic neighbourhood and alter the balance of power in its favour. The balancing of Pakistan-China collusion and China's growing influence in India's strategic neighbourhood poses a challenge but also offers opportunities for India to reinvigorate its ties with the neighbouring countries.

India's lack of direct geographical connectivity with Central Asia is complicated by the obstinacy of Pakistan, the Talibanisation of Afghanistan and the geopolitics of Iran owing to economic sanctions imposed on Tehran by Washington. These geopolitical developments have dampened the prospects of operationalisation of the Chabahar-Zaranj-Delaram axis, International North South Transit Corridor (INSTC), energy corridors connecting Central Asia with South Asia, or, for that matter, implementation of the Ashgabat Trade Agreement. The risk of Afghanistan becoming an epicentre of terrorism will give a fillip to cross-border terrorism. Another challenge India faces is the extension of CPEC from Peshawar to Kabul and the possible creation of a Pakistan-China condominium in Afghanistan that would seek to marginalise India. On the positive side, there is some thaw in India and the Taliban regime to establish

a minimum functional relationship to render humanitarian assistance to Afghan people. India is assuming centre stage in a number of multi-lateral dialogues for building peace and security in Afghanistan. India is fully cognisant of the fact that given its economic heft, size of the market, and IT prowess, New Delhi gains salience in the regional geo-economic integration.

India's strategic interests in West Asia devolve around energy security; India imports about 2/3rd of its energy requirements from West Asian countries. Also, India must balance its interests between Israel, Saudi Arabia and Iran and checkmate Pakistan's nefarious agenda at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Recently, India's relations with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have significantly improved. Nonetheless, a new Islamic bloc that comprises of Pakistan, Turkey, and Malaysia needs deft diplomatic handling. India also needs to take extra measures to balance the growing influence of China in the region. India must be extra vigilant on the import of Wahabi ideology and radicalisation of the Indian diaspora. India has joined a new West Asian (Quad) — US, UAE, Israel and India. This grouping is essentially aimed at economic cooperation, albeit, with misgivings from some quarters which need to be allayed through diplomacy.

Another significant strategic challenge for India is to balance antagonistic big-power relations. India's strategic autonomy precludes New Delhi to join any military alliance or strategic partnership that is inimical to another country or group of countries. Traditionally, the West has perceived India as closer to the Soviet Union / Russia. These perceptions are accentuated by India actively participating in SCO, BRICS, and RIC forums. The security dilemmas that particularly stem from Pak-China hybrid threats make it incumbent for India to resort to external balancing in the Indo-Pacific, to balance an assertive China. India's participation in the Quad, and the signing of foundational agreements with the US, Japan, France, the UK, and Indonesia should be seen from that perspective. It needs to be acknowledged that India is too huge a country to fall under the tutelage of another country or be prompted in the strategic choices it makes in pursuance of its national interests.

It needs to be acknowledged that India is too huge a country to fall under the tutelage of another country or be prompted in the strategic choices it makes in pursuance of its national interests.

The Eurasian heartland has recently witnessed unprecedented geopolitical developments that have impacted the balance of power in the region. The ensuing Ukraine conflict has plunged the world into the throes of heightened confrontation between the West on one side and the Russia-China strategic nexus on the other. India and Russia are endowed with a very robust and specialised privileged strategic partnership that has withstood the vagaries of geopolitics. Russia's embroilment in Ukraine has implications for India. India-Russia trade has crossed \$15 bn since 2018.⁸ Over 60 per cent of Indian military inventory is of Russian origin,⁹ especially concerning fighter jets, tanks, helicopters and submarines among others, while several major deals are in the pipeline. Russia's embroilment in the Ukraine conflict and consequential economic sanctions imposed on Moscow will have implications on the procurement of a \$ 5.43 bn deal for S-400 air defence systems¹⁰, modernisation of frigates, induction of nuclear-powered submarines, AK 202 assault rifle project, Very Short-Range Defence Systems, spares for Brahmos, R-27 Air to Air Missiles, and modernisation of AN-32 transport aircraft fleet. Likewise, the import of fossil fuels under the Rupee-Rouble exchange may have attendant repercussions as far as India's western strategic partners are concerned.

The Ukraine crisis has further reinforced Indian experience with China that international treaties and accords can be broken by the belligerents at will if the other side does not have wherewithal to enforce them. Break up of Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), Minsk Accord, Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) and Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) between Russia and its opponents, and similar unilateral abrogation of treaties and accords by Pakistan and China must strengthen our resolve to build up comprehensive punitive deterrence and war fighting capabilities against our adversaries.

The Ukraine conflict should further reinforce India's determination to develop comprehensive strategic assessment capabilities to correctly analyse intent, capability and strategic behaviour paradigm of our adversaries, particularly China. Flawed strategic assumptions, archaic mental maps, group thinking, and coterie-based decision-making need to be replaced by promoting a system of alternate non-linear and 360-degree horizon scan by multi-domain experts.

The Ukraine conflict has once again proved the importance of control over the territory and need for having balanced force structures with a fine mix of heavy weaponry and boots on the ground, complemented by niche and disruptive technologies. The impact of high terrain friction, highly built-up areas, hostile population, and militarised state sponsored non state actors at the battlefield are big challenges that India too faces on its land borders. These lessons should encourage the politico-military establishment to revisit our extant military strategy and approach to force structuring and development. Our assumptions of short and swift wars are flawed. India should be prepared for long and protracted grey zone conflicts and hone its understanding of the spectrum of conflicts and escalation domination control mechanism. This can best be achieved by national level strategic gaming adopting not only the 'All of Government' but also a 'Whole of Nation' approach.

Our adversaries, particularly China, enjoy a competitive advantage in the application of disruptive technology in its war fighting capabilities. Indian Armed Forces need a technology-based Revolution in Military Affairs with a critical rethink on the modernisation of non-kinetic means, Precision Guided Missiles (PGMs), smart ammunitions, drones, tanks, AD systems, helicopters, artillery systems, efficacy of larger combat platforms vis à vis hand-held weapons, missiles, Electronic Warfare (EW) capabilities, submarines vs aircraft carrier and the whole gambit of operational philosophy by each Service. Theaterisation, jointness, civil-military fusion, and reforms in the national security architecture need to be undertaken on top priority.

The evolving geopolitical contestation devolves around a battle of narratives. The side that is defter in theme based narrative crafting and propagation will gain ascendancy over its rival.

The evolving geopolitical contestation devolves around a battle of narratives. The side that is defter in theme based narrative crafting and propagation will gain ascendancy over its rival. The Ukraine conflict has proved the superiority of western media crusade vis à vis Russia. Both Pakistan and China have well-honed state control system of strategic communication. Democratic India faces a major challenge in so far as its national narrative campaign is concerned. It is high time that we develop a comprehensive strategic communication eco-system by articulating a strategy and creating robust structures, systems, and skills.

Conclusion

India is at the cusp of transiting from a balancing to a leading power. It seeks a peaceful internal and external security environment for its comprehensive development. However, the evolving geopolitical scenario that is rife with contestation and mistrust poses strategic and foreign policy dilemmas for India. However, India has to develop its CNP and strategically configure it to promote its sharply defined national interests. India needs multi-vector engagement with strategic partners across the geopolitical divide. India's foreign policy has to be nimble-footed to steer its interests through the choppy waters of the VUCA environment. Fora such as G-20 UNGC, SCO, BRICS and other platforms should be optimally utilised to promote India's Strategic intent. Our dialogue process must remain dynamic and progressive to reconcile divergences, mitigate risks, and maximise opportunities. At the same time, India needs to invest more substantially in its self-reliance, credible deterrence, and war fighting capabilities. India should have de-novo look at the spectrum of threats and challenges and its escalation domination matrix. An informed debate on strategic behaviour of our adversaries and strategic partners must be initiated so that we have well-thought-out views to bridge strategic capacity gaps and a pragmatic approach to strategic balancing; internally, externally and in the asymmetric domain.

Endnotes

- 1 Narendra Modi. <https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modis-reply-to-the-motion-of-thanks-to-presidents-address-in-rajya-sabha-567760>
- 2 PIB Mumbai, 10 Dec 2022 7:10PM. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1882356>
- 3 BBC News, “COP26: India PM Narendra Modi pledges net zero by 2070” Published 2 November 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-59125143>
- 4 Ulrich Jochheim, European Parliamentary Research, European Parliament. Briefing on China’s 20th Party Congress. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733702/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)733702_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733702/EPRS_BRI(2022)733702_EN.pdf)
- 5 Russia in Global Affairs, Report “A World Without Superpowers”, Oct 24, 2022. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/world-without-superpowers/>
- 6 PTI. “India Overtakes U.K. to Become Fifth Largest Economy in the World.” *The Hindu*, September 3, 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-overtakes-uk-to-become-fifth-largest-economy-in-the-world/article65844906.ece>.
- 7 “India \$5 Trillion Economy by FY29 Only If It Grows at 9% for Five Years, Says Former RBI Guv Subbarao.” *The Economic Times*. Accessed September 12, 2022. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/india-5-trillion-economy-by-fy29-only-if-it-grows-at-9-for-five-years-says-former-rbi-guv-subbarao/articleshow/93576521.cms>.
- 8 Huma Siddiqui, “Financial express.” *The Financial Express Stories*, December 7, 2021. <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/india-and-russia-military-trade-touches-usd-15-bn-in-three-years-expected-to-grow-more/2383787/>.
- 9 Dinakar Peri, “India Faces Uncertainty over Defence Supplies from Russia and Ukraine, as Also Caatsa Waiver.” Return to frontpage. *The Hindu*, March 2, 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-faces-uncertainty-over-defence-supplies-from-russia-and-ukraine-as-also-caatsa-waiver/article65144678.ece>.
- 10 Dinkar Peri, “India signs \$5.43 billion S-400 Deal with Russia”, *The Hindu*, Oct 5, 2018, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-russia-sign-543-billion-s-400-missile-deal/article25132142.ece>

India's Strategic Autonomy in an Age of Strategic Uncertainty

Shri DB Venkatesh Varma, IFS (Retd)[@]

Abstract

The coming age of strategic uncertainty will bring new and unprecedented challenges. This article carries out a brief objective analysis as to how India must respond proactively during this period to secure its interests. It carries out an analysis of the 'rules-based order', the impact of the Ukraine war, and countering of the China threat in the best security interest of India in order to help maintain its strategic autonomy while continuing with measures to strive towards prosperity. The article ends by stating that the coming decade will be crucial for the emergence of India as a global power. But this objective can be achieved only if there is single minded pursuit of strengthening national power, setting aside all the obstacles that may come in the way.

Introduction

As India celebrates the 75th anniversary of its Independence, there is every reason to feel proud of the country's achievements. This is not to overlook policy shortcomings of the past, even while recognising some great achievements — to cite just two examples — victory in the 1971 India-Pak War and India's emergence as a nuclear weapons power. As the world's largest democracy, India has overcome numerous challenges to its external and internal security, consolidated an economic growth model that is improving the lives of millions of its people, and a foreign policy that has secured the country's interests in the international system. The coming age of strategic uncertainty will bring new and unprecedented challenges. These should be analysed objectively and responded to proactively through policy actions that will secure India's interests.

A Changing World Order

While strategic change is a constant, current changes are unprecedented as the geopolitical competition between the big powers is accompanied by major shifts in the distribution of economic and technological power. In addition, geopolitical competition is hindering international cooperation necessary for addressing transnational threats such as those arising from climate change, pandemics, terrorism, and the proliferation of new technologies. Put together, these multiple and compounding risks are now referred to by experts as the 'polycrisis'.

The end of the Cold War saw big power competition subside for a few years. Globalisation gave rise to the hope that international cooperation on economic and trade issues would have precedence over security calculations. US unipolar dominance for the two decades after the Cold War fed the illusion that US dominance was for global good and would be long-term. This in turn, gave rise to concepts such as 'rules based international order' — which were

[@] Ambassador DB Venkatesh Varma, IFS (Retd) served in the Indian Foreign Service from 1988 to 2021. During his diplomatic career, he worked in the Office of the External Affairs Minister and in the Prime Minister's Office. He served as India's Ambassador to Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, to the Kingdom of Spain and to the Russian Federation until October 2021. He has vast experience in India's Security and Defence policies and served as Joint Secretary in charge of Disarmament and International Security in the Ministry of External Affairs.

only a euphemism for the continuation of the US dominated liberal international order. These were, essentially, rules drawn and enforced by the US to perpetuate its own interests. These precepts were increasingly questioned after the 2008 financial crisis, the rise of China, and major dents in the image of the US as a formidable military power after the botched Iraq invasion and later the inglorious withdrawal from Afghanistan. While the global reality changed, foreign policy experts were slow to adapt their analytical concepts to keep pace with those changes.

The Ukraine War and New Power Centres. The five phases of NATO expansion at a time of Russian weakness, came to a halt in Feb 2021. Russian military invasion of Ukraine, commencing not just a war between Russia and Ukraine but a more general conflict between Russia and the West, along military, economic, technological, cyber, and information dimensions. The military conflict is local to the border areas of Russia and Ukraine, but the conflict *per se* is global. Russia felt challenged in its core geopolitical space and is now resisting by military force, US imposed security conditions on its peripheries — in the Ukraine and the Black Sea area. The outcome of this conflict will have long-term impact on European and Eurasian security including long-term implications for China. The US-China conflict over Taiwan will also be impacted by the outcome of the Ukraine conflict. Geopolitical conflict between big powers can have unforeseen consequences and, thus, is an unpredictable driver of uncertainty in the global strategic situation. The devolution of global power is as much a result of the rise of new centres of power as resistance to the emergence of such new power centres.

Multipolarity will have to traverse through pathways that will be contested through the use, or threat of use, of military force. The international constraints on use of military force are eroding — paralysis of the UNSC, decline of various arms control agreements, increasing proclivity of big powers to test the limits of geopolitical tolerance, lowering of the nuclear threshold, weakening of the norm against chemical and biological weapon use, rise of private and mercenary militias, persistence of cross border terrorism, emergence of new technologies such as cyber and space which increase the prospects for asymmetric conflict along with difficulties for attribution, and the growing disrespect for international law by the big powers on matters relating to use of force to seek unilateral advantage, whether it is related to territorial disputes or assertion of control over maritime domains.

The devolution of global power is as much a result of the rise of new centres of power as resistance to the emergence of such new power centres.

Impact on India

Analysing the current changes in the international situation and their impact on India's interests requires clear-headed thinking devoid of the assumptions that have accumulated over the past three decades. Since the end of the Cold War, India's external view was characterised by openness and a willingness to engage not just with our neighbourhood but with the big powers, while prioritising our security interests as well as our requirements as a growing economy in terms of markets, investments, and technology. There was a belief in the benefits of globalisation, which lasted for about two decades until the global financial crisis of 2008. Thereafter, it increasingly became apparent that globalisation and its rules and instruments were in the hands of the West. China had benefitted from this western-dominated globalisation through trade, investments, and technology transfers — both legal and illegal. China had also emerged as a near-peer military competitor to the US through three decades of high military expenditures. For India, the benefits of globalisation were of declining utility economically—with the previous generation of free trade agreements affording disproportionate benefits to others at the expense of the Indian manufacturing industry.

Atmanirbhar Bharat. Our programme of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* is, therefore, a welcome measure to safeguard India's economic and security interests at a time when globalisation is no longer able to deliver on its original promises. The risks of over-dependence on the Bretton Woods centred banking and financial system became apparent with the overt and reckless weaponisation of global interdependence in the banking sector in the sanctions imposed on Russia

following its invasion of Ukraine. These sanctions were imposed without UN approval or consultation with other countries which were indirectly impacted. There is now greater awareness of the risks of over-dependence on the dollar based international banking system, thus accelerating the push for greater use of national currencies even though the transition will be a long-term project. On the other hand, the Covid pandemic showed that there were similar risks of overdependence on critical supply chains on countries such as China, which needed to be corrected through measures such as 'on-shoring' or 'friend-shoring'. While it is prudent to create supply chain alternatives, it is equally important to avoid replacing one dependency with another. Technology cooperation should not lead to technology dependency.

Big Power Conflict and Strategic Instability. The return of persistent geopolitical competition between the big powers — US and Russia over Ukraine and, more broadly, on which power will dominate key points on the Eurasian continent, along with the opportunities that this may afford China to seek strategic advantage with both Russia and the United States, in a triangular relationship in which it occupies an advantageous position, is amongst the most important sources of strategic instability for India's security policy. It is imperative that none of the big powers align in such a way as to extract a cost at India's interests.

Strategic Balancing for Strategic Autonomy

The Ukraine conflict is expected to tie down Russia for several years to come even if a ceasefire were to be declared in the coming months. While Russia will bounce back later, in the interim, its military and its military industrial complex will go through a challenging phase which, in turn, will create pressure points for the supply of arms, munitions, and spares for our armed forces. This would need to be handled through a combination of measures aimed at reducing risks to our combat preparedness. These include close coordination with the Russian industry for timely spares, transfer of production units to India through Joint Ventures, as part of Make in India programme, third country purchases, creation of a special fund to stockpile adequate inventories, phasing out of excess and old stocks and other measures. It is the task of our diplomacy to insulate our armed forces from pressures from third countries, such as the US, to take advantage of the tight supply situation or to use strong arm tactics to secure a share in the Indian defence market that is against India's security interests. The transition in the Indian defence inventory must be at a pace and pattern as decided by India, consistent with its security and budgetary interests and capabilities.

While it is prudent to create supply chain alternatives, it is equally important to avoid replacing one dependency with another. Technology cooperation should not lead to technology dependency.

Military Capability. The Ukraine conflict has shown that modern day battlefields are undergoing revolutionary changes due to armed forces utilising new doctrines and technologies. Battlefields are becoming more open and transparent and are extending far beyond the visual range. New technologies are boosting asymmetric conflict that are further democratising firepower at the infantry unit level — the use of drones for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), handheld anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, and the return of attrition warfare based on massive use of artillery requires a rethink on backend industrial capacities to support future conflicts. At the same time, the fusion of cyber and space assets for ISR, and broader war aims involving informational warfare, make modern warfare an extremely complex, multi-layered, and still evolving exercise. These aspects require detailed study and analysis to inform our future doctrine, strategy, and tactics. China's decade long lead on these aspects is a matter of concern and the gap in our capabilities should be addressed on an urgent basis.

Maintaining Strategic Autonomy. The rise of multipolarity means that wars will no longer be like the ones conducted by the US in Iraq or Afghanistan — where US enjoyed a substantial measure of battlefield dominance. China can be expected to study the Ukraine war for lessons for use in its expected conflict with the US over Taiwan or, more generally, in the Indo-Pacific. While the US has massive superiority in air and sea-based assets in the Indo-Pacific, its territorial assets on the Eurasian continent are now confined to its peripheries. China is, thus, poised to take advantage of Russian

distraction in Ukraine to expand its influence in Central Asia and further deepen its influence in South Asia, directed against India.

Thus, while US related security structures in the Indo Pacific are critical elements for maintenance of countervailing structures of security against Chinese assertiveness in the region, it is important to factor in its limitations in addressing India's security concerns vis-à-vis China. Hence, while our strategic partnership with the US, including in the defence field, is of vital importance, we must avoid overt Americanisation of the China threat as there cannot be an identity in threat perceptions nor an equivalence in available options to deal with the China threat in the coming decades. While US will be the most important source of high technology, we must avoid being sucked into US dominated networked systems that undercut our ability to fight wars independently on our terms and conditions. The concept of 'inter-operability' must be scrutinised from the standpoint of whether it would curtail the ability of our armed forces to conduct military operations independent of foreign influence or control.

The China Threat. Given the expected changes on the Eurasian continent, it is important to prioritise our national security and defence doctrine to confront the China challenge while not excluding the eventuality of a two-front conflict with both, China and Pakistan. China's current strategy appears to be to provoke India along the entire length of the LAC to dissipate force concentrations and tire out the Indian Army over prolonged high-altitude deployments. While a new generation of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) with China are necessary to ease the pressure on our armed forces, in the long run there is no substitute to a major build-up that would restore credibility of our conventional deterrence with China. This will perhaps take a decade or so and our diplomatic strategy should be cognizant of the power-differential in the intervening period.

The concept of 'inter-operability' must be scrutinised from the standpoint of whether it would curtail the ability of our armed forces to conduct military operations independent of foreign influence or control.

China is primarily a continental threat. Hence our defence posture should reflect this primacy, even while striking an optimal balance between our continental and maritime strategies. Our support for an open and free maritime domain has not prevented China's assertiveness in the South China Sea and it may have acted as an open valve for countries of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) to engage with China, thus, defeating the purpose of India sponsored initiatives such as SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region) or the Indian Ocean Symposium. While Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) are important for maritime security — and given high prominence, along with freedom of navigation, as such in western discussions on the subject — for India in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) a more compelling threat is China gaining exclusive access to maritime assets among the Indian Ocean littoral states or threatening our island chains thereby diluting India's primacy in the Indian Ocean Region, which, in turn, would render the more expansive concept of the Indo-Pacific quite meaningless. For strategic purposes, the Indian Ocean should be one that reflects Indian primacy not just in name but also in reality.

Conclusion

At a time of multiple security challenges in the external sphere, a coherent and comprehensive national security strategy that encompasses the key priorities for our defence and nuclear strategy cannot be overemphasised. This is necessary to mobilise and channelise national resources for identified long-term objectives. There is a need for a common agreed definition of 'strategic autonomy' — defined here as 'the will and capability to think and act independently on matters of war and peace that affect the vital interests of the country'. In the age of strategic uncertainty, to depend on external sourcing of support for national defence entails high risks of undependability and unreliability. Hence, the notion of external balancing as a means of compensating for national shortfalls in power which was popular among some Indian experts promoting stronger India-US defence cooperation should be set aside. While the US relationship is important, no external relationship with any foreign country should be used as an excuse not to build up our national strength. This

India's National Security Overview

would require sustained economic growth. But a military build-up cannot just follow growth but must run parallel to it. This will require not just ongoing military reforms to reduce teeth to tail ratios, greater use of advanced technology, and deeper jointness amongst the services but also assured budgetary support for the armed forces for the next decade of 12 percent of central govts expenditure from the current level of less than 10 percent. A national cess for the purposes of funding the military build-up could be considered. Our foreign policy should be reoriented to creating the most enabling environment that would insulate and facilitate such a military build-up. The coming decade will be crucial for the emergence of India as a global power. But this objective can be achieved only if there is single-minded pursuit of strengthening national power, setting aside all the obstacles that may come in the way.

Section II

Internal Security Issues

Security Challenges of Managing the India-Myanmar Borders

Lieutenant General Shakti Gurung, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)[@]

Abstract

Of all of India's land borders, the most difficult to manage is the Indo-Myanmar border. This is on account of a number of factors such as hilly terrain with thick jungles, tropical weather, a porous border due to tribes being split across the border, and presence of insurgent groups in both India and Myanmar. On the Myanmar side, the writ of the government is also weak. However, the North East Region (NER) is very important for India's security and as a window to the countries of South East Asia which is yet to be utilised to its full potential because of the reasons enumerated earlier. This article examines the challenges of managing the India-Myanmar border in this respect and in the context of the NER.

"India will be successful when UP, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam and other parts of North East India are strengthened. India cannot develop till the eastern part of the country develops"

— Shri Narendra Modi, PM of India

Introduction

In November 2014, when India's Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi announced the upgradation of the 'Look East' policy to 'Act East', he meant every word of it. In pursuance of this new policy, two more initiatives were announced by him; one termed Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR); and the other, the 'Neighbourhood First' policy. All three policies meant developing deeper relations with countries to the east starting with Myanmar at the gateway.

India's North East Region (NER) is hemmed in from all sides by borders with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh. A narrow strip of land, called the 'Siliguri Corridor', connects it to the rest of the country, making it that much more fragile and vulnerable to external interferences. With an unemployment rate of over 5 per cent, which is much higher than the national average of 4.2 percent, the area is prone to separatism Movements.¹

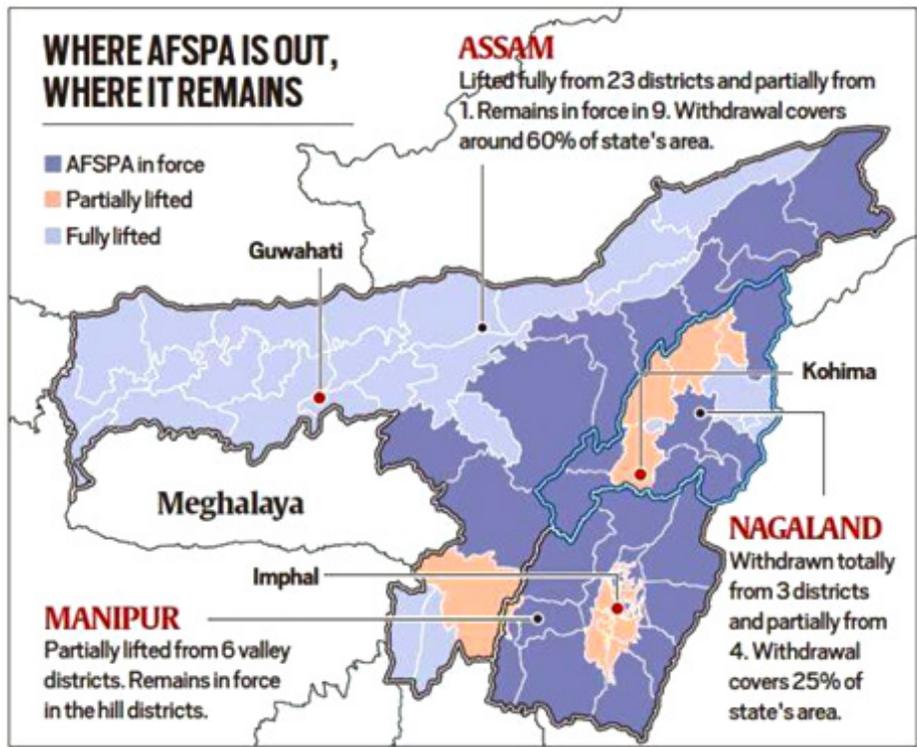
The incidents of 04 June 2015, when 18 soldiers were killed in an ambush in Manipur in Chandel district, and of 13 November 2021, when a Colonel, his wife and eight-year-old son, along with four soldiers of an Assam Rifles battalion, were ambushed and gunned down by insurgents in Churachandpur district of Manipur, tell a lot about the turbulent situation in the NER.

[@] Lieutenant General Shakti Gurung, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) an alumnus of NDA Khadakvasla and IMA Dehradun, was commissioned in The Grenadiers in June 1975. During his career spanning forty years, Lt Gen Gurung held important command and staff appointments in the Army and has also served abroad as India's Defence Attache' in Myanmar from May 2000 to Dec 2003.



(Map From Concept Research Foundation)²

Internal Security Situation in the NER



(Map Courtesy www.dristiiias.com)

Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). An emotive debate in the NER is that of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). On 31 March 2021, the government announced the removal of the AFSPA with effect from 01 April 2022 from a number of districts in the three insurgency affected states of Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland.³ This was just four months after it had been extended for a year. In Assam, 23 districts were completely excluded, besides one which was only partially removed from the list. 15 police station areas of six districts of Manipur and 15 police station areas in seven districts of Nagaland were also removed from the list. The exclusion appears to be a result of the December 2021 accidental killing of 15 civilians in Mon district of Nagaland by security forces and the justifiable huge public outcry that followed. A number of Chief Ministers from the NER, some of whom were from the BJP, had also joined the protests demanding the removal of AFSPA. Available data shows that the year 2020 recorded a figure of 163 incidents involving five Special Forces (SF) and two civilian casualties. However, 2021 (the year the government took the decision) registered a higher tally of 209 incidents with eight SF and 23 civilian fatalities.⁴ The reality is that internal security situation in almost all insurgency affected states in the Northeast also does not support complete removal of the Act. In Manipur, the demand of the hill tribes (Kukis and Nagas) for tabling the Hill Areas Autonomous District Councils Bill 2021 in the State's assembly, and its subsequent transformation into an Act, was being opposed by the valley groups as it went against the principle of co-existence and could lead to division of the State. Similarly, the Centre's response to the issues of Nagaland's insistence on their flag being flown instead of the tricolour, and acceptance of their constitution (Naga Yezhabo), is also affecting the peace process. The demand of the seven tribes in eastern Nagaland for a Frontier State is also an added issue.⁵ In Assam too, the 'Foreigners' aspect is very fragile at the moment. It is evident that politics assumed more importance in the decision taken. The ground realities in the districts where the Act has been removed speak of a different story.

In Assam too, the 'Foreigners' aspect is very fragile at the moment. It is evident that politics assumed more importance in the decision taken. The ground realities in the districts where the Act has been removed speak of a different story.

Challenges to Managing the Indo-Myanmar Border

Terrain and Tribes along the Border. The 1650 km long land border between India and Myanmar is amongst the most inhospitable terrain on our borders. It is porous, riverine, and densely forested. While border pillars exist highlighting the alignment, physically it does little to separate people living on both sides. Starting from the South, the Mizos have their cousin, the Chins, living across in Chin State of Myanmar. In Manipur, the Kukis have their brethren, the Myanmar Kukis, and similarly, the Nagas of Nagaland have related Naga tribes across the border. The lay of the ground makes it ideal for insurgents to thrive and lends itself to execution of hostile actions by them, besides being an impediment to operations by security forces. Because of kinships across the border, the British era Free Movement Regime (FMR) is a sensitive issue with the locals who desire that it should not be rescinded.

Free Movement Regime (FMR). The FMR has its genesis in the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 after the First Anglo-Burmese War. It was given a contemporary shape in the 1967 Indo-Burma Treaty which delineated their borders. However, move of people across the India and Myanmar border, because of the FMR, adds to the security dilemma. This agreement permits people to travel freely up to 16 kms inside each other's territory for a period of 14 days on a pass issued by respective government. This was stopped during the Covid pandemic. With the abatement of the pandemic, India is known to have issued passes on a trial basis while Myanmar is yet to restart it. At State level, Manipur has shut down the FMR through its area, while Mizoram and Nagaland still follow it. To monitor and control movement, India has proposed 43 crossing places all along the border which are yet to be accepted by Myanmar. Unless this happens, it will enable insurgents to 'melt' away adding to the degree of difficulty of security forces.

Availability of Border Guarding Troops. Guarding the 1650 km porous border is another major challenge. Of the 46 Assam Rifles (AR) battalions, 20 are deployed along the border with Myanmar with the remainder being used for counter insurgency operations in the hinterland. Patrolling 80 to 100 kms by each battalion becomes difficult due to

Internal Security Issues

limited road and wireless connectivity. Moreover, compared to a serving army jawan whose average age is 26 years, an AR soldier is roughly 38 years old. The latter also goes to serve up to the age of 60, getting older with each year. The physical and mental stress on AR troops is, thus, enormous and beyond compare.

Insurgent Activity. The Covid pandemic over the last two years provided Indian Insurgent Groups (IIGs) with adequate time to re-arm, re-equip, and review their strategy of engaging the Indian security forces. Giving emphasis to synergised and joint operations, alliances have been formed by almost all groups. In early 2015, nine militant groups got together to form an alliance called the United National Liberation Front of Western South East Asia (UNLFWs).⁶ This alliance included Manipuri IIGs as well, but the alliance broke up over leadership issues. The non-Manipuri groups then formed the United National Liberation Front of Western South East Asia (UNLFW) on 17 April 2018. This comprises the United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA(I)), The National Socialist Council of Nagaland Khaplang NSCN(K), The National Democratic Front of Boroland Sangbifit NDFB(S), Kamptapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), and the now-defunct Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA). The Manipuri groups already had their alliance called the Coordination Committee (CorCom)⁷ created in 2011. This comprises of six valley-based groups that are the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), its Progressive faction (PREPAK-Pro), Revolutionary People's Front (RPF), the political wing of the People's Liberation Army Manipur (called PLA), and the United National Liberation Front (UNLF). Alliances enable IIGs to fight in a synergised and joint manner. It also conveys the message of collective spirit and bonding, the feeling for a common cause and determination to achieve the collective aim. The flip side is that these are formed for leadership issues, reasons for loss of space for operations, shortage of cadres, restriction on the availability of funds, limited arms and ammunition, and, above all, an increase in intensity of operations by Indian security forces. Alliances among IIGs can affect and alter the security dynamics of the region.

The situation in neighbouring Myanmar has had a telling effect on the management of the Indo-Myanmar border by security forces. Post 01 February 2021 coup, there is absolute mayhem in the internal situation in Myanmar.

Environment in Myanmar

The situation in neighbouring Myanmar has had a telling effect on the management of the Indo-Myanmar border by security forces. Post 01 February 2021 coup, there is absolute mayhem in the internal situation in Myanmar. Having experienced a decade of democratic rule and peace and development from 2011 to 2020, the people were not willing to get cowed before the military this time. The 'junta' took a while to react in order to bring in a semblance of law and order. Thereafter, it has been two years of absolute chaos leading to what is almost a civil war. While the ASEAN issued a five-point consensus for the military to respond to, the National Unity Government (NUG) formed by the people in the meantime has begun engaging with ethnic minorities promising them a federal state with an equal role for all in governance. People Defence Forces (PDF) have been created by almost all ethnic groups to defend and protect their areas and people. The National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signed by armed groups in May 2015 has taken a beating and is now defunct. To keep armed groups away from joining the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), the junta, after creating its own State Administrative Council (SAC), has started interacting with them. It has recognised the Arakan Army and has called for a cessation in operations against it. Taking advantage, the Arakan Army has consolidated its hold over the area in Rakhine State and has built itself into a formidable force. With the support of Arakan political parties, it is reported to be setting up an autonomous State. Similarly in Chin State, the Chin National Front (CNF), the Chinland Defence Force and the Chin civil society are also in the process of setting up a government in their liberated areas. While most ethnic armed groups have stayed away from the confrontation, there are at least four that have joined the CDM. These are the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) of Kachin State, the Chin National Army of Chin State, the Karenni National Army of Kayah State and the Karen National Liberation Army of Karen State. Each of these

groups has its own PDF. The Myanmar military, it is learnt, has made a secret pact with the PLA and Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL), two Manipuri IIGs. As part of the quid pro quo, while the junta will allow adequate space to these groups on its soil, the groups, in turn, are to fight alongside the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Army) against the PDFs in the liberated zones of Sagaing Division and Chin State. The above is a dangerous trend as it would provide the freedom to IIGs to operate at will from Myanmar territory onto Indian soil. The environment in Myanmar has generated other security related issues as given in succeeding paragraphs.

Rohingya Refugee Problem. The Rohingya offensives launched by the military in 2015-17 in Rakhine State has had its major fallout in India. More than one million Rohingyas are reported to have crossed the border into India and Bangladesh. The bulk has settled in the Siliguri Corridor area. Crackdown against the Chin National Defence Force (CNUF), a PDF of the Chin people, by the junta has resulted in a similar exodus across the border. The Rohingya crisis could become detrimental to India's security environment if not resolved earliest. Presence of homeless Rohingyas would mean availability of more cadres for jihadist movements emanating from Bangladesh and from across India's western borders.

Drug Trafficking, Human Trafficking, and Illicit Arms Trade. Myanmar is part of the infamous 'Golden Triangle'. This makes it simpler to traffic heroin and amphetamine tablets into the NER. The porous border and the FMR make drug peddling that much easier. Drug money enables purchase of arms and ammunition. According to data available from Mizoram, the volume of heroin recovered by the excise department and the State police increased from 20.36 kilogram in 2020 to 34.52 kg in 2021. During the January-May period of 2022, it has already reached 19.81 kg.⁸ Rohingyas have heightened the drug problem enormously. Being jobless in India, drug peddling becomes the easiest source of income. The border between India and Nepal, which has been kept open for strategic reasons, comes with its own problems. Prime among these is that of human trafficking for flesh trade and cheap labour. Through Myanmar, Indian and Nepali citizens are known to be taken to different South Asian cities before flying to Iraq, Kuwait, and other Middle-Eastern countries illegally.⁹

The 'Pauk-phaw' relationship shared by Myanmar and China is another aspect that upsets the security balance in the NER. Basing their relationship on this logic, China has influenced political events in Myanmar since the time of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in the 1950s.

The China and Myanmar: The 'Pauk-phaw' (Fraternal) Relationship

The 'Pauk-phaw' relationship shared by Myanmar and China is another aspect that upsets the security balance in the NER. Basing their relationship on this logic, China has influenced political events in Myanmar since the time of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in the 1950s. As a result, Myanmar has a total foreign debt of USD 10 billion, of which USD 4 billion is owed to China. Of this, USD 500 million has to be paid annually. Through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has tightened its grip on India's NER from all directions. Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan all have extensive Chinese investments short of a debt trap similar to what Sri Lanka is facing. China has also kept the India-Myanmar border alive by supporting the IIGs indirectly through the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and other armed groups which make available arms and equipment. China has invested heavily in the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) that runs through Myanmar connecting Kunming to a port at Kyaukphyu in Rakhine State giving it access to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This has been done to address its energy related problem for landlocked Yunnan Province as also to dilute the threat to its shipping through the Malacca Straits better known as its 'Malacca Dilemma'. Relations between Myanmar and China have only deepened post the coup, bridging the gap that had occurred during the brief democratic period from 2011 to 2019. CMEC is on track and Chinese investments are on the rise. China's presence at India's eastern doorstep, the area through which the much-flaunted Act East Policy is to take shape, is in itself enough to constitute a security challenge for India.

Growing Russian Influence

Besides China, the other major power in Myanmar is Russia. On 27 March 2021, two months after the country had witnessed the military coup, Russian Deputy Minister Aleksandr Fomin attended the Armed Forces Day in Myanmar as Chief Guest. This signaled the entry of Russia in Myanmar. Both Russia and Myanmar face western sanctions. Myanmar has supported Russia for its intervention in Ukraine, and in exchange, has received huge defence imports. Russia has also used its veto power to support the junta for the coup. Russia's entry has given Myanmar the opportunity to diversify and modernize its armed forces. Myanmar's weapons bill for 2010-19 reached USD 2.4 billion, including USD 1.3 billion in Chinese-supplied arms and \$807 million from Russia.¹⁰ Myanmar gives Russia strategic space for expansion in the IOR through the Bay of Bengal. It enables it to be within reach of the Malacca Straits in order to influence any activity in the South China Sea. Increasing presence of Russia in Myanmar is a welcome step for India. If nothing else, it will help reduce Chinese influence in India's eastern flank. India as a member of QUAD, besides being a close friend of Russia, will have to balance her priorities in the region. Strategic freedom which India follows will have to be applied correctly and is a challenge when dealing with two great powers, US and Russia.

Security Challenges to Indian Projects in Myanmar

Indian projects through Myanmar also face an equally daunting task. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP) is a sea-river-road project funded by India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). Aimed at countering China's influence in the neighbourhood, the KMTTP will connect Kolkata to Mizoram via Sittwe port in Myanmar. Also meant to remove the threat to the sensitive Siliguri Corridor, the sea route from Kolkata to Sittwe is 539 km. This is followed by an inland water way on the Kaladan River from Sittwe to Paletwa which is another 150 km. From Paletwa in Myanmar starts the road which is 110 km on the Myanmar side till Zorinpui in Mizoram, India. From Zorinpui, there is another 87 km to Lawngtalai. Local turf battles between the Arakan Army of Rakhine State and the Chin National Front of Chin State have now erupted with each claiming the port of Paletwa as being in its territory.¹¹ Rakhines are only 15 percent of Paletwa's population, the rest are Chins and smaller tribes of the Mizo-Kuki-Chin family like Khumis. The Arakan Army is reported to be settling Khumis in the area so as to claim it. Paletwa, it appears is of tactical significance to the Arakan Army as it is then able to access the Sangu Valley in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) to take shelter during Tatmadaw offensives. Started in 2008, the project missed its 2015 and 2021 deadlines but now is set for 2023. With an enhancement of funds from Rs 536 crore in 2008 to Rs 3,200 crore, the project appears to be on its final leg of completion provided the issues between the two rival, Myanmar States is resolved amicably and does not become a security challenge for India. The other Indian project being undertaken is the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. This connects India to Southeast Asia entering Myanmar at Moreh-Tamu and Thailand at Myawaddy. From Thailand, the highway is planned to connect to Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam becoming part of the Greater Mekong Economic Corridor. Meant to give a boost to India's Act East Policy, tremendous progress in the construction of the highway had been made over the past decade when peace and democratic rule prevailed in the country. Designed to allow a seamless flow of traffic from both sides of the border, the only formality left to be cleared is the approval of transit facilities by Myanmar. Post this clearance, threat from IIGs operating from Myanmar is likely to reduce.

Myanmar gives Russia strategic space for expansion in the IOR through the Bay of Bengal. It enables it to be within reach of the Malacca Straits in order to influence any activity in the South China Sea.

Security Challenges Along the Maritime Boundary

Myanmar has a coastline of 228 km from the mouth of the Naaf River (opposite Myanmar-Bangladesh border) to Kawthaung at the southernmost tip of the Tanintharyi Division. It has 29,043 square nautical miles of internal waters

and 9895 square nautical miles of territorial waters. Myanmar also has 852 islands in its waters. While the maritime boundary between Myanmar and India and its other neighbour Thailand are properly delineated, issues exist with Bangladesh. Drug and arms trafficking along sea routes to IIGs are the main security challenges. Existence of islands within its territorial waters, most of which are occupied by the Myanmar Navy as outposts, do not pose any problem during times of peace. If these are used as halts by unfriendly ships and submarines during times of war it will then be a cause for concern.

Conclusion

Myanmar is an immediate and important neighbour of India and should be viewed accordingly. Without compromising on its principles, India must leverage the numerous advantages it has of religion, culture, education, diaspora, and historical links with Myanmar. Handling Myanmar with 'kid-gloves' may just be the answer to India's woes in the NER. The situation along the India-Myanmar border must not be viewed in isolation. Management of borders with Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh and, especially, the Siliguri Corridor area are equally important as these are interlinked to the overall security of the region. India needs to secure its immediate neighbourhood if it has to look beyond in pursuance of its regional and global ambitions. Since the issue of IIGs and the multiple 'armies' in Myanmar are linked, it is important to have a greater control on the border. To that extent, the border guarding force, the AR, requires organisational changes. These can range from revamping the critical infrastructure grid to rotation of troops in a proper 'peace-field' mode to keep up their efficiency, as is done on all borders and by all forces. This requires raising more AR units. Smart fencing suitably boosted up with sensors and 'round the clock' UAVs and drones would also help to maintain vigil on this difficult border.

The situation along the India-Myanmar border must not be viewed in isolation. Management of borders with Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh and, especially, the Siliguri Corridor area are equally important as these are interlinked to the overall security of the region.

Endnotes

- 1 Sangmuan Hangsinghl Lian Muan Sang, “India’s Job Crisis, Security & Agnipath: Why Northeast May Become a Litmus Test”, *The Quint*, 25 Jul 2022.
- 2 Prapanna Lahiri, “Lack of development in the North-eastern part of India — a historical legacy”, Apr 21, 2017, Concept Research Foundation, <https://conceptresearchfoundation.com/2017/04/21/lack-of-development-in-the-north-eastern-part-of-india-%E2%80%95-a-historical-legacy/>
- 3 Deeptiman Tiwary , Tora Agarwala, “Govt removes AFSPA from parts of Nagaland, Assam and Manipur”, April 1, 2022, *The Indian Express*.
- 4 “Insurgency North East: Assessment- 2022”, South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) and Institute of Conflict Management.
- 5 Prabin Kalita, “, Centre to spell out its reply to demand for Frontier Nagaland” Jan 05, 2023, *The Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/centre-to-spell-out-its-reply-to-demand-for-frontier-nagaland/articleshow/96748857.cms>
- 6 Prabin Kalita, UNLFW: The new name for terror in NE, *Times of India*, June 5, 2015.
- 7 “The Heart Of Revolutionary Movement In Manipur Is CorCom”, Kangla Online, July 8, 2014.
- 8 “Rise in smuggling activities in Mizoram due to Myanmar crisis: Officials”, *The Hindu*, September 18, 2022.
- 9 Dinesh Sharma, “Human Trafficking along Indo-Myanmar Border: A concern for North East”, *The Darjeeling Chronicle*. Feb 05, 2019.
- 10 Dipanjan Roy Chaudhary, “Myanmar’s auditor general cautions own govt against Chinese loans,The Economic Times, June 13, 2020.
- 11 Subir Bhaumik, “Myanmar : Chin rebels oppose Arakan Army’s Paletwa claim”, *Northeast Now*, Jan 27, 2020.

Enhancing Coastal Security through Synergy: 2022 in Review

Captain Himadri Das[@] & Ms Uma Kabe[#]

Abstract

Cooperation and synergy amongst the multitude of coastal security stakeholders is an essential prerequisite for effective maritime and coastal security. The need for cooperation and synergy has been doctrinally articulated, and has been reiterated by the political leadership in India. In 2022, a number of reformative measures — some long pending — have been realised, and this could potentially lead to a transformation of coastal security governance. This article explores the important developments in 2022, and provides some perspectives on issues related to policy and operational synergy.

Introduction

From an Indian perspective, the term coastal security, despite its conceptual origins in the 1990s, began to emerge in officialise only in the first decade of the 21st century, and its etymological origin has been attributed to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).¹ However, it was only in 2015 that the *Indian Maritime Security Strategy* (2015) conceptually described coastal security as a subset of maritime security, focused on the coastal waters that entail the “protection, preservation and promotion of peace, stability, and security in coastal waters against various threats”.² Further, the strategy amplified that the wide canvas of the concept encompasses “maritime border management, island security, maintenance of peace, stability and good order in coastal areas and enforcement of laws therein, security of ports, coastal installations and other structures including Vital Areas and Vital Points (VAs/VPs), vessels and personnel operating in coastal areas”.³ Since then, in practice, the activities have further expanded to other activities, such as island security, and the coastal security construct is also activated to respond to a host of situations and contingencies in the coastal regions.

Synergy and Cooperation in Maritime Security

The word ‘synergy’ is a noun which means, “the extra energy, power, success, etc. that is achieved by two or more people, companies or elements working together instead of on their own”.⁴ Its etymology is attributed to the New Latin *synergia*, from the Greek *synorgos*, which means working together.⁵ In essence, the word synergy, which became a buzzword in the 1990s, encapsulates the saying that the ‘whole is greater than the sum of its parts’.⁶

[@] Captain Himadri Das is a serving naval officer and is presently a Directing Staff at the Naval War College (NWC), Goa. At the time of writing this article he was a Senior Fellow at the National Maritime Foundation (NMF). He is the author of two books on coastal security: *Coastal Security: Policy Imperatives for India* (2019) and *Coastal Dimensions of Maritime Security* (2022).

[#] Ms Uma Kabe is a Project Research Associate at the Maritime History Society (Mumbai) and is currently pursuing her Masters (MA) in Maritime Studies from the Center of Excellence in Marine Science (CEMAS), University of Mumbai. She was earlier associated with the Naval History Project for researching on the Navy’s Decadal history book for the decade 2011-2020.

From a military perspective, according to the *Indian Maritime Doctrine* (2009, updated 2015), ‘Cooperation and Synergy’ is one of the Principles of War.⁷ Cooperation — the efficient compounding of all the fighting elements of a force or power to attain an aim that they could not have achieved separately — essentially reflects the accretion of individual efforts into a joint one.⁸ Cooperation, which manifests itself as jointness in a Tri-Service context, is essential both in planning and for conduct of operations and is manifested in activities such as information sharing and mutual support.⁹ The principle is also related to the principle of economy of effort, and facilitates reduction of friction.¹⁰

Synergy, an extension of cooperation in modern warfare, relates to the effect, while cooperation is in the action. In other words, cooperation in activities bring out synergistic effects which cannot be achieved independently. Synergy is predicated on enhanced cooperation (and jointness) between and across components of military, and also national power, and is relevant across the entire spectrum of conflict.¹¹ This principle is also germane to inter-agency coordination, which is the coordination between government departments and agencies for the purpose of achieving an objective within the government.¹²

Related to the word ‘cooperation’ are also the words ‘coordination’ and ‘collaboration’. ‘Collaboration’ literally means, “the act of working with another person or group of people to create or produce something”, and the term ‘coordination’ means, “the act of making parts of something, groups of people, etc. work together in an efficient and organised way”.¹³ The three words — coordination, cooperation, and collaboration (3Cs) — are often used interchangeably, but in the context of partnerships, have different meanings with coordination often being a first step. Cooperation may be an end by itself or could lead to collaborative efforts, which reflects a higher level of integration.¹⁴ The 3C approach, however, contrasts to the Command and Control, or C2 approach, which is essentially a military approach.

Synergy is predicated on enhanced cooperation (and jointness) between and across components of military, and also national power, and is relevant across the entire spectrum of conflict

Related to the military principle of ‘cooperation and synergy’, is the ‘whole-of’ approach which highlights the movement from isolated silos in public administration and governance to formal and informal networks driven, *inter alia*, by factors such as the need for collaborative responses to complex problems.¹⁵ The ‘*whole-of*’ paradigm pertains not only to government(s) (*whole-of-government*), but also to the nation (*whole-of nation*), or across society (*whole-of-society*).¹⁶

In an address at the ‘*Chintan Shivir*’ (brainstorming session) of Home Ministers of states, in October 2022, which, *inter alia*, discussed issues related to coastal security, in the context of ‘cooperative federalism’, the Union Home Minister Amit Shah highlighted that the ‘Whole-of-Government’ and ‘Team India’ approach is promoting the 3Cs approach comprising ‘Cooperation, Coordination, Collaboration’ between the Centre and the states. Notably, a press release stated that “the *Shivir*, in the spirit of cooperative federalism, will bring more synergy in planning and coordination between various stakeholders at centre and state levels”.¹⁷ Prime Minister Modi, addressing the *Chintan Shivir*, highlighted that the *Shivir* was a prime example of cooperation and the role of states in ensuring the unity and integrity of India; ‘unity and harmony’ also being one of the *Panch Pran*¹⁸ resolutions.¹⁹ He also underscored the criticality of cooperation in view of increasing transborder crimes, across both states and countries.²⁰

Earlier in June 2022, the National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval, addressing the maiden high-level meeting of a national-level maritime security group, called for ‘seamless coordination among all stakeholders involved in the maritime domain’, and highlighted the critical role of every individual in the maritime and coastal security construct, from a beat constable to officials at the national level²¹ In November 2022, the Union Home Minister, addressing a high level meeting of Intelligence Bureau (IB) officers, highlighted the need for strengthening of information sharing and communication, and for making ‘coastal security impenetrable’, greater surveillance of ports.²² Clearly, the political

articulations across different forums through the year point to the importance that cooperation, synergy, and information sharing have, especially in the context of coastal security.

Notably, the *Indian Maritime Security Strategy (2015)* focuses on “developing the coordinative framework and ways by which the mechanism for coastal and offshore security will counter continuing and evolving threats [emphasis added]”.²³ It does this through the 3Cs approach across operational and functional areas, such as presence and patrol; response Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) community engagement and improved maritime [security] governance.²⁴ In practice, effective maritime security governance requires the development of an institutional mechanism, along with necessary resources (capacity and capability, such as for information sharing), and an underlying legal framework. Each of these pillars mutually support the development of synergy.

Strengthening Synergy in Coastal Security in 2022: Key Developments

National Maritime Security Coordinator. In February 2022, Vice Admiral G Ashok Kumar (Retd.), former Vice Chief of the Naval Staff (VCNS), was appointed as India’s first National Maritime Security Coordinator (NMSC) fulfilling a longstanding recommendation for apex-level coordination for maritime security.²⁵ The genesis of an apex-level coordination mechanism can be traced to the ‘Group of Ministers (GoM) Report on National Security (2001)’ which had recommended the setting-up of an apex body for the management of maritime affairs to provide institutional linkages between the maritime security agencies and other stakeholders of the Centre and in states.²⁶

The appointment of the NMSC has been widely acknowledged as a positive development and is seen as part of the continuing reforms of the higher military and national security architecture.

The NMSC is part of the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) and reports to the NSA.²⁷ While there has been no official announcement on the mandate of the NMSC, as per media reports, the broad responsibility of the NMSC is to function as the nodal point for developing a cohesive approach to maritime security amongst the numerous maritime security stakeholders — including those of the Centre and states, as well as between military and civilian agencies — through ‘better’ coordination.²⁸ The NMSC is also likely to function as the principal advisor to the government on maritime security.²⁹ The appointment of the NMSC has been widely acknowledged as a positive development and is seen as part of the continuing reforms of the higher military and national security architecture.³⁰

State Maritime Security Coordinators. The concept of coastal security, which requires both the Centre and states to work together, is predicated on effective cooperative federalism for security (‘cooperative security federalism’). Therefore, strengthening institutional mechanisms within states is also a prerogative. According to media reports, states had been asked to ‘nominate’ State Maritime Security Coordinators (SMSCs) to coordinate and work more closely with other maritime security agencies, and states have, thereafter, nominated SMSCs.³¹ The main imperatives for appointing an SMSC are four-fold: first, the fundamental need to have institutions across all levels of governance; second, as the scope of maritime security expands and overlaps with ocean governance, there is a need for enhanced cross-cutting coordination across maritime stakeholders outside of the more contemporary focus of states which has been on coastal security; third, overcoming the limitations of ‘committee-based’ approaches to more institutional mechanisms; and fourth, leveraging the principle of subsidiarity by strengthening of maritime security in states so that the centre, while coordinating with states, can focus on issues that are outside the remit of states. It is unclear whether the SMSC is a dual-hatted nomination, or a dedicated coordinator, much like the NMSC. To be effective, the need would be dedicated coordinator.

Multi-Agency Maritime Security Group. Another notable development in 2022 is the creation of the Multi-Agency Maritime Security Group (MAMSG) which had its first meeting in June 2022 under the chairpersonship of the newly

Internal Security Issues

appointed NMSC.³² The MAMSG brings together SMSCs from all 13 coastal states and Union Territories (UTs), as well as other maritime/coastal stakeholders.³³ The MAMSG is an apex platform for coordination of all aspects of maritime security, including coastal and offshore security. It is envisaged that the MAMSG will contribute to addressing both, the present and future challenges to maritime security in its various forms, and strengthen maritime security governance in India.

National Maritime Domain Awareness Project. From an information-sharing perspective, it has been reported in the media that towards the end of 2022, the government had approved the Rs 250 crore National Maritime Domain Awareness (NMDA) Project.³⁴ The NMDA project is intended to expand the scope of the existing National Command Control Communication and Intelligence (NC3I) network — which was limited to the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard — by linking all maritime agencies, coastal states and Union Territories into one network, and also pooling data through interfaces with additional data sources, such as from the shipping and fisheries sectors.³⁵ Seven ministries, 15 agencies and 13 coastal states/UTs are likely to be integrated through the project.³⁶ The NMDA Project, which in many ways is the natural evolution of the NC3I network, is also envisaged to be a real-time ‘integrated intelligence grid’ for generating actionable intelligence to counter threats at sea.³⁷ Notably, the project which was conceptualised and accorded an Approval-in-Principle (AIP) in 2010 took over a decade to be approved, and will likely take a few more years to be fully functional — a gap of about a decade-and-half from conceptualisation to operationalisation.³⁸

It has also been reported that the project to install transponders on small fishing vessels, under 20 metres in length (and associated Vessel Management System), is now making progress with a project underway in Tamil Nadu.³⁹ Reportedly, the technology has been handed over to four companies for commercial production.⁴⁰ If successfully implemented, the sub-20m transponder has the potential to significantly improve fisheries Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) in India.

If successfully implemented, the sub-20m transponder has the potential to significantly improve fisheries Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) in India.

Common Communication Plan. As per reports in the media, MHA has approved a Common Communication Plan for coastal security, aimed at integrating marine law enforcement agencies into a single network for better coordination and seamless exchange of mission-critical information.⁴¹ Reportedly, MHA had previously constituted a task force comprising representatives of central and state agencies to facilitate effective communication between coastal security stakeholders.⁴² While the exact details are unknown, ‘communication’ is the backbone on which military concepts, such as Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) function, and with increasing involvement of multiple agencies at sea — military and non-military — communication is also prerequisite for coordinated, or joint, maritime and coastal security operations. The plan, which appears to be complementary to the NMDA, could address the issue of inter-agency communication which has for long been an impediment for effective operational synergy. Collectively, the NMDA and the Common Communication Plan could lead to a revolution in building synergy in coastal security. The spin-offs would also facilitate other tasks in which coastal security agencies are often deployed, such as Search and Rescue (SAR) missions, Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR), etc.

Exercise Sea Vigil-22. Exercise *Sea Vigil* — a unique national-level coastal defence exercise — was conducted on 15-16 November 2022.⁴³ This was the third edition of the biennial exercise which started in 2019. The exercise, conducted across all coastal states and UTs, witnessed the participation of about 20 agencies, 500 surface and air platforms from all maritime stakeholders, Special Forces [Indian Navy MARCOS⁴⁴ and National Security Guard (NSG)], and over 800 cadets from the National Cadet Corps (NCC). The exercise, in addition to validating operational procedures, also validated measures for technical surveillance and information sharing. The official press release emphasising the need for cooperation and synergy, notes that the objectives were met by the “whole-hearted participation of all stakeholders”,

and that “cooperation and coordination amongst various agencies involved is a reassuring sign of progress made in the realm of Coastal Defence”.⁴⁵

In sum, in 2022, there have been some landmark developments which foster synergy and strengthen coastal security. These include, the appointment of the NMSC, the nomination of SMSCs, the creation of the MAMSG, clearances to the NMDA Project and Common Communication Plan, as well as the conduct of Exercise *Sea Vigil-22*. Each of these, in their own ways, promotes the 3Cs and synergy at the policy-making level (NMSC, SMSC, MAMSG) and at operational levels (NMDA, Common Communication Plan, and Exercise *Sea Vigil-22*), as well as with the community, through participation of the NCC and other voluntary groups in the exercise. The implementation of the NMDA and Communication Plan has immense potential to address gaps and to transform operational synergy, much like the net-centric operations in a military context.

Developing Synergy for Coastal Security: Some Perspectives

Whole-of Paradigm. Maritime security governance in India today is characterised by an inclusive ‘*whole-of*’ paradigm. From essentially a single agency activity till the early 1970s (Indian Navy), the governance of maritime and coastal security has established itself as a multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral, multi-level activity involving a host of ministries, departments, agencies, as well as civil society at large, through a mix of largely formal, but also informal, processes, especially after the ‘26/11’ incident.⁴⁶ The establishment of coordinating committees at multiple levels of governance — the National Committee for Strengthening Coastal and Maritime Security (NCSMCS) in 2009, the Steering Committee for Review of Coastal Security (SCRCS) in 2013, and the state- and district-level Coastal Security Committees in 2016, followed by the NMSC, SMSCs and MAMSG in early 2022 — has institutionalised mechanisms for policy coordination and implementation across the centre and states, as well as within states and districts. With the appointment of the NMSC and the nomination of SMSCs in quick succession in the first-half of 2022, the ‘*whole-of*’ paradigm is only likely to get further streamlined and consolidated within the centre and states, and between the centre and states. Therefore, towards effectively leveraging the institutional framework for policy coordination, the overwhelming need is to strengthen the existing institutions primarily through adequate cross-sectoral manning, and by empowering them.

In sum, in 2022, there have been some landmark developments which foster synergy and strengthen coastal security. These include, the appointment of the NMSC, the nomination of SMSCs, the creation of the MAMSG, clearances to the NMDA Project and Common Communication Plan, as well as the conduct of Exercise *Sea Vigil-22*.

Cooperative Security Federalism. In India, ‘cooperative federalism’, based on the complementary role of the centre and states, is the mantra for effective centre-state relationships.⁴⁷ However, this does not come without its own set of challenges, such as in coordination. Till the turn of the 21st century, in India, maritime security was largely a ‘centralised’ affair; however, the emergence of contemporary threats has led to wider ‘federalisation’ with a larger role for states. The fact is that no level of government is equipped to confront the security challenges of the 21st century by itself.⁴⁸ Therefore, while the institutionalisation of the SMSCs is an important step, harnessing state and local institutions for national security is an enduring imperative — as much in the maritime domain as it is in the land-based context. It is only through horizontal, vertical, and transverse coordination — in other words all-round coordination — that ‘unity of effort’ can be achieved towards meeting the objectives of holistic maritime security. Therefore, state-level institutions for the governance of subjects allocated in the State List, whether it be those related to fisheries, ports, etc, also need to be strengthened, the development of robust fisheries, MCS system is one such imperative.⁴⁹

Integrated Theatre Command. At the operational level, several important initiatives have been taken to streamline coordination and have facilitated greater ‘unity of effort’. These include, amongst others, adoption of a multi-layered approach to coastal security involving maritime security and policing agencies; the institution of the ‘hub-and-spoke

Internal Security Issues

model' between the Indian Coast Guard and the State Marine Police (SMP); the establishment of the NC3I network; the formulation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), etc. The GoM Report of 2001, acknowledging issues related to 'command and control' associated with the deployment of multiple forces, had enunciated the 'one-border-one-force' principle to obviate 'problems of conflict in command and control'.⁵⁰ Towards enhancing coordination and improve jointness among the armed forces in the maritime domain, a Maritime Theatre Command (MTC) is under consideration as a "one-point command structure for all sea-going warships, submarines, [aero]planes, and surveillance assets like drones".⁵¹ Further, as per media reports, the MTC is expected to unify and integrate assets of the three defence forces as also the Coast Guard, which is an armed force, under the Ministry of Defence (MoD).

At the operational level, globally there are multiple models in which multiple agencies operate to achieve 'unity of effort'. These include *unified command* (maritime assets from different agencies temporarily assigned under a joint operational command), *unified force* (all maritime assets are centralised under a single agency), and '*division of labour*' (multiple agencies with their own assets, authorities, and operational tasks).⁵² There is, however, no unanimity as to the ideal operational model, as each one has its advantages as well as disadvantages. However, it is a fact that coordinated models have shortcomings which could, at a critical time, affect effectiveness of operational actions. The fact that 'unity of command' based on the military 'command and control' approach, as opposed to 'unity of effort', premised on the 3Cs approach, is considered as a Principle of War, by some militaries, is not without reason. The raising of the MTC, whenever raised, in whichever form, will potentially have an effect on operational coordination and synergy.

Towards enhancing coordination and improve jointness among the armed forces in the maritime domain, a Maritime Theatre Command (MTC) is under consideration as a "one-point command structure for all sea-going warships, submarines, [aero]planes, and surveillance assets like drones".

Exercises and Drills. One of the important initiatives has been the conduct of biannual coastal and offshore security exercises, (Exercise *Sagar Kavach*), and more lately, biennial coastal defence exercises since 2019 (Exercise *Sea Vigil*).⁵³ The scale and scope of these exercises varies from the state to the national level. Each of these exercises has a specific aim and work complementarily to achieve larger maritime security objectives. These are also complemented by sectoral exercises and drills, such as in port and the offshore sectors. The benefits from such regular exercises which promote inter-agency 'socialisation', are immense, including developing synergy. However, these exercises could be complemented by drills across the maritime security sector, encompassing critical maritime infrastructure, and with exercises encompassing a smaller maritime front in some cases, such as in a district. Operational exercises also need to engage with crisis management institutions at the national and state levels, to the extent possible.

Maritime Domain Awareness. As India moves towards a NMDA structure, there is a need to establish the requisite governance structures to provide policy direction and practical guidance for sharing information and intelligence, and to align individual efforts with national MDA goals.⁵⁴ The governance architecture could include inter-ministerial/inter-agency bodies at appropriate levels and necessary directives and guidance could take the forms of plans, strategies, SOPs, protocols, Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), etc. In the long-term, these could also lead to the development of statutory provisions.

Conclusion

Over the years, especially after the '26/11' incident, the management of maritime and coastal security has transformed, ushering in a new inclusive paradigm of partnerships and coordination in the maritime and coastal security sector. Synergy is a *sine qua non* for effective coastal security. The requirement of synergy is manifold. Synergy is required

between the centre and states, between states, between defence forces, between military and non-military forces, between government and the private sector, between the government and the community, etc. These are encapsulated in concepts such as ‘jointness’ between defence forces, ‘interagency coordination’ between government agencies, and ‘whole-of’ paradigms comprising the whole-of-government, the whole-of-society, and the whole-of nation approaches. Coastal security — a novel and complex concept — encompasses the need for multidimensional synergy.

The need for cooperation and synergy for effective coastal security has been doctrinally articulated, and has been reiterated by the political leadership in India. In 2022, a number of reformative measures — some long pending — have been realised, and this could potentially lead to a transformation of coastal security governance. Each of these, in their own ways, promotes the 3Cs approach and synergy at the policy-making level (NMSC, SMSCs, MAMSG) and at operational level (NDMA, Common Communication Plan, and Exercise *Sea Vigil-22*). Initiatives aimed at wider community participation, such as by participation of the NCC and other voluntary groups in exercises, contribute to strengthening community engagement for security.

Some of the imperatives for improving synergy are strengthening the institutional framework across governance levels; greater focus on ‘cooperative security federalism’; strengthening state capabilities; overall capability enhancement, such as through exercises and drills; and, strengthening MDA governance structures for streamlining information flows. The likely raising of the MTC will also have an impact on synergy for coastal security. In sum, much progress has been made in 2022, but there is a need for consolidation on the gains, and to remain agile to future developments and challenges. Synergy, however, will remain the lynchpin for effective coastal security.

The need for cooperation and synergy for effective coastal security has been doctrinally articulated, and has been reiterated by the political leadership in India.

Endnotes

- 1 Himadri Das, “Marine Policing and Maritime Security in India,” National Maritime Foundation, 25 November 2022, <https://maritimeindia.org/marine-policing-and-maritime-security-in-india-evolving-dimensions/>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 2 Indian Navy, *Ensuring Secure Seas: India Maritime Security Strategy* (2015), 162.
- 3 Indian Navy, *Ensuring Secure Seas: India Maritime Security Strategy*, 109.
- 4 Oxford Learner’s Dictionary (online), s.v. “synergy,” <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/synergy?q=synergy>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 5 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, “Synergy,” Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/synergy>, accessed 27 December 2022.
- 6 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, “Synergy.”
- 7 Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Indian Maritime Doctrine* (2009, updated online version 2015), 43, <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian-Maritime-Doctrine-2009-Updated-12Feb16.pdf>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 8 Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, 43.
- 9 Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, 43.
- 10 Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, 43.
- 11 Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, 43.
- 12 DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (November 2021), US Department of Defence, s.v. “inter-agency cooperation,” 109, <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/dod/dictionary.pdf>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 13 Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries (online), s.v. “collaboration,” <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/collaboration?q=collaboration>, accessed 28 December 2022; Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries (online), s.v. “coordination,” <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/coordination?q=coordination>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 14 Himadri Das, ongoing thesis on “Maritime Security Governance: Imperatives for Reform;” FISH-i Africa and West Africa Task Force, *Stop Illegal Fishing (2021) Regional Cooperation to Stop Illegal Fishing: A Tale of Two Task Forces*, (Gaborone, Botswana: 2021), 14, https://1ae03060-3f06-4a5c-9ac6-b5c1b4a62664.usrfiles.com/ugd/1ae030_adff42091e77403db1f894ff1d17f986.pdf, accessed 04 January 2022.
- 15 United Nations, *United Nations E-Government Survey 2012*, 55, <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/Portals/egovkb/Documents/un/2012-Survey/Chapter-3-Taking-a-whole-of-government-approach.pdf>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 16 Himadri Das, “India@75: Reflections on the Homeland Dimensions of Maritime Security in India,” National Maritime Foundation, 08 August 2022, <https://maritimeindia.org/15395-2/>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 17 Prime Minister’s Office, “PM to Attend Chintan Shivir of Home Ministers of States on 28th October,” Press Information Bureau, 26 October 2022, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1870876>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 18 The Prime Minister had laid out five resolution [Panch Pran of Amrit Kaal] during the Prime Minister’s Independence Day speech in August 2022: moving any trace of a colonial mindset, taking pride in our roots, unity amongst workers, especially women, and the duties and responsibilities of citizens.
- 19 Prime Minister’s Office, “PM addresses ‘Chintan Shivir’ of Home Ministers of States,” 28 October 2022, https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pm-addresses-chintan-shivir-of-home-ministers-of-states/, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 20 Prime Minister’s Office, “PM addresses ‘Chintan Shivir’ of Home Ministers of States.”

- 21 Dinakar Peri, "Changing Geopolitical Scenario in Indian Ocean Region, Important to Protect Our Interests: NSA Ajit Doval," *The Hindu*, 30 June 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/stakeholders-in-maritime-sphere-must-coordinate-says-nsa-ajit-doval/article65584902.ece?homepage=true>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 22 Ministry of Home Affairs, "Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah Chaired a High Level Meeting of Intelligence Bureau (IB) Officials from across the Country in New Delhi Today and Reviewed the Internal Security Situation in the Country." Press Information Bureau, 09 November 2022, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1874804>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 23 Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas; India's Maritime Security Strategy* (2015), 107.
- 24 Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas; India's Maritime Security Strategy* (2015), 107.
- 25 Krishn Kaushik, "First Coordinator for National Maritime Security Appointed, to Report to NSA," *The Indian Express*, 17 February 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/ashok-kumar-first-coordinator-for-national-maritime-security-appointed-7777016/>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 26 Group of Ministers, "Report of the Group of Ministers to Review the National Security, 2001," 74, <https://www.vifindia.org/sites/default/files/GoM%20Report%20on%20National%20Security.pdf>, accessed 28 November 2020.
- 27 Krishn Kaushik, "First Coordinator for National Maritime Security Appointed, to Report to NSA."
- 28 Shishir Gupta, "India to Appoint National Maritime Security Coordinator for Maritime Security," *Hindustan Times*, 13 July 2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-to-appoint-national-maritime-security-coordinator-for-maritime-security-101626154622796.html>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 29 Shishir Gupta, "India to Appoint National Maritime Security Coordinator for Maritime Security."
- 30 Snehash Alex Philip, "India's New Maritime Security Coordinator Is 22 Years Too Late. But It Ticks Many Boxes," *ThePrint*, 18 February 2022, <https://theprint.in/opinion/brahmastra/indias-new-maritime-security-coordinator-is-22-years-too-late-but-it-ticks-many-boxes/836242/>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 31 S. Vijay Kumar, "T.N. To Get High-Intensity Boats for Patrolling" *The Hindu*, 16 June 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/tn-to-get-high-intensity-boats-for-patrolling/article65533487.ece>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 32 Dinakar Peri, "Changing Geopolitical Scenario in Indian Ocean Region, Important to Protect Our Interests: NSA Ajit Doval."
- 33 Dinakar Peri, "Changing Geopolitical Scenario in Indian Ocean Region, Important to Protect Our Interests: NSA Ajit Doval."
- 34 Rajat Pandit, "Govt approves project to tackle real-time maritime threats," *The Times of India*, 04 December 2022, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/95968208.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 35 Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, 167.
- 36 Admiral Karambir Singh, "Transforming the Indian Navy to be a Key Maritime Force in the Indo-Pacific," Talk at the United Services Institution of India (USI), New Delhi, 27 August 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JliLaXx46AI>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 37 Rajat Pandit, "Govt approves project to tackle real-time maritime threats,"
- 38 Himadri Das, *Coastal Security: Policy Imperatives for India* (New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation, 2019), 215.
- 39 Dinakar Peri, "Projects to track small fishing vessels along India's Coasts make progress." *The Hindu*, 14 November 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/projects-to-track-small-fishing-vessels-along-indias-coast-makes-progress/article66135823.ece>, accessed 20 December 2022,

Internal Security Issues

- 40 Dinakar Peri, “Projects to track small fishing vessels along India’s Coasts make progress.”
- 41 “Centre Approves Common Communication Plan for Ramping up Coastal Security.” Press Trust of India, 20 November 2022, <https://www.ptinews.com/news/national/centre-approves-common-communication-plan-for-ramping-up-coastal-security/2/461689.html>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 42 Outlook Web desk, “MHA approves unified communication network for maritime law enforcement agencies to improve coastal security,” Outlook India, 20 November 2022, <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/mha-approves-unified-communication-network-for-marine-law-enforcement-agencies-to-improve-coastal-security-news-238728>, accessed 20 December 2022.
- 43 Ministry of Defence, “Completion of Coastal Defence Exercise Sea Vigil-22,” Press information Bureau, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1876738#:~:text=Exercise%20Sea%20Vigil-22%2C%20the,and%20EEZ%20of%20the%20country>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 44 MARCOS: Marine Commandos
- 45 Press information Bureau, Ministry of Defence, ‘*Completion of Coastal Defence Exercise Sea Vigil-22.*’
- 46 Himadri Das, “India@75: Reflections on the Homeland Dimensions of Maritime Security in India.”
- 47 Himadri Das, “Strengthening Maritime Security Governance in India: A Case for ‘State Maritime Security Coordinators,’ National Maritime Foundation, 23 July 2022, <https://maritimeindia.org/strengthening-maritime-security-governance-in-india-a-case-for-state-maritime-security-coordinators/>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 48 atthew C. Waxman, “National Security Federalism in the Age of Terror,” *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 64 (2012): 289, Columbia Public Law Research Paper No. 11-271 (2011).
- 49 Himadri Das, “Maritime Safety and Security in India: Fisheries “MCS” a Key Enabler,” National Maritime Foundation, 21 November 2021, <https://maritimeindia.org/maritime-safety-and-security-in-india-fisheries-mcs-a-key-enabler/>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 50 “‘Group Of Ministers’ Report On “Reforming the National Security System,” Press Information Bureau, 23 May 2001, <https://archive.pib.gov.in/archive/releases98/lyr2001/rmay2001/23052001/r2305200110.html>.
- 51 Ajay Banerjee, “Indian Navy to Set up Maritime Theatre Command by next Year: Navy Chief.” *The Tribune*, 03 December 2021, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/confident-of-dealing-with-any-threat-in-indias-maritime-domain-navy-chief-345863>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 52 Evan A. Laksmana, “Remodelling Indonesia’s Maritime Law Enforcement Architecture: Theoretical and Policy Considerations,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs*, Volume 44, Number 1, 122-149.
- 53 Himadri Das, “An Integrated Approach to Coastal and Offshore Defence: Leveraging the Coastal Security Construct,” National Maritime Foundation, 23 March 2021, <https://maritimeindia.org/an-integrated-approach-to-coastal-and-offshore-defence-leveraging-the-coastal-security-construct/>, accessed 28 December 2022.
- 54 US Maritime Administration, “Maritime Domain Awareness Executive Steering Committee (MDA ESC),” <https://www.maritime.dot.gov/sites/marad.dot.gov/files/docs/ports/office-security/7941/mda-esc-2017-rev1.pdf>, accessed 30 June 2021.

Section III

Pakistan-China Nexus

20th National Congress - 'Communist Party of China' Salient Facets - Key Take Aways and Ramifications

Major General (Dr) GG Dwivedi, SM, VSM & Bar (Retd)[@]

Abstract

A week-long 20th Congress of the 'Communist Party of China' was held during October 2022 at Beijing. An event of immense political significance, it drew world-wide attention. This conference was of special significance as Xi Jinping secured an unprecedented third term. The newly elected members of the highest governance bodies are all Xi's loyalists. Xi has signalled a major shift in priorities from economic to security. Hence, China is expected to be even more assertive in pursuit of its ideological and national interests. Xi's continuation is not good news for China in view of past experience of Mao's era. For the international community, it may be viewed as a blessing in disguise, Xi being a known entity. Given Beijing's grand design and enduring hostility towards Delhi, not much is expected to change in the bilateral relations, particularly the border situation. Xi's third term is off to a rough start with a devastating outbreak of Covid 19 infections, as a sequel to the reversal of 'Zero Covid' policy, coupled with slowed down economic growth. Xi's ambition to be a life-long ruler is fraught with high risks.

Introduction

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) was held during the third week of October 2022 at Beijing. The twice-a-decade conference, being an event of enormous political significance, was closely followed across the globe as supreme power in 'People's Republic of China' (PRC) lies with the Communist Party. It is at the Party Congress that the Chinese leadership for the coming five years is decided and national policies defined. The current Congress was of special significance wherein, the precedence of 'two terms norm' which had been strictly adhered to since past three Communist leadership changes, was blatantly set aside. As expected, Xi Jinping secured the third term as the General Secretary of CPC; the most powerful position in the Chinese governance structure. The new top Party tiers are stacked with Xi's protégés and loyalists, making him the supreme leader. Xi had worked systematically and assiduously to consolidate his hold on key levers of power since he assumed the mantle of Fifth Generation Leadership in 2012. With China's growing role alongside the Communist leadership's quest to reshape the Western led international order, the outcome of the 20th Party Congress has far-reaching ramifications. Xi's steadfastness to lead China into the 'New Era'¹ and how he goes about it, will have profound impact on the international milieu across the spectrum. The relationship between China and the West, particularly the USA, have already undergone dramatic change; trade, technology and Taiwan being the major friction areas. Given Beijing's enduring hostile attitude towards Delhi, developments inside PRC are of serious concern for India in view of the cascading effect on the tenuous bilateral relations. To address the above issues, a holistic review has been undertaken in this article of the salient facets of 20th National Congress, its key takeaways and ramifications

[@] Major General (Dr) GG Dwivedi, SM, VSM & Bar retired as Assistant Chief Integrated Defence Staff, after 38 years of distinguished service in the Army. A Veteran of Bangladesh War, he later commanded Battalion in Siachen (Northern Glacier), Brigade in Kashmir Valley and Division in the North East. He served as Defence Attaché in China, North Korea and Mongolia. An alumnus of National Defence College and Harvard Kennedy School, he has Ph D from JNU besides MBA and Interpretation in Chinese. Presently, he is a Professor Strategic-IR and Management; Distinguished Fellow at USI and Senior Fellow & Associate at Alon Ben-Meir Center, New York. An acclaimed writer and speaker, he regularly appears as a panellist on the national TV.

Salient Facets

The week-long Party Congress was attended by 2296 handpicked representatives elected under the norms and guidelines set by Xi. Of these, 771 were the frontline party members who hold jobs outside the Party bureaucracy. The ethnic composition of Congress remains predominantly Han; women and members of minority groups constituting barely 27 percent and 11.5 percent respectively.²

In the opening session of the Congress, President Xi delivered a report to the Congress on behalf the 19th CPC Central Committee. The theme was all encompassing; “Holding high the great banner of ‘Socialism with Chinese Characteristics’, fully implementing the ‘Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era’, carrying forward the great founding spirit of the Party, staying confident and building strength, upholding fundamental principles and breaking new ground, forging ahead with enterprise and fortitude, striving in unity to build a modern socialist country in all respects and advance the great rejuvenation of Chinese nation on all fronts”.³

During the two-hour speech, Xi highlighted various achievements of the past decade. He recalled embracing of the CPC Centenary in 2021, ushering of a ‘new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics’ and eradication of absolute poverty, consequently building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, thus completing the ‘First Centenary Goal’. China witnessed a historic rise in its economic stature during the past decade with GDP around \$ 16 trillion, accounting for 18.5 percent of global economy, up from 7.2 percent. The General Secretary also pledged to improve people’s well-being and quality of life.⁴

Xi confidently defended his ‘hard-line reign’ and underscored PRC’s rising influence during his tenure. He vowed to guide China towards national rejuvenation and claimed victory over numerous challenges, including Covid 19, by protecting the lives of citizens, steering Hong Kong from chaos to governance, and standing up to ‘independence forces in Taiwan’ — while striving for peaceful reunification; yet never promise to renounce use of force, to this end. China has taken a clear-cut stand against hegemonism, unilateralism, and bullying, stated Xi; an oblique reference to the US led international order.⁵ Xi also underscored CPC’s overwhelming victory and consolidation of gains in its fight against corruption. He reiterated that “to escape the historical cycle of ‘rise and fall’, the answer is ‘self-reform’, ensuring that Party will never change its nature and its conviction or its character”.

Xi confidently defended his ‘hard-line reign’ and underscored PRC’s rising influence during his tenure. He vowed to guide China towards national rejuvenation and claimed victory over numerous challenges, including Covid 19, by protecting the lives of citizens, steering Hong Kong from chaos to governance, and standing up to ‘independence forces in Taiwan’ — while striving for peaceful reunification.

Successfully ‘running the table’, Xi managed to pack the CPC’s top leadership with, his most faithful allies and got rid of residual elements of factional opposition, thus, gaining absolute control over the Party to run the country. Paying scant regard to the previous norms of retirement age, Xi retained or eased out personnel based entirely on the personal equations, evident from the new line up. In the top most governance layer — the seven member ‘Politburo Standing Committee’ (PBSC) which presides over the 24-member Politburo of the 96 million strong CPC, four of its members were replaced by Xi’s loyalists, including the No 2 — Premier Li Keqiang, widely seen as his main opponent. So were Li’s allies — Wang Yang, who was expected to become PM, and Hu Chunhua — forced out from the Politburo itself. Han Zheng, considered to be part of former leader Jiang Zemin’s faction, met a similar fate.⁶

Xi’s devoted loyalists who have been elevated to the PBSC are Li Qiang — Shanghai Party Secretary — tipped to be the PM, Ding Xuexian — Xi’s ‘Chief of Staff’, Cai Qi — Beijing Party Secretary and Li Xi — Guangdong Party Secretary. While Cai and Li have become heads of ‘Central Secretariat’ and ‘Central Commission for Inspection’ (CCDI) respectively, Ding is expected to be the Vice Premier. Two members of the PBSC who retained their seats are Zhao Leji — former head of CCDI and Wang Huning — the ideology tsar; both being closely aligned with Xi. While the former

is likely to take over as the Chairman of National People's Congress (NPC), the latter is set to head the Consultative Legislative Body⁷ Times when there existed Jiang Zemin centric 'Shanghai Gang' or Hu Jintao connected 'Communist Youth League Faction' are over and consigned to history.

As the Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), Xi retained Gen Zhang Youxia, a Vietnam War veteran, as the Vice Chairman and member of the Politburo, despite his age. Gen He Weidong (commanded Eastern Theatre — facing Taiwan and was Ground Forces Commander Western Theatre Command —opposite India) is the new appointee to the CMC as second Vice Chairman, and member of the Politburo. It is double promotion for him as before the 20th Congress, Weidong wasn't even a member of Central Committee.⁸ With no civilian nominated to the CMC, it is obvious that Xi does not intend to name a successor anytime soon. It implies that there might be no Sixth Generation Leadership of CPC.

Although the recent Party Congress appeared to be a clean run and an absolute victory for Xi, however, the Chinese elders did defend the Party charter. Xi fell short of his goal to amend Party constitution on three scores; (i) Document was not altered to refer Xi as the "People's Leader" (ii) Xi's 16-character eponymous ideology was not shortened, which would have elevated him at par with Mao (iii) Xi's Thoughts as guiding principle of the Party was not established. Instead, the Party continues to hold "Central committee authority and its centralised leadership".⁹

Key Takeaways and Ramifications

The 20th Congress was a well-choreographed event — a pre staged show. Xi Jinping went about painstakingly to renew the heavenly mandate as the 'core leader'. Besides the new seven member PBSC composed of Xi's loyalists, even the Politburo —second tier of Party's power structure with two dozen members — does not have any representation from the opposing factions. Xi, now, virtually owns the system to pursue his agenda — both at home and overseas without concern for any disruptions.

Most discerning trend to emerge from the Congress is clear prioritisation of security concerns over all other issues. As per Xi, national security is the foundation of PRC's rejuvenation and social stability. He has gone on to integrate domestic and external security dimensions.

Describing the current era as marked by 'unprecedented changes not seen in a century', Xi has set out 'Vision 2035' to usher China into 'New Era'. China's future agenda will be driven by both internal factors and external dynamics, former overriding the latter. Revamping of PRC's slowing economy will be Xi's top priority —critical for his very survival. To achieve quality of growth, he has advocated the policy of 'common prosperity' which seeks to bolster social equality. Alongside, inception of 'dual circulation' system entails boosting domestic consumption and reducing dependence on export markets.¹⁰ Xi has adopted 'economic nationalism' route by prioritising ideology over reforms to foster cultural unity, concurrently cracking on the business tycoons and conglomerates. Most discerning trend to emerge from the Congress is clear prioritisation of security concerns over all other issues. As per Xi, national security is the foundation of PRC's rejuvenation and social stability. He has gone on to integrate domestic and external security dimensions. The ambit of security now covers entire range of non-traditional threats as well. During his speech, Xi flagged issues like realignment of supply chains, impact of moves to impose sanctions on China by the West, and technological decoupling. He reiterated that all these issues posed profusion of challenges to the national development goals.

Security will now form key component of China's foreign policy. Xi called for entirely de novo approach towards self-reliance, signifying close politico-economic linkage with security. This will imply tougher regulations against foreign companies and even subject to sanctions. Xi called upon the military to prepare for 'new situations for modernisation of national defence and adopt diversified ways 'to fight and win limited wars' as sovereignty over the claimed territories remains a core issue.¹¹ China's top internal-focussed security body which oversees all the legal enforcement agencies

including police — ‘Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission’ (CPLAC) — is expected to be headed by Chen Wenqing, who has been newly elevated to the Politburo.¹² He will be the first person with background in China’s foreign intelligence service, the Ministry of State Security (MSS). Chen has also secured a seat in the Central Secretariat which runs day-to-day Party affairs. Two other officials with security background set to occupy positions in the Central Secretariat are Wang Xiaohong — MSS Minister and Liu Jinguo, Deputy Head of CCDI. Xi, in his speech at the Congress, had sought to severely combat infiltration, sabotage, subversion, and secession by hostile forces.

Xi’s ‘China dream’ (zhong meng) and ‘rejuvenation’ (fuxing) envision PRC’s emergence as a ‘Great Power’ by mid of the century. In view of its global aspirations, Beijing’s strategic outlook has undergone radical shift, marked by aggressive behaviour and coercive diplomacy. Grand projects like the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI), Maritime Silk Route (MSR), and Digitised Highway (DH) are intended to enlarge China’s strategic space and global footprint and are set to gain further traction. Xi’s vision of Sino centric global order envisages unipolar Asia. His China model is based on political ‘neo authoritarianism’ and ‘state driven development’ as an alternate to ‘Western Liberal Democratic Capitalist’ one.

In China’s strategic culture, any competitor is perceived as an impediment to its progress. Hence, marginalised India and passive Japan suit the Dragon’s grand design. Communist leadership views grouping like Quad as measures to checkmate China. Beijing-Moscow strategic partnership complemented by traditional allies, namely North Korea and Pakistan and new joinees like Iran and Turkey — the ‘axis of convenience’ — is part of China’s counter coalition strategy. It is obvious that Xi perceives China to be in the period of confrontation rather than cooperation. Hence, the superpower rivalry is set to intensify further, making the international landscape more turbulent and complex.

Xi’s vision of Sino centric global order envisages unipolar Asia. His China model is based on political ‘neo authoritarianism’ and ‘state driven development’ as an alternate to ‘Western Liberal Democratic Capitalist’ one.

The Crux of China’s India policy has been strategic containment and settlement of disputes on its own terms. Beijing has succeeded in delinking the boundary dispute from the bilateral relations as evident from the all-time high trade surplus in its favour. Beijing’s aggressive stance towards Delhi is primarily due to glaring power differential and perception of India to be a soft state. Xi has kept Ladakh-Galwan in glare which is evident from the manner Generals from ‘Western Theatre Command’ have been rewarded with positions in the Politburo and Central Committee. Even Colonel Qi Fabao, Regiment Commander, who was injured during Galwan skirmish was one of the torch bearers during Beijing Winter Olympics and a delegate at the recently concluded Party Congress. Hence, little is expected to change in Beijing’s stance towards Delhi.

On the other hand, India’s China policy has been dictated more by expediency rather than in long-term perspective. Delhi has often been yielding ground in the hope of political settlement, which obviously has not come about. Therefore, India needs to evolve a pragmatic policy to deal with China based on the ground realities. While armed forces must continue to scale up capacity and act firmly, the political leadership ought to be audacious in its intent to engage with the Communist regime.

Conclusion

The picture that emerged at the end of 20th Congress was that CPC and Chinese State stand fully aligned with Xi’s vision of ‘Comprehensive National Security’ and ‘fortress economy’, and firmly focussed on preparation for geopolitical confrontation and competition in the times ahead.¹³ The loyal inner circle has not only strengthened Xi’s hold over power but also tightened grip over the nation. Unseen in decades, China’s future will be shaped by one man, with virtually no

room for discord. Xi has signalled shift in priorities from economic development to security. Hence, Beijing is expected to be far more assertive in pursuit of its national interests and resort to hostile posturing to further ideological agendas.

Xi's third term has started on a challenging note with wave of protests which led to the end of unpopular 'Zero Covid Policy'. Consequently, sudden surge in the Covid infections has led to a devastating outbreak wave; 60,000 deaths reported due to Covid 19, between early December 2022 to mid-January 2023.¹⁴ Three years of 'Zero Covid' measures have crushed businesses, evident from streets lined with shuttered stores and workshops. The dragged down economy in 2022 recorded three percent growth rate, with a perilous road to recovery. Besides, there is a concerted push back against China's aggressive behaviour with 'China plus One' policy gaining ground.

For the Chinese public, Xi as the life-long autocrat is not a good news, given the past experience of Mao's era. Xi is expected to double down with self-destructive domestic policies which could prove detrimental. However, for the world at large, Xi's continuation may be a blessing in disguise as he is a known entity — albeit for his disruptive ways. Change in the Communist line up would have implied decoding ideological contours of the new dispensation in an opaque system. Xi may move back and forth knowing fully well that in the globalised world, China cannot develop in isolation. With regards to India, China's containment policy is set to continue; so also, the tension on the LAC which is entirely of Xi's making.

Xi has chosen to ride the Dragon solo in a bid to replicate Mao, although he does not belong to the same tribe. His ambition to be the life-long dictator is fraught with high risks, should his policies go awry. As per the Chinese Eleventh Century Classic — 'The General Mirror for Aid of Government' (*Cu Chi Tang Qian*), "Anyone who is able to prevent violence and remove harm from people [...] who can reward good and punish evil thus avoid disaster — such a man may be called an emperor". Given Communist leadership's penchant for history, Xi's dream to usher China in to the 'New Era', with renewed mandate, is a quest to be part of the exclusive league.

Unseen in decades, China's future will be shaped by one man, with virtually no room for discord. Xi has signalled shift in priorities from economic development to security. Hence, Beijing is expected to be far more assertive in pursuit of its national interests and resort to hostile posturing to further ideological agendas.

Endnotes

- 1 The term 'New Era' was introduced in 2017 at the 19th Party Congress.
- 2 *Indian Express* (16 October 2022).
- 3 'Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Full Text of Report 20th Party Congress, Communist Party of China, Peoples Republic of China. <https://fmprc.gov.cn> accessed on 30 December 2022.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Asia Society Policy Institute (22 October 2022), Decoding 20th Party Congress. <https://asiasociety.org>. Accessed on 5 January 2023..
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 *Hindustan Times* (24 October 2022), Xi Jinping promotes 3 generals with LAC experience to top PLA posts.
- 9 Katsuji Nakazawa (03 November 2022), Analysis-China's Elders Defend Party Charter from Xi's Onslaught, *Nikkei Asia*.
- 10 Center for Strategic International Studies (19 April 2022), Will the Dual Circulation Strategy Enable China to Compete in Post Pandemic World? <https://chinapower.csis.org>
- 11 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Report 20th Party Congress, op cit.
- 12 Echo Xie, (29 October 2022), Politburo Member Chen Wenqing to Step upto China's top security job, *South China Morning Post*. [Hhttps://www.scmp.com](https://www.scmp.com)
- 13 Asia Society Policy Institute, Decoding 20th Party Congress, op cit.
- 14 *The New York Times* (15 January 2023). <https://www.nytimes.com>

Strategic Dimensions of Sino-Pak Nexus

Shri Sharat Sabharwal, IFS (Retd)[@]

Abstract

The Sino-Pak nexus, with its genesis in their shared animosity against India, has widened and deepened over the years. With changing US priorities, China's military, economic, political, and diplomatic support is vital to the sustenance of Pakistan's adversarial posture against India. CPEC, China's hedge against the maritime choke points in the east and an enabler to project its naval power in the Arabian Sea and beyond, has added a new strategic dimension to the nexus. It poses multiple challenges for India and other members of the international community. Forging a partnership with like-minded countries and exploiting Pakistan's growing economic and other compulsions to exercise tactical restraint vis-à-vis India are possible answers for India to mitigate its adverse impact.

Introduction

Bereft of a positive identity at its inception, Pakistan came to define itself as the antithesis of India and adopted an adversarial posture, which was perpetuated by its army to rationalise its stranglehold on the Pakistan's polity. This necessitated a powerful external patron to underwrite, economically and militarily, Pakistan's ambitions vis-à-vis a much bigger and better endowed India. The role was taken by the United States of America when Pakistan cast its lot with the Western bloc during the Cold War, resulting in large scale US military and civilian aid. However, the US-Pakistan relationship — whether during the Cold War or Pakistan's leading role in the Afghan *Jihad* and the US led War on Terror — lacked strategic congruence and was largely transactional. Even as they worked together, they pursued different goals. For many years following the US-China détente in the nineteen seventies, Pakistan rapidly developed its relationship with China while continuing to enjoy the US patronage. However, with the changing US geostrategic goals and equations in the region, China has increasingly come to acquire the mantle of Pakistan's external patron. The China-Pakistan relationship is characterised by strategic congruence owing to their shared animosity against, and the desire to contain India, which has been supplemented by other mutual interests. It got a major boost with the announcement of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the crown jewel of President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), during his visit to Pakistan in April 2015.

Key Drivers of the Sino-Pak Nexus

Aside from their shared goal to checkmate India's rise, the China-Pakistan nexus is driven by the following key factors:

- Pakistan's strategic location at the hub of multiple geopolitical interests of China, India, Central Asia, Russia, US, Iran and other countries abutting the Persian Gulf.
- The so-called Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan's illegally occupied link to China, borders its restive Xinjiang province. Presence of East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) militants in Pakistan's tribal belt and Afghanistan, and

[@] *Shri Sharat Sabharwal, IFS (Retd)* is a retired career diplomat of the 1975 batch of the Indian Foreign Service, who served, inter alia, as Ambassador of India to Uzbekistan (2002-05), Deputy High Commissioner (1995-99) and High Commissioner (2009-13) to Pakistan. He is author of the book '*India's Pakistan Conundrum: Managing a Complex Relationship*'.

flow of Islamic extremism to Xinjiang has been a matter of serious concern to China. A close relationship with the Pakistan's establishment serves as a hedge against such threats.

- The Xinjiang-Gwadar linkage to the sea, a key component of the CPEC, is strategically valuable as one of the routes for China to bypass the maritime choke points in the east and a potential facilitator for projection of China's naval power in the Arabian Sea and beyond from Gwadar and other Pakistani ports.
- Pakistan remains an unquestioning ally for China in its periphery and extended neighbourhood which is alarmed by China's aggressive and overbearing conduct on multiple fronts.
- For Pakistan, China's military, economic, political, and diplomatic support is indispensable to sustain its adversarial posture against India, more so in the face of changing US priorities.

Military Co-operation

Military co-operation is the core of the Sino-Pak nexus. It comprises high level military exchanges, growing arms supplies from, and joint production with, China, joint exercises and expanding interoperability of their armed forces. China's technological and financial help was critical in setting up the key facilities of Pakistan's military-industrial complex such as Pakistan Aeronautical Complex, Kamra; Heavy Industries, Taxila; and National Defence Complex (missile facility) at Fateh Jang near Rawalpindi. With the western sources of supply largely drying up due to strategic considerations/Pakistan's inability to pay for arms purchases, China has emerged as Pakistan's largest arms supplier, accounting for 72 percent of its arms purchases during the period 2017-21¹, up from 51 percent during 2010-14². The major weapon systems supplied/contracted for supply by China to Pakistan or produced/ due for production by Pakistan under licence, for its army and air force, include Type-90-2M/MBT-2000 tanks (known in Pakistan as Al-Khalid and Al-Khalid I), CH-3 and WING LOONG-2 armed UAVs, CH-4A UAV, JF-17 aircraft Block-2 and its much improved Block-3 version, anti-ship missiles and guided bombs for these aircraft, the more advanced J-10C aircraft and VT-4 tanks.³ In the systems described as joint development, the R&D and technological inputs are preponderantly Chinese. Pakistan also has a wish list that it expects China to look into, including 5th generation combat aircraft and long-range air-defence missile systems.⁴

With the western sources of supply largely drying up due to strategic considerations/Pakistan's inability to pay for arms purchases, China has emerged as Pakistan's largest arms supplier, accounting for 72 percent of its arms purchases during the period 2017-21, up from 51 percent during 2010-14.

Naval supplies from China, confined largely to corvettes and small craft during the Cold War, have burgeoned in recent years. In an interview to Global Times in February 2021⁵, the Pakistan Navy Chief, Admiral M Amjad Khan Niazi, spoke of the impressive range of naval platforms/equipment procured/ being procured by Pakistan from China: F-22P frigates, fast attack craft (missile), helicopters, a state-of-the-art survey ship, type 054A/P frigates, eight Hangor class submarines, and medium altitude long-endurance unmanned combat aerial vehicles.

Joint exercises between the armed forces of the two countries have been a regular feature to enhance their interoperability. During his visit to Pakistan in November 2020, the Chinese Defence Minister, General Wei Fenghe, was quoted by the Chinese Defence Ministry as calling for a closer engagement to "jointly cope with various risks and challenges, firmly safeguard the sovereignty and security interests of the two countries, and safeguard the regional peace and stability".⁶ In May 2021, China and Pakistan carried out a joint exercise close to the Line of Actual Control(LAC) in the backdrop of the Galwan clash.⁷ Pakistan's Special Services Group and PLA Special Operations Forces have also been conducting joint exercises in YOUYI series since 2004. The China-Pakistan air forces have been conducting the

Shaheen series of exercises since 2011, held in Pakistan and China alternately. The navies of the two countries have interacted bilaterally for a long time through joint exercises, port calls, training and dialogue on maritime security. In 2003, Pakistan Navy became the first foreign navy to conduct a joint exercise with the Chinese Navy.⁸ In January 2020, China and Pakistan conducted the naval exercise ‘Sea Guardians-2020’, said to be the sixth such exercise, in the northern Arabian Sea. Presented as the beginning of a series of similar exercises, it covered joint patrolling, anti-submarine operations, submarine rescue, air defence, and maritime live firing.

In 2020, the two countries concluded an agreement that would allow Pakistan Armed Forces officers, with top-secret clearance, to use and interact with the Chinese intelligence infrastructure under the aegis of the Joint Staff Department of the Chinese Central Military Commission.⁹ In 2021, it was reported that Pakistan Army liaison officers had been posted in the headquarters of China’s Western and Southern Theatre Commands. China has accorded unrestricted partnership to Pakistan for military use of its BeiDou navigation system.¹⁰ The CPEC plans include fibre-optic cable linking the headquarters of PLA’s South Xinjiang Military District, in Kashgar, initially to Rawalpindi, with further extension to Islamabad, Karachi, and Gwadar.¹¹ There have been reports of China collaborating with Pakistan for cyber-attacks against India.

The aforementioned multifaceted military co-operation, together with other strands of collaboration examined below, increasingly underpins Pakistan’s continued antagonistic posture towards India and the allied policy of encouraging religious extremism and terrorism, which, besides posing a threat to India, have also caused instability in the region and within Pakistan itself, aside from contributing to international terrorism. For India, it also implies a two-front threat that has acquired greater salience due to China’s increasingly aggressive conduct since 2020. This could result either from a deliberate decision taken by the two countries or one of the two trying to take advantage of India’s military conflict with the other or China getting involved in protecting its CPEC equities against an Indian threat, particularly in the so-called Gilgit-Baltistan — an area claimed by India. One of the operational tasks assigned to PLA’s Western Theatre Command, established in 2016, is “protecting the Chinese workers and assets of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor”.¹²

China has played a key role in the development of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal, on which it has come to rely increasingly owing to the growing conventional force gap with India.

Nuclear Co-operation

China has played a key role in the development of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal, on which it has come to rely increasingly owing to the growing conventional force gap with India. It is now well established that Pakistan had acquired its nuclear weapons capability much before its nuclear tests of May 1998 as a result of technological exchanges with China, including the design of a device tested by China in the 1960s, and the test of a Pakistani device reportedly conducted by China at its Lop Nur test site. China also supplied M-11 and M-9 missiles to Pakistan in the 1990s which, together with additional Chinese technical help, enabled Pakistan to develop various delivery vehicles. The eight Hangor class diesel-electric attack submarines, with air-independent propulsion, to be supplied by China would help Pakistan in its quest to acquire a sea-based nuclear capability. It has been reported that Pakistan’s 450 kilometres range Babur-3 nuclear tipped cruise missiles may be placed on them.

At the time of joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in 2004, China declared two nuclear power reactors (325 megawatt each) at Chashma in Pakistan as a prior commitment to be covered by the ‘grandfather clause’. However, in 2009, it contracted the setting up of two more reactors (340 megawatt each) at Chashma and subsequently signed yet another contract for two 1000 megawatt reactors near Karachi. The additional reactors are, as said by the two sides, to be covered by their agreement of 1986 on co-operation for construction and operation of nuclear reactors, which sets

no limit to the number of reactors to be constructed. These additional contracts did not face any meaningful opposition in the NSG due to the geopolitical interests of its influential members, including the US.

Strategic Dimension of the CPEC

China had built the Karakoram Highway across the Khunjerab pass through India's illegally occupied territory in the 1960s and 70s. In 2007, when a Chinese company completed the first phase of the largely Chinese-financed Gwadar port, China chose not to take over its operations primarily due to the fraught security situation, poor hinterland, and connectivity to the rest of Pakistan. The task was, therefore, assigned to the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA). However, with port activity not picking up, PSA exited in 2013 and port operations were taken over by the China Port Holding Company Ltd. Strategic considerations appear to have outweighed the aforementioned negatives, which remained largely unchanged in 2013, and the port and its linkage to Xinjiang became the centrepiece of the CPEC. CPEC was conceived as an ambitious undertaking covering, inter alia, road and rail infrastructure, special economic zones, energy, agriculture and optical fibre linkage. While the Chinese may have envisaged it, inter alia, as a project to boost the economic activity of a close ally and build deeper economic linkages with it, the economic rationale for the Corridor is overblown. Commercial activity at Gwadar has failed to pick up. China sees it primarily as a strategic linkage; first as a hedge against the maritime choke points in the east and; second as an enabler to project its naval power in the Arabian Sea and beyond by acquiring naval facilities at Gwadar or possibly further west at Jiwani, close to the Strait of Hormuz.

For Pakistan, CPEC means deeper Chinese commitment, badly needed in the changed international scenario. Its naval co-operation with China and the strategic aspects of the CPEC constitute a tremendous boost to its maritime ambitions in the strategically important Arabian Sea where a large part of India's Exclusive Economic Zone and some key Indian ports lie.

For Pakistan, CPEC means deeper Chinese commitment, badly needed in the changed international scenario. Its naval co-operation with China and the strategic aspects of the CPEC constitute a tremendous boost to its maritime ambitions in the strategically important Arabian Sea where a large part of India's Exclusive Economic Zone and some key Indian ports lie.

Political and Diplomatic Co-operation

Pakistan's scant diplomatic interaction with China picked up after the Sino-Indian border war of 1962 resulting, inter alia, in the Sino-Pakistan Boundary Agreement of 1963 under which Pakistan ceded over 5000 square kilometres illegally occupied Indian Territory in the Shaksgam Valley to China. Thereafter, their political and diplomatic ties have grown continuously. China's stance on Jammu and Kashmir, instead of being a principled one, has varied with its equation with India. Following India's Article 370 move, which it opposed strongly, China has started calling for proper and peaceful resolution of the J&K issue based on the UN Charter, UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, and bilateral agreements. It engineered three closed-door discussions on Kashmir in UNSC, though without any result because of opposition of other members. In recent years, China's diplomatic support to Pakistan has also taken the form of repeated blockage of the moves for designation of well-known Pakistani terrorists as global terrorists by UNSC and thwarting of India's entry to the NSG by calling for criteria for admission of non-NPT signatories, thus, linking it to Pakistan's admission.

China and Pakistan have been strongly supportive of each other's core national interests. Thus, the joint statement issued at the end of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to China, in November 2022, referred to Pakistan's "commitment to the one-China Policy and support on issues of Taiwan, South China Sea, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and

Tibet” and reaffirmation of Chinese support for “Pakistan’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, security, and promoting its socio-economic development and prosperity”.¹³

Trade and Economic Relations

Pakistan’s annual trade with China, its largest trading partner, has ranged between \$15 to 20 billion in recent years, surging to \$27 billion in 2021, preponderantly in China’s favour (trade deficit with China in 2021 was around \$ 20 billion). The China-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement (FTA), operationalised in 2007, benefitted China at the cost of Pakistan’s industry. By 2018, China’s share in Pakistan’s exports and imports was around 7 percent and 27 percent, respectively. Agreement on the second phase of FTA was concluded in 2019 with a delay of five years because of difficult negotiations. It is too early to assess its impact. The Chinese debt to Pakistan has burgeoned with the CPEC. According to a recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) report, Pakistan owes 30 percent of its foreign debt to China and the Chinese assistance to Pakistan is three times greater than IMF debt and exceeds both World Bank and Asian Development Bank funds combined.¹⁴ Traditionally a source of concessional debt to Pakistan to finance Chinese exports and projects, China has in recent years come to Pakistan’s help to meet its external sector needs. Following the aforementioned visit of the Pakistani PM to China, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that China had done its utmost to help Pakistan stabilise its financial situation and will continue to do so. For a country like Pakistan that has all along lived far beyond its means, the above Chinese role is invaluable.

China is pursuing two contradictory aims in Pakistan: seeking to use it as a strategic partner and transit route and exploiting its India obsession to contain India.

A Few Spoilers

The flourishing China-Pakistan partnership is not without a few spoilers. First, China has suffered collateral damage to its nationals and interests in Pakistan over the years because of rampant extremism and terrorism there.

This problem has bedevilled the CPEC projects also in spite of a large force raised by Pakistan to protect them. As stated earlier, ETIM militants have found sanctuary in Pakistan’s tribal belt, besides Afghanistan. However, given their strategic interests in Pakistan, the Chinese could be expected to absorb such periodic damage. Second, CPEC has not lived up to its declared promise. Besides security issues, it has been hit by Pakistan’s poor investment absorption capacity, inefficient project management, and growing debt burden that has come under increasing scrutiny of IMF and other international lenders. Serious doubts persist about the CPEC investment generating sufficient foreign exchange to repay the Chinese debt. Some other adverse factors have been: controversies within Pakistan over priority to be given to various projects, lack of transparency in award of contracts and liberal tax concessions to Chinese companies, and Pakistani industry’s misgivings about special economic zones. Energy projects have added to Pakistan’s existing circular debt. The investment in 47 CPEC projects, started or completed, stood at \$ 25 billion in November 2022, a far cry from \$ 62 billion touted around during Xi Jinping’s 2015 visit.¹⁵ Third, even while consolidating its bonds with China, Pakistan has been trying to retain a broad-based relationship with western countries, particularly US. With growing US-China dissonance, the above balancing act will become increasingly difficult. Last, but not the least, China is pursuing two contradictory aims in Pakistan: seeking to use it as a strategic partner and transit route and exploiting its India obsession to contain India. The policies adopted by Pakistan to sustain its adversarial posture towards India are largely the cause of its instability and dysfunction. Moreover, as the US experience showed, in its quest to hurt India, Pakistan does not always observe the red lines laid down by its external patron. Therefore, encouragement to this posture by China risks saddling it with an unstable ally and unsafe transit route.

Conclusion

In spite of the above problems, the China-Pakistan nexus will continue to widen and deepen owing to their geostrategic interests. It poses multiple challenges for India in the form of propping up of Pakistan militarily, economically, and diplomatically, their naval co-operation in the Arabian Sea and, thus, the need to remain prepared for a two-front war. The Chinese designs in Pakistan, particularly its potential naval presence at Gwadar or Jiwani, close to the Strait of Hormuz, would be a matter of serious concern to influential members of the international community. Moreover, the prospect of Gwadar becoming a transshipment point for the sea cargo moving from the east to the west and vice versa worries the countries with busy commercial ports in the Persian Gulf. Forging a partnership with such countries offers India an obvious answer to mitigate the adverse impact of the Sino-Pak nexus. Further, for a long time, India's primary focus has remained on its western frontier with Pakistan. That is fast changing now because of China's progressively aggressive demeanour on the LAC. Pakistan no longer poses a serious military threat to India except in conjunction with China. While it is unlikely to make a strategic shift in its overall posture towards India in the foreseeable future, its growing economic compulsions and problems on its western frontier give rise to a frequent need of tactical restraint vis-à-vis India. After all, Pakistan did not try to take advantage of China's aggressive action in eastern Ladakh in 2020. It would be in India's interest to exploit such compulsions of Pakistan to reduce volatility on its western front so as to pay greater attention to the LAC.

Endnotes

- 1 SIPRI Fact Sheet March 2022 ‘Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2021’, Pieter D. Wezeman, Alexandra Kuimova and Siemon T. Wezeman, p. 6.
- 2 Pakistan ranks 11th in arms imports, *The News International*, March 10, 2020. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/626854-pakistan-ranks-11th-in-arms-imports>
- 3 SIPRI Trade Registers, https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade_register.php
- 4 China cements its place as Pakistan’s largest supplier of major arms: Report, *Hindustan Times*, April 26, 2022. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/china-cements-its-place-as-pakistan-s-largest-supplier-of-major-arms-report-101650973184494.html>
- 5 China, Pakistan strength naval collaboration with arms procurement: Pakistan Navy Chief, *Global Times*, February 8, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1215245.shtml>
- 6 The China-Pakistan Partnership Continues to Deepen, Rejeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, *The Diplomat*, July 9, 2021.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 The Evolving Pakistan-China Maritime Economic Relationship in the Indian Ocean by Anwar Saeed, *Sea Power Centre-Australia*, page 8.
- 9 Pakistan and China Reach a New Intelligence Sharing Agreement, Jack Beyrer, *World Defense*, August 7, 2020.
- 10 China’s BeiDou navigation system for Pakistan, *Foreign Policy News*, Sadia Kazmi, August 3, 2020.
- 11 China-Pakistan Strategic Nexus: Implications for India, Jayadeva Ranade, *Vivekananda International Foundation*, April 16, 2021.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Joint Statement between the People’s Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, <https://mofa.gov.pk/joint-statement-between-the-peoples-republic-of-china-and-the-islamic-republic-of-pakistan-2-november-2022/>
- 14 Pakistan owes more debt to China than to IMF, *World Bank*, *Geo News*, September 3, 2022.
- 15 The unique China-Pakistan relationship, by Nong Rong, *Daily Times*, November 9, 2022.

Section IV

India's Strategic Neighbourhood

Managing India-Afghanistan Relations under the Taliban Regime

Shri Jayant Prasad, IFS (Retd)[@]

Abstract

India has recalibrated its policy toward Afghanistan after the dramatic fall of its Islamic Republic. It has realistically engaged with the Taliban primarily to ensure supplies of humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people. It has stressed to the functionaries of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan the need to ensure that Afghan territory is not used for terrorism and no anti-Indian terrorist groups, such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) or the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) are permitted to refuge there.

The Current Situation

The outlook on Afghanistan is dismal. Its foreign currency reserves continue to remain frozen. There is no liquidity or investment. External assistance is meagre. Employment opportunities have dramatically shrunk. The World Food Programme estimates that almost half of all Afghans are already going hungry, and a good proportion of them might face starvation. Destitution and impoverishment loom for most Afghans — whether men, women, or children. One of the stark choices faced by them is fleeing their country. Symptomatic of this is the tragic news in February 2023 of the drowning of 80 Afghan men, women, and children just off the Italian coast.

The human rights conditions have deteriorated. Independent observers testify that a significant number of former Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) members have been executed, despite the early assurances of amnesty. There are reports of abductions, enforced disappearances, and even ethnic cleansing of the Hazara, Uzbek, and Turcoman residents by evicting them from their lands and homesteads. Women have vanished from public life and institutions. Girls are barred from secondary school education and universities. Professional avenues, even medicine and architecture, are closed for them. They are not quite visible even in mosques and markets. The focus of the Taliban regime seems to be on imposing Sharia law and suppressing women and minorities.

Some of the Taliban's younger leaders want a less oppressive regime. However, its present Amin-ul-Momineen, Hidayatullah Akhundzada, is unmoved by any progressive calls. Indeed, the old guard has reasserted a harsher Islamist orientation of governance. The senior Taliban leadership is composed of Islamists, misogynists, and ethno-nationalists. Yet, one of the most indefatigable crusaders for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Kabul today, Mahboub Seraj, realistically believes that to improve the situation, there is no alternative to engaging with the Taliban.¹ There is deepening resentment against the repression of the Taliban but no credible alternative to it within Afghanistan.

[@] *Shri Jayant Prasad, IFS (Retd)*, in his 37 years of public service career has been India's Ambassador to Afghanistan, Algeria, and Nepal. In between, he has held many appointments in the Ministry of External Affairs and abroad. Post retirement from the IFS, he has worked on India Studies with University of Pennsylvania (2014-15) and was Director General, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi (2015-2018).

India's Approach

In August 2021, the Economist described the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan as a "strategic setback and stinging humiliation" of India.² Pakistan was triumphant and was generally regarded as having gained strategically, having helped and guided the Taliban to victory. Their logistics support and advice hastened the Taliban's march to Kabul. The Pakistan Army's support helped in quickly extinguishing the early challenge to Taliban rule by the National Resistance Front in Panjshir.

In the one-and-a-half years since then, the outlook for India-Afghanistan relations does not appear so bleak. Contrary to Pakistan's expectations, the Taliban regime has not taken action against, or handed over to Pakistan's security agencies, any member of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Border skirmishes along the disputed Durand Line between Afghanistan and Pakistan are reported in the regional and international media frequently. India has, meanwhile, engaged constructively with the Taliban and has been able to promptly deliver much-needed humanitarian supplies for the suffering Afghan people.

Following the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under the Taliban, global attention moved away from the Af-Pak region to Ukraine. The United States and the four dozen countries, which were part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) fighting against the Taliban for two decades, appear now to have adopted an almost 'hands-off' policy towards Afghanistan. Unlike them, India has had historical and cultural ties of terrain and temperament with neighbouring Afghanistan. The question of India distancing itself from developments there simply does not arise, irrespective of the political change that has come about in Afghanistan. India has an abiding, people-centric interest in maintaining her connection with the Afghan people. Afghanistan has undergone incessant suffering for 44 years and India is working with Afghanistan, the regional countries, and the international community to ensure that Afghanistan's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity are maintained.

There are immediate, intermediate, and eventual objectives that compose India's approach toward the current regime in Afghanistan. The first, immediate objective has been to ensure that the regime change from a republican Afghanistan to the Islamic Emirate does not create a hiatus in the contact between India and Afghanistan that developed in the 1990s.

There are immediate, intermediate, and eventual objectives that compose India's approach toward the current regime in Afghanistan. The first, immediate objective has been to ensure that the regime change from a republican Afghanistan to the Islamic Emirate does not create a hiatus in the contact between India and Afghanistan that developed in the 1990s. Moreover, in their hour of need, when facing deprivation and a deep economic crisis, the Afghan people could not be left to their own devices. That is why, over the past several months, India sent 40,000 tonnes of wheat (overland, through Pakistan), 50 tonnes of life-saving medicines, 28 tonnes of earthquake relief materials, and half a million doses of Covid vaccines. A further shipment of 20,000 tonnes of wheat is being shipped over the next few weeks through the Chabahar port in Iran. Afghan government spokespersons have expressed appreciation for the fact that India's annual budget for the fiscal year 2023-24 provisions for Rs 200 crores as aid to Afghanistan.

India's other immediate concern is to ensure that the Islamic Emirate does not allow Afghan Territory to be used to spread radicalism or terrorism. The Taliban's commitment is not to allow Afghan Territory to be used to attack or threaten other countries. It has made no pledges to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism and not to harbour Al-Qaeda or other like-minded terrorist groups. India is concerned about the rise of Daesh (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, especially the Islamic State – Khorasan) and its ability to attack minorities, including Afghan Sikhs and Hindus. India is also watching the activities of LeT and HM, which had established camps in Afghanistan in collaboration with Al-Qaeda when the Taliban was in power in the late 1990s.

While reporting on the situation in Afghanistan, the UN Secretary General stated that “Al-Qaeda continues to have ties with the Taliban and enjoying freedom of movement” in Afghanistan. The US announcement of the targeting and killing of Al-Qaeda’s leader, Aiman al-Zawahiri underlined the continuing ties between Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, contrary to the Taliban’s commitment. The close alignment of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda has been repeatedly confirmed in the UN’s Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Teams reports (the two groups “show no indication of breaking ties”). The report suggests that the Taliban will not “live up to its commitment to suppress any future international threat emanating from Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan”. It notes that the Al-Qaeda and like-minded militant groups celebrate developments in Afghanistan “as a victory for the Taliban’s cause and thus for global radicalism”. It conjectures that Afghanistan under the Taliban’s control will harbour like-minded groups, including the LeT. Further, periodic reports presented in the United Nations Security Council highlight that:

- International terrorist groups view the Taliban’s victory as a motivating factor.
- Al-Qaeda plays an advisory role with the Taliban and contacts “remain close” between them.
- There are fighters from India within the ranks of the Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent.³

India’s constructive engagement with Afghanistan is premised on responsible behaviour by the Taliban and its progressive dissociation with terrorist groups inimical to India. India’s intermediate objective in Afghanistan — without meaning in any way to interfere in the internal functioning of the Islamic Emirate — is to nudge it toward an inclusive government promised by the Taliban soon after the Emirate’s establishment. Contrary to the promises made, the Taliban did the opposite: appointed a Pashtun-heavy government with only token representation for the other ethnicities, and no women. The Taliban abolished the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and re-instituted the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. Internal contentions among the Taliban leadership and the growing restiveness against the one-sided, non-inclusive Taliban regime will inevitably result in more disaffection, and the creation of empty, ungoverned spaces, occupied by non-state actors. Until a more inclusive government takes office in Kabul, there seems little prospect of the international community conceiving formal recognition of the regime.

In the long term, India’s objective is for Afghanistan to become the crossroads between Central Asia and South Asia, and a regional trade, transportation, energy, and minerals hub.

India’s ensuing objectives align with the concerns of the larger international community, as reflected in the resolutions and declarations adopted by the United Nations and other institutions. These include preserving the social and economic gains made over the past two decades, implementing UN Security Council Resolution 2593 (2021)⁴, protecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Afghan people, allowing the United Nations and its agencies to play an important role in interfacing with Afghan authorities, and forging a unified international response to the current situation.

In the long term, India’s objective is for Afghanistan to become the crossroads between Central Asia and South Asia, and a regional trade, transportation, energy, and minerals hub. Although progress on the two regional energy projects, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline and Central Asia - South Asia Regional Energy Market (CASAREM), has slowed, they have not been abandoned. The bigger obstacle to this vision, which will help all the regional countries, is Pakistan’s obstructionism in preventing overland trade and transportation between Afghanistan and India, while at the same time seeking similar access for itself to connect to Central Asia and Iran through Afghanistan.

India-Afghanistan Interaction

To attain the aforementioned objectives, India has maintained official-level contact with the Government of the Islamic Emirates at the mid-bureaucratic level. Joint Secretary, JP Singh (equivalent in the US State Department hierarchy to an Assistant Secretary of State), visited Kabul three times over the last 18 months. There have been no ministerial or higher-level exchanges or conversations between Indian and Taliban officials. A technical team from the Ministry of External Affairs has been placed in the Indian Embassy in Kabul since June 2022, under an officiating Deputy Chief of Mission, to coordinate humanitarian supplies and assess the situation. The Islamic Emirate has welcomed India's diplomatic presence and wants India to resume its development cooperation, including taking up unfinished projects like the Shatoot Dam in Kabul province.

Trading contacts between India and Afghanistan have resumed. The weekly commercial flight between Delhi and Kabul brings in Afghan asafoetida and dry fruits and carries back medicines and essential supplies. Both governments are proceeding with the full activation of the Shahid Beheshti terminal in Iran's Chabahar Port.

While the US and other major Western donors focused largely on counter-terrorism or counter-insurgency, India invested in the past in creating infrastructure and building institutions, hoping to get Afghanistan to stand on its own feet. India built a transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul over the Salang Pass, at a height greater than the transmission lines built in any of the Indian hill states, and the largest Afghan power station at Chimtala, north of Kabul, for the distribution of the electricity from Uzbekistan. Another significant Indian infrastructure project was the 218 kilometres Zaranj-Delaram highway connecting the Iranian port of Chabahar to Kandahar and Herat. Both these are operating optimally over a decade-and-a-half since their construction. India also constructed the only green-field hydro project completed in Afghanistan in the past two decades — the Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam on the Hari Rud River. Besides the construction of the Afghan parliament, which now stands dissolved, India implemented some 400 Small Development Projects which were low-gestation, quickly implementable community-oriented projects, typically entailing an expenditure of between USD half a million to two million, including schools, clinics, micro-hydel and solar electrification. Finally, India made a useful contribution to Afghanistan's soft infrastructure, nurtured institutions, developed human resources, trained Afghan public officials, and provided the country with a new generation of skilled and educated workforce through a massive Indian scholarship and technical cooperation programme. The Afghan people would very much want such assistance to be continued.

While the US and other major Western donors focused largely on counter-terrorism or counter-insurgency, India invested in the past in creating infrastructure and building institutions, hoping to get Afghanistan to stand on its own feet.

Contact with the other Stakeholders

India is now seen as a valued partner in any regional or international arrangement to promote stability in Afghanistan. India is part of the Moscow Format meeting set up in 2017 with six countries initially (Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan). All the five Central Asian countries have since joined to make it more representative of the region. India is an active participant in the National Security Advisors meeting on Afghanistan (called the Moscow Multilateral Security Dialogue). Pakistan boycotted the last meeting in Moscow held on 08-09 February 2023 viewing this as an Indian initiative. Delegations from Russia, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan attended the meeting. Indian officials have been regularly interacting with the office of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, as also with the Special Envoys of China, Russia, and the US, Yue Xiaoyong, Zamir Kabulov, and Tom West.

The Next Steps in Afghanistan

To impart greater resonance to the Indian Government's emphasis in its public pronouncements that it is pursuing a people-centric policy in Afghanistan, India needs to exert more to restore the people-to-people link between Indians and Afghans. This could be accomplished by extending the already restored Indian Council of Cultural Relations scholarships to Afghan nationals beyond Afghan students accepted in Indian universities and institutions, to cover Afghans based in their country. A relaxation of India's current visa policy to enable bonafide visitors from Afghanistan, especially those seeking medical attention, to visit India will go a long way in restoring a feeling of fellowship with Afghans. The erstwhile easier grant of the Indian visa to Afghans has been rescinded on security grounds since there are questions raised about the credibility of Afghanistan's citizenship papers and passports. The Indian security agencies can work their way around this impediment. While an immediate restoration of the *status-quo-anté* might be difficult, relaxation could be introduced in phases. As for the resumption of development activities and capacity-building efforts, these will depend on how the situation unfolds.

Endnotes

- 1 Syed Salahuddin, "Afghan Nobel Peace Prize nominee Mahbouba Seraj calls for Taliban talks," *The Globe and Mail*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-nobel-peace-prize-mahbouba-seraj-afghanistan/> (accessed on March 5, 2023).
- 2 Asia/Banyan, "What the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan means for India and Pakistan", *The Economist*, August 21, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2021/08/21/what-the-taliban-takeover-of-afghanistan-means-for-india-and-pakistan> (accessed on March 3, 2023).
- 3 See "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security" - *Report of the Secretary-General* (A/75/926-S/2021/570), 22 June 2021, <https://afghanistan.un.org/en/132548-situation-afghanistan-and-its-implications-international-peace-and-security-report-secretary> (accessed on March 5, 2023) and the 13th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the United Nations Security Council, May 25, 2022, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3975071> (accessed on March 5, 2023).
- 4 UNSCR 2593 (2021), was adopted during India's presidency of the Security Council. It demanded that Afghan territory not be used to threaten or attack any country and reiterated the importance of combating terrorism in Afghanistan. Additionally, it sought enhanced efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and called on all parties to allow safe, unhindered access for the United Nations and its agencies, including to internally displaced persons. Furthermore, it called on all donors and international humanitarian actors to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. It reaffirmed the importance of upholding human rights, including those of women, children and minorities, and encouraged all parties to seek an inclusive, negotiated political settlement, with the full, equal and meaningful participation of women. See <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/2593> (accessed on March 5, 2023).

Appraisal of Indo-Indonesia Relations

Commodore Anil Jai Singh (Retd)[@]

Abstract

India and Indonesia are two strategically located maritime neighbours with a common interest in ensuring a non-confrontational, multilateral and inclusive regional architecture. The bilateral relationship, forged after both countries shed the yoke of colonialism in the late 1940s, has seen a steady improvement over the years and was elevated to a strategic comprehensive partnership in 2019. Both countries should leverage their strengths as medium maritime powers to develop an inclusive security architecture, particularly in the maritime domain and with like-minded partners, develop an inclusive capacity-building framework to influence the geopolitical and geoeconomic outcomes in the region.

Introduction

At the G20 Summit held in Bali on 15 and 16 November 2022, where Indonesia handed over the Presidency of the G20 to India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a metaphorical reference to the relationship between the two countries, stating that “We are not 90 nautical miles away, we are 90 nautical miles close”¹, which is the geographical distance separating the southern tip of India’s Nicobar Islands from Indonesia’s Aceh Region. It highlighted the steady growth in the relationship over the years, which was elevated to a ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ in 2019. India and Indonesia are two large maritime neighbours strategically located on either side of the Malacca, Lombok, and Sunda Straits, the three narrow bodies of water that provide the connectivity between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans and form the very premise of the Indo-Pacific as a single strategic entity. This relationship, therefore, is important not only from a bilateral perspective but also from a regional perspective to influence the dynamics of this region, which has not only become the global geopolitical and geoeconomic centre of gravity, but is also the epicentre of the emerging great power rivalry between China and the United States of America. It will require both countries to work closely together, individually and collectively to build the necessary capacity and capability to shape the future outcomes in the Indo-Pacific.

India and Indonesia have a historical relationship extending over two millennia with strong cultural linkages that, despite Indonesia officially being an Islamic country with the largest Muslim population in the world, are reflected in the depiction of the Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, across the land in Indonesian folk art and culture. In fact, not just Hinduism, but even the Buddhist and Muslim faiths went to Indonesia from India.² Many festivals bearing a resemblance to similar festivals in India are celebrated there; in India too, the famous Baliyatra or the ‘Voyage to Bali’ is celebrated annually on the banks of the Mahanadi River near Cuttack to commemorate the ancient links between the seafaring people of the coastal Indian state of Odissa and those of Bali. Similar efforts are being made to revive other historic linkages to recognise the depth of the relationship which has been on an upswing since 2016. This historical connectivity was not restricted only to these two places but also shaped the historical narrative across South-East Asia.

[@] Commodore Anil Jai Singh (Retd), a submarine veteran, is presently the Senior Vice president of a leading European MNC in India, the Vice President of the Indian Maritime Foundation, and an Honorary Adjunct Fellow of the National Maritime Foundation. A life member of the USI, he takes keen interest in matters maritime and speaks and writes extensively on the subject in India and abroad.

Indonesia – A Strategic Overview

Indonesia's importance as a pivotal state in the Indo-Pacific is as much about its physical and economic size as its strategic geographic location. It is the largest archipelagic state in the world and comprises 17,504 islands, of which about 6000 are inhabited.³ These are spread across a geographical expanse extending 5120 kilometres east to west and 1760 kilometres from north to south. Its maritime area is spread over 5.8 million sq km; it has a coastline of 54,720 km and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) covering 6,159,032 km² (2,378,016 sq mi) and extending 200 nautical miles seawards. It is the 14th largest country in the world in area and the fourth most populous with the largest Muslim population in the world. It is amongst the 20 leading economies in the world and within the top ten on a Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) basis. After a string of dictatorial heads of state and a brief brush with communism it has been a politically and economically stable functioning Presidential democracy since 1998, with the current Head of State, Joko Widodo (also referred to commonly as Jokowi) having been at the helm since 2014. It is the largest member of ASEAN, a grouping of 10 nations in the region that zealously projects its centrality in the Indo-Pacific. However, it is not only its physical size that defines Indonesia's strategic significance but, more notably, given the contemporary geopolitical environment in the Indo-Pacific, its location straddling the approaches from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean is equally important to shape the regional dynamics in the coming years.

Indonesia's Defence Potential. The size of the Indonesian military belies its size as a nation. In the 2021 Lowy Institute Asian Power Index, it ranked 13th out of 26 countries in Asia.⁴ Within the Armed Forces too, the army has been the dominant force despite the country's maritime expanse and the challenges it faces in that domain. The recent appointment of Admiral Yudo Margano as the Chief of the Indonesian Armed Forces, handpicked for the job by President Jokowi, could perhaps lead to a shift in priority towards maritime capability.⁵ However, Indonesia, once a formidable regional naval power, will have to make a considerable investment in its navy given the emerging regional security scenario.

Indonesia's 'free and active' foreign policy is rooted in its non-aligned approach of taking strategic decisions based on its own national interest and an unwillingness to become a part of any bloc or ideological construct.

Indonesian Foreign Policy. Indonesia's 'free and active' foreign policy⁶ is rooted in its non-aligned approach of taking strategic decisions based on its own national interest and an unwillingness to become a part of any bloc or ideological construct. It has good relations with both, the US and China but is also equally wary of both. It has been a victim of China's maritime belligerence but has refrained from any retaliation to the Chinese incursions into its EEZ in the Natuna Sea⁷, which includes research vessels carrying out seabed-mapping and the discovery of a Chinese underwater glider called 'Haiyi' in December 2020.⁸ This, however, does not suggest that Indonesia is not vigilant but has avoided taking any action that may be construed as hostile. More recently, President Jokowi's efforts to develop the economy and national infrastructure to benefit the common man have added a 'down to earth' element to the foreign policy.⁹ Indonesia, therefore, did not hesitate to join the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and is closely cooperating with China in many spheres including space technology.¹⁰ The overall military cooperation between the two countries, though, has been limited. Indonesia is also conscious of its size and importance in the regional maritime architecture; on taking over in 2014, President Jokowi highlighted his vision of making Indonesia the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) to play a larger role in promoting maritime security and regional peace. This was also reflected in Indonesia's Ocean Policy (IOP). However, the GMF has been a disappointment and has fallen short on delivering on its promise and is no longer considered a foreign policy priority.¹¹ However, President Jokowi clearly understands Indonesia's strategic importance as a regional middle power and in his capacity as the president of the G20, paid a visit to both Russia and Ukraine to convey his concern at the ongoing conflict and the likely food crisis that could result for the Global South — a theme that India too has emphasised. As the leader of ASEAN for the coming year, and as the largest and most powerful member of this group, Indonesia may be required to do more towards addressing the regional security

challenges that impact the other members, even though these may not be fully aligned with the basic tenets of the country's foreign policy.

Contemporary Bilateral Relationship

The bilateral relationship between the two countries was forged in the aftermath of India's independence from the British in 1947 and Indonesia's from the Dutch in 1949. President Sukarno, the first Head of State of newly independent Indonesia, was invited as the Chief Guest for India's first ever Republic Day Parade held in New Delhi on 26 January 1950. Both, Pandit Nehru and President Sukarno shared a warm personal relationship and both championed the cause of independence movements in Asia and Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. This also led to the famous Bandung Conference of 1955, with both countries playing a leading role in the non-aligned movement that evolved from there.¹² The India-Indonesia bilateral relationship has maintained a positive and steady course for the most part, except for the occasional blip as happened in 1965, when President Suharto openly offered to support Pakistan when it waged war on India and even laid a claim to the Nicobar Islands.¹³ The relationship has been on a distinct upward trajectory in the last few years. In 2018, during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Indonesia, the relationship was elevated to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'¹⁴, and both leaders also discussed the enhancement of the connectivity between Aceh and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. This led to the formation of the Aceh-Andaman Joint Task Force in 2018, the second meeting of which was held in Port Blair on 19 December 2022 where maritime connectivity, tourism, and enhancement of the people-to-people interaction was discussed.¹⁵ It may be recalled that till a few years ago, Aceh was facing an internal insurgency, which, given the proximity of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, had been a major security concern for India as well.

The relationship has been on a distinct upward trajectory in the last few years. In 2018, during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Indonesia, the relationship was elevated to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'.

The bilateral interaction also encourages people-to-people contact through cultural exchanges, opportunities in higher education through scholarships, and the prosperous and well-regarded Indian diaspora of over 120,000 including over 8500 Indians working in the country in high-end jobs who are effective ambassadors for the country. However, the depth of the relationship is defined mainly by the economic and security dimensions of the relationship. In 2019, both countries enthusiastically celebrated 70 years of diplomatic relations with a series of events in both countries highlighting the traditional links, the people-to-people contact, and the closeness of the relationship. There have also been numerous high-level exchanges over the years with Prime Minister Modi and President Joko Widodo also meeting frequently, with the most recent being at the G20 Summit in Bali.

Economic Relations. On the economic front, Indonesia is India's second largest trading partner in the ASEAN Region, with the trade between the two countries having increased from US \$ 4.3 billion in 2005-06 to US \$ 21 billion in 2018-19 and in the first nine months of 2022, this figure has increased to US \$ 25.43 bn. Many of India's leading business houses have invested in Indonesia across multiple sectors and Indonesian investment in India, though less in comparison, is being encouraged. As per the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) analysis, Indian exports to Indonesia grew at an annualised rate of 7.91 per cent over a period of 25 years from 1995 to 2020 and Indonesian exports increased at a rate of 12.9 per cent over the same period.¹⁶ The two countries have targeted a figure of US \$ 50 Bn in bilateral trade by 2025.¹⁷ On 09 October 2022, Shinta Widjaja Kamdani, the Chair of B20¹⁸, speaking at a B20 Indonesia Global Dialogue said that the two countries should soon conclude a comprehensive free trade agreement.¹⁹

Defence Cooperation. The definition of security in the contemporary geopolitical environment, particularly in the maritime domain, also includes economic and energy security. With 90 per cent of global trade and energy travelling over the sea, its safety and security is critical for the well-being of the global economy. The Indo-Pacific, which generates

over 60 per cent of the global GDP and is home to two-thirds of the global population is faced with a wide spectrum of traditional, non-traditional, and transnational maritime security challenges. These are further exacerbated by Chinese military adventurism, maritime belligerence, grey zone tactics, and the emerging US-China great power rivalry. The nature of the maritime threat, thus, precludes any single country from tackling these. Countries in the region will, therefore, have to adapt their strategies to address these multi-dimensional and multi-layered security challenges with an inclusive and cooperative approach. The convergence of security interests between India and Indonesia can be the foundation that will determine the robustness of the bilateral relationship and, in turn, would be able to influence the security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. Both countries, as two medium regional powers can then take the lead in developing the regional response. The elevation of this relationship to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' is therefore, a significant step in that direction.²⁰ Both sides have also agreed on a Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. A biennial Defence Ministers Dialogue, annual Joint Defence Cooperation Meetings, and regular service level Staff Talks²¹ are some of the institutionalised mechanisms to develop a shared understanding of the security imperatives in the region and enhance the bilateral security cooperation. The armed forces of both countries participate in joint exercises; Indian warships frequently visit Indonesia and vice versa. Capacity building efforts are further enhanced through exchange of personnel for training courses in both countries. Another area of interest which provides a sound strategic foundation is in defence manufacturing. India is giving a thrust to defence exports to friendly countries in certain niche areas; a greater understanding on this will further consolidate the strategic dimension of the partnership.

The convergence of security interests between India and Indonesia can be the foundation that will determine the robustness of the bilateral relationship and, in turn, would be able to influence the security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific.

India and Indonesia have an ongoing operational cooperation with the two navies undertaking Coordinated Patrols (CORPAT) twice a year since 2002. The 39th CORPAT took place in mid-December 2022.²² This initiative is in line with India's Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) Doctrine of 2015 and is aimed at inclusive capacity and capability enhancement in India's strategic sphere of interest. India was among the first responders to provide Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) in the aftermath of the tsunami which ravaged the region in December 2004, and when an earthquake and tsunami hit Palu and Donggala on 28 September 2018, it launched Operation Samudra Maitri (Ocean Friendship) and deployed three ships and two aircraft with medical teams and relief supplies.²³

Indonesia's strategic location gives it maritime jurisdiction over the Malacca, Lombok, and Sunda Straits, which will play a pivotal part in the future Indo-Pacific strategic scenario. Even though Indonesia has avoided any kind of confrontation with China despite provocation, the expanding Chinese footprint westwards towards the Indian Ocean will see a marked increase in the PLA Navy's presence in Indonesian waters which may require Indonesia to change its current posture. Access through these three straits will determine the extent and capability of China's presence in the Indian Ocean. China is constrained by an unfavourable maritime geography that limits its options and it, therefore, needs the oceanic space and the access to the Atlantic Ocean that the Indian Ocean provides, for it to make its bid for global maritime domination. Hence, containing India's combat edge as a maritime power in the Indian Ocean will be important for China. India will have to prevent that from happening as a favourable maritime situation is critical for India's economic well-being with 90 per cent of its trade by volume and over 80 per cent of its energy requirements coming over the sea. Therefore, it is important for India to contain, or at the very least, constrain the PLA Navy's forays into the Indian Ocean. Hence the importance of a robust India-Indonesia bilateral maritime security relationship.

The Multilateral Dimension

In 1992, India enunciated its Look East Policy to engage more deeply with the region east of the Malacca Straits. This received a boost in 2014 when 'Look East' became 'Act East'. This policy acknowledged the centrality of ASEAN in

the regional framework. Indonesia is the largest and most influential member of ASEAN; it assumed the chairmanship of the group on 13 November 2022 and announced ‘ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth’ as the theme during its helm. This has led to a view that, while this underlines Indonesia’s emphasis on economic growth, it undermines the importance of the security and geopolitical challenges facing ASEAN. This is not entirely surprising since Indonesia has always tended to down play the security challenge but it is a concern, nevertheless, as some ASEAN members have serious security concerns. As a country, Indonesia is equally wary of both China and the US and would prefer not to be seen as taking sides. However, it is also keen to link the infrastructure development initiatives like the China led BRI and the US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework to ensure optimum capital utilisation for the region by mitigating competition and, thereby, emphasising ASEAN’s centrality and its inclusive approach.

The formation of the Quad and more lately AUKUS, to address the twin issues of a free and open Indo-Pacific and China’s maritime belligerence does indirectly undermine the ability of ASEAN, and its associated security mechanisms (ARF, ADMM+ etc), to address the emerging security challenges. In fact, ASEAN was not welcoming of the Quad and thawed only after its centrality was acknowledged.²⁴ However, ASEAN as a group is wary of challenging China’s domination of the region and its ownership of the 9-Dash Line, despite five of its members having contentious maritime boundary disputes with China, and also bearing the brunt of China’s Grey Zone tactics in the maritime domain. All ASEAN members have signed on to the BRI and China has been quick to expose fault lines within ASEAN in areas where all 10 members are not on the same page. Indonesia, in its leadership role will have to take a position on the ASEANs, response to the Chinese threat and work together with the Quad in its non-military capacity building initiatives towards mutual benefit. India, which has always projected its view of the Indo-Pacific as an inclusive region, could be the catalyst where ASEAN could benefit from the Quad’s security-related capability while the Quad could benefit from the inclusiveness embedded in ASEAN.²⁵

India, which has always projected its view of the Indo-Pacific as an inclusive region, could be the catalyst where ASEAN could benefit from the Quad’s security-related capability while the Quad could benefit from the inclusiveness embedded in ASEAN.

In June 2019, ASEAN articulated the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and in November the same year, India introduced the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) under the aegis of the East Asia Summit. The AOIP was an Indonesia-led initiative, and reflected its approach of emphasising inclusiveness and neutrality. The inadequate attention to security is expected to be addressed through other mechanisms like the ADMM, which has highlighted the centrality of ASEAN in regional defence and security cooperation amongst and with its security partners in the region.

The India-led IPOI has been developed on seven pillars towards building a comprehensive multi-layered regional security and economic architecture in the Indo-Pacific. Both these initiatives acknowledge the centrality of ASEAN and there is a convergence between the AOIP and the IPOI on four main areas which include maritime cooperation, connectivity, UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030, and economic and other areas of cooperation including climate change and Disaster risk reduction and management.²⁶ In June 2021, India endorsed the AOIP with the signing of the ASEAN-India Joint Statement on the AOIP for Peace, Stability, and Prosperity in the Region.²⁷ This document will perhaps drive India’s approach towards this region.

Both India and Indonesia are also invested in various other multilateral mechanisms on both sides of the Malacca Straits. While India is an active participant in groupings like the EAS, the ADMM+ etc., Indonesia has been seeking a deeper engagement with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). It is also a member of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and therefore also has a stake in the dynamics of the Indian Ocean. Both India, and Indonesia, as the architects of these respective constructs must therefore leverage the strength of their bilateral relationship to energise and operationalize both these concepts towards ensuring a comprehensive capacity building, multisectoral architecture which addresses the fundamental economic and security related challenges in the region.

The Australia-India-Indonesia Trilateral. The multilateral engagements in the Indo-Pacific are characterised by numerous bilateral, trilateral and minilateral²⁸ arrangements, which effectively complement the larger mechanisms. The Australia-India-Indonesia trilateral is one such.²⁹ Conceptualised in 2017, the Foreign Ministers finally met in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in September 2022.³⁰ This trilateral of three strategically located maritime democracies in the Indo-Pacific can become not only a medium power bulwark against the existing security challenges and the impending great power rivalry, but also ensure the economic resilience of the region. All three countries can leverage their size and strategic location to ensure the safety of trade and energy transiting through this region as well as ensure that the existing rules-based order is not threatened. More significantly, this trilateral has the political and economic capacity to address some of the long-term challenges related to climate change, HADR, maritime diplomacy, sensitivity to the vulnerability of the small island states, and through their inclusive capacity building initiatives, mitigate the regional security challenges, particularly in the maritime domain.

Conclusion

In the 73 years since Indonesia and India established diplomatic relations, the bilateral engagement between the two countries has seen a steady upward trajectory based on a shared vision for the region and defined by a common preference for strategic autonomy, multilateralism, and developing an inclusive regional architecture. Both countries championed the cause of non-alignment when the global focus was on the Cold War that was 'raging' in the Atlantic and the North-South divide was very prominent. In the years since, and with the focus shifting to the Indo-Pacific, both countries have continued to steer a non-confrontational path and have actively supported the emergence of multilateral mechanisms to support capacity building in addressing the wide spectrum of emerging kinetic and non-kinetic security challenges, including existential ones that require a multi-dimensional and multi-layered approach. Both countries have highlighted their concerns for the economic well-being of the Global South and their 'comprehensive strategic relationship', besides consolidating the bilateral engagement, should work towards operationalising initiatives like the AOIP and the IPOI to create an effective multilateral security and economic architecture for the Indo-Pacific.

The multilateral engagements in the Indo-Pacific are characterised by numerous bilateral, trilateral and minilateral arrangements, which effectively complement the larger mechanisms. The Australia-India-Indonesia trilateral is one such.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://bharatshakti.in/not-90-nautical-miles-away-but-pm-modi-on-india-indonesia-ties/>
- 2 https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/INDIA_INDONESIA__2019.pdf
- 3 <https://www.britannica.com/place/Indonesia>
- 4 <https://power.lowyinstitute.org/downloads/lowy-institute-2021-asia-power-index-key-findings-report.pdf>
- 5 Aristyo Rizka Darmawan. “Challenges and expectations for Indonesia’s new Armed Forces Chief”, December 21, 2022. *Policy Forum, Asia and the Pacific Policy Society*.
- 6 <https://thediplomat.com/tag/indonesia-foreign-policy/>
- 7 <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/indonesia-natuna-south-china-sea-chinese-incursion-10192021134552.html>
- 8 <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/11/chinese-underwater-glider-haiyi-found-in-indonesian-waters-defense-analyst.html>
- 9 <https://www.republika.co.id/berita/nhvax2/minister-indonesias-diplomacy-will-be-downtoearth>
- 10 Rafikasari, Astri. (2020). “Redefining Indonesia’s Foreign Policy “Free & Active”: Challenges & Opportunities of Indonesia’s - China’s Alliance in the Development of Space Technology”. *Researchgate, 6th International Conference on Social and Political Sciences (ICOSAPS 2020)* 10.2991/assehr.k.201219.099.
- 11 Alfyan Nooryan Putra Pikoli. Critical Analysis of Indonesia’s Global Maritiem Fulcrum under Joko Widodo: Problems and Challenges. *Publik (Jurnal Ilmu Adminsitra Vol 10 No 1)*. 07 June 2021.
- 12 <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/bandung-conf>
- 13 GM Hiranandani. “Transition to Triumph: Indian Navy 1965-1975”. Published by Director Personnel Services, Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy) New Delhi, 2nd Ed, 2005
- 14 https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/INDIA_INDONESIA__2019.pdf
- 15 <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/india-indonesia-hold-meeting-on-development-of-connectivity-between-andaman-and-nicobar-island-and-aceh-province20221219225613/>
- 16 [https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/ind/partner/idn#:~:text=During%202020%2C%20India%20had%20a,and%20Chemical%20Products%20\(%24957M\).](https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/ind/partner/idn#:~:text=During%202020%2C%20India%20had%20a,and%20Chemical%20Products%20(%24957M).)
- 17 https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/INDIA_INDONESIA__2019.pdf
- 18 The Business 20 (B20) is the official G20 dialogue forum with the global business community.
- 19 [Times of india.indiatimes.com/trade-pact-between-india-indonesia-to-boost-economic-ties / articleshow /94754154.cms](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/trade-pact-between-india-indonesia-to-boost-economic-ties/articleshow/94754154.cms)
- 20 https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/INDIA_INDONESIA__2019.pdf
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 39th edition of India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol. Posted On 11 Dec 2022 by PIB Delhi. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1882468>
- 23 https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/INDIA_INDONESIA__2019.pdf
- 24 Quad Joint Leaders Statement, White House, May 24, 2022. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/24/quad-joint-leaders-statement/>

India's Strategic Neighbourhood

- 25 Sarah Teo, The Quad and ASEAN -where to next. East Asia Forum, June 25,2022. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2022/06/25/the-quad-and-asean-where-to-next/#:~:text=But%20the%20difference%20lies%20in,US%20allies%20and%20close%20partners.>
- 26 Pradeep Chauhan, Prabir De, Sarabjeet Singh Parmar, Durairaj Kumarasamy. Indo-Pacific Cooperation:AOIP and IPOI. AIC Working Paper No 3, October 2020. https://aseanindiacentre.org.in/sites/default/files/Publication/AIC%20Working%20Paper%20October%202020_0.pdf
- 27 Gurjit Singh, The India ASEAN AOIP-IPOI Cooperation, ORF, October 15,2022. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-india-asean-aoip-ipoi-cooperation/>
- 28 Small, issue-based partnerships outside the confines of formal institutions.
- 29 Jagannath Panda, The Australia-India-Indonesia Trilateral , April 23, 2021. The national Bureau of Asian Research. <https://www.nbr.org/publication/the-australia-india-indonesia-trilateral-fostering-maritime-cooperation-between-middle-powers/>
- 30 Premesha Saha, The Australia-India-Indonesia trilateral finally takes off. Raisina Debates October 04, 2022. Observer Research Foundation. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-australia-india-indonesia-trilateral-finally-takes-off/>

Developments in the Gulf and its Environs and India's Role

Shri Sanjay Singh, IFS (Retd)[@]

Abstract

In the fundamental economic and geopolitical reordering underway in the world, new security, trading, and economic arrangements are being put into place the world over, including in the Gulf. The countries in the region are anticipating these changes and are positioning themselves accordingly to deal successfully with them. India too is playing its role in the Gulf in this, in keeping with mutual interests.

The Changing World Order: An Overview

A fundamental economic and geopolitical reordering is underway in the world. New security, trading, and economic arrangements are being put into place in which emerging technologies play a critical part, as do the traditional factors of demography, natural and human resources, economic strength, and governance. Despite the opposition to globalisation from certain quarters, it is clear that there needs to be greater global cooperation to address global challenges such as Climate Change or pandemics. The six Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries or the Gulf are not immune to this reordering. These countries are anticipating these changes and are positioning themselves to deal successfully with them. Against this background, India is playing a significant role in the Gulf in keeping with mutual interests. The most important factor in the reordering that is underway is that the hegemony of the US and the Western Alliance in the world order is under challenge. The rise of China has brought an end to the brief unipolar moment. China, with its spectacular growth, is attempting to rewrite the rules and remake the world according to its own interests. This competition is leading to the beginning of what could well be a substantive decoupling of the US from China. The US faces challenges on various fronts.

Developments in West Asia and the Gulf

The loosening of the US embrace of the Middle East, the expanding presence of Russia and China, and other global developments are leading to fundamental realignments in the West Asian Region and the Gulf. Details are in the succeeding paragraphs.

The United States of America. President Biden's stated intention is to address domestic challenges, strengthen ties with US allies, and meet the strategic challenge from China and Russia. The crisis in Ukraine has highlighted the need for new arrangements in Europe. Its fallout on energy and food security has affected the whole world including the Gulf. Consequently, the US Middle East Policy has undergone a major overhaul under the Biden administration, with the region getting less attention. However, despite the change in its priorities, the US will continue to be involved in managing developments in the region, especially where these impact its own national interests. The US, with several bases in the Gulf, is presently the main global power in West Asia and the main security provider and is capable of

[@] *Shri Sanjay Singh, IFS (Retd)* is an alumnus of Delhi University. He joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1976 and served in Indian Missions in Mexico, Germany, Ghana, Vietnam and France. He was India's Ambassador to Iran and Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs. Since retirement in 2013, he has been working with think tanks on issues related to foreign affairs and was President of the Association of Indian Diplomats.

India's Strategic Neighbourhood

effectively projecting force all over the region. It will continue to have a say over any security arrangement being put in place, or even over the security role of any other power in the region.

Russia. Russia has re-emerged as an assertive actor in certain countries in the region, such as in Syria. It is also an active partner of the Gulf energy producers as part of the OPEC+ arrangement. Its actions in Ukraine have not elicited negative reactions from the region.

China. Chinese imports from and trade with West Asia are expanding exponentially. Its growing economic presence is underpinned by the central belt of the BRI being put in place throughout the region. This has been accompanied by an increasing maritime presence and the acquisition of naval facilities in the Indian Ocean Region. Authoritative Chinese studies recommend its greater politico-military engagement in West Asia. President Xi paid a successful visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in December 2022 when a slew of agreements were signed.¹

The Gulf. The Gulf, the resource rich part of the West Asian Region, is relatively stable but impacted by the problems of the wider region. The region is confronted with daunting political, socio-economic, and security challenges, and violence rooted in religious, tribal, and ideological differences. There has been a proliferation of radical extremist groups. Some of the underlying causes related to poverty, climate change and desertification, droughts, high population growth and accompanying youth unemployment remain largely unaddressed. Sustainable growth is consequently under pressure.

The major threats to the Gulf are from instability in the Arab world at large, exemplified by the conflicts in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq and the fact that fossil fuels will diminish in importance relative to green technologies, affecting revenues, economic growth, and the social contract.

Turkey, in a reversal of its policy of befriending the Muslim Brotherhood, has reached out to Egypt, KSA, the Emirates (UAE), and even Israel. The Gulf outreach to Russia and China has strengthened in terms of a more effective OPEC+ and greater economic cooperation with China. There is impetus to modernisation and social reforms in the Gulf, such as those pushed by Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and Mohamed bin Zayed (MBZ) in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. The Abraham Accords, and the subsequent opening to Israel, create new possibilities. The Shia crescent is feared by Sunni monarchies. Their stand-off with Iran gives rise to regional tensions and threats to shipping lines in the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Gulf of Aden. Nevertheless, in a welcome development, officials of KSA and Iran had been meeting in Baghdad during 2022. The major threats to the Gulf are from instability in the Arab world at large, exemplified by the conflicts in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq and the fact that fossil fuels will diminish in importance relative to green technologies, affecting revenues, economic growth, and the social contract.

An Analysis of Unsettled Areas and Future Challenges

The violence in Iraq, Yemen, and Syria shows no sign of abating. This provides safe havens for terrorist groups to flourish and multiply, thereby, threatening regional and global security. The Palestinian-Israeli conundrum remains unresolved. There is a deepening divide between Iran on one side and Saudi Arabia and its allies, UAE and Bahrain, on the other, underlining the schism within political Islam. A more potent challenge is the tension between Iran and Israel. Great powers continue intervening in the region, further heating up the cauldron. Given this vitiated atmosphere, accidents can occur leading to the situation spiraling out of control, with global consequences.

The Iranian factor in Regional Instability. Economic sanctions imposed on Iran by the US, following its withdrawal in 2018 from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) have inflicted considerable damage to the Iranian economy which was further afflicted by the pandemic, and has contracted considerably in consequence. With the re-imposition of US sanctions, Iran no longer kept its nuclear development programme on hold and is increasingly

noncompliant with the JCPOA.² It is enriching Uranium above the JCPOA agreed threshold, increasing its stockpile of Low Enriched Uranium (LEU) above that permitted, commissioning advanced centrifuges etc. This increases regional instability.

The Biden administration had expressed its readiness to re-engage with Iran over the JCPOA.³ Talks are being held between the other members of the P5+1 and Iran in Vienna, with the US being kept informed and consulted. There are, however, no indications of the talks yielding a positive outcome till date. The US relationship with Israel, and that with the Gulf monarchies, and its own domestic compulsions limits the scope for a possible US opening to Iran and in the ongoing negotiations in Vienna on the Iranian nuclear issue. Iran has consequently grown closer to Russia and China, and has entered into a 25-year cooperation arrangement with the latter.

Meanwhile, following the death of Mahsa Amini, Iran has been racked by continuous protests. These are fuelled by the economic difficulties faced by the populace and their desire to challenge the constrictions placed on their lives by the clerical regime. These protests have also adversely affected Iran's relations with its Gulf neighbours and has led it to suspend its dialogue with KSA whom it has accused of inciting these protests.

Israel and the Abraham Accords. These Accords which have led to the normalisation of ties between the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Israel are another critical development, as is the softening of Saudi policy towards Israel. There is a slow but sure geopolitical integration of Israel in West Asia, as Israel 'normalises' ties with Gulf Arab and other regional nations. The Abraham Accords in many ways are indicative of the broad based fundamental change taking place in West Asia. They perhaps anticipate to an extent a less involved US, a rising Iran, the increasing role of Russia, Turkey, and China. In Israel itself, a disparate coalition consisting of extreme rightist parties led by PM Netanyahu has come into power, which could well worsen the Palestinian problem. While the Palestinian peace process is moribund, the problem will not go away. This has its effect on the Arab street and feeds a sense of grievance. Palestinians themselves remain divided and the relations between al-Fatah ruling West Bank and al-Hamas ruling Gaza have been inimical, with national elections yet to be held even after a gap of 15 years.

There is a slow but sure geopolitical integration of Israel in West Asia, as Israel 'normalises' ties with Gulf Arab and other regional nations.

Syria. The conflict in Syria concentrated around the rebel militia's bastion around Idlib, in the North-West of the country bordering Turkey, and shows no sign of abating. In the Northeast, there is an uneasy stand-off between Turkey and Kurdish militias. Israel continues to bomb targets in Syria connected to Iran and Hezbollah. Turkey periodically threatens to open the floodgates of Syrian refugees to Europe.

Yemen. In Yemen, the expiry of a six-month ceasefire in October 2022 thrust the country back into war after limited improvements in humanitarian conditions. The Houthis continue their attacks on Saudi Arabia, launching sporadic drone attacks especially on oil installations. The conflict also provides the opportunity for Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) to expand its activities.

Iraq. Iraq remains a playground for US-Iran rivalry. The internal situation in Iraq is unstable owing to corruption and sectarian fighting. Nearly a year after elections were held in October 2021, new Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al Sudani took over. However, this has not stabilised the country.

Egypt and Turkey. These two countries have historically influenced events in the Arabian Peninsula. Even though recent finds of gas by Egypt and related developments have reduced its economic and other difficulties somewhat, a weakened Egypt, dependent on financial assistance from KSA and UAE, creates a power vacuum in the Arab world and limits it to dealing with its own internal economic and political problems. This also increases Israeli intransigence.

India's Strategic Neighbourhood

Turkey had an aggressive regional policy as manifested by its incursion into Syria, its new security arrangements with Qatar and Libya. Its support for Islamic parties such as the Brotherhood in Egypt, and Hamas, however, did create problems in its relations with Egypt, Israel, KSA, and the Emirates. Internally it has been affected by the economic slowdown and the pandemic. Its increasing authoritarian turn has brought criticism from the West. Feeling its increasing isolation, Turkey, in a reversal of its policy, has made overtures to Egypt resuming diplomatic ties in March 2022, as also to Israel, the KSA, and the Emirates. Its relevance has also increased owing to its role related to the Ukraine conflict.

Geo-Strategic Scan of the Gulf Countries

The Gulf is relatively the more stable and prosperous part of the West Asian Region, greatly dependent on energy exports. It is estimated that by 2035, about 90 per cent of Gulf oil and gas production will go to Asia. While owing to the Ukraine crisis in no small measure energy prices today have recovered, they remain volatile. Depressed prices put stress on the social contract in the region.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The Gulf's powerhouse is the (KSA), an economic power and the only Arab country in the G-20 grouping. KSA has embarked on the implementation of its Crown Prince MBS's pet project called 'Vision 2030', to foster rapid development in the country, and the Shareek (Partner) programme envisaging a \$1.3 Tn investment to help boost the private sector, create new jobs and wean the country off oil and gas. They are financed to some extent by Saudi ARAMCO's privatisation. The clouds on the Saudi horizon are difficulties in its relations with the US, the conflict in Yemen, and the increasing Saudi-Iran confrontation. KSA faces pressure from the US owing to human-rights issues, those related to its actions in Yemen, and the consequences of the Khashoggi incident. The Ukraine conflict and the need to get the Gulf oil producers to increase production, led President Biden to change his negative stance towards KSA and MBS. He visited the Kingdom in July 2022 but did not get satisfaction. In contrast, President Xi received a much better reception when he visited KSA in December 2022.

The clouds on the Saudi horizon are difficulties in its relations with the US, the conflict in Yemen, and the increasing Saudi-Iran confrontation.

UAE. The UAE is playing a more robust role, being less affected by the global slowdown owing to its more diversified economy. It put Amal, a satellite, in Martian orbit in Feb 2021 and is operationalising its Barakah nuclear power reactors. It has effectively minimised its involvement in the Yemen conflict. It is poised to leverage its accord with Israel and has, at the same time, reached out to Iran. The Israel, India, USA, UAE (I2U2) West Asia Quad arrangement is another positive development for the UAE.

Qatar. Qatar maintains good relations with Iran, Turkey, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Qatar's ostracisation had created disunity in the peninsula. However, this was papered over by the agreement entered into at the Jan 2021 al-Ula Summit of the GCC normalising relations between Qatar on the one hand and Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt on the other. The Ukraine crisis has made Qatar's gas endowment even more important especially for the Europeans. This year Qatar successfully hosted the FIFA World Cup despite criticism of its conservative laws and its treatment of foreign workers.

Oman and Kuwait. In Oman, Sultan Qaboos, a voice for moderation and peace in the region, passed away in 2020. Oman is comparatively not so well endowed and has been facing economic difficulties. In Kuwait, another moderate voice, Emir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah passed away in September 2020, making governance in Kuwait even trickier. The absence of these sage voices will be felt in the peninsula.

Bahrain. Bahrain, the only Shia majority country within the GCC and ruled by a Sunni monarchy, experienced serious disturbances during the Arab Spring. These were put down with a heavy hand with the help of KSA and the Emirates. However, the problem remains with constant Bahraini allegations of Iranian interference.

The Role of India

India's engagement with the West Asian Region and the Gulf is steadily intensifying with increasing exchanges of high-profile visits. Prime Minister Modi has paid special attention to India's ties with the region. Every capital he has visited bilaterally, sees India as a valued partner and seeks an enhanced political, economic, security, and defence partnership with India.

West Asia is part of India's extended neighbourhood. Its stability, and particularly that of the Gulf, is of strategic importance and national interest for India. Over 9 million Indians live and work, in the region, sending back valuable remittances. The region provides around 60 percent of India's oil and gas requirements as well as phosphatic fertilisers and urea essential for agriculture. West Asia is India's largest economic partner with trade exceeding \$150 billion annually and a growing investment partnership. UAE and KSA have announced intentions to invest upto \$ 75 bn and \$ 100 bn respectively in India. A large number of Indians have faith-based reverence for the holy sites in the region and visit them on pilgrimages. Iran, in particular, provides connectivity corridors for India to Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Eurasia. India is an active participant in connectivity initiatives such as the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the development of Chabahar Port. India has moved from 'Look West' to 'Think West' and now to an 'Act West' policy, building strong economic and security ties. India has steadily strengthened its multi-dimensional relationship with the region, which has now acquired a critical mass ready to expand exponentially.

West Asia is part of India's extended neighbourhood. Its stability, and particularly that of the Gulf, is of strategic importance and national interest for India.

India has defence and security cooperation arrangements with a number of countries in the region. Its defence cooperation is marked by exchange of high-level visits, maritime arrangements and joint exercises, counter-piracy operations and counter terrorism engagements, capacity building and training of military personnel, and now through the possibility of provision of military equipment and its joint production. India has troops in peace-keeping missions in Lebanon and the Golan, and has been committing its naval resources for ensuring the safety of SLOCs in the region. India has developed bilateral institutional mechanisms with nearly all countries in the region to enhance cooperation in the fight against terrorism and extremism, especially through sharing of information. Various statements signed in last few years clearly highlight the common position which leadership of the countries of the region share with India on extremism and terrorism, making them partners in fighting this global menace.

India enjoys an image in the region of a benign but growing power which harbours neither extra-territorial ambitions nor the desire to export its views. Its non-prescriptive and non-interventionist approach, good relations with all countries of the region as well as global powers, and its positive image make a good case for India to play a greater role in the region. The key to India's diplomatic success lies in its pursuit of a balanced, non-partisan policy with a focus on forging bilateral win-win relations with each country individually.

Conclusion

Peace and stability in the Gulf Region will require wide-ranging understanding among all major regional actors as well as global powers. This would need to be based on geo-political realities, must be region-wide, regionally led and inclusive. Towards this end, platforms must be created to bring together experts, policy makers, officials, and academic communities from the region to debate regional issues. India's view is that violence will not lead to long-term solutions

India's Strategic Neighbourhood

and only make the situation worse and it has been counselling moderation and dialogue in its bilateral interactions. India is a lead actor in Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA),⁴ which can provide platforms to initiate dialogue and India is itself not averse to providing platforms for confidence building exercises. Given that peace and stability in the Gulf, in particular, is of strategic importance for India, India will need to be an active participant in its promotion and to encourage it.

Endnotes

- 1 Mohita Kaur Garg, Ed. "Xi meets MBS as China-Saudi Arabia sign 34 agreements worth \$30 billion", *WTON*, Dec 08, 2022. Accessed Jan 12, 2023 from <https://www.wionews.com/world/xi-jinpings-saudi-visit-china-saudi-arabia-sign-34-agreements-worth-30-billion-541177>
- 2 Permanent Mission of France to the UN. "Non-Proliferation Joint Stake Out By France, Germany And United Kingdom", 19 December 2022. Accessed Jan 12, 2023 from <https://onu.delegfrance.org/iran-s-nuclear-programme-has-never-been-more-advanced>
- 3 Natasha Turak," Biden team takes a major step in offering to start talks with Iran as Tehran's sanctions deadline approaches", *CNBC*, Feb 19 2021. Accessed Jan 11, 2023 from <https://www.cNBC.com/2021/02/19/jcpoa-bidens-return-to-the-iran-nuclear-deal-is-getting-harder.html>
- 4 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.(Dr Vijay Sakhuja, IPCS, 3 Mar 2014)

Decodifying Taliban and ISKP in Afghanistan

Dr Adil Rasheed @

Abstract

The doctrinal differences between Deobandi Taliban and Salafi-jihadist Al-Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) are so stark that it affects their respective strategic objectives and designs, decision-making, mode of warfare, tactical choices, and even desired end-state. Therefore, it is always critical to know more about the ideological/theological discourses of these groups to gain insight into the strategic behaviour of these violent extremist groups, because the cognitive domain is now the new centre of gravity in hybrid warfare.

Introduction

On the face of it, the ideological narratives of Violent Non-State Actors (VNSAs) may appear too prolix, polemical, and somewhat inconsequential to most strategic experts. Perhaps, only some sections of the dogmatic discourse that directly deal with strategic or military matters may seem to merit attention. The rest of the abstruse scholasticism, the compulsive myth-building, and the caustic self-righteousness that litter the PR collateral of most extremist literature may seem too involved and conceited to be useful. Yet, this article suggests that an intensive study of even ideological texts may, at times, be useful in winning wars in the cognitive domain — which in the age of grey zone warfare has become the new centre of gravity. The ideological texts of these groups may hold within them clues to deciphering the groups' inner workings, the psychotic tics in their strategic decision-making, preference modes and methodologies in warfare, covert strategic designs, tactical aims, and desired end-state etc. More importantly, it may expose the strategic, if not doctrinal, differences among both rival and allied VNSAs that may be used or exploited while developing strategies both in kinetic and non-kinetic warfare.

Salafi-Deobandi Divergences: Conflicting Agendas

For instance, if one studies the three prominent radical groups currently operating in Afghanistan — Taliban, Al-Qaeda and ISIS — it is noteworthy that their ideology, methodology, aims, and desired end state vary considerably. Thus, Salafi-jihadist¹ Al-Qaeda and ISIS claim to be waging a so-called 'global jihad' to overthrow the existing liberal world order, not out of any political, nationalist or humanist cause or concern but simply for the sake of Allah (*jihad fi Sabilillah*) — so as to establish, as it were, Allah's universal *hakimiyyah* (sovereignty) upon the world.² Conversely, Hanafi-Deobandi Taliban wages jihad almost exclusively to uphold Pashtoon nationhood, which in turn is associated with its unique socio-religious way of life steeped in Deobandi fundamentalism.³ Unlike globalist ISIS and Al-Qaeda, the Taliban is content with restricting its area of military operations within Afghanistan, even though it often readily gives refuge to foreign jihadist groups within its territory.

@ Dr Adil Rasheed joined MP-IDS as Research Fellow in August 2016. Before that, he was researcher and political commentator in various international think tanks and media organisations for over 17 years, both in the United Arab Emirates and India. He was Senior Research Fellow at the United Services Institution (USI) of India for two years from 2014 to 2016, and still remains Distinguished Fellow. He has researched and written extensively on a number of security related subjects with specialisation in the ISIS.

Again, the Taliban is different from Salafi-jihadist Al-Qaeda and ISIS in that it is generally open to negotiating with its enemies. Even under Mullah Omar's hardline leadership, the Taliban was mostly willing to parley, even hold diplomatic negotiations with its non-Muslim adversaries in times of strategic impasse and even sought a seat for itself in the UN.^{4,5} Recently, we witnessed the Taliban holding negotiations with the US administration in Doha for securing the safe exit of coalition troops out of Afghanistan and has been conducting diplomatic exchanges with Chinese ministers and senior officials on a regular basis, something the Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISKP) or Al-Qaeda could never imagine doing. Thus, the diplomacy and warfare of Taliban vis-à-vis that of the truce-averse Salafi-jihadist groups Al-Qaeda and ISIS, as well as their affiliates like Al-Shabaab and the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) respectively, is quite different in its orientation and methodology. This has partially to do with the Hanafi-Deobandi brand of Sunni Islam the Taliban follow, which recognises nationhood as a religiously legitimate institution unlike Salafi-jihadism which considers nationalism and patriotism as a kind of *taghut* (worship of something other than Allah) and a manifestation of non-Islamic *jabiliyyah* (pernicious ignorance).⁶

Besides these differences, there are certain other doctrinal issues between Salafi school of Sunni Islam and the Hanafi school of Sunni jurisprudence, which, if studied properly, could prove strategically significant in the campaign against violent extremism, such as in fighting Salafi/Ahle Hadeeth Lashkar-e-Toiba or against the Hanafi Deobandi Jaish-e-Mohammad, etc. This Salafi-Hanafi incompatibility was, in fact, well-known to the Arab mercenaries, among them early Al-Qaeda leaders, when they first entered the Af-Pak theatre to fight Soviet Forces in the 1980s, although the average Afghan and Pakistani Sunni Muslim was less aware or concerned about them back then. As Al-Qaeda leaders wanted to gain a foothold in the region, they tended to overlook these doctrinal differences with Hanafi-Deobandi mujahideen fighters in the region, whom they even started to slowly Salafise over a passage of time.⁷ Still, in his online book *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*⁸, Bin Laden's aide Abu Musab Al Suri described some Arab-Afghan jihadists (such as Abu Qatada and Abu Musab al Zaraqawi) as being derisive of the 'muqallid'⁹ doctrinal beliefs of the Taliban in the 1990s and highly dismissive of Mullah Omar's claim of having established an 'Islamic emirate' in Afghanistan. According to Al - Suri, many of the Arab jihadists regarded the Taliban as no more than a 'safe haven' from which they could operate freely, and did not regard the so-called Taliban 'emirate' as a suitable starting point for launching their cherished dream of a future Islamic/Salafi Caliphate. Thus, Al - Suri states in his online book: "One of the astonishing things [...] is a statement made by one of those extremist Salafi-jihadists. He told me in one of our conversations that jihad must be under the Salafist banner; its leadership, program and religious rulings must also be Salafist [...] If we accept that non-Salafists participate with us in jihad, we only do so because we need them. However, they should not have any leadership role at all. We should lead them like a herd of cows to perform their duty of jihad".¹⁰

There are certain other doctrinal issues between Salafi school of Sunni Islam and the Hanafi school of Sunni jurisprudence, which, if studied properly, could prove strategically significant in the campaign against violent extremism.

Murjia Hanafism: Non-Judgmental Islam that Fostered Sufism

In fact, Hanafi school of jurisprudence has been the subject of Salafi criticism for centuries.¹¹ The Hanafi school was founded by Numaan bin Thabit, better known as Abu Ḥanifah, who is said to have been born in 689 CE in Kufa (in Iraq) to a Persianate father from Kabul (Afghanistan). Unlike other orthodox schools of jurisprudence, Abu Ḥanifah is often charged by his Salafi detractors for having depended excessively on '*qiyas*' (rational analogy) and '*ijtihad*' (independent reasoning) in his codification of Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence) while interpreting Quran and Hadeeth scriptural references.¹² In fact, Abu Hanifa is said to belong to the early Islamic movement of *ahl al-ra'y* (scholars using rational derivations) as opposed to the more conformist *ahl al-hadeeth* (scholars of traditional literalism or conformism).¹³ Abu Hanifa is also clubbed among *Murjia* scholars, those who deferred or suspended judgment while adjudicating on the faith of any person by claiming that God alone has the right to judge about the faith of a person, whether the person is a believer

or not. In fact, Abu Hanifa believed that faith in God was of a static nature and was never affected by a person's deeds and one cannot be adjudged a believer or non-believer on the basis of a person's actions.

This pacifist stance itself made Abu Hanifa the subject of controversy in his times that were fraught with great internal religious feuds and turmoil (*fitan*). According to theologian Allama Shahrastani, "Abu Hanifa and his companions were branded 'Murjatus Sunnah', or 'Murjia' (deferrers)".¹⁴ Even today, ISIS uses the term Murjia to vilify pacifist Muslims (mostly Hanafi adherents of Sunni Islam) for being morally weak in making religious judgments. This reluctance of Murjia scholars to make conclusive pronouncements against the faith of people (with whom Abu Hanifa came to be associated) made them popular among Sufi mystics who had a more universalist understanding of Islamic values. When the militant and rationalist theological schools of 'jabariyya' (under the Umayyads) and the *Mutazila* under Abbasid empire fell by the 10th to 12 centuries, it was the Ashari-Maturidi mystical theologians who peacefully won over Mongol forces and much of their Central Asian Regions embraced the Hanafi version of Sufi-Ashari Sunni faith. Thus, Hanafi school of jurisprudence grew popular in Central Asia and India, where it continues to be the dominant version of Islam to this day. In the words of Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asia's Muslims have traditionally practiced Islam as it is interpreted by the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, which is known for its liberalness and respect for personal freedom".¹⁵

In fact, the Hanafi school of jurisprudence and the Ashari embrace of mystical truths allowed Mongol converts to Sufi Islam to continue pursuing their pre-Islamic yassa code of life (as propounded by Genghis Khan) alongside the Islamic way of life, much to the chagrin of the foremost Salafi scholar Ibn Taimiyyah in the 13th century.¹⁶ Even Akbar's court in India followed more of the '*yassa-i-changezi*' norms, popularly known as '*Tura-i-Changizi*', than any Shariah school of Islamic law in its dispensation of governance across India, until the coming of Aurangzeb.¹⁷

At the risk of being simplistic, the Deobandi movement can be categorised as a Sufi-Salafi hybrid, which seeks to combine Hanafi and Ashari-Maturidi legal/philosophical system with Salafi-Wahhabi emphasis on God's oneness.

Deobandism: Endorsement of Nationhood

At the risk of being simplistic, the Deobandi movement can be categorised as a Sufi-Salafi hybrid, which seeks to combine Hanafi and Ashari-Maturidi legal/philosophical system with Salafi-Wahhabi emphasis on God's oneness (*tawhid*). Although Deobandi scholars seek to marry the Hanafi Ashari and Sufi free-spiritedness of Sunni Islam with Salafi/Ahl-e-Hadeeth rectitude, they still carry with them some of the non-conformist allowances of Hanafi jurisprudence. It might surprise many but Hanafi Deobandis of South Asia are advocates of nationalism, even of inter-faith nationalism, unlike the Salafi-jihadists who detest the idea of nationalism in all its forms. To the Deobandis, nationhood is recognised in Islam and to this end they quote the following Quranic verse:

"O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another".¹⁸

(Pickthall translation of Quran, Surah 49, Verse 13)

According to some Islamic scholars, the verse purportedly recognises the distinctiveness of national identities, which set them apart from others, and helps them to be known as different from the other. In the context of Indian history, Deobandism (a Hanafi hybrid of Salafi-Sufi thought), thus, emerges as a surprising votary of national identity, from which it remarkably keeps even the religious identity as inconsequential. In fact, the top-tier of the Darul Uloom Deoband has been such an advocate of Indian nationalism and Hindu-Muslim unity that it disapproved of Muslim League separatism and remained involved in India's freedom struggle against the British until 1947. In the famous Silk Letter Movement (or as is known in India as the *Reshmi Rumal* Movement)¹⁹, Indian Deobandi leaders played an active part in garnering international support for the freedom struggle and had ties with the Ghadar Movement of Lala Hardayal. With their influence in Afghanistan, they made Raja Mahendra Pratap the President of India's Provisional

Government in Kabul in 1915.²⁰ Maulana Hussein Ahmad Madani, head of Darul Uloom Deoband, was a famous activist of the Silk Letter case for which he was sent to a prison in Malta by the then British Government. Maulana Hussein Ahmad Madani is still a highly revered Deobandi leader not just in India but also in Afghanistan to this day.²¹

In his rebuttal to Allama Iqbal's idea of an Islamic State, Madani propounded his theory of 'united nationalism' in his book titled '*Muttahida Qaumiyat Aur Islam*' ('United Nationalism and Islam') in 1947.²² In it, he stressed that Islam does not oppose nationhood based on a common motherland (*watan*), language (*zubaan*), ethnicity (*nasl*), or colour (*rang*) and that both Muslims and non-Muslims can share this common nationhood.²³ Denouncing Jinnah's 'Two Nation Theory' (*do qaumi nazariya*), Madani argued that the word '*qaumi*' appears about 200 times in the Quran and is often used in the holy book while describing the community of Prophets Noah, Abraham, Lot and others. In the Quran, some people of the prophets' '*qaumi*' rejected the divine message and still they remained members of their prophet's communities and vice versa. Therefore, Quran recognises '*qaumi*' as a community or nationhood, whose legitimacy is independent of its people's religious affiliations. Thus, Madani argued that Islam recognises the identity of a nation or community, be it on ethno-linguistic or on any other socio-political affiliation, with religion not being contingent as a basis for political identity. It is on this basis that Madani opposed Jinnah's '*do qaumi nazariya*', in which the latter claimed that Hindus and Muslims constitute two different people and in the spirit of Islam India be partitioned and Pakistan be created.

Madani even stated that Prophet Muhammad's 'Charter of Medina' (*Mithaq Al Madinah*) included all the residents of the city state of Medina — Muslims, idol-worshippers and Jews. Every community had equal rights of citizenship and could freely practise their faith and even approach their respective courts of law on religious matters.²⁴ There was also no *jaziya* (poll tax) in this charter and all the citizens (Muslim and non-Muslim) are called the Prophet's '*umma*'.²⁵ Thus, the word *umma* has varied connotations and is not always necessarily associated with the unity of Muslim community.²⁶

It is curious to note that the predominantly Deobandi Sunni population of Afghanistan never approved of the concept of the Two Nation Theory and Afghanistan was the only country to vote against Pakistan's admission into the United Nations following the latter's formation in 1947.

It is curious to note that the predominantly Deobandi Sunni population of Afghanistan never approved of the concept of the Two Nation Theory and Afghanistan was the only country to vote against Pakistan's admission²⁷ into the United Nations following the latter's formation in 1947.²⁸ Even when the Taliban, a political protégé of ISI, came to rule Afghanistan in late 1996, relations between Deobandi Taliban and Jinnah's Pakistani state began to decline as the Taliban refused to endorse the Durand Line despite pressure from Islamabad and even today the Taliban and its Pakistani affiliate Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP) refuse to accept the Republic of Pakistan as being an Islamically legitimate state. Leave aside Bangladesh, Pakistan's bogey of creating a country based on Islam was never successful even with Afghanistan, with which it has had a contiguous land border since 1947.

Conclusion

Taliban and ISKP. Unfortunately, the Hanafi-Ashari and Sufi doctrines that were embedded in Afghan Muslim tradition have been eroded in recent centuries with the rise of firstly, the introduction of the Tariqa -i-Mohammedia movement of Ahmad Shah Barelvi in the 19th century and secondly, the influence of Salafi-Arab mujahideen, who still operate in the region in the form of Al-Qaeda and ISKP. In fact, the militant strains of Salafism got introduced through the hybridised version of Deobandism in the Afghan belief system only in recent centuries, which were catalysed by failed attempts by colonial powers to control Afghan politics.

The Threat Ahead. In the future, pan-Islamist Al-Qaeda remnants would always find a safe and friendly haven in Taliban-ruled Afghan territories, while ISKP will engage in turf wars with the Taliban, unable to reconcile its hardline Salafi differences with the Murjia Hanafis. It is more likely that ISKP will support more regional jihadist organisations over time as the Taliban gets bogged down running affairs of its restive regime. Although the Taliban does not follow

the Islamic restrictions against the killing of non-combatants (*ghair muharrib*) and pursues indiscriminate violence against civilians by conducting suicide blasts, it does not fight jihad for perpetuity. The Taliban might support the TTP in fighting for Pashtun regions in Pakistan, but it might never actively engage with its adversaries in the neighborhood. It seems unlikely to lead terrorist campaigns into Central Asia and beyond, and it is here that the ISKP has the potential of becoming a major regional threat as the latter believes in waging *jihad fi sabilillah* until a global caliphate has been established.

Having said that, Taliban remains a terrorist organisation and continues to commit serious war crimes — including the targeting of ethnic minorities like Shia Hazaras — in its military operations. Its mistreatment of women and violation of their basic human rights is even more egregious than those of Salafi-jihadists. One can only hope that with the passage of time, Taliban, like many of the moderate states in Central Asia, would embrace the more assimilative and liberal aspects of Hanafi-Ashari Islam. Here the Darul Uloom Deoband in India could play an important part in reaching out and in deradicalising Deobandi militants in the Af-Pak and Central Asian regions. Such efforts could help India emerge as a major global counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation force at the regional and international scene.

Endnotes

- 1 It should be noted that Salafis do not like being called Wahhabi, as most consider themselves following pristine Islam as practised by the first three generations of Muslims (known as Salaf) and are not blind adherents of the 19th century theologian Muhammad Abdul Wahhab to be called Wahhabis. Salafis do not strictly conform to any of the four schools of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence, which came into existence after the time of the Salaf-i-saliheen (the generation of Salaf). In South Asia, people following Salafi beliefs are known as Ahl-e-Hadeeth.
- 2 Ramlan, Ramlan & Erwinsyahbana, Tengku & Hakim, Nurul, “The Concept of Jihad In Islam”. IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 2016
- 3 Saikal, Amin. (2010). Afghanistan and Pakistan: The Question of Pashtun Nationalism?. Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs. 30. 5-17. 10.1080/13602001003650572.
- 4 Barnett R. Rubin, “Leveraging the Taliban’s Quest for International Recognition”, United States Institute for Peace, March 2021
- 5 In this Taliban follows the example of most Muslim states around the world that are signatories to international peace treaties and institutions, even if they are non-Muslim initiatives to begin with. To this end, mainstream Muslim theologians cite the Prophet’s endorsement of the pre-Islamic Arab peace pact called ‘Hilful Fudul’, which continued to be in force during the time of the Prophet and under his direct endorsement. However, Salafi-jihadists refuse to accept these precedents of peace found in Prophet’s life and consider them as having been abrogated later without providing any proof for such an invalidation.
- 6 Abstract from ISIS’ ‘Aqidah wa Manhaj’ (Creed and Path) “We believe that secularism in the multiplicity of its banners and the variety of its programs, such as nationalism, patriotism, Communism, and Ba’thism, is flagrant unbelief, nullifying Islam and expelling one from the religion.” (p.41), published in Cole Bunzel: “From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State”, Analysis Paper No. 19, Centre for Middle East Policy, Brookings, March 2015
- 7 Anne Stenerson, “Blood Brothers or a Marriage of Convenience? The ideological relationship between al-Qa’ida and the Taliban,” paper presented at International Studies Association convention, New York, 15-18 February 2009,
- 8 Brynjar Lia, Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus’ab al-Suri (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).
- 9 ‘Muqallid’ (literally ‘one who strictly adheres’) is a term referred to those Hanafis that strictly adhere to the Hanafi school of Sunni jurisprudence (the earliest extant classical Sunni school of law) in religious matters, even if Hanafi rulings might seem to appear at variance with scriptural injunctions (such as was claimed on the issue of Hanafi acceptance of ‘triple talaq’).
- 10 Assaf Moghadam, Brian Fishman, “Fault lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic and Ideological Fissures”, Taylor and Francis, 2011, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Fault_Lines_in_Global_Jihad/MLE68zW_7LUC?hl=en&gbpv=0
- 11 Joseph Givony, “Murjia and the Theological School of Abu Hanifa: A Historical and Ideological Study”, University of Edinburgh, 1977, https://www.academia.edu/66059693/Murjia_and_the_theological_school_of_Abu_Hani_fa_a_historical_and_ideological_study
- 12 Dar, Eissa. (2018). Does Abū Ḥanīfah Reject Sound Ḥadīth in Order to Formulate Legal Rulings? A Study of Abū Ḥanīfah’s Usūl and His Competency in Ḥadīth. 10.13140/RG.2.2.34650.18883.
- 13 Daniel W. Brown (1996). *Rethinking tradition in modern Islamic thought*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 13–15.
- 14 William Cureton transl. of Shahrastani’s ‘Kitab al-milal wa-al-nihal: Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects’, James Madden and Co., London
- 15 Martha Brill, Olcott, “Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2007)
- 16 Amitai-Preiss, R. (1996). Ghazan, Islam and Mongol tradition: A view from the Mamlūk sultanate. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 59(1), 1-10. doi:10.1017/S0041977X00028524
- 17 Mohammad Khursheed Alam Anjum, “Nobility Under Babur and Humayun”, Centre for Advanced Study, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, 2010
- 18 Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall (English translation), “The Holy Quran” Shalimar Recording Co. Ltd., 1975

India's Strategic Neighbourhood

- 19 Syed Muhammad Miyan Deobandi/Muhammadullah Qasmi, Moulana (2013), *Silk Letter Movement*, Manak Publications, Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 2013
- 20 Vir Singh (2005). *Life and Times of Raja Mahendra Pratap*. Low Price Publications (India).
- 21 Rasheed Kidwai, "Why we miss scholars like Maulana Madani today". Observer Research Foundation, (21 September 2018)
- 22 Yoginder Sikand, "The United Nationalism of Maulana Madani", *The Milli Gazette*, 1-15 August 2004
- 23 Qasmi, M. Burhanuddin, "Maulana Madani Most Deserving of Bharat Ratna". *Asian Tribune*, (24 January 2008)
- 24 Robert D Crane, "Islamic Social Principle of the Right to Freedom: An Analytical Approach", *Arches Quarterly*, Volume 3, Edition 4, , 2009, P.8
- 25 Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800*, Cambridge University Press, p.64
- 26 Abdul Malik Ghozali, *The Concept of Conflict Management in the Madina Charter*, *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, volume 492, Atlantis Press, 2019
- 27 Qassem, Dr Ahmad Shayeq (28 March 2013). *Afghanistan's Political Stability: A Dream Unrealised*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.
- 28 "General Assembly, 2nd session : 92nd plenary meeting, held in the General Assembly Hall at Flushing Meadow, New York, on Tuesday". 30 September 1947.

Section V

Global Issues

The Ukraine Conflict: Implications for International Peace and Security

Shri Asoke Mukerji, IFS (Retd)[@]

Abstract

The Ukraine conflict has been caused by the non-implementation of the 2015 Minsk Agreement, endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2202 in February 2015. Simultaneously, Ukraine's integration into NATO inter-operability has been objected to by Russia as a threat to its security. The failure of diplomatic negotiations during 2021 between Russia and the US catalysed the Russian armed intervention in Ukraine in February 2022, which has a global impact. A resolution of the conflict requires a review of existing frameworks of regional and international security to ensure that this will not be 'an era of war'.

Introduction

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine intertwines two dimensions with implications for the maintenance of peace and security. One dimension is the impact of the conflict on the identity of contemporary Ukraine, which seeks full membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)¹ and its strategic partner the European Union (EU). The other dimension is the impact of the conflict on the existing European security framework committed to the 'indivisible security' of Europe, which is anchored in the Charter of Paris of 1990², and overseen by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).³ The Ukraine conflict has had a major impact on the international framework built on the UN Charter⁴ to sustain a global environment of peace and security for sustainable development.⁵

Ukraine's Contemporary Identity: Seeds of Conflict

The Soviet Republics of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine jointly decided on 08 December 1991 to dissolve the Soviet Union and create the 'Commonwealth of Independent States' (CIS).⁶ That generated the dynamic for each of the constituent twelve CIS republics to assert national identities that had been submerged under Soviet communist ideology for 70 years.

On 21 December 1991 at Almaty, the CIS decided to 'continue' the participation of Ukraine and Belarus in the United Nations (UN) as 'sovereign independent states. They also decided unconditionally on "Russia's continuance of the membership of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the United Nations (USSR), including permanent membership of the Security Council, and other international organisations".⁷ The remaining CIS states would seek membership of the UN, supported by Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine.

The Almaty decision secured contemporary Ukraine's international identity as a sovereign state, after which it embarked on the process of establishing its post-Soviet national identity. The origins of the current Ukrainian conflict are rooted in this process. On one hand, pro-active Ukrainian 'nationalists' mostly from the western Ukrainian Region

[@] *Shri Asoke Mukerji, IFS (Retd)* is an elected member of the USI Council (2023-2025). He retired in December 2015 from the Indian Foreign Service as India's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York. He is presently a Senior Fellow at the Diplo Foundation, where he teaches diplomacy.

of Galicia⁸, asserted an identity that excluded any shared links with Russia. On the other hand, most Ukrainians living in the east and south of the country favoured a national identity that drew upon a shared history and culture that included both Europe and Russia.⁹

The political contestation pitted supporters of a strong executive presidential system for Ukraine against those favouring a parliamentary democracy. Since 1992, support for the parliamentary model has been magnified in local and national governance structures by the emergence of regional political parties funded by a new class of Ukrainian entrepreneurs (oligarchs), who sought or protected specific business interests in the country's political economy.¹⁰ Ukraine elected a series of presidents through popular vote, including Leonid Kravchuk (1992-1994), Leonid Kuchma (1994-2005), Viktor Yushchenko (2005-2010), Viktor Yanukovich (2010-2014), and Petro Poroshenko (2014-2019). Each of these elected Ukrainian presidents had to contend and compromise with Ukrainian oligarchs, and their political parties represented in Ukraine's parliament.

Ukraine's current President Volodymyr Zelenskyy took office in May 2019 with 73 percent of the popular vote, and created a new political party, called Servant of the People, which was elected to 254 of the Ukrainian parliament's 450 seats. In September 2021, President Zelenskyy approved legislation outlawing political parties and media outlets of the oligarchs.¹¹ He signed a decree in June 2022 to create a register of oligarchs.¹² Ukraine has been under martial law declared by Presidential Decree since the outbreak of the conflict with Russia on 24 February 2022.¹³

Since the overthrow of the elected Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich in February 2014 during violent mass protests triggered by Ukraine's stance on signing an Association Agreement with the European Union (EU),¹⁴ Right-Wing Informal Armed Groups (IAGs) have emerged as a new factor in the quest for Ukraine's identity. The most prominent of these IAGs, who draw their inspiration from the platform of Ukrainian 'nationalists', and display their anti-Semitic¹⁵ credentials, have received material support from the West.¹⁶ The role of the IAGs, now integrated into Ukraine's Armed Forces, will be significant for the future political orientation of Ukraine,¹⁷ particularly in resolving the 'Eastern Ukrainian Question'.

The 'Eastern Ukrainian Question' revolves around the key issues of language and religion in defining Ukraine's national identity.

The 'Eastern Ukrainian Question' revolves around the key issues of language and religion in defining Ukraine's national identity. Ukraine adopted a law on the mandatory use of Ukrainian as the state language in July 2019, which was seen by Ukraine's Russian-speaking minority population as an attempt to erase the use of the Russian language in Ukraine.¹⁸ In 2018, a combination of religious and legislative initiatives by President Poroshenko resulted in separating the Russian Orthodox Church (which counted 52 percent of the population of Ukraine as its adherents) from the Moscow Patriarchate in order to create a 'national' Orthodox Church of Ukraine.¹⁹

On 17 February 2022, the UN briefed member-states represented in the UN Security Council (UNSC) that the armed conflict within Ukraine's eastern regions between 2014 and 2021 had claimed 14,000 persons, with the accompanying humanitarian crisis impacting on 2.9 million people, the majority of whom were living in non-government-controlled areas of eastern Ukraine. It reiterated that the "issues underpinning the current crisis are complex and long-standing. They tie together the eight-year conflict in eastern Ukraine with the larger issues relating to the European security architecture...[given] the stakes involved for our collective security and European stability, those issues can and must be solved through diplomacy and the full use of the many available regional and other mechanisms and frameworks. The Minsk agreements remain the only framework endorsed by the Council, in resolution 2202 (2015), for a negotiated, peaceful settlement of the conflict in eastern Ukraine".²⁰

The Minsk Agreements

The ‘European security architecture’ referred to by the UN is the framework of the Charter of Paris, adopted in November 1990 as the Cold War was ending and the Soviet Union was unravelling. The Charter asserted that “security is indivisible and the security of every participating State is inseparably linked to that of all the others”.²¹ The emergence of the armed conflict in Ukraine poses a major challenge to the objectives of the Charter of Paris. Ideally, this challenge should be responded to by the 57-member OSCE which includes both Russia and Ukraine and the NATO.

The OSCE had taken the lead in resolving the conflict that erupted in eastern Ukraine in 2014, after the ouster of the elected President. On 24 February 2014, the OSCE informed the UNSC that it had “the necessary tools to assist Ukraine in this difficult phase”. It emphasised “the need to foster dialogue, re-establish trust, and rebuild bridges, both within Ukraine and across the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian Regions”, and underscored the importance of supporting a “fair and inclusive process of transition that does not marginalise any part of Ukraine or any community”.²²

In June 2014, France, one of the two permanent members of the UNSC from the EU, launched the Normandy Format talks to bring together the leaders of France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine informally to address the Ukrainian crisis. One outcome was the creation of a Trilateral Contact Group, consisting of Russia, Ukraine, and the OSCE, which was able to reach negotiated outcomes between September 2014 and February 2015 to resolve the internal armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. The package of measures along with a Political Declaration, signed on 12 February 2015 by France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine, are collectively referred to as the ‘Minsk Agreements’.²³ The United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) were not signatories of the Minsk Agreements.

The Minsk Agreements were endorsed unanimously (including by the US and UK) through UNSC Resolution 2202 on 17 February 2015. Under Article 25 of the UN Charter, all members of the UN have a legal obligation to ‘carry out’ the decisions of the UNSC. Three aspects of the Minsk Agreements stand out.

The Minsk Agreements were endorsed unanimously (including by the US and UK) through UNSC Resolution 2202 on 17 February 2015.²⁴ Under Article 25 of the UN Charter, all members of the UN have a legal obligation to ‘carry out’ the decisions of the UNSC. Three aspects of the Minsk Agreements stand out.

First, they clearly uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine in achieving a “comprehensive political settlement” of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Second, they commit to a peaceful solution, through dialogue and holding of local elections under Ukraine’s ‘law on local self-government’, of the issues that provoked the conflict, including the ‘right to linguistic self-determination’. Third, they specify obligations of the signatories for implementation, with Germany and France responsible for restoring the damaged financial services sector in the conflict-affected areas; the EU, Russia, and Ukraine responsible through a trilateral dialogue for political crisis settlement, including disruptions in the energy (natural gas) sector; and a trilateral dialogue between the EU, Russia, and Ukraine to address Russia’s concerns on the impact of the Ukraine-EU free trade agreement on Russia’s trade with Ukraine. The obligations of the Minsk Agreements pertaining to the EU were to be implemented through France and Germany.

From July 2015, the OSCE deployed Special Monitoring Missions (SMMs) for monitoring the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine, and providing humanitarian assistance.²⁵ The implementation of the ‘comprehensive political settlement’ through legislation, as set out in the Minsk Agreements, was ignored by Ukraine. In public statements in December 2022, both the French and German leaders (President Françoise Hollande and Chancellor Dr Angela Merkel) who signed the Declaration on the Minsk Agreements endorsed by the UNSC, affirmed that the “2014 Minsk Agreement was an attempt to give Ukraine time [...] It also used this time to become stronger, as you can see today.”²⁶ Such political expediency on the part of these two EU powers does not absolve them of resiling from their legal obligations to implement UNSC Resolution 2202, as co-sponsors of the Minsk Agreements, which contributed to the outbreak of the Ukraine conflict in February 2022.

The US/NATO and the Ukraine Conflict

The abdication of its mandate by the UNSC to ensure compliance with UNSC Resolution 2202 on Ukraine, upholding the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, created the opening for the role played by the US/NATO in the Ukraine crisis from 2015 onwards. The NATO was established by the Washington Treaty in April 1949 to defend its members against the Soviet armies stationed in central and eastern Europe after the Second World War. Unlike the OSCE, the 30-member NATO military alliance does not include either Russia or Ukraine.

The US leads the NATO by setting its security policy objectives, backed by its substantial financial and military contributions to the NATO budget and its ‘nuclear umbrella’ for defending NATO members from 1949.²⁷ The NATO brought West Germany into the alliance in 1955, leading to the creation of the Warsaw Pact. Another, less-discussed consequence was the visible deployment of senior German military officers into the command structures of the NATO, including several who had fought in Hitler’s armies against the Soviet Union.²⁸ After the Cold War, the NATO redefined its mission to focus on ‘dialogue and cooperation’ with the former Warsaw Pact countries, setting the stage for its ‘eastward expansion’.²⁹

The US, which emerged as the sole surviving superpower in 1992 after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, had a strategic choice over its security objectives in Europe. One option was to strengthen the framework of ‘indivisible security’ defined by the Charter of Paris in 1990. The other option was to push the ‘eastward expansion’ of the NATO. The Ukraine conflict shows that the US opted for the second option, which identifies European security in terms of a threat from non-communist Russia. This choice was made despite the strong influence exercised by the US on Russia’s policies between 1992-2000.³⁰

The US, which emerged as the sole surviving superpower in 1992 after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, had a strategic choice over its security objectives in Europe. One option was to strengthen the framework of ‘indivisible security’ defined by the Charter of Paris in 1990. The other option was to push the ‘eastward expansion’ of the NATO. The Ukraine conflict shows that the US opted for the second option.

Three landmark moments illustrate the impact of the US decision to support the ‘expansion’ of the NATO at the risk of antagonising Russia, a global nuclear weapons power.³¹ The first was the commitment extracted by US President Clinton from President Boris Yeltsin, between 1995-1997, for Russia to engage with the NATO. President Yeltsin initially opposed the continuation of the NATO alliance after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, telling US President Bill Clinton during their meeting in Moscow on 10 May 1995 that “[We] need a new structure for Pan-European security, not old ones”! President Clinton responded that the US goal was to stay in Europe and ‘promote a unified, integrated Europe’. He promised a ‘clear statement from the US that Russia should not be excluded from NATO membership’ and held out ‘greater integration of Russia into other international institutions, like the G-7’ if Russia cooperated with NATO.³² On 25 May 1997, Russia agreed to sign a Founding Act on Mutual Relations with the NATO to ‘build a stable, peaceful and undivided Europe, whole and free, to the benefit of all its peoples’. In 1998, the US sponsored Russia’s membership of the G-7, making it the G-8.

The second landmark moment was the 1998 NATO Bucharest Summit. The US President George W. Bush declared the US intention ‘that Ukraine and Georgia will become members of NATO’.³³ Russian President Putin, who had been the first foreign leader to extend support for President Bush’s ‘war on terror’ following the 9/11 attacks on the US³⁴, responded negatively to this announcement. At their Summit in Sochi held shortly after the NATO Bucharest Summit, Russia and the US resolved ‘to address serious differences in areas where our policies do not coincide, including NATO expansion’.³⁵

The third landmark moment occurred in 2014. Despite the US declaration at the 2010 NATO Lisbon Summit that it saw ‘Russia as a partner, not an adversary’³⁶, Russia’s repeated objections to integrating Ukraine into the NATO were brushed aside. Instead, the US backed the ouster of Ukraine’s democratically elected President in February 2014,³⁷ precipitating the Russian annexation of Crimea, the location of its only warm-water naval base (Sevastopol) on the Black Sea, and a gradual build-up of Russian Armed Forces along its border with Ukraine. In his farewell address in January 2017, President Obama referred to Russia’s ‘return to the adversarial spirit’ under President Putin, demonstrated by Russia going into ‘Crimea and portions of Ukraine’ in 2014. The US imposed unilateral economic sanctions on Russia.³⁸ Russia was suspended from membership of the G-8 in 2014.

NATO gradually integrated Ukraine *de facto*, if not *de jure*, into the military alliance through the concept of ‘inter-operability’.³⁹ The newly installed Ukrainian government negotiated a ‘Comprehensive Assistance Package’ for Ukraine adopted at the NATO Summit in Warsaw in 2016. In 2017, the Ukrainian parliament reinstated joining the NATO as a strategic and foreign policy objective, amending the Constitution to reflect this in 2019. The Ukraine National Security Strategy launched by President Zelenskyy in September 2020 made Ukraine’s partnership oriented to membership of the NATO, developed on the basis of 16 NATO capacity-building programmes and trust funds. At least 80,000 Ukrainian troops trained by the NATO between 2015-2022 were in position on 24 February 2022 when Russian Armed Forces entered Ukraine.⁴⁰

Ukraine’s integration into NATO ‘inter-operability’ had been substantially implemented before 24 February 2022. Inter-operability connected Ukraine and the NATO in regional airspace security; secure tactical communications; knowledge-sharing; situational awareness; logistics and transportation cooperation; maritime situational awareness activities in and around the Black Sea; and the establishment of an incident-management centre with laboratories for monitoring and investigating cyber security incidents. In June 2020, Ukraine became the NATO’s sixth Enhanced Opportunity Partner, getting preferential access to the NATO’s inter-operability toolbox (the other five partners are Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan, and Sweden).⁴¹ To lock in the NATO, embrace of Ukraine, the US and Ukraine signed an updated Charter on Strategic Partnership on 10 November 2021 based on the US-Ukraine Strategic Defence Framework of 31 August 2021, which agreed to apply ‘NATO principles and standards’ to Ukraine’s security sector.⁴²

The Russian negotiating documents were rejected by a US/NATO letter dated 26 January 2022, foreclosing a negotiated solution to the brewing crisis in Ukraine.

After the Biden Administration took office in January 2021, Russia and the US attempted to use bilateral diplomatic engagement to address their differences over Ukraine’s membership of the NATO. President Biden confirmed after his Summit with President Putin in Geneva on 16 June 2021 that the two leaders had agreed to establish a dialogue on strategic stability, and “agreed to pursue diplomacy related to the Minsk Agreement”.⁴³ The strategic stability dialogue began in Geneva on 30 September 2021. The Russian and US Presidents held a two-hour video call on 07 December 2021 and discussed the Ukraine situation, with President Biden calling ‘for de-escalation and a return to diplomacy’.⁴⁴

President Vladimir Putin stated on 21 December 2021 that Russia had handed over the drafts of two treaties on 16 December 2021, in response to President Biden’s proposal during their 07 December 2021 call, aimed at preventing the ‘accession of Ukraine’ to the NATO and its eastward expansion. He stressed that “if US and NATO missile systems are deployed in Ukraine, their flight time to Moscow will be only 7-10 minutes, or even five minutes for hypersonic systems. This is a huge challenge for our security”.⁴⁵ The Russian negotiating documents were rejected by a US/NATO letter dated 26 January 2022,⁴⁶ foreclosing a negotiated solution to the brewing crisis in Ukraine.

Future Trends

Three trends based on the ongoing Ukraine conflict deserve attention. First, negotiated outcomes of armed conflicts will depend on both the ground situation as well as trust between the parties during negotiations. Lack of trust appears to have overtaken attempts to resolve the Ukrainian conflict at different levels. At least four rounds of direct talks between Russia and Ukraine between 28 February 2022 and 10 March 2022 (the first three in Belarus, and the fourth in Istanbul at foreign minister level mediated by Türkiye) failed to produce any draft agreement. The OSCE appears to have hesitated on initiating any regional negotiation between the parties to the conflict, opting instead to ‘help avert a humanitarian crisis and create the conditions for assistance and evacuation’ inside Ukraine.⁴⁷ The UNSC has been deadlocked from taking any decision due to the Russian use of its veto power⁴⁸ on decisions proposed by the US and its NATO allies in the UNSC. The ambivalence of the UN Secretary-General, who is mandated by Article 99 of the UN Charter to mediate peace, has thwarted the unanimous request of the UNSC in May 2022 to find a “peaceful solution”.⁴⁹ So far, the only tangible impact of the UN is the agreement between Russia, Ukraine, Türkiye, and the UN for the export of grains from Ukraine and fertilisers from Russia to global markets.⁵⁰

A second trend is the increasing recourse to the calibrated use of global military measures by alliances like the NATO in the absence of an equitable international order. This significantly dilutes the commitment in the UN Charter to the peaceful settlement of disputes. In 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower of the US had cautioned that “in the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex”, referring to the phenomenon that the United States possessed an immense military establishment and a large arms industry, which contained the ‘potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power’.⁵¹

The international preoccupation with the Ukraine conflict has given communist China a free ride to continue with its current aggressive expansionist military policies in Asia, including against India.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken publicly acknowledged such calibration by the NATO when he said on 22 December 2022 that “if we were still in Afghanistan, it would have, I think, made much more complicated the support that we’ve been able to give and that others have been able to give Ukraine”.⁵² Through NATO’s use of military measures, the alliance’s military-industrial complex has generated billions of dollars in profits from NATO’s role in the Afghan⁵³ and Ukraine conflicts.⁵⁴

Such calibration of military measures by the NATO has an impact on countries that consider themselves ‘strategic partners’ of major NATO members like the US. The NATO’s withdrawal from Afghanistan in mid-August 2021 has had a strategic impact on two fronts. It has kept alive strategic instability in Afghanistan, undermining the strategic security of US’s “strategic partners” in Central Asia to the north and India to the south, while prosecuting the Ukraine conflict to ‘weaken Russia’.⁵⁵ The US announcement on 07 September 2021 of its \$450 million assistance for Pakistan’s F-16 inventory,⁵⁶ has augmented military support for a country antagonistic to India, but counted among the NATO’s 18 ‘major non-NATO allies’ designated by the US under its domestic law.⁵⁷

The third trend has global implications. The international preoccupation with the Ukraine conflict has given communist China a free ride to continue with its current aggressive expansionist military policies in Asia, including against India. This is happening despite the NATO’s Strategic Assessment issued in June 2022 highlighting that the main challenge to NATO’s “interests, security and values” came from communist China,⁵⁸ and the Biden White House 2022 National Security Strategy’s unequivocal assessment that communist China was the only competitor of the US “with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective”.⁵⁹ Worryingly, the proposed policy response to this identified global challenge recommended by the NATO/US is “constructive engagement with the PRC”⁶⁰ and peaceful co-existence.⁶¹

Conclusion

The use of double standards in addressing these inter-linked dimensions of the Ukraine conflict is a recipe for fragmenting both the European and global security framework. Countries like India which have a major stake in a functional, stable, and cohesive international security framework to support their national transformation must take the lead to restore the emphasis of the UN Charter to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”. This requires restoring the UN’s role in ensuring international peace and security for development. The call for ‘reformed multilateralism’ needs to be presented at a General Conference of the UN, as mandated in Article 109 of the UN Charter, to review the provisions of the Charter on international peace and security, so that countries do not live in an “era of war”, but in an era of prosperity built on sustainable peace and indivisible security.⁶²

Endnotes

- 1 *Britannica*, “North Atlantic Treaty Organization”, 1 December 2022. Accessed at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/North-Atlantic-Treaty-Organization>
- 2 “Charter of Paris for a New Europe”, 21 November 1990. Accessed at <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/6/39516.pdf>
- 3 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Accessed at <https://www.osce.org/whatistheosce>
- 4 United Nations Charter, 26 June 1945. Accessed at <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>
- 5 United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, A/RES/70/1 dated 25 September 2015, Preamble subparagraph on “Peace”. Accessed at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/291/89/PDF/N1529189.pdf?OpenElement>
- 6 *BBC*, “How three men signed the USSR’s death warrant”, 24 December 2016. Accessed at <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-38416657>
- 7 United Nations, Document A/47/60- S/23329 dated 30 December 1991. Annex V, page 8. Accessed at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/197253?ln=fr>
- 8 Yale University Press, “Ukraine between the East and West: the case of Galicia,” by Iryna Vushko, 12 August 2015. Accessed at <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/2015/08/12/ukraine-between-east-and-west-the-case-of-galicia/>
- 9 Wilson Center, Kennan Cable No. 30, January 2018. “Democracy in Ukraine: are we there yet?” by Mikhail Minakov and Matthew Rojansky. Accessed at https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/kennan_cable_30_-_rojansky_minakov.pdf
- 10 Carnegie Endowment, “Ukraine’s Oligarchs are a dying breed” by Konstantin Skorkin, 14 September 2022. Accessed at <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/87914>.
- 11 *Reuters*, “Ukrainian lawmakers pass law on oligarchs after assassination attempt”, 23 September 2021. Accessed at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukrainian-parliament-passes-law-oligarchs-final-reading-2021-09-23/>

The action against oligarchs reportedly includes the oligarch Igor Kolomoisky, whose network of Ukrainian television stations aired “Servant of the People” starring Volodymr Zelenskyy from 2015, helping create his national persona. See *Britannica*, “Servant of the People”, 21 December 2022. Accessed at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Servant-of-the-People-political-party-Ukraine>
- 12 *The Times of Israel*, “Zelenskyy said to strip 3 Jewish oligarchs of citizenship; all hold Israeli passports”, by Cnaan Liphshiz, 28 July 2022. Accessed at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/zelensky-reportedly-strips-3-jewish-oligarchs-of-ukrainian-citizenship/>
- 13 UkraineInvest, “About Martial Law Regime”, 2023. Accessed at <https://ukraineinvest.gov.ua/response-to-war/helpdesk/martial-law/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Decree%20of,%20economic%20entities%20in%20Ukraine%3F>
- 14 European Parliament, “At a Glance Ukraine: the Minsk Agreements five years on”, March 2020. Accessed at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/646203/EPRS_ATA\(2020\)646203_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/646203/EPRS_ATA(2020)646203_EN.pdf)
- 15 United States Holocaust Museum, “[The Holocaust in Ukraine](#)”. Chapter 1 by Delphine Bechtel gives a comprehensive factual background to the current undercurrents behind the role of Western Ukrainian political groupings in the Ukraine Conflict. <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20130500-holocaust-in-ukraine.pdf>
- 16 *The Hill*, “Congress bans arms to Ukraine militia linked to neo-Nazis”, by Rebecca Kheel, 27 March 2018. Accessed at <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/380483-congress-bans-arms-to-controversial-ukrainian-militia-linked-to-neo-nazis/>
- 17 Stanford University, Mapping Militant Organizations. “Azov Movement.” Last modified August 2022. <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/azov-battalion>

- 18 The Wilson Centre, Kennan Institute. “Ukraine’s language law: whose rights are protected?”, 8 July 2019. Accessed at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/ukraines-language-law-whose-rights-are-protected>
- 19 *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, “The Gospel according to Poroshenko: politics, religion, and the new Church of Ukraine” by Nicolai N. Petro, 4 April 2019. Accessed at <https://www.yalejournal.org/publications/the-gospel-according-to-poroshenko-politics-religion-and-the-new-church-of-ukraine>
- 20 UN Nations Security Council Meeting Record S/PV. 8978 dated 17 February 2022. Accessed at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/PRO/N22/260/33/PDF/N2226033.pdf?OpenElement>
- 21 See note 2. page 5.
- 22 UNSC Meeting Record, S/PV.7117 dated 24 February 2014. Accessed at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/PRO/N14/242/88/PDF/N1424288.pdf?OpenElement>
- 23 Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington D.C. “Understanding the Normandy Format and its relation to the current standoff with Russia”, dated 9 February 2022. Accessed at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/understanding-normandy-format-and-its-relation-current-standoff-russia>
- 24 UN Security Council, *Security Council resolution 2202 (2015) [on the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements (12 Feb. 2015)]*, 17 February 2015, S/RES/2202 (2015). Accessed at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/54eefb4155.html>
- 25 OSCE, “No alternative to Minsk Agreements says Chairman-in-Office Dačić during visit to OSCE operations in Kyiv”, 17 July 2015. Accessed at <https://www.osce.org/cio/173431>
- 26 *The Kyiv Independent*, “Hollande: There will only be a way out of the conflict when Russia fails on the ground”, 28 December 2022. Accessed at <https://kyivindependent.com/national/hollande-there-will-only-be-a-way-out-of-the-conflict-when-russia-fails-on-the-ground>.
- 27 NATO, “Funding NATO”, 19 December 2022. Together the U.S. and U.K. contribute about 28% and France and Germany about 27% of the NATO budget. Accessed at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67655.htm
- 28 Ironically, the first two high-ranking West German army officers in NATO, Lt. Gen. Adolf Heusinger (who headed NATO’s Military Committee) and Lt. Gen. Hans Speidel (who was commander-in-chief of NATO’s Allied Land Forces in Central Europe) had both played active roles during the Second World War as part of Hitler’s military offensives against the Soviet Union. Lt. Gen. Adolf Heusinger created the BND, the West German counterpart of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. For details see Retired U.S. Army Maj. Gen. David T. Zabecki’s *These NATO Generals Had Unusual Backgrounds: They Served in the Third Reich.* (12/25/2022). Accessed at HistoryNet <https://www.historynet.com/these-nato-generals-had-unusual-backgrounds-they-served-in-the-third-reich/>.
- 29 National Security Archives, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard”, 12 December 2017. Accessed at <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early>
- 30 See “The Russia Hand” by Strobe Talbott. Published by Random House in 2002. Talbott was appointed Ambassador-at-large for the CIS by President Clinton in 1992. <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/176222/the-russia-hand-by-strobe-talbott/>
- 31 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “World Nuclear Forces, 2021”. Accessed at <https://www.sipri.org/research/armament-and-disarmament/weapons-mass-destruction/world-nuclear-forces>
- 32 National Security Archives, George Washington University, Washington D.C. Verbatim transcript of the meeting between Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton on 10 May 1995 in Moscow, Clinton Presidential Library. Accessed at <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/4390833/Document-19-Summary-report-on-One-on-One-meeting.pdf>
- 33 George W. Bush Presidential Library, “President’s Radio Address”, 5 April 2008. Accessed at <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/04/20080405.html>
- 34 Associated Press, “Putin calls Bush on Sept. 11”. Accessed at <https://apnews.com/article/5373d96aa8ed8f3fe3a2010b7ad521c7>
- 35 George W. Bush Presidential Library, “U.S.-Russia Strategic Framework Declaration”, 8 April 2008. Accessed at <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/04/20080406-4.html>

Global Issues

- 36 Barack Obama Presidential Library, “Press Conference of the President after NATO Summit”, 20 November 2010. Accessed at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/20/press-conference-president-after-nato-summit>
- 37 BBC, “Ukraine Crisis: Transcript of leaked Nuland-Pyatt call”, 7 February 2014. Accessed at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26079957>
- 38 Barack Obama Presidential Library, “Remarks by the President in Final Press Conference”, 18 January 2017. Accessed at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/18/remarks-president-final-press-conference>
- 39 NATO, “Inter-operability: connecting forces”, 22 February 2022. Accessed at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84112.htm
- 40 *The Wall Street Journal*, “The Secret of Ukraine’s military success: years of NATO training”, by Daniel Michaels, 13 April 2022. Accessed at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-military-success-years-of-nato-training-11649861339>
- 41 NATO, “Relations with Ukraine”, 28 October 2022 provides these factual details. Accessed at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37750.htm
- 42 U.S. Department of State, “U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership”, 10 November 2021. Accessed at <https://www.state.gov/u-s-ukraine-charter-on-strategic-partnership/>
- 43 The White House, “Remarks by President Biden in Press Conference”, 16 June 2021. Accessed at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/06/16/remarks-by-president-biden-in-press-conference-4/>
- 44 The White House, “Readout of President Biden’s video call with President Putin of Russia”, 7 December 2021. Accessed at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/12/07/readout-of-president-bidens-video-call-with-president-vladimir-putin-of-russia/>
- 45 Yale Macmillan Centre, “U.S. and NATO to open talks with Russia over Ukraine security guarantees”, by David R. Cameron, 22 December 2021. The language of the two draft treaties is also sourced from here. Accessed at <https://macmillan.yale.edu/news/us-and-nato-open-talks-russia-over-ukraine-security-guarantees>
- 46 DW, “U.S., NATO respond to Russia’s security demands”, 26 January 2022. Accessed at <https://www.dw.com/en/us-nato-send-written-response-on-russias-security-demands/a-60567276>
- 47 OSCE, Remarks of Secretary-General OSCE to Special Permanent Council”, 7 March 2022, Vienna. Accessed at <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/7/513397.pdf>
- 48 *Security Council Report*, “In Hindsight: The Security Council in 2022”. Accessed at <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2023-01/in-hindsight-the-security-council-in-2022.php>
- 49 UN Security Council, “Statement by the President of the Security Council”, S/PRST/2022/3 dated 6 May 2022. Accessed at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/341/96/PDF/N2234196.pdf?OpenElement>
- 50 United Nations, “Black Sea Grain Initiative”, 27 July 2022. Accessed at <https://www.un.org/en/black-sea-grain-initiative>
- 51 National Archives, “President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Farewell Address (1961)”. Accessed at <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-dwight-d-eisenhowers-farewell-address>
- 52 Accessed at <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-a-press-availability-27/>
- 53 *The Intercept*, “\$10,000 invested when the Afghan war began now worth almost \$100,000”, by Jon Schwarz, 17 August 2021. Accessed at <https://theintercept.com/2021/08/16/afghanistan-war-defense-stocks/>
- 54 *Congressional Research Service*, “U.S. Security Assistance to Ukraine”, 7 December 2022. Accessed at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12040>
- 55 U.S. Department of State, “Secretary Anthony J. Blinken and Secretary Lloyd Austin remarks to traveling press”, 25 April 2022. Accessed at <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-secretary-lloyd-austin-remarks-to-traveling-press/>
- 56 Vivekananda International Foundation, “US military assistance package to Pakistan will have a Direct Bearing on India’s national security”, by Dr Arvind Gupta, 12 September 2021. Accessed at <https://www.vifindia.org/2022/september/12/us-military-assistance-package-to-pakistan-will-have-a-direct-bearing-on-indias-national-security>

- 57 U.S. Department of State, “Major Non-NATO Ally Status”, 20 January 2021. Accessed at <https://www.state.gov/major-non-nato-ally-status/>
- 58 NATO, 2022 Strategic Concept, 29 June 2022. Para. 13. Accessed at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf
- 59 The White House, “National Security Strategy”, October 2022. Page 8. Accessed at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>
- 60 Note 62. Para. 14.
- 61 Note 63, Page 24.
- 62 *American Diplomacy*, “‘Reformed Multilateralism’ at the United Nations” by Asoke Mukerji, February 2021. Accessed at <https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2021/02/reformed-multilateralism-at-the-united-nations/>

Geopolitics of the Arctic

Vice Admiral Satish Soni, PVSM, AVSM, NM (Retd)[@]

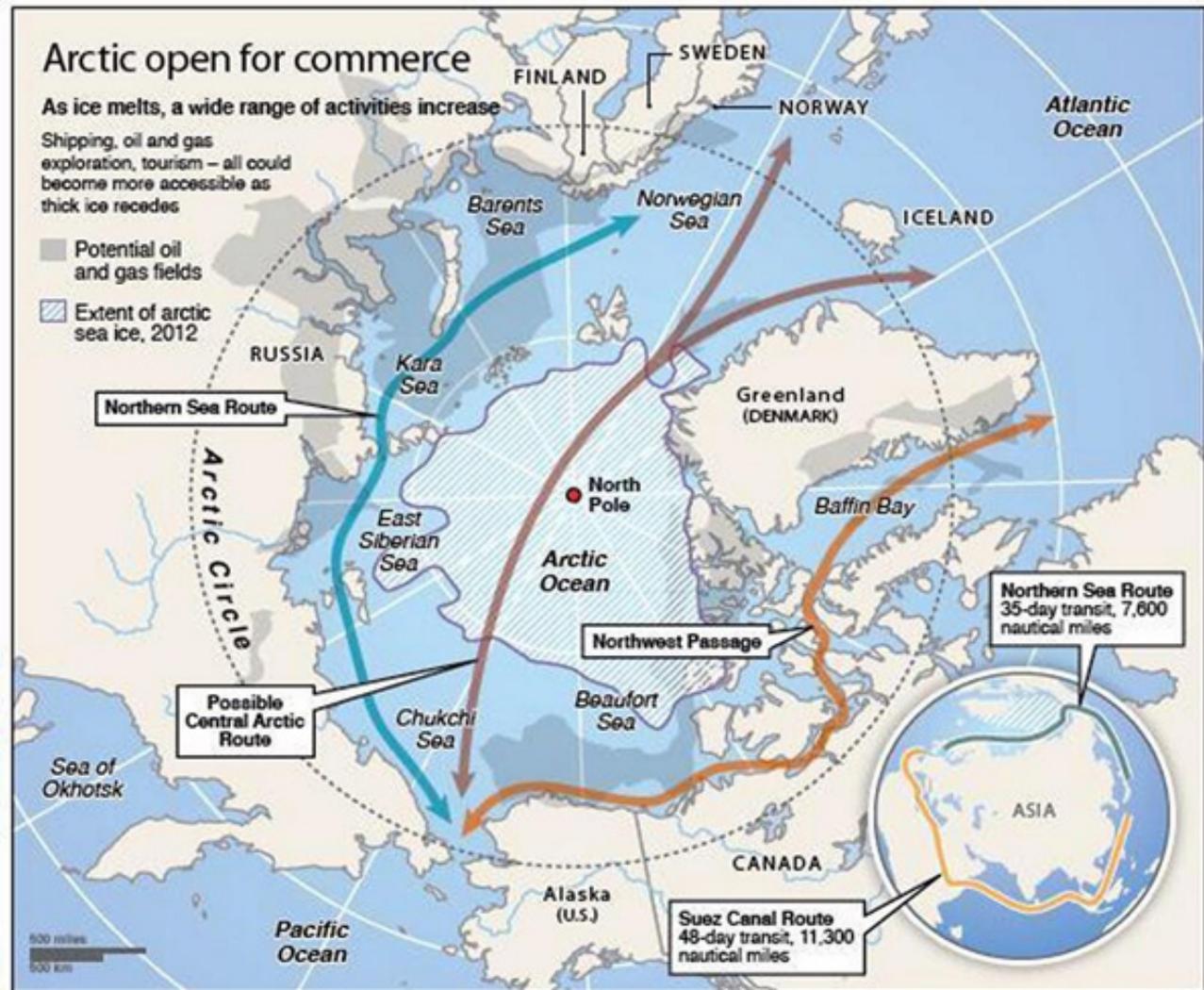
Abstract

Global warming shows no sign of abating and it is the Arctic that is facing the brunt. The ice is melting at a rate faster than elsewhere and changing the geography of the world's last unspoilt region. There are gains and losses to be made as the world gains access to undiscovered resources and shorter navigable sea routes. Russia, China, and the United States, along with the Arctic states, have started to jostle for influence. Economic considerations are changing the geopolitical landscape in a region where friends and foes have cooperated for decades to address common challenges to mankind. The effects of the Arctic ice-melt and the consequent sea level rise are being felt in distant lands, including the Indian Ocean Region. As cooperation in the Arctic metamorphosises into contestation, India is evolving a mature response in accordance with the Indian philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – the world is one family'.

Introduction

The Arctic Ocean with an area of 5.4 million square miles is the smallest of the world's oceans. The waters and the arid coastal regions remain covered by a blanket of ice for most of the year. It was only in 1905 that a Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen made his way through the hitherto mythical Northwest passage connecting the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. Since then, the Arctic has warmed at about four times the global average. As the Tundra gets exposed, the greying ice cap absorbs more heat, thereby, accelerating its depletion.¹ Both the Northwest and the Northeast Sea routes are already navigable for several weeks in a year — reducing the transit time and bringing about considerable savings in maritime transportation. The melting ice reveals other potential riches by way of vast quantities of undiscovered natural gas and oil reserves, large reserves of gold, zinc, nickel and iron amongst other rare earth minerals. Fish stocks have a tendency to move northwards due to climate change and the Arctic stands to become a more attractive fishing ground in the future. And yet there are challenges; Global warming accelerates release of large quantities of methane stored in natural gas deposits, permafrost and as undersea clathrates. The thawing permafrost would also release organic matter that has been frozen for millennia, including pathogens that can still reproduce. Continental shelves on the Arctic Ocean bed occupy more space proportionally than anywhere else and we could see competing claims for a resource rich sea bed. There are at least nine territorial disputes already, all legally complicated with a propensity to cause serious tensions between countries.²

[@] Vice Admiral Satish Soni, PVSM, AVSM, NM (Retd) has held the appointments of Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief Eastern Naval Command, Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, Commandant National Defence Academy and Chief of Staff Eastern Naval Command in the rank of Vice Admiral. Post retirement, he has been writing, travelling, participating in seminars and discussions. He is a Council Member with the USI of India.

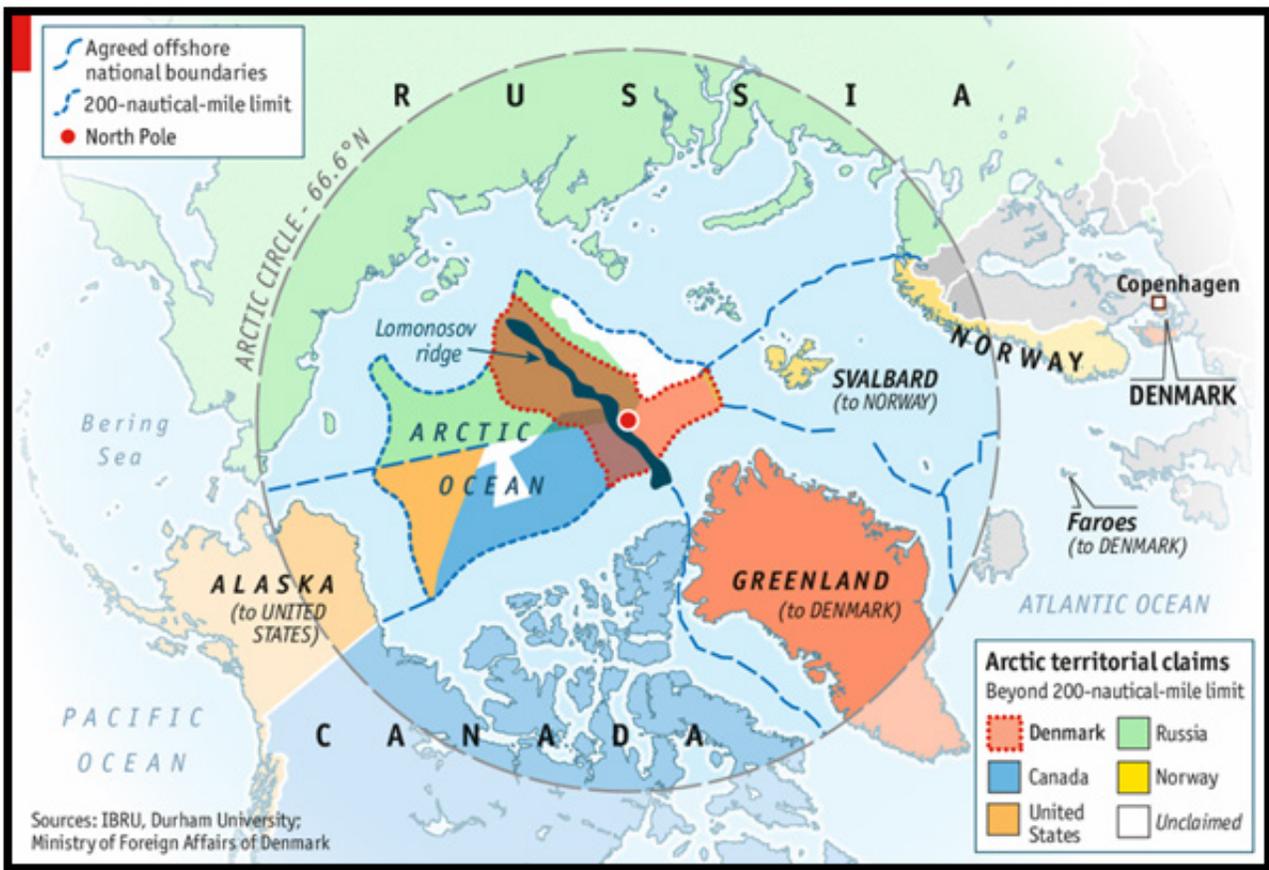


(Source: Jeremy Bender, Michael b. Kelle, 'Global Militaries Know That the Arctic Is Melting - Here's What They're Going to Take Advantage', Business Insider, 04 Jun 2014.)

From Cooperation to Contestation

The Arctic Council is the most visible high-level intergovernmental platform that steers cooperation amongst the Arctic governments and the indigenous people. At present, eight countries viz Canada; Denmark; Finland; Iceland; Norway; Russia; Sweden; and the United States comprise the Council. Other members include organisations representing the concerns of the indigenous people and 13 countries with an observer status. The first step towards the formation of the Council was taken in 1991, when the eight Arctic countries signed the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS). The 1996 Ottawa Declaration formally established the Arctic Council and since then the Council has succeeded in maintaining cooperation on a number of crucial issues through the work of its six working groups and a number of task forces and expert groups on issues such as sustainable development and environmental protection. The declaration mandated the Council to work by consensus. This resulted in all member states channelising their expertise toward cooperative ventures. The Council produced the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment and pursued its agenda with one voice at the United Nations, the International Maritime Organisation, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and other fora. The Council provided the structure for negotiation of three treaties among the Arctic States

on issues of critical importance: search and rescue, oil pollution preparedness and response, and scientific cooperation. The council has, most deservedly, been nominated for the award of the Nobel Peace prize in 2018, 2019, and Jan 2022. The citation by the Members of the University of the Arctic Thematic Network on Geopolitics and Security highlighted that ‘[T]he Arctic Council has exceeded all expectations’. The Arctic Region has always been a place where cooperation between and amongst groups was not only desirable but, in many cases, necessary for survival. This philosophy has continued into the 21st century, where climate change, globalisation, mass-scale utilisation of resources, and narrow interpretations of geopolitics impose new challenges to the region. The Arctic Council is a model for promoting fraternity between nations and a deserving recipient of Alfred Nobel’s Peace Prize³. None of this would have been possible without the active participation of all member states. It was often argued that the Arctic cooperation is immune to geopolitical turmoil, sparking a debate about ‘Arctic exceptionalism’ to the east-west rivalry. Alas, after 25 years, the famed cohesion is at risk. In March 2022, in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, seven of the eight countries of the Arctic Council decided to pause cooperation in the Arctic. A heavily sanctioned and delinked Russia is seeking fresh partners. Others with legitimate interests in the region argue that under the theory of ‘common heritage of mankind’, the Arctic should be open to everyone. These countries are building capabilities to keep pace with the Arctic States. Contestation in the Arctic has begun. Let’s take a closer look at the major players.⁴



United States

The US became an Arctic Country by the inclusion of Alaska, which was purchased from Russia in 1867 for US \$ 7.2 million. It is now the largest US State with an area of 1.72 million square kilometres, comprising 16 percent of its total land area. Its coastline of 6,640 miles is more than half of the entire US coastline of 12,459 miles.⁵ The US, therefore,

has an important stake in the Arctic pie. On 07 Oct 22, the US released the second edition of its Arctic Strategy titled ‘National Strategy for the Arctic Region’; the first version being articulated in 2013. The strategy outlines US concerns and commitment to address challenges emerging out of the changing geopolitical realities and climate change induced by global warming.⁶ It avers US action for environmental protection, sustainable economic development and International Cooperation by upholding international law. The US seeks to address increased strategic contestation caused by an increasingly disruptive behaviour by Russia and China for exploiting economic opportunities and garnering resources that become accessible on melting of the Arctic ice. Even at the height of the Cold War, Arctic was an arena for cooperation between the US and the Soviet Union. The new US National Strategy charts a sharp alteration of course and does not foresee cooperation with Russia in the Arctic – a distinct change in attitude consequent to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. China is accused of seeking to increase its ‘influence in the Arctic through an expanded slate of economic, diplomatic, scientific, and military activities’ as well as for emphasising its ‘intention to play a larger role in shaping regional governance’. A strident response by the US Armed Forces in recent years includes increased deployment of warships, including aircraft carriers, for joint exercises, re-establishment of the Second Fleet, conduct of regular under-ice operations, modernising its ageing fleet of ice breakers, the establishment of the 11th Airborne Division for developing expertise in Arctic mobility and establishment of a regional combat training centre in Alaska where the troops assigned to the new 11th Airborne Division will be trained.⁷

Russia

Dominating the Arctic with more than half the coastline, Russia is in a prime position to exploit the region’s resources, be its oil and natural gas reserves or food and minerals. It must secure the North Sea Route as over 70 percent of Russia’s hydrocarbon reserves are on the continental shelf off the Arctic coast. It is already a leading Arctic power with over 40 ice breakers, more than the rest of the world put together; five of these being nuclear-powered. By 2035, it could have 13 heavy ice breakers of which nine may be nuclear-powered. With an ice breaker costing over a billion USD and taking ten years to build, others have a lot

Russia has indeed claimed the North Eastern Sea Route as internal waters of Russia. The Federation Council, the upper chamber of Russia’s Parliament, on 30 Nov 22, approved a law suspending the rights of foreign warships in what Russia claims to be its “internal waters”.

of catching up to do. The ‘US Arctic Strategy’ claims that Russia has significant investments in ‘enhancing its military presence in the Arctic, modernising its military bases and airfields, deploying new coastal and air defence missile systems and upgraded submarines, and increasing military exercises and training operations with a new combatant command-equivalent for the Arctic’. It also accuses Russia for ‘developing new economic infrastructure in its Arctic territories’ and for its ‘excessive maritime claims along the Northern Sea Route’, which the Strategy declares are attempts to ‘constrain freedom of navigation’. Russia has indeed claimed the North Eastern Sea Route as internal waters of Russia. The Federation Council, the upper chamber of Russia’s Parliament, on 30 Nov 22, approved a law suspending the rights of foreign warships in what Russia claims to be its “internal waters”. Three straits along the Northern Sea Route are important for the new limitations; the Kara Gate, the Vilkitskii Strait, and the Sannikov Strait. According to this law, no more than one foreign warship or other state-owned vessels may be located in the internal waters along the Northern Sea Route.^{8,9} In 2007, Russia sent two submersibles 13,980 feet below sea level and planted a titanium Russian flag on the seabed under the North Pole to underscore its intent. A think tank has proposed that the ocean be named as the ‘Russian Ocean’. Elsewhere, Russians have argued that the Lomonosov Ridge off its Siberian coast is an extension of its Siberian continental shelf, and therefore, belongs to Russia exclusively. This would, of course, not be acceptable to others as the ridge extends all the way to the North Pole, way beyond the 350 nautical mile limit set by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). In August 2022, Russia revised its Maritime Doctrine after a gap of seven years.¹⁰ Interestingly, in laying out its maritime vision, the Arctic and the waters of the North Sea Route have been upgraded to the ‘vital’ category. Russian assertions in the Arctic are unambiguous, even as it seeks alternate partnerships to the Arctic Council, which for all purposes has become moribund, at least for the time being.

China

In 2018, China released its white paper titled ‘China’s Arctic Policy’, indicating a desire to play a prominent role in the region. Interestingly, the paper seeks a distinctly different classification for China from the other non-Arctic States, describing it as a ‘near-Arctic State’. The paper articulates that China is one of the continental States that is closest to the Arctic Circle and the natural conditions of the Arctic and their changes have a direct impact on China’s climate system and ecological environment and, in turn, on its economic interests in agriculture, forestry, fishery, marine industry and other sectors.¹¹ Whilst accepting that States from outside the Arctic Region do not have territorial sovereignty in the Arctic, China asserts the right to scientific research, navigation, overflight, fishing, laying of submarine cables and pipelines in the high seas and other relevant sea areas in the Arctic Ocean, and to resource exploration and exploitation in the Area pursuant to treaties such as UNCLOS and international law. China was accepted as one of the 13 observer States in the Arctic council in 2013 and has since pressed for a greater role in Arctic affairs. In 2018, China also introduced the ‘Polar Silk Road’, under the broader Belt and Road Initiative, as a framework to facilitate joint development of the Arctic. China has doubled its investments in the region in the last ten years with a focus on critical minerals extraction, expansion of its scientific activities, and using these scientific engagements to conduct dual-use research with intelligence or military applications in the Arctic. China is also expanding its icebreaker fleet, including a nuclear powered one, and deploying warships into the Arctic for the first time. China envisions using the North Eastern Sea Route for cost effective maritime transportation, for ensuring exploitation of more secure sea lines of communication. China is progressing cooperation with all Arctic States, both bilaterally and multi laterally, but it is its engagement with Russia that adds an intriguing complexity to Arctic geopolitics. Is it a strategic alliance or merely a marriage of convenience? For now, Sino-Russian cooperation is mutually beneficial with Russia dominating the geography and China possessing the economic wherewithal to develop infrastructure. The Ukraine war seems to have strengthened the bond between them but sceptics opine that China’s burgeoning role could translate into direct competition with Russia in the long run.

Widening geopolitical differences and contestation over perceived violations of State jurisdictions have a propensity to trigger unintended military escalation.

Security Cooperation in the Arctic

Security cooperation in the Arctic is lacking. The founding document of the Arctic Council explicitly excludes military security matters from the Council’s mandate and to date, there is no other Arctic forum that deals with military security cooperation. The Arctic Council provides an excellent forum to discuss environmental issues and scientific research. The International Maritime Organisation provides a framework to negotiate the Polar Code for shipping traffic in the Arctic and the Arctic Coast Guard Forum discusses Maritime law and regulatory challenges while the Arctic Economic Council facilitates sustainable Arctic economic and business development. A platform to discuss Maritime security is conspicuously absent. Widening geopolitical differences and contestation over perceived violations of State jurisdictions have a propensity to trigger unintended military escalation. Military diplomatic dialogue could complement other multilateral Arctic organisations leading to enhanced mutual understanding of defence challenges and confidence building. The meetings of the Chiefs of the Defence Staff of the Arctic States initiated by Canada in 2012 was suspended following the conflict in Ukraine. Russia has also been disinvited from participating in the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable, an initiative by the US European Command. Cutting the lines of communication on matters impinging on security does not help in resolving tensions. On the contrary, absence of Russia from the table could create more risks and uncertainties.¹² The Arctic States should explore the possibility of establishing military-to-military contacts in the Arctic and discuss adopting a code of conduct for confidence building.

India's Engagement with the Arctic

The Arctic ice-melt is of immense significance to India as one of the consequential effects could be weakening of the movement of monsoons with unacceptable effects on our economy. The rising sea-levels would adversely impact coastal communities across the Indian Ocean Region as also our low-lying maritime neighbours, especially Maldives and Bangladesh. In February 1920, India signed the Svalbard Treaty and in 2008, established a research station 'Himadri' in the International Arctic research base in Spitsbergen, Svalbard.¹³ Since becoming an observer nation in the Arctic Council in 2013, India has been actively participating in meetings of Senior Arctic Officials and contributing to the six Working Groups of the Arctic Council. India also had sustained engagement with the Arctic Energy Summit, Arctic Science Ministerial, and meetings of Task Forces. India's Arctic Policy released in March 2022 aims to prepare the country to contribute in a region impacted the most by climate change. Like other countries, India too believes that this fragile and sensitive region should be sustainable and be governed in accordance with international laws, including UNCLOS. Close partnerships with countries of the Arctic Region and other international partners must not only ensure sustainable development but accord equal importance to peace and stability. India's Arctic Policy rests on six pillars viz., Science and Research, Climate and Environmental Protection, Economic and Human Development, Transportation and Connectivity, Governance and International Cooperation, and National Capacity Building.¹⁴

Indian engagement in the Arctic is already substantial and is set to grow. Total Indian investments in Russia's oil and gas sector at the beginning of 2021 were more than 10 bn USD but could rise significantly in the long term. Negotiations have also resumed with the Russian side on the participation of Indian companies in the Vostok Oil megaproject in the Arctic. This project involves the development of oil and gas fields located in the north of Krasnoyarsk Krai. According to Rosneft estimates, the total recoverable reserves of all Vostok Oil fields could be six billion tons (more than 44 billion barrels) of oil. As the pharmacy of the world, India has the potential to contribute in stitching a global response in combating the release of new viruses from the thawing Arctic permafrost. India is among the top countries in the field of scientific research and should also be able to contribute in developing geo-engineering capabilities in 'methane and carbon capture' for managing climate change.

An inactive, if not moribund, Arctic Council may provide a fillip to bargain hunting by neutral non-arctic States for cross-sectoral cooperation with the Arctic States.

Indian engagement must also aim to counter creeping Chinese influence in the Arctic by positioning itself as an alternate source for infrastructure development. As a repository of experienced and trained seafaring community, India could contribute in operationalisation of the new sea routes. A prominent agriculturist nation, India could help in converting the melting permafrost regions into cultivable fields. Sustainable development of the Arctic cannot be achieved today without harnessing the knowledge of indigenous peoples and residents of the Arctic. India already has rich experience in dealing with many issues related to the indigenous people living in the Himalayas and could share the best practices arrived at after a long experience. Our interests converge with those of the Arctic States as, we have in the Himalayas, the third pole and our own indigenous people with similar problems as the Arctic communities.

The Future of Arctic Cooperation

An inactive, if not moribund, Arctic Council may provide a fillip to bargain hunting by neutral non-arctic States for cross-sectoral cooperation with the Arctic States. India, for one has a huge potential to contribute in almost all facets of Arctic development — from scientific research to providing trained human resources; UAE has been developing port infrastructure worldwide and would only be too happy to be given an opportunity; South Korea's shipbuilders would be able to meet the growing demands of ice breakers and Singapore should be welcomed as a partner as a disciplined financial hub and a reservoir of expertise in information technology. All these countries do not have any geopolitical axes to grind and their interests are primarily commercial. They have a voice in international organisations and could

be the catalysts for expanding participation, thereby, spreading the onus of sustainable exploitation of the world's most sensitive region.

Conclusion

China, Russia, India, and the United States have all articulated their visions for the Arctic. There is unanimity in understanding the challenges that face humanity but it is only India that genuinely seeks a collaborative approach in accordance with the Indian philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – the world is one family'. Given the challenges posed by climate change and the limited capabilities of smaller Arctic States to coalesce a response, it becomes imperative that the leading powers pull together and avoid a contestation which would only result in a 'lose-lose' situation. The Ukraine war has accelerated the prospect of the simmering contestation turning into a big-power rivalry in yet another arena. India has done well by articulating a very modest, yet mature, Arctic Policy. It must now pursue a whole-of-nation approach in crafting an overarching Arctic Strategy. Some policy recommendations are:

- As contestation sets in Arctic geopolitics, India could attempt to build a non-controversial neutral grouping of India, South Korea, UAE, and Singapore to discuss a way ahead to resolve the Arctic imbroglio arising out of the Russia-Ukraine confrontation.
- India could offer to play the role of a mediator between the Arctic States.
- In our discussions in various Arctic fora, we must encourage the Arctic countries to discuss maritime security and confidence-building measures.
- Think tanks in India must build awareness about the Arctic and its impact on India.
- The government must enhance India's Arctic Engagement by meaningful proactive contributions in areas of India's core strengths.
- We must include the Arctic engagement in our overall maritime strategy.

Endnotes

- 1 Karen McVeigh, “Arctic Ocean acidifying up to four times as fast as other Oceans”, *The Guardian*, 29 Sep 2022. Tim Marshall, ‘Prisoners of Geography’, Chapter 10, *The Arctic*, Pages 272-287.
- 2 “The melting Arctic ice is releasing ancient germs: Should we be worried?”, *First Post*. 06 Dec 2022. <https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/world/the-melting-arctic-ice-is-releasing-ancient-germs-should-we-be-worried/ar-AA14XAIW#>:
- 3 Trine Jonassen, ‘The Arctic Council Nominated for the Peace Prize’, High North News, Jan 2022. Eilis Quinn, ‘Members of UArctic Thematic Network nominate Arctic Council for Nobel Peace Prize’, *Eye on the Arctic*, 16 Jan 2018.
- 4 “Consequences of the War in Ukraine on the Arctic”, Finabel European Army Interoperability Centre.
- 5 Anurag Bisen, “India’s Arctic Policy: Building a Partnership for Sustainable Development”, *IDSIA Issue Briefs*, 17 March 2022.
- 6 United States National Strategy for the Arctic Region October 2022.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Thomas Nilsen, ‘Russian parliament passes law limiting freedom of navigation along Northern Sea Route’, *The Barents Observer* 01 Dec 2022.
- 9 Tim Marshall, *Prisoners of Geography*, (London: Simon and Schuster, 2015), Pages 272-287.
- 10 National Maritime Foundation. ‘Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation-2022: An Analysis’, August 2022.
- 11 China’s Arctic Policy, The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, January 2018. Lyle J. Goldstein, ‘What’s China Up to in the Arctic?’, *The National Interest*, 28 Nov 2021. Nadya Yeh, ‘China’s slow but steady moves in the Arctic’, *The China Project*, 12 Oct 2022.
- 12 Troy J. Bouffard, Elizabeth Buchanan & Michael Young, ‘Arctic Security and Dialogue: Assurance through Defence Diplomacy’, *Modern Diplomacy*, 11 July 2020.
- 13 Annual Report 2009-2010, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India, para 4.3, p. 21.
- 14 India’s Arctic Policy ‘India and the Arctic: building a partnership for sustainable development’. Released on 17 Mar 2022. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1806993>

The Geopolitics and Geo-economics of the Ukraine War Related Economic Sanctions: Implications for India

Dr Sanjaya Baru @

Abstract

A study of economic sanctions imposed worldwide in the half century following the Second World War, concluded that economic sanctions imposed by just one country end up being a blunt instrument of policy unless the country being targeted is considerably smaller and economically critically dependent upon the sanctioning country. In spite of this fact, being common sense economic sanctions have been used very often by the USA led Western powers. In a globalised economy, such sanctions adversely affect all countries in one way or the other. This article examines the geopolitics and geo-economics of the Ukraine war related economic sanctions and its implications for India and recommends some steps that should be taken to minimise the adverse impact.

General

The decision of the United States, European Union, and Japan to impose economic sanctions on Russia, in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has once again drawn attention to the geopolitical role and efficacy of such a geo-economic response, and to the wider impact of such sanctions going beyond the target aimed at. While the Russia-Ukraine war is essentially an East-West conflict in geopolitical terms, the economic sanctions imposed in response have implications for the global economy as a whole, hurting especially the development prospects of the Global South. In voicing concerns about both the conflict and the response to it, India has consistently focused on the interests of the Global South.

In a comprehensive study of economic sanctions, imposed worldwide in the half century following the Second World War, a mid-1990s study by the Washington DC based Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE) concluded that economic sanctions imposed by just one country end up being a blunt instrument of policy unless the country being targeted is considerably smaller and economically critically dependent upon the sanctioning country.¹ The study concluded that economic sanctions are likely to be ‘most effective’ and achieve the intended foreign policy goals only when:

- The goal is relatively modest. This also lessens the importance of multilateral cooperation, which often is difficult to obtain.
- The target country is much smaller than the country imposing sanctions, economically weak, and politically unstable. (In the PIIE study, the average sanctioner’s economy was 187 times larger than that of the target.)

@ *Dr Sanjaya Baru* is a Distinguished Fellow at USI of India, New Delhi. He was Director for Geo-economics and Strategy, International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), London and Honorary Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi. In 1999-2001 he was Member, National Security Advisory Board of India and later was Media Advisor to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2004-08. He has been Editor, Business Standard and The Financial Express; Editorial Page Editor, The Times of India and Associate Editor, The Economic Times. An accomplished author of many books, he writes and speaks extensively on strategic and economic matters.

- The sanctioner and target are friendly toward one another prior to the imposition of sanctions and conduct substantial trade. The sanctioner accounted for 28 percent of the average target's trade in success cases but only 19 percent in failures.
- The sanctions are imposed quickly and decisively to maximise impact. The average cost to the target as a percentage of GNP in success cases was 2.4 percent and 1 percent in failures.
- The sanctioning country avoids high costs to itself.

Analysts have long pointed out that United Nations supported sanctions are likely to be more effective than unilateral sanctions. The most successful case of economic sanctions achieving their aim in the past half century was the United Nations supported global sanctions against apartheid South Africa. They helped end the apartheid regime. Despite this sober assessment of sanctions, the US has been tempted time and again to use economic sanctions as an instrument of foreign policy. In 1998, the US imposed economic sanctions on India in response to the Indian decision to conduct nuclear weapons tests and declare itself a nuclear weapons state.² The US has also used unilateral economic actions, not quite called sanctions, to target specific countries. Thus, for example, it used trade related restrictions to force Japan to reduce its exports to the US in the late 1980s and early 1990s, aimed at reducing the trade surplus Japan enjoyed vis-à-vis the US. Economic sanctions with a geopolitical aim have long been recognised as an instrument of statecraft and a means to seek a change in the behaviour of targeted states.

War by other Means

In their study of geo-economics as statecraft, Blackwill and Harris view the imposition of sanctions as 'war by other means'³, following the historian Samuel Huntington's earlier emphasis on 'economic primacy' in international relations. Writing in the early post-Cold War years, in 1993, on why 'Economic Primacy Matters' Huntington suggested, "In the coming years, the principal conflict of interests involving United States and the other major powers are likely to be over economic issues. US economic primacy is now being challenged by Japan and is likely to be challenged in the future by Europe[...] economic activity is a source of power as well as well-being. In the realm of military competition, the instruments of power are missiles, planes, warships, bombs, tanks, and divisions. In the realm of economic competition, the instruments of power are productive efficiency, market control, trade surplus, strong currency, foreign exchange reserves, ownership of foreign companies, factories, and technology".⁴

In the realm of military competition, the instruments of power are missiles, planes, warships, bombs, tanks, and divisions. In the realm of economic competition, the instruments of power are productive efficiency, market control, trade surplus, strong currency, foreign exchange reserves, ownership of foreign companies, factories, and technology.

Despite such an academic case being made for economic sanctions as an instrument of statecraft, politicians and business leaders have always remained sceptical about their impact and, more importantly, their ability to secure the desired policy outcome. Dick Cheney, former US Vice President, under President George Bush Jr, was eloquent in his skepticism, especially with a view to the likely domestic impact of sanctions. In a Cato Institute study, published before he became Vice President, Cheney observed:

"Some in the United States Government view sanctions as a low cost, easy foreign policy tool. But there is a cost to the US in using embargoes. If US embargoes are unilateral, without worldwide support, then US industry can be damaged with the loss of thousands of jobs as the effects ripple through the economy[...] the government must recognise that US companies are not the only ones with capital and technology — [T]he world is a competitive business. There are firms around the world who are ready and able to step in when the US shuts the doors on its own

companies. Increasingly, foreign governments will be reluctant to work with US companies since the US government may attempt to use them for leverage when any political differences arise. We will be viewed as unreliable investors [...] [S]anctions should be multilateral and narrowly targeted with measurable objectives".⁵

The Ukraine war-related sanctions were not unilateral, but they were not multilateral either. They have been imposed by the US and its allies. Neither the PIIE study nor the Cato Institute assessment, both from the 1990s, dissuaded the Obama and Biden administrations from responding to the Russian invasion of Crimea, in 2014, and then of Ukraine with the imposition of economic sanctions. The difference in 2022 was that the US roped in its allies, especially EU member states, Canada, UK, and Japan to join it in imposing these sanctions.

The Ukraine Sanctions

If Japan and the EU were the targets of US geo-economic actions in the late 1980s and early 1990s, China and Russia have replaced them in recent years. It is not often recognised that after the implosion of the Soviet Union, the US and West-dominated international financial institutions advocated macro-economic policies that ended up weakening the Russian economy rather than strengthening it. Through the advocacy of a variety of economic policy interventions in the 1990s, the International Monetary Fund and US economists encouraged Russia to pursue 'market-oriented reform' that in the end did not deliver stable growth.⁶ This process was reversed by President Vladimir Putin, with Russia finally being ejected from the Group of 8 (G8) in 2014, having been welcomed into it in 1997, after Russia reclaimed Crimea from Ukraine.

The US Treasury's action against the Russian Central Bank, it may be noted, went beyond any such economic sanctions imposed against Adolf Hitler's regime in Germany through the Second World War period.

From 2014, the US took a series of geo-economic measures to sanction Russia and seek to alter its geopolitical course. This only drew Russia closer to China, both geopolitically and geo-economically, with Russian economic and diplomatic dependence on China increasing. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the US, followed by EU and Japan, responded by providing both diplomatic and military support to Ukraine and combined this with the imposition of a range of economic sanctions. These included:⁷

- **Trade Sanctions.** Import and export bans covering semiconductors and other dual-use goods and technology exports, and high-tech exports contributing to Russia's defence and security industry.
- **Travel Restrictions.** On Russian business persons. Aeroflot banned from UK and EU airspace.
- **Financial Sanctions.** Restrictions on Russian banks. Freezing of bank accounts and assets overseas. On 26 February 2022, the US, many EU members countries, UK, Canada, and Japan announced a joint action to remove some Russian banks from the SWIFT financial messaging system, agreed to prevent the Russian Central Bank from deploying reserves to undermine sanctions, and chose to limit 'golden passports' used by Russian oligarchs to skirt sanctions by obtaining citizenship in other countries. These 'trans-Atlantic sanctions' were followed by the US Treasury's decision to prohibit transactions with the Central Bank of Russia, the National Wealth Fund of the Russian Federation, and the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation. It also blocked transactions with Russian Direct Investment Fund, a key sovereign wealth fund. The US Treasury's action against the Russian Central Bank, it may be noted, went beyond any such economic sanctions imposed against Adolf Hitler's regime in Germany through the Second World War period.

On the following day, 27 February, British firm BP announced its decision to exit its several billion dollars' worth shareholding in Rosneft, the Russian oil giant. Similar announcements of leaving or suspending Russian operations were

made by Shell, ExxonMobil, Apple, Google, Microsoft, Ford, and dozens of other western companies. However, the US issued a general license to authorise certain energy-related transactions with Russia, in recognition of European energy dependence on Russia, and a few South Korean and Japanese energy companies also kept their energy operations with Russia going.

The former governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Raghuram Rajan, dubbed these actions as ‘economic weapons of mass destruction (WMD)’, drawing attention to their likely indiscriminate global impact. “When fully unleashed, sanctions, too, are weapons of mass destruction. They may not topple buildings or collapse bridges, but they destroy firms, financial institutions, livelihoods, and even lives. Like military WMDs, they inflict pain indiscriminately, striking both the culpable and the innocent. And if they are used too widely, they could reverse the process of globalisation that has allowed the modern world to prosper”.⁸ Rajan’s assessment echoed the Huntington-Blackwill-Harris view that in a ‘war by other means’, geo-economic instruments can be as effective as military WMDs.

Global Impact of Sanctions on Russia

In an early assessment of the impact of western sanctions on Russia, the International Monetary Fund observed:

“While the situation remains highly fluid and the outlook is subject to extraordinary uncertainty, the economic consequences are already very serious. Energy and commodity prices — including wheat and other grains — have surged, adding to inflationary pressures from supply chain disruptions and the rebound from the Covid19 pandemic. Price shocks will have an impact worldwide, especially on poor households for whom food and fuel are a higher proportion of expenses. Should the conflict escalate, the economic damage would be all the more devastating. The sanctions on Russia will also have a substantial impact on the global economy and financial markets, with significant spill overs to other countries.”⁹

The US decision to relocate supply chains away from China, the continued impasse in the multilateral trading system, and so on, created an environment of uncertainty that impacted world trade.

These apprehensions have been proved correct given the spike in global food, fertilizer, and oil prices. Various studies have shown that the disruption to the global economy, caused by the war and the sanctions, has contributed to a 30 percent increase in oil prices and a 17 per cent increase in food prices. While India is not an importer of food, the very high dependence of the Indian economy on imported oil has meant that there has been a huge direct loss of national income on account of the spike in oil prices. The geo-economic response to the war has also contributed to a disruption of global supply chains and the need to recalibrate these links, imposing further cost on developing economies.

As several commentators around the world have noted, the economic impact of the Ukraine war comes on top of the economic impact of Covid-19 and the disruptions caused to economic activity. In response to the global economic slowdown due to Covid-19, several governments, especially the United States, injected purchasing power to stimulate demand. This monetary injection has sparked off inflationary expectations, without adequate growth in demand, and continued disruption of production caused by supply chain disruptions and trade wars. Consequently, the global economy has slipped into a stagflationary phase.

The developments on the international trade front are also worrisome. World trade began to be disrupted before Covid-19, when the world’s two major trading nations — China and the US — became engaged in a trade war. The US decision to relocate supply chains away from China, the continued impasse in the multilateral trading system, and so on, created an environment of uncertainty that impacted world trade. As a World Bank study observed, economic policy uncertainty had reduced world trade growth after 2018 by one percentage point.¹⁰ On top of this came the Covid

disruption with physical constraints imposed on global value chains and supply chains. The World Trade Organisation has reduced its growth estimate for world trade in 2022 from 4.7 per cent to 3.0 per cent and warned that war related disruptions and uncertainties could continue to dampen the outlook for world trade.¹¹

Taken together, all these developments have had a debilitating impact on global growth prospects with the developing economies — the Global South — being particularly impacted. While India is acutely import-dependent in oil, gas, and fertilisers, several developing countries are equally import-dependent for food. They have all been badly impacted by the spurt in commodity prices, apart from the disruption to trade in general.

Implications for India and the Global South

The immediate impact on India of the global situation arising out of the Ukraine war and the global sanctions is best summarised in this World Bank growth forecast [see Table 1] that has been published in the monthly economic report of the Union Ministry of Finance. The Chief Economic Advisor to the Government of India has been making observations on the impact of the global economic situation on the Indian economy in the ministry’s Monthly Economic Report since March 2022.

Table 1: World Bank Real GDP Growth Projections (per cent)

Countries/Region	2022 Revised Estimate	2022 Previous Estimate	2023 Forecast
World	2.9	4.1	3.0
Advanced Economies	2.6	3.8	2.4
USA	2.5	3.7	1.9
Euro Area	2.5	4.2	1.9
Japan	1.7	2.9	1.3
Emerging Market & Developing Economies	3.4	4.6	4.2
China	4.3	5.1	5.2
India	7.5	8.7	7.1 (6.8)
Russia	-8.9	-20.2	-2.0

Source: Monthly Economic Report, Ministry of Finance, GoI, May 2022.

The March report identified three major risks for the Indian economy arising out of the war. First, commodity price inflation, especially a spike in energy prices and the consequent impact on inflationary expectations; second, the likely fiscal impact of increased energy and food prices on the public exchequer; third, an increased current account deficit owing to rising cost of imported energy and potential disruption of world trade. In the words of the report: “After touching a five-month low in January 2022, merchandise trade deficit widened in February 2022 and further increased in March 2022 owing to elevated crude oil prices amid escalating geopolitical tensions and recovery in domestic demand post omicron wave of COVID-19 pandemic. Widening trade deficit and an increase in net outgo of investment income led to widening of current account deficit”.¹²

The ministry's report for May 2022 went on to add, "The Russia-Ukraine conflict and pandemic-related lockdowns in China thus caused a slowdown in global trade, which in turn caused a dip in global economic activity. Weaker global growth cues may lead to weaker export growth for India, taking away a growth stimulus that contributed substantially to India's economic recovery in 2021-22".¹³

In its April 2022 statement, the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) observed:

"Since the MPC's meeting in February 2022, the global economic and financial environment has worsened with the escalation of geopolitical conflict and accompanying sanctions. Commodity prices have shot up substantially across the board amidst heightened volatility, with adverse fallouts on net commodity importers. Financial markets have exhibited increased volatility. Crude oil prices jumped to 14-year high in early March; despite some correction, they remain volatile at elevated levels. Supply chain pressures, which were set to ease, are rising again. The broad-based jump in global commodity prices has exacerbated inflationary pressures Across Advanced Economies (AEs) and Emerging Market Economies (EMEs) alike causing a sharp revision in their inflation projections. The global composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) eased to 52.7 in March from 53.5 in February with output growth slowing in both manufacturing and services sectors. World merchandise trade momentum has weakened".¹⁴

Weaker global growth cues may lead to weaker export growth for India, taking away a growth stimulus that contributed substantially to India's economic recovery in 2021-22.

Responding to reports that India might switch to a Rupee-Rouble denominated trading system, as was in vogue till the early 1990s, the RBI Governor clarified in early April 2022 that no such decision was as yet under consideration and that India would remain mindful of the economic and financial sanctions imposed by its major trading partners on Russia.¹⁵ Till date, there has been no further development in this regard. While in mid-March the RBI governor stated that the economic impact of the Ukraine war would be 'marginal', by June 2022, the RBI was seriously concerned about the impact of the war and sanctions on the economy, with RBI Deputy Governor Michael Patra stating, "The world has been overwhelmed by the fallout of geopolitical conflict which threatens to snuff out a recovery that was hesitantly and haltingly making its way through multiple waves of the pandemic and multiple mutations of the virus. India's economic prospects are also challenged by these ongoing developments, and the outlook is darkened and highly uncertain".¹⁶

Patra's statement is perhaps the most comprehensive official assessment to date of the impact of the Ukraine war and sanctions on the Indian economy. To quote:

"The escalation of geopolitical tensions into war from late February 2022 delivered a brutal blow to the global economy, battered as it had been through 2021 by the pandemic, supply chain and logistics disruptions, elevated inflation and bouts of financial market turbulence triggered by diverging paths of monetary policy normalisation. Since then, the global macroeconomic outlook has become suddenly overcast with the economic costs of the war and retaliatory sanctions. Emerging Market and Developing Economies (EMDEs) are bearing the brunt of these geopolitical spill overs as I speak, despite being bystanders. Capital outflows and currency depreciations have tightened external funding conditions, and along with elevated debt levels, put their hesitant and incomplete recoveries in danger. Heightened volatility in financial markets and surges in prices of commodities — especially of energy, metals, grain futures and fertilisers — have accentuated risks to growth, inflation and financial stability".¹⁷

While the focus of both fiscal and monetary policy authorities has been on likely inflationary consequences of the war, an equally, if not more, serious concern would be the negative impact of rising crude oil prices on growth, given India's overwhelming dependence on imported hydrocarbons. A jump in the average monthly Brent crude oil price from around US\$74 in December 2021 to \$117.25 in March 2022 constitutes an enormous loss of income for the import-dependent Indian economy. The negative wealth effect of this price shock is humungous and will impact national income growth this year.

Conclusion

For India and the countries of the Global South, the economic consequences of the Ukraine war are both short-term and long-term. The short-term impact is clearly on national income growth and inflation. The long-term impact will depend on how these countries adjust to these short-term setbacks and restore their growth momentum. However, a more enduring long-term impact would be felt through the response of the Global South to western economic and financial sanctions. India, like China and many other emerging economies, has been the beneficiary of post-Cold War economic globalisation. There was a step jump in India's long-term growth rate from an average of 3.5 per cent per annum in 1950-80 to an average of 7.5 per cent per annum in 1991-2011. The 'weaponisation of globalisation' through financial and trade sanctions has already disrupted the global economy and economists forecast a period of 'stagflation'.

The post-Ukraine economic problems come on top of post-Covid disruptions and, in India's case, post-demonetisation disruptions. The long-term impact of these developments on Global growth will have geopolitical consequences. India's principal adversary, China, is also facing economic headwinds and a consequent economic slowdown. The power gap between the West and East may take longer to bridge but will continue to narrow.

This will require India to reinforce its own capabilities, maintain good relations with several major powers, including the US, Russia, European Union, Japan and countries of the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean Regions. India's *Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan*, a return to the Nehruvian model of self-reliant economic development and non-aligned foreign policy, has once again emerged to be a strategic option of choice. It is, therefore, understandable that India has opted to mobilise the Global South in seeking a global environment more conducive to their development and well-being.

While the focus of both fiscal and monetary policy authorities has been on likely inflationary consequences of the war, an equally, if not more, serious concern would be the negative impact of rising crude oil prices on growth, given India's overwhelming dependence on imported hydrocarbons.

Endnotes

- 1 Kimberly Ann Elliott, 'Evidence on the Costs and Benefits of Economic Sanctions', Peterson Institute for International Economics, 23 October 1997. Accessed at: <https://www.piie.com/commentary/testimonies/evidence-costs-and-benefits-economic-sanctions>. See also GC Hufbauer, JJ Schott, KA Elliott & B Oegg, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, Peterson Institute for International Economics, 3rd Edition, June 2009. Accessed at: <https://www.piie.com/bookstore/economic-sanctions-reconsidered-3rd-edition-paper>
- 2 For an assessment of US sanctions on India see G. Balachandran, 'Sanctions: Indo-US Perspectives', *Economic Issues 2*, Asian Institute of Transport Development, Delhi, , 1998.
- 3 Robert Blackwill and Jennifer Harris, *War by Other Means: Geo-economics and Statecraft*, Harvard University Press, 2016.
- 4 S Huntington, Why International Primacy Matters, *International Security* Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring, 1993), pp. 68-83. The MIT Press, 1993.
- 5 Richard B. Cheney, Defending Liberty in a Global Economy, Cato Institute, June 23, 1998. Accessed at: <https://www.cato.org/speeches/defending-liberty-global-economy>. See also Solveig Singleton & Daniel T Griswold (Editors), *Economic Casualties: How U.S. Foreign Policy Undermines Trade, Growth and Liberty*, Cato Institute, Washington DC, March 1999.
- 6 Peter Rutland, 'Mission Impossible? The IMF and the Failure of the Market Transition in Russia', *Review of International Studies* Vol. 25, no. 5, fall 1999, pp. 183-200.
- 7 Chad P. Bown, 'Russia's war on Ukraine: A sanctions timeline', Peterson Institute of International Economics, Washington DC, January 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economics/russias-war-ukraine-sanctions-timeline>
- 8 Raghuram Rajan, 'Economic Weapons of Mass Destruction', *Project Syndicate*, 17 March 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/economic-wmds-and-the-risk-of-deglobalization-by-raghuram-rajan-2022-03>
- 9 IMF Staff Statement on the Economic Impact of the War in Ukraine, March 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2022/03/05/pr2261-imf-staff-statement-on-the-economic-impact-of-war-in-ukraine>
- 10 C Constantinescu, A Mattoo and M Ruta (2020), *The Global Trade Slowdown: Cyclical or Structural?*, The World Bank, Feb. 2020. Accessed at: elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/10.1093/wber/lhx027
- 11 'Russian-Ukraine conflict puts fragile global trade recovery at risk', WTO, Geneva, 12 April 2022. Accessed at: https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/pr902_e.htm
- 12 Monthly Economic Report, March 2022, Ministry of Finance, Govt. of India. Accessed at: <https://dea.gov.in/sites/default/files/MER%20March%202022.pdf>
- 13 Monthly Economic Report, May 2022, Ministry of Finance, Govt. of India Accessed at: https://dea.gov.in/sites/default/files/MER%20May_2022.pdf
- 14 Minutes of the Monetary Policy Committee, *Reserve Bank of India*. 22 April 2022. Accessed at: https://www.rbi.org.in/Scripts/BS_PressReleaseDisplay.aspx?prid=53601
- 15 RBI says sensitive to economic sanctions on Russia, no formal rupee-rouble payment platform in place yet, Press Trust of India, 8 April 2022. Accessed at: theprint.in/economy/rbi-says-sensitive-to-economic-sanctions-on-russia-no-formal-rupee-rouble-payment-platform-in-place-yet/908223/
- 16 Shaktikanta Das (2022), 'Marginal impact of Ukraine war on Indian economy', 21March 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.ndtv.com/business/17-lakh-crore-liquidity-infused-in-two-years-will-ensure-adequate-funds-says-rbi-governor-2834328>
Michael Patra (2022), 'Geopolitical Spillovers and the Indian Economy', Reserve Bank of India, 24 June 2022. Accessed at: https://rbi.org.in/Scripts/BS_SpeechesView.aspx?Id=1314
- 17 Patra (2022), op cit.

Blue Helmets: Looking into the Future

Major General (Dr) AK Bardalai (Retd) @

Abstract

By not being able to protect civilians in some complex intra-state conflicts at the United Nations (UN) Organisation is giving an impression of an ineffective multinational organisation. The prime current example of this is the failure of the UN Security Council to prevent Russia from invading Ukraine or to bring an end to the conflict. The Ukraine War has generated discussion on the utility of the Cold War-era traditional UN peace operation as an effective tool of conflict management. This article starts by examining what is ailing UN peacekeeping and what changes are required to rectify this and thereafter looks at the future of UN peace operations in the context of both inter-state and intra-state conflicts.

Introduction

Despite a concerted effort by the UN and member states, peace operations continue to come under criticism for their failure but rarely receive accolades for their positive contribution. Most of the new peace operations are deployed in complex intra-state conflicts, barring a few like United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United Nations Disengagement Force (UNDOF). These two missions were deployed during the Cold War and are contributing to maintaining the status quo. But it has not been easy for the missions deployed in intra-state conflicts to effectively contribute towards bringing stability for the political process to move ahead. Performance of the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has questioned the very utility of the peace operations despite their contribution to ushering *negative peace*. *Negative peace* has been described differently by different academicians. In simple words, it is the absence of violence.¹ Besides, as observed through indicators identified by Walter, Howard, and Fortna, peacekeeping missions have been effective in reducing and preventing violence from recurrence, containing its spread within and across borders, reducing civilian and military deaths, and making post-conflict settlement easier.²

While the international community has been grappling to find ways to best use peacekeeping to manage conflicts, Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022. With no respite from the ongoing war and no hope for the deployment of blue helmets post a ceasefire — if it happens — between Russia and Ukraine, the very future of UN peace operations looks bleak. This article looks at the future of UN peace operations in the context of new inter-state conflicts, like the Ukraine War and some of the ongoing intra-state conflicts. However, commenting on the future of peace operations assumes that UN peace operations are currently not able to deliver as mandated. Therefore, the article starts by examining what is ailing UN peacekeeping and what changes are required to rectify this?

@ Major General (Dr) AK Bardalai (Retd) is a former peace keeper and currently a Distinguished Fellow of the USI of India. He holds a PhD in UN Peace Operations under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Joseph Soeters, Tilburg University, the Netherlands.

Does Peacekeeping need a Change?

The list of factors/causes for success or failure is not exhaustive since these will vary from conflict to conflict.³ Examples of some of the glaring failures of the UN in the past are the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) I and II from 1992 to 1995, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) and the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in the former Republic of Yugoslavia. Despite a whopping budget of \$1.68 billion, UNOSOM ended in disaster.⁴ Similarly, in Rwanda, even though a peace agreement was signed before the deployment of the peacekeeping mission and adequate warning of the impending genocide was available, the mission was not able to protect the civilians from the wrath of the Hutu militias when the genocide began in April 1994.⁵ The case of the former Yugoslavia was different because there was no peace agreement between the parties to the conflict, and there was a lack of consensus among the powerful nations in defining the actual problem or a workable strategy to restore peace. The following sections will look at what ails peacekeeping by drawing examples from the traditional UN peace operations deployed in inter-state conflict followed by a few complex peace operations deployed in intra-state conflicts in the African Region.

Inter-State Conflict

At the strategic level, the current security situation in Europe involving at least one superpower and another industrialist European nation in an inter-state conflict has posed a daunting challenge to the international community and made the UN look like an ineffectual organisation. During the Cold War, most of the conflicts were inter-state and peacekeeping missions were deployed between two opposite parties to the conflict in a pre-designated and agreed-on temporary security zone. After the end of the Cold War, when the countries gained independence from colonial rule, internal fighting began over control of turf, leading to vicious violence involving several armed groups, destruction of property and death of civilians. The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), a traditional peace operation, was deployed in a temporary security zone that separated both Ethiopia and Eritrea in 2000; the mission closed in 2008 without achieving the objective mandated. Apart from UNMEE, UNIFIL was established in 1978 in the context of the inter-state conflict between Israel and Lebanon. UNIFIL has been able to contribute towards the maintenance of stability and avert a major conflict between Israel and Lebanon since the last war of 2006. But the Ukraine War has prompted academicians and practitioners to explore new ideas on the future role of UN peace operations for the return of peace to the conflict zone. One of the ideas is to examine the utility of some of the Cold War era traditional peacekeeping missions and use the results as models for preventive diplomacy and deployment to prevent conflict, prevent the recurrence of conflict, and act as a tool for conflict management.

At the strategic level, the current security situation in Europe involving at least one superpower and another industrialist European nation in an inter-state conflict has posed a daunting challenge to the international community and made the UN look like an ineffectual organisation.

Intra-State Conflict

UN peace operations have been drawing flak for their failure to achieve the core objective of the UN — the protection of civilians. For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the civilian population accuse MONUSCO of failing to protect the civilians who suffer the most amidst the rebel armed groups' turf war. According to media reports, the local population in the troubled Eastern Region of DRC was aggrieved over MONUSCO's failure to stem violence in Eastern DRC, mostly attributed to the resurgence of the M23 group which comprises ex-Congolese Tutsi soldiers.⁶ Their frustration resulted in attacking the UN compound on 25 July 2022, resulting in the death of three UN peacekeepers, at least five civilians, and some 50 wounded. It is not only the civilians; the peacekeepers also have become the target of violence by armed groups. To give an example, according to the UN press release, "For the ninth year in a row, the MINUSMA was the deadliest for peacekeepers with 14 fatalities, followed by 13 fatalities in the United Nations

Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), four fatalities in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)”.⁷ The UN peace operations appear to be suffering from a crisis of confidence and crisis of legitimacy of the UN among the local population and a crisis of consent by the local population.⁸ UN peace operations in DRC, South Sudan, Mali, and the Central African Republic have been under the radar for the plight of the local population and their perception of the peacekeeping missions as failing in their duty. According to the Brussels-based Crisis Group report, in the wake of the insurgency led by the jihadis and the separatist groups, the peacekeeping mission in Mali seems to be in trouble. More so, after the French pulled out its soldiers in August 2022, and growing tensions between Bamako and its main Western partners, MINUSMA is at a crossroads and finding it difficult to meet the challenges.⁹ The performance of MINUSCA is a shade better. Even though the mission has managed to help avert large-scale civilian deaths, the mission’s exit, however, is not in sight.¹⁰ In the following paragraphs, the possible future role of the Blue Helmets, first in inter-state followed by intra-state conflicts, is analysed.

Blue Helmets in Future UN Peace Operations

Inter-State Conflicts. Ukraine has amplified the need for more attention to inter-positional forces and observer missions.¹¹ Since it has generated discussion on the feasibility of traditional peace operations in the context of inter-state conflict, such feasibility after a cease-fire agreement should be discussed first. Unless there is a ceasefire, consent, and a reasonable chance of even partial success, it would be futile to invest in deploying a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine. Since the Ukraine War is generally seen as a war between Russia and the West (more specifically the US), no negotiated settlement leading to a ceasefire is possible unless the US is part of the process. To this end, 30 left-wing lawmakers from President Biden’s Democratic Party have indicated that there are advantages of a negotiated settlement.¹² However, even if such negotiation is possible and leads to a ceasefire and both sides agree to the deployment of the peacekeepers, it is difficult and early to comment on the effectiveness of the peacekeeping mission in Ukraine.¹³ To deploy peacekeepers without the consent of the parties to the conflict is against the first cardinal principle of UN peacekeeping — Consent. Besides, UN peacekeeping rarely succeeds when peacekeepers get deployed in vicious conflicts. The bigger question is who is going to participate in such a mission. Given the kind of violence that the peacekeepers would be exposed to (including the threat to peacekeepers), any peacekeeping mission for such a conflict must be comprised of capable peacekeepers. The desired capability is at a premium except for a few nations from the Global South and mostly from the Western nations, who are reluctant to participate in UN peace operations in complex intra-state conflicts.¹⁴ Besides, the Ukrainian forces have succeeded in taking back a few of the lost territories, followed by Russia declaring martial law in the occupied territories of Ukraine. The West is bracing for a possible nuclear attack by Russia.¹⁵ Moreover, as one Permanent five-member is, this article starts by examining what is ailing UN peacekeeping and what changes are required to rectify this invader of Ukraine, and another supports the invasion, even a negotiated settlement seems very far.¹⁶

Since the Ukraine War is generally seen as a war between Russia and the West (more specifically the US), no negotiated settlement leading to a ceasefire is possible unless the US is part of the process.

Putting aside the probability of a peace operation in Ukraine, as derived from experiences from some of the traditional peace operations like the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) and UNIFIL (UNIFIL is the only current armed peace operation deployed in inter-state conflict), if there is a sincere commitment on the part of the parties (states) to the conflict, traditional peace operations still have a role in conflict management. These missions were deployed as preventive deployment in the context of inter-state conflicts and were found to be cost-effective.¹⁷ Though, when powerful nations are either party to the conflict or have stakes in the continuation of the conflict, prevention of the occurrence of the conflict is fraught with diplomatic challenges. American diplomat Richard N. Haass observed that when Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, there was consensus in the international community

for the use of force against Iraq. Therefore, once the conflict occurs and powerful nations are parties to the conflict, the application of the idea of peace is not likely to go beyond the conceptual stage. On the other hand, when the conflict is between two states who are not as powerful as the developed nations and the conflict is not in the strategic interest of the powerful nations, there is a high probability that preventive diplomacy and preventive deployment would succeed. With enough early warning available and sincere commitment by the UN leadership and the permanent members of the Security Council, skilful diplomacy accompanied by timely deployment by UN peacekeepers can save the day. The composition of the mission for such a purpose need not be the same as UNPREDEP. Regardless of which form it takes, the peacekeeping mission must adhere to the three basic principles of peacekeeping. The verification of a ceasefire can be done by either lightly armed (for self-defence) peacekeepers or unarmed military observers. Alternatively, only civilian observers or a combination of civilian and military observers might be able to perform the role of a verification mission.

The understanding of the use of force for self-defence is ambiguous. Since the profile of even lightly armed peacekeepers can sometimes be misinterpreted as a sign of arrogance and offensive intent, an unarmed observer verification mission supported by a liaison and coordination mechanism is likely to be more suitable for facilitating a ceasefire. In this regard, even a UN civilian observers' mission in the line with the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe's Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) is another option worth considering. So far, these observers have performed well.¹⁸ Besides, since peacekeeping is expensive, prevention with political content in the driver's seat is a better option. If civilian peacekeepers are not possible because of security constraints, the next option is to have a multi-lateral political mission. Several past political missions have made positive contributions in mediating between the parties leading to conflict resolution.¹⁹ As for civilian peacekeepers, military practitioners are generally weary of civilians' ability in peacekeeping. As mentioned earlier, there are examples of civilians' ability to contribute effectively either all by themselves or side by side with uniformed peacekeepers.²⁰

Engaging with the de-facto authorities is a necessity but is an operational challenge for the UN. Also, there is no formed policy for engaging with the de-facto authorities.

Intra-State Conflicts. The dynamics of intra-state conflicts are slightly different. Besides the host government (if it is still effective), several armed groups can fight for their separate agendas. In such a case, it is difficult to get absolute consent from all parties to the conflict. After prolonged negotiations — if at all it becomes possible to get the parties to agree to the deployment of peacekeepers — such consent at best becomes a fragile consensus which may break down quickly even for trivial reasons. The peacekeeping missions of the past in the United Nations Verification Missions (UNAVEM), Somalia (UNOSOM), and Rwanda (UNAMIR), and a few current missions like MONUSCO, UNMISS, and MINUSMA are a few such examples of the absence of effective government/authority or the presence of several armed groups with de-facto authorities.²¹ Engaging with the de-facto authorities is a necessity but is an operational challenge for the UN. Also, there is no formed policy for engaging with the de-facto authorities.

Given their complex dynamics and vicious violence, peacekeeping in intra-state conflicts is more difficult than inter-state conflicts. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, statistics prove that there are a greater number of peacekeeping missions (including those deployed in intra-state conflicts) that have contributed effectively to the return of peace.²² The important factor that must be considered in intra-state conflicts is the protection of civilians. Since it is the responsibility of the host state to protect the civilians, what the international community should do is support the host state to protect its own citizens. But when the host state itself becomes involved in the death of its citizens, there is no other way than the international community intervening militarily. Though military intervention by outside powers, including the UN peace operation, sometimes seems like the intervening force acting partially. The use of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in DRC is a case in point.²³ However, when the parties to the conflict are not too many like in South Sudan, even

a political mission or combination of political missions with unarmed observers can be an alternative. Such a model was tried in Somalia. When conceived initially, it had better chances to work until the then Secretary-General took a unanimous decision without consulting either the head of the mission or the leader of the main party to the conflict to deploy peacekeepers far more than what was agreed to.²⁴ In a similar context of Mali, three options, as suggested by Leimbach, are, to increase the troops' strength, reduce the footprints, and convert the mission into a political mission.²⁵ Given the animosity between the Malian Government and the UN, the first option of the increased strength of the mission is unlikely and the third option of converting the mission to a political mission is risky without the cooperation of the host government assuring guarantee of protection of civilians by the state. Even the second option. i.e., reduced footprints will be full of challenges. No matter what strategy is adopted, in absence of any other workable alternatives, peacekeeping missions with formed units (armed) will be the mainstay in intra-state conflicts for quite some time.

Conclusion

The Ukraine conflict has brought to the fore the relevance of traditional peace operations as a tool for conflict management as also raised the question of the efficacy of UN peacekeeping to supervise post-ceasefire agreements. The conflict has given rise to the renewed possibility of large inter-state conflicts. After exploring the feasibility of a role for peacekeeping in Ukraine, the relevance or utility of traditional peace operations for the prevention of inter-state conflict was studied. The 'status quo' status of these traditional peace operations helped to maintain stability in the conflict zone and prevent the recurrence of conflict which has the potential to escalate beyond the regional geography. The UN is best suited for preventing disputes and conflicts from arising out of both inter-state and intra-state relationships. UN peacekeeping uses preventive diplomacy and deployment and used in past the concept of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) for conflict management. In the wake of R2P drawing worldwide criticism, Ban Ki-moon in his letter to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council, underlined that the framework for R2P should aim to encourage a preventive rather than a reactive approach.²⁶ If it was done that way, R2P action in Libya possibly would not have got a bad press. As observed by Opiyo, preventive diplomacy interventions can provide only breathing space as they rarely settle the underlying differences that drive conflicts.²⁷ However, much will depend on the Global South's geopolitical views and coherent positions on the UN peace operations. According to Gowan, one of the side effects of the Ukraine war is the rise of another power centre—the Global South, which contributes the most to complex peace operations.²⁸

There has been a re-ignition of the international community's consciousness of the need to consider traditional UN peace operations of the Cold War era as an effective tool for the management of inter-state conflicts is a positive development.

On a positive note, there has been a re-ignition of the international community's consciousness of the need to consider traditional UN peace operations of the Cold War era as an effective tool for the management of inter-state conflicts is a positive development. As for intra-state conflicts, given the challenges of protection of civilians and failure on the part of the host state to protect its citizens, the UN peace operation is likely to continue its role as heretofore. As observed by Adam Day, the Director of Programmes at the Centre for Policy Research at United Nations University, if the UN is to continue mandating peace operations in the kinds of civil wars that are driven by weak state governance capacities, endemic corruption, political exclusion, and decades of structural violence, it should prepare for a long haul or revisit its conditions for success.²⁹ A lot, however, will depend on the Secretary General's report on the New Agenda for Peace scheduled to come out sometime in 2023.

Endnotes

- 1 Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research.” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/422690>. Also see, Jessica Di Salvatore and Andrea Ruggeri, “Effectiveness of Peacekeeping Operations”, *Contentious Politics and Political Violence, World Politics* (September 2017), 23, DOI:10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.586 and Vincenzo Bove, Chiara Ruffa and Andrea Ruggeri, *Composing Peace: Mission Composition in UN Peacekeeping* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 25; Annemarie Peen Rodt, “Successful Conflict Management by Military Means,” *Ethnopolitics*, 11, no. 4(2012): 376-91.
- 2 Barbara F. Walter, Lise Morje Howard, and Virginia Page Fortna, “The Extraordinary Relationship between Peacekeeping and Peace,” *British Journal of Political Science* (2020): 3, doi:10.1017/S000712342000023X. Also see Virginia Page Fortna, “Does Peacekeeping Keep Peace? International Intervention and the Duration of Peace After Civil War,” *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no.2 (2004): 269–292, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0020-8833.2004.00301>
- 3 Indarjit Rikhye, “The United Nations Operation in the Congo: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking and Peacebuilding”, in Donald C.F Daniel and Bradd C. Hayes (eds), *Beyond Traditional Peacekeeping*, London: Macmillan, 1995, pp. 207–27
- 4 Aisha Ahmad, ‘Agenda for Peace or Budget for War? Evaluating the Economic Impact of International Intervention in Somalia’, *International Journal*, Vol. 67, No. 2, Spring 2012, pp. 313–31, available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23266009>, accessed on 17 July 2018; and Jonathan Mermin, “Television News and American Intervention in Somalia: The Myth of a Media-driven Foreign Policy”, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 112, No. 3, Autumn 1997, pp. 385–403, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2657563>, accessed on 19 July 2018.
- 5 Romeo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003) and Apurba Kumar Bardalai, *United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon: Assessment and Way Forward*, https://research.tilburguniversity.edu/files/50853309/Bardalai_UNIFIL_1_07_2021_correct.pdf
- 6 “10 Conflicts to Watch in 2023,” Crisis Group Commentary/Global, January 1, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/10-conflicts-watch-2023> and “10 Conflicts to watch in 2023”, Foreign Policy, January 1, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/01/ukraine-yemen-armenia-congo-iran-ethiopia-haiti-10-conflicts-2023/>
- 7 The UN Press Release ORG/1730, January 20, 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/org1730.doc.htm>
- 8 Jenna Russo, “Protests against UN in eastern Congo highlight peace mission’s crisis of legitimacy,” *The Conversation*, 31 July 2022, https://theconversation.com/protests-against-un-in-eastern-congo-highlight-peace-missions-crisis-of-legitimacy-187932?utm_source=linkedin&utm_medium=bylinelinkedinbutton, accessed August 1, 2022, and Anjali Dayal, “A Crisis of Consent in UN Peace Operations,” *IPI Global Observatory*, August 2, 2022, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/08/a-crisis-of-consent-in-un-peace-operations/>
- 9 “MINUSMA at a Crossroads,” *Crisis Group* December 1, 2022, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/minusma-crossroads>
- 10 Lise Howard, “Assessing the Effectiveness of the UN Mission in the Central African Republic,” *IPI Global Observatory*, November 21, 2019, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2019/11/assessing-effectiveness-un-mission-central-african-republic/>
- 11 Alexandra Novosseloff, A comparative study of older one-dimensional UN Peace Operations: Is the Future of UN Peacekeeping its Past?, EPON and FES Cyprus (2022), <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/zypern/19099-20220510.pdf>
- 12 AFP News, “US Left-wing Lawmakers Urge Biden To Negotiate On Ukraine” 24 Oct 2022. *International Business Times*. <https://www.ibtimes.com/us-left-wing-lawmakers-urge-biden-negotiate-ukraine-3627583>
- 13 Peacekeeping principles were identified after the establishment of UN Emergency Force I (UNEF I) in Gaza. See United Nations, “*Summary Study of the Experience Derived from the Establishment and Operation of the Force: Report of the Secretary-General, A/3943*,” (October 9, 1958) and Paul F. Diehl, “First United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I)” in *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, ed. Joachim A. Koops, Norrie Macqueen, Thierry Tardy and Paul D. Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 151.
- 14 Major General AK Bardalai, Retired, “Ukraine Conflict: Is UN peacekeeping an option?” *Ukraine Conflict: Is UN peacekeeping an option?* <https://hesperus.co.in/analysis/f/ukraine-conflict-is-un-peacekeeping-an-option>

- 15 Elizabeth Piper, “Britain’s Wallace discussed Ukraine security concerns on Washington trip -source.”, October 19, 2022, *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/britains-wallace-discussed-ukraine-security-concerns-washington-trip-source-2022-10-19/>. Also see, Chels Michta, “Putin Says the Gloves Are Off — Believe Him,” *Centre for European Policy Analysis*, October 18, 2022, <https://cepa.org/article/putin-says-the-gloves-are-off-believe-him/> and Anatol Lieven “Ukraine’s War Is Like World War I, Not World War II,” *Foreign Policy*, October 27, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/27/ukraines-war-is-like-world-war-i-not-world-war-ii/>
- 16 Richard Haass, “The Dangerous Decade,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/dangerous-decade-foreign-policy-world-crisis-richard-haass>
- 17 The United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) was established on 31 March 1995 in Security Council Resolution 983 to replace the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in the Republic of North Macedonia.
- 18 André Härtel, Anton Pisarenko, and Andreas Umland, “The OSCE’s Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine: *The SMM’s Work in the Donbas and Its Ukrainian Critique in 2014–2019*,” June 7, 2021, https://brill.com/view/journals/shrs/31/1-4/article-p121_121.xml?language=en, accessed on May 18, 2022. Also, see Richard Gowan, “For UN Peacekeeping, Smaller Is Looking Better Again,” *World Political Review*, July 5, 2022, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/30655/on-peacekeeping-un-could-turn-to-a-cold-war-model>
- 19 Richard Gowan, “Multilateral Political Missions and Preventive Diplomacy,” Special Report 299, *United States Institute for Peace*, December 2011, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/SR299.pdf>
- 20 Personal experiences of the author from his days as an Unarmed Military Observer in the United Nations Verification Mission in Angola (UNAVEM) in 1991-92. Also see, Major General (Dr) AK Bardalai, “Ukraine Conflict Is UN peacekeeping an option/”, April 1, 2022, <https://hesperus.co.in/research/f/ukraine-conflict-is-un-peacekeeping-an-option>
- 21 Damian Lilly, “Does the UN Need a More Coherent Approach Toward “De Facto” Authorities?” *IPI Global Observatory*, January 6, 2023, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2023/01/does-the-un-need-a-more-coherent-approach-toward-de-facto-authorities/>
- 22 Barbara F. Walter, Lise Morje Howard, and Virginia Page Fortna, “The Extraordinary Relationship between Peacekeeping and Peace,” *British Journal of Political Science* (2020): 3, doi:10.1017/S000712342000023X.
- 23 Emily Paddon Rhoads, “Implementation and the Local Politics of Peacekeeping in the Congo,” *Taking Sides in Peacekeeping: Impartiality and the Future of the United Nations* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2016), 120-159
- 24 Lise Morje Howard, *UN Peacekeeping in Civil Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 25–27.
- 25 Dulcie Leimbach, “Three Stark Choices Proposed for the Future of UN Peacekeeping in Mali,” *Pass Blue*, January 23, 2023, <https://www.passblue.com/2023/01/23/three-stark-choices-proposed-for-the-future-of-un-peacekeeping-in-mali/>
- 26 United Nations, *UN Secretary General’s letter addressed to the Presidents of General Assembly and Security Council*, A/70/741–S/2016/71, February 16, 2016.
- 27 J. Ododa Opiyo, “The challenges of preventive diplomacy: The United Nations’ post-Cold War experiences in Africa,” *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 12, no. 1 (2012) {61-82.
- 28 Richard Gowan, “The U.N. Already Has a Challenging To-Do List for 2023,” *World Political Review*, January 24, 2023, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/united-nations-un-russia-ukraine-unsc-reform/?share-code=MNYtqv7mphZ>
- 29 Adam Day, “The Future of UN Peace Operations in a Changing Conflict Environment,” *Future of Peacekeeping*, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/future-of-peacekeeping>. Also see, Ilhan Dahir, Agathe Sarfati, and Jake Sherman, “The Future of UN Peacekeeping and Parallel Operations,” *International Peace Institute*, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/the_future_of_peacekeeping_and_parallel_operations.pdf

Nuclear Sabre Rattling in Ukraine-Russia Conflict: Global Implications

Dr Roshan Khanijo @

Abstract

The nuclear sabre rattling in Ukraine-Russia conflict has brought the debate about the possible use of nuclear weapons to the forefront. Whether it is nuclear brinkmanship or propaganda, this posture will have global implications. Three issues emerge which need to be deliberated. Firstly, the nuclear sabre rattling has brought the debate about the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons to the forefront. Secondly, there are concerns about the safety and security of nuclear power plants during an armed conflict, and finally, it has dented the nuclear disarmament negotiations as Russia has suspended her participation in the New START Treaty. Further, President Putin mentioned that he may restart the nuclear tests if the US does so. All this does not go well for nuclear stability. Hence, this article tries to analyse the above issues and suggests a way forward.

Introduction

The Ukraine-Russia conflict, amongst other things, has unleashed discussions on the possible use of nuclear weapons to the forefront. The gravity of the argument will depend on the side you consider. Ukraine and some sections of western media constantly talk about the possible use of nuclear weapons by the Russians and want to re-open the debate about the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons¹, whereas the Russians and their allies have another opinion. However, the war has definitely brought one aspect to the forefront and that is, the safety and security of Ukraine's six nuclear reactors at Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant. The legal loophole in international treaties have been used to their advantage by some states, especially considering that treaties are lacking to completely address the issue of attack on nuclear installations in military conflicts. Thus, the issues need to be addressed seriously. This article analyses the global implications of this war, especially the nuclear safety and security issues, as also whether nuclear weapon can actually be used in this conflict, or is it an exaggerated assumption.

Nuclear Doctrines and Deterrence

Nations often debate that nuclear weapons are for deterrence purpose. But for the weapons to achieve this objective, the usability of weapons become essential without which it may not deter the adversary. Hence, there is a usability paradox which countries use to their advantage, depending on the situation and the capability of their opponent. Except for India, and in a limited sense China, who have a 'No First Use' (NFU) nuclear doctrine, all other Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) have an escalatory 'First Use' nuclear doctrine. Whether this 'First Use' is against NWS, and not for Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) is of little consolation because most of the NWS have conventional weapon superiority and, therefore, it is easy for them to give such assurances to NNWS. However, hypothetically, if in a conflict situation a

@ Dr Roshan Khanijo is Assistant Director (Research) at the USI of India. She has authored and edited, books, monographs, occasional papers and chapters in national and international books and magazines. Her areas of interest are strategic issues particularly Nuclear Strategy, Nuclear profile of Nuclear Weapon States, Armament, Disarmament and Niche technologies. She has been a panellist in national and international seminars and lectures on nuclear matters.

NWS's territorial sovereignty is threatened then it will not hesitate to use these weapons— otherwise the purpose of the nuclear weapon will get defeated. The dangers of use of nuclear weapons are very well documented in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Hence, propagation of nuclear weapon needs to be treated with caution, both for countries who use it as a tool for nuclear brinkmanship as well as for those who use it for false propaganda. The renowned American political scientist, Joseph S Nye Sr comments that for any NWS to use nuclear weapons, “the just war tradition that we have inherited over the centuries suggests three relevant conditions that must be met: a just and proportionate cause, limits on means, and prudent consideration of all consequences”.² If we study the Russian scenario under these conditions then the fact that till now, they have not used nuclear weapons against the Ukrainians depicts that they do not consider the cause to be so big that they need to use the nuclear weapons, as also they have considered the consequences and, hence, have been careful in not using them. Further, they can maintain their conventional weapon superiority and there is no existential threat to their territorial sovereignty. However, it does not guarantee that they will not use it in the future. A lot will depend upon their own capacities and capabilities, as also the environment which the West and America weave in Europe.

Russian Nuclear Posture

The Russian state policy, while commenting on nuclear deterrence, has stated that for them, “nuclear deterrence is of a defensive nature, [it is] aimed at maintaining the potential of nuclear forces at a level sufficient to ensure nuclear deterrence, [...] guaranteeing the protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state, [ensuring] deterrence in the event of an outbreak of a military conflict and the preclusion of the escalation of military actions, and [finally] their cessation on conditions acceptable to the Russian Federation and (or) its allies”.³ Further, “the Russian Federation views nuclear weapons exclusively as a means of deterrence, the use of which is an extreme and compelled measure, and is making all the necessary efforts to reduce the

Russian President Putin became more explicit about nuclear issues when he stated that “If the territorial integrity of our country is threatened, we will, without a doubt, use all available means to protect Russia and our people.”

nuclear threat and not allow the aggravation of interstate relations that could provoke military conflicts, including nuclear ones”.⁴ According to this, the actual deployment of weapons by the Russians is under very restrictive conditions, mainly to be used against an existential threat. Having said that, in September 2022, Russian President Putin became more explicit about nuclear issues when he stated that “If the territorial integrity of our country is threatened, we will, without a doubt, use all available means to protect Russia and our people.[...] This is not a bluff”.⁵ This statement was backed by another aggressive nuclear signalling when he mentioned of positioning Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs) in Belarus. Additionally, he also suspended Russian participation in the New START Treaty. He also stated that any country interfering in Ukraine would “face the consequences greater than any of you have faced in history”.⁶ All this depicts the mindset of President Putin. By making nations aware of Russia’s nuclear status, he has prevented the direct involvement of other countries from helping Ukraine. Additionally, President Putin had put Russian nuclear forces on high alert. This is worrisome as it is a known fact that Russia has the largest nuclear weapons arsenal (nearly 4500 nuclear weapons). It has long strategic weapon to counter the US as also a large number of TNWs for regional scenario. However, according to Mr Hans Kristensen, Director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists, “The strategic forces are, most of them, deployed on their launchers. But the tactical weapons, they’re in central storage or, at least, the warheads are in central storage. So, if Russia decided to use nuclear weapons in a scenario in Europe, it would first have to haul these warheads out and bring them to the launchers. But despite Russia’s threats, the intelligence community has not seen any changes in the way that the Russians operate their nuclear forces”.⁷ This was the scenario last year; however, it can quickly change and spiral out, hence all the participants, including Russia, America, and European nations, need to restrain from giving irresponsible statements and indulging in false propaganda.

Global Implications

The Russian-Ukraine military conflict has highlighted the vulnerabilities and dangers of nuclear war. Primarily, the facets are as given below:

- Firstly, the threat of use of nuclear weapons against a NNWS has “re-opened the debate about the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons, a debate in the past that led to somewhat inconclusive results by the International Court of Justice’s (ICJ) opinion of 1996 on the “Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons”.⁸ The ICJ found that: “the threat or use of nuclear weapons ‘would generally be contrary’ to humanitarian and other international law regulating the conduct of warfare”.⁹ It also stated that “[h]owever, in view of the current state of international law, and of the elements of fact at its disposal, the Court cannot conclude definitely whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be lawful or unlawful in an extreme circumstance of self-defence, in which the very survival of a State would be at stake”.¹⁰ This caveat has opened a window, whereby NWS in the garb of survival of the State, may achieve their objectives by manipulating and threatening NNWS. This was visible in the case of Russia, and may happen in future also.
- Secondly, the military conflict has brought to the forefront the safety and security of nuclear power plants. Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant is the largest in Europe with a capacity of 6,000 megawatts of electricity, and shelling has damaged the plant at least six times since the war began, temporarily cutting off the four high-voltage power lines that connect Zaporizhzhia to Ukraine’s energy grid.¹¹ Needless to say that these power lines are essential for preventing a nuclear meltdown and if things go out of hand and cooling systems are compromised, then a Fukushima like situation could become a reality. The members from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have visited Ukraine, and released a report where Director General Raphael Grossi had stated that the IAEA has in their assistance “involved the continuous engagement of the IAEA’s Incident and Emergency Centre; nine IAEA missions to Ukraine; the stationing of IAEA safety and security experts at every Ukrainian nuclear site, including Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant on the front lines of the war; facilitating an international assistance package totalling over €7 million”.¹² The fact that all the pillars of safety and security have been compromised is quiet unnerving. According to the report “Every single one of the IAEA’s seven indispensable pillars for ensuring nuclear safety and security in an armed conflict have been compromised in Ukraine, including the physical integrity of nuclear facilities; the operation of safety and security systems; the working conditions of staff; supply chains, communication channels, radiation monitoring and emergency arrangements; and the crucial off-site power supply”.¹³ Further, although the IAEA Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and Nuclear Facilities criminalises offences related to illicit trafficking and sabotage of nuclear material or nuclear facilities, this convention does not cover attacks on nuclear power plants by state militaries.¹⁴ Although, Article 56 prohibits targeting nuclear electrical generating stations, even where these objects are military objectives¹⁵, however, “the scope of Article 56 is limited to nuclear electrical generating stations, leaving research reactors, transportation of nuclear materials, conversion and enrichment facilities, and spent fuel pools outside the Protocol”.¹⁶ Clearly, there are loopholes.
- Thirdly, the spin off from this war is the possibility of construction of more nuclear power plants due to energy shortages faced by nations’ globally as the supply chain has been disrupted due to war and sanctions. Most countries require to diversify their energy resources and nuclear energy comes up as a major clean resource. Nuclear energy now provides about 10 per cent of the world’s electricity from about 440 power reactors and over 50 countries utilise nuclear energy in about 220 research reactors.¹⁷ In addition to research, these reactors

Every single one of the IAEA’s seven indispensable pillars for ensuring nuclear safety and security in an armed conflict have been compromised in Ukraine, including the physical integrity of nuclear facilities.

are used for the production of medical and industrial isotopes, as well as for training.¹⁸ There are debates of installing Small Modular Reactors (SMR). “SMRs are advanced nuclear reactors that have a power capacity of up to 300 MW(e) per unit, which is about one-third of the generating capacity of traditional nuclear power reactors. SMRs, can produce a large amount of low-carbon electricity”.¹⁹ All this will, thus, result in the increase in the nuclear inventory, including research reactors, fuel cycle facilities, and radioactive sources, hence, the issue of nuclear safety and security will come to the forefront. We already know that proliferation may lead to nuclear terrorism, especially nations becoming vulnerable to ‘Dirty Bombs’. These bombs are ‘Radioactive Dispersal Devices (RDDs)’, or, in other words, a conventional bomb spiked with radioactive material.

- Fourthly, a consequence has been the damage done to nuclear disarmament. If it was the US who withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 2019, it is now the turn of Russia, and Putin said that Russia “is suspending its participation”²⁰ from the New START Treaty. Further, he mentioned that he may also go in for nuclear tests if the US does so. The New START Treaty was the last in the series of nuclear weapons treaties signed between the US and Russia. “The treaty is significant as it is a legally binding, verifiable treaty, limiting each side to 1,550 strategic nuclear warheads deployed on 700 strategic delivery systems (ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers assigned to a nuclear mission) and limiting deployed and nondeployed launchers, including those in overhaul, to 800”.²¹ Regular inspection was already on hold since 2020. Thus, most of the treaties formed during the Cold War era between the two countries have come to an end. However, the Russian foreign ministry announced later on that “Moscow would continue to abide by the limits set by the treaty and would also continue to exchange information with the US on planned launches of intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles under the 1988 Ballistic Missile Launch Notification Agreement”.²² Whether this is a political signalling, or the arms race between the two countries will intensify, needs to be seen.

India has been following a policy of NFU. If all the NWS accept this, it will create less tension and will improve nuclear stability.

Recommendations

Both, the NWS and the NNWS have approached the problem of dealing with nuclear weapons in different ways. For the NWS, it is more to do with the prevention and control of the nuclear weapons through treaties like Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of nuclear weapons (NPT), Seabed Treaty, Outer Space Treaty etc, the objective is to minimise the damage caused from nuclear weapons. Whereas, NNWS want complete elimination of these weapons, one such example is the recently formulated Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons which talks about complete elimination of nuclear weapons. They also have the support of a number of non-governmental organisations who are working through organisations like the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). However, realistically speaking, in the current environment, it is very difficult to abolish nuclear weapons completely, once the genie is out of the bottle it cannot be put back. Therefore, to start with, the options are to negotiate legitimate arms control and create a via media, where both the groups can initiate multilateral dialogues. India was one of the few countries which had understood the impact of nuclear war early on, and, hence, had actively participated in the Conference on Disarmament (CD). The then PM Indira Gandhi had stated that “It is only through nuclear disarmament that discrimination would be eliminated and equality between nations re-established”. Further, PM Rajiv Gandhi had also put an action plan for the phased elimination of nuclear weapons. Had this proposal been followed, today, the world would have been a nuclear free world.

However, notwithstanding, arms control, especially, starting with a certain class of nuclear weapons like the TNW, can be deliberated on. India has been following a policy of NFU. If all the NWS accept this, it will create less tension and will improve nuclear stability. The old Cold War architecture will not work in today’s environment. In the last few years, global trends have changed alarmingly, specifically, the pace of modernisation of weapons and the development

of disruptive and niche technologies. These technological innovations are changing the military landscape, and Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) are bound to transform the nature of warfare leading to a cascading effect globally. Hence, dyadic negotiations will not work. Disarmament/arms control talks need to be more inclusive where countries like China need to take more responsibility.

Nuclear safety and security of power plants during armed conflict is of utmost significance. Though ICJ's Article 56 provides for the security, as mentioned in earlier paragraphs, but the Paragraph 2 provides an exception to the protection of nuclear facilities by ceasing the special protection against attack on nuclear facilities if it provides electric power in regular, significant, and direct support of military operations.²³ So, any power plant near a military base can become collateral damage. Therefore, the discussions should be to create a new legal convention, which can address all these loopholes, as also include caveats to protect fuel reprocessing facilities and protect spent fuel storage facilities. Here one can also learn from the "India-Pakistan Non-Attack Agreement" pact which was signed in December 1988 and according to which "Each party shall refrain from undertaking, encouraging or participating in, directly or indirectly, any action aimed at causing the destruction of, or damage to, any nuclear installation or facility in the other country".²⁴ In order to do so, both the countries every January inform each other of any new nuclear facilities and installations. Both the countries have so far successfully managed their nuclear risks and this bilateral treaty can be studied in the larger global context.

Conclusion

Russian-Ukraine conflict is an unfortunate event, and the responsibility lies with all the stakeholders in not escalating the situation further. The objective should be to bring both the parties to the negotiation table so that a viable solution can be achieved. Here, India can play a positive role as a mediator, as it understands both sides, and can use its good office to mediate and bring this conflict to an end. The conflict has also impacted the nuclear disarmament architecture which needs to be rebuilt. It has opened many questions on nuclear safety and security of nuclear installations during the armed conflict, which require detailed discussion and deliberation.

The discussions should be to create a new legal convention, which can address all these loopholes, as also include caveats to protect fuel reprocessing facilities and protect spent fuel storage facilities.

Endnotes

- 1 Hilpold, Peter, “The Ukraine Crisis and the Nuclear Threat “, September 23, 2022, at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1758-5899.13201>,
- 2 Joseph S Nye S, “Is Nuclear War Inevitable?”, *Opinion, Observer*, at <https://www.omanobserver.om/article/1124714/opinion/international/is-nuclear-war-inevitable>
- 3 Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence, Informal translation by the CNA Russia Studies Program. <https://www.cna.org/reports/2020/06/state-policy-of-russia-toward-nuclear-deterrence>
- 4 Ibid
- 5 W.J. Hennigan/Honolulu, Hi “This Is Not a Bluff.’ Putin Raises Spectre of nuclear weapons Following Battlefield Losses”, *Time Magazine*, September 21, 2022, at <https://time.com/6215610/putin-nuclear-weapons-threat/>.
- 6 N. Srinivasan Rathbun, “Russia is sparking new nuclear threats – understanding non-proliferation history helps place this in context, *The Conversation*, April 07, 2022, at <https://theconversation.com/russia-is-sparking-new-nuclear-threats-understanding-nonproliferation-history-helps-place-this-in-context-180533>
- 7 Sarah McCammon ,Lauren Hodges, & Christopher Intagliata, “Putin has threatened nuclear action. Here’s what Russia is actually capable of”, *npr*, March 08 ,2022, at <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/08/1085248170/putin-has-threatened-to-use-his-nuclear-arsenal-heres-what-its-actually-capable->
- 8 See, I, Hilpold Peter
- 9 Reaching Critical Will, International Court of Justice and its 1996 advisory opinion, at <https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Resources/Factsheets/icj.pdf>
- 10 See, I , Hilpold Peter
- 11 Emily Olson , Ukraine’s top nuclear plant lost power for the sixth time. Is disaster imminent? *npr*, March 9, 2023, at <https://www.npr.org/2023/03/09/1162172158/ukraine-zaporizhzhia-nuclear-power-russia>
- 12 IAEA Releases Report on Nuclear Safety, Security and Safeguards in Ukraine, Feb 23, 2023, at <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/iaea-releases-report-on-nuclear-safety-security-and-safeguards-in-ukraine>
- 13 Ibid
- 14 Luis Rodriguez, Lauren Sukin, “Russian actions at Zaporizhzhia show need for better legal protections of nuclear installations”, *Bulletin of Atomic Scientist*, October 28, 2022, at <https://thebulletin.org/2022/10/russian-actions-at-zaporizhzhia-show-need-for-better-legal-protections-of-nuclear-installations/>
- 15 Ali Alkış, Nuclear Security During Armed Conflict, *Stimson Policy Memo*, Oct 19, 2022, at <https://www.stimson.org/2022/nuclear-security-during-armed-conflict/>
- 16 Ibid
- 17 Nuclear Power in the World Today, updated March 2023, World Nuclear Association, at <https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/current-and-future-generation/nuclear-power-in-the-world-today.aspx>
- 18 Ibid
- 19 Joanne Liou, “What are Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)?”, IAEA, November, 04 2021, at <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/what-are-small-modular-reactors-smrs>
- 20 Charles Maynes ,” Putin says Russia will stop participating in its last nuclear treaty with the U.S.”, *npr*, Feb 21, 2023, at <https://www.npr.org/2023/02/21/1158463688/putin-tells-russian-parliament-the-west-is-fighting-to-dismember-russia>
- 21 U.S.-Russian Nuclear Arms Control Agreements at a Glance, *Arms Control*, Revised in October 2022, at <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/USRussiaNuclearAgreements>
- 22 Andrew Roth, “Putin says Russia will halt participation in New Start nuclear arms treaty”, *The Guardian*, February, 21, 2023, at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/21/putin-russia-halt-participation-new-start-nuclear-arms-treaty>
- 23 See Luis Roudriugez
- 24 India-Pakistan Non-Attack Agreement, December 31, 1988, at https://www.nti.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/india_pakistan_non_attack_agreement.pdf

Ukraine Conflict: Long Term Global Economic Impact and Strategic Repercussions

Dr Rajan Katoch, IAS (Retd) @

Abstract

The long-drawn-out conflict in Ukraine, by its very nature and scope, will have huge global repercussions regardless of the outcome. The costs of the conflict are going to be immense, and the long-term economic impact will be felt in many ways, across many regions. The conflict may presage the beginning of a period of major churning of the world economy and consequent shifts in the global power balance. It may well end up leading to a decline in the strategic influence of the countries that dominate the existing global order.

Introduction

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is turning out to be the longest conflict of its kind. No one expected this conflict to last so long. As yet, there is no prospect of a negotiated peace on the horizon. This is a conflict that, by its very nature and scope, will have huge global repercussions, regardless of what actually happens in the fighting. The longer it lasts, the greater the global impact will be, and the wider the repercussions.

The proximate conflict is a conventional military battle on the ground in Ukraine. There is also a proxy war being waged. The United States (US) and its allies, Europe including the United Kingdom (UK), the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), are all backing Ukraine. This backing is in the form of financial support and direct military assistance to the Ukrainian side for the conduct of the operations, and in the form of sanctions against its adversary Russia. The broader conflict is essentially between the Western world, and its allies, versus Russia.

The costs of the conflict are going to be immense, and the destructive impact will take a long time to overcome. Already, supply disruptions due to the conflict have led to turmoil in commodity and financial markets all over the world. Prices and availability of essentials like oil, gas, food, fertilisers etc. have been impacted adversely in importing countries. Path-breaking financial and trade sanctions have fractured the world in unprecedented ways. Beyond the immediate, longer-term reverberations of the conflict will result in unanticipated power shifts.

Global Growth and Inflation

What is the big picture on the global economy? According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF)¹, global growth is projected to decline from 6 percent in 2021 to an estimated 2.7 percent in 2023. Average global inflation levels will remain high in the near future. Recession is a strong possibility. We are looking at a period ahead of reduced prosperity,

@ Dr Rajan Katoch, IAS (Retd) is a former Secretary Heavy Industry, Government of India. In the course of a distinguished civil service career, he has served in the Finance and Commerce Ministries, and on deputation to the World Bank. A student of economics, Dr. Katoch writes regularly on topical economic issues.

less employment and more suffering for the common man all over, even in developed countries. The trends are already being seen.

The Sanctions Regime

The Western powers led by the US, including the EU, UK and other alliance partners like Japan and Australia, have imposed severe and unprecedented financial, trade, and transportation sanctions on Russia. More than the direct impact of the fighting, the long-term global repercussions of the conflict will result from the sweeping sanctions regime put in place by the Western world.

A special feature of this sanctions regime is that it is for the first time finance and trade have been weaponised in the manner they have. Further, an unprecedented, whole-of-society economic war has been unleashed on Russia. Both the economy and society have, in a sense, been weaponised.

Russian foreign exchange reserves (denominated in US dollars) have been frozen; about half of Russia's foreign exchange reserves of about US \$ 630 billion have been so impounded.² Russian banks have been cut off from making interbank settlements through Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecom (SWIFT), the global standard for the purpose. Notably, such steps were not taken even at the height of the Cold War.

Again, for the first time, private sector enterprises based in US/EU jurisdictions have been wielded as an economic weapon. Private entities doing business in Russia were directed to exit the country by their own governments, putting aside commercial considerations. Tech giants like Apple and Tesla, energy multinationals like Shell and Exxon, IT companies like IBM and Apple, credit card majors like Visa and MasterCard, consumer brands like McDonalds and Coca-Cola have all had to stop operating in Russia.

A special feature of this sanctions regime is that it is for the first time finance and trade have been weaponised in the manner they have. Further, an unprecedented, whole-of-society economic war has been unleashed on Russia. Both the economy and society have, in a sense, been weaponised.

There is an embargo on transportation to and from Russia. Movement of essential commodities through shipping has been curtailed. Transit through European airspace is blocked for Russian airlines, and transit through Russian airspace is blocked for Western airlines. This means longer routes, and higher costs of East-West air movement.

Sanctions also target individual Russians outside Russia. Assets of 'oligarchs' i.e., rich businessmen of Russian origin, have been summarily seized or dispossessed. Prominent Russian personalities like sportsmen, artists etc. are being denied participation in international events. Media is being tightly controlled, and discordant voices kept muffled.

Yes, financial sanctions against Russia will impact their economy. However, the impact has been less damaging to Russia than envisaged by the West. Indications are that these sanctions may continue for a long time, even after cessation of hostilities. The longer the sanctions continue, the more difficult will the situation become for all concerned. Not just the Russian economy, the economies of countries that have hitherto had significant trade with Russia (including the Western countries) will also be affected.

Energy

The biggest impact of the sanctions is on the oil and gas markets. Russia is the world's third biggest oil exporter, after the US and Saudi Arabia, and the second largest gas exporter after the US. While all oil importing countries have had to face the resultant disruptions, European countries that are a party to the conflict are having a particularly tough time.

Europe has been heavily reliant on cheap Russian gas. Russian supplies hitherto met up to 40 percent of Europe's demand for gas. Under pressure of the anti-Russia sanctions, European countries have had to curtail (though not stop) imports from Russia. Energy shortages have resulted, and will continue for quite some time. Alternate sources becoming available, such as Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) supply from the US, will cost much, much more. European countries are managing by cutting supplies, raising prices, reviving coal plants, and subsidising consumers with large budgetary expenditures. An estimated Euro 330 billion has already been spent by EU states to shield consumers from higher prices³. With gas being the main source of heating energy, it looks like winters are going to be a lot colder in Europe for a while. Increased government expenditures, coupled with oil and gas shortages will hit industry and create economy-wise inflationary pressures.

With disruption in the supplier-consumer relationship between Russia and Europe, the US has acquired new markets for its gas exports in Europe. Two thirds of the additional LNG supply to Europe is coming from the US.⁴ However, this has only added to the inflationary pressures. On the other hand, Russia, the target of the sanctions, is not doing too badly. Russia saw a 34 percent increase in budget revenues from hydrocarbon production and exports in 2022.⁵ It is continuing to sell reduced quantities of oil and gas to Europe at higher prices, and has found large new markets for its oil in Asia. In the long term, this shift is likely to be a stable arrangement for Russia, allowing it to brush off the intended effect of the energy sanctions.

The exports have been blocked affecting food supply in import-reliant countries like Turkey, Egypt, Bangladesh, and many countries in Africa and South East Asia.

Food and Commodities

The food and commodity markets are in turmoil. Russia and Ukraine put together account for about a third of global wheat and corn exports. In edible oils, almost the entire global sunflower exports originate from these two countries. These exports have been blocked affecting food supply in import-reliant countries like Turkey, Egypt, Bangladesh, and many countries in Africa and South East Asia. Prices of sunflower oil as well as most other substitute edible oilseeds are shooting up. Again, supply shortages here affect importing regions as far away as Africa. In the long run, the denial of foodgrains from Russia to subsistence level countries may be unsustainable to maintain in view of the human suffering caused.

Russia is a significant fertiliser exporter. There will be problems for the countries that rely on imported fertiliser. These include large consumers such as Brazil and India. In view of the large share of Russia in global exports of these commodities, we may expect a tight supply situation to continue in importing countries. If the situation continues, more bilateral government-to-government deals between the exporters and the markets are possible.

Money and Finance

The economic sanctions will have a major long-term effect on the global finance. Most countries hold foreign exchange reserves that represent the earnings of a country from the goods and services exported by it to other countries. Most such reserves are held in dollars since the dollar is regarded as the universally acceptable currency. What has happened now is that if the dollar issuing country so desires, such reserves belonging to a country can be just taken away. This is surely going to be a cause of concern to any non-Western country with relatively large foreign exchange reserves (e.g. China, India, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Indonesia) who may at some point of time happen to be on the wrong side of the US. It would lead to a lessening of the confidence in the dollar as a reserve currency, and encourage countries with large dollar reserves to diversify their holdings. Eventually, it will lead to the weakening of the dollar's historically dominant status in the world economy.

One major force reinforcing the dollar as the world's reserve currency has been the petrodollar. By an agreement with the US⁶, Saudi Arabia agreed to sell its oil only in exchange for dollars. Later, all of the Organisation of Petroleum

Exporting Countries (OPEC) countries followed suit. This arrangement also meant that oil-importing countries also had to stock dollar reserves to pay for its oil. Today, the US has reduced its dependence on Saudi oil, while China constitutes about 25 percent of the market. Saudi Arabia is reportedly⁷ seriously considering accepting yuan, in addition to the dollar, as payment for oil. If this happens, it may be the beginning of the unraveling of unquestioned dollar supremacy. Other efforts are on to bypass the dollar, like the alternative rupee-rouble payment settlement mechanism being worked out by India and Russia for bilateral oil trade.

The action on SWIFT is equally significant. SWIFT is a financial messaging protocol that enables secure and quick worldwide money transfers to happen. SWIFT is run by an ‘independent’ cooperative society registered in Belgium promoted by a consortium of US and European central banks. Over time, it has evolved as a widely acceptable facility that has become the de facto industry standard for enabling international money transactions. Complying with an American led directive, the ‘independent’ SWIFT overnight cut off Russian banks from their network. As a result, today SWIFT is no longer ‘worldwide’ in scope. It is now being realised by the rest of the world that what was hitherto thought to be a convenient and neutral technical facility can be easily weaponised against a country on purely political considerations. Non-Western countries are understandably worried.

This opens up room for parallel systems to fill the gap. Russia and China have similar systems, the Structured Finance Messaging Solution (SFMS) and Centralised integrated Payment System (CIPS), but with limited reach. Russia is pushing use of SFMS to bypass sanctions, and also thinking of developing a blockchain based messaging system, the ‘golden rouble’ linked to gold. However, wider acceptability of a Russian or Chinese system will be a problem. India has the technical capabilities, having put in place far more complex domestic systems like RTGS/NEFT and the UPI. It is learnt that Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is exploring the possibility of floating an international payment settlement system.⁸ It is possible, and worth attempting.⁹ While SWIFT has the first mover advantage and is not going away anytime soon, it is likely that sooner or later an alternative with acceptability in the non-Western world may emerge.

INSTC illustrates how the changed geopolitical situation is reshaping the world economy. In the long term, the new trade linkages will also enhance strategic space for all the countries involved.

Trade and Transit

The sanctions and de facto economic blockade of Russia have cut off or restricted communication linkages across a large part of the globe. This increases costs of movement and transportation for all countries, and disrupts established supply chains. The way things are going, with a maximalist hardline policy being adopted by the countries of the NATO alliance, there is a strong possibility of the increasing segmentation of world trade, transport, communications and the internet continuing even after the crisis is over. Countries that are able to successfully straddle the fault lines of the emerging fragmented world will gain at the expense of those that find themselves on one side of the divide.

For example, the sanctions regime has led to redoubled efforts by Russia and Iran to develop the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC).¹⁰ The corridor will be a multimodal sanctions-proof trade route from Moscow through Central Asia to the Iranian ports of Bandar Abbas and (eventually) Chabahar, enabling sea linkages to India also. INSTC illustrates how the changed geopolitical situation is reshaping the world economy.¹¹ In the long term, the new trade linkages will also enhance strategic space for all the countries involved.

Armament Industry

For the European countries, as part of the NATO alliance against Russia, there is now a sharp escalation in threat perception from Russia. European countries will be spending a lot more on arms, much of it sourced from the US. Even normally pacifist Germany, which had invested heavily in building a relationship with Russia, has decided to spend an additional Euro 100 billion on armaments.¹² It goes without saying that this would be at the expense of spending on

development and welfare. Similarly, other EU countries are also upping their military spending with similar trade-offs. Europeans also have to bear the burden of the refugee influx caused by the displacement of populations due to the conflict. The US is flooding the war zone with modern weapons, with over \$ 40 billion committed for the purpose.¹³ This is a bonanza for their arms manufacturers, which include the biggest names in US industry like Boeing, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, and General Electric. In the long term too, the US seems to have successfully created a huge and continuing additional demand in Europe for its weapons industry.

Multilateralism and the Global Economic Order

The current set of anti-Russia economic sanctions strike at the heart of the international capitalist order based on trust in open global trade and business, and sanctity of ownership of private property across borders. There was till now a broad consensus on the working of the economic order. Even countries with different domestic systems like China, Russia, Saudi Arabia essentially played by the rules of the game. This is set to change fundamentally. In the new dispensation, mere ownership of assets won't be enough; you have to be on the right side of the Western world. As mentioned earlier, the seizure of assets and dollar reserves of an adversary country will inevitably lead to questions on the status of the dollar as a universally acceptable currency.

A unique feature of the sanctions is that now hitherto sacrosanct international and intergovernmental commercial contracts can be easily repudiated, never mind international law! Putting aside their own commercial considerations, private sector behemoths of the US and Europe operating in Russia have been roped into the sanctions regime willy-nilly. This weaponising of private sector entities may eventually threaten their trans-national credibility. The ease with which foreign investors have complied regardless of their contractual and legal obligations, and the arbitrariness by which time-honoured rules of the game can be changed overnight by an American diktat is going to worry others outside the Western ambit. Today, Russia is the target. Tomorrow, someone else may be at the receiving end. The idea of multilateralism may lose its appeal for many.

Russia may be able to tighten its belt and tide through the sanctions regime, albeit at a reduced level of living. It is unlikely to be crushed into strategic irrelevance, as hoped by the West.

The Strategic Repercussions

The economies of both the combatants on the ground, Ukraine and Russia, are going to be hard hit. The cost of Russia's "special military operation" is estimated by Western analysts to have crossed \$ 82 billion.¹⁴ Even allowing for overestimation, it is evident that the economic sanctions would lead to costs that would not be easy to mitigate. Some of the costs would be offset by the increased profits being earned by Russia from the high price of oil and gas. But with prospects of the war continuing, and sanctions perhaps outlasting the cessation of hostilities, there is near term economic pain ahead for Russia. The availability of high technology inputs for key industries as well as consumer goods will be squeezed, there will be shortages, and things will cost more.

Nevertheless, being a large country with immense natural resources, Russia may be able to tighten its belt and tide through the sanctions regime, albeit at a reduced level of living. It is unlikely to be crushed into strategic irrelevance, as hoped by the West. Contrary to initial expectations, the impact on the rouble and the contraction in GDP are both turning out to be relatively marginal.¹⁵ In the medium and long term, the importance of being a commodity producing country in the new world economic environment is only going to grow. Russia is endowed with vast oil, gas and mineral deposits that are needed for the modern world to function. Seeking to exclude Russia will lead to painful adjustments for the West. The forces of demand and supply will ensure that sanctions or no sanctions, commodities and resources will find their way to where there is a requirement. Iran is a classic example. With the drawing of new lines of hostility, global peace appears to be a far cry!

Being the theatre of war, Ukraine and the Ukrainians are suffering the most. The country's infrastructure is being destroyed. GDP is expected to contract by a third this year. An early estimate of the World Bank had put the reconstruction bill for Ukraine at about \$ 350 billion.¹⁶ The government estimates it needs \$ 7 billion every month in foreign assistance just to stay afloat.¹⁷ The human cost is incalculable. Whatever remains of Ukraine, post-conflict will be entirely dependent on Western aid, which may or may not be commensurate with the needs. Further, regardless of the outcome, Ukraine is now firmly on the front lines of conflict and will remain a regional flashpoint for years to come.

Amongst the Western countries, the blowback effect of the sanctions will be felt most in Europe, including the UK. Mainland Europe in particular had built up deep economic linkages with Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and had benefited from it. The long-term economic interests of Europe still lie in stronger economic linkages with Russia. However, the current situation is forcing them to snap these linkages, forego the benefits that these linkages entailed, and also contribute financially to the NATO's war effort. European industry may see a period of decline as a result. The common man will suffer in the form of layoffs and higher prices.

The forces unleashed by the sanctions are working at cross-purposes with intrinsic national economic interests in Europe, and this may lead to a fracturing of European unity. Already, Turkey, Hungary, and Serbia are forging their own path based on a more hardheaded appreciation of their own interests. At some point, the fissures will show in major European countries too, especially when they face domestic voter pressures due to economic decline and social unrest. In the medium term, expect a period of turbulence in Europe.

Europe will have to bear the burden of refugees, and the responsibility for reconstruction of Ukraine. It will become politically and economically more dependent on the US in a manner it wasn't before. This will weaken its position as an independent power bloc, and thereby it's standing in the rest of the world, eventually reducing its strategic options. The US is actively driving the hardline economic sanctions against Russia. The US is a gainer from the conflict in the short term, mostly at the expense of European countries. It has found in Europe, new growth markets for exports, particularly LNG and arms. It has successfully scuttled the growing Russia-Europe trade partnership, and reinforced instead American military and economic links with Europe. No wonder that the US would like to continue fighting *'to the last Ukrainian'*. But in the longer-term, the US may be slipping. Pressures on supply of energy and food are leading to record domestic inflation levels of around 8 percent. The weaponisation of private sector entities may eventually threaten the trans-national credibility of these entities. The role of the dollar as the world's reserve currency itself is likely to become shaky if the petrodollar arrangement unravels, and other countries attempt alternative currency arrangements.

The long-term economic interests of Europe still lie in stronger economic linkages with Russia. However, the current situation is forcing them to snap these linkages, forego the benefits that these linkages entailed, and also contribute financially to the NATO's war effort.

The present focus on Russia as an adversary also means a dilution of focus on China. The US formally recognises in its National Security Strategy¹⁸ that its principal economic, technological and military challenge in the future is going to be from China. In reviving Cold War hostilities with gusto, maybe the US has lost sight of its main challenger. This might cost it dearly in the years to come. Alternately, China stands to benefit overall from the new US focus on Russia. The China juggernaut is faltering due to its own misguided domestic policies such as the Zero Covid Policy, and would have been under further pressure with the hardening of US positions and moves for denial of high technology by the West. However, with its sizable domestic economy, manufacturing capabilities, close relationship to Russia, and potential weakening of the US dominated global financial order, China may well bounce back once the conflict is over.

India too has advantages, in that its historical relationship with Russia, and present strategic utility to the US may enable it to ride out the storm relatively unscathed, despite pressures from the West. India is prudently staying on the sidelines of the conflict, and seeking to derive national economic advantage out of a tricky situation.

Barring the oil-producing countries, for the rest of the developing world in Africa, Asia, and South America, there will be hard times for quite some time. Significantly, most of the non-Western world has been less than enthusiastic about the anti-Russia tirade of the West. Still, they will have to put up with shortages of food, essential commodities, and tackle domestic inflation. The spectre of economic distress like Sri Lanka may stare some vulnerable countries in the face, potentially causing political instability. In this flux, there may be opportunities for major, non-Western, players to gain influence in affected countries by supporting them in their time of need.

Finally, as a result of the decisions taken by the Western alliance under the whole-of-society sanctions, the narrative around their professedly 'universal values and consequent moral high ground will receive a setback. These 'universal values' seem to have been summarily jettisoned when it suited the national interests of the countries propagating them. Steps have been taken like repudiation of international contracts, seizing of private property, targeting of uninvolved individuals, curbing of media freedom, and giving the go by to environment concerns. Such steps can only lead to a loss of confidence in the so-called 'rules-based order'; an order that had been held out as a model for countries to emulate. This might be a major inflection point in the battle between competing worldviews for the mindspace of the world.

As a result of the decisions taken by the Western alliance under the whole-of-society sanctions, the narrative around their professedly 'universal values and consequent moral high ground will receive a setback. These 'universal values' seem to have been summarily jettisoned.

Conclusion

The present capitalist global order, driving greater economic integration, has been in place since the Second World War. While this economic order is dominated by the rich democratic Western countries that created the architecture, it has been generally accepted even by countries that have different domestic political systems. Clarity in the rules of the game brought about a long period of relative stability. It also ensured the dominance of the custodians of the order. The fallout of the current set of economic and societal sanctions resulting from the Ukraine conflict will be that countries may now begin questioning the rules of the game. Continuing segmentation of commerce, communications, and the internet, more financial turmoil, shifts in relative economic power are all in the offing. Consequently, we may be seeing the beginning of a period of major churning of the world economy. In this churning, the very process of globalisation and the rules-based order will be set back. This set back will lead to a decline in the strategic influence of its custodian countries that dominate the existing order. Other major players quick to pick up the opportunities that may arise as a result, will benefit.

It is axiomatic that economic strength determines the ability of a country to project comprehensive national power. The differential economic impact of the conflict will, thus, inevitably result in strategic power shifts. Indications so far are that these power shifts will be away from the Western world. The long-term repercussions of these forces at play may end up diminishing the very powers that set these forces in motion. Future historians looking back at this era will have much to ponder about. They will wonder why the US-led Western alliance was so avidly pursuing policies that could potentially undermine the very architecture that had ensured its global dominance for so long. To put it in words generally attributed to Mao, "*Sometimes the enemy strives mightily to lift a huge stone only to drop it on its own feet*".

Endnotes

- 1 World Economic Outlook, International Monetary Fund, October 2022, available at <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO>
- 2 Statement by Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov, *Reuters*, 13 March 2022 available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-russia-reserves-idUSL5N2VG0BU>
- 3 IEA (2022), How to Avoid Gas Shortages in the European Union in 2023, IEA, Paris <https://www.iea.org/reports/how-to-avoid-gas-shortages-in-the-european-union-in-2023>
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 ‘Does Russia have enough Money for War?’ Al Jazeera, 5 December 2022, available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/12/5/does-russia-have-enough-money-for-war>
- 6 ‘What is the Petrodollar’, *The Balance*, 4 June 2022 available at <https://www.thebalancemoney.com/what-is-a-petrodollar-3306358> accessed on 8 November 2022
- 7 ‘Saudi Arabia Considers Accepting Yuan Instead of Dollars for Chinese Oil Sales,’ *The Wall Street Journal*, 15 March 2022, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-arabia-considers-accepting-yuan-instead-of-dollars-for-chinese-oil-sales-11647351541> accessed on 8 November 2022
- 8 ‘Payment Vision 2025,’ *Reserve Bank of India*, available at <https://www.rbi.org.in/Scripts/PublicationVisionDocuments.aspx?Id=1202#S4.5>
- 9 Rajan Katoch, ‘An Indian Alternative to Swift?’ *Rising Kashmir*, 13 April 2022 available at <http://risingkashmir.com/an-indian-alternative-to-swift>
- 10 ‘The Political Economics of the International North-South Transport Corridor,’ *The Wire*, 30 June 2022, available at <https://thewire.in/world/political-economics-international-north-south-transport-corridor-india-iran-russia>
- 11 ‘Russia and Iran sail past Sanctions on Caspian Trade Route,’ *Bloomberg*, December 21, 2022, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2022-12-21/supply-chain-latest-russia-and-iran-build-caspian-trade-route>
- 12 ‘German Lawmakers approve Euro 100 billion Military Revamp’, *Reuters*, June 3, 2022, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/german-lawmakers-approve-100-bln-euro-military-revamp-2022-06-03/>
- 13 ‘Biden signs \$40 billion aid package to Ukraine,’ *CNBC*, 21 May 2022, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/21/biden-signs-40-billion-aid-package-for-ukraine-during-trip-to-asia.html>
- 14 ‘In Nine Months, Russia spent \$ 82 billion on the War,’ *Forbes Ukraine*, November 24, 2022, available at <https://forbes.ua/war-in-ukraine/za-devyat-misyatsiv-rosiya-vitratila-na-viynu-82-mlrd-tse-chvert-i-richnogo-byudzhetu-rozrakhunki-forbes-24112022-9997>
- 15 Country Report 2022 – Russian Federation, International Monetary Fund, available at <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/RUS>
- 16 The World Bank, 9 September 2022, available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/09/09/ukraine-recovery-and-reconstruction-needs-estimated-349-billion>
- 17 Volodymyr Zelensky quoted in ‘Ukraine War: Country needs \$ 7 billion a Month in Aid, Zelensky says’, *BBC*, 22 April 2022, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-61184275>
- 18 US National Security Strategy, *The White House*, October 2022, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

The Collaborative Potential of the I2U2 Group

Dr Ghazzala Shabbana @

Abstract

India is making necessary moves toward integrating the Jewish state into its broader Middle East agenda. It's almost three decades since the then PM PV Narasimha Rao broke the convention and normalised ties with Israel. The Indian Government had previously considered Israel while handling the American Government. External Affairs Minister (EAM) engaged in a virtual teleconference with his counterparts from the UAE, the USA, and Israel during his five-day visit to Israel in October 2021. The conference's goal was to establish the framework for a broader regional strategy, with Israel as the centre. In addition, circumstantial evidence suggests that nations with comparable belief systems, such as France, Egypt, Jordan, and Bahrain, might participate in the so-known 'multilateral'. The different, relatively young and modest 'Quad', composed of India, Israel, the UAE and the United States, referred to as I2U2, is progressive, avoids confrontation, and is likely to continue, albeit in baby steps. This article examines the potential of this grouping.

Introduction

The I2U2 group of four countries held their first virtual summit on 14 July 2022 with the US President Joe Biden's visit to Israel, with 'I2' standing for India and Israel and 'U2' for the US and the UAE. The summit-level talks were a necessary push as the introduction of I2U2 foreign ministers in October 2021 was followed by a lull despite many pundits labelling this new setup as the 'Middle East Quad' (or 'West Asia Quad'). The four-member countries selected six crucial areas of cooperation for this engagement's next phase. Cooperation initiatives in the sectors of water, energy, food security, health, transportation, and space cooperation have been recognised as the first set of issues operating under more significant global issues like international economic stability, volatile energy markets, climate change, and food outlets that have disproportionately impacted the Global South in comparison to the more developed nations. The Israeli Prime Minister said this Quad is the best structure for quick decision-making, implying that more influential organisations like the United Nations (UN) or the G20 cannot move quickly and decisively in an increasingly complicated world. On his visit to the Middle East, the US President addressed the first summit of this unique alliance. Foreign ministers from the I2U2 met in the fall of 2021 to discuss global issues about water, transportation, space, and food and energy security through bolstering technological and private-sector collaboration. However, beyond introducing a food security initiative and a hybrid renewable energy plant for India, little information was disclosed concerning the future of I2U2.

@ Dr Ghazzala Shabbana has worked as an Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi. She is a Post-Doctoral Fellow from, Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI), New Delhi. Her areas of interest are International Relations, Geo-politics and Water Conflict in West Asia. She has presented papers in International and national Seminars and contributed research papers to reputed journals. She has published a book 'Conflict over Water in West Asia - Sharing of Trans-Border Rivers'. She is currently a Field Investigator, Department of Defence Studies, Meerut College, Meerut and Visiting Fellow, at the USI, New Delhi.

India, USA, and the Middle East Partnership as a Game Changer in I2U2

In recent years, the friendship between India and Israel has been strengthening. Both Israel and the USA too must endeavour to enhance it following the recent inauguration of the latest Israeli Government. The economic repercussions of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in February 2022, have reignited interest in the Middle East's rich oil reserves. Moreover, the struggle between China and the USA has highlighted India's critical position on the global stage, which might tip the balance in favour of any of the two superpowers. Likewise, the Abraham Accords are an unmistakable sign of the seismic changes unfolding in the Middle East. By embracing the I2U2 partnership with the UAE and Israel, India has increased its regional hegemony and strengthened its ties with the USA.

The inaugural summit conference of the new mini-lateral grouping termed 'I2U2' was held virtually on 14 July 2022 and was attended by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of Israel Yair Lapid, President of the UAE Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and the US President Joe Biden. Following the Minister of External Affairs' trip to Israel in October 2021, the delegations of the four nations met in a quadrilateral format to continue the process begun at that time.¹ It was decided to establish a new quadrilateral forum for "expanding political and economic collaboration in the Middle East and Asia, including commerce, tackling climate change, energy collaboration, and rising maritime safety", with Yair Lapid, then Israel's foreign minister and Indian foreign minister in attendance in person and the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed participating virtually.² The India-US 2+2 meeting in April 2022 in Washington "welcomed the chance to increase interaction" between the four nations "on common goals such as food security, renewable energy, waste disposal, and infrastructure investment" via the new quadrilateral platform.³

Likewise, the Abraham Accords are an unmistakable sign of the seismic changes unfolding in the Middle East. By embracing the I2U2 partnership with the UAE and Israel, India has increased its regional hegemony and strengthened its ties with the USA.

There are several reasons why the I2U2's release is noteworthy. First and foremost, it shows that all four nations have agreed to cooperate on a cooperative structure to improve human security in the Middle East. Therefore, this cluster prioritises water, energy, transportation, space, health, and food security issues.⁴ The mini-lateral initiative's overarching goal is to promote geo-economic cooperation between the four nations to pool their resources and expertise to create innovative responses to regional concerns. The new bloc's formation also affects regional politics and the relationships among regional and global powers. It promotes what has been called an "Indo-Abrahamic Alliance", in keeping with the spirit of the Abraham Accords made in September 2020.⁵ This entails concerted efforts by like-minded world powers to find mutually beneficial solutions to pressing regional issues.

The Geo-economics of I2U2

I2U2 was made possible by the 2020 signing of the Abraham Accords, which established a partnership and cooperation between Israel and a coalition of Arab Gulf governments headed by the UAE. The group's objective is to develop collaboration in areas of mutual benefit to each other's economy. Therefore, Israel can now capitalise on the financial power of hotspots such as Dubai to sell its globally renowned technical services. And, the first to enjoy the rewards of this development has been the Gulf States themselves, as the desire for Israeli defence equipment surges throughout the region. According to media reports, states like Bahrain are examining Israeli drones and anti-drone weaponry to counter Iran's threat. However, most countries, including Israel, the UAE, and some other Gulf States, depend mainly on imports to satisfy their fundamental requirements.

Due to the disturbances in worldwide supply chains created by the previous COVID-19 outbreak, Russia's conflict in Ukraine, and increased attempts to diversify worldwide productive base away from China, a greater emphasis is being put on "mini-laterals" such as I2U2 and similar institutions. One of the outcomes of the summit was that the United Arab Emirates pledged \$ 2 billion towards the construction of cutting-edge integrated and balanced food

parks in regions across India. Additionally, their domestic partnerships shelter them from the tighter and much more complicated global standards which regulate commodities trading. With Abu Dhabi's ascent to significance — becoming the most influential Arab capital in cartel-like situations like 'OPEC and OPEC+' — India should turn to the UAE and (tacitly) the United States for a more prominent voice in these organisations. Through the UAE and (tangentially) the United States, India should also seek to expand its impact. The objective is to meet India's and the Gulf's energy and food security demands.

Strategic Advantages of I2U2 and Difficulties

Even while the I2U2 will continue to be significant in the future, New Delhi understands that it would be the odd man out in terms of the regional geopolitics of the Middle East. Most of the Arab nations want to create a new strategic architecture with the US that would protect them in case of an armed confrontation with Iran. Maintaining a significant presence while staying out of the military conflict would be a fine balancing act for the US in that region. India is embroiled in an Israel-Arab security agreement sponsored and endorsed by the US, which would jeopardise its 'strategic autonomy' in the Middle East. Non-alignment is still crucial to India's West Asia policy, even if it is a discredited idea. The Abraham Accords have stabilised the region since they were signed, but they have also formed two significant blocs, one of which is Iran and the other of which is now regarded as anti-Iran. The UAE continues to work closely with Tehran on several issues despite ancillary diplomacies, such as Saudi Arabia's talks with Iran that Baghdad sponsored. These issues are visible from more than just the perspective of New Delhi. Concerns have also been voiced in Europe, where scholars have advised European governments to keep working towards a continental de-escalation rather than copying Washington and embracing a Gulf-Israeli defence accord.

In 2023, India is hosting two significant global diplomatic events that the press and the academicians will extensively cover, making it an exceptional year for the country. The two summits in question are the SCO summit and the G20 summit.

I2U2's Present and Future

It has often been said that there are no permanent friends or enemies in politics and that ambition is the only element that persists. In geopolitics, 'convergence for profit' trumps 'convergence of philosophy'. States unify when they realise that cooperating is more beneficial than competing. All of this, however, is easier said than done. This is because sometimes partnering with one country to promote one's interests might jeopardise that country's relationships with other countries and, therefore, those interests. In 2023, India is hosting two significant global diplomatic events that the press and the academicians will extensively cover, making it an exceptional year for the country. The two summits in question are the SCO⁶ summit and the G20⁷ summit. However, the real question is why India receives so much attention and enthusiasm for hosting two major events simultaneously. It is more connected to the orientation of the two entities (G20 and SCO) than their composition.

While the G20 primarily reflects the triumph of western imperialism, the SCO is more concerned with states such as China and Russia that oppose western domination. In specific ways, the two groups disagree, if not actively oppose one another. However, India continues to feel comfortable adhering to both groups. According to academics, this is a triumph for India's multi-alignment/multilateralism approaches. Its involvement in the I2U2 summit demonstrates this mentality of multilateralism well.

The I2U2 is primarily concerned with the global economy and people's safety. The common areas for collaboration are the population and abundance of natural resources, especially fossil fuels and minerals. However, these partner countries are susceptible to climate change and environmental instability and have recurring geopolitical and socioeconomic problems.⁸ In the recent decade, conflicts and armed conflicts have erupted in the region in countries such as Lebanon, Libya, Iraq, Yemen and Syria.⁹ The I2U2 consequently provides a new paradigm for intergovernmental

cooperation in enhancing human security circumstances. I2U2 emphasises the significance of introducing global and regional prerogatives to build the foundation for collaborative efforts in commerce, industry, infrastructure investment, interconnection, and innovative technological remedies to nutrition and nourishment, water, resources, and health and medical security problems.¹⁰

All four members of I2U2 possess attributes that, when joined, might provide the impetus required to establish human security as a significant priority. The US is an important military power and an economic and technological superpower. It has the most important diplomatic and strategic influence, and its industry is the most interwoven with neighbouring countries. This makes it the foremost international actor in the Middle East.¹¹ Moreover, the UAE has become an economic giant due to its expertise in the shift to a post-oil society.¹² Due to its creative mix of hydrocarbon reserves and clean and renewable energy technology expenditures, the UAE is at the leading edge of the international energy business. Israel's cutting-edge research and technological expertise have catapulted the nation to the vanguard of start-up company development in irrigation and water resource management, sustainable farming, and sewage disposal.¹³ After the first I2U2 summit meeting in July 2022, the gathering issued a united statement outlining its goals; this included “galvanising private enterprise capital and knowledge to revitalise transportation system, advancing low-carbon investment passageways for our industry segments, improving public health and connect directly to vaccines, promoting interconnectivity among nations of the Middle East Region, collectively creating new waste management strategies treatment, exploring joint funding sources, connecting the Middle East region to the rest of the world”, among other objectives (public health, modernise infrastructure, advance low carbon development pathways for industries, and increase access to vaccines).¹⁴ During the first I2U2 summit meeting, two projects addressing food security and sustainable energy were revealed.

Given the present regional geopolitical situation, this new quadrilateral organisation faces the urgent question of ‘to what degree a collaboration structure within a geo-economic context can be formed?’

The second announcement made after the conference relates to renewable energy. In Gujarat, I2U2 plans to construct a “hybrid renewable energy project” with “300 MW of wind and solar electricity, as well as a battery energy storage system”.¹⁵ The United States Trade and Development Agency conducted a feasibility study to attract enterprises from all four countries to collaborate on the project's development. Such initiatives have the potential to make India a global hub for alternative supply chains in the renewable energy sector.

Geo-economics and Geo-politics of I2U2

Given the present regional geopolitical situation, this new quadrilateral organisation faces the urgent question of ‘to what degree a collaboration structure within a geo-economic context can be formed?’ This is essential due to the regional pressures, competitions, and hostilities stated earlier. There are many grounds for hope. Nonetheless, the Abraham Accords and the improvement in bilateral agreements between Israel and the UAE, two years after their signature, have created new opportunities for industry and developing commerce within the geo-economic collaboration.¹⁶

I2U2 continues to confront global and regional hurdles. Russia, China, and Iran provide the gravest concerns. To face China's forceful rise, India, Australia, the United States, and Japan have reactivated its Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (often shortened as “Quad”), and some analysts have started to compare and contrast Quad with I2U2, calling the latter the “Middle East Quad”.¹⁷ Beijing's rising worry and Beijing's developing strategic and financial engagement in the Gulf and Middle East Region have prompted rumours that the I2U2 is another geopolitical effort to contain China.¹⁸ Concerns about the I2U2's ability to organise a unified international response to Iran's disrupting regional efforts have been expressed.¹⁹ Moreover, Iran's broadening army and tactical presence in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Palestinian, and Yemen territories, as well as its assistance for local militias and intermediaries and its threats on non-combatant and oil transportation systems in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, have aggravated provincial stabilisation concerns.

Since the US withdrew independently from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 under the Trump administration, escalating tensions between the United States and Iran have compounded the subject of regional security. This retreat triggered a domino effect that resulted in the 2020 assassination of Iranian military leader Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad by a US drone.²⁰ Despite indirect contacts with Iran, the Biden administration has yet to re-enter a nuclear accord inside or outside the limits of the JCPOA. India is hesitant to join any regional geopolitical alliance against Iran due to its strategic concerns in Afghanistan and Central Asia and its expenditures in bilateral relations with Iran. Notably, the building and operation of the Chabahar Port.²¹ Russia's participation is also vital from a geopolitical sense. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has revived the Cold War-era continental mainstream against Moscow and raised European apprehension over Russian territorial expansion and global ambitions.²² In light of Russia's return to the Middle Eastern theatre as a de facto military power in Syria and the significant positive ties between Russia and Iran, as well as between China and Iran, it is plausible to speculate on the upsurge of a Russia-Iran-China alliance to assert the US-led regional and global order.²³

India's Policy towards Middle East

The I2U2 signifies a modest shift in India's perspective on the Middle East. India's participation in I2U2 illustrates that India's approach towards the Middle East is becoming more defined. Political and strategic relations with the region have evolved to establish more excellent cooperative alliances with essential partners to enhance human security. India also hopes to profit from the new multilateral initiative by contributing cutting-edge innovation, technological breakthroughs, and foreign direct investments (FDI) in sustainable energy and food production.

The I2U2 signifies a modest shift in India's perspective on the Middle East. India's participation in I2U2 illustrates that India's approach towards the Middle East is becoming more defined.

The I2U2 also signifies India's growing strategic connections with the United States, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates. During the preceding decade, Indo-US ties have increased substantially due to better bilateral linkages and mutual values in the Indo-Pacific area. Moreover, India's relations with Israel and the UAE have also strengthened in the last decade. Consequently, India is more inclined to study the possibility of regional geo-economic cooperation with 'Washington, Tel Aviv, and Abu Dhabi'.

Conclusion

I2U2 makes sense on paper and in practice. India uses its strong connections with the Gulf, Israel, and the US to develop mutually advantageous commercial interactions with few disadvantages. Realpolitik and geo-economics are intertwined. The I2U2 emphasises mini-lateral efforts and the Middle East's enduring role in world affairs. The new quadrilateral organisation builds on the "Abraham Accord". The I2U2 brings Israel, India, the UAE and the US working together to solve economic and growth problems. US leadership, Israeli ingenuity, UAE's financial strength, and the Indian economy's innovative drive will give a good impetus to the group in its economic issues. First, however, partner nations must navigate geopolitical matters. Despite its shortcomings, the I2U2 is a prognosticating good cross-regional coordination programme that might set a precedent for greater cooperation. As geopolitical circumstances shift suddenly, it may be too premature to forecast the destiny of an informal gathering like I2U2. The club contains two partners (Israel and UAE) from West Asia, an area known for its lengthy sectarian and geo-strategic wars. Strategic players may not be interested in this association as it does not want to become a military force. Indian foreign policy experts don't view coalitions sans military power seriously.

Endnotes

- 1 “First I2U2 (India-Israel-UAE-USA) Leaders’ Virtual Summit”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 12 July 2022.
- 2 “Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken’s Meeting with Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, and Israeli Foreign Minister and Alternate Prime Minister Yair Lapid”, Office of the Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State, 18 October 2021.
- 3 “Joint Statement on the Fourth India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 12 April 2022.
- 4 “Joint Statement of the Leaders of India, Israel, United Arab Emirates, and the United States (I2U2)”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 14 July 2022.
- 5 Mohammed Soliman, “An Indo-Abrahamic Alliance on the rise: How India, Israel, and the UAE are Creating a New Transregional Order”, Middle East Institute, Washington, DC, 28 July 2021.
- 6 The G20 is an informal group of 19 countries and the European Union, with representatives of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The G20 membership comprises a mix of the world’s largest advanced and emerging economies, representing about two-thirds of the world’s population, 85% of global gross domestic product, 80% of global investment and over 75% of global trade.
- 7 The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is an intergovernmental organisation focused on issues of politics, economics, development, and the military. It began in 1996 as the ‘Shanghai Five’ by the leaders of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Currently, the organisation has eight member states - including India, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan in the above list - four Observer States, and six Dialogue Partners. The organisation was renamed the SCO in 2001. Its main aims are to ensure regional security, resolve border issues, counter-terrorism and religious extremism, and enhance regional development, among others.
- 8 Adriana Seagle, “Environmental (In)security in the Middle East”, *E-International Relations*, 15 May 2019.
- 9 “Global Humanitarian Overview 2022: Middle East and North Africa”, UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
- 10 Daniel Markey and Hesham Youssef, “What You Need to Know About the I2U2”, United States Institute of Peace, 28 July 2022.
- 11 “U.S. Power and Influence in the Middle East: Part One”, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 7 March 2022.
- 12 Ashna Mehmood, “UAE’s Economic Progress: A Symbol to Follow”, *Modern Diplomacy*, 2 April 2021.
- 13 Cristina Lago, “How Israel became a tech Powerhouse”, *The New Statesman*, 4 February 2021.
- 14 “Joint Statement of the Leaders of India, Israel, United Arab Emirates, and the United States (I2U2)”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 14 July 2022.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 C. Raja Mohan, “Making a Case for Indo-Abrahamic Accord”, *The Indian Express*, 3 August 2021.
- 17 Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, “A Quad for the Middle East?”, *The Diplomat*, 22 October 2021.
- 18 Imran Khalid, “I2U2: Why US Efforts to Fan the Flames of anti-China Sentiment in West Asia, Middle East are Failing”, *South China Morning Post*, 25 July 2022.
- 19 Geeta Mohan, “Quad came together due to instability caused by Iran in the region: Israeli Envoy to India”, *India Today*, 29 October 2021.

- 20 Md. Muddassir Quamar, “Soleimani’s Killing Redefines US-Iran Rivalry”, *MP-IDS Comment*, 13 January 2020.
- 21 P. R. Kumaraswamy, “How Middle Eastern Quad Can Be a Challenge for India”, *News 18*, 28 June 2022.
- 22 Nicolas Bouchet, “The Impact of the War in Ukraine on the Transatlantic Relationship”, The German Marshal Fund, 10 May 2022.
- 23 Syed Zain Abbas Rizwi, “The Axis of Russia, Iran, and China: Birth of a New World Order?”, *Modern Diplomacy*, 28 July 2022.

ChatGPT: An Emerging Digital Disruption

Brigadier Pawan Bhardwaj, YSM[@] & Mr Mohamed Zaid[#]

Abstract

OpenAI's GPT 4 is the most advanced natural language processing model currently available, with unmatched language finesse and the ability to analyse charts and evaluate its own performance. While there are competitors in the market, but not match the prowess yet. China's failed attempts to launch an indigenous version may force it to take special measures to stay relevant. GPT 4 collects personal and technical information, which it may share with third parties for business operations or legal obligations. While Europe and America have data protection laws, India struggles with political and industry pushbacks. Indian startups are advised to venerate these issues and exhibit ethical self-regulation standards.

GPT - 4 has vast potential for military applications, including data curation, information and cognitive warfare, simplifying complex issues and connecting various aspects of HR, training and operations. It can perform an important role of identifying propaganda material and fake news. Launch of GPT-4 raises humanitarian and labour concerns. With the ability to generate convincing phishing emails, write polymorphic malware, and technical assistance, its potential use in cyberattacks is an existent. It can also be used as an assistive tool for cybersecurity, generating reports and educational materials to improve awareness and identify common misconceptions.

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to performing tasks that require human intelligence, understanding natural language, recognising patterns, making decisions, and solving problems. AI technologies use a combination of machine learning, natural language processing, computer vision, and other techniques to analyse data and generate insights that can help businesses and organisations make better decisions, automate processes, and create new products and services.

One of the most exciting developments is the development of Chat GPT 4, a Natural Language Processing (NLP) model - a subfield that deals with the interaction between humans and machines through natural language. GPT 4 is a continuation of the Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT) family of language models, created by OpenAI, one of the leading organisations in the field of AI research. This model is designed to generate human-like responses to text prompts, making interaction with machines more intuitive and natural. Its development has significant implications for a range of industries, and will influence all walks of human life. However, as with any other technology, its un-regulatory and irresponsible usage is fraught with risks and ethical concerns. This article seeks to provide readers an overview of evolution, appraisal of current state, legal and security implications.

[@] Brigadier Pawan Bhardwaj, YSM is an Infantry Officer with 31 years of service experience. He is a Senior Research Fellow at United Service Institution (USI) of India. He is researching on Employment of AI at Tactical Level. His reading interests include Technology Trends, Information Warfare and Military Training.

[#] Mr Mohamed Zaid is a Research Intern with United Service Institution (USI) of India. A budding scholar and a keen learner, he has special interest in niche technologies with special focus on AI and its applications. He has been selected for Engineering Under Graduate programme at USA.

Evolution of GPT 4

The development of GPT 4 can be traced back to the original GPT model, which was first introduced by OpenAI in 2018. The GPT model was a significant breakthrough in natural language processing, as it was able to generate coherent and realistic responses to text prompts, without the need for explicit supervision. It was based on a transformer architecture, which uses self-attention mechanisms to allow the model to focus on different parts of the input text, depending on the context. The original GPT model was trained on a large corpus of text data, which enabled it to learn the patterns and structures of language and generate responses consistent with the input prompts. The success of the original model led to the development of several versions, finally leading to GPT 4.

GPT 4 is significantly more creative and collaborative, thanks to its increased computational power and the use of more sophisticated techniques. Its neural network architecture consists of an encoder, a decoder, a feed-forward network, and a cross-attention layer.¹ These components generate accurate and contextually relevant human-like text, when it is prompted with and textual or image content. It can generate, edit, and iterate on technical writing tasks- song and story writing. It accepts images as inputs, analyses them and responds to a query. With its 25000 word handling capability it can analyse URL query, examine and create long-form content creation – useful feature for extended conversations and analysis.² 50 experts from AI safety and cyber security trained the model's safety features with human feedback, steering it away from disallowed content. It has 100 Trillion parameter compared to 175 billion of GPT 3, making it a highly sophisticated language model in the market.

The original GPT model was trained on a large corpus of text data, which enabled it to learn the patterns and structures of language and generate responses consistent with the input prompts. The success of the original model led to the development of several versions, finally leading to GPT 4.

GPT 4 also benefits from a larger (45 gigabytes³ of training data, compared to 17 gigabytes for GPT 3) and more diverse training corpus, which includes a wider range of text data sources, widening its comprehension. The responses are more representative of multi-turn conversations, making recommendations, and performing complex calculations. Much like Batman's Alfred Pennyworth, it is ready to do almost anything. It has more language finesse, it understands dialects and slangs, it can create websites based on a picture of a handmade drawing, it can analyse charts⁴ of a scientific experiments to summarise results, it can even recommend cooking options⁵ when shown picture of ingredients. Exhibiting 'Reflexion' – an ability to emulate human-like self-reflection⁶ it can evaluate performance, giving it a dynamic memory to enhance its existing reasoning. It can critique its own answers, looks for errors and then rewrite.

Competitors of GPT 4

Bing AI by Microsoft. Bing provides users with more relevant and personalised search results based on their search history, location, and other factors. Called a copilot⁷ for the web - it is one. It is a feature of the Bing search engine, utilising GPT technology⁸, thus having a training dataset. It brings together search, browsing and chat in one unified experience. It also collaborates with OpenAI's DALL·E⁹ (a Generative Adversarial Networks – GAN) for visual creation capacity, generating images on a textual prompt. The exclusive, standalone and distinctive feature are its capability to search the internet¹⁰ for additional and live information, before churning out answers. Accessing resource-rich internet provides Bing with an 'Edge'. Bing AI's focuses on leveraging information from multiple search results to respond comprehensively and requires navigating to the Bing search engine, logging into Microsoft account.

Google's BARD. Though not supported around the world¹¹, it is there. BARD is Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers Auto-Regressive Decoder. It is based on LaMDA¹² (Language Model for Dialogue Applications), that provides a range of tools and APIs for building chatbots and dialogues across a range of input and output channels. It is still experimental, and some of the responses may be inaccurate, so double-check is vital. Experimentation is ongoing and the release is pending. It is unique because it can support audio and voice too.

Global Issues

Chatsonic. Invented by Writesonic in 2021, Chatsonic¹³ is supported by same technology of ChatGPT. It integrates with Google Search, Stable Diffusion and DALL-E for image generation to create content with the latest information, including visuals and voice commands.¹⁴ It pulls information from Google’s Knowledge Graph to create improved and updated answers. It is prone to making factual mistakes, is not very elaborative, cannot generate large amounts of text and needs a subscription plan. Since the free plan is hardly sufficient for viable use and tends to repeat itself, Chatsonic is not fully ready to create codes, yet.

China. Though nothing finite exists yet, but China’s leadership will not take the March AI launch failure of Baidu too well and would ambitiously drive AI technology in a ruthlessly competitive manner than rest of the world to stay relevant in the global AI landscape. Concerns about the potential authoritarian uses will remain – particularly, ethical, data privacy and relentless surveillance.

- **Baidu’s ERNIE.** Known as “Wenxin Yiyan” in Chinese, Baidu failed to release its AI during March 2023 highly¹⁵ televised ‘release’ – plunging¹⁶ the company shares by 10%. It is a Large Language Model (LLM), trained on datasets, scraped from Chinese internet, which itself is already cleaned and purged. It is thus obvious that AI will possess limited utility for non-resident Chinese.
- **Alibaba.** Alibaba’s DAMO Academy, a research institute, is under pressure¹⁷ to develop of LLM. In February 2023, there was increase¹⁸ in capital from 10 million yuan to 300 million yuan. It also applied for a patent for a ‘human-computer dialogue and pre-trained language model training method, system and electronic equipment.’ There is nothing reported in the media or research yet.

Chatsonic is supported by same technology of ChatGPT. It integrates with Google Search, Stable Diffusion and DALL-E for image generation to create content with the latest information, including visuals and voice commands.

Legal and Privacy Issues

The author prompted ChatGPT to condense the Privacy Policy¹⁹ of OpenAI which is paraphrased below.

- We collect Personal Information; this includes your name, contact information, account details, payment card information, transaction history, personal information in the user chats, social information from social media pages. Technical Information is collected when you use our services includes Log Data, Usage Data, Device Information, and Cookies. We analytics and cookies to enhance your experience.
- We may share your personal information with third parties such as vendors and service providers, for business operations and services, or a transaction without further notice. We may also disclose personal information to comply with legal obligations, protect our rights or property, prevent fraud, or protect personal safety.

GPT 4 could theoretically skim all personal information of the user and threaten privacy infringement. The industry and political pushback²⁰ forced the withdrawal of India’s Personal Data Protection Bill in August 2022. While the Indian Government attempts a legal framework to regulate privacy within the digital ecosystem, the unsettled nature of Personally Identifiable Information (PII) will continue to disquiet the users. Illustratively, while the UK, European Union (EU) and European Economic Area (EAA) protect their data through General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)²¹, the USA dwells on California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA).

Indian IT Act, 2000 defines downloading/copying/extraction of any data²² from a computer resource (expansively including hardware, network and database) liable to civil and criminal penalty. Under Section 57 of the ‘Indian Copyright Act 1957’, violation may lead to punishment only if the original author ‘decides’ to file a lawsuit.²³ Globally, copyright is taken seriously. Getty Images²⁴ a stock image giant provided licenses for training AI, ‘respecting personal

and intellectual property rights.’ It felt belittled when ‘Stability AI’ allegedly utilised images and committed copyright infringement in ‘pursuit of stand-alone commercial interests’. ‘Stability AI’ was accused of copying and processing millions of images without obtaining proper licensing. This could be a warning to all the Startups in Indian to be careful and define the limit of innovative talent vs the legality of action, lest it disrupts the cycle of development in India.

How does GPT 4 play in Military Arena?

The potential military applications of GPT-4 are vast and varied. But the article will analysis and logic map a few cases prospectively, immediately or near future. Speculative role or uses in the future is deliberately avoided.

Curating Data. Long prompts, image and graphical analysis, makes GPT 4 a good tool to curate and clean data from different sensors in different file formats, which can be a complex process. Militaries would benefit from this unique capability, supported by the ‘chattiness’ of the AI model.

Insights from Detailed Reports. Militaries generate large, iterative and frequent report formats, which are essential to include wide-ranging aspects of military planning, decision making and operational processes. GPT 4 will be able to generate easily understandable briefs, citing references, urged on prompt augmentation.

Reducing Technology Bias. Simplification of complex issues, especially technology is a special forte of GPT 4. This will provide wide variety of support to military analysts and operatives.

Targeted Training. High logic and compute capabilities of the language tool can curate focussed training material on the go, simplifying complex issues and connecting various aspects of training and operational area. It could also assist to generate a wide range of operational scenarios for training, especially those that may be a Wild Card or Black Swan events - difficult to fathom or predict without an AI support.

Long prompts, image and graphical analysis, makes GPT 4 a good tool to curate and clean data from different sensors in different file formats, which can be a complex process. Militaries would benefit from this unique capability, supported by the ‘chattiness’ of the AI model.

Updating Training Material. A military AI model, trained on a large corpus of military-specific text, training manuals, orders, directives, and special instructions, could generate new training materials or summarise existing ones. In the event of a change in directives or instructions, the LLM could recommend changes to training manuals, which otherwise is a cumbersome process using the traditional book-keeping method.

Operational and Intelligence Analysis. Textual and image input understanding capabilities may be utilised to examine variety of inputs to ascertain collaborations and generate likely event possibilities, assisting the militaries in intelligence and operational analysis.

Historical and Military Record Analysis. Fine-tuned to military needs and trained on focussed data, LLM can process wide and deep insights, identifying patterns, suggesting triggers and estimates to the students and commanders. This could also assist in creation of Decision Support Systems, when supported by Battle Space inputs.

Digital Staff Officer. GPT 4 has a wide role capability to perform HR and administrative role. Assisting in creating reports, updating spreadsheets, and organising files, drafting memos, preparing presentations, and proofreading documents. A cross-functional Deloitte team²⁵ worked with the Australian military to scope, design, configure, test, and pilot the automated assistants. The team identified and classified all current and anticipated work types, then mapped them according to the level of importance of the work and the cognitive power required to do it. This map provided options about which work could be augmented with AI aka chatbots, supported by LLM, to what extent and in what sequence. Pilot projects built as proofs of concept, freed 10 percent of the soldiers for higher-value tasks.

Translation. GPT 4 could be used for language translation for the military. This would also assist militaries to read and analyse adversary’s primary literary sources too. This is an easier and ready option, compared to a focussed AI model for audio translation.

Information and Cognitive Warfare. GPT 4 has largest variety of tasks in interdependent fields of technology and psychology.²⁶ Sentiment analysis from various social media inputs, content creation to affect target population or to motivate friendly population, all is possible with this unique tool. It is ‘intelligent’ enough to understand the subtle and unique linguistic and cultural characteristics of users and can be coaxed to generate text that is relevant to a user’s cultural background, slangs, idioms, and regional expressions. It can adjust and adapt the communication style to target specific population. This application can be thus exploited to access personal information of the individuals to learn their behaviour or pattern. A digital version of ‘Proof of Life’. Concurrently it can also be prompted to create tools to identify such propaganda material, fake news or deepfakes too.

General Security Concerns

Human Communications. The CPT like language model’s smart prompt in electronic communication are routinely short and overtly positive.²⁷ These prompts will overtime decrease human generated language production, interpersonal perception and task performance - it is just easier to select a prompt, rather than drafting a detailed reply. An AI generated text prompt is increasingly being regarded a good option, bolstered by procrastination and AI overreliance.²⁸

This application can be thus exploited to access personal information of the individuals to learn their behaviour or pattern. A digital version of ‘Proof of Life’. Concurrently it can also be prompted to create tools to identify such propaganda material, fake news or deepfakes too.

Humanitarian Concerns. Conversational and Language model AI will establish itself as daily-use tool make in workplace, automating substantial parts of many jobs. Higher paying desk jobs that depend on digital communication and decision-making will take more heat. It is estimated that majority of the US workforce could feel some effect, and all higher paying jobs will observe major change in their workplaces.²⁹ Layoffs and workforce reductions may occur in data processing services, information services and publishing industries and also in low-order jobs like trainers, stenographers and personnel assistants.³⁰ Workers in developing countries unable to exploit the capability or download speeds will also suffer from technology apartheid.

As the technology advances, the need for robust security measures becomes increasingly important. The areas of concern are the architecture - overall framework and organisation of a system and logic map - flow of data and the interaction between various components of a particular technology. Any weaknesses in architecture and logic map of a particular technology can leave a technology vulnerable to exploitation, making it imperative to thoroughly assess and address potential security concerns. GPT 4 is equally vulnerable to such issues.

It relies on supervised learning³¹ to train and reinforcement learning by utilising newer and updated training datasets³² to reflect changes in language usage and new information. This means continually improved performance. Such a system is highly dependent on large amounts of high-quality data while insufficiently cleaned dataset will affect the output. If the training dataset is not cleaned – it could get things wrong and ‘hallucinate’³³ incorrect facts or become gullible to leading questions by the users.

As an AI language model, GPT 4 is also designed to learn from user inputs. User feedbacks to questions like “*Was this response better or worse or same?*” help improve responses over time. If a user corrects or asks a follow-up question, the prompt is used to refine understanding and generate better responses. The authors tested a related hypothesis, if ChatGPT could identify the origin of a particular text? Surprisingly it could identify and also provide the date of generation - from a different chat box/ login.

Many users routinely volunteer information to ‘improve’ the output. A gullible user may provide information of the company, its core competency, task at hand and details of client to ‘generate a good quality’ operational brief, or a research paper, unknowingly providing ‘espionage material’. Such information in pre ChatGPT era was designated confidential and could be considered breach of non-disclosure agreements. The organisations will have to navigate maze and reword their NDA scripts.

The fear of plagiarism is also well founded. It is a two way street. Does GPT 4 not suffer from it when it generates content? ‘Originality. AI’ provides plagiarism check to many products. It also claims to be the best content detection tool³⁴ in the market (96 per cent accuracy against 35 per cent by closest competitor) and attributes it to ‘subscription only business model’. It uses ‘A LOT’ of computational power too. If the content creator aka ChatGPT is plagiarism free, how does the user ensure his content is too? The answer lies- ‘By ethical use’. An informed user could counter check the new content by using quality and top line³⁵ plagiarism checkers like AI-generated content like - OpenAI’s AI Text Classifier, GPTZero, Plagibot, Content at Scale and Writer.com

Cyber Security Issues

Adversarial attacks are a type of cyber-attack in which an attacker deliberately manipulates input data to mislead a machine learning model. A ChatGPT learning from an adversarial data will naturally generate flawed natural language responses, which are more difficult to detect than other types of attacks.

GPT 4 is trained on publicly available content on the internet. As yet there seems no API³⁶ available for third parties to train it on specific content. When it becomes possible the disinformation, phishing, and other attack vectors will increase in numbers and become much more finely tuned and targeted. Improved and convincing phishing emails, including emails in multiple languages will create more attack surfaces for criminals and improve social engineering attacks.

Maliciously oriented clickbait journalism and omnipresence of social media, challenges the differences between real and fake. Politically driven agendas can be accurately curated to target specific audiences, convincingly.

GPT can impersonate³⁷ an individual style of a real person – if prompted sufficiently. A convincing email from a person in authority could induce subordinated to undertake malicious activities – unwittingly. Business email compromise (BEC) is a type of social engineering attack. The attacker creates a fake email that looks like it is from a trusted source, such as the CEO or a vendor. The email may include a sense of urgency, such as a request for an urgent payment or a need for sensitive data. The recipient of the email, thinking it is legitimate, follows the instructions and shares confidential company data or money. Security software usually detects BEC attacks by identifying patterns. However, a BEC attack powered by GPT 4 can get past security filters.

Maliciously oriented clickbait journalism and omnipresence of social media, challenges the differences between real and fake. Politically driven agendas can be accurately curated to target specific audiences, convincingly.

There have been demonstrations of GPT writing a malware. Could an insufficiently skilled criminal order such a malware. The tool appears to be convincing but could the criminal in context identify an error in the malware – unlikely. This means that GPT will be useful to experts only ‘by saving time’ – since the expert can validate the output.

Researchers at Cyber Ark have found that GPT 4 can aid malware development. They could coax it to create a highly elusive and difficult to detect polymorphic malware³⁸ following text-based interactions. They “easily evade security products and make mitigation cumbersome with very little effort or investment by the adversary”.

Global Issues

Another argument about criminals attempting more complex tasks. Would an expert criminal choose to create a malware and ratify it on the AI model or order creation and approve it in person? Obvious choice would be former, since trying to identify a bug in externally created malware would be much more taxing, irritatingly slow and arduous.

Criminals could however query an advice to a technical problem, which would assist in the activity. If an attacker is struggling to escalate privileges or find data, the model's answer would be more accurate to the context. These answers might help criminals with better and faster attacks, which would be otherwise beyond their capabilities. This also means many more people could create malware, potentially leading to many more attacks and breaches.

It can be an assistive tool to protect cyber interests too. It generate reports and analysis of cybersecurity threats, turn those into reports and share more widely, in a conversational language. These models have the potential to improve cyber security education and awareness. By analysing text from variety of educational resources, ChatGPT can identify common misconceptions and areas of confusion, and then curate focussed educational and training material.

Conclusion

GPT4 already has an image understanding capability³⁹, which is considered impressive, so is its capability to analyse graphical representations in a research report. But it is still fall short of further exploitability; Multimodal Dialogue Response Generation (MDRG)⁴⁰, moves in to fill the gap. It is a new process to generate or understand visual content in collaboration in a textual context. The researchers are attempting to generate a multimodal response (e.g., containing both image and text). If proven, it will empower the content creators, entertainment industry, curate highly focussed educational or motivational multimedia content. Could video also form part of this multimodal dialogue? The possibilities are enormously enriching and ominously frightening.

The most intriguing aspect is data monetisation, which is the process of extracting value from collected data by selling it to interested buyers for the purpose of developing new models, technologies, and conducting market research.

ChatGPT developer, OpenAI has also launched plugins⁴¹ to grant access to third-party knowledge sources including the web. Though restricted and testing level availability, it is an interesting update. Can the plugin authenticate the website and its content? Will it countercheck and reorganise the final output after website visit? There are many questions and an exciting future.

GPT 4's business model⁴² is yet another aspect to look for in future. Its API services enable businesses to access digital resources and data, enabling them to create innovative applications and services that improve customer experience and increase operational efficiency. Premium subscription plans and selling training datasets, provides advanced features and capabilities to their customers. However, the most intriguing aspect is data monetisation, which is the process of extracting value from collected data by selling it to interested buyers for the purpose of developing new models, technologies, and conducting market research. This capability is humongous, since it is collecting a large amounts of data, including PII, tacit knowledge, and general data.

We would let this AI tool conclude about itself⁴³ with instructive words – ‘conclusion for future use, buoyant, illustrative, considering the security, legal issues, recommending intelligent use by informed users’.

- “As Chat GPT continues to evolve and improve, the future of this technology is incredibly exciting. With the ability to generate human-like responses, it has the potential to revolutionise communication and interaction between humans and machines. However, as with any new technology, there are also important security and legal considerations to keep in mind.

- One of the biggest security concerns surrounding ChatGPT is the potential for malicious actors to use the technology for nefarious purposes, such as spreading disinformation or carrying out phishing attacks. To address these concerns, it will be important for developers and users alike to implement robust security measures, such as multi-factor authentication and encryption, to prevent unauthorised access to sensitive information.
- In addition to security concerns, there are also legal implications to consider when it comes to using ChatGPT. For example, as the technology becomes more advanced, there may be questions about who is responsible for the responses generated by the system, and whether or not they can be held liable for any negative outcomes resulting from those responses. It will be important for developers and users to stay informed about the legal landscape surrounding ChatGPT to ensure they are in compliance with all relevant regulations and laws.
- The future of ChatGPT is bright, but it is important to approach this technology with caution. As users become more familiar, they should be encouraged to use the technology intelligently and responsibly, with an eye towards minimising risks and maximising potential benefits. Ultimately, by working together to address these challenges, we can unlock the full potential of Chat GPT and usher in a new era of human-machine interaction.”

The above text perceptibly lacks in quality, which is actually inextricably linked to the instructions provided to the ChatGPT.

Endnotes

- 1 Marcin Frackiewicz, 'The Science Behind GPT-4: Understanding its Architecture and Training Process, 27 March 2023, <https://ts2.space/en/the-science-behind-gpt-4-understanding-its-architecture-and-training-process/>, accessed on 23 April 2023.
- 2 <https://openai.com/product/gpt-4>, accessed on 23 April 2023.
- 3 Daivi, 'GPT3 vs GPT4-Battle of the Holy Grail of AI Language Models, 13 April 2023, <https://www.projectpro.io/article/gpt3-vs-gpt4/816#:~:text=Compared%20to%20GPT%2D3's%2017,accurate%20results%20than%20GPT%2D3.>, accessed on 23 April 2023.
- 4 <https://blog.tryamigo.com/use-cases-of-gpt-4/>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 5 'AI engineer asked ChatGPT for recipes from refrigerator pic. The answers were...?', MONEYCONTROL NEWS, 17 March 2023, <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/trends/visual-chatgpt-gpt-4-ai-openai-language-model-chatbots-twitter-ai-recipes-10266611.html>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 6 Loz Blain, 'GPT-4 becomes 30% more accurate when asked to critique itself', 03 April 2023, <https://newatlas.com/technology/gpt-4-reflexion/>, and <https://arxiv.org/abs/2303.11366>, both accessed on 22 April 2023 and
- 7 <https://blogs.microsoft.com/blog/2023/02/07/reinventing-search-with-a-new-ai-powered-microsoft-bing-and-edge-your-copilot-for-the-web/>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 8 <https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-bing-ai-chatbot-7371141#:~:text=The%20Bing%20AI%20chatbot%20was,into%20answers%20using%20natural%20language.>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 9 Andrew Hutchinson, 'Microsoft Integrates DALL·E Visual Creation Tools into Edge and Bing', 12 March 2023, <https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/microsoft-integrates-dalle-visual-creation-tools-into-edge-and-bing/645621/>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 10 <https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-bing-ai-chatbot-7371141#:~:text=The%20Bing%20AI%20chatbot%20was,into%20answers%20using%20natural%20language.>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 11 <https://bard.google.com/?hl=en>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 12 <https://bard.google.com/faq?hl=en>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 13 <https://www.makeuseof.com/best-alternatives-chatgpt/>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 14 <https://chatsonic.pro/>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 15 <https://newatlas.com/technology/baidu-ernie-bot-ai/>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 16 <https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2023/03/chinese-search-giant-launches-ai-chatbot-with-prerecorded-demo/>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 17 Pandaily, 'Alibaba's DAMO Academy Leaders Take Charge in AI Development', 17 March 2023, <https://pandaily.com/alibabas-damo-academy-leaders-take-charge-in-ai-development/>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 18 Seaton Huang, 'Tracking the Race to Develop Generative AI Technologies in China', 16 February 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/tracking-race-develop-generative-ai-technologies-china>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 19 Updated Privacy Policy on 07 April 2023, <https://openai.com/policies/privacy-policy>, accessed on 20 April 2023.
- 20 <https://www.dataguidance.com/notes/india-data-protection-overview#:~:text=In%20August%202022%2C%20the%20Government,privacy%20within%20the%20digital%20ecosystem>, accessed on 21 April 2023.

- 21 <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/dp-at-the-end-of-the-transition-period/overview-data-protection-and-the-eu/>, accessed on 20 April 2023.
- 22 <https://cis-india.org/internet-governance/blog/privacy/safeguards-for-electronic-privacy>, accessed on 20 April 2023.
- 23 <https://copyleaks.com/blog/a-brief-look-at-plagiarism-in-india#:~:text=Section%2057%20of%20the%20'Indian,infringement%20as%20a%20criminal%20offense>, accessed on 21 April 2023.
- 24 <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/17/tech/getty-images-stability-ai-lawsuit/index.html>, accessed on 22 April 2023
- 25 'AI reports for duty in the Australian military', <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/services/consulting/perspectives/AI-reports-for-duty-in-the-australian-military.html>, accessed on 02 March 2023.
- 26 Som Biswas, 'Prospective Role of Chat GPT in the Military: According to ChatGPT', 27 February 2023, <https://www.qeios.com/read/8WYYOD>, accessed on 22 April 2023.
- 27 Melissa De Witte, 'How will ChatGPT change the way we think and work? Stanford scholar examines', 13 February 2023, <https://news.stanford.edu/2023/02/13/will-chatgpt-change-way-think-work/>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 28 Mihaela Vorvoreanu and Samir Passi, 'Overreliance on AI: Literature review', 2022, <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/research/uploads/prod/2022/06/Aether-Overreliance-on-AI-Review-Final-6.21.22.pdf>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 29 Michael Webb, 'The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on the Labor Market', Stanford University, January 2020, https://www.michaelwebb.co/webb_ai.pdf, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 30 Shamika N Sirimanne, 'How artificial intelligence chatbots could affect jobs', 18 January 2023, <https://unctad.org/news/blog-how-artificial-intelligence-chatbots-could-affect-jobs>, accessed on 24 April 2023.
- 31 ChatGPT: The Future Of Conversational AI In The Cyber Security Landscape, 06 April 2023, <https://emergingindiagroup.com/2023/04/06/chat-gpt-the-future-of-conversational-ai-in-the-cyber-security-landscape/>, accessed on 21 April 2023.
- 32 Gagan Anand, 'India: The Revolutionary ChatGPT And Its Legal Policies', 01 March 2023, <https://www.mondaq.com/india/privacy-protection/1288150/the-revolutionary-chat-gpt-and-its-legal-policies>, accessed on 21 April 2023.
- 33 David C and Paul J, 'ChatGPT and large language models: what's the risk?', <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/blog-post/chatgpt-and-large-language-models-whats-the-risk>, accessed on 21 April 2023.
- 34 <https://originality.ai/>, accessed on 22 April 2023.
- 35 Eray Eliaçık , 'Is ChatGPT plagiarism free?- Will ChatGPT change the definition plagiarism?', 30 March 2023, <https://dataconomy.com/blog/2023/03/28/is-chatgpt-plagiarism-free-turnitin-checker/#:~:text=The%20short%20answer%20is%20yes,of%20AI%20usage%20and%20plagiarism>, accessed on 22 April 2023.
- 36 Kate Bevan, 'ChatGPT presents new risks – here are five things you can do to mitigate them', <https://www.infosys.com/insights/cyber-security/new-risks.html>, accessed on 20 April 2023.
- 37 <https://www.malwarebytes.com/cybersecurity/basics/chatgpt-ai-security>, accessed on 20 April 2023
- 38 Alessandro Mascellino, 'ChatGPT Creates Polymorphic Malware', 18 January 2023, <https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/chatgpt-creates-polymorphic-malware/>, accessed on 22 April 2023.
- 39 Chetan, 'Analyzing Images with Chat GPT-4 : A First Look', 17 March 2023, <https://aivatapi.com/analyzing-images-with-chat-gpt-4-a-first-look/>, accessed on 22 April 2023.
- 40 Qingfeng Sun, Yujing Wang etal, 'Multimodal Dialogue Response Generation', 2022, <https://aclanthology.org/2022.acl-long.204.pdf>, pp 2855, accessed on 22 April 2023.

Global Issues

- 41 Kyle Wiggers , 'OpenAI connects ChatGPT to the internet', 23 March 2023, <https://techcrunch.com/2023/03/23/openai-connects-chatgpt-to-the-internet/>, accessed on 22 April 2023.
- 42 Gloria Coles, 'How Does Chat GPT Make Money?', <https://www.pcguide.com/apps/how-does-chat-gpt-make-money/>, accessed on 22 April 2023.
- 43 Generated on 21 April 2023 at <https://chat.openai.com/>

Section VI

National Security Capacity Building

Transformation Imperatives for the Indian Military: Talks by the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) and the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) at the USI of India in 2022

USI Editorial Team @

Abstract

In the months of Aug 2022 and Sep 2022, the CAS and the COAS had addressed the serving and retired members of the USI fraternity and distinguished strategic, defence and security experts on the subject of transformation in their respective Services. The CAS delivered the 20th Major General Samir Sinha Memorial Lecture on the subject “Transformation of the Indian Air Force: Present Status and the Way Ahead” while the COAS had spoken on “Transformation Imperatives for the Indian Army in Coming Decades”. The article below is an edited and amalgamated compilation of the two addresses.

Talk by the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari, PVSM, AVSM, VM, ADC

Environmental Scan

Any analyses of transformation within the Indian Air Force (IAF) must take into account a broad global scan at a high level. Towards this end, starting [the analysis] with the ongoing war in Ukraine is in order. Without dwelling into what type of tactics or strategies are being followed there in the use of air power and what are the outcomes of the ongoing battle, very broadly, we need to understand that:

- There can never be adequate soft power without hard power. To be able to project soft power we need to concurrently develop hard power capabilities.
- Irrespective of international treaties like NATO, QUAD, ASEAN, etc., friendship between countries will always come second to the nation’s own security and self-interest. There is ample evidence of this in the way European nations have taken a stance during this ongoing conflict.
- There is definitely a lesser appetite for global rules-based order.
- Nuclear deterrence is still effective. What we are witnessing today is skirmishes taking place under a nuclear overhang.
- Self-sufficiency in arms manufacturing is an absolute necessity. We cannot be dependent on other nations to defend our own country. Therefore, we need to promote and support indigenous industries and technology.
- The Ukraine war has shown private companies like Google or even McDonald’s will take sides based on the natural and national interest.

@ This article is based on the talks delivered by the CAS and the COAS to the distinguished members of the USI of India at the USI during 2022.

National Security Capacity Building

- Anything can be weaponised including financial protocols. SWIFT transactions have prevented us from transferring money into Russian accounts, similarly, air space is being controlled, social media-based businesses are being controlled; even international sporting bodies are getting weaponised in some form or the other.
- Strong narratives can build influence globally. The narrative that we see from this conflict has definitely changed the world order today from what it was in last decade or so.

Our Near Vicinity

Pakistan. Pakistan in the recent past has been spending a lot of money on newer acquisitions. From the air force point of view, a highlight is the J-10 aircraft which they recently procured from China, and the ANTPS-77 class of radars. Pakistan has also got a Bayraktar RPA from Turkey with more to follow. Besides these, it has got CH4 UAVS from China. Their arsenal is continuing to be built up continuously. The fighter squadron strength which was 20 is likely to increase to 23 or 24 in next 2-3 years. Their predominately defensive approach has been gradually transforming into a more aggressive approach.

China. When it comes to China, their asset investment is definitely growing. The use of PLAAF in the aftermath of Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, the activation of their southern and western theatres are all symptomatic to their growing assertiveness. Chinese infrastructure like heliports, airfields and hardened aircraft shelters, weapon storage shelters and SAM sites are coming up at an astonishing pace. This is not just in the Eastern Ladakh border but all over our Northern borders. Their road and railway infrastructure development are enhancing their op-logistic capabilities. All this is giving rise to an increase in asymmetry, not only in terms of numbers but in terms of technology too between China and India.

The attacks could be staggered attacks or China could be posturing on one side and attacking on other side. Two front engagements and collusion between China and Pakistan is a possibility for which we have to continuously prepare ourselves.

Analyses of the Threats

The threats we face can lead to conflicts which, unlike past conventional conflicts, will be more of synchronised attacks across our fronts. The attacks could be staggered attacks or China could be posturing on one side and attacking on other side. Two front engagements and collusion between China and Pakistan is a possibility for which we have to continuously prepare ourselves. The escalation matrix needs to be controlled by us. To be able to do so, we should be able to determine what are the definitive conflict termination criteria; we should be able to hold the strings to decide when to end this conflict. To be able to do that, we need to first understand what our capability voids are and where do we need to build our capabilities? We can do so when we decide that conflict termination will be only from a position of strength.

Hybrid War. When we talk about hybrid war and threat manifestation, we need to understand that hybrid war aims to create asymmetric and disproportionate effects on the enemy. The threat spectrum in the kinetic domain will range from slow moving, small sized and undetectable drones to hypersonic weapons. In between these two [ends of the spectrum] are fighter aircraft, long-range missiles, and so on. If we analyse these threats, the Precision Guided Munitions and Anti-Radiation Missiles and Stand-off Weapons will continue to pose threats to us. This is in the realm of conventional warfare; therefore, they can be tackled by the conventional air defence system — a combination of air defence aircraft, layered air defence systems, Electronic Warfare (EW), concealment and deception measures, and so on. The UCAVs, a new and emerging threat, can be tackled by layered air defence weapon systems, newer kind of radars and interceptors for small Radar Cross Section (RCS) bodies, soft kill directed energy weapons, electromagnetic pulse and whatever such means technology has to offer in the coming years. And, when it comes to the surface-to-surface missiles which are the biggest threat from the PLA rocket force, the defence against them are again conventional ballistic missiles and

distribution and dispersal of our assets. The counters to hypersonic threats are still evolving. Lastly, as far as the threats from Manned-Unmanned Teaming (MUMT), swarm and miniature drones are concerned, we understand that hard kill will be difficult through conventional means so we have to start looking at soft kill, through jamming or other means or through electromagnetic pulses.

Capability Voids

The capability voids for the air force and how we are transforming to fill them are given below:

- **Infrastructure.** We need more airfields, particularly, in northern regions, blast pens, hardened aircraft shelters, weapon storage areas, heliports, and so on. Basically, we should aim to get a better infrastructure parity not only vis à vis China, but also Pakistan.
- **Numbers.** While technology is essential, it is very important to underscore the point that numbers do matter, especially to have an offensive capability. People keep asking this question as to where we are, and where do we stand with present 30 fighter squadrons as against the requirement for the authorised 42 squadrons even though we have 4.5 generation aircraft being added into our arsenal. To have persistence, to have the ability to simultaneously tackle multiple threats across our long borders, there definitely would be a requirement of larger numbers.
- **Air Defence & Surveillance.** The Eastern Ladakh situation has opened our eyes to the lack of persistent surveillance over that region. The solution lies in the procurement of AWACS & AEW&C aircraft. There is also a limitation in the number of SAGW systems that can operate from that altitude. We need to start looking at modern and mobile systems that can be operated easily from this altitude.
- **Communications.** The Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS) of the Indian Air Force is well established. The *Akashteer* of the Indian Army now taking shape, is good, and hopefully should plug in into the IACCS at a later date. Similarly, the *Trigun* of the Indian Navy needs to be hastened up to be integrated into a common tri Services network.

The Eastern Ladakh situation has opened our eyes to the lack of persistent surveillance over that region. The solution lies in the procurement of AWACS & AEW&C aircraft.

Centres of Gravity

It is very important for all the military thinkers and strategists to understand that our centres of gravity are no more merely military leadership and military decision-making. The centre of gravity will continuously change in this context of hybrid warfare and multi-domain operations. They are now more focussed on a broad spectrum of civil and military domains. To provide affects with a tempo and timing that the enemy cannot match, the traditional Air, Land, and Maritime domains now have to include non-conventional domains such as cyber, IW, social media, and space domain. The influence of each of these domains on the others has to be clearly understood. Cross-domain integration is very essential. Axiomatically exploiting the enemy's cross-domain integration and disrupting his cohesion will be one of our primary tasks. We need to provide the effects of timing and tempo that the adversary cannot compete with. Though we will continue to use the conventional means of land, air, sea, and space — our focus will shift on parallel use of non-conventional means, cyber warfare, social media, and so on.

Applications of Air Power – Future Plans for Transformation

We have signed the contract of six squadrons of LCA Mark I-A, another six squadrons of LCA Mark-II have been given a commitment for. We have also given a commitment for 2.5 squadrons of the AMCA — the programme to

National Security Capacity Building

develop a fifth-generation fighter. The 114 MRFA case is in the advanced stage of being put up to the government. People question as to why do we need this asset when we have already put our bets on the AMCA and LCA? The bottom line is that we are not going for pure ‘Buy Global’ cases; we are looking at cases where we can ‘Buy Global’ and then ‘Make in India’.

To be able to fill in the cockpits of the fighter aircraft that we would be getting in future, we need to enhance the training capability. Therefore, the requirement of 106 basic trainer aircraft; of which the initial contract for 70 HTT- 40 aircraft is in place. Similarly, in the transport fleet we have signed a contract for 56 C-295 aircraft that will replace the Avros, out of which the first 16 aircraft will be in flyway condition from Airbus Spain and the remaining 40 will be made in India. This will be the first time that India will produce a military transport aircraft. The AoN for ISTAR is under progress, AoN for wet leasing of one Flight Refuelling Aircraft (FRA) and subsequent procurement of six additional FRA is in pipeline. We have procured six Airbus-321 from Air India which will be modified by the DRDO to meet the requirements of the AEW&C systems.

In terms of helicopters, we are going to induct 10 of the LCH. The old fleets of Mi-17s are also getting upgraded. The case for the Light Utility Helicopters is in the advanced stage and we are progressing finalisation of the QRs of the Indian Multi-Role Helicopter. When it comes to RPAs, upgradation of the existing fleet is high on our agenda. Indigenous UCAV development is being supported by the IAF in all respects. We are also lead Service for the indigenous 127 MALE UAVs development; the tri-Service case for the High-Altitude Long Endurance (HALE). RPA is being led by the Indian Navy. In case of the swarm drone, we have got a huge response from the Indian start-ups, MSMEs, and colleges which are taking part in the competitions for supplying us with swarm drones and anti-drone systems.

The case for the Light Utility Helicopters is in the advanced stage and we are progressing finalisation of the QRs of the Indian Multi-Role Helicopter.

In terms of the procurement of surface to air weapon systems, we have inducted eight squadrons of Akash (ground to air missiles) and seven more are being delivered. The S-400 (five squadrons), MRSAM (18 squadrons), replacement of the aging IGLA Missiles with the VSHORADS, CIWS (Close in Weapon System) for 61 flights are on the anvil. Some of the weapons that are in the pipeline for procurement — out of which maximum number will be made in India — are the Astra (BVR air to air missiles), RUDRAM (long range air to ground missiles), SAAW (Smart Anti Airfield Weapon), LRGB (Long Range Glide Bomb) and Brahmos. We are in advanced stages of negotiations for producing weapons such as the Hammer, Spike, Spice, and Mistral in the country. To counter and detect the stealth aircraft primarily operating in our northern borders, particularly the J-20s in the eastern Ladakh region, we have deployed some of the oldest radars in our inventory, the P-18 radars which were inducted 41 years ago. To replace them, we are going in for VHF radars, Mountain Radars, and the Ashlesha (LLLWR), a highly mobile radar. Multitudes of them will be required to fill in the gaps, particularly in the mountainous terrain.

Disruptive Technology. Organisational structures have to be realigned to shorten decision making cycles. AI, Big Data Analytics, space-based communications & surveillance — everything has to be put to use. We are also looking at UCAVs to team with Tejas and Rafale (MMT) in future. Focus will remain on 5th generation technology through the indigenous route. The IAF is also making a foray into AI domain by having a system for a quicker cycle of analysing ELINT data and putting it back into the operator’s systems.

The Integrated Air Command and Control System

The IACCS forms the backbone of our air defence network’s today, that rides on the air force net. Every single aircraft is identified and tracked while it is over the Indian air space and on a daily basis we track, identify, and tag almost

18,000 to 20,000 aeroplanes. When it comes to enhancement of space and near space, we are looking forward to the launch of the next GSAT-7 which will carry along with it capability for Software Defined Radios (SDR). SDRs are a revolutionary change that will give us an ability to be able to exchange data. We procured several of these few years ago. Our fighters are being upgraded to carry these SDR capabilities. The ground stations of the AWACS and AEW&C are being equipped with this. In a short span of time, most combat aircrafts will have this capability.

Training

When it comes to training, we need to have adequately trained and equipped air warriors who are ready to take on the challenges of this new dimension of warfare. We regularly carry out joint operations with the army and the navy, in the integrated training area (400km x 200km in Central India) to carry on all our training in an environment which gives us full freedom to operate all our electronic systems without exposing them to the prying ears of our neighbours. We carry out large force engagement; 90 to 100 aircraft taking part at any given time, integrated with the army and navy aircraft. We have started a new course WASP (Warfare and Strategy Programme) for mid-level officers. It is an expensive reading course where the officers are expected to read about 250 pages a day and after the end of 3 months be prepared to expound the strategies of the nation, especially the air force. We are emphasising on professional military education and smart training .

The Way Forward

Budgetary constraints will remain. Within them we need to accelerate the induction of enablers which will enable us to fight the next battle and they can come in various forms, whether AWACS, tankers, fighter aircraft etc. We are aware of China working on A2AD and other counter strategies and we are continuously working on retraining ourselves. Shortening of the OODA loop and improved ISR is a pre-requisite on the battlefield. Multi-domain capability build-up and robust, hardened C2 structures and networks with redundancy is something we have to ensure. This all will require multi-skilled and well-trained personnel who can operate in an environment of denial.

When it comes to enhancement of space and near space, we are looking forward to the launch of the next GSAT-7 which will carry along with it capability for Software Defined Radios (SDR). SDRs are a revolutionary change that will give us an ability to be able to exchange data.

**Talk by the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS)
General Manoj Pande, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC**

The Imperative of Transformation

The Armed Forces as the vital instrument of the state need to be strong and effective. For that, the military must constantly align with future requirements and the ever-changing character of warfare. They must embrace change and then reform and reorganise from time to time. A number of major initiatives are underway to transform the Indian Army into a modern technologically driven, self-reliant and battle worthy force. These initiatives would span across various domains which include capability development, human resource management, restructuring and rebalancing — to name just a few. The drivers for change are many, such as the unprecedented events that are reshaping the geostrategic landscape, the limitless potential of disruptive technologies, the transforming character of modern wars, and the profound changes that are taking place in the socio-economic domain.

Evolving Geopolitical/Geostrategic/Technological Construct

In order to comprehend the challenges that lie ahead of us, we need to take a holistic view of the evolving geopolitical situation around us and the world over. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict and developments in the Indo-Pacific have exposed the highly fragmented global security architecture. South Asia is one of the least economically integrated entities in the world resulting in both security and economic imbalances in the region. The economic chaos and socio-political unpredictability in our neighbourhood are stark reminders of the unstable environment that we live in, which has grave implications for national security. While the environment in which we exist and operate continues to evolve, the character of war itself has witnessed transformative changes. The fusion of technologies has blurred the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres. Almost all new technologies that we see today have the potential for military application and disruptive impact on modern day warfare.

In the non-Kinetic domain, Information Warfare (IW) has been sharpened by the use of social media in conflict zones to create and spread disinformation and panic, and has become an inseparable part of conflict prosecution.

Evolving Battlespace

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict continues to underscore the relevance of hard power as the ultimate instrument to preserve national interest when red lines are breached, and other instruments of the state appear ineffective. In the non-Kinetic domain, Information Warfare (IW) has been sharpened by the use of social media in conflict zones to create and spread disinformation and panic, and has become an inseparable part of conflict prosecution. Land has yet again featured as a decisive domain of warfare, where control of territory is acknowledged as a victory marker for conflict resolution. In our context where we have legacy issues with disputed borders, this is all the more significant. Therefore, conventional preparedness cannot be ignored. Our prolonged commitment in counter insurgency and counter terrorism operations should not lull us into a false sense of readiness to address operations across the full spectrum of conflict.

Grey Zone War. Grey Zone War offers an attractive alternate strategy to the aggressor to achieve the desired end state using sub-threshold activities, both by employing kinetic as well as non-kinetic means. There is enough evidence to tell us that our adversaries are already widening this band of Grey Zone.

Conventional Military Power. Combat ratios which provide a benchmark, or comparison, need to be factored intelligently into our assessment. Mere numbers neither yield the desired outcome nor are good enough to provide credible deterrence. It is logical that the primary objective or transformation effort needs to focus on development of capabilities and capacities that will enable us to tackle future challenges in a more effective manner across the physical, informational and most importantly, the cognitive domains.

Transformation Imperatives

Future challenges make it imperative for us to achieve rapid speed of decision making and design for structures that can operate in dispersed forms. There is also need to develop deep sensor reach capabilities to exponentially multiply the lethality index of our combat forces. In a highly networked battlespace, we must achieve superior information levels for greater situational and shared awareness. The ability to undertake precision strikes that have effective and impactful reach will always be a force multiplier and a means of credible deterrence. Military logistics is a key area that requires transformative changes. An important lesson from the Russia-Ukraine conflict is that the pace, intensity, and reach of military operations ride on the strength, agility, and capacity of the logistic support. This is a larger issue that not only requires seamless synergy between the three Services but more importantly, better fusion of civil and military resources.

Present State

In the Indian Army rebalancing and the reorientation of forces has already taken place after a great deal of deliberations. However, this remains a dynamic process. The Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) and the IBGisation of selected formations in the army has already been initiated. The success in effectively transforming to these robust, agile, and tailor-made response structures will be important as we move forward and prepare ourselves to respond to the two-front threat. We are now transiting towards an Integrated Capability Development System (ICADS). The major focus areas would include precision capability, long range vectors, ISR systems, communication networks, night enablement, UAV's, and Air Defence. The search for a new platforms for the mechanised forces and mediumisation of artillery are currently underway. The aviation fleet too will soon undergo transformation when the induction of the light combat helicopter, the light utility helicopter, and additional Apache helicopters is completed. However, there are teething challenges, as would be expected, in ICADS. That is largely because of the wide variations in the capability requirements of each of the Services.

The ability to undertake precision strikes that have effective and impactful reach will always be a force multiplier and a means of credible deterrence. Military logistics is a key area that requires transformative changes.

Atmanirbharta or Self Reliance

The vision of *atmanirbharta* in defence is giving roots to hundreds of start-ups and small enterprises and the results have been extremely encouraging. In this context, the Army Design Bureau has become the single window for outreach to the Indian industry and academia for capability development. There has been progressive increase in the indigenous content year on year. The fact that 87 percent of contracts last year went to Indian manufacturers further validates the growing partnership of the Indian Army with the indigenous defence Industries. A number of indigenous design and development projects have been successfully completed with exclusive proprietary rights with the Indian industry. Currently the AoN, which means approval of the government to proceed ahead — albeit at the first stage — has been given for indigenous weapons and equipment valued at about 40000 crores. Back of the envelope calculation has told us that over the next eight years the potential for defence procurement indigenously can be something close to 8 lakh crores — of course subject to the availability of the budget.

In terms of our Innovation in Defence Excellence (IDEX), one of the initiatives that the government took some time back, we currently have about 30 projects where 32 industries are directly involved, with budgetary outlays to the tune of 187 crores. Likewise, in the 'Make II' category (wherein the industry develops the product through its own investment), we have a total of 43 projects where the private industry is extremely closely involved. In the 'Make I' category — where up to 70 percent of a development is funded by the government — we have some promising projects coming up. In the realms of manufacture of indigenous ammunition, we had identified a total of 12 different categories. We are still in the trial stages but by the end of 2022, some projects should fructify. However, we are aware that in certain areas where our industry has not fully matured or developed, we still need to go for some part of procurement as import and we are putting this across to the government.

The corporatisation of the Ordnance Factories Board (OFB) has removed many monopolistic practices and that has been a very positive step. Now this continuum of reforms must get extended to other organisations that have for years formed the mainstay of our indigenous public sector R&D, but are not aligned to the best modern practices. However, for better dividends, especially, for niche and disruptive technologies, we need to encourage better competition from the industry as well as from the academia. Reforms that will usher in a more collaborative and competitive approach and ensure equal opportunity to the private industry need to be taken forward. The government's decision to permit 25 percent of the defence R&D budget to be reserved for the industries, start-ups, and academia has been a much need shot in the arm for the private industry. One of the areas that we are looking at, which has for long been discussed, is to move away from this aspect of L1 wherein you decide on what you want and then you choose somebody who offers you that solution at the lowest cost. Now instead of that we are looking at a system of a combination of L1 and T1 wherein by a process of benchmarking you decide on equipment which balances the lowest cost and best technology. We have mooted this and the government has been considering it. Infrastructure development especially in the forward areas is another area that has made significant progress but much more needs to be done. Some of the measures that we are looking at are how other agencies can complement the Border Road Organisation. In road construction, forest clearances, land acquisition, and related clearances have been an ongoing issue. There were certain waivers granted where no clearances were required up to 100 km from the LAC. But this expired in December 2020. We are trying to again have that extended.

Combat Manpower. The optimisation of combat manpower of the Indian Army has been given fresh impetus post the *Agnipath* scheme. Because of no recruitment having taken place for almost two years, in a manner, the army is reduced by about 1.2 lakhs personnel. While there were a number of initiatives in terms of manpower optimisation earlier, it has now been put on a fast track. Some of the measures being looked at are:

One of the areas that we are looking at, which has for long been discussed, is to move away from this aspect of L1 wherein you decide on what you want and then you choose somebody who offers you that solution at the lowest cost.

- **Outsourcing of Non-Core Functions especially in the Peace Areas.** Of the army's strength of close to 12 lakhs, almost 89-90,000 are tradesmen. Tradesman encompass the non-core activities of cooks, housekeepers, barbers and the likes. If in peace stations, units were to have only 60 percent tradesmen, and in establishments which are permanently in peace, they were reduced substantially by outsourcing — we may be able to reduce adequate manpower.
- **Rashtriya Rifles.** Another area for optimisation is the Rashtriya Rifles, especially with the improvement in the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir. Whether there is a scope to reduce the battalions from 63 to whatever number, or whether battalions with six rifle companies can be brought down to four companies — are some of the areas being looked at.
- **Deputations.** We have about 1.2 lakh personnel out on deputation to various establishments outside the army, including NSG, Strategic Forces Command etc, where our soldiers are employed on administrative or non-core activities. This is another area where there may be scope for optimisation. In a manner these numbers have been identified and in-principal approval obtained. What remains is to put it into practice.
- **Animal Transport (AT).** A plan has been made where our total holding of AT will reduce by 70 percent. We will retain 30 percent of the AT, the rest will be replaced by other means such as logistic drones. We are still struggling to find a good logistic drone which will operate beyond 10,000 feet. But in the lower altitudes, we do have options. We also have better op-tracks as well as All-Terrain Vehicles, which can again substitute AT.
- **Agnipath Scheme.** The scheme will enable us to improve the technological threshold and the youthful profile of the army. However, we have to make sure that there is a correct balance between combat experience and youthful profile. We want to recruit youth from the ITI or other polytechnic/technical institutes. When the advertisement was put out, we called for the youth who have ITI qualification for which in our selection process they will get some additional credit/marks. How far we succeed in getting ITI trained candidates in the desired

numbers will be known only in the next 2-3 years. This is because ITIs, technical colleges and polytechnics are all over the country and their method of instruction and language of instruction are different. However, if we get such entrants in our technical trades then the requirement to train them further will come down drastically. That is where the key lies — what systems do we put in place to implement the *Agnipath* scheme?

The assimilation and integration of *Agniveers* in the units when they come after six months of training in the recruit centres is another area we'll have to work on. With a four-year term for the *Agniveers*, we have now made our recruit training to between 24 to 31 weeks. Currently we have —depending on which Arm and Service they belong to — basic recruitment training started from 51 weeks and went right up to 104 weeks, that is, close to 2 years in certain technical trades. We have been able to condense it to 31 weeks, which would include the basic military training as well as the advance military training. And, subsequently when a soldier goes to the units, he continues with the on-the-job training. One of the key issues here is our ability to select the best 25 percent who will continue in the army for the rest of their service. For that a very transparent and credible assessment system based on a centralised automated database has been made. Here 60 percent of the marks are based on an objective assessment and the balance 40 percent based on the assessment of the COs/OCs. While the *Agniveers* are in service, they will add to their qualifications. In this respect, consultations/discussions with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship have made good progress. Whatever military skill or the training the *Agniveers* undergo during their training, they will get certain credits, and based on these credits, if the soldier joins as a 10th standard pass, when he completes his tenure in the military and goes out he will exit as a 12th standard pass young man. If he's come in as a 12th standard pass, he goes out as a potential degree holder. To be a graduate/degree holder, out of the 140 credits required, 70 credits will be accumulated based on the basic military training and the training he has undergone as a soldier. The exiting *Agniveer* will have to appear for an examination for the balance 70 credit points.

The assimilation and integration of *Agniveers* in the units when they come after six months of training in the recruit centres is another area we'll have to work on. With a four-year term for the *Agniveers*, we have now made our recruit training to between 24 to 31 weeks.

Another benefit is the fact that currently we have about 7.2 percent soldiers who are in Low Medical Category (LMC). Their availability for duty in various terrain is restricted. Out of this 7.2 percent, 90 percent are above four or five years of service. With *Agnipath*, if in a unit you have a ratio of 50 percent less than four years and 50 percent more than four years, the availability of medically fit soldiers will go up significantly. This will be a major positive. While the scheme is unique and a significant break from the past, its impact will be incremental and spread over many years. The fear that the character of an infantry battalion will change with induction of *Agniveers* is allayed by the fact that every year a battalion gets only 25-30 new recruits. So, if 25-30 *Agniveers* come to a battalion every year, there will be adequate time as we move forward to assimilate and absorb the features of the scheme.

Conclusion

The Chiefs stated that the future battle space is going to be cluttered, congested, contested, and complex and what this requires is that we need to reimagine, reinvent, rededicate, and retrain ourselves for future conflicts. Their talks made it clear that transformation for the Indian Military is a necessity that is already clearly manifest. That the Services individually, and in unison, are striving to transform comes through clearly in the gist of the two addresses given in the condensed version of their talks. The talks brought out that we need to fully integrate into a common, functionally efficient, and operationally potent architecture to succeed under the changing conditions of warfare. This needs a constant reassessment of where we are and where we need to transform with respect to both our operational preparedness as well as other aspects of functioning to meet the emerging threats. At every stage of transforming to become more effective, or in the implementation of human resource management initiatives like the *Agnipath* scheme, the major challenge would be to ensure that there is no dilution in our operational preparedness level, especially, along our contested borders as well as in the hinterland. Both Chiefs assured the audience that the Air Force and Indian Army will remain steadfast and fully committed to take on any challenges that come our way.

Russia's Ukraine War: Lessons for Indian Warfighting

Lieutenant General (Dr) Rakesh Sharma, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)[@]

Abstract

The central theme of this article is to analyse the course of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War, and its military implications on India. The article, which draws from the author's extensive study of this subject carries out an analysis and examines the Russian operations against Ukraine in four phases, the fourth being the current operations. It covers Russian ground, air, cyber, information and other domains following Moscow's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine and draws 10 lessons learnt in the operations so far which are relevant for India. It covers as to what do these lessons suggest about the future of the war for Indian warfighting. The assessment focuses on the operational and tactical level of warfare. It briefly analyses the planning and conduct of the military campaign and the utility of various weapon systems.

Backgrounder

The best teacher of war is war itself! With over a year behind us of the Russo-Ukraine War 2022, it is imperative to rationalise and focus on the geopolitics, geoeconomics, and geostrategy of the war. With plethora of largely one-sided narratives, it is Herculean to sift through and piece together a rational explanation of the whys and wherefores. Indeed, the Russian policy-makers and political hierarchy, at the outset, must have determined that this war is worth fighting with its costs, consequences, and ramifications. In the pre-emption to it, the military brass would have candidly and directly advised on military strategy, the options available, the appreciation of the defenders' leaders and their will to fight, military training, wherewithal, and culture and values and conduct of campaign. The political hierarchy thence would have established the policy and guided the military in strategising and selecting the option to conduct the war towards a military end-state that would lend to the envisaged political end game. Political policy and military strategy are, hence, equally accountable for the conduct of war. The central theme of this paper is to analyse the course of the ongoing war, and its military implications for India

The Conduct of the War

It is necessary at the outset to broadly recount the situation consequent to the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, when an armed conflict of varying intensity broke out. Over the course of last eight years, Ukrainian Government forces fought separatists for control over much of the two heavily industrialised regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, also known as Donbas. This war was a heavy burden as in eight years it had killed over 14,000 people. The fighting transformed into a trench war, with roughly 75,000 troops facing off along a 420-km-long front line cutting through densely populated areas.¹ The war ruined the area's economy and heavy industries, forced millions to relocate and

[@] Lieutenant General (Dr) Rakesh Sharma, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd), has had extensive operational experience in Jammu and Kashmir, North East and on the Western Borders. He had trained the Botswana Army, and attended the National War College at Abuja, Nigeria. A former Research Fellow at the MPIDSA, he has a PhD in Defence Studies. He commanded an infantry division on the LoC and a corps in Ladakh. He superannuated as the Adjutant General of the Indian Army in 2017. He is an avid author and speaker. He is currently a Distinguished Fellow with Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) and CLAWS and is on the Executive Council of the USI, MPIDSA and of Global Counter Terrorism Council (GCTC).

turned the conflict zone into one of the world's most mine-contaminated areas. Like all ongoing military operations, it is necessary to sift through wholesome pathological lying. The present war can be split in four distinct phases for ease of consideration. These phases are dynamically based on criteria of major operational change on ground.

Special Military Operation - Phase One. The first phase commenced on 24 February 2022, when President Putin announced his decision to launch a 'Special Military Operation' (SMO) in eastern Ukraine. In the stated aim, there were no plans to occupy Ukrainian Territory and the aim was to support the 'right of the peoples of Ukraine to self-determination'. President Putin also stated that Russia sought the "demilitarisation and denasification" of Ukraine, and that "all responsibility for possible bloodshed will be entirely on the conscience of the regime ruling on the territory of Ukraine".² Russian forces entered Ukraine from Belarus towards Kyiv, Chernihiv Oblast, Sumy Oblast, Kharkiv Oblast, and Luhansk Oblast, as well as from Crimea. Large-scale amphibious landings took place in Mariupol. In the Battle of Antonov Airport, Russian airborne troops arriving in helicopters seized Hostomel Airport, a suburb of Kyiv. This operation eventually turned into a failure. Advancing from Crimea, Russian Forces captured the first city, Kherson, and took control of the North Crimean Canal, which allowed them to resume water supply to the Crimean Peninsula. Following fierce fighting, by 07 April 2022, Russian Forces had withdrawn from Kyiv-Chernihiv-Sumy.

Donbas Offensive: Phase Two. The second phase can be taken as from 08 April to 28 August 2022, just before Ukrainian counter-offensives made ground in the Kharkiv, Donbas, and Kherson. The siege of Mariupol, which had begun on 24 February 2022, lasted until 20 May 2022. It saw fighting between the combined Russian Armed Forces and the Donetsk People's Republic People's Militia versus the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Ukrainian troops remaining in the city surrendered at the Azovstal Iron and Steel Works on 20 May 2022.

President Putin also stated that Russia sought the "demilitarisation and denasification" of Ukraine, and that "all responsibility for possible bloodshed will be entirely on the conscience of the regime ruling on the territory of Ukraine"

In this period, a suspected Ukrainian missile sank the flagship of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, the Moskva. Ukrainian forces recaptured Snake Island, a tiny islet off the coast of southern Ukraine in the Black Sea. Russian Forces had launched an all-out assault to encircle Ukrainian troops in the twin cities of Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk, which are situated on the east and west banks of the Siverskiy Donets River. Consequently, President Zelenskyy had acknowledged the loss of the Luhansk Oblast.

Ukraine's Forces, thereafter, focused on defending Donetsk, the second part of the prized Donbas. By 25 June, HIMARS missiles from the US began hitting Russian ammunition depots, logistics and command and control systems. The United States had agreed to send the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (M142 HIMARS) on the assurance that it would not be used against targets in Russia.³ The last city in the eastern Luhansk Region fell to the Russian assault.

Counter-Offensives and Onslaught against Infrastructure: Phase Three

The third phase of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine covers the period from 29 August 2022 to 12 November 2022, when Ukrainian Forces retook substantial ground during counter-offensives in the south and east. Ukraine had won a decisive victory in the 29th week of the war, reclaiming an estimated 8,000 square kilometres (3,090 square miles) of north-eastern territory from Russian Forces. Inflicting a serious blow to Russia, Ukraine's counter-offensive in the northern Kharkiv Region began on 06 September, under the ruse created of a counter-offensive in Kherson. Russia admitted the loss of significant territory on 13 September, though it claimed it was tactically retreating from the area west of the Oskil River, which now forms the new front line.

On 21 September, President Vladimir Putin officially announced partial mobilisation to begin immediately. Although it was stated that only reservists with military experience would be mobilised, the official decree allowed

for any citizen to be conscripted with exceptions for only age, sickness, and imprisonment status. Meanwhile, on 23 September, Russian-occupied regions held referendums to join Russia.

In October 2022, Ukrainian successes were firstly, serious damage to the Kerch Bridge and secondly, a maritime drone attacks on the Black Sea Fleet. The Russian withdrawal from Kherson, west of Dnieper River, came after reports of heavy damage to the Antonivsky Bridge — the area's only road crossing over the Dnipro. In addition, the rail bridge and the bridge on the Dam were also damaged by Ukrainian Forces, making Russian occupation of Kherson tenuous.

Ukrainian soldiers began entering Kherson on 10 November, after Russian retreat from the strategic city, in a significant win for Ukraine. Ukraine's recapture of the key southern city marked a major setback for Russia, just six weeks after Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that the broader Kherson Region and three other territories were being incorporated into the Russian Federation. Kherson city was the only regional capital seized by Russia since it launched its large-scale invasion in February.

Damage to the Kerch Bridge was a Red Line for Russia. Russia launched a barrage of cruise missiles on 10 October 2022 in the busy Ukrainian cities, knocking out power and heat with its most widespread air attacks since the start of the war. The volley of missiles pitched multiple cities into darkness, cutting water and heat and forcing people to endure freezing cold. Ukraine's national energy provider said its system had lost more than half its capacity after strikes targeted 'backbone networks and generation facilities'. This missile onslaught has sporadically continued thereafter.

The Russian military stubbornly pressed its effort to ram through the multi-layered Ukrainian defences in the eastern region of Donetsk in dogged trench warfare reminiscent of World War I.

Stalemate: Fourth Phase

The fourth Phase encompasses the period from 13 Nov till date, denoted by largely a stalemate. With the war in Ukraine grinding through, both sides are locked in a stalemated battle of attrition, as it was getting harder to sustain military operations in colder weather. Russia continued in this period with a campaign of massive strikes against Ukrainian infrastructure. The strikes on the energy infrastructure are aimed at inciting social tension and raising pressure in order to push for talks. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the bombardments have destroyed half of his country's infrastructure.

The Russian military stubbornly pressed its effort to ram through the multi-layered Ukrainian defences in the eastern region of Donetsk in dogged trench warfare reminiscent of World War I, though making slow progress. Russia's apparent strategy behind relentless attacks on the Ukrainian stronghold of Bakhmut in the Donetsk Region is to try to force Kyiv to keep a sizable number of troops there and inflict heavy losses. The town of Bakhmut has no strategic importance beyond its propaganda value. Russia achieved some advances with the capture of Soledar on 16 January 2023.

Lessons for India's Warfighting

The war is ongoing and is being currently studied worldwide. It is apparent that conventional wars are here to stay and can commence with limited preparations or notice. Wars will have to be fought by India with its own prowess and combat capabilities, with very limited, if any, assistance from friendly nations. In this context, most significant is the political policy and military strategy interface in conduct of war. The Russo-Ukraine War 2022 has clearly indicated that historical similarities will not provide any guidance to the future. Therefore, there is need to contemplate the transformation that modern warfare is undergoing. Ten such propositions are examined to draw lessons relevant to Indian context.

First, wars are costly gambits, and a greatly destructive endeavour. War is a constant teacher, albeit, very brutal and costly one. Questions have previously been raised about utility of large conventional forces involved in long-drawn attrition warfare in hostile battlefield conditions, to gain territory or to break the will of the adversary to fight. The ongoing war has put paid to many such posers, though it does not foretell that wars cannot be swift, short, lethal, and intense. Fact is, the adversary has a vote too in war, and will not fight like us, and would have planned a counter strategy. The course of war could not be pre-determined, even with the in-depth knowledge that Russian political and military hierarchy had of Ukraine and its military and irregular forces prowess. As in the current case, mass concentration of own and adversary's forces, as training exercises that culminate in war, will be clearly discernible by commercial and military technologies.

Second, in the Russo-Ukraine War 2022, there are apparently political constraints in use of combat force. Doctrinally, Russian Armed Forces have emphasised on mass fire offensive strategies, leveraging improved intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, wide array of fires platforms, and using speed, surprise and integrated combined arms manoeuvre forces to disrupt and overwhelm enemy forces. It was apparent that Russian applied military strategy in Ukraine incorporated largely tenets of measured response and precision fires, in the initial stages of the war. The issue that needs emphasising is that our military must train and exercise, and create the force design that facilitates a wide range of options — ones that have concordance of the government in peacetime. War is not predetermined, it is not linear: mistakes will happen, conditions will change, and innovations will be demanded. To sum it, we need to make political and military strategic choices, based on outcomes, in peacetime.

Fact is, the adversary has a vote too in war, and will not fight like us, and would have planned a counter strategy. The course of war could not be pre-determined, even with the in-depth knowledge that Russian political and military hierarchy had of Ukraine and its military and irregular forces prowess.

Third, terrain plays tremendous role in territorial wars. Urban warfare is an absolutely different kettle of fish! Recent examples of urban warfare, Grozny (31 Dec 1994 to 08 Feb 1995 and 25 Dec 1999 to 06 Feb 2000), Fallujah (04 Apr 2004 to 01 May 2004, 07 Nov 2004 to 23 Dec 2004, and 22 May 2016 to 29 Jun 2016) among others, saw great devastation. A significant case is of Mosul from 16 Oct 2016 to 04 Jan 2017, when US-backed Iraqi security forces conducted a full-scale city attack to liberate Mosul from the Islamic State. The operation was the largest conventional land battle since the attack on Baghdad during the US-led invasion in 2003 and one of the most destructive urban fights in modern history — a force of over one hundred thousand attacking somewhere between five and twelve thousand irregulars. Ukraine is a modern urban state, with very large cities and large suburbs, Kyiv is a huge metropolis. The four to five Combined Arms Armies (CAA) applied against even Kyiv's suburbs were a grossly insufficient combat force.⁴ This brings to fore the immense urbanisation (in addition to the water-obstacle ridden terrain) in plains of Pakistan and India. We ought to draw right lessons from the modern-day urban wars in contemplating military strategies in urbanised environment.

Fourth, many thinkers have opined about the demise of a tank, or otherwise. It is necessary to observe the battlespace intently. There is indeed no replacement to boots on the ground or tank as a platform. However, the urban environment, modern technology, and irregular warfare practised by the Ukrainian defenders clearly indicate limitations of mechanised warfare. The survivability of tank has come in question. Much has been written about Javelins, New generation anti-tank weapons (NLAW) and Stinger missiles. While 84mm Rocket Launcher (RL) has serious limitations against 1000 mm effective Rolled Homogeneous Armour (RHA), NLAW is six times more expensive than 84mm RL and Javelin is ten times of NLAW. However, the NLAW and Javelin can effectively target, from closed environment, a many times more expensive tank. To add to this are the drones and loiter ammunitions that will eventually be with Artificial Intelligence and autonomy.

National Security Capacity Building

There has been conservative use of tactical air force, aircraft have been avoiding low level operations, and, in future, would require advanced defensive aids to survive. Attack helicopters may have limited use in contested airspace. Long-range precise artillery has been and would play decisive role, though collateral considerations may demand more precision ammunition. ISR is the key, as, for example, requisite data to Ukraine provided the opportunity to effectively use Neptune missiles against the Russian ship *Moscova* — other considerations notwithstanding.

The tank will have to take another avatar, sort out its ‘cook off’ of ammunition issue, get some directed energy weapons, different metallurgy and protection, improve its survivability, all without gaining weight. Use of mechanised forces through urban contested environment or even gullies of eastern Ladakh, with the preponderance of precision firepower, clearly needs reanalysis. Contextually, light tanks will have serious survivability issues.

Fifth, are the modern trends in warfare that have been highlighted in the ongoing operations — the conjoined targeting by ballistic and cruise missiles and rockets fired from air by fixed wing aircraft, helicopters, and drones. Firing of missiles at sea, on land, and underwater. Firepower coordination with Electronic Warfare (EW) changed the character of warfare in Donbas. Is there a need for a geospatial intelligence agency and creation of unified information space in battlefield? Defensive and offensive Cyber - EW amalgamation and leveraging has become imperative. Indeed, Cyber - EW will not replace conventional war, though their disruptive potential must not be understated.

Sixth, the major armies of the world — the US, Chinese and Russian — have gone in for combined teams at tactical level, with Brigade Combat Team (US), Combined Arms Team (PLA), and the Battalion Tactical Groups (BTG) (Russian). The success of the Russian BTG ought to be studied and analysed. The PLA's CAB were seen in Eastern Ladakh in 2020 and thereafter. Naturally, India has to compose and organise forces as per own war fighting doctrines. However, the concept must not be negated on the narrower scoped altar of human resource issues, but on a deliberate operations think.

Demand for combat-enabling supplies such as rations, fuel, ammunition, and repair parts are difficult to forecast because of the nature and unpredictability of conflict. The actual demand for items for the forward combat echelons is never truly known, only projected.

Seventh is the distinctive emphasis in the ongoing morality issues, rules of warfare, human rights, humanitarian corridors and evacuation of civilians from the thick of battle zones, and war crimes investigations, many of which are motivated. These were not so apparent in other conflicts such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen. May be the future has largely precision and principled use of combat power in store.

Eighth, is of logistics planning. Much has been stated about poor logistical planning by the Russian advancing columns, terrain conditions for move, limited road space management, and focussed targeting of logistical convoys and trucks by irregulars. The Russians follow the model of push system logistics, as against the West's pull model, when it comes to managing inventory as it is distributed to combat forces. Russian push network operates from forecasted data and delivers supplies based on estimated and pre-determined requirements. Demand for combat-enabling supplies such as rations, fuel, ammunition, and repair parts are difficult to forecast because of the nature and unpredictability of conflict. The actual demand for items for the forward combat echelons is never truly known, only projected. The practice of holding reserve is common to offset possible shortages. Pull system is preferable when it comes to following lean principles.

Ninth is the issue that has been constantly debated, Information Warfare (IW) and information dominance. It is understandable that virality triumphs veracity, and negative information is viral in no time. Creation of narratives is a process that mandates specialisation and requires specialists or social media will become hand maiden of inimical elements and adversaries. This is indeed era of Tik-Tok warfare and Indian audio-visual media also tends to get over-emotional. We need to get on with creating the strategy, the structures, and the specialists for future IW.

Last, and the tenth, lesson is the human resource which is a domain that is enmeshed in all domains. Russian operations were named as 'SMO', and not 'war', to avoid mass mobilisation and call in of reservists. The Russian Battalion Tactical Groups hence remained sub-strength, with non-availability of reservists, and conscripts having been pulled out as they could not be used in combat as per law.⁵ Human Resource is critical to warfare, very difficult to train and retrain. The success of Ukraine in urban areas also rested upon the trained reservists who joined the Territorial Brigades and undertook the task of irregulars. This is a critical element of analysis for the armed forces in India, presently on the cusp of immense changes.

Conclusion

In sum, predicting future scenarios is a majorly onerous task. What caused the conflicts of yesterday is unlikely to be useful to anticipate those of tomorrow. Historically, armed conflicts are too complex to allow prediction. The greatest challenge of our times is to be able to make correct and timely assessments of the changes taking place and the nature and extent of challenges and opportunities they present, and to learn and learn from ongoing wars. The easiest way out for the militaries is to remain in status quo, the power of inertia is just too strong! It is critical to obtain firm analytical foundation – the *why* of prospective war, understanding the likely political objective or aim, politico-military strategy, the technological changes that have over-riding implications on warfare, and create dynamic sectoral profiling on use of combat force. This transformation to modern warfare requires careful holistic analysis as exhorted by PM Narendra Modi at Kevadia, in March 2021, on creation of a '*future force*'.⁶

The Indian Armed Forces should build combat capabilities, train and prepare for the uncertain future, in total consonance with the larger political policy, and on whose shoulders must ride the current military doctrine and future military strategy. If restrictions or restraints are envisaged in the political policy thinking, it is best now that the military hierarchy be aware of and makes plans for. There is also a need to professionalise IW. Case in point is the overdrive of Western (and Indian) media creating narratives, with much truth, many half-truths and more blatant lies and fakery, showing gross failures of the Russian war machine and extolling the virtues of the stoic Ukrainian defence.

The Indian Armed Forces should build combat capabilities, train and prepare for the uncertain future, in total consonance with the larger political policy, and on whose shoulders must ride the current military doctrine and future military strategy.

Endnotes

- 1 “Conflict in Ukraine’s Donbas: A Visual Explainer”, *International Crisis Group*, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/conflict-ukraines-donbas-visual-explainer>
- 2 Full text: Putin’s declaration of war on Ukraine, *The Spectator*, 24 February 2022. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/full-text-putin-s-declaration-of-war-on-ukraine/>
- 3 Peter Beaumont, “US says Ukraine will not use US-supplied rocket systems to hit Russian territory”, *The Guardian*, Jun 01, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/01/us-says-ukraine-will-not-use-us-supplied-rocket-systems-to-hit-russian-territory>
- 4 Seth g. Jones, “Russia’s Ill-Fated Invasion of Ukraine: Lessons in Modern Warfare”, CSIS Brief, Jun 01, 2022, Centre for Strategic and International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-ill-fated-invasion-ukraine-lessons-modern-warfare>
- 5 Lt Gen (Dr) Rakesh Sharma, Learning to Win wars, Not Just Battles. *VIF*, May 14, 2022. <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2022/may/14/learning-to-win-wars-not-just-battles>
- 6 “India must develop military into a ‘future force’”, says PM Modi, *Business Today*, Mar 07, 2021. <https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/economy-politics/story/india-must-develop-military-into-future-force-says-pm-modi-290227-2021-03-07>

Leveraging Soft Power to Achieve India's National Security Objectives

Lieutenant General Ghanshyam Singh Katoch, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)[@]

Abstract

The American political scientist Joseph Nye had articulated Soft Power as the power which countries can use in international affairs of “getting others to want the outcomes that you want”.¹ India, too, has Soft Power present through various elements. This article opines that we need to firstly do beyond looking at Soft Power in the traditional element of culture. Secondly, we need to be more focussed doctrinally and organisationally to apply it. The nation's potential of Soft Power, if implemented with a plan, would certainly enhance India's more exalted position in empowering it to influence opinions favourably. The article examines India's Soft Power and the manner in which India can apply it for fulfilment of its national security objectives.

Introduction

Soft Power refers to the ability of a country to influence and persuade others to do what it wants them to do, without the use of force or coercion. ‘Soft’ is an antonym of ‘hard’ so obviously ‘Soft Power’ is the opposite of ‘Hard Power’, the latter being national power applied through the use of kinetic military action — the ultimate ‘Hard Power’. Military power is employed either directly or as a threat in being — to coerce — in order to influence the behaviour/compliance of another country or entity. Soft Power uses economic inducement or cultural influences rather than military strength. However, while it is safer to say that Soft Power does not depend on military capabilities, it is not as straightforward to separate Soft Power from economic power because the latter can be used both as an inducement or as coercion. This article takes Hard Power to be the use or threat of use of kinetic violence through war, and Soft Power as the power to gain ‘positive collaboration’ without war and the attendant loss of life in a violent manner. The article carries out an analysis of India's Soft Power using the description and paradigm above. Therefore, to that extent, economic power is clubbed under Soft Power as one of its components — though more important than the others.

Soft Power and Hard Power

The United States of America is the best example of a country possessing both Hard and Soft Power. Its military, economic, and cultural prowess has been unparalleled. Its Soft Power permeated into even the most hard-core competitor societies, thereby making them more malleable to US foreign policy objectives. From democracy to liberalism to McDonald's to Rock music to Jeans — the US mores and culture have been the ones to emulate, and the United States is seen as the ‘American Dream’. The appeal of this culture has percolated into its most aggressive competitors, including the Chinese. It is obvious that when Nye argues that successful states need both Hard and Soft Power — the ability

[@] Lieutenant General Ghanshyam Singh Katoch, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) has commanded a battalion on the LoC, Brigade in CI Operations in Kashmir Valley, a Division in the North East and a Corps in the Desert sector. He has two Masters Degrees, one in Defence & Strategic Studies from Madras University and the other in Defence Analysis from the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, USA and an M.Phil degree in Defence & Strategic Studies from Devi Ahliyabai University, Indore. He retired in March 2016 from the Indian Army as the Director General Perspective (now Strategic) Planning.

to coerce others as well as the ability to shape their long-term attitudes and preferences — he is correct. The United States can militarily dominate others, but it has also excelled in projecting Soft Power with the help of its companies, foundations, universities, churches, media and other institutions of civil society; US culture, ideals, and values have been extraordinarily important in helping Washington attract partners and supporters and create alliances.

Nye acknowledges the limits of Soft Power: it tends to have diffuse effects on the outside world and is not easily wielded to achieve specific outcomes. Indeed, societies often embrace American values and culture but resist US foreign policy. But overall, Nye's message is that US security hinges as much on winning hearts and minds as it does on winning wars. As the academic George Gao wrote in 2017, "the quest for cool is key to a country's so-called Soft Power. Unlike hard power, which is the ability to get what one wants through coercion or payment, Soft Power usually comes in the form of seduction".²

India's Soft Power

The Past. The past perception of India's Soft Power is associated with the *Abimsa* (respect for all living things and avoidance of violence towards others) doctrine of Emperor Ashoka, derived from a syncretic Hindu/Buddhist/Jain philosophy — which 2150 years later had formed the bedrock for Mahatma Gandhi's technique of 'non-violent' agitation. After this, the Nehruvian policy of non-alignment appeared a natural corollary. The perception created through Indian association with *Abimsa* and Non-violence was of an unaggressive, fair, and an impartial stance. This gave India the moral authority to emerge as the champion of the doctrine of non-alignment in the post decolonisation. Non-alignment helped in giving India a status and standing which gave it a modicum of power — albeit Soft Power — in a world divided into two opposing camps during the Cold War. India's actual military or economic status could not have given it an equal leverage in world affairs.

The perception created through Indian association with Ahimsa and Non-violence was of an unaggressive, fair, and an impartial stance. This gave India the moral authority to emerge as the champion of the doctrine of non-alignment in the post decolonisation.

The application of India's Soft Power, based upon its cultural heritage, was most pronounced during the Nehruvian period of non-alignment when it became a world leader of that movement, especially amongst the Afro-Asian nations. While institutional support for leveraging yoga and meditation as a cultural heritage has occurred during the tenure of the present NDA government, its reach through private practitioners was more profound in the pre/post-independence era — probably because of its novelty to the western world, when India could first independently outreach to a western world beyond Great Britain. India's Soft Power bubble burst consequent to the 1962 defeat by China.

The Present. In the modern world, the heft of yoga/meditation/non-violence as a source of Soft Power has reduced to a significant degree. The 1962 war taught India that Soft Power not complemented by Hard Power can be catastrophic. It is now derived from other factors as well. In 2022, the Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs published its 16th report which was on the subject 'India's Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy: Prospects & Limitations'. The report stated that:

"India possesses a vast repertoire of Soft Power resources with widespread global appeal. These include its cultural heritage evident in arts, dances, literature, cuisine, yoga, traditional medicine, cinema and entertainment, sports, historical monuments, India's democratic traditions, Constitution, unity in diversity and contributions in resolving contemporary environmental issues, scientific/technological accomplishments and socio-economic innovations".³

The report contained a number of recommendations for the government to act upon. The Committee — as is also the norm — recommended the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) — an autonomous body under the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) — to be strengthened by budget, staffing, and restructuring to better project India's Soft Power.⁴ While these recommendations are undoubtedly important yet they reflect a traditional view of the ability of Soft Power to be restricted to winning 'Hearts and Minds'. In the application of Soft Power to meet national foreign policy objectives, the Hearts and Minds approach is slow, passive and often fails when confronted with a strong nationalist counter narrative.

To have greater control and understanding of Soft Power, India's (MEA) has determined to promote a 'Soft Power Matrix' to measure the effectiveness of the country's Soft Power outreach.⁵ Initiatives such as 'Destination India' and 'Know India' have been launched. The ICCR even organised a national convention 'Destination India' initiative for the first time in 2019, which believes that India can move up fast to be a leader of the global knowledge society. However, the ICCR is definitely not in the business of covert influence operations and its success in promoting the Indian brand has been inadequate.⁶ Since the inception of the ICCR, the work of sending Indian cultural troupes abroad has been the mainstay of its work, as the primary mandate of the Council is to create international understanding through culture.⁷ This does not aid leveraging Soft Power for meeting national security objectives.

The Future. The future of India's Soft Power must be always weighed in its ability to influence its foreign policy in the interest of India's security. Soft Power's connect with security rests on its ability to attract, build, and mobilise networks of actors to work collaboratively. Those countries with the ability to do so will be the ones driving change and shaping global events in the future.⁸ The same elements of ability cannot have equal effect on the target because of a host of other factors. Hence, India must, after analysis of the target, decide upon which elements to use and how to use them.

This article opines that while the traditionally understood determinant of Indian Soft Power (culture) can be used as an element of India's Soft Power, it needs to be used in light of its limitations and keeping in view new sources of Indian Soft Power which have emerged post-independence and in a globalised world.

It would be naïve to discount the capability of Soft Power to synergise and strengthen foreign policy. Often such conditions exist that ultimately Hard Power makes no headway. Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan are clear recent examples. This article opines that while the traditionally understood determinant of Indian Soft Power (culture) can be used as an element of India's Soft Power, it needs to be used in light of its limitations and keeping in view new sources of Indian Soft Power which have emerged post-independence and in a globalised world. In the world assessment of Soft Power, India does not figure among the first 30 as per the 2021 index; it was at the 36th place.⁹ The assessment basically looks at high and middle-income countries and uses seven elements as the determinants of Soft Power. These are business and trade, governance, international relations, cultural and heritage, media and communication, education and science, and people and values.¹⁰ This assessment appears to be a western biased study where riots in India pull the Indian ranking down, reflecting on poor governance though the frequent gun shootings in the USA are not impacting their governance in the same manner.

Hence Indian Soft Power is recommended to be applied using the elements listed below:

- **Market Size.** The Soft Power that the market size gives, arises from leveraging the countries which trade with India in large volumes and want to maintain it or those who want to derive benefit from India's large market. This power derives from India's geographic and demographic size and relative prosperity.
- **A source of Technically Educated Human Resources.** The power is relevant from the point of view of developed economies who are looking for cheaper but skilled manpower.

- **A source of Affordable Services Sector.** This is more so in the education, healthcare, and infrastructure development sectors where India can provide the same services at a cheaper rate.
- **Diaspora.** Especially in the Western countries where its reputation for technical knowledge and being hardworking is established. In the Gulf though having a large diaspora, since they are more in the blue-collar jobs their influence is comparatively less as similar workers available from a number of other Asian or African countries.
- **Aura of being a Civilisational Power.** This aura requires to be maintained through cultural exchanges and institutes like China's Confucius Institutes and requires governmental support.
- **Reputation of being Peace-Loving and Unbiased.** This has to be followed by word and deed. Engagement with multilateral organisations like the United Nations strengthens as India is seen as a reliable member of the global community. Greater engagement means greater influence.
- **Ability to render Economic Support.** This finds greater salience in the underdeveloped countries and again requires considered government commitment. The result of this Soft Power is more quantifiable.
- **Appeal of its Culture.** Such appeal has limited impact in India's immediate neighbourhood. Smaller neighbours proud of their national identity are chary of being swamped by the larger neighbour's culture and liken this to a loss of sovereignty.
- **Ambivalent Alignment.** This is a shade different from non-alignment as it gives the ability of hedging, which in turn provides a form of Soft Power. Ambivalent alignment is in the "balancing-bandwagoning" spectrum within the 'balance of power' theory, in which hedging is located between balancing and bandwagoning as the state's third strategic choice.¹¹
- **Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR).** This is relevant to the immediate and extended neighbourhoods. A current example is Indian aid to Turkey post the devastating earthquake in Feb 2023 and the goodwill it has earned. It also gives an indication of India's capability to project Soft (and Hard) Power at long distances on account of its airlift capability. As Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain of the National Disaster Management Authority writes, "Nations wishing to make an international impact in terms of their Comprehensive National Power (CNP), spoken reputation, and strategic influence would find this HADR domain extremely suitable to invest in".¹²
- **Diplomatic Trust.** Diplomatic trust aids diplomatic manoeuvrings. Conversely military diplomacy aids building of diplomatic trust. Indian diplomats often play leadership roles in multilateral work where their proficiency in English makes them a natural choice as in international diplomacy English is the bridge language.¹³

In the Gulf though having a large diaspora, since they are more in the blue-collar jobs their influence is comparatively less as similar workers available from a number of other Asian or African countries.

India's National Security Objectives

Many voices are heard arguing that India does not have a National Security Strategy and which *ipso facto* flows from the National Security Objectives. However, a study states that the well-known Indian foreign policy analyst C Raja Mohan maintains that India does have a grand strategy and a set of observable national security objectives and concludes this by looking at speeches, parliamentary debates, and India's behaviour with allies and enemies over many decades

to demonstrate India's clear strategic objectives".¹⁴ Besides this, the various reports by the Ministries of Defence and External Affairs also give a clear enough idea. The essence of the objectives is best summed in brief by Lt Gen DS Hooda (Retd) in a brief on national security written as part of the manifesto of the Congress party for national elections in 2019.¹⁵ For ease of clarity, this article uses them and they are as under:

- Protecting India's national sovereignty.
- Securing the territorial integrity of India.
- Promoting India's rise to its rightful place in international affairs.
- Ensuring a peaceful internal environment within India.
- Creating a climate for our citizens that is just, equitable, prosperous, and shields them from risks to life and livelihood.

The first three objectives are applicable for India's external security for which further analysis of India's Soft Power is done. Another useful construct is by C Raja Mohan who concludes that New Delhi's national security objectives are subdivided into 'three concentric circles'; India's immediate neighbourhood, its extended neighbourhood, and the global stage".¹⁶

India's supremacy in space statesmanship and technology is an added induced element of Soft Power with endless prospects.

India's Application of Soft Power

In the immediate Neighbourhood. Other than China and Pakistan — because one is way ahead in the matrices of national power and the other sees displaying affinity for anything Indian as an existential threat — India's appeal to its immediate neighbours rests on many elements of Soft Power. Prime amongst these is economic assistance, trade, and services. This is in line with Indian offerings being more popular on account of their relative affordability. For example, despite lagging behind Western universities and hospitals, India's universities and hospitals attract a large number of students and patients from its immediate neighbourhood. India's supremacy in space statesmanship and technology is an added induced element of Soft Power with endless prospects. India's regional diplomacy has reached outer space with the nation launching its GSAT-9, also known as the South Asia Satellite, that aimed to bestow South Asian countries with space-enabled services. These are services which would be prohibitively costly for some in the immediate neighbourhood. Application of Soft Power in the immediate neighbourhood comes with a caution. A huge neighbour can be intimidating in case it tries to impose its culture and views. Application of Soft Power in the immediate neighbourhood must be done with the caveat of not being overbearing or patronising.

In the extended Neighbourhood. India's extended neighbourhood extends up to the Middle East and Southeast Asia and to all the countries on the Indian Ocean rim. This does not imply that India has to employ its Soft Power on this vast canvas. But it requires India to be conscious of what works, and what will not, in its extended neighbourhood. To a large extent — especially with respect to the Indian Ocean Region — the countries are less developed and require, for the most part, economic assistance. This is also the region where military diplomacy can get gains in respect to assistance in natural disasters, UN peacekeeping, and by goodwill visits by naval ships. This is also the region where there is growing Chinese influence on account of its greater economic capability. It would be naïve to try to match the Chinese dollar for dollar but if the right projects and assistance after careful analysis offered, it can be more beneficial. The areas being impoverished, elements like culture and spiritual offerings may not be cost effective.

At the Global Stage. In a rule based globalised world, Hard Power is restrained by convention and capability. However, on account of the same globalisation, Soft Power is unrestrained and can be projected across borders. It is Soft Power that can boost the image of India and create a niche for the country in the modern global system. India in the modern era is much more robust than what it was several decades ago and this gives it greater Soft Power capability.

When developing Soft Power globally, the influence of India being a large market, a robust democracy, and offering cultural and spiritual solace has more heft. At the same time, it is important to dispel the notion of a chaotic environment which is the archetypical Indian image persisting to some degree even now. A concerted effort is required globally to dispel this image. The growing Indian diaspora with its influence especially in North America and UK can help in that, if leveraged successfully.

As can be deduced from the Parliamentary Standing Committee report referred to earlier as well as many other writings, India is an enlightened nation with a vibrant Soft Power inheritance. However, while this inheritance can make individual attitudes favourable to India, when viewed through the foreign policy and related security prism, this Soft Power falls short of helping to further India's security interests. From the contemporary Soft Power attributes listed above, the ones that can be directly leveraged for assisting India's security concerns at the global stage are:

- Its market size on account of its very large middle class.¹⁷
- Its educated manpower and its ability for providing certain world class services at affordable rates.
- A heritage of literature, music, dance, software industry, Ayurveda, etc., produce an array of Soft Power assets that portray the attractiveness of India to the foreign populace.
- The Indian diaspora can perform a significant role in expanding the Soft Power of the country through the tremendous magnetism that they hold in the nations where they live, especially the USA and UK. Around 20 million active Indian diasporas are spread across various countries. By 2024, United Nations (UN) has predicted that, India is set to become the world's most populous country. The Indian diaspora will also continue to grow. They are an important asset for creating a positive perception of the nation.
- Its ambivalent alignment coupled with its reputation of being peace-loving and its traditional high profile with the UNO.
- Its economic strength and ability to assist other nations in times of economic crises, natural disasters, or in infrastructure development.

In a rule based globalised world, Hard Power is restrained by convention and capability. However, on account of the same globalisation, Soft Power is unrestrained and can be projected across borders.

Recommendation

The table below recommends matching the elements of Soft Power which can aid in the furtherance of national security objectives and the area of application:

	Protecting India's national sovereignty.	Securing the territorial integrity of India.	Promoting India's rise to its rightful place in international affairs.	Area Applicable in
Market Size	✓		✓	Global Stage
A Source of Technically Educated Human Resources			✓	Global Stage
A Source of Affordable Services Sector (Education, Healthcare, infrastructure development)			✓	Immediate and extended neighbourhood
Its Diaspora, Especially in The Developed Countries			✓	Global Stage
Aura of being a Civilisational Power			✓	Global Stage and extended neighbourhood
Reputation of being Peace-Loving			✓	Global Stage and extended neighbourhood
Ability to Render Economic Support	✓			Immediate and extended neighbourhood
Appeal of its Culture			✓	Global Stage and extended neighbourhood
Ambivalent Alignment	✓	✓	✓	Global Stage
Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief			✓	Immediate and extended neighbourhood
Diplomatic Trust and Military Diplomacy	✓	✓	✓	Immediate and extended neighbourhood and Global Stage

While the above table can have its infirmities or be subjective, one point that stands out is that Soft Power has lesser applicability where it is a question of protecting a nation's sovereignty and integrity.

Conclusion

In the latest article by Joseph Nye while he defends his hypothesis in relation to the war in Ukraine, one can sense that he has some self-doubts to his hypothesis.¹⁸ In case of India, Soft Power through culture alone has reducing salience if to be used in the interest of national security. For meeting security goals, institutional planning and a central mechanism is required. In the Soft Power Index mentioned in the article, there are numerous factors at play forcing what feels like an underperformance index for India. This should be taken as a western bias in the western origin of the index. However, all countries do not have the same parameters to measure their soft power, most are intangible unless the parameter is economic power. To conclude, India should figure out what Soft Power strengths it must nurture and use it to get maximum advantage. It needs to build a specific organisation within the MEA to do so. So far India's ability to tell a better story in its external security interest has not been very effective in getting desired outcomes. We must realise the importance of the non-traditional determinants of Soft Power and develop them. With all the above, the last word is that Soft Power helps only if the country has built up its conventional sources of economic and military power, otherwise it just adds a feel-good factor which provides no leverage to further a country's security interests.

Endnotes

- 1 Dhruva Jaishankar, "India rising: Soft Power and the world's largest democracy" Brookings September 17, 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/india-rising-soft-power-and-the-worlds-largest-democracy/>
- 2 J. Mac Ghlionn, "The demise of American Soft Power: How America lost its mojo", *Foreign Policy News*, February 24, 2021. <https://foreignpolicynews.org/2021/02/24/the-demise-of-american-soft-power-how-america-lost-its-mojo/>
- 3 Sixteenth Report Committee on External Affairs (2021-22) (Seventeenth Lok Sabha) India's Soft Power And Cultural Diplomacy: Prospects & Limitations. *Lok Sabha Secretariat* New Delhi August, 2022/ Sravana 1944 (Saka). Para 1.19, page 9.
- 4 Standing Committee Report Summary India's Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy, *Parliamentary Legislative Research Service*. <https://prsindia.org/policy/report-summaries/india-s-soft-power-and-cultural-diplomacy>
- 5 "India's Soft Power Push- Just Following a Fad?", *The Mint*, Feb 23, 2018. <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/JU8gsI713CuUvMgD8GUrM/Indias-soft-power-push-just-following-a-fad.html>
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 ICCR. Outgoing Cultural Delegations. <https://www.iccr.gov.in/cultural/outgoing-cultural-delegations>
- 8 The Soft Power 30. Accessed Aug 19, 2022 from <https://softpower30.com/>
- 9 <https://brandfinance.com/press-releases/global-soft-power-index-2022>
- 10 UNCTAD, "Global Soft Power Index", *SDG Pulse*, <https://sdgpulse.unctad.org/glossary/global-soft-power-index/#:~:text=Global%20Soft%20Power%20Index%20is,cultural%20and%20heritage%2C%20media%20and>
- 11 Kei Koga "The Concept of 'Hedging' Revisited: The Case of Japan's Foreign Policy Strategy in East Asia's Power Shift", *International Studies Review*, Volume 20, Issue 4, December 2018, Pages 633–660.
- 12 Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain, "The Payoffs Of Disaster Diplomacy", *The Chanakya Forum*, 11 Feb 2023. <https://chanakyaforum.com/the-payoffs-of-disaster-diplomacy/>
- 13 Teresita C. Schaffer & Howard B. Schaffer, *India at the Global High Table*. (Noida: Harper Collins: 2016) P. 214.
- 14 Amrit Ben Grant Bagia, M.A. "Understanding India's National Security Objectives through Indian Sources", Thesis submitted at Georgetown University for MA in Security Studies <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/553439/bagiaAmrit.pdf?sequence=1>
- 15 Lt Gen DS Hooda (Retd), "India's National Security Strategy". Paper by as part of *Congress Manifesto*, 2019. https://manifesto.inc.in/pdf/national_security_strategy_gen_hooda.pdf
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 In 2021-22 it was estimated to be 31% of the population, or approximately 300 million people which is almost as big as the complete US population which itself is the third largest population in the world. *Business Standard*, https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/every-one-in-three-indians-middle-class-to-double-by-2047-report-122110200522_1.html#:~:text=The%20report%20added%20that%20the,per%20cent%20in%202021%2D22.
- 18 Joseph S. Nye, Jr, "Soft Power After Ukraine", *Project Syndicate*, May 3, 2022. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/soft-power-after-russia-war-in-ukraine-by-joseph-s-nye-2022-05>

Breaching the Dragon's A2AD: Strategic Targeting is the Key

Air Marshal (Dr) Diptendu Choudhury, PVSM, AVSM, VM, VSM (Retd)®

“Security against defeat implies defensive tactics; ability to defeat the enemy means taking the offensive”¹

--- Sun Tzu

Abstract

Asia's growing salience in the world order coupled with India's growth trajectory inevitably sets it on a path of conflict with China's national interests. The Army's firm push-back to Beijing's coercive foreign policy on the borders have certainly put India on China's security strategy main list. From a future perspective, India can no longer continue to look at China from a limited border-centric continental perspective instead of the multi-domain security threat that it is. With two adversaries, both with strong air forces, and given the high-altitude terrain traction and associated geographical challenges, future conflicts will entail highly contested battle-spaces. The shape and outcome of all future surface conflicts will undeniably be impacted by the vertical dimension, and, hence, will have to be integrated synergistically in all future military strategies. However, Anti-Access-Area-Denial(A2AD), a vital element of China's anti-intervention military strategy, has successfully pushed-back the US from the First Island Chain in the aerial and maritime domains. A similar offensive-defence construct of the Western Theater Command in Tibet will have to be breached in order to exploit India's asymmetric offensive air power advantage in the region. Indian Air Force's offensive and integrated air defence capabilities will have to be exploited aggressively to bolster the surface campaign, interdict the enemy's deployed military and logistic capabilities behind the lines, to shape the battle-spaces, and equally critically, to target military and strategic target systems in depth, for the success of India's synergised military strategy and political outcomes.

Introduction

As a nation with deep conviction and faith in its ancient civilisational construct of *Zhongguo* or middle kingdom, China incorporates its ancient strategic thoughts into its contemporary strategic outlook. The Sun Tzu quote accurately reflects China's views of its military instrument of power as inherently defensive at the strategic level and offensive at the operational level. It is also the heart of its anti-intervention strategy, where, if an adversary's attack is imminent, it will not hesitate to preempt with offensive action to defend its national interests.² The US military which coined the term 'Anti-Access-Area-Denial' or A2AD, explains it as “anti-access refers to those actions and capabilities, usually long-range, designed to prevent an opposing force from entering an operational area,” whereas, “area-denial capabilities target forces in all domains, including land forces”.³ The proliferation of the term which began among the

[@] *Air Marshal (Dr) Diptendu Choudhury PVSM, AVSM, VM, VSM (Retd)* is a former Commandant of the National Defence College and SASO of HQ WAC. An experienced pilot with over 5000 sorties on fighters, he has a vast experien of operations at all levels. Actively involved in policy and doctrine formulation, Air Strategy development, and International Defence cooperation, he has led three international air exercises. A post graduate from Kings College London, an alumnus of the Royal College of Defence Studies, he is also an M Phil and PhD. A distinguished fellow of several think tanks including the USI, he is an avid scholar of international and national security, strategy, and air power.

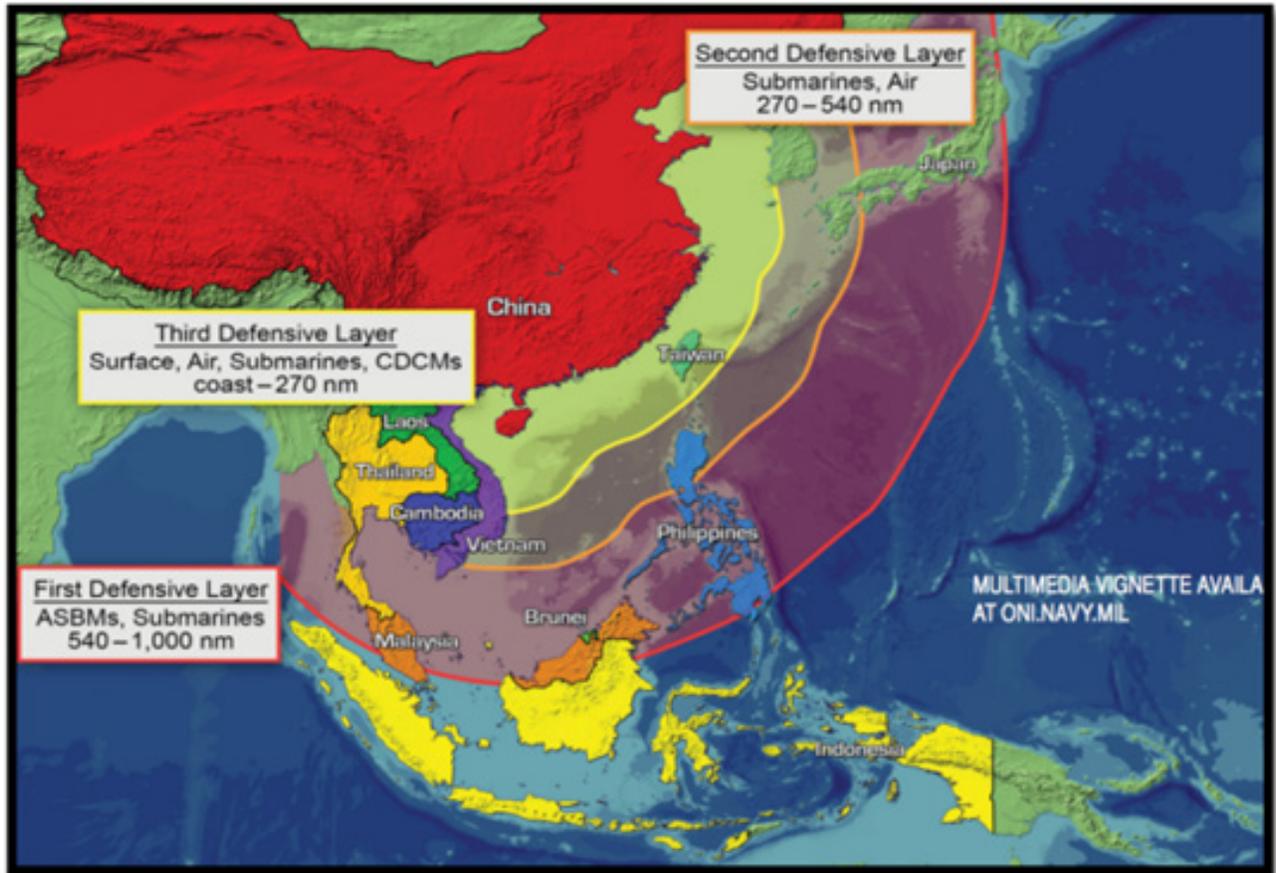
China-watchers, found traction over the last decade with the rapid growth of the Chinese military and Beijing's coercive foreign policy strategy.

Anti-Intervention: The Chinese Construct

Simply explained, A2AD conceptually comprises of two concurrent strategies and caters for conventional weapons which, are not only offensive and defensive in their construct, straddle both forward tactical spaces and strategic depths simultaneously. Since anti-access is designed to deny access to the adversary into China's theatre or area of interest, it, therefore, involves larger strategic spaces. Area denial, on the other hand, seeks to deny use of designated air spaces for preventing overflight and also deny use of defined maritime spaces, and, therefore, is more tactical in its application.⁴ Enforcement of A2AD involves high-tech Integrated Air Defence Systems (IADS), anti-ship missiles, long-range precision ballistic and cruise missiles, anti-satellite weapon systems, cyber weapons, long-range sensors, and the ability to use them effectively together.⁵ Resources and assets of the Peoples Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) are a major element of Peoples Republic of China's A2AD, giving it a both offensive and defensive capability and is primarily aimed at denying the effective employability of the US Carrier Strike Groups (CSGs) in the region. Of the seven artificial Island bases created by China, three are replete with fighter capable airfields, hardened air shelters, radars, Surface-to-Air-Guided Weapon (SAGW) systems, logistic and support facilities, etc. They bolster the A2AD bubble in the South China Sea (SCS), by allowing forward deployment of over 40 sensors, and a variety of AD and offensive weapons, thereby increasing the range and the volume of denial coverage.⁶

Simply explained, A2AD conceptually comprises of two concurrent strategies and caters for conventional weapons which, are not only offensive and defensive in their construct, straddle both forward tactical spaces and strategic depths simultaneously.

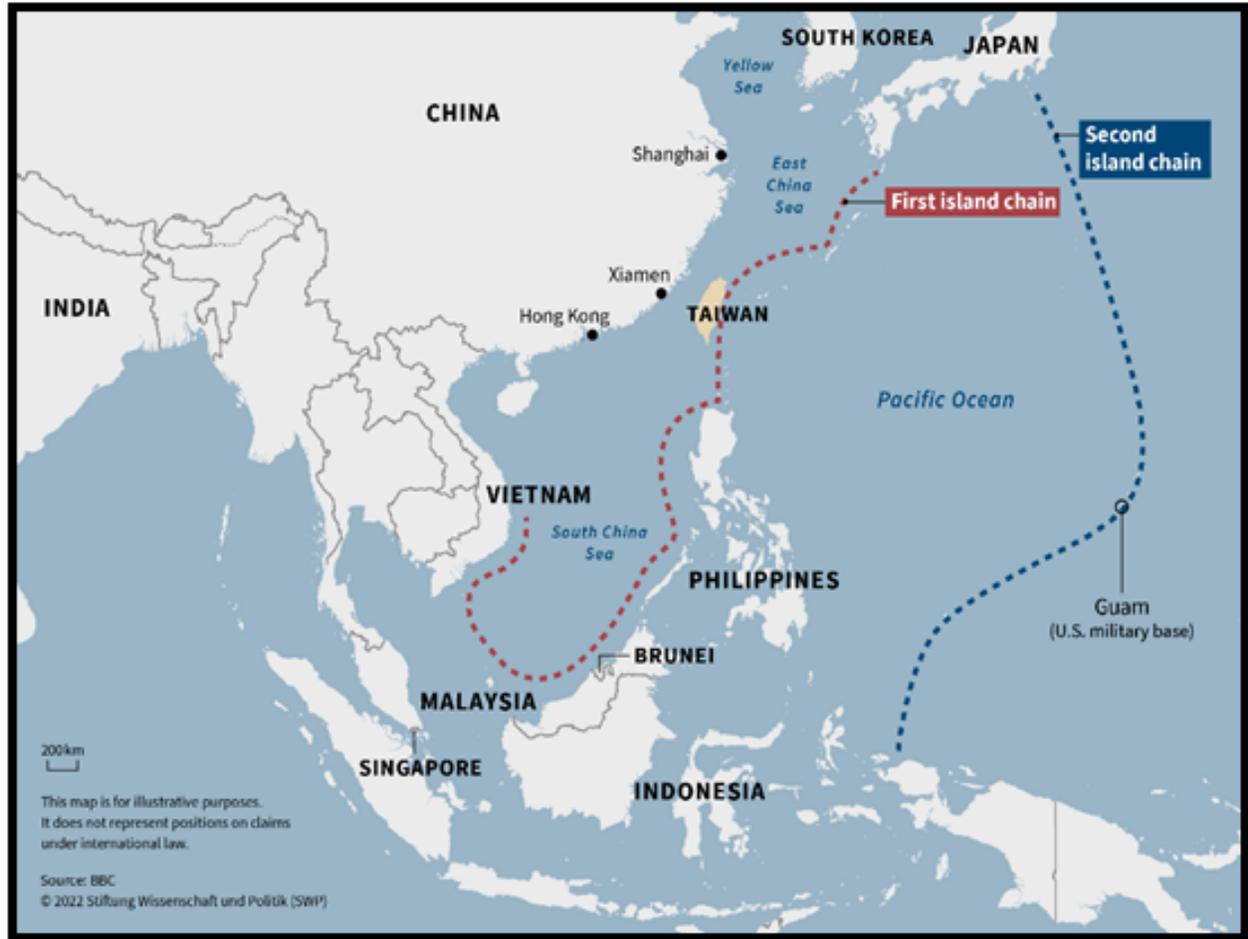
The offensive element of the hardware content of China's A2AD consists of the Dongfeng series of intermediate-range ballistic missiles, Donghai cruise missiles, anti-ship cruise missiles, long-range air-to-air and air-to-surface missiles with which modern Chinese fighters such as the Su-27, Su-30, Su-35, J-15, J-16, J-17, and J-20, are equipped with. The four and four plus generation fighters, including Russian Su-35 and Chinese-made J series versions, make up the 'offensive-defence' element. China's Yaogan series of satellites provides persistent real time stare over its areas of interest. Operational ISR is provided by Y-8 AEW and the modern KJ-2000 AEW&C (Airborne Early Warning and Control) aircraft purchased from Russia. It has a fleet of electronic reconnaissance aircraft to enable the collection of real-time intelligence and border surveillance. UAVs in service with the PLA ground forces, naval aviation, and the PLAAF play a major part in ISR. An important element of the anti-access is China's multilayered air and missile defence system that covers the land territory and extends up to 550 km from its coast which is a network of early warning radars, advanced fighter aircraft, and various SAGW systems. Its important components are the Russian S-300 and S-400 SAM (Surface-to-Air Missile) systems, which are capable of tracking and engaging aircraft, cruise and ballistic missiles. They not only provide defensive cover to its vital assets and infrastructure from long-range cruise missiles and enemy aircraft, they also provide offensive AD coverage of the entire territory of Taiwan, and a major part of the South China and East China Seas (ECS).⁷ Wheeled version of the HQ-17 and HQ-17A SAMs provide mobile AD coverage. Alongside the Electromagnetic spectrum, offensive cyber operations provide deterrence, degrade the effectiveness of the enemy's military operations, and manage escalation of the conflict by attacking and blocking adversarial information support and communications and control systems.⁸



China's A2/AD Bubble in the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean

Key Concerns of the Concept

Comprehensively viewed, the A2AD concept has reversed the dominance of the US forces in the region. It has allowed China to militarily dominate the First Island chain with a goal to seize control up to the Second Island chain.⁹ Effectively, it dominates the ECS and SCS and the airspace above them, thus, creating area denial. It has also created anti-access by effectively pushing back the US CSGs which used to threaten the Chinese mainland. This is because the extended threat range of the Chinese out-sticks the reach of US platforms and weapons. In order to counter the integrated defensive system, the entire EM spectrum has to be addressed to include the active and passive detection devices along with the targeting and tracking devices. It has, thus, effectively 'pushed back' the US forces by forcing them to redeploy its warships, aircraft (strike and reconnaissance), and military and naval bases in the region. The US recently redeployed the B-52 strategic bombers from the island of Guam in the Pacific Ocean to North Dakota, thereby, removing them from a potential strike from Chinese medium-range missiles.



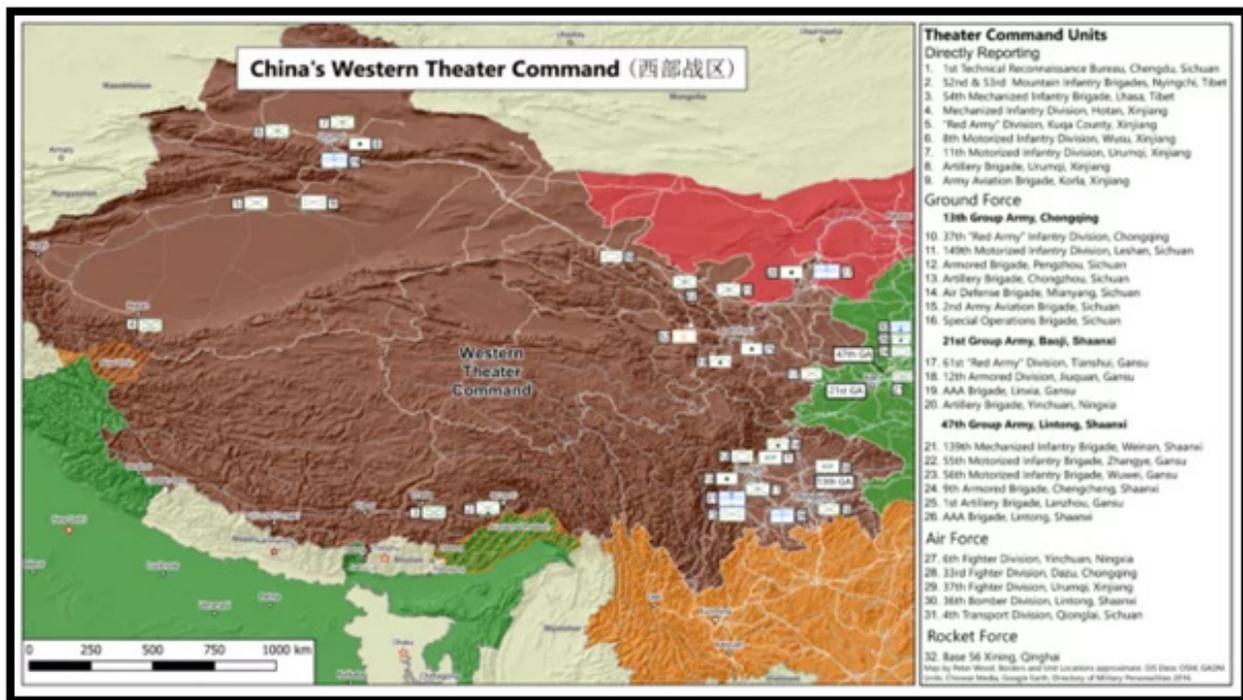
First and Second Island Chains¹⁰

The waning US conventional military capability in the region has the US worried as they estimate the growing Chinese military capabilities will be able to wrest the advantage in their favour. Consequently, the USAF (United States Air Force) Chief introduced the Air Superiority 2030 (AS 2030) Enterprise Capability Collaboration Team (ECCT) to develop capability options to enable joint force Air Superiority in the highly contested environment of 2030 and beyond. The anti-intervention strategy along China's coast is not only a US concern, it is deeply worrying for Taiwan, Japan, all the countries within the Nine-Dash line and spills over into the larger Indo-Pacific construct as well. But, arguably, the A2AD construct, which has the US worried, is significantly different from that which impacts the Indian sub-continent in certain aspects. The Western seaboard remains China's almost existential geo-strategic politico-military concern, and, therefore, the primary focus of the PLA's capabilities and capacities are and will remain deployed to safeguard its interests there in the foreseeable future. The construct of the A2AD has a significant maritime element, which, including its artificial Islands, allows expansive force projection and area denial with no geographical obstructions.

The Dragon across the Himalayas

As China continues to pursue a strategy of expansion of sovereignty to regain its 'perceived' historical territories and maritime spaces, India's border issues with it, in all likelihood, will get more complex. However, the threat while certainly is the major security concern, needs to be seen in the correct perspective. First, the strategic military deployment in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) has somewhat of a land-fortress construct, with the flat Tibetan plateau being protected by the Himalayan ranges in the South and the Karakoram Range in the South West. The high altitudes of

the plateau and the layers of some of the highest mountain ranges of the world prevent the unrestricted sensor and weapon system coverage that China's A2AD deployment enjoys in its East and South-East. The next is that while China remains the highest priority threat for India, the reverse is not so. China's highest strategic security challenge lies to its East, and, therefore, it can ill-afford a simultaneous two-adversary military conflict. A simultaneous conflict with India on its South and with the US on its East and South East is Beijing's worst nightmare and is borne out by its strategic discomfort of the growing politico-military proximity between the US and India. The third is that in the past China had been predominantly focused on strengthening its Eastern and Central Theater Commands. It is only in the past few years that there has been a thrust to develop the Western Theatre Command (WTC), especially so after the series of military brushes with India. China's largest military formation the WTC spreads across the Sichuan, Tibet, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, Xinjiang, and Chongqing regions. After having ignored the military infrastructure development in the TAR, the Doklam and Galwan stand-offs brought India into China's military strategy playlist, and it has gone into an overdrive in building and upgrading airfields, extending logistic lifelines and storage facilities, strengthening its road-rail communication networks.



WTC ORBAT¹¹

Massive infrastructure projects sanctioned by the 14th Five-Year Plan are scheduled for completion by 2030-35. These will upgrade the WTC's military capabilities and include new railways, a new highway, and 30 additional airfields in the TAR and its surrounding areas. The nearly double the number of PLA delegates compared to the other theater commands in the recently concluded 20 Party Congress, Presidents Xi's visit and meeting with officers of the WTC in visits to Lhasa, Urumqi and Chengdu, underscore China's focus in the region.¹² Most importantly, its military deployment, training, and exercises have taken on a distinctly India-centric operational flavour.

So, what is the likely concept of operations that can be expected in a conflict in the icy heights on top of the world? From the overhyped and somewhat far-fetched assessment of technology assisted cake walk for the PLA¹³, a more realistic and contemporary assessment that the Indian Army's operational approach seeks, is to prevent continuation of China's rather successful salami-slicing strategy on the borders. As the well-known military analyst

Lieutenant General Prakash Menon writes, “China’s evident operational designs mean there is no better preparation for the Army than to be ready to pay back in the same kind of like-for-like retorts. The vastness of the border would permit it as long as we are prepared”.¹⁴ But, will a limited operational approach, centered only on not ceding territory and limited tactical offensives, suffice as a strategy from a national security perspective? Will it deter the possibility of the PLA upping the ante with its offensive-defence strategy in what it conveniently perceived as Indian aggression in its territory? Will India be able to hold out against a sustained Chinese offensive which is fuelled with the PLA’s robust and swift logistic backend support that extends right up to the likely conflict zones? Will a countervailing strategy in the maritime domain, as has been proposed in some quarters,¹⁵ really deter the Chinese in the continental domain? Especially, given the likelihood of the Indian Navy (IN) taking the fight into the SCS being somewhat of an overstated possibility, can any engagement of the PLA Navy in the IOR be significant in magnitude to serve as a countervailing military strategy? While there seems to be no doubt that any future continental conflict has to be countered by India and India alone but to think that a serious Chinese offensive can be deterred by just resolute tactical surface action of limited depth will be a strategic mistake.

Unless PLA’s deployed forces, military assets, logistic nodes and communication infrastructure¹⁶ are targeted, the Indian Army’s fight will be an extremely difficult and defensive one. It is only with the employment of offensive air power to interdict the PLA behind the frontlines and at the intermediate depths, along with simultaneous targeting of depth strategic military assets, will there be a possibility of deterring the Chinese from going up the escalation matrix. From an Indian military perspective, the need to include air power in the border equation was not considered necessary in the past till Doklam, where according to O’Donnell and Bolfrass – “PLA’s strategic options were constrained by IAF(Indian Air Force)’s asymmetric advantage over the PLAAF.”¹⁷ In Ladakh, the swift and extensive IAF activations in the region, with a clear intent to undertake all operational tasks and provide support to the entire range of high-altitude military operations, was not missed by China.¹⁸ China understands air power’s coercive capability and its importance in the national security context, which is evident in its increased exploitation of PLAAF on its Eastern and Southern sea-boards. It, therefore, recognises the asymmetric air power advantage India currently enjoys in TAR. To close the gap, it is rapidly expanding infrastructure and assets, increased its air combat training, conducting international exercises including the dedicated Shaheen series with Pakistan¹⁹, and deploying its latest aviation hardware in its bases in the region.

“China’s evident operational designs mean there is no better preparation for the Army than to be ready to pay back in the same kind of like-for-like retorts. The vastness of the border would permit it as long as we are prepared”

Breaching the A2AD Citadel in TAR

PLA’s strategy is underpinned with the need for superiority in three main domains — information, air, and maritime — with the information domain as its top priority in its targeting strategy. The ‘*three superiorities*’ lie at the core of its doctrinal thinking and operational planning.²⁰ Therefore, it is the limitations of PLAAF’s ability to exercise air superiority in the TAR²¹, coupled with the IAF’s offensive capabilities, which has led to the extensive integration of the PLA AD into the WTC’s order of battle.²² Given PLAAF’s limited air to ground strike ability, it has attempted to compensate it by ballistic missile targeting by the PLARF (Peoples Liberations Army Rocket Force) against the IA’s deployed forces and IAF bases as well.²³ It is also enhancing the accuracy of its missiles, with much improved Circular Error of Probability (CEP), which is the radius of a circle in which 50 percent of rounds are expected to hit and is a measure of a weapon’s precision.²⁴ With more accurate CEP of its missiles, the PLARF’s targeting ability of “key strategic and operational targets of the enemy”, including reconnaissance, intelligence, command and control, electronic warfare, anti-aircraft and logistics systems to disrupt enemy supply, logistics, and defences, will improve.²⁵ The PLARF’s expanding capabilities

while essentially aimed at the Taiwanese and US systems, will be able to engage some IA and IAF targets as well, the quantum of which will increase in proportion with the rise of China's India threat perception.

However, the PLA's military capabilities are not without critical vulnerabilities. The military capability and the capacity of its weapons against India are presently limited to those deployed in the WTC. The threat priorities on its East and the large geographical distances preclude the possibility of switching its forces and redeploying them against India. Also, the weapon and deployment densities are presently limited to specific areas of China's focus against India in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, and these will keep the IA engaged in the assessed 'like for like retorts'.²⁶ Thus, the only depth offensive into the layered PLA defences will be possible by the IAF, which will have to carry out extensive parallel targeting — in the frontages to assist the Army in its defensive operations by keeping the PLAAF off its back by targeting PLA's offensive elements in the intermediate depths to cut off the logistic and communication lifelines and in the depths to target the PLAAF's air power on ground by striking its key air bases in WTC,²⁷ its fixed AD radars and missile sites, its aircraft and UAVs in the air, and identified long-range vector deployments. Penetrating the WTC's equivalent of A2AD deployment will be, therefore, critical not only to all IAF's air operations, it will be the deciding factor in giving the IA with its significant high-altitude warfare experience and skills a fighting chance. But breaching the citadel will certainly come at a cost, as, aside from the enemy, there will be attrition both for the IAF and the IA in combat.

Penetrating the WTC's equivalent of A2AD deployment will be, therefore, critical not only to all IAF's air operations, it will be the deciding factor in giving the IA with its significant high-altitude warfare experience and skills a fighting chance.

Several aspects will define IAF operations: Given the terrain challenges, majority of the assistance to the IA will be interdiction heavy as was in the Kargil war; the AD deployment and the Himalayan terrain will necessitate the IAF to use terrain masking tactics for penetration and targeting. This is where the IAF's vast professional experience and relentless training in offensive strikes, Suppression and Destruction of Enemy Air Defences (SEAD) and air-air combat will enable it to overcome the area denial capabilities of the PLA by going 'below, above and around' it using multi-mode penetration, saturation, decoying, etc. skill sets which the IAF regularly trains for. The prevalent advantage of fighter force ratios, better weapons payload capacity, higher mission rates, larger number of airfields, dispersed launch and recovery capabilities at lower altitudes,²⁸ swift turnaround between missions, Air-to-Air(A-A) refuelling and AWACS/AWEC integration, etc., long-range multi-mission offensive cum AD capabilities, will all play a significant role in carrying the fight to the enemy's citadel. Offensive Air and AD operations will provide the much-needed asymmetric advantage to enable the IA to even carry out limited offensives. But the real 'balance-tilter' in India's military strategy would be the in depth strategic targeting against the wide variety of targets in the WTC heartland. The development of continental pivots from where air power can be employed against China, like the Tajikistan model, will provide enormous strategic flexibility and must be considered and leveraged. The concentric arc of the large number of IAF bases which enables tremendous flexibility and agility to shift focus of force application rapidly in the TAR must be exploited to India's advantage,²⁹ with relentless offensive pressure to saturate China's A2AD.³⁰ Analysis of the massive China contingency Exercise *Gagan Shakti* conducted in 2018 demonstrated the high volume and intensity of IAF's offensive capability and capacity and the vast range of coercive asymmetry operations.³¹ The seamless inter-command air operations conducted between all IAF Commands, where it operates its resources 'from a cloud' and 'can go from any base to any target', will provide the vital flexibility, agility, and surprise.³²

End Thoughts

To achieve any significant politico-military outcome, it is the asymmetric ability to cause serious military attrition, swiftly and deep inside the enemy's territory, which will not only be a demonstration of India's resolute intent and its offensive capability to take the fight to the enemy, it will most importantly also be the greatest international perception shaper of the fallibility of China's military. Offensive air power is, therefore, a vital strategic asymmetry which can work in India's

favour as it has the ability to take the fury of the nation driven by the ghosts of the past, deep into the Chinese territory and their minds. While the Indian Air Force and the Army are no stranger to combat losses, capacity will play a critical role in any conflict with China. Under the current less-than-desirable levels of capacity, the need for inter-Service synergy in India's military strategy and extensive operational integration are imperative for its military instrument. Today, there is a wider understanding that the outcome of any war with China will pivot on the IAF's capacity, and there is significantly greater operational synergy.^{33, 34, 35} Therefore, the IAF's dwindling combat bench strength will need to be addressed on the highest priority, along with long-range offensive AD weapons systems and offensive long-range precision stand-off weapons. Capacity building of mission critical enablers like AWACS, AEW&C, Electronic Warfare and A-A Refuellers, are vital for not only anti-A2AD, but for all future conflicts. China's 'informationalised' warfare operational strategy will have to be countered with non-kinetic offensive EW and cyber penetration capabilities alongside building persistent space-based and operational ISR capabilities for combat critical real-time situational and spatial awareness. Given India's fiscal thrift in defence spending, the policymakers need to consider the hard question — is a future war with China a far-fetched possibility? If not, then it is time the Chinese threat is looked at from a larger strategic perspective that such a conflict will be a clash of nations, which it indeed will be, and not just merely a manageable tactical border issue, which it certainly is not. It is for the nation's leadership and its security establishment to decide where the chances of a serious future conflict are higher — in the land and air or in the seas, and invest in the long term accordingly.

Endnotes

- 1 Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by Lionel Giles,(Charlotte: Baker & Taylor Publishing Group, 2014), p.11
- 2 David M. Finkelstein, *China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the Military Strategic Guidelines*, in Roy Kamphausen and Andrew Scobell, ed., *Right-Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, September 2007, 88-89
- 3 Ibid
- 4 Diptendu Choudhury, *Expanding Role of PLAAF in China's National Security Strategy*, Strategic Analysis, 2020, 44:6, pp.531-532
- 5 Timothy M. Bonds, Joel B. Predd, Timothy R. Heath, Michael S. Chase, Michael Johnson, Michael J. Lostumbo, James Bonomo, Muharrem Mane, Paul S. Steinberg, *What Role Can Land-Based, Multi-Domain Anti-Access/Area Denial Forces Play in Deterring or Defeating Aggression?* https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1820.html
- 6 *The Military Balance 2019*, IISS, Routledge Taylor and Francis, London, p.233
- 7 Ibid, pp.260-262
- 8 M. G. Yevtodyeva, *Development of the Chinese A2/AD System in the Context of US–China Relations*, 29 September 2022 <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1134/S1019331622120048>
- 9 Choudhury, n.9
- 10 Image downloaded from: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/dealing-with-taiwan>
- 11 2017 vintage image downloaded from <https://jamestown.org/program/snapshot-chinas-western-theater-command/>
- 12 Jayadeva Ranade, *Xi Strengthens Western Theatre Command*, The Tribune, January 17, 2023, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/xi-strengthens-western-theatre-command-433039>
- 13 Pravin Sawhney, *The Last War: How AI Will Shape India's Final Showdown With China*, Aleph Book Company, 2022, Kindle Edition
- 14 Lt Gen Prakash Menon, *Army's Most Potent Weapon Against China on Indian borders—Human Force*, The Print, January 17, 2023, <https://theprint.in/opinion/armys-most-potent-weapon-against-china-on-indian-borders-human-force/1317146/>,
- 15 Ibid
- 16 Rezaul H Laskar, *China Bolstering Tibet Military Infrastructure*, Hindustan Times, February 08, 2021 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/china-bolstering-tibet-military-infrastructure-101612808993838.html>
- 17 Frank O'Donnell and Alex Bollfrass, *The Strategic postures of India and China*, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs Harvard Kennedy School, Report March 2020, pp 6-11, <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/india-china-postures/China%20India%20Postures.pdf>, accessed on May 30, 2021
- 18 *Indian Air Force Geared up for Combat Role in China Border Area*, ANI, July 4, 2020, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/76788189.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst, accessed on May 30, 2021
- 19 *Pak China Air Exercise Shaheen IX Underway*, International, The News, 11 December 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/756852-pak-china-air-exercise-shaheen-ix-underway>, accessed on June 1, 2021
- 20 Edmund J. Burke, Kristen Gunness, Cortez A. Cooper III, Mark Cozad, *People's Liberation Army Operational Concepts*, Research Report, RAND, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA394-1.html
- 21 Dr MS Pratibha, *PLA Western Theatre Command Lays Stress on Joint Operations Capabilities*, MPIDSA Issue Brief, November 02, 2022, <https://www.idsa.in/issuebrief/PLA-Western-Theatre-Command-msprathibha-021122>
- 22 Rezaul H Laskar, *China Creates Combined Air Defence System along LAC*, Hindustan Times, July 02, 2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/china-creates-combined-air-defence-system-along-lac-101622544473501.html>
- 23 Ravinder Singh Chatwal, *Enter the PLA Rocket Force: Assessing China's Missile Capabilities*, Air Power Journal Vol. 11 No. 3, monsoon 2016 (July-September)
- 24 Ibid

- 25 Adam Ni and Bates Gill, *China's New Missile Force: New Ambitions, New Challenges (Part 1)*, *China Brief* 18, no. 14 (10 August 2018), accessed 12 March 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-new-missile-force-new-ambitions-new-challenges-part-1/>.
- 26 Menon, n.20
- 27 Air Mshl Anil Chopra, *Xinjiang Military Region: Air Assets to Monitor*, CAPS Issue Brief 137/21, June 16, 2021 <https://capsindia.org/xinjiang-military-region-air-assets-to-monitor/>
- 28 Ibid
- 29 Air Marshal Diptendu Choudhury, *Security Vision 2047: A Hundred Years Since Independence*, VIF Paper, p.16, November 4, 2022, <https://www.vifindia.org/paper/2022/november/04/security-vision-2047-a-hundred-years-since-independence>
- 30 Grynkewich, n.2
- 31 Dr Arvind Gupta, *Significance of Exercise 'Gagan Shakti-2018'*, May 27, 2018, <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2018/may/07/significance-of-exercise-gagan-shakti-2018>
- 32 Air Marshal Diptendu Choudhury, *Salience of Air Power in Asian Waters*, *Naval War College Journal*, Vol. 32, Annual Issue, 2020
- 33 Maj Gen (Dr) Rajan Kochhar, *Sino-Indian War: Are We Prepared?* Chakaya Forum, January 05, 2023 <https://chanakyaforum.com/sino-indian-war-are-we-prepared/>
- 34 *Indian Army Carries out Military Exercise in North Bengal*, PTI, *Deccan Herald*, 31 January, 2023 <https://www.deccanherald.com/amp/national/east-and-northeast/indian-army-carries-out-military-exercise-in-north-bengal-1186503.html>
- 35 *IAF Begins Mega Air Exercise in Northeastern Region*, PTI, *The Economic Times*, January 30, 2023 https://economic-times.india-times.com/news/defence/iaf-begins-mega-air-exercise-in-northeastern-region/articleshow/97456202.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

Theaterisation of the Indian Armed Forces: A Maritime Perspective

Vice Admiral AK Chawla, PVSM, AVSM, NM, VSM (Retd)[@]

Abstract

This article provides a maritime perspective on the need for theatreisation of the sharp end of the Indian Armed Forces. Commencing with a brief history of the concept of theatre commands and the existing global best practice in this regard, the article then elaborates the necessity for jointness in the armed forces today and delves into the fitful progress of jointness in India thus far. The final section looks at the imperatives and advantages of theatreisation, specifically in the maritime context.

Introduction

A theatre is a geographic area of significant size that contains several potential strategic objectives. In case of war or national emergency, a theatre would become a ‘theatre of war’ and would include the entirety of the airspace, land, and sea area that is, or that may potentially become, involved in combat operations.¹ Tenets of Operational Art dictate that a theatre should be operationally (and administratively) organised to ensure the most favourable conditions for the employment of one’s forces across the entire spectrum of conflict, from peacetime operations to high-intensity conventional war. A large theatre of war, such as those that existed during World War II, can be further divided into ‘theatres of operations’ for better command and control. The concept of a ‘theatre’ is not new and was actually evolved by General Baron Henri Antonine de Jomini, the celebrated Swiss soldier who served during the Napoleonic wars in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, which were, until then, the largest theatres of war in human history, both in terms of space and force.² In subsequent decades, ‘theatre commands’ were established, principally during war, to ‘synchronise’ and ‘synergise’ operations across a wide geographical area. The American Civil War (1861-65), the Russo-Japanese War (1901-05), World War I (1914-18), and World War II (1939-45) all saw the employment of the concept of theatres of war. Interestingly, while the Allied Powers and the Russians established theatres of war during World War II, Germany and Japan did not do so, and was one of the several reasons for their ultimate defeat.

After World War II, the United States (US) realised that its global presence required a permanent structure of geographical combatant commands to facilitate preparation and transition to war at short notice. It, therefore, devolved the responsibility for operations across the entire globe, both in peace and in war, onto six geographical theatre commands in 1946, which have been modified or re-named several times over the past 77 years depending on strategic developments. The US has been the global leader in ‘jointness’ and has today refined its military into 11 Unified

[@] Vice Admiral AK Chawla, PVSM, AVSM, NM, VSM (Retd) superannuated from the Indian Navy on 30 November 2021 as the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Navy’s Southern Command. Over the course of his career, he has commanded five warships, including the aircraft carrier INS Viraat and the Indian Navy’s Western Fleet. He is an accomplished maritime thinker and author, and has completed his PhD on “The Role of Maritime Power in China’s Grand Strategy”. An active contributor to various defence journals, he is currently an Eminent Resource Faculty for the Rashtriya Raksha University and a Council Member of the United Services Institution of India, as also several other think tanks, besides being involved in various social and environmental initiatives.

Combatant Commands, of which seven are ‘geographic’ commands and four are ‘functional’ commands. The Chiefs of Staff of individual Services in the US do not have any operational responsibility and are instead entrusted with the equally important tasks of ‘raising, training, and sustaining’ the hardware and human resources of their respective Service, which are then given to the theatre commanders for operational employment.

Russia’s military organisation too has been based on the concept of military theatres since World War II, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was re-organised into five Joint Strategic Commands, four of which are termed as ‘military districts’, with the fifth being the Northern Fleet & Joint Arctic Command. Each Joint Command contains units from all their military branches (Ground Forces, Air Force, Air Defences and Navy).³ In China, seven military regions were reorganised into five theatre commands and one functional command (the Strategic Support Force) in 2016.⁴ Major European and Asian powers such as UK, France, Australia, and Japan do not have theatre commands due to their armed forces being much smaller in size than their US, Russian and Chinese counterparts. However, they all have Chiefs of Defence Staff, supported by joint staff, with responsibility for the conduct of operations in a joint manner, while Service Chiefs are entrusted with the duties of ‘raising, training, and sustaining’ their individual services.

Why Jointness

Sir Julian Corbett, the British naval strategist, in the opening chapter on his work on maritime strategy had stated: “[...]it is almost impossible that war can be decided by naval action alone[...]since men live upon land and not upon the sea, great issues between nations at war have always been decided either by what your army can do against your enemy’s territory, or by the threat of what the fleet can enable the army to do”.⁵ This endorsement of jointmanship is even more valid today, than when it was written in 1911, not only because air power is today as vital to the land battle as it is to operations at sea but also because warfare today has become ‘hybrid’ in nature, requiring the joint efforts of not just the three Services but also other government and non-government agencies to combat.

In China, seven military regions were reorganised into five theatre commands and one functional command (the Strategic Support Force) in 2016.

Hybrid War. Hybrid warfare has been described as, “A theory of military strategy, which employs political warfare and blends conventional warfare, irregular warfare, and cyber warfare with other influencing methods such as fake news, diplomacy, lawfare and foreign electoral intervention”.⁶ These methods are used simultaneously across the spectrum of conflict with a unified strategy, using a combination of state and non-state actors. Hybrid warfare encompasses three distinct battlefields — the conventional battlefield, the population of the conflict zone, and the international community. The concept of grey-zone warfare is intimately linked to hybrid warfare, as today states most often apply unconventional tools and hybrid techniques in the grey-zone, such as propaganda campaigns, cyber warfare, economic pressure, and non-state entities, which do not cross the threshold into formalised state-level aggression, thereby, neutralising the deterrence provided by conventional military force of even the strongest military powers. To add to the complexity, conventional warfare, itself, today encompasses eight dimensions — the traditional land, sea, undersea, and air dimensions having been augmented by the dimensions of electromagnetic spectrum, cyber, space, and cognition. Traditional militaries find it hard to respond to hybrid warfare since they are not structured to fight such conflicts and need greater flexibility and multiple resources to constantly shift tactics, priorities, and objectives, which can only be provided through jointness and inter-agency coordination.

India has been facing tremendous security challenges since independence, with two adversarial, nuclear armed neighbours who have shown repeated intent to disrupt peace and stability in the region. Over the past three decades, India has also been confronting a hybrid war against both Pakistan and China. This requires India’s security infrastructure to adopt an integrated approach, by sharing of resources, expertise, and information, between the three Services and other government agencies, to be able to protect our national interests in the dynamic and challenging strategic environment.

Brief History of Jointness in India

In the Indian context, it needs to be remembered that India itself was a distinct theatre of operations under British colonial rule, which is why the senior-most military officer in India prior our independence was titled as the ‘Commander-in-Chief in India’ (C-in-C India). The C-in-C India had an operational role, with duties relating to ‘raise, train, and sustain’ being largely handled by Whitehall in London, some of which were subsequently delegated to the Military Department, (later Defence Department), under the Viceroy of India.

Shortly after India’s independence, in 1955, the Chiefs of the Indian Army, Indian Navy (IN), and Indian Air Force (IAF), originally designated as C-in-Cs were re-designated as Chiefs of Staff of the Army, Navy and Air Force as they were primarily carrying out staff functions at their individual Service Headquarters. The title of C-in-Cs of individual army / navy / air force commands was, however, retained by Army Commanders (and equivalents in the IN and IAF) as it correctly reflected their operational role. However, despite their re-designation, Service Chiefs still retained the overall responsibility for operations, which were to be actually conducted by the Army Commanders / equivalents. This resulted in the dichotomy of the Chiefs being responsible for both staff and operational functions, to the detriment of both, unlike western militaries who had separated both functions for greater efficiency. After independence, Jointness in the Indian Armed Forces was sought to be achieved through a set of apex-level empowered joint committees such as the Defence Minister’s Committee (DMC), the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC), the Joint Planning Committee (JPC), the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), etc. However, the joint committees established after independence atrophied after Service Headquarters were reduced to the status of ‘attached offices’ to the Ministry of Defence in 1952, which put paid to any visions of credible jointness in the Indian Armed Forces.

In the Indian context, it needs to be remembered that India itself was a distinct theatre of operations under British colonial rule, which is why the senior-most military officer in India prior our independence was titled as the ‘Commander-in-Chief in India’ (C-in-C India).

While the Indian Armed Forces performed creditably in most wars after independence, the absence of jointness was keenly felt in the 1962, 1965, and Kargil conflicts, which has been well documented in various books and articles. The long felt need for transformation of India’s Higher Defence Organisation (HDO) was finally voiced firmly in the Kargil Review Committee Report (1999-2000) and the follow-up Group of Ministers (GoM) Report submitted to the Prime Minister in February 2001. This report recommended (among other things) the establishment of a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) with a Joint staff and Joint commands in order to bring in greater synergy between individual services.⁷ The report was, however, implemented half-heartedly, and while the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) and India’s first Joint command, the Andaman & Nicobar Command (ANC) were established in 2001 itself, the office of the CDS was not created due ‘lack of political consensus’.

In 2017, the Shekatkar Committee again recommended reforms in the HDO, including the creation of the CDS and Theatre Command structures, in a phased and planned manner.⁸ Appointment of the CDS, and creation of a Department of Military Affairs (DMA), was finally approved by the Government of India with effect from 01 January 2020, which also mandated the DMA/CDS to restructure the existing single Service commands for optimal utilisation of resources by bringing about jointness in operation, including through establishment of Joint / Theatre Commands.⁹ To achieve the mandate given to the DMA, studies for raising Theatre Commands were ordered in 2020. From open sources, it can be gleaned that the DMA was considering the setting up of four/five theatre commands in a progressive manner, which included: an Air Defence Command, a Maritime Theatre Command (MTC); and two/three Land Theatre Commands for the Northern / Western and Eastern theatres.¹⁰ A number of discussions and consultations are understood to have been carried out over the past three years, which is where the matter rests today.

Rationale for Establishment of a Maritime Theatre Command

India has substantial maritime interests to defend in war and peace. Apart from the defence of our coastline, maritime zones, and island territories, India's maritime interests have expanded to encompass the maintenance of security and stability in our extended maritime neighbourhood. Smaller countries in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), especially Small Island Developing States (SIDS), look towards the IN as a net security provider and preferred security partner. Over the past seven decades, the IN has also ensured that the vital international sea lanes of oceanic commerce connecting the Suez Canal to the Malacca Strait, that pass close around the Indian peninsula and its island territories, remain free for international navigation. With the international adoption of the 'Indo-Pacific' concept over the past decade, India and the IN's role in ensuring peace and stability in the wider Indo-Pacific Region will grow exponentially in the years ahead.

Almost 95 percent of India's trade by volume, and 70 percent by value, transits over the seas. Today, India also depends on the seas for importing over 85 percent of its petroleum product needs, apart from the import of over 50 percent of its needs for coal. India's energy needs are expected to double by 2040.¹¹ Despite our active push for alternate and greener energy sources, declining domestic production of oil and gas will more than double India's dependence on the seas for its trade and energy needs by 2047. It is also seldom realised that the seas are the conduit for over 99 percent of the data required to feed today's information economy¹², which can be disrupted by an adversary. With land-based resources depleting, the world is now turning towards the seas for both living and non-living resources and the concept of a country's Blue Economy has taken concrete shape, which will take both expertise and capacity to exploit in a sustainable manner. Finally, climate change due to global warming and oceanic pollution has its greatest impact on the seas and its surrounding coastlines, combatting which is today not just a national but a global maritime interest.

China is expected to deploy its first Carrier Task Force (CTF) in the Indian Ocean by 2030 and by 2047 would be capable of deploying up to two CTFs in the Indian Ocean in times of conflict or tension.

The China Factor. The IN's task of ensuring maritime security has been greatly complicated by the growing presence of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the IOR. Recent estimates indicate that the PLAN is already the largest maritime force in the world and will reach a strength of 425 blue water combatants by 2030.¹³ The PLAN has a three-ship anti-piracy task force permanently deployed in the Gulf of Aden since 2008, and operationalised its first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017. China also deploys its oceanographic research and satellite monitoring ships regularly to the IOR. Around 200-250 Chinese fishing trawlers, supported by logistics re-supply ships and factory ships (to process the fish caught by the trawlers) also operate year-round in the IOR. Some of these trawlers are suspected to double as maritime militia, and are tasked to gather intelligence in the region. China is expected to deploy its first Carrier Task Force (CTF) in the Indian Ocean by 2030 and by 2047 would be capable of deploying up to two CTFs in the Indian Ocean in times of conflict or tension. China has already started deploying both its conventional and nuclear submarines in the IOR, and by 2047, could have at least one nuclear-powered attack submarine (SSN) on permanent patrol in the IOR, with a few conventional submarines based in at least two Chinese naval bases in the region including the current one at Djibouti and a possible future base in Gwadar in Pakistan, where China is the port builder and operator, or in East Africa. China's Djibouti naval base is now capable of basing an aircraft carrier and already houses a marine brigade. A future war with China could therefore, see the deployment of a substantial maritime force — both regular and irregular — in our maritime theatre of operations.

Pakistan. Despite Pakistan being on the verge of bankruptcy, the Pakistan Navy's re-arming and modernisation efforts continue, being bank-rolled by China. Major capability enhancements include eight Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) - capable Yuan class submarines and land attack capability from Chinese-built *Ammat* class missile boats, which eventually

could be armed with tactical nuclear warheads. Pakistan is also acquiring a modest surface warfare capability in the form of four additional 054-A/P Chinese-built guided missile frigates. It is also replacing its US-built P3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft with Brazilian-built Embraer aircraft modified for anti-submarine warfare role. It can, therefore, be seen that Pakistan will continue to pose a credible sea-denial capability to the IN in the Arabian Sea in times of conflict.

Current IN Organisation. In the current organisation, the Western and Eastern Naval Commands, the ANC, and the Southern Naval Command are responsible for all operations in their areas of responsibility. However, unlike land threats, which can be segregated into individual sectors, threats in the maritime domain are omnidirectional due to the seamlessness and freedom of navigation on the high seas. Therefore, due to the inherent mobility of maritime forces, maritime operations cannot be confined to the Area of Responsibility (AoR) of an individual command. As such, due to the limited number of blue water platforms available with the IN, naval forces from all maritime commands have always had to be re-deployed as required by the operational situation. A prominent example is the deployment of the aircraft carrier *Vikrant* to the east coast during the 1971 War. Additionally, other Indian maritime agencies, especially the Coast Guard (CG), have considerable resources available for deployment at sea. While the CG would come under the command and control of the IN during war and crises, it (and other maritime agencies) largely operates independently during peace time, resulting in sub-optimal integration and utilisation of scarce national resources. With the ingress of the PLAN in the IOR, the IN can expect a two-front threat to exist in future wars in the maritime domain, requiring a unified approach in the maritime theatre of operations.

Unlike land threats, which can be segregated into individual sectors, threats in the maritime domain are omnidirectional due to the seamlessness and freedom of navigation on the high seas.

The Maritime Theatre Command (MTC). The AoR of the MTC should comprise the combined AoRs of the IN's Western, Eastern and Southern commands, as also the ANC. A Joint AoR would ensure better coherence and surveillance through Joint Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in all three dimensions — above water, in the air, and underwater. The MTC would synergise all maritime resources available to the country and synchronise operations across its AoR to provide the country the best 'bang for the buck' in peace and in war. Optimisation of assets and unity of effort and command, in concert with other Theatre Commands and government agencies operating in, through or above the maritime domain, will maximise effectiveness through economies of scale. The biggest advantage of a MTC will be the conduct of joint planning and coordinated military effort in all situations in the maritime arena. Joint planning would be achieved through a joint staff using joint planning procedures and the permanent allocation of resources from all three Services and the CG. Even more importantly, this would ensure constant joint training of all allocated assets, which is possible only episodically under the current organisation due to each force being under a different commander. Besides ensuring jointness in operations, the MTC would also bring about jointness in logistics, support services, communications, and maintenance. A Joint Command would also better streamline aspects of civil-military liaison, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (ADR), and assistance to civilian authorities.

Conclusion

Creation of the MTC (and other theatre commands) would free up the Service Chiefs and Service Headquarters for discharging their staff functions of 'Raise, Train, and Sustain', which are the critical foundations of any military force. The Service Headquarters would still retain a link with operations because of the fact that Service Chiefs, being part of the COSC, are mandated to advise the CDS and higher authorities on service-specific matters. For this function, each Service Headquarter should retain a small operations staff, not only to support the Service Chief in his apex advisory function, but to also coordinate with the Operations staff of the IDS and the Theatre Commands, who would be actually handling day-to-day operations. Over 75 years after we attained our independence, time is nigh for India to

realise its long pending vision of a Joint military. Theatre Commands being the end point of jointness, the creation of the CDS and his mandate to create integrated theatre commands has provided the correct launch pad for their creation. The creation of the ANC in 2001, which was designed to serve as the crucible of jointness, has provided us with sufficient learning over the past two decades to fashion the proposed MTC and other theatre commands. Establishing the MTC as the 'lead theatre command' would be an excellent start point for the creation of more theatre commands in the Indian Armed Forces and brooks no further delay.

Endnotes

- 1 Milan N. Vego, *Operational Warfare*, NWC 1004, Copyright © 2000, 112.
- 2 Ibid, Milan N. Vego, 110.
- 3 Wallace, Andrew, “New Military Command Structure and Outsourcing Initiatives”, *The ISCP Analyst (Russian Federation) and Analytical Review*, Boston University, 27 May 2010, XVI.
- 4 “Theater Commands”, *Ministry of National Defence, The People’s Republic of China*, <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/theater-commands/index.htm>.
- 5 Corbett, Julian Stafford, *The Project Gutenberg eBook: Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, 2005, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/15076/15076-h/15076-h.htm>, 16.
- 6 Hoffman, Frank. G, “Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars”, *Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, Arlington, Virginia*, December 2007, https://www.potomac institute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf.
- 7 “Group of Ministers Report on Reforming the National Security System”, *Press Information Bureau, Government of India*, 23 May 2001, <https://archive.pib.gov.in/archive/release98/lyr2001/rmay2001/23052001/r23052001/r2305200110.html>.
- 8 Preeti Khenta, “Theatre Commands: The Way to Revolution in Indian Military Affairs”, *Usnas Foundation*, 25 December 2021, <https://usanasfoundation.com/theatre-commands-the-way-to-revolution-in-indian-military-affairs>.
- 9 “Creation of New Department of Military Affairs”, *Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defence*, 03 February 2020, <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid+198903>,
- 10 Ajai Shukla, “General Rawat Reveals shape of India’s joint theatre commands”, *Business Standard*, 15 September 2021, https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/cds-general-bipin-rawat-reveals-shape-of-indias-joint-theatre-commands-121091501662_1.html,
- 11 “India’s Energy Outlook 2021”, February 2021, <https://www.iea.org/reports/india-energy-outlook-2021>.
- 12 Dick Weisinger, “Internet: 99% of Data is in the Sea, not the Cloud: Underwater Cabling”, *formtek*, 06 June 2019, <https://formtek.com/blog/internet-99-of-data-is-in-the-sea-not-the-cloud-underwater-cabling>.
- 13 “China’s Naval Modernisation: Implications for the US Navy”, *Congressional Research Service*, 01 December 2022, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL33153.pdf>.

Energy Security of India

Major General AK Chaturvedi, AVSM, VSM (Retd)[@]

Abstract

Energy is essential for the economic well-being of any society/country. It is one of the most important resources contributing to the growth of a State. Non-availability of energy resources impedes progress. Therefore, it is the responsibility of a State to ensure uninterrupted supply of energy at an affordable price to its people and the industry. Energy management in India has not been able to keep pace with the rising aspirations of people and the growing requirement of industrialisation. As such, the gap between demand and supply has been increasing exponentially. The energy security of the country can be ensured only by exploiting all available indigenous resources and shortfall, if any, should be planned to be made up with international collaboration and cooperation.

Introduction

The International Energy Agency (IEA) defines energy security of a country as the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price over a sustained period of time. Thus, energy security has to be seen in both long and short term. It also emerges that forecasting of future requirements, continuous audit of the economic availability of resources, identification of new sources, energy intensity of available sources, and finally, efficient transmission and distribution are equally important and are necessary elements of the energy security. Energy and economic growth are linked: without access to energy, growth is impossible; and economic growth will lead to more energy use. However, the relationship between the two is complex. The relationship is non-linear. Also, experiences of past do not hold true as far as extrapolation to the future is concerned. Similarly, transposing the experiences of developed countries on the energy growth of developing countries has its limitation. Up to the 19th century, the fuel of choice was biomass. Even after industrialisation, many economies ran primarily on biomass. In India, this state continued till the middle of 20th century. Though biomass was highly inefficient as fuel, but still its use before the industrial revolution continued as there was enough wood to burn. Needless to add that with this fuel economic growth was quite slow. Subsequently, many new sources of energy conversion got added, of which coal, petroleum, and hydro were the main. During the second half of the 20th century, gradually new sources of energy conversion got added to the energy basket. These were renewable and nuclear. Besides enhancing the size of energy basket, the aim of adding these relatively cleaner forms of energy was due to the need to address the impact of climate change. Simultaneously, efforts continued in the domain of frontier technologies like Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC), hydrogen, and gasification of coal and many other sources which could add to availability of energy without adding environmental pollution.

[@] Major General Ajay Kumar Chaturvedi, AVSM, VSM (Retd) was commissioned in Corps of Engineers in December 1974 and after a distinguished career of 38 years, both in Engineers and staff, retired in Jul 2012. Popularly referred, as an intellectual soldier; he is an alumnus of CME Pune, IIT Madras, CDM Secunderabad and NDC New Delhi. Post retirement, he is pursuing PhD on 'India's Energy Security: 2030'. He is a prolific writer, who has also been active in the lecture circuit on national security issues. His areas of interests are; energy, water and other elements of 'National Security'.

Energy Scenario and Needs of India

As per the World Energy Outlook 2021 of the IEA, the current share of India in global primary energy consumption is 6.1 percent and is likely to increase to about 9.81 percent by 2050.¹ As such, India is a major energy consumer and is likely to become an even bigger consumer in the years ahead. Energy consumption in her case has more than doubled since 2000, propelled upwards by a growing population — soon to be the world's largest — and a period of rapid economic growth. Some of the government programmes such as the *Gati Shakti* National Master Plan and the *Atma Nirbhar Bharat* scheme call for a need of additional power (by implication additional energy). In addition, near-universal household access to electricity was achieved in 2019, meaning that over 900 million citizens have gained an electrical connection in less than two decades. Still the energy use on a per capita basis is well under half the global average, and there are diversities in energy use and the quality of service between the states and between rural and urban areas.

In 2021, the energy consumption per capita was 1208 kilowatt-hour (kWh) against the world average of 3260 kWh. In India, Bihar has lowest power consumption and Dadra & Nager haveli being higher than developed countries.² India's conscious effort to boost the manufacturing sector and post pandemic flight of production units from China have thrown up new opportunities. These developments have resulted in a demand of additional energy. The energy demand during the period 2021-30 is likely to grow at 31 percent per annum.

It will be the largest for any country. Also, industrialisation is resulting into urbanisation, which has further led to an increasing energy demand. Up until now, India's economic growth has been driven mainly by the services sector rather than the more energy-intensive industry sector, and the rate at which India has urbanised has been somewhat slower than in other emerging economies. Urbanisation underpins a massive increase in total residential floor space from less than 20 billion square metres today to more than 50 billion in two decades time. This prompts a huge growth in demand for energy-intensive building materials. Urbanisation is also a spur for a transition in household energy use away from solid biomass and towards electricity. Rising ownership of appliances and demand for air conditioners mean that the share

Energy affordability and reliability of energy supply are key concerns for India's consumers. Here it needs to be appreciated that the Indian approach has always been 'pro-state' and 'reflectively anti-market'.

of energy demand taken by electricity in India's buildings sector rises from a quarter today to around half by 2040 in the STEPS.³ Energy affordability and reliability of energy supply are key concerns for India's consumers. Here it needs to be appreciated that the Indian approach has always been 'pro-state' and 'reflectively anti-market'.⁴ This approach has constrained the resilience of the Indian energy system. Energy choices determined by the immediate demands placed upon it by the political economy have often been in conflict with long term energy planning. Also, this approach has brought in systemic rigidities which inhibited India to respond to changes in global, regional, and domestic energy markets, including lack of investment in energy production and energy infrastructure, to the country's benefit. It is anticipated that coal generation is projected to continue to expand in absolute terms in the STEPS, peaking around 2030, though its share of electricity generation is likely to fall from just below 75 percent to 55 percent over this period.⁵ Even though India continues to make great strides with renewables deployment (more than 60 percent of the growth in demand) and efficiency policies, the sheer scale of its development means that the combined import bill for fossil fuels doubles over the next two decades in the STEPS, with oil by far the largest component. This points to continued risks to energy security. It is estimated that renewables will account for 35 percent of the electricity mix by 2030 (Photo Voltaic alone will account for more than 15 percent) though oil will continue to dominate transportation sector for another quarter of a century. In the APS⁶, more rapid progress in deploying low-emissions alternatives in power, industry, and transport sectors in particular, puts India on a trajectory in line with its goal of net zero emissions by 2070.

Nuclear Energy in India's Energy Security Matrix. Nuclear power is the fifth largest source of electricity in India. As of November 2020, India had 22 operational nuclear reactors spread in eight nuclear power plants. The total installed capacity is 7,380 MW.⁷ 10 more reactors are under construction with a combined generation capacity of 8,000 MW. The capacity factor in 2019-21 has been 74.4 percent.⁸ One of the main reasons for the low capacity factors has been

inadequacy of indigenous nuclear fuel. However, with latest finds at Tummalapalle in Andhra Pradesh and Bhima Basin, Karnataka, the situation appears to have changed. Also, India has been making advances in the field of thorium based fuels (India has a very large reserve of Thorium: 518,000 tons⁹), as part of her 'Three stage Nuclear Programme of 1954.¹⁰ Although the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Pact (123 Agreement) of 2008 removes the nuclear pariah status of India but India needs to push for the second stage of India's nuclear programme (operationalisation of 'Fast Breeder' based nuclear power generation) with a view to firstly, exploit vast indigenous thorium reserves, secondly, reduce dependence on import of Uranium which India is short of, and, finally, it is the logical progression to stage three of the nuclear programme (operationalisation of Thorium based reactors) which shall make India truly energy independent.

Renewable Sources in India's Energy Matrix. India is blessed with a number of energy bearing resources which are renewable in nature. If all the renewable resources are exploited within the economic constraints, India can easily achieve energy security utilising its own resources. All that is needed to be done is to develop necessary economically viable technologies. This puts the onus on Indian scientists and the research organisations. It will help India not only to achieve rapid economic development but will also save India from the vulnerabilities on account of energy deficiency. Some of the important resources with their potential are as tabulated below:

Resource	Potential
Solar	748 GW ¹¹
Wind	302 GW at 100 meters and 695.50 GW at 120 meters above ground level. ¹²
Biomass	Energy Alternatives India estimates: Potential in the short term - about 18,000 MW-50,000 MW, depending on the definition of biomass. ¹³
Small Hydro	a. Plants having capacity 25 MW and below are categorised as Small Hydro. b. Estimated potential spread over 1512 sites is 6782 MW c. Total installed capacity - 4940 MW. ¹⁴
Waste to Energy	a. Definition of waste to energy- urban and industrial organic waste. b. Potential - 5690 MW. ¹⁵
Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion	a. India has maritime domain where the temperature difference between warm waters of surface and cold waters deep in the sea (77°F) lends itself for power generation. b. It is estimated as 180,000 MW, considering 40 percent of gross power for parasitic losses. ¹⁶

Table 1: Important Renewable Energy Resources and their Potential

Issues Related to India's Energy Supply

Technology-Quality-Quantity (TQQ) Syndrome.¹⁷ While India has adequate quantity of energy bearing resources to meet its energy requirement, but still India remains distinctly deficient of energy. This strange dichotomy is on account of following:

- India has adequate quantity of coal but the coal has high ash content and low calorific value, and, indigenous clean coal technologies for economic exploitation are not well developed.
- India has inadequate oil and gas reserves, however, indigenous fully matured technologies for economic exploitation exist.

National Security Capacity Building

- Inadequate reserves of uranium and adequate thorium reserves exist, though fully operational indigenous technology for uranium based nuclear energy conversion exist, but, for the Fast Breeder, technology for exploitation of indigenous thorium is still not operational.
- Abundant solar energy resources are available but efficiency of indigenous conversion equipment is still quite low.
- Similar is the case with other frontier technologies like OTEC, geothermal etc.

Imbalance in the Grid Connectivity. The Indian National Grid is one of the largest operational synchronous grids in the world with 371.054 GW of installed power generation capacity as of 30 June 2020.¹⁸ The Union Territories of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep are however, not connected to the National Grid. The inter-regional Total Transmission Capacity (TTC) of the national grid is 105,050 MW as on 30th June 2021.¹⁹ However, the Available Transmission Capacity (ATC) on daily basis is not exceeding 35 percent of TTC and the actual usage is around 25 percent.²⁰ There are also synchronous interconnections to Bhutan, and asynchronous links with Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal.²¹ An undersea High Voltage Direct Current interconnection to Sri Lanka has also been proposed. A proposed interconnection between Myanmar and Thailand would facilitate the creation of a power pool and enable trading among all BIMSTEC nations.²² The first interconnection with Bangladesh was commissioned in December 2013, connecting Berhampore with Bheramara. As of April 2017, there are 12 cross-border interconnections between India and Nepal. India became a net exporter of electricity for the first time in the fiscal year 2016-17.²³ Presently, India is importing electricity from Bhutan and exporting power to Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar. There is also a scope for exploiting the resources of the central Asia provided India and Pakistan cooperate for establishing the necessary transmission corridor. There are some problems which need to be addressed. These are as follows:

Oil and natural gas have been the main source of energy for the last century or so. The Middle East has been the major source of these resources and, as such, has been vulnerable to geopolitical jockeying to secure them.

- Cyber-Threats to the Grid and Critical Infrastructure abound. While modernisation planning focuses on new energy related technologies for distribution, resilience, storage, and capability, it is also focused on cybersecurity. The solution lies in having an infrastructure that lends itself for distributed data base.
- Electricity distribution over long distances increases the temperature within power lines and, thus, causes significant energy losses in the form of heat. In the end, these losses are paid for by everyday electricity consumers. There is a need to decentralise the system and go for micro grids.
- India's Transmission and Distribution (T&D) losses have been over 20 percent of generation, which is more than twice the world average. The ideal level of T&D losses should range between six to eight percent.²⁴ There is a need to upgrade the technology and ensure energy conservation.
- A peculiar issue in case of India is that the requirement of energy as well as resources are available in border areas which are generally quite remote and as such India has a substantial requirement to provide energy (electricity) off grid. Thus, India needs infrastructure which can support off grid provision of power.

Geopolitics of Energy. Oil and natural gas have been the main source of energy for the last century or so. The Middle East has been the major source of these resources and, as such, has been vulnerable to geopolitical jockeying to secure them. In the last about half a century, Asia is becoming a major consumer hub. Initially it was China and gradually even India have become major energy consumers. India suffers from a major deficiency of oil and gas. In April 2022-23, India's oil import dependence was around 86.4 percent.²⁵ The import dependence for the natural gas for 2020-21

has been 45.3 percent.²⁶ In view of this deficiency, besides exploiting indigenous resources both onshore/ offshore, India started acquiring energy bearing properties abroad. Given this situation, resources from Central Asia in terms of gas, uranium, electricity have become important for India. However, due to the volatile situation of the region and the hostile relations with Pakistan, pipelines like TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline) and IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline) have remained non-starters. Therefore, Iran (particularly Chabahar Port) being the start point of North South Corridor assumes great importance in transportation of energy bearing resources for India. Also, India had been developing Vladivostok-Chennai Sea Link for last few years. But the current Russo-Ukraine War has come as a God sent opportunity because of which India has access to more Russian resources. In the case of oil, increased Russian flows to Asia are already visible. For natural gas, the reorientation of flows will require more time to take shape because of the need for major new infrastructure investments if exports are to expand beyond the 38 bcm/year foreseen for the 'Power of Siberia' pipeline. These will require new agreements with partners, some of whom have found their confidence in natural gas — and in Russia — shaken by recent events. Another trend discernible post Russo - Ukrainian War is new the momentum behind the global low-emissions hydrogen sector.

Way Ahead

Regional Cooperation for Energy within South-Southwest Asia (SSWA²⁷).

There is a need to enhance the regional cooperation for exploitation of the common energy bearing resources, technical prowess of the constituent countries, and related technologies. Enhancing regional energy cooperation and trade of energy/electricity among SSWA countries can help them to exploit the complementarities in their energy portfolios. Trade in energy/electricity can potentially be a main driver for economic growth as in the case of Bhutan and Nepal. As per a recent study carried out by South Asia Regional Initiative for Energy Integration (SARI/EI) on economic benefits of power trade between India-Nepal, “With an accelerated power trade scenario between India and Nepal, Nepal’s gross domestic product could reach NPR (Nepalese rupees) 13,100 billion (over US \$120 billion) in 2045, which is 39 percent more than with existing trading mechanisms”.²⁸ As per estimates, Bhutan’s GDP growth is likely to increase three-fold from NPR 310 billion in 2030 to NPR 1,069 billion in 2045 in terms of revenue earned from electricity trade only. This shows that cross border trade of energy/electricity can significantly contribute to sustainable development of the subregion as it can provide affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy supplies to the subregional economies, driving their socio-economic progress.²⁹

Cross border trade of energy/ electricity can significantly contribute to sustainable development of the subregion as it can provide affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy supplies to the subregional economies.

Scaling up Clean Energy Supply Chains

Accelerating clean energy transitions requires large increases in the global manufacturing capacity of clean energy technologies and in related inputs such as critical minerals. Meeting this industrial challenge is essential to reduce emissions in line with climate goals. Current deployment trends for key clean energy technologies show some encouraging signs. Renewables-based electricity generation rose by a record 500 TWh in 2021 to reach an all-time high and it looks set to reach a new record in 2023. Can India claim a place in this supply chain mechanism? Probably more investment in R&D of renewables, nuclear, hydrogen, OTEC and geo thermal will pay rich dividends, besides reducing indigenous dependence on resources which are vulnerable to geopolitical pulls (oil & gas) or are simply inefficient (indigenous coal) or are source of environmental pollution. India’s initiative of creating International Solar Alliance (ISA)³⁰ is a step in right direction.

Establishment of Green Hydrogen Eco System. The Union Cabinet approved National Green Hydrogen Mission on 04 Jan 2023 with an initial outlay of Rs.19,744 crore.³¹ The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) will formulate the scheme guidelines for implementation of the respective components. An outcome is expected by 2030,

including the development of green hydrogen production capacity of at least 5 Million Metric Tonne (MMT) per annum with an associated renewable energy capacity addition of about 125 GW in the country. The mission will help in reducing the import dependence on fossil fuels. The mission will also facilitate demand creation, production, utilisation, and export of Green Hydrogen. Under the Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition Programme (SIGHT), two distinct financial incentive mechanisms — targeting domestic manufacturing of electrolysers and production of Green Hydrogen — will be provided. The mission will also help in creating an enabling policy framework to support establishment of a Green Hydrogen ecosystem.

Conclusion

Energy security is essential for the transformation of a country from a weak and vulnerable State to a powerful country which can take its own decisions without fear of arm twisting by those countries which control energy bearing resources. An analysis of Russia after all the sanctions proves a point that just because she controls major energy bearing resources she cannot be put down. On the contrary the other major economies of the world like EU and Britain are almost on their knees. India has diversities in the availability of energy bearing resources. However, she lacks economically viable technologies to exploit her indigenous resources. To make matters worse, climate change and impact of usage of coal with antiquated technology is limiting options for India and she is getting forced to depend on import of energy bearing resources to meet her energy requirements. Thus, there is a need to adopt a policy to address energy needs of the country. Important elements of that policy need to lay emphasis on following aspects:

- A detailed audit/survey of the indigenous resources.
- Strengthening R&D in the country to develop technologies to exploit indigenous resources. R&D cannot be the sole preserve of the govt organisations alone. This is where collaboration and cooperation between industry and academia needs to be done intimately which will help in bringing better accountability in the system.
- Besides grid-based usage of energy, efforts need to be made to encourage off-grid use of energy management in the remote parts of the country to achieve economically optimal solutions.
- Diplomacy to achieve international cooperation within South Asia as well as with immediate strategic neighbourhood to achieve collective growth.

Energy security is essential for the transformation of a country from a weak and vulnerable State to a powerful country which can take its own decisions without fear of arm twisting by those countries which control energy bearing resources.

Endnotes

- 1 A PIB update, “India has been ranked third largest primary energy consumer in the world dated 24 Mar 2022 and uploaded on <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1809204#:~:text=As%20per%20World%20Energy%20Outlook,stated%20policies%20scenario%20by%202050>.
- 2 Chaitanya Mallapur, “India’s per capita power consumption rising but wide variation persists across states”, pub in Money Control dated 21 Mar 2021 and uploaded on <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news>
- 3 Stated Policy Scenarios (STEPS) provides a more conservative benchmark for the future, because it does not take it for granted that governments will reach all announced goals. The policies assessed in the Stated Policies Scenario cover a broad spectrum. The scenario takes into account the policies and implementing measures affecting energy markets that had been adopted as of end of September 2022, together with relevant policy proposals, even though specific measures needed to put them into effect have yet to be fully developed.
- 4 Government of India (2015), «Annual Economic Survey 2015-16», Ministry of Finance.
- 5 Chapter-1, page 70 of the World Energy Outlook 2022
- 6 The APS (Announced Pledges Scenario) introduced in 2021 aims to show to what extent the announced ambitions and targets, including the most recent ones, are on the path to deliver emissions reductions required to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. It includes all recent major national announcements as of September 2022 for 2030 targets and longer term net zero and other pledges, regardless of whether these have been anchored in implementing legislation or in updated NDCs.
- 7 An internet upload: https://web.archive.org/web/20180520054943/http://cea.nic.in/reports/monthly/installed_capacity/2018/installed_capacity-03.pdf
- 8 “PRIS - Last three years factors - Energy Availability”. pris.iaea.org. IAEA PRIS. Retrieved 9 October 2022.
- 9 An internet upload: https://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/TE_1450_web.pdf
- 10 Pham, Lisa, “Considering an Alternative Fuel for Nuclear Energy”, pub by The New York Times dated 20 Oct 2009 and uploaded on https://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/20/business/global/20renthorium.html?_r=1
- 11 National Institute of Solar energy as on 10 Feb 2023 <https://www.clearias.com/solar-energy/#:~:text=India%20is%20endowed%20with%20vast,providing%20huge%20scalability%20in%20India>.
- 12 MNRE Overview as uploaded on <https://mnre.gov.in/wind/current-status/>
- 13 <https://www.eai.in/ref/ae/bio/bio.html>
- 14 <https://powermin.gov.in/en/content/power-sector-glance-all-india> as on 31 Jan 2023.
- 15 <https://mnre.gov.in/waste-to-energy/current-status>
- 16 <https://www.drishtias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/otec-plant-in-lakshadweep#:~:text=The%20total%20OTEC%20potential%20around,gross%20power%20for%20parasitic%20losses>.
- 17 Maj Gen AK Chaturvedi, “Nuclear Energy in India’s Energy Security Matrix: An Appraisal”, Chapter-2, Page-17, published by Vij Books India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, dated January 2014.
- 18 An internet upload: http://cea.nic.in/reports/monthly/installedcapacity/2020/installed_capacity-06.pdf
- 19 An internet upload: “Inter Regional Transmission Capacity” (PDF). Retrieved 2 July 2017.
- 20 <https://posoco.in/reports/daily-reports/daily-reports-2017-18/>
- 21 An internet upload: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Grid_\(India\)#cite_note-CERC-4](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Grid_(India)#cite_note-CERC-4)
- 22 RN Nayak, “BIMSTEC needs a ‘power tool’; here’s why it is time for a green energy revolution”, pub in Financial Express

National Security Capacity Building

dated 03 Jan 2017 and uploaded on <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/bimstec-needs-a-power-tool-heres-why-it-is-time-for-a-green-energy-revolution/494732/>

- 23 A PTI report, “India becomes net exporter of power for the first time” pub in Mint dated 29 Mar 2017.
- 24 A PTI Report, “Economic Survey flags high T&D losses in power sector” pub by The Economic Times, dated 29 Jan 2021 and uploaded on <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/power/economic-survey-flags-high-td-losses-in-power-sector/articleshow/80585965.cms>
- 25 Internet upload: <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/india-s-oil-dependence#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Petroleum%20Planning,the%20corresponding%20year%20Dago%20period.>
- 26 Debjit Chakraborty, “India searches for new energy sources as global oil prices rise” pub in World Oil on 09 Mar 2021 and uploaded on <https://www.worldoil.com/news/2021/3/9/india-searches-for-new-energy-sources-as-global-oil-prices-rise>
- 27 South and South-West Asia (SSWA) subregion comprising of 10 countries - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Turkey - is home to about 2.20 billion people, amounting to almost 25 % of world’s population and around 43 % of the population of Asia and Pacific Region as of 2020. 23 The subregion is blessed with huge energy resources including coal, natural gas, oil and various renewable energy sources.
- 28 An internet upload: [https://irade.org/Final%20Post%20Event%20Press%20Release%20Jan%2019%20\(5\).pdf](https://irade.org/Final%20Post%20Event%20Press%20Release%20Jan%2019%20(5).pdf)
- 29 Vijay Kumar Kharbanda, “Strategies to Promote Regional Power Grid Connectivity and Cross-Border Electricity Trade (CBET) in South and South-West Asia “ pub as Development Papers 22-01 by South and South West Asia Office of the ESCAP in Jan 2022 and uploaded on https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/Energy%20Connectivity_%20SSWA%20Development%20Papers%2022-01_Full%20Final%20Draft_.pdf
- 30 The ISA was conceived as a joint effort by India and France to mobilize efforts against climate change through deployment of solar energy solutions. It was conceptualized on the side-lines of the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held in Paris in 2015. With the amendment of its Framework Agreement in 2020, all member states of the United Nations are now eligible to join the ISA. At present, 110 countries are signatories to the ISA Framework Agreement, of which 90 countries have submitted the necessary instruments of ratification to become full members of the ISA. The ISA is guided by its “Towards 1000” strategy which aims to mobilise USD 1,000 billions of investments in solar energy solutions by 2030, while delivering energy access to 1,000 million people using clean energy solutions and resulting in installation of 1,000 GW of solar energy capacity. This would help mitigate global solar emissions to the tune of 1,000 million tonnes of CO2 every year.
- 31 Cabinet approves National Green Hydrogen Mission, posted by Ministry of New and Renewable Energy on 04 Jan 2023 and uploaded on <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1888547#:~:text=India's%20Green%20Hydrogen%20production%20capacity,create%20over%206%20lakh%20jobs.>

Atmanirbhar Bharat: A Reality Check

Air Marshal (Dr) Rajeev Sachdeva, AVSM (PhD)(Retd)[@]

Abstract

As per the Constitution of India, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) is responsible for National Security and also to provide military capability to counter perceived national threats. To achieve the above desired military end state, Departments of the MoD steer the procurement cycle to acquire the best weapon systems by optimally utilising the allocated budgets as per the financial guidelines of the Government of India through Defence Acquisition Procedure — DAP 2020, in effect from September 2020. The DAP 2020 gives out thirteen acquisition categories, with three grades of Indigenous Content of 30 percent, 50 percent and 60 percent, respectively. The previous IC of 40 percent and 60 percent has neither been achieved nor the eco-system has a viable methodology to ascertain it. This procedure has been too over-supervised from the IC point of view that it has failed to ensure the right kind of technology transfer to Indian industry. India has been one of the largest importers of arms in the last three decades. India's arms imports fell by 21 percent between 2012-16 and 2017-21, after continuously rising since 1991. However, despite this, India remained the largest arms importer, accounting for 11 percent of the total global arms importer in 2017-21. National Capability Building Process requires a Systems' Approach¹ to realign the entire eco-system with the recent and bold National Vision and simplify the Acquisition Process.

Introduction

During the Second World War, Sir Winston Churchill had said, “Unless the void that exists between the scientists, the engineers and war fighters is recognised – a hiatus will exist between the inventors, who know what they could invent if only they knew what was wanted and the soldiers, who know or ought to know what they want and would ask for it if they only knew how much science could do for them”.² India has displayed its capabilities in reaching the Moon, is ready to send humans to space, and has a most innovative ‘Mars’ mission but is still producing and delivering less than 50 percent of requirement towards its military capability development and that too in low-end technology. Despite the national thrust towards innovation and self-reliance, India still remains one of the largest arms importers in the world.

Atmanirbhar Bharat³

On 13 May 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the country should view the Covid-19 crisis as an opportunity to achieve economic self-reliance. In his address to the nation, he stressed on the importance of promoting ‘local’ products and named the mission — ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan’ (or Self-reliant India Mission). The cherished goal of Mission ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’, is based on five pillars moving from local to global as shown in the figure below:

[@] Air Marshal (Dr) Rajeev Sachdeva AVSM (PhD) (Retd) is an alumnus of FIS, CDM and NDC. A Cat ‘A’ QFI with over 7200 hours flying experience, he retired as the Deputy Chief of Integrated Defence Staff and officiating Additional Secretary (Air) at DMA. He has served in all the four verticals of HQ IDS at appointments of DACIDS (Regional-DIA), ACIDS (ICT), ACIDS (Joint Ops), DCIDS (Ops), DCIDS (PP & FD). He was also Commandant of CDM, Secundrabad. He is an elected member of the USI Council.



Five Pillars of Mission ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ (PIB)

The Self-Reliant India Mission aims towards cutting down import dependence by focussing on substitution while improving safety compliance and quality goods to gain global market share. The mission is also expected to complement the ‘Make In India’ initiative which intends to encourage manufacturing in India and focuses on the importance of promoting ‘local’ products, based on the five pillars namely:

- Economy.
- Infrastructure.
- System.
- Vibrant Demography.
- Demand.

The policy approach was to create a conducive environment for investments, develop modern and efficient infrastructure, and open up new sectors for foreign capital. The initiative targeted 25 economic sectors for job creation and skill enhancement and aimed ‘to transform India into a Global Design and Manufacturing Hub’.

Military Capability Building Process

As per the Constitution of India⁴, the MoD is responsible for National Security and also to provide military capability to counter perceived national threats. To achieve this objective, all the four Operational Departments of the Ministry, namely; ‘Department of Military Affairs’; ‘Department of Defence’; ‘Department of Defence Production’; and ‘Department of Defence R & D’ work in unison and like any other military, carry out:

- Military Threat Analysis.
- Draw a National Military Security Strategy.

- Strategise the required Military Capability.
- Identify the Capability Voids.
- Prepare a long-term and immediate weapon induction priority plan.
- Procure best weapon systems to counter the perceived threats.
- Finally, induct capability before the perceived manifestation of the threat.

To achieve the above desired end-Military State for the nation, Departments of the MoD steer the procurement cycle to acquire the best weapon system by optimally utilising the allocated budgets as per the financial guidelines of the Government of India. It is, thereafter, the collective responsibility of all the Departments of the MoD to build the National Military Capability by timely induction of the right weapon system to counter the threat envisaged by the nation. The Acquisition Entities which are responsible for arming a soldier are, the Defence Industry; the Military, and the Acquisition Managers, who follow, a co-authored, Defence Acquisition Procedure – DAP 2020, in effect from 01 October 2020.

Defence Acquisition Procedure – DAP 2020

Preamble to Defence Acquisition Procedure.⁵ Defence Acquisition Procedure is based on the concept of ‘Womb to Tomb’ and has certain unique aspects such as supplier constraints, technological complexity, foreign suppliers, high cost, foreign exchange implications and geo-political ramifications, and, therefore, is not a standard open market commercial form of procurement. While maintaining the highest standards of transparency, probity, and public accountability, a balance between competing requirements such as expeditious procurement, high-quality standards, and appropriate costs need to be established. As a result, decision-making pertaining to defence acquisition remains distinctive and complex.

While maintaining the highest standards of transparency, probity, and public accountability, a balance between competing requirements such as expeditious procurement, high-quality standards, and appropriate costs need to be established.

The *Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan* clarion call given by the Hon’ble Prime Minister further accentuated by policy reforms in the defence sector, as part of Phase IV ‘New Horizons of Growth’, are focussed towards enhancing self-reliance in defence production, indigenisation of spares, overhauling of Trial and Testing procedures, based on realistic Services Qualitative Requirements (SQRs) and requisite monitoring by Project Management Unit (PMU), for time bound procurement. There is a need to institute enabling provisions for utilisation and consolidation of design, development, and manufacturing infrastructure available in the country. A need has also been felt, for identifying strategic partners for promoting defence production in the private sector. The visionary FDI policy statement of enhancing FDI through automatic route from 49 percent to 74 percent in defence will enable in making ‘Manufacturing in India’ a lucrative option for foreign equipment manufacturers.

DAP 2020 focuses on simplifying the Defence acquisition procedure and institutionalising monitoring mechanism with concurrent actions using digital technologies AND data base for the selection of best equipment in a transparent and competitive manner giving adequate opportunities to capable vendors. The ‘Make in India’ initiative of the Government of India focuses on increasing participation of Indian vendors including MSMEs, and, therefore, ‘Make’ procedure has been further refined in DAP 2020 to make it more objective and time-bound with focus on Indian industries especially MSMEs. Cutting down permissible timeframes for various activities and institutionalising robust mechanisms to monitor for probity at various stages of the acquisition process are the attributes of this DAP.

While the Defence Acquisition involves long gestation periods, whereas the needs of the Armed Forces being non-negotiable, flexibility in the procedure has been provisioned for to ensure timely availability of important equipment.

Thus, the DAP favours swift decision-making, provides for suitable timelines, and delegates powers to the appropriate authorities to ensure an efficient and effective implementation of the acquisition process by all stakeholders concerned. DAP 2020, a product of extensive analysis, deliberations, interactions, and focused formulations, aims to further ‘Self Reliance’ of the country in the defence sector and implement ‘Ease of Doing Business’ with emphasis on Simplification, Delegation, Reduced Timelines and making the process as industry-friendly as possible. Separate chapters have been formulated to incorporate specialised acquisition through the DRDO / Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) / defence public sector undertakings (DPSUs), procurements related to Information and Communication Technology Systems, enable leasing of equipment as also address issues related to Post Contract Management.

The Aim.⁶ The aim of the (DAP) — erstwhile Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) — is to ensure timely acquisition of military equipment, systems, and platforms as required by the armed forces in terms of performance, capabilities and quality standards, through optimum utilisation of allocated budgetary resources. While enabling the same, DAP provides for the highest degree of probity, public accountability, transparency, fair competition, and level-playing field. In addition, self-reliance in defence equipment production and acquisition will be steadfastly pursued as a focus of the DAP, with an ultimate aim to develop India as a global defence manufacturing hub.

A Reality Check

If we ask ourselves the question whether there is any equipment in service which is 100 percent Indian designed, developed and manufactured, in most cases the answer is a big ‘NO’. ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ is another step, after ‘Make in India’, towards converting the above answer from a NO to a ‘YES’. The two main acquisition procedures of making India *Atmanirbhar* are the IC in the weapon system and the ‘Offset Agreement’ with the foreign vendor; the author aims to do a reality check in these fields only.

The previous IC of 40 percent and 60 percent have neither been achieved nor the eco-system has a viable methodology to ascertain it. This procedure has been so over-supervised from the IC point of view that it has been a failure to ensure the right kind of technology transfer to the Indian industry.

Reality Check: Indigenous Content.⁷ The DAP-2020 gives out thirteen acquisition categories, with three IC percentages of 30 percent, 50 percent and 60 percent respectively. The previous IC of 40 percent and 60 percent have neither been achieved nor the eco-system has a viable methodology to ascertain it. This procedure has been so over-supervised from the IC point of view that it has been a failure to ensure the right kind of technology transfer to the Indian industry. As per the MoD reports⁸, India has achieved a favourable ratio of Imports vs the Indigenised acquisition, by placing indigenous orders to the tune of 65.5 percent. However, the flow chart (Chart 1) explains the actual material IC is mere 24.4 percent and Import bill is that of 67.5 percent. This depicts the self-reliant voids because of the IC overemphasis.

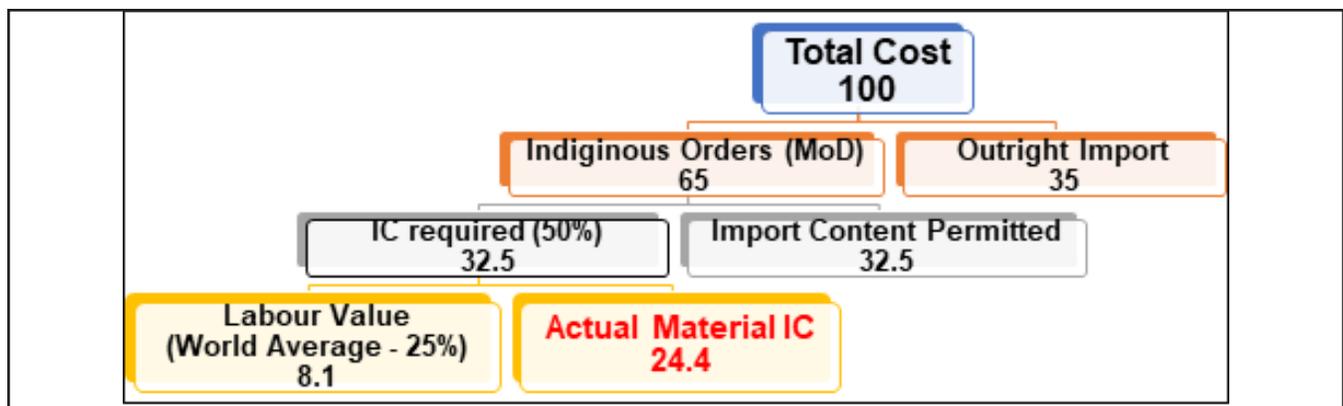


Chart 1: Indigenous Content

If the total contracted value is of 100 *percent* and the indigenous orders are of 65.5 *percent* then the import and, thus, the outflow of foreign exchange should be mere 34.5 *percent*, however, the foreign exchange still being expended towards weaponisation is to the tune of 67.25 *percent* of the total capital orders approved by the Defence Acquisitions Committee or DAC [value of outright import plus the import content permitted to qualify as IDDM or Indigenously Designed Developed and Manufactured] (IDDM).

At the upfront, armed forces are required to determine the indigenous content promised by the vendor at the bidding stage itself. Thereby, the responsibility to ensure that the weapons system has been procured under make in India category, lies solely with the respective Vice Chief. Services should only be restricted to identifying a weapon system required to counter a threat and not get involved with administrative, technical, and commercial issues of procurement. This responsibility should be shouldered by the Acquisition administrators, i.e., the DG Acquisition, who has been given Serving Officers on deputation for their advice.

Reality Check: Offset Clause. A defence offset policy was promulgated under the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP-2005) to bring high-end technology to the country and help build the domestic defence industry. The key objective was to leverage the capital acquisitions and technology to develop the Indian defence industry by:

- Fostering development of internationally competitive enterprises.
- Augmenting capacity for research, design, and development related to defence products.

Under the offset clause, a foreign vendor who qualifies for a defence deal is supposed to invest a part of the contract value in India, thus developing skills and bringing in technology, with a secondary aim of generating employment.

Under the offset clause, a foreign vendor who qualifies for a defence deal is supposed to invest a part of the contract value in India, thus developing skills and bringing in technology, with a secondary aim of generating employment. DPP 2006 fixed the offset value at 30 *percent* of the total deal amount of over ₹300 crore, which was revised upwards to ₹2,000 crore in DPP 2016, thus giving a promise of a technology transfer worth ₹600 crore per contract. The first offset contract was signed in 2007.

The audit report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of March 2018⁹ was tabled in the Parliament, and brought out the reality of the offset contracts after a decade of signing the first offset contract and the highlights of the report were:

- Till Dec 2018, 46 offset contracts were signed for ₹66,427 crore.
- ₹19,223 crore worth of offsets should have been discharged as per the rate of discharge per year.
- The vendors claimed a discharge of ₹11,396 crore (59.3 *percent* of total offsets contracted for).
- The MoD had accepted contracts worth only ₹5,457 crore or 47.8 *percent* of these offsets claimed by the vendor and only, 28.4 *percent* of the total value.
- 71.6 *percent* of the offsets to be released were either rejected or not honoured by the vendors, thus giving an offset discharge rate of only about ₹1,300 crore per year.
- An offset commitment amounting to ₹55,000 crore is to be honoured by 2024 and at the above honouring rate, it was next to impossible to achieve it in the time-frame agreed to.

Maths of the Penalty of Non-Adherence to Offset Contract

If a vendor fails to fulfil the offset obligation in a particular year in accordance with the annual phasing as agreed in the

National Security Capacity Building

offset contract, a penalty equivalent to 5 percent of the unfulfilled offset obligation will be levied on the vendor. The unfulfilled offset value will be re-phased as per the clauses in the contract. The penalty may either be paid by the vendor or recovered from the bank guarantee of the main procurement contract or deducted from the amount payable under the main procurement contract or recovered from the Performance Bond of the offset contract. The overall cap on penalty will be 20 percent of the total offset obligation¹⁰ during the period of the main procurement contract. There will be no cap on penalty for failure to implement offset obligations during the period beyond the main procurement contract.

The Reality Check. Maths as under:

- Presume the contract for the weapon system is of ₹2000 crore.
- Total Offset value @ 30 percent works out to ₹600 crore.
- Maximum penalty due to non-fulfilment of the offset clause is 20 percent of the offset obligation (₹600 crore), that is ₹120 crore, which works out to be mere 6 percent of ₹2000 crore, the value of the weapon system.

In a 'what if' scenario, the vendor could upfront increase the negotiated cost of the weapon system by 6 percent. In any case, 6 percent is too small an amount in a big military contract and also a loss of ₹120 crore from the profits is a very small amount to lose, but could keep India from not achieving the *Atmanirbharta* in weapon systems. A point to ponder — has the offset clause satisfied the very essence of the aim with which it was introduced in DPP-2005? The answer lies only with Department of Offset Management Wing (DOMW), MoD, the custodians of the offset contracts. Only DOMW can list out the technology capability voids filled in by the offset agreements in the last 17 years. If the answer to the above question is a 'yes', then it satisfies the aim of *Atmanirbhar Bharat*. On the other hand, DAP-2020 removes the requirement for offset for single vendor Inter-Governmental Agreements and in the contracts on government-to-government route, which will generally be over ₹2000 crore, because the offset clause was not satisfying the essence of *Atmanirbhar Bharat*.

Has the offset clause satisfied the very essence of the aim with which it was introduced in DPP-2005? The answer lies only with Department of Offset Management Wing (DOMW), MoD, the custodians of the offset contracts.

Re-Defining 'Make in India' in Defence Sector

Keeping in line with the National vision of 'Make in India' and to cater for the 'Military Capability Voids', the source of Capital Acquisition could be broadly classified as:

- 'Indian'; or
- 'Not-Indian'.

For a product to classify as 'Indian' and fulfil the 'Make in India' vision, the vendor and his weapon system should provide either or all of the following:

- Production line set up in India.
- Technology is owned by an Indian firm.
- Jobs are created for Indians.
- Taxes are paid to Indian Govt.
- Supply chain management is set up in India.
- Comes to the market as an 'Indian Brand'.

Priority of procurement from the 'Indian' classification could be:

Priority – I: Designed, Developed and Manufactured in India; or

Priority – II: Developed and Manufactured in India; or

Priority – III: Acquired and Manufactured in India; or

Priority – IV: Partnered with a foreign vendor but manufactured in India.

All the above, under the category 'India', will satisfy the national vision of 'Make in India' and should be analysed and certified by the Department of Defence Production (DDP). A vendor database categorising all the Indian vendors needs to be captured by the department and hosted on an e-portal. The Department should set up guidelines for the industry to ensure the capabilities specified above and screen them to qualify under the categories of 'Indian' before being put on the e-portal.

An Introspection

India has been one of the largest importers of arms in the last three decades. India's arms imports fell by 21 percent between 2012-16 and 2017-21, after continuously rising since 1991. SIPRI's Trend Indicator Value (TIV)¹¹ indicates that India's arms imports reduced from US\$ 19,432 million to US\$ 15,356 million in the last five years. However, despite this, India remained the largest arms importer accounting for 11 percent of the total global arms imports in 2017-21.

The process of arming the armed forces is depicted in the DAP-2020. The draft was promulgated in Mar 2020. The military and the defence industry put in their observations, which ran into thousands of pages, and the observations were serviced by the Acquisition administrators. An introspection — does the DAP-2020 satisfy:

Under the category 'India', will satisfy the national vision of 'Make in India' and should be analysed and certified by the Department of Defence Production (DDP). A vendor database categorising all the Indian vendors needs to be captured by the department and hosted on an e-portal.

- Felt need conveyed by Hon'ble PM from Red Fort on 15 Aug 2019.¹²
- Charter of duties specified for the CDS vide the Allocation of Business Rules, approved by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) on 30 Dec 2019.
- Report of GoM on Kargil Review, approved by Cabinet in 2001¹³.
- Authority of CDS, COSC, CISC & Vice Chiefs.
- Creation of DMA under CDS — for jointness & prioritisation¹⁴.

As per a proven and existing procedure for two decades, a Military Necessity was generated at Services Capital Acquisition Categorisation Higher Committee (SCAPCHC)¹⁵, chaired by CISC, with three Service Vice Chiefs as its members. The collegiate of CISC and the Vice Chiefs at SCAPCHC would accord an Acceptance of Necessity for a value of less than ₹ 300 crore, whereas, an AON upto ₹ 500 crore was accorded by DPB, chaired by the Defence Secretary, with Vice Chiefs and CISC as members. All cases above ₹ 500 crore were accepted at the Defence *Acquisition Council* (DAC) level, granting AON, chaired by the Hon'ble Raksha Mantri, with Raksha Rajya Mantri, CDS, Service Chiefs and all other Secretaries of MoD as its members.

All procurement proceedings were prepared and promulgated by HQ IDS, with Deputy Chiefs of Integrated Defence Staff Policy Planning and Force Development DCIDS (PP&FD)¹⁶ as member Secretary of DAC. However,

National Security Capacity Building

despite the procedure approved by the Cabinet, post Kargil, to overcome deficiency in the eco-system of Acquisition, the DAP 2020 scrapped both the Services Capital Acquisition Categorisation Committee (SCAPCC) and the SCAPCHC, that too without a cabinet approval and thus, the very essence of Jointness, transparency, and dual processing of military acquisitions was shelved.

While writing a new DAP, if only piece-meal tweaking of acquisition process is resorted to then it could surely fall short of the national aspiration. The national leadership is concerned because despite a DAP, presumably in sync with 'Make in India', our military hardware import dependency is not reducing and, thus, measures like 'Negative Import List'¹⁷ or the 'Positive Indigenisation List' are being resorted to. National Capability Building Process requires a Systems' Approach¹⁸ to realign the entire eco-system with the recent and bold National Vision, and simplify the Acquisition Process. To achieve the National Vision, we have to re-create a new eco-system and not resort to para-wise amendment of the existing DPP / DAP.

Conclusion

Defence and development are supposed to be the twin facets of national security. The correlation is quite evident in contemporary international politics, where security is being redefined with equal emphasis on defence and development. However, a similar correlation is emerging very slowly in India. One of the major challenges is to establish a harmonious linkage between the defence and development requirements in a national security doctrine and making them complementary rather than competitive. The annual report of the Indian MoD too, needs to delve into the developmental aspects of security while describing the threat environment. In recent times, the government has been talking of 'inclusive growth' in its policy statements. But the irony is that the soldier, while facing the enemy bullets, knows that his weapon system, its ammunition, his protective gear, his communication equipment, and all essentials for war-fighting were supplied by the lowest bidder.¹⁹

While writing a new DAP, if only piece-meal tweaking of acquisition process is resorted to then it could surely fall short of the national aspiration. The national leadership is concerned because despite a DAP, presumably in sync with 'Make in India', our military hardware import dependency is not reducing

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/management/system-approach-to-management-definition-features-and-evaluation/27897>
- 2 Karl E. Friedl, Military applications of soldier physiological monitoring, *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sports*, Vol 12, Issue 11, November 2018, Pages 1147-1153. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsams.2018.06.004>
- 3 Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhyan. <https://aatmanirbharbharat.mygov.in/> Accessed on 31 May 2020
- 4 Constitution of India, <https://legislative.gov.in/constitution-of-india>, accessed on 1 Dec 2022
- 5 Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020, <https://www.mod.gov.in/dod/defence-procurement-procedure-dap>, accessed on 1 Oct 2020.
- 6 Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020, <https://www.mod.gov.in/dod/defence-procurement-procedure-dap>, accessed on 1 Oct 2020.
- 7 Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020, <https://www.mod.gov.in/dod/defence-procurement-procedure-dap>, accessed on 1 Oct 2020.
- 8 The economic times, 29 July 2022, “Percentage of capital expenditure by Armed Forces on decline in last 3 years’, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/percentage-of-capital-expenditure-on-import-by-armed-forces-on-decline-in-last-3-yrs-govt-data/articleshow/93217994.cms>, accessed on 3 Dec 2022.
- 9 Business Today, 24 Sep 2020, “Defence offset policy performance dismal: CAG”, <https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/economy-politics/story/defence-offset-policy-performance-dismal-cag-273706-2020-09-23>, accessed on 4 Dec 2022.
- 10 Ministry of Defence – Amendment draft DAP-2020, 29 Jul 2020 <https://www.mod.gov.in/dod/sites/default/files/Offguid300720.pdf>, accessed on 1 Aug 2020.
- 11 Sipri report: India emerges as largest Importer of arms, 15 March 2022, <https://currentaffairs.adda247.com/sipri-report-india-emerges-as-largest-importer-of-arms/>, accessed on 4 Dec 2022.
- 12 “PM addressed the nation from the ramparts of Redfort on the 73rd Independence Day”, 15 Aug 2019, https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pm-addressed-the-nation-from-the-ramparts-of-the-red-fort-on-the-73rd-independence-day/, accessed on 16 Aug 2019.
- 13 “Kargil Review Committee Report” edited on 15 May 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kargil_Review_Committee, accessed on 02 Dec 2022.
- 14 “AOB Department of Military Affairs”, 01 Jan 2020, <https://www.mod.gov.in/sites/default/files/DMAall141220.pdf>, accessed on 1 Jan 2020.
- 15 “Acquisition”, Updated 7 Dec 2022, <https://www.ids.nic.in/acquisition.php>, accessed on 7th Dec 2022.
- 16 “Organisation”, Updated 7 Dec 2022, <https://www.ids.nic.in/organisation.php>, accessed on 7th Dec 2022.
- 17 “Amendment to DAP-2020”, dated 13 Apr 2022, <https://www.mod.gov.in/archive/news?page=1>. Accessed on 5 Dec 2022.
- 18 “Systems Approach to Management”, 3 Oct 2021, <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/management/system-approach-to-management-definition-features-and-evaluation/27897>, accessed on 4 Dec 2022.
- 19 Sneha Alex Philip, “Gen Naravane urged to drop L1 regime from defence procurement . That’s just one problem area.” *The Print* 13 Aug 2021, <https://theprint.in/opinion/brahmastra/gen-naravane-urged-to-drop-l1-regime-from-defence-procurement-thats-just-one-problem-area/714259/>, accessed on 6 Dec 2022.

The Air Battlespace: Present and Future Technologies for Dominance

Air Vice Marshal Anil Golani (Retd)[@]

Abstract

Incremental, rapid, and disruptive changes in technology are influencing the air battlespace at a hitherto unseen pace. The advent of space and cyber domains, along with the development of sixth-generation fighter aircraft, drone swarms, combat air teaming, hypersonic weapons, and quantum radars, would inevitably have a profound effect on the future air battlespace. The use of disruptive technologies, including artificial intelligence and robotics, would need a clear and unambiguous understanding by the strategic leadership to influence the outcome of future conflicts.

Introduction

Air power, the most nascent arm of warfare, has always been technology intensive. Ever since its advent in conflicts, air power has invariably played a decisive role in outcomes depending upon its employment and utilisation. The last couple of decades have had an indelible impact on the air battlespace, which is not only undergoing transformation at a hitherto rapid pace but is also set to undergo further transformation with emerging technologies and the increasing role of the space domain and unmanned aerial systems. With technology enabling long-distance precision weapons, use of artificial intelligence and lethal autonomous weapon systems, non-kinetic employment of force in the form of directed energy weapons and cyber-attacks to disrupt or degrade the enemy's war-waging potential, the modern battlespace is becoming increasingly contested and congested. The next generation of fighter aircraft is likely to be developed with new propulsion technologies, self-healing and dynamically changing structures along with plug and play interchangeable hardware. With increasing impetus on secure communication and networking in the battlespace, there would also be a requirement to operate in an environment that attempts to degrade and disrupt this communication. This article presents a sneak preview of the future air battlespace and the manner in which existing and emerging technologies would shape the same.

Evolving Air Threats and Lessons from Russia - Ukraine Conflict

The air battlespace of today is being increasingly permeated by drones and unmanned aerial systems that afford a low-cost option with no risk to life, and the ability to swamp the air defence systems with multiple and non-discernible targets. The air battlespace with these options also offers plausible deniability to rogue elements and non-state actors. The use of space for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and for denial of services like GPS and internet, through this medium, would be increasingly encountered in future conflicts. The Russia-Ukraine military operation continues to simmer without any signs of conflict termination. Though it might still be presumptive to draw lessons

[@] *Air Vice Marshal Anil Golani (Retd)* was a fighter pilot commissioned in the IAF in Dec 1982. He has served in senior ranks in both the Joint Services Commands of the country, Andaman & Nicobar Command and Strategic Forces Command. He has done the Staff Course, Higher Air Command Course and a year's course in International Security & Strategy at the Royal College of Defence Studies, London. He superannuated in Nov 2019 and is presently the Additional Director General, Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi.

from the conflict, some broad conclusions on the manner in which the air battlespace has been utilised could certainly be drawn. The initial part of the conflict saw the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) conducting extensive fixed wing strike operations while suppressing Ukrainian Ground Based Air Defence Systems (GBADS). Russian fighter aircraft have remained highly effective and lethal against Ukrainian aircraft near the frontlines throughout the war. However, after the initial few days, VKS aircraft lost the ability to operate inside Ukraine-controlled airspace due to its inability to reliably suppress or destroy increasingly effective, mobile, and well-dispersed Ukrainian Surface to Air Missile (SAM) systems. Low-altitude operations by Russian fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft suffered heavy casualties due to numerous MANPADS provided to Ukrainian troops and, therefore, ceased to operate after Apr 22. Russian strikes have, since then, been against fixed targets like infrastructure, electricity grids, and energy power plants. The initial advantage gained by Russia was, to large extent, neutralised by the inability of the Russian Air and Space Forces (VKS) to retain the control of the air, neutralise Ukrainian ground-based highly mobile air defence systems, including shoulder fired missiles. Since Ukraine was fighting a defensive battle and operating in its own territory, it became easier for its mobile shoulder-fired systems to shoot and scoot at short notice. The availability of vital and timely intelligence through the space domain by its western allies, led by the United States, also helped in neutralising, to a large extent, the air threat posed by VKS. The enduring lesson that has emerged from the limited military operation, so far in terms of air battlespace is that unrestricted use of air power is essential to achieve success.

The importance of the control of the medium of air to enable unrestricted employment of air power cannot be overemphasised. Most of the wars that have been fought in the recent past by the western powers and NATO forces have been in scenarios where the airspace was not heavily contested. In a benign airspace, gaining and maintaining a degree of control of air is not a major problem. However, when the conflict takes place with comparable forces, victory or an edge can only be achieved through asymmetry and disruptive technologies. In today's context and existing conflict scenario, asymmetry is seen to be a virtue and is considered innovative. Air power, with its might, reach, and technological prowess, would be a prime target for asymmetric counters.

When the conflict takes place with comparable forces, victory or an edge can only be achieved through asymmetry and disruptive technologies. In today's context and existing conflict scenario, asymmetry is seen to be a virtue and is considered innovative.

Technologies for Dominating the Air Battlespace

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Advanced Robotics. Multi-sensor, multi-platform data fusion is going to be the key technique for achieving information superiority over the adversary. An AI based decision support system architecture needs to emerge for the complex AI combat operation environment. The F-35 Lightning is ninety percent software centric for target detection, categorisation, tracking and target engagement. In today's air combat environment, it is humanly impossible for a pilot to process the enormous amounts of data being produced by multiple sensors. AI for autonomous engagement will be a reality in the future air battlespace. Robotic systems comprise two key attributes, uninhabited, or unmanned, platforms and autonomous, or semi-autonomous, operations. Removing the human being from a platform can have several advantages viz. platforms that are not constrained by physical human limitations can have increased range, manoeuvrability, endurance, speed, and stealth. The platforms could also be used to undertake hazardous missions without any risk to human life. Increased automation can have many advantages of safety and reliability, improved reaction time and performance apart from the ability to operate in a communication-degraded, or denied, environment.

Drones and Swarming. Even though the tryst with drones started almost simultaneously with manned aircraft more than a century ago, the advancement of technology, advanced systems, avionics, composite materials, and autopilot and remote tracking with data link have led to the proliferation of drones being exploited for commercial purposes as well in large numbers. Swarm drones are neither a lot of drones in one place nor a number of drones moving in a centrally controlled choreographed manner as seen in light shows. To make a true swarm requires more than numbers or central

control. Drone light shows have a central computer on the ground tracking every single drone and making them move in unison in a complicated and detailed version of air traffic control, ensuring that their flight paths do not collide. Individual drones do not take any part in the decision-making process. True swarm behaviour arises from a simple set of rules which each of the participating members follow, with no central control.¹ Computer simulation modelling carried out by AI expert Craig Reynolds showed that swarming displays could be replicated if each member followed a simple set of rules. Large groups could move together with seamless fluidic agility and spread out to search a wide area, or ‘de-conflict’, to ensure that they all do not hit the same target. It is estimated that swarming drones could be fifty per cent more lethal while decreasing the losses by more than fifty per cent from defensive fire. In an omni-directional attack, swarming drones could attack a target from multiple directions. A drone swarm could have different drones working in unison as attackers, sensors, communicators, or decoys. Israel is the first country that has used ‘Legion X’, an ‘autonomous networked combat solution’, for locating and destroying targets in semi urban, cluttered and built-up areas. Legion X, with a tablet interface, allows an operator to specify an area and assign a number of drones and vehicles that would autonomously navigate to the target. The drones could be fitted with explosive charges as expendable loitering munitions. As most countries experiment with swarm drones, the challenge to counter them will take warfare to the next level in the coming years.

Sixth Generation Fighter Aircraft. The United States is already working on the Next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) programme which is likely to succeed the F-22 Raptor and the F-35 Lightning, presently the most advanced fighter aircraft in the world. Sixth generation technology would incorporate technologies like optional manning depending upon the nature of the mission, broad spectrum stealth, directed energy weapons, and next generation power plants. The future air battlespace would require sensors with long range detection capability to launch modern missiles as well as for self-protection. The United States Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) is developing a fibre laser system called, Self Protect High Energy Laser Demonstrator (SHiELD), which is a laser weapon contained in a pod. With a beam controller for the aircrew, it could take on incoming missiles or even daze, or burn, the electronics of other airborne platforms. Air and ground-launched hypersonic weapons that could manoeuvre to improve accuracy, or evade defences, as they approach targets will penetrate the future air battlespace. The next generation of turbine-based power plants are likely to have enhanced electrical power generation capacity that would power sensors, communications systems, directed energy weapons, and avionics. The next-generation fighter would also be able to function as a command centre for drones, including attack drones, while carrying out joint operations. Advances in software architecture would facilitate dynamic software upgrades that would not interfere with the fighter’s ability to fly. Radio photonic radars that would use pulsating lasers, instead of radio signals, to produce near perfect sine wave transmissions and reflections to produce a 3D image of the target would be the order of the day.

In an omni-directional attack, swarming drones could attack a target from multiple directions. A drone swarm could have different drones working in unison as attackers, sensors, communicators, or decoys.

Combat Air Teaming. This is a concept driven by the need to team a pilot from a manned aircraft with drones in a seamless manner. The current generation of drones need to be piloted from the ground. With combat air teaming as a mother ship concept from a manned fighter, teaming drones could execute directions given by the pilot just as formation members do for the lead pilot in manned missions. This concept could execute tasks such as battlefield surveillance, communication relay, or even hard kill options with expendable payloads. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), along with DRDO and Newspace Research Technologies, is developing a Combat Air Teaming System (CATS) wherein a twin seater Tejas is likely to be the ‘mothership’ aircraft. According to the CATS project in charge, Group Captain Harsh Vardhan Thakur, Deputy Chief Test Pilot at HAL, “CATS is an umbrella term for a combination of manned and unmanned stealth infused assets to increase dominance and decrease human casualties in a highly contested airspace where it can perform air to air and air to ground operations”.² Boeing is developing the MQ 28 Ghost Bat as

a stealth, multirole, unmanned aerial vehicle capable of flying alongside manned aircraft for support and autonomous missions independently using AI.

Defending Airspace: Quantum Radars. Still under development, quantum radars represent breakthrough technology that has the potential to significantly transform warfare in the twenty-first century. This technology, once incorporated, would make stealth and jamming obsolete because the functioning principle of quantum radars is different from traditional radars. This system exploits a particular physical property known as quantum entanglement. When two particles are entangled, they have the same quantum state and any change in the status of one particle results in a corresponding change in the status of the other, even if they are distant from one another. The quantum radar exploits this property by generating a visible light beam of entangled photons which then splits into two, converting one half into the microwave band without changing its quantum state and then emitting it by the radar. When the signal hits an object it is reflected back to the source and converted back to visible wavelength in order to be compared with the other half of the original beam. As the quantum state of its particles changes when it collides with the object, the system can detect its presence by observing the differences in the quantum status of the particles present in the two beams and by filtering out those from other sources. A properly functioning quantum radar would, therefore, make both jamming and stealth technology useless. Since the jamming system cannot know the quantum state of the original radar signal, the characteristics of the spoofing mission would not match and would automatically be ignored. As for stealth platforms, they would still retain their ability to disperse most of the incoming radar signals, but a small part, not sufficient to be detected by conventional radars, will still come back to the source and the observation of changes in the particle's quantum status will result in detection.³

A properly functioning quantum radar would, therefore, make both jamming and stealth technology useless. Since the jamming system cannot know the quantum state of the original radar signal, the characteristics of the spoofing mission would not match and would automatically be ignored.

Hypersonic Weapons. The three key attributes distinguishing hypersonic weapons from cruise and ballistic missiles are speed, manoeuvrability, and low altitude flying.⁴ Hypersonic weapons fly at an altitude of 20 to 60 km within the earth's atmosphere. Hypersonic flight, by definition, is an atmospheric flight that exposes hypersonic vehicles to thermal, aerodynamic, and material challenges which are not encountered by ballistic objects travelling faster than most hypersonic weapons in a low-density near space environment.⁵ All the major powers of the world are developing hypersonic weapons, with Russia already having deployed the Kinzhal hypersonic missile in the ongoing military operations against Ukraine. Hypersonic weapons will become a reality sooner, rather than later, in India as well, with DRDO having successfully flight tested the Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator with hypersonic air-breathing scramjet technology.⁶ With the development of hypersonic missiles, countries are also looking at counter-measures to address emerging hypersonic threats. Russia claims that its most advanced missile defence system, the S-500, deployed around Moscow, can defend against hypersonic threats. China has made remarkable progress in developing an infra-red heat-seeking hypersonic missile that could target objects such as stealth aircraft, aircraft carriers, and hypersonic missiles.⁷

Strategy and Leadership

Niche technologies, once available, would permeate the future air battlespace across the entire spectrum of warfare. Technological asymmetry, however, would persist depending upon the amount of effort and capital a nation invests in research and development, and integration of technology into warfighting. Disruptive technologies, however, would have the potential to counter asymmetric force levels, provided the leadership understands it and has the ability to influence and implement the same. Leadership, therefore, would remain key to influence the outcome of future conflicts. From direct and operational level leadership at the tactical level, leaders need to be groomed to become strategic and visionary leaders who understand the impact and integration of modern technology in the realm of warfare and are able to have an impact on the organisational work culture. It is more than necessary for today's leaders to be able to foresee and

understand the impact of disruptive and niche technologies in the future air battlespace. The most difficult task for a strategic leader would be to understand how the various levers of warfare integrate to influence the outcome of conflicts and to be able to manage change in a deeply structured and hierarchical organisation like the military. Interpersonal skills to communicate and effect change at the organisational level would remain key and nations must have the ability to pick and groom the right leaders to lead their organisations.

Conclusion

The future is always difficult to predict. Technology, however, facilitates a glimpse into the future air battlespace. The last couple of years have witnessed a hitherto unseen pace of development of niche and disruptive technologies that would influence the manner in which future wars would be waged. The air battlespace is becoming increasingly contested and congested while seamlessly merging between the air, near space and space domains. Air power, with its inherent ability to rapidly react, reach and deliver munitions, personnel and equipment — with precision — would always remain key to the outcome of future conflicts. The air battlespace is already witnessing the impact of AI, advanced robotics, proliferation of drones of all shapes and sizes, combat air teaming, sixth-generation fighter aircraft, quantum radars, and hypersonic weapons, to name a few. The use of the space and cyber domain would also influence the future air battlespace to a large extent. Air power, with its might and reach, would remain a prime objective for disruptive and innovative counters with the use of technology. Strategic leadership with the inherent ability to understand the impact of technology and implement change at the organisational level would remain key to the outcome of future conflicts.

The most difficult task for a strategic leader would be to understand how the various levers of warfare integrate to influence the outcome of conflicts and to be able to manage change in a deeply structured and hierarchical organisation like the military.

Endnotes

- 1 David Hambling, “What are Drone Swarms and Why does Suddenly Everyone want One”, *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidhambling/2021/03/01/what-are-drone-swarms-and-why-does-everyone-suddenly-want-one/?sh=1a255ea42f5c> accessed on 27 Dec 22.
- 2 HAL Combat Air Teaming System. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HAL_Combat_Air_Teaming_System accessed on 27 Dec 22.
- 3 Alessandro Gaggariadis, “Warfare Evolved: Quantum Radar”, Jul 02, 2012, *Geopolitical Monitor*. <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/warfare-evolved-quantum-radar/> accessed on 28 Dec 22.
- 4 Abhishek Saxena, “Russia launching hypersonic missiles heralds a new era of warfare—high speed, more lethal”, Apr 03, 2022, *The Print*. <https://theprint.in/opinion/russia-launching-hypersonic-missiles-heralds-a-new-era-of-warfare-high-speed-more-lethal/898194/> accessed on 28 Dec 22.
- 5 James M. Acton, “Hypersonic Boost-Glide Weapons”, *Science & Global Security*, 23:191–219, 2015. <https://scienceandglobalsecurity.org/archive/sgs23acton.pdf> accessed on 29 Dec 22.
- 6 Ministry of Defence, Govt of India, “DRDO successfully flight tests Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle”, 07 Sep 2020, *PIB Delhi* <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1651956> accessed on 29 Dec 22.
- 7 Stephen Chen, “China says it has hypersonic missiles with heat-seeking tech – years before US”, Dec 31, 2021, *South China Morning Post*, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3161762/china-says-it-has-hypersonic-missiles-heat-seeking-tech-years> accessed on 29 Dec 22.

Theaterisation – Needs a Realistic Approach

Major General RS Yadav, VSM (Retd)[@]

‘Change with times is a must. Change can be painful, but resistance to change can be even more painful.’

--- Gautam Buddha

Abstract

India today faces two aggressive and colluding adversaries. The Chinese aggression along the LAC and continuation of the proxy war by Pakistan clearly underline the gravity and likely dimensions of this looming two-front threat. Since India may not be able to match up to either the Chinese or the collusive force levels, it is a strategic imperative for India to re-structure its armed forces to build up the required deterrent capabilities to safeguard its interests. As such, the ongoing exercise to adopt the ‘Theaterisation’ model needs to be progressed to an early fruition in right earnest. This article analyses all issues comprehensively and suggests a way forward to facilitate a smooth transition.

Backdrop

The world enjoyed reasonable stability during the Cold War period when the two contestant camps maintained a balance of power. However, post the disintegration of the erstwhile USSR, various hegemonic actions of the US triggered a new power tussle amongst the nations. The two decades of the new millennium have witnessed the aggressive rise of China, assertive resurgence of Russia, enfeebling of the US and EU ties, and emergence of numerous middle powers, which are a sure sign of the world gravitating towards multi-polarity. The ongoing jostling among nations to carve out their new areas of influence is likely to continue till a semblance of a ‘new global balance or order’ is achieved. The aggression being displayed by China in context of Taiwan and along the LAC with India, the unending Russian military action in Ukraine, the divided opinion within the EU with regard to expansion of NATO membership and extent of support to Ukraine, and the utterly haphazard US withdrawal from Afghanistan leaving the control to Taliban and their jihadists affiliates are but a few examples of the possibilities in this transitional phase.

In this spiralling contestation of the US and its affiliates on the one hand and the strategically embraced China and Russia on the other, the middle and small powers have been put on the horns of dilemma causing them to hedge, align, and rebalance their strategic interests vis-à-vis these contending behemoths. And, with ‘nationalism’ scoring over ‘humanism’ during the COVID pandemic and lack of any conflict prevention mechanism due to a virtually dysfunctional UN, the unbridled use of military power has gained currency. The advancement of technologies and the growing realisation regarding the effectiveness of multi-domain warfare, duly facilitated by the non-attributable character of grey-zone warfare, has put nations in almost a continuum of competitiveness, combativeness, and confrontation. Mitigation of such wide array threats require not only a ‘Whole of Government Approach’ but a ‘Whole of Nation Approach’.

[@] Major General Rajendra Singh Yadav, VSM (Retd) is an infantry officer with 38 years’ service. He has rich operational experience of CI/CT operations and has served on both the Pakistan and China borders. He was Defence Attache of India in the Middle East. Post superannuation, he has been Vice Chancellor of a University. He has travelled to 24 countries, and has deep interest in International Relations. A prolific writer, he is presently a Distinguished Fellow with USI of India, and is currently engaged in developing a Strategic Level Decision Aiding Digital Tool in a Theaterised Environment in collaboration with DRDO.

In this nebulous global environment, the aggressive and expansionist Northern adversary, enjoying a yawning asymmetry both in numbers and in technology, alongwith the colluding Western adversary is challenging the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India. Faced with this ‘two front threat’, the Government had taken a much-desired step to appoint a CDS and given him the mandate to promote jointness amongst the three Services and draw out a plan for Theaterisation. However, the urge to encash the ‘low hanging fruits’ in a quick timeframe¹ without garnering a larger consensus, generated strong headwinds and general apprehension within the stakeholders, and the process literally stalled due to the untimely and unfortunate accidental demise of General Bipin Rawat. The appointment of General Anil Chauhan as the next CDS, though delayed, reflects the government’s support to the process, and some whispers in the corridor indicate towards the gathering momentum on the subject². However, it needs to be clearly understood that Theaterisation of the world’s second largest armed forces would be a complex process involving logical progressive steps spread over a defined time window to bring about a seamless change.

Concept and Benefits of Theaterisation

‘Unity of Command’ and ‘Synergy of Effort’ have been the two time tested principles of war fighting, and Theaterisation, in broad terms, is but an organisational structuring for adoption and facilitation of these two basic war winning factors. The two relevant models³ for Theaterisation are as follows:

- **Geographic Integration Model.** In this model, the forces and resources are grouped as per the geographic responsibility assigned to a Military Commander, which enables evolution of a ‘unified strategy’ and a ‘cohesive plan’ for desired results. The six US Theatre Commands, the five newly created Theatre Commands of China and the Indian Andaman & Nicobar Command (ANC) fall in this category.
- **Functional Integration Model.** In this model, the forces and resources with similar functions are coalesced for coordinated functioning, as also for exercising centralised control over these Force Multipliers/ Scarce Resources, for allocation across geographical theatres on required basis for optimum utilisation and results. The United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), United States Space Command, United States Cyber Command, the Chinese Strategic Support Force (PLA SSF), Rocket Force (PLA RF) and the Indian Strategic Forces Command (SFC) fall in this category.

‘Unity of Command’ and ‘Synergy of Effort’ have been the two time tested principles of war fighting, and Theaterisation, in broad terms, is but an organisational structuring for adoption and facilitation of these two basic war winning factors.

The concept of Theaterisation, adopted by the two most advanced militaries over time viz. by the US post WW II and by China recently, accrue significant operational, logistic and administrative benefits. Moreover, the concept is flexible enough to be adopted for both, expeditionary forces as well as for forces deployed for defence of own borders. Theaterisation in Indian context, which faces external threats from three distinct avenues – two land frontiers and a large coastal frontier with island territories, would, therefore, definitely facilitate a unified approach resulting into better planning and improved military response, as also would reduce costs in the long run.⁴

Challenges to Theaterisation

Most initial reservations like ‘Why is a change required when armed forces have fared well in all operations? Is it a right time to change when India is beset with myriad security challenges? and is the concept of Theaterisation relevant for India or are we blindly copying the models of others/ have since petered off. Even the debate on the requirement of a separate Air Defence Command⁵ possibly has been put to rest based on views of various experts, including the current Air Chief himself stating that offensive air operations can’t be separated from air defence, and an integrated approach is desirable.⁶ However, the reservations of the IAF to Theaterisation continue to simmer, and a debate regarding the need of having the National Security Strategy (NSS) as a precursor to Theaterisation has recently surfaced. These issues are examined in detail below:

- **The IAF seems to be having reservations regarding the process of Theaterisation.⁷ Are the apprehensions real, or can these be managed?** The IAF's apprehension / contention that it is not amenable to Theaterisation due to its scarce resources which need to remain centrally controlled for optimum use may not be totally technically correct. Presently too, the IAF's resources during peace time are divided and allocated to five Operational Commands viz., Southern, South Western, Western, Central, and Eastern. During operations, the Air Chief / Air HQs may change the allocations between Commands as per requirements, and thereafter Command HQs continue to retain freedom of planning, and getting the missions executed through the Air bases and squadrons. As such, if the sanctity of Air Commands / Air Component Commanders with a Functional Integration Model is maintained for the IAF in Theaterisation, there should be little change to the existing methodology, except that in place of Air Chief / Air HQs, the Chief of staff committee (CoSC) may be taking the decision of allocation / re-allocation of air resources, that too with the expertise and advice of the Air Chief who is a member of the CoSC.
- **Should a Single Service (IAF) Doctrine / Beliefs continue to obstruct the concept of Theaterisation being evolved based on National Objectives, Priorities, and Capabilities?** The current Air Chief had earlier stated that the IAF supports Theaterisation, however, he had added that any structural changes should not compromise service specific doctrines.⁸ And now publication of the revised IAF Doctrine, which projects the IAF as an Aerospace Power, emphasises on retention of its unique character, and states that air power being seen merely as an arm to support joint operations significantly limits its strategic options and security response matrix.⁹ This clearly exhibits the continuing reservations of the IAF. In this context, it needs to be clearly understood that India today faces serious security threats largely to its territorial integrity from two colluding adversaries, and these contested boundary issues are likely to persist in the foreseeable future.¹⁰ The need of the hour, therefore, is to evolve a national strategy to meet this challenge by integrating the available resources of all the three Services in the most efficient manner. The IAF needs to evolve plans to use versatility of modern aerial platforms to do more in the proposed integrated theaterised environment, rather than continue to seek independence. Open ended Service-specific aspirational doctrines¹¹ need to be called out, at least till there are sufficient resources at hand!
- **Is a NSS needed to guide / facilitate Theaterisation?** Forethought about an imminent / future development or threat, and making of a timely strategy and plan to tackle it has been a general weakness of the Indian system. The concept of 'Strategic Fore-Thought' seems to be lacking. This has been the basic reason for a 'reactive approach' in almost all situations. Even in the military, whether it was Kargil or now the LAC face-off, the response has been totally reactive! Despite fighting numerous wars with our adversaries, and suffering the security impacts of the un-ending proxy war, India till date has not drafted and issued a NSS, a document which should be specifying various threats, the national policies, desired objectives, organisational structures required to tackle these, the funding for timely acquisition of resources, and lateral linkages with various Ministries and central armed police force (CAPFs) for not only smooth functioning of the armed forces, but galvanising the much needed 'Whole of Nation Approach'. There are divergent views on issuance of a written NSS in the political, diplomatic, bureaucratic and military circles with regard to maintenance of ambiguity, or otherwise, in the ongoing troubled times. However, when the ambiguity / absence of clear - cut strategy begins to impact national security and impair domestic functioning, it should be time to act with due haste. The NSS can always be in two parts — open and closed portions—which may meet both requirements, firstly, of expressing the

There are divergent views on issuance of a written NSS in the political, diplomatic, bureaucratic and military circles with regard to maintenance of ambiguity, or otherwise, in the ongoing troubled times. However, when the ambiguity / absence of clear - cut strategy begins to impact national security and impair domestic functioning, it should be time to act with due haste.

Indian view to the global community in the open portion, and secondly, of spelling out policy, objectives, internal reforms / re-structuring and capacity building measures in the closed portion. Since in a democracy, the political decisions would always reign supreme, the NSS would also assist in integrating the government and military aspirations and plans, thus, facilitating theaterisation. The former Army Chief has also expressed similar views.¹²

The Proposed Way Ahead

Theaterisation would be a major change for the Indian Armed Forces, which should mitigate the current and imminent challenges faced by the nation, as also support India's medium and long term geo-political and geo-strategic aspirations. It should, therefore, be undertaken with due deliberation, fore-thought, and caution, where each aspect is critically analysed to facilitate smooth transition. Also, it takes a long time to change the military's equipment profile, and requires an equally long time and effort to synchronise and train on the procedures and drills to perfection. Under the circumstances, where there are still some organisational reservations cum resistance, a top driven approach with *Make haste Slowly*⁴³ mantra, wherein the change gets implemented in phases within stipulated timelines, as suggested below may be the best option.

- **Step 1: Empower the Enabler — The CDS.** Post 1971, since India did not face any major conventional war, the three Services evolved in respective silos. The appointment of CDS was created after a lot of deliberations to bring in the required integration and synergy amongst the three Services to face the emerging challenges to national security. The prime challenge that India faces today is the threat to its territorial integrity. China and Pakistan are well identified adversaries and their collusivity against India too is a near certainty because of their common interests. Therefore, the threat along any frontier — land or coastal (or any Theatre), would need an integrated plan — not only in allocation / distribution of resources, but also in execution of operations. As such, the proposed Theatre Commanders too would need to fight an integrated battle against common adversaries. Therefore, the post of CDS (as part of COSC) with full operational control over theatres, and full administrative control over the armed forces through the DMA, may be an imperative at this juncture to facilitate the process of integration and theaterisation. The disparate functioning of the three Service Chiefs in the COSC may not suffice during any future conflict! The direct govt control over Theatre Commanders may only be needed much later when India emerges as a powerful military nation, and desires to undertake expeditionary operations, wherein the Theatres Commanders could be assigned exclusive Out of Area Contingency (OOAC) tasks by the Govt (in this context, also refer to the US Goldwater Nichols Act of 1986¹⁴, which was brought in to change the control over US Theatre Commanders with global mandate). Moreover, the Indian Armed Forces have always adhered to the constitutional dictate of accepting political supremacy. Therefore, the govt too needs to enable the CDS and the armed forces to evolve as per emerging threats and needs of the nation.
- There also exists a need to have something like a National War Centre, where all stakeholders (various Ministries, Central Security Establishments, and CAPFs) need to sit together with the armed forces to plan and fight or support a unified battle, as applicable to each.**
- **Step 2: Drafting of the NSS, (Military Security Strategy (MSS), and Vision Document of Theaterisation:**
 - ❖ **NSS.** The NSS, as elaborated above, should be the core document from where should flow the policies, objectives, structures, and capability building programmes. And since multi-domain warfare has made a 'Whole of Nation Approach' an imperative, there also exists a need to have something like a National War Centre, where all stakeholders (various Ministries, Central Security Establishments, and CAPFs) need to sit together with the armed forces to plan and fight or support a unified battle, as applicable to each.

❖ **MSS.** Despite the Indo-China war of 1962 and unsettled borders, the Indian Armed Forces for long remained focussed largely on Pakistan, and being conventionally superior, stayed glued to the number game and a strategy of attrition warfare. Now with China emerging as a major threat, a realisation has dawned to re-structure, re-orient, and re-equip to face a superior and modernised adversary. The face-off at LAC has already forced re-balancing and re-orientation of forces and resources. The ‘Two Front Threat’ has now assumed reality. Under no circumstances can India hope to achieve parity against a collusive threat. So, while India would need to prepare for a two-front threat, it would be prudent to strategise to fight only a one front war at a time. And, with limited resources, the military aims and aspirations too would need to be redefined. As such, MSS would also need to be drafted in sync with the NSS, giving out the military threats, strategy to address these threats and structural changes and capacities required, followed by joint doctrines and war fighting methodologies. Such a document will not only indicate the military limitations and needs to the political hierarchy, but will also serve as a guiding document for Theaterisation.

❖ **Vision Document of Theaterisation.** Simultaneously, a detailed Vision Document (Blue Print) of Theaterisation, which gives out the final desired architecture of the Indian Armed Forces, needs to be prepared (after inclusive deliberations to arrive at the most suitable model), in sync with the NSS and MSS, so that the way ahead is clearly stated, and all apprehensions and reservations too are put to rest.

➤ **Step 3: Creation of Supporting Structures / Establishments.**

The current debate and deliberations on Theaterisation seem to be largely concentrated on spans of control and resource allocation to Theatre Commands. There is also a talk to say that Theatre Commanders would primarily concentrate on operations, and may not be burdened with administrative responsibilities; the Raise, Train and Sustain functions would continue to remain with the respective

There is also a talk to say that Theatre Commanders would primarily concentrate on operations, and may not be burdened with administrative responsibilities; the Raise, Train and Sustain functions would continue to remain with the respective Service Chiefs.

Service Chiefs; and scarce force multipliers viz., cyber, space and special forces may necessarily remain under centralised control in the functional integration mode. Accordingly, the re-modelling of the Controlling HQs (HQ IDS and Service HQs) and support structures, which would be expected to support the entire edifice of the prospective Theatre Commands, should assume primacy and priority to enable a smooth transition. So, the third step should logically include the following:

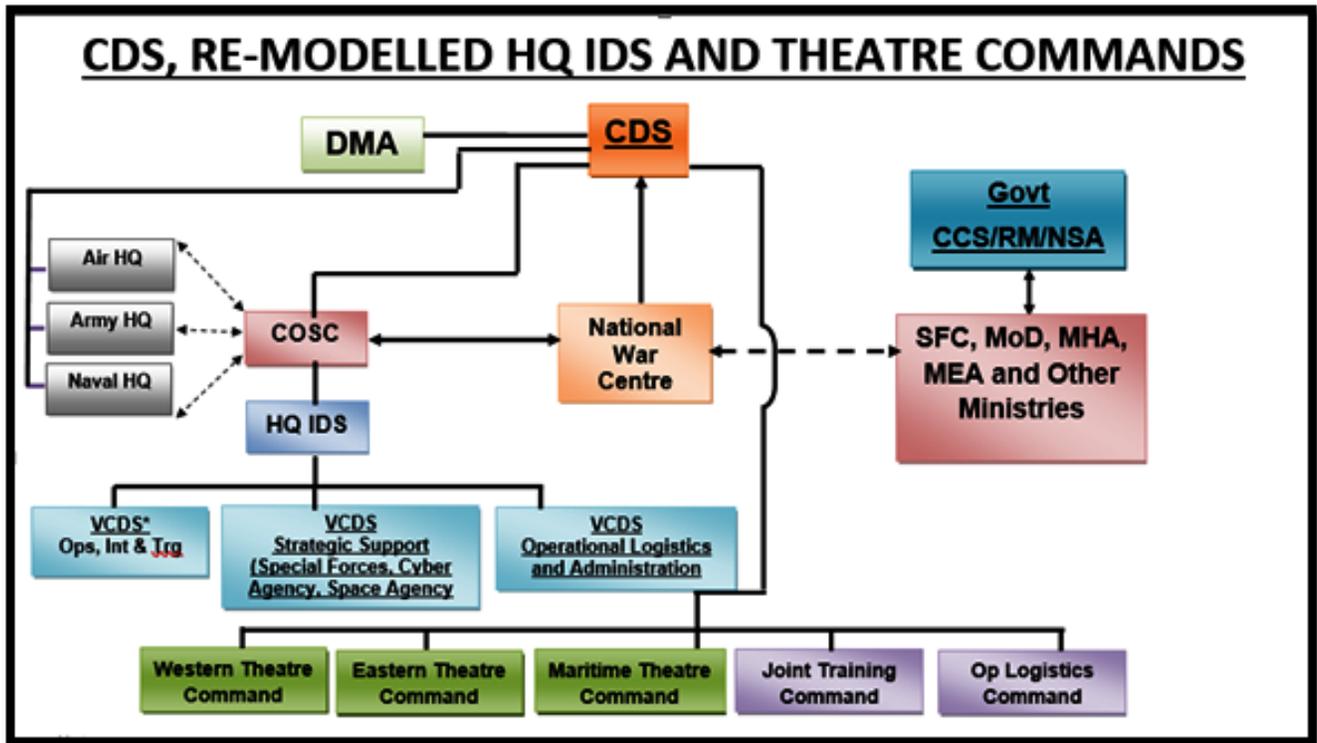
❖ **Re-structuring of HQ IDS.** To support the CDS, re-modelled COSC and the Theatre Commands. This proposed model of Theaterisation is explained in the charts given in the succeeding paragraph.

❖ **Re-structuring of the three Service HQs.** To integrate with HQ IDS and each other, and avoid any duplicity.

❖ **Creation of Tri-Services Training, Logistics, and Administrative Grid.** Such that it would support all the Services and Theatres (by amalgamation/re-structuring of all such establishments of the three Services), and specifying their command & control chains.

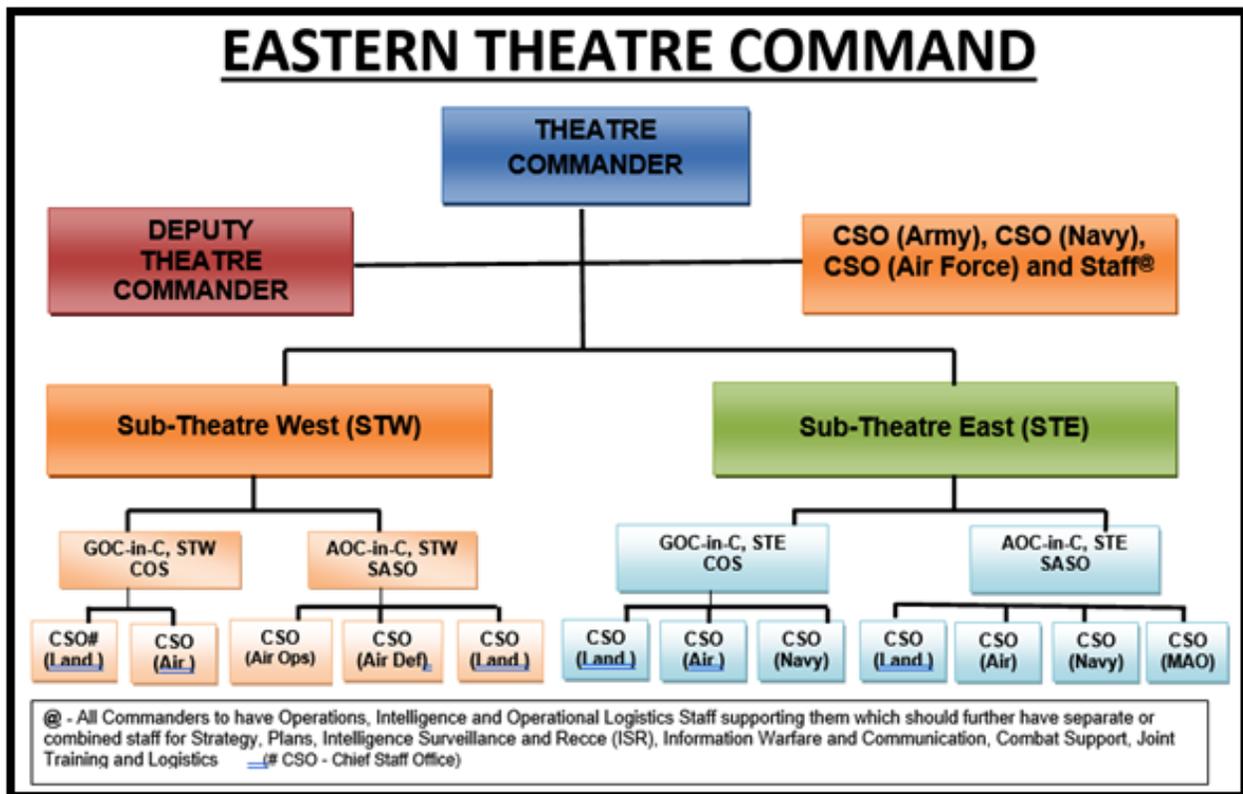
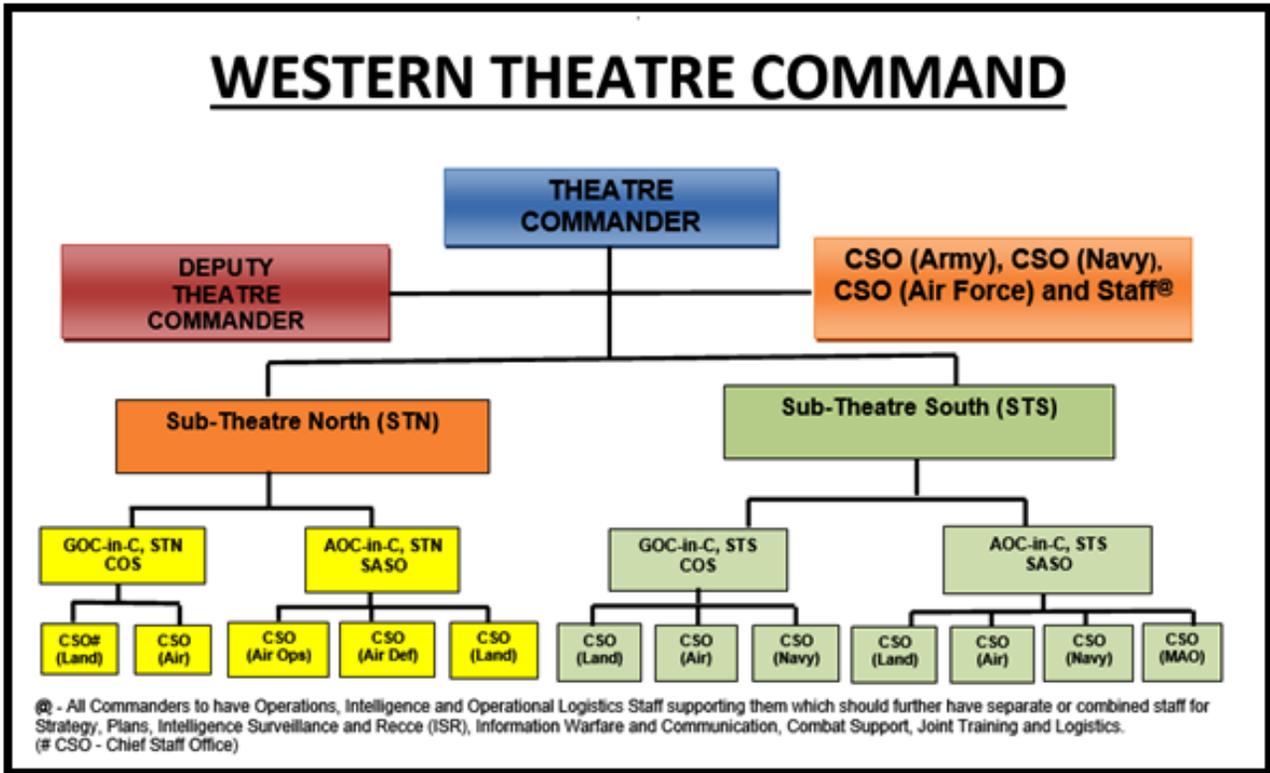
➤ **Step 4: Raising of Theatre Commands.** The creation of Theatre Commands should be the last step in the whole process to ensure that the ‘operational readiness’ is not dented during the entire process, and all support structures are already in place to be responsive to demands and need of the Theatre Commands, the moment these are created.

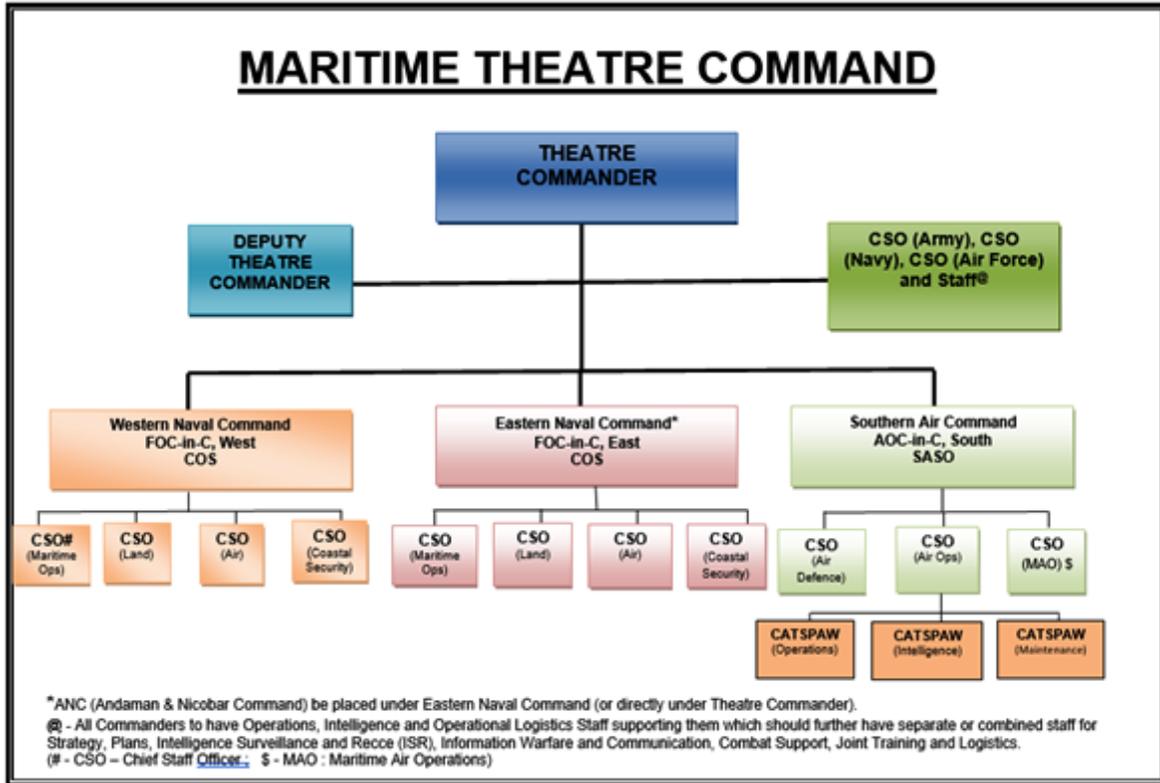
Proposed Model of Theaterisation



To amplify the above, the following points merit attention:

- CDS to be Permanent Chairman of COSC with full Operational and Administrative control over entire armed forces.
- National War Centre would be a place to congregate and co-opt all stakeholders to ensure ‘Whole of Nation’ approach.
- Service HQs to only be responsible to Raise, Train & Sustain.
- Aspects of Operations, Intelligence, Strategic Support, Training & Operational Logistics to be controlled and coordinated by remodelled HQ IDS.
- A Strategic Forces Command could be created later to include all Force Multipliers.
- Three VCDS — Vice Chiefs of Defence Staff are recommended to assist the CDS in functions as given in the chart.





Conclusion

The PLA is acquiring humongous capabilities, and Xi Jinping is now aggressively and effectively utilising its military might to coerce and intimidate India. Current crisis notwithstanding, Pakistan, which has never missed an opportunity of military adventurism, is fast building up its military might with the support of China to bridge the conventional asymmetry enjoyed by India till now. It is, therefore, time that Indian Armed Forces undertake the desired re-structuring and build capacities to safeguard against imminent security challenges to continue to provide strategic autonomy to the national leadership.

Endnotes

- 1 Shushant Singh, 'Air Defence, peninsular, logistics commands on the table : General Bipin Rawat', *Indian Express*, 05 Feb 2020. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/air-defence-peninsular-logistics-commands-on-the-table-gen-bipin-rawat-6251211/>
- 2 Dutta Amrita Nayak, 'Armed Forces give shape to contours of theatre plans', *Indian Express*, 22 Jan 2023. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/armed-forces-give-shape-to-contours-of-theatre-plans-8396568/>
- 3 Khera, Kishore Kumar, 'Air Defence Command – A Bold Test Case', *IDS.A* 27 Jan 2020. <https://idsa.in/issuebrief/air-defence-command-kkhera-270120>
- 4 Snehesh Alex Philip, 'What are military theatre commands and why does India want to switch to them', *The Print*, 06 Jul 2021. <https://theprint.in/defence/what-are-military-theatre-commands-and-why-does-india-want-to-switch-to-them/690487/>
- 5 Air Marshal S S Soman (Retd), 'Air Defence Command –Need for a Rethink', *Salute*, 10 Jun 2020. <https://salute.co.in/air-defence-command-need-for-a-rethink/>
- 6 Manu Pabby, 'Air defence command will be counter productive, need integrated approach : IAF Chief V R Chaudhari', *Economic Times*, 15 Jul 2022. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/iaf-chief-air-defence-command-will-be-counterproductive-need-integrated-approach/articleshow/92907593.cms?from=mdr>
- 7 Rahul Singh, 'Theaterisation of Armed Forces : Decoding the new approach to defence', *India News*, 02 Jul 2021. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/theaterisation-of-armed-forces-decoding-the-new-approach-to-defence-101625236673690.html>
- 8 HT Correspondent, 'IAF backs theaterisation, has reservations: Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari', *Hindustan Times*, 05 Oct 2022. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/iaf-backs-theaterisation-has-reservations-air-chief-marshal-chaudhari-101664908647577.html>
- 9 Snehesh Alex Philip, 'What does IAF's new doctrine contain & why air force put it out – everything you need to know', *The Print*, 07 Feb 2023 (<https://theprint.in/defence/what-does-iafs-new-doctrine-contain-why-air-force-put-it-out-everything-you-need-to-know/1358780/>)
- 10 Lt Gen (Dr) Rakesh Sharma, 'Imperatives for Reconsideration of the Armed Forces Doctrines', *VIF*, 20 Feb 2023. <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2023/february/20/imperatives-for-reconsideration-of-the-armed-forces-doctrines>
- 11 Lt General Prakash Menon, 'New IAF doctrine advertises aerospace power too much. It overshadows focus on core beliefs', *The Print*, 14 Feb 2023 <https://theprint.in/opinion/new-iaf-doctrine-advertises-aerospace-power-too-much-it-overshadows-focus-on-core-beliefs/1369506/>
- 12 Rahul Singh, 'Ex-Army Chief questions theaterisation approach', *India News*, 30 Dec 2022 (<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/exarmy-chief-questions-theaterisation-approach-101672338025747.html>)
- 13 Snehesh Alex Philip, 'Joint military command is the future but India can't rush into it', *The Print*, 18 Jun 2021. <https://theprint.in/opinion/brahmastra/joint-military-command-is-the-future-but-india-cant-rush-into-it/680012/>
- 14 See – Goldwater Nichols Department of Defense Reorganisation Act of 1986. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/house-bill/3622>