

**REGIONAL
STUDIES**

**38:4
Winter 2020**

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REGIONAL STUDIES

Quarterly Journal of the
Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad

38:4

Winter 2020

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INDO-PACIFIC: A BALANCING MECHANISM IN MUTATION?

ANWARA BEGUM*

Abstract

This paper explores the underlying nuances of the Indo-Pacific strategy with special reference to four participant countries, i.e., Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. It uncovers the reasons for the aforementioned countries' involvement in the formulation and implementation of the strategy. In doing so, an added aim of the paper is to highlight the underlying contradictions within the policy. The paper also sheds light on the current status of the policy and the potential that it possesses, given the interests and institutional frameworks for decision-making within the aforesaid states. Additionally, the paper looks into frequent mutations that the policy has undergone, which result in difficulties for the participants considering the economic and political transformations taking place in the world signified by the rise of China. Lastly, the paper argues the impact of Donald Trump's policies and public statements on the overall outlook of the Indo-Pacific as a containment policy; a reflection of elite consensus. This consensus did alter, to some extent, before the 2020 elections in the United States. The paper concludes with a debate on the potential alterations in the policy under the Biden administration.

Keywords: *Indo-Pacific, global transformation, off-shore balancing, Sino-US relations, trade war, China containment, US decline*

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Introduction

The Indo-Pacific seems to raise the Platonic concern of appearance and reality. The fundamental question to answer here is if it is really what it seems to be? Initially, the Indo-Pacific strategy seemed to be the introduction of a long-overdue concept of the Japanese conservative Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe. Later, it became enmeshed in the former US President Barack Obama's Pivot to Asia Policy, which advanced as the beginning of an important shift towards Asia leaving behind the conflict-ridden Middle East. After Trump came to power, the moves seemed to fall into place as an elaborate containment strategy, as the agreement for the need of a coalition became coherent. One can even think about the evolution of this strategy over time from what appeared to be a balancing mechanism into the foundation of a new cold war. Or, to put it differently, what was called a gentle deterrent fast became a grand containment strategy, intermingled with an American president's re-election campaign. The question arises, 'How should we view it?'

Howsoever we look at it, it appears as if a grand strategy has emerged. This paper examines the Indo-Pacific strategy, delving into the participants' perspectives and some contradictions in the coalition. The main premise of the argument is that the strategy had elements that could be used by the Trump administration to start a cold war-like conflict with China. While seemingly, the Trump administration appears to be behind all the sudden and unforeseen economic, diplomatic, and military moves, it is argued that the strategy has been a product of elite consensus that has evolved over a long time and Trump's image has been deployed to promote it. The Indo-Pacific strategy seems to be constantly changing and the election of Joe Biden is expected to further mutate it. When a plan like this requires frequent adjustments, analysts tend to perceive it as a weakness, i.e., weakness within the plan itself, inherent weakness in the coalition, or weakness in the hegemonic power. Changes also point towards the need for adjustments to the rapidly changing global atmosphere.

The Emergence of the Concept

The concept appeared as an academic construct in the writings of the German geopolitical thinker Karl Haushofer in 1920.¹ With the

establishment of the East Asian Summit (EAS) in 2005, the linkage between the two oceans began to acquire prominence. Rory Medcalf wrote, "But from birth, the summit was misnamed. It was, in fact, an Indo-Pacific institution, an early reflection of the changes in the regional system of economic and strategic links."² The idea of a link between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean became an important reality at the beginning of the 21st century, after Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's formulation of the concept of Indo-Pacific as a partnership in his speech at the Indian parliament in 2007.³ Hemmings asserts, "It is fascinating because we have seen a concept move from a foreign policy speech by a Japanese politician develop to an approach towards regional dynamics adopted by a number of different states."⁴ President Obama, in similitude, adopted the idea to formalise his vision of 'Pivot to Asia', which later became 'Rebalance to Asia'. Glosserman mentions that Obama's Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton used the concept in her famous article *America's Pacific Century*. Obama emphasised the importance of linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans in his speech at the Australian Parliament. "Clinton's frenetic Assistant Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific, Kurt Cambell, was an evangelist for the notion as well," is how Glosserman likes to put it.⁵

In no time, the idea of the Indo-Pacific became popular in policy, academic, and media circles in Asia, Australia and the United States. Likewise, Indian Prime Minister Modi and the Australian government embraced the term. The Indian side stresses that the two oceans had always been linked before the US started treating them as two different theatres following World War II.⁶ Trump's Secretary of State Rex Tillerson used the term in his October 2017 speech at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) 19 times, demonstrating the US acceptance of the strategy. Following President Trump's Asia tour in November 2017, the US government officials and government documents frequently began using the term.⁷ Most analysts believe that the Obama administration's rebalance strategy has continued in the Trump administration with just a different name.

Some Indian analysts call it Shinzo Abe's "strategic pursuit of a free and open Indo-Pacific" as does Basu.⁸ Japanese observers refer to it as an effort by Japan at tactical hedging against China.⁹ China, of course, considers it as a concerted attempt to contain its growing influence.

The US Perspective

The Asia Pacific region has long been important to the US, especially since the end of the 19th century when the Open Door Policy was articulated. At the beginning of the 21st century, the region rose to prominence. So much so that Obama's Secretary of State Hillary Clinton compared Asia-Pacific to post World War II Europe contending:

Just as our post-World War II commitment to building a comprehensive and lasting transatlantic network of institutions and relationships has paid off many times over....The time has come for the United States to make similar investments as a Pacific power...¹⁰

She believed that it was necessary to harness Asia's growth and dynamism to American economic and strategic interests. According to the *Global Trends 2025* Report by the US National Intelligence Council, "the unprecedented shift in relative wealth and economic power" from the West to the East will continue.¹¹

President George HW Bush Sr believed that his experience and knowledge of China would enable him to arrive at an agreement with the rising power on the issue of global governance.¹² However, his assumption did not work out as planned because of the Tiananmen incident. On a similar note, President Obama came to power with a predisposition that viewed China as a strategic rival of the US. Soon after coming to power, Obama declared his policy of Pivot to Asia. During the Trump administration, China came to be viewed as a more serious rival whose rise and behaviour seemingly challenged the post-World War II liberal international order that was established under the

leadership of the United States.¹³ Obama's Pivot to Asia policy intermingled with the Japanese Indo-Pacific idea to evolve into the manifest Indo-Pacific construct. It is needless to say that the construct is still evolving.

Many in the US policymaking and expert circles view Chinese President Xi Jinping's rise to power and growing Chinese assertiveness in the South and the East China Sea and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as the major underlying determinants behind the formulation of US Indo-Pacific strategy. However, the contents of this paper are limited to understanding the US rationale with regards to policies to counter China, if necessary, stretching back to George W Bush Sr and even Richard Nixon.

Above in view, the Indo-Pacific policy evolved slowly and steadily over time although it may seem that Japan has actively pulled the reluctant United States into supporting a vision that Japan and India have been working on since the 1990s. Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe developed cordial relations in the early 1990s.¹⁴ It may seem that these two leaders were taking forward the Indo-Pacific strategy and Trump joined later.¹⁵ Some Japanese experts—for instance, Koga—think that Japan's role in developing this policy has been crucial. But the way it has been evolving makes it clear that despite varying appearances, the US was involved in (re)writing geography as Tuathail would put it.¹⁶ It has been quite long that the United States has been thinking about India as a counterweight to China.¹⁷

Certain discourses have surfaced from the views of American policymakers and experts and are found in speeches, interviews, seminars and, of course, writing. These discourses indicate why and how the United States articulated the Indo-Pacific policy. This paper puts forth six different strains but briefly discusses the relatively more important three;

1. Response to the Chinese challenge to the liberal international order
2. Balancing mechanism against an emerging major power
3. Conflict in the power transition

The aforementioned can be viewed as well-articulated and disseminated discourses.

Response to the Chinese Challenge to the Liberal International Order

After the Second World War, the US was crucial in building a liberal international order (LIO) in which countries (outside the Soviet orbit) gradually became more open to trade and developed capitalist national economies. The European Union (EU) developed and remained secure under its security umbrella and East Asia blossomed. China's rise to power challenges this liberal system because China's rapid growth seemingly violates the prevalent norms of this system by trying to encircle India. It also engages in predatory economic practices like extending huge amounts of loans to corrupt governments and non-compliance with transparent rules of lending or bilateral economic relations developed over time by the Western countries and the Bretton Woods institutions, i.e., the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The United States, as the hegemon in the world order, tends to view its role as that of a guardian power overseeing the functioning of the LIO as well as identifying problems and finding solutions. It has contributed to globalisation, the process which, many in the US believe, has led to its decline.¹⁸ It upholds the values and norms of the existing order and imposes sanctions when infractions of norms take place. By rejecting the international tribunal's ruling in July 2016 and by upholding the nine-dash line in the South China Sea, China ostensibly keeps violating the norms of this order. It is asserted that, in addition, China has continued its military build-up in the South China Sea, which violates

the rules-based maritime order. It is implied that China's behaviour threatens freedom of navigation in the South China Sea as well as in the wider Indian and Pacific Ocean areas.

Under Xi Jinping, China has been ignoring Deng Xiao Ping's rule of thumb that China should 'hide its power and bide its time'. China wariness has been a long-term trend in American foreign policy. Starting from Nixon, there has always been an effort to manage relations with China to have control over the growth of its power and wealth. The Asia-Pacific security architecture under the US leadership carried an undeclared goal of containing China. American military presence in the Asia-Pacific, as Stuart puts it, "...has also made it possible for the United States to sustain a strong neo-containment posture toward China without having to admit it publicly."¹⁹ Glosserman too attests to this view. The US created a security system in East Asia based on the Hub and Spokes model. The spokes are South Korea, the Philippines, Japan and New Zealand. That is how Japan came to have more than 80 American bases.²⁰

Understanding the Balancing Mechanism

The Obama administration's renaming of the 'Pivot' as 'Rebalancing to Asia' marks the Indo-Pacific strategy as a balancing policy and not an aggressive containment policy. Obama wanted to engage China and managed to do so to some extent. The Indians at first viewed the policy more like a gentle balancing signal to China.²¹ The Indo-Pacific seems tied with the emerging 'balancing' literature which contains suggestions about how the US can make a coalition that will be a balancing act.

The literature emphasises that the classic concept of balance of power needs to be refined and updated so the changes taking place in the international system and hitherto neglected phenomena of regional and small state balancing acts can be taken into consideration. Klieman believes that some modifications are necessary

and those are: attention should be paid to balancing rather than balances; the mechanism for balancing not measurement of balances should be the focus of attention; regional and local balancing not only systemic or global balancing also demand analytical attention.²² In addition, balance is not confined to only 'Politics among Nations' but is linked to internal-external linkages (for instance, level of development, ethnic division, the composition of the population, technological sophistication etc.). This flourishing literature draws attention to the ability to intervene in ethnic relations or actual functioning of the economy and so on.

Balancing can be viewed as "...constant striving, the instinctive: the competitiveness, the instinctive or felt need to offset. Not so much the endgame as skill at playing the game."²³ The literature on balancing suggests multipolarity as a state where all states, big or small, qualify as 'aspiring powers'.²⁴ Because of this multifaceted power competition, geography has gained renewed salience. According to this literature, Sino-US rivalry, competition in East Asia, and the Iran-Saudi-Pakistan triangle can be considered as balancing mechanisms at work. Terms like bandwagoning, buck-passing, hedging, off-shore balancing are all part of the evolving discourse on balancing. Along with these can be added the destabilisation of an opponent through support for opposition groups inside the country. Klieman refers to this US Rebalancing to Asia that involves other countries like Japan as an example of the kind of balancing that the contemporary literature draws attention to.

Considering that the times are perplexing for the United States since the American unipolar moment seems to be dissolving and the features of the emerging system, though not evident as yet, do reflect a multipolar trend. Above in view, the existing body of literature also offers some recommendations for the United States. There is an agreement among some experts over the fact that the US is declining economically and not militarily. While the true basis of the

aforementioned remains debatable, some commentators like to believe that the decline of the US hegemony is inevitable sooner or later. At this time of hegemonic decline, one policy suggestion offered in this literature looks very much like the Indo-Pacific coalition strategy. Thus, Rubinovitz suggests, “The preferred strategy is one of off-shore balancing that would have the United States rely heavily on select regional allies with the ability to dominate their regions under an American umbrella of military, political and economic support.”²⁵ This option is suggested at a time when China’s goals and true intentions are supposedly not clear to the American policymakers.²⁶ It is also believed that the United States—if committed to maintaining its presence in East Asia—will have maritime supremacy and can manage China’s rise at a reasonable cost and while keeping the East Asian balance of power stable.

India does have apprehensions but it seems to have taken the Indo-Pacific as a balancing mechanism. Khurana refers to this as a gentle deterrence to communicate to China that it is crossing its limits. Japan also sees it as a rather soft balancing measure; that’s why Koga calls it ‘tactical hedging’.²⁷ Australia also emphasises balance as Hemmings points out that it “...orients Australia around an ideologically-driven economic strategy of building up India to balance Chinese dominance in the region.”²⁸

Conflict in Power Transition

China’s growth during the past three decades has been rather remarkable. Henry Kissinger who shaped Nixon’s engagement policy with China in the 1970s commented that he had never thought that China’s growth trajectory would be as fast-paced as it was. The 2019 US National Strategy Paper refers to China as a strategic rival. The idea that there has to be a power transition from the status quo hegemon to the rising power has become a prominent theme in the United States. Among the American scholars on power politics, Graham

Allison and John Mearsheimer are vocal about the power transition. In the last 500 years, according to Allison, there have been sixteen transitions where one rising power replaced a declining power. And not so surprisingly, twelve of the said transitions came through armed conflicts.

The security architecture that was selected in East Asia after the Second World War was aimed at preventing the rise of any hegemon. A Pentagon Strategy Paper stated, "Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival ... that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union."²⁹ Mearsheimer himself contends that the US wants "... to be the hegemon in the Western Hemisphere and have no rival in either Europe or Northeast Asia."³⁰ Realists like Mearsheimer refute the constructivist argument that international relations are shaped discursively and point out that realism has held strong over the past seven centuries because it reflects how the international system is anarchic.³¹ This is why, from the realist perspective, conflict is inevitable and one of the states is bound to lose. The zero-sum game logic is starkly clear in this argument.

Mearsheimer's views remained unchanged. In a recent debate with Australia's Hugh White, he commented that the aim of the US had remained the same. The US has crushed such rising powers before, for example, Germany, and other great powers like the USSR and it would do the same to China.³² Believing in the dichotomy of one power defeating the other, nothing in between, he seemingly tried to persuade Australia to go all the way with the US-led alliance to contain China because if it chooses to do otherwise, the US could be quite difficult to deal with. In an alternative situation, if the US loses, the Chinese could similarly become a challenge to deal with and might work towards curtailing Australia's sovereignty. That is how great powers behave. It is needless to stress Mearsheimer's argument reflects reiteration of the realists' claims that designate China's

dominance as a threat. Additionally, this also points towards what kind of pressures an ally like Australia faces and could further face from the involved experts who very likely have had close links with policy circles. Graham Allison has written a full-length book, titled *Thucydides' Trap*, on how war becomes inevitable when power transitions occur.

It should, however, be mentioned that other experts view the rise of China through the prism of the concept of power transition and system change but have different views. Stuart has categorised them as adapters and game-changers.³³ Those who like Mearsheimer and Allison are called containers believing in the containment of China. The adapters, like Brzezinski and Hugh White, advise caution because of China's nuclear capability and point at the military power disparity to show that a conflict between China and the United States is not likely. Brzezinski sees China as a cautious power that does not aim to challenge the United States. He writes that the Chinese have "serious grievances regarding external issues, notably Taiwan. But conflict is not inevitable or even likely.... its focus remains on economic development and winning acceptance as a great power."³⁴ China's determination, he goes on to stress, to sustain economic growth demands a cautious foreign policy. "A confrontational foreign policy could disrupt that growth... and threaten the Chinese Communist Party's hold on power." The adapters also think that these two states will be able to find common grounds to tackle international problems.

Game changers believe China will eventually evolve into a democratic society. China faces economic, political, and environmental problems and the United States can help it so it can achieve a soft landing. Stuart himself suggests some policies that are close to the policies of the Obama administration. These combine balancing efforts with allies in the region in a manner that does not alarm the Chinese. That was how the Indo-Pacific was evolving when containment thinkers like Mearsheimer began talking loudly and impatiently about containment plus rollback.

The Indian Perspective

India feels that China's rise is taking place at the expense of its influence.³⁵ From the Indian perspective, as from the perspective of the US, China is challenging the prevalent international order. It wants to (re)shape it so it becomes conducive to its interests. The new order will seriously affect India's strategic and related interests.

India has noticed that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) involves different kinds of connectivity infrastructures like roads, ports, airports, and pipelines. In addition, the BRI also includes ICT infrastructures such as optical cables across borders and submarine optical cables. India also noticed what Chinese leaders had been thinking and saying. Xi Jinping commented that the BRI is "...for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems and uphold the security for Asia."³⁶ There is a sense among Indian observers that China is financially stable and that it wants to invest abroad.³⁷ Additionally echoed are the Chinese narratives of wanting to change the international system, the lack of international best practices in Chinese aid and projects, and the debt burdens of the recipient countries. These narratives are shared by Australia, Japan, and the US. Some like Mohan point at India's sluggishness in letting China grab infrastructure building opportunities with characteristic efficacy; "This includes road links and gas and oil pipelines from southern China through Myanmar, and possibly high-speed rail links to Thailand. These are being built while India talks".³⁸

Indo-Pacific, as articulated, reflects how important the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has become. The concept of Asia-Pacific did not include the IOR. Indo-Pacific is thus a more inclusive concept. The idea of Asia-Pacific was promoted, Khurana believes, to draw Australia and Japan closer to the US in the 1970-80s.³⁹ India was thought to be geographically at a distance and so it remained uninvolved politically, economically, and strategically.⁴⁰ India's desire to support the Indo-Pacific strategy is mainly driven by its geo-economic objectives. It

wants a conducive maritime environment for its economic growth. Along with this, it wants to participate in the 'strategic deterrence' against China.

The military aspects of the relationship are a critical component of this debate. The US considers India crucial in the Indo-Pacific construct. Former Director of the CIA, General David Petraeus, in his speech at the Raisina Dialogue hosted in India, said that the US shift in its lexicon from 'Asia-Pacific' to 'Indo-Pacific' was an explicit recognition of the importance of India.⁴¹ It has been a long time that the US has been trying to bring India closer.⁴² Indo-Pacific brings the two closer and India is now considered to be as important as a NATO ally.⁴³

India aims to dominate the Indian Ocean. It is paying attention to the choke points: Malacca, Lombok, and Ombai and Wetar Straits. These straits link the Indian Ocean with the Pacific Ocean. Malacca Straits is a very important choke point. Annually 70,000 ships transit through Malacca. Lombok is an alternative strait for larger ship movement. Whereas, Ombai and Wetar are submarine routes. If India manages to have a strong presence in these areas as a member of the Indo-Pacific coalition, it serves its strategic interests. Panda cites four factors for India's turn to the Pacific Ocean and each of the four have security/military implications.⁴⁴

1. Security of Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs)
2. Increasing Chinese intrusion into the Indian Ocean
3. The Indo-Pacific strategy of the US
4. India's growing ambition in the Indian Ocean.

The fourth factor seems extremely important for Indian neighbours in terms of understanding its foreign policy; primarily, how its importance overshadows the first two factors. In India's calculation, the Pacific Ocean is vital in protecting the Indian Ocean security.

India seeks to build a connection with South East Asian countries from its northeast and considers Southeast Asia as its extended neighbourhood.⁴⁵ India's extended neighbourhood is the same as the Indo-Pacific. As Panda puts it "This concept of 'extended neighbourhood' suggests a classic mixture of soft power as well as hard power projection with continuous political, economic, and ideational engagements that India steadily employs in different regions of the world".⁴⁶ The Indo-Pacific construct, by linking the two oceans, has drawn India's attention to the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and India now strives to develop military linkages with them. For India, the two oceans are interlinked now and this proximity can expand its security outreach to the Pacific Ocean. Prime Minister Modi in his speech at the India-Pacific Islands Cooperation Summit commented, "... we also look forward to goodwill visits by Indian Navy to Pacific Islands."⁴⁷ This shows Indian inclination toward the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea as the gateway for shipping to East Asia and linkage between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

India's participation in the Indo-pacific has made it militarily closer to the US. Beginning from the Bush administration, the US has been actively wooing India. Traditionally, India purchased arms from Russia (previously USSR). But US arms sales to India have been steadily going up since 2008 when US-India defence trade was close to being non-existent. From then onwards, it has become \$20 billion.⁴⁸ Additionally, India was made a Major Defense Partner in 2016 and was given Strategic Trade Authorisation Tier 1 status (STA1) in 2018. The STA1 status enables India to enjoy license-free access to a large group of military and dual-use technologies under the ambit of the Department of Commerce.

India purchased MH-60 Seahawk helicopters (worth \$2.6 billion), Apache helicopters (worth \$2.3 billion), P-81 maritime patrol aircraft (\$3 billion), and M777 howitzers (\$737 million) from the US. It also bought the Sea Guardian, a Missile Technology Control Regime

Category 1 unmanned aerial system which is manufactured by General Atomics.⁴⁹ The Department of State is pushing the sale of F-21s (by Lockheed Martin) and F/A-18 (by Boeing), the most advanced models of fighter aircraft. The State Department believes that all these weapons systems will enhance the Indian ability to safeguard shared security interests in the Indo-Pacific. The emerging Indo-Pacific strategy has opened the Indian arms market for the US military-industrial complex and India, it has created opportunities to purchase state of the art military equipment. As an Indian member of the foreign policy establishment wryly notes, "Under Trump, therefore, we will have to deal with a transactional administration supportive of strengthening India as part of its Indo-Pacific strategy, but also counting gains for itself."⁵⁰ During Trump's visit to India in February 2020, the two sides reached an agreement that allowed India to purchase arms worth \$3 billion.

The economic factors that have drawn India into the Indo-Pacific coalition can and must not be neglected. An alliance with the US facilitates the inflow of investments from Japan and Australia in addition to increased trade with the US itself. Japan has already initiated new investment projects in India. India hopes to develop its underdeveloped north-eastern states by leveraging Japanese investments and technical cooperation.⁵¹ Japan is already engaged in building the Delhi-Ahmedabad bullet train railway system. The US trade war with China created hopes that other leading companies would shift their businesses to India as well. India's prominent role in the Indo-Pacific will also upgrade its status in the region. The onset of the Covid-19 crisis has been seen by many to be a factor in India's ability to draw more Western investments because multinational companies now want to reduce their over-dependence on China as a supplier of components. Modi has already expressed hopes that India following the Covid-19 crisis, India is now perfectly in a position to become the main global supplier. The US expects more cooperation

from the Modi government with some multilateral trade arrangements where differences between the US and India persisted and led to a “certain amount of ‘scratchiness’ and lack of progress.”⁵² The Modi government, with its policy of coming very close to the US and its ally Israel along with getting India into the Indo-Pacific coalition, seems to be ready to further open up the Indian economy to American investments in response to the US demands.

Modi wants more reforms in India to speed up economic growth and he has US support for it. The American government and business elites agree with Thomas Pickering:

In fact doing business in India for the United States opens up new opportunities that can be very significant. Having worked for the Boeing Company for a number of years... I find that is a good example of how a large American firm can work in the vast Indian market. On a high-tech front, Boeing enjoys the benefits of increased sales, particularly of commercial aircraft but also of military equipment and at the same time works with Indian suppliers on everything from software to aircraft parts. This produces a mutually beneficial relationship as well, not only in pure business terms but also in opening up opportunities for future cooperation and mutual confidence.

Over the years, the Americans, have not only specified problems in India—such as patent and copyright issues—but have also indicated that they were very interested in building partnerships with Indian businesses. They want to be partners in everything, “... from the IT sector to the construction sector.” Hence, the US desire to build a partnership not only inside India but globally is not just a sudden policy change. The Obama administration worked hard to build a strategic partnership with India.⁵³ India was already considered a linchpin in Obama’s Rebalance to Asia strategy. Economically, India wanted the US and the US

wanted India. US policy circles were abuzz with notions of 'two great democracies coming together' for quite some time.

It must be noted that never before this point in time has India been this close to the United States. Its tradition of non-alignment and cordial relations with the USSR (and then Russia) and for some time with China in the 1950s (Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai) made it appropriate to be close to these countries for Indian intellectuals, policymakers, and bureaucrats. Narasimha Rao, A.B. Vajpayee, Manmohan Singh, and various others tried to build a close relationship with the US but faced strong internal opposition.⁵⁴ India's good relations with Russia or China were viewed as progressive whereas good relations with the United States were viewed as regressive. However, Modi has apparently succeeded in overturning the historic preferences of the previous ruling governments in India. Modi represents the rise of worldwide conservatism which is manifest in the US in the forms of Trump's white supremacy and economic conservatism, in France as Macron's populist conservatism, in Britain as conservatism becoming captive to Trump administration, and in Japan as Abe's nationalism and conservatism. Some like Raja Mohan believe that Modi substantially aided Trump's re-election bid. He states, "Unlike many of America's friends, the Modi government was willing to take some political risks in appearing to endorse Trump's re-election at the 'Howdy Modi' rally last September in Houston."⁵⁵ Trump came to Delhi in February 2020—with the US elections looming in November and the Corona crisis deepening—to clinch a \$3 billion arms deal about which he had this to say, "... tomorrow our representatives will sign deals to sell over \$3 billion in the absolute finest, state of the art military helicopters and other equipment to the Indian armed forces Together, we will defend our sovereignty, security, and protect a free and open Indo-Pacific region for our children and for many, many generations to come".⁵⁶ The two sides, however, were not able to agree to sign even a limited trade

package even after two years of negotiations. Trump imposed tariffs on aluminium and steel products from India and withdrew GSP benefits from some labour-intensive products, consequently removing India from the US list of developing countries. All this, says Singh, “flies in the face of citing strategic partnership and convergence in Indo-Pacific Strategy.”⁵⁷

Japanese Perspective

Japan has claimed that it has formulated the Indo-Pacific Vision that was expressed through Prime Minister Abe’s speech at the Indian parliament in 2007. For Abe, joining the two oceans brought the dynamic coupling of two seas of freedom and prosperity. Many Japanese policymakers and experts like to emphasise that the Indo-Pacific vision is a global policy initiative formulated by Japan; they call it Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). Tadashi Maeda, Governor of Japan Bank of International Cooperation, said that Shinzo Abe proposed the policy of Free and Open Indo-Pacific to Trump in 2017.⁵⁸ Maeda added that it could be called a counter-proposal to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It has three elements, i.e., rule of law, open and free trade, and navigation. The Japanese Prime Minister and his national security advisor visited India, the UK, and the US, trying to put together and then solidify a coalition that would balance the rising China. Kentaro Sonoura, the national security advisor to Abe, said in his presentation at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Japan is an island nation and maritime security is its security. At a time when the rules-based international order is being challenged (by China), the two oceans which form the global growth centre together must be open and free as a global commons and this will ensure global peace, prosperity, and stability because half the global population is touched by the two oceans.⁵⁹

According to Sonoura, the Indo-Pacific region faces the following challenges: piracy, terrorism, the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), illegal fishing, natural disasters, and unilateral attempts to change the status quo. For him, the purpose of the Indo-Pacific vision is to ensure stability and prosperity, not only for this region but for the entire world. Sonoura meticulously describes the three pillars on which the Japanese government claims that its Indo-Pacific vision stands as following:

1. Rule of law and rule-based order. This requires compliance to the United Nations Convention on Law of Sea (UNCLOS) and concrete actions to ensure freedom of navigation.
2. Economic prosperity through connectivity via quality infrastructures that conform to international standards. Infrastructure needs are enormous in the region. For many years Japan has helped Asian countries with policy-making including help with building physical connectivity, i.e., roads, ports, railroads, etc. It helped with the improvement of people to people connectivity through human resource development and the development of institutional connectivity through facilitating customs and procedures. In developing infrastructures, Sonoura believes, "...we have to conform to certain international standards such as openness; transparency, economy of lifecycle, financial viability of recipient countries, job creation and capacity building, social and environmental costs and so forth."⁶⁰ It is implied that Chinese projects do not have these qualities.
3. The third pillar is sustaining peace and stability. This includes assistance for capacity building for maritime law enforcement. Cooperation is needed on anti-piracy, anti-terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Japan thinks it is important to enhance the enforcement capabilities of the coastal states by providing patrol vessels and materials related to maritime security, holding joint exercises are equally essential. Sonoura mentions that Japan and the US are cooperating on enhancing the maritime law, which enhances the capacity of the Southeast Asian countries. In November 2017, the Japanese coast guard and the US coast guard held joint exercises with the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Japan believes it is important to work on disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. Japanese policymakers like to stress that FOIP is open to all countries who support this vision. It by no means targets specific countries. Japan, Sonoura emphasises, aims at building cooperation with European nations which have strong political, historical and economic ties and experiences with Indo-Pacific

nations. With regards to countries that can be included in this ambit, Japan intends to cooperate with the US, India, Australia, Saudi Arabia and other countries in South Asia. Japan was open to more countries being included beyond the four core countries, i.e., Australia, India, Japan, and the US. Such a large coalition would certainly look very aggressive to any observer since the underlying reasons for its conceptions were, to balance, however gently, a rising China. He emphasised that Japan is with the Indo-Pacific strategy because it needs to be linked with other areas with bearing potential for growth like Africa, Asia, and India.

The Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), which originated in 2004 and consists of the four Indo-Pacific coalition countries – Australia remaining away for a ten years interregnum—deals with the security aspect and military operations. Sonoura contends further that Japan does not envisage the evolution of the Quad into an organised institution like an eastern NATO. Japan, he believes, wants to see it as a very flexible network of security cooperation. There should be synergy between the strategies of the four countries but each country must have its own strategy. Simply put, the member states must not be under any pressure to adopt a particular strategy. Japan even does not want a stronger Quad. Considering China's behaviour in the South China Sea, Sonoura does not seem to blame China for any of its actions. Commenting on the observation with regards to Japan losing an enormous opportunity because the Philippines did not pursue the 2016 UNCLOS ruling, he carefully contends that Japan's current focus is on providing equipment to ASEAN countries that do not have long-range vessels to prevent illegal fishing. Japan would provide them with petrol vessels, air planes, and radars so that they could take care of their problems themselves. As he put it, "We are not going to press them; and that is the Japanese way."⁶¹

Japanese experts have tried to explain how and why the Indo-Pacific strategy has emerged and why Japan is in it along with its partners. Tsuruoka thinks since Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions have become quite interconnected and what happens in one region eventually affects the other.⁶² It is, for him, quite closely related to maritime security, which refers to the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and the East China Sea and

other areas, so that SLOCs remain protected, as does Japan's trade. He stresses that there are some elements of competition alongside some elements of cooperation. His views come close to Sonoura's assertion that in the Indo-Pacific strategy Japan and the US stand on different positions as Japan is more focused on economic cooperation whereas the US on its own security and primacy. Koga expresses similar views but emphasises some additional factors like ASEAN not being able to reach a consensus to endorse the 2016 UNCLOS Arbitral Commission verdict when China was rejecting it. China has been strengthening its influence in Asia and beyond, not only through trade and investment but also through its BRI projects. As Koga puts it, "Despite the Obama administration's 'pivot/rebalancing' policy towards Asia, US effectiveness and commitment continues to remain uncertain, particularly since President Donald Trump took the office in January 2017."⁶³ Japan declared its FOIP strategy in such an uncertain atmosphere. This strategy, Koga believes, aimed at "maintaining the existing regional order based on US preponderance by readjusting the regional strategic balance."⁶⁴ Koga supports the view that Japan initiated the Indo-Pacific but also dedicates due attention to maintaining US preponderance. This is not the first time that the US has threatened Japan with abandonment.⁶⁵ It is what critical geographers like Tuathail would call writing/ scripting/rewriting the world. Something the imperial/hegemonic powers do as did Mackinder when he discovered/conquered mount Kenya in 1904 when the British empire was trying to stall its decline.⁶⁶

Australian Perspective

Australia's identity as the 'European Outpost' has been shaken by the rise of Asia, especially that of China. Australia fell into a 'US or Asia' binary dilemma after the end of the cold war and the emergence of the Indo-Pacific strategy seemed to resolve the dilemma.⁶⁷ Hemmings notes, "Australia has been an essential component of the concept from the very beginning."⁶⁸ But even Hemmings whose initial impression leads one to believe that Australia entered the Indo-Pacific with the hope of solving its identity-related problems further adds that "One of the challenging aspects of the Indo-Pacific concept is that

while it seems to answer the 1990s binary of 'US or Asia'... it may well replace that with another, that of 'US or China.'"⁶⁹

Unfortunately, identity-based issues and structural economic dependencies are not separable pieces for Australia. Australia is substantially dependent on the US for its security and on China for its economy. It entered this coalition with hesitation and sometimes tried to pull away towards a more balanced position. Personal rapport was indeed built among Tony Abbot, Shinzo Abe, and Narendra Modi, and the strategic and security interests of the three countries seemed to be merging. However, when Akitaka Saiki, the Japanese Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, referred to China's aggressive attitudes and the three countries coming closer in New Delhi in June 2015 after a trilateral meeting, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Secretary, Peter Varghese, hastened to dilute the impression that the trilateral meeting could be thought to be an 'anti-China front'.⁷⁰ Some Australian observers, like Lang, thought that being in the trilateral could provide Australia with autonomous decision power from both China and the United States. As the noise about a military conflict between the US and China became louder the Australian government emphasised more and more that it did not want to be involved in an ideological confrontation with China and Australia and would decide its course of action, keeping its national interests in mind. India and Australia might have been a bit naïve in believing that the Indo-Pacific was going to be a gentle balancing mechanism against China. Covid-19 helped unleash strident attacks against China in addition to facilitating a call for delinking from China while accelerating cold war-like tensions. This strengthened the realisation that the Indo-Pacific coalition considerably reinforced United States' position in the strategic rivalry between China and the US. The Indo-Pacific is a coalition of the world's democracies and supports liberal Western values such as freedom of speech, freedom of association, and human rights. Needless to say that when such a coalition calls itself a group of

democracies, China is certain to feel that it is being a target of a democratisation attempt, overt and covert, as Deng Xiao Ping believed happened during the Tiananmen turmoil in 1989.⁷¹

Barack Obama's Rebalance to Asia strategy was milder than the Indo-Pacific in the sense that the Obama administration was trying to engage China. Even that strategy brought forth what Brendon Taylor called "a marked disjuncture between official Australian pronouncements on the US pivot and the sometimes quite heated public debate that has emerged."⁷² Taylor found criticism and suspicions among Australian policy and opinion makers about the US ability to work with regional allies to manage China's rise. Malcolm Fraser, former Australian Prime Minister, criticised the pivot as "American militarisation of the Western Pacific" and "containment" of China.⁷³ Very recently, on October 28, 2020, Kurt Campbell, former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific during the Obama administration, said that generally, Australians felt that the United States was being hard on China.⁷⁴ In Australia, the intellectual division on how to deal with China is symbolised by Rory Medcalf and Hugh White with Medcalf strongly supporting the Indo-Pacific construct and White advocating realistic and more flexible management of the rise of China that can be done through US sharing power in Asia with China. Medcalf was concerned about China's rise and thought that a balancing alliance was needed in the Indo-Pacific region. However, his pronouncements became increasingly strident as the tension between China and the US accelerated under Trump.

Medcalf believes that Indo-Pacific has long been here.⁷⁵ Historically the theme of maritime connectivity has been important. But he emphasises that this was an Asian theme not Chinese and that's how BRI centres around a myth that China wants to recreate its maritime connections. He calls China's economic aid to poorer developing countries as 'China's accelerated imperial expansion'. For Medcalf, BRI is a benign form of expansion. He draws a parallel

between European colonialism and China's mental map of the region for designing BRI. It is indicated that it is possible for Australia, India, Southeast Asian countries, and the US to potentially constrain China's path. He believes that the entire idea needs to be considered beyond binary terms, i.e., China and the US as the only central players of the game. Middle power coalitions have several options to pursue and this evidently reflects in the way Japan has managed to push against China. The term middle power diplomacy has been used by analysts who support the Indo-Pacific idea; it seems like an attempt to legitimise the US-led strategy to different constituencies in the participating countries.

Hugh White made the famous suggestion that the US should share power with China in Asia in his book, *The China Choice* (2012).⁷⁶ He asserts that the rate at which China has grown in the past decades was a major event of the century since the Europeans settled in Australia or probably in human history.⁷⁷ This growth shall inadvertently result in shifts within the global power distribution. China's quest to alter the order prevailing in Asia is quite natural a motive, as per Hugh White. Its desire to change the US plan to preserve the order could lead to a strategic rivalry. Australia intended to grow on China's wealth based on US power.

However, with the rising risk of conflict between China and the US, Australia faces two challenges, i.e., How can it help avert a conflict and how can it deal with a bitter rivalry? The Australian government, in his opinion, has failed to address both challenges. "Every nation wants US presence in Asia and every country values its relations with China. They want the US to balance China, not dominate Asia but the US wants to dominate Asia."⁷⁸ By 8 August 2019, he began sounding pessimistic and worried. He felt the US had moved into a China containment strategy. As the US Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense talked about a new cold war, he began to see little reason for incurring the cost of a confrontation with China.

Australia is aware of its geographic destiny and feels that its economic destiny is intermingled with its geographic destiny as the rise of China has indicated. As an Australian analyst puts it "The onrush of China has been so central to this decade that it's difficult to summon up the hysterical response eight years ago to Hugh White's heresy; the proposition that America should cede some power to negotiate a new regional order, retaining a lesser but still substantial American strategic role in Asia to balance China's power".⁷⁹ But as the Indo-Pacific Strategy started gaining momentum after Trump assumed power, Australia began feeling pressure from both directions. Added to this was the fact that 1.2 million Australians are of Chinese origin and 600,000 of them were born in China. Australians have the impression that the US felt a close ally like Australia would be 'Finlandised' and would slowly slide into China's orbit. An influential official from the Obama administration expressed his frustration over this by saying, "We hate it when you guys keep saying, 'we don't have to choose between America and China!' Dammit, you do have to choose, and it is time you chose us."⁸⁰ Many Australian analysts feel that Australia should adopt an independent foreign policy cutting its own suits and not riding on someone else's coat-tails.

Contradictions and Uncertainty: Inherent and Emerging

The Indo-Pacific strategy embodied certain contradictions. This paper discusses only the most relevant of the said contradictions. The first contradiction lies in Japan's role and understanding of the strategy. It is normal for scholars to point at Japan as a significant factor in the origin and development of this strategy because Japanese leaders felt that the United States was withdrawing from the Asia-Pacific. This impression was created under the Trump administration through its withdrawal from the TPP and other agreements. But the United States has always emphasised the

importance of the Asia-Pacific and as noted earlier, Hillary Clinton viewed the Asia-Pacific to be as important for the US as Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War. Hugh White's (2012) entire book revolves around the idea that the US does not want to lose primacy in the Asia-Pacific. The credit goes to the Trump administration policy of using the Indo-Pacific strategy as the foundation for the escalation of the Sino-American conflict to the level of the initiation of a new cold war and the carefully crafted image of President Trump as a whimsical, erratic, rough leader of the populist type. This is not the first time that the United States created the fear of abandonment in Japan.⁸¹ This pressure on Japan pushed it to buy more weapons from the United States.

The states in the Indo-Pacific coalition emphasised different goals and their definitions of the Indo-Pacific geographical area are different. As Gyngell puts it, there is "no such thing as the Indo-Pacific." He thinks that it is "simply a way for governments to frame the international environment to suit their policy objectives in particular circumstances."⁸² The United States defined it as the area from its west coast to Aden across the Western border of India. Australia defined Indo-Pacific in its 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper excluding eastern Africa and as "ranging from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean connected by Southeast Asia, including India, North Asia and the United States."⁸³ Australia's definition is much more restricted than both that of India and Japan. Its definition reflects its policy decision to focus on the Eastern Indian Ocean. Japan also has a different definition of the Indo-Pacific with emphasis on Southeast Asia and it is, to some extent, interested in having a share in contribution to African development. For the Japanese, both the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean are important but it is more focused on the Pacific Ocean. India also sees the Indo-Pacific area as extending to Africa but it tends to see the Indian Ocean as a space where India should have dominance. As David Brewster stresses, many Indian elites see the domination of the

Indian Ocean as India's destiny.⁸⁴ India faces some constraints which are both internal (its capability) and external. The United States has control over the oceans. The US is willing to cede some control to India under the Indo-Pacific strategy but the extent of that control-sharing depends on whether India acts according to US interests.⁸⁵ India participates in the Indo-Pacific strategy but for it, the Indian Ocean is of primary importance and the Pacific Ocean bears secondary importance.⁸⁶

It appears that the lesser powers were playing a much more important role while the US was thinking about withdrawing from the Asia-Pacific. Indeed, Japan and Australia seemed more eager to take this forward. The chemistry or *apparent* chemistry among the four leaders, Abe, Abbot, Modi, and Trump tried to convey that there was a unity of purpose among the global conservative forces. But a closer look peels away the appearance showing how different these countries were with regards to their divergent interests. India is not as allied to the United States as the other two countries are. Economic development levels are different as India lags behind the other two. India wants to preserve its strategic autonomy and does not want interoperability of forces. India has long land borders with China and the latter's close ally Pakistan.

2020 US Elections and Changes

Under the Trump administration, especially after the onset of the Sino-American trade war in 2018, the rhetoric surrounding the Indo-Pacific became tough. Trump seemed poised to lead an aggressive right-wing conservative containment—with important conservative allies like Boris Johnson, Narendra Modi, Emmanuel Macron, Scott Morrison—using the Indo-Pacific as the pillars of that containment. Some like John Mearsheimer believed that the United States would even 'rollback' China. There were talks about an imminent cold war. As the Malabar exercise started to become more

regular in the Bay of Bengal, Bangladeshi experts began referring to the Bay as a theatre of conflict. Many saw the trade war as an attempt by the US to decouple the Western economies and especially the US, from the Chinese economy. This talk of and efforts towards decoupling intensified after the Covid-19 crisis burst into the scene. Rather than trying to manage the Covid crisis together with other major powers including China, the United States started blaming China for its origin. The intellectual supporters of the Indo-Pacific were not far behind with Medcalf stressing that the Covid crisis would force countries (outside the Indo-Pacific coalition) to think twice and make their own calculations as to on which side they would be.⁸⁷ Covid and the accompanying lockdowns all over the world brought with them concerns about supply chain vulnerabilities. There were talks about companies rushing out of China. Japan offered an incentive package to Japanese companies to shift businesses from China.

Japan was lukewarm from the very beginning. As time passed it had more misgivings and it moved away from the United States. India and Japan also felt pressured to buy more US arms. As Koga pointed out, Japan's FOIP policy would not be very meaningful without ASEAN participation. ASEAN did not sign on to it, rather it came out with the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) which emphasises everyone's participation including China and ASEAN centrality. As the Covid crisis intensified, Japanese scholars expressed doubts about the Indo-Pacific. Sato, for instance, indicated that Japanese companies were not interested in leaving China, incentives notwithstanding.⁸⁸ He expressed doubts about whether Japan would be as interested in this strategy once Prime Minister Abe left office. This is not surprising given Japan's history of relations with China. Some Japanese governments distance the country from China whereas others prefer to have warm relations with it. Welfield clarifies that no matter how eagerly American governments may want Japanese governments to go along with their wishes, they may see

their “...hopes turn to ashes in the face of resistance, both overt and concealed, on the part of Japanese Prime Ministers, powerful conservative faction leaders, the Diet, the bureaucracy, the media, and the general public.”⁸⁹

Over time, the Trump administration began connecting the strategy with its re-election campaign, which required a hardening in its posture. The other three members probably did not want to see the Indo-Pacific buttressing a full-blown cold war against China with whom they had good relations and subtle Japanese dissent became more and more evident. As the Japanese economy felt the blow of Covid, the dissenting voices became louder. Japanese experts began talking about how an unprepared Japanese foreign policy establishment was hesitant about the Strategy and how they had not even had a clearly defined map of the Indo-Pacific.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, in the Japanese government maps, the area of the Indo-Pacific kept shifting because of pressure and counter pressures. This is being publicised despite Japan being crucial in proposing the Indo-Pacific idea. It becomes clearer when Jimbo says in his presentation that Japan had to adjust the concepts it used in the Indo-Pacific. It had to delete the word democracy and it no longer calls it a strategy; now it calls it a vision. Japan is now one of the fifteen countries in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) along with China.

Covid-19 lay bare the potential impacts of the sudden decoupling on the world economy. Some punitive steps taken by China were considered rather harsh by Australian businesses. As the 2020 US elections approached, it became clear that both Australia and India were shifting their positions. In a webinar, the Indian experts made it clear that India wanted to guard its strategic autonomy and the Indian foreign policy establishment was uncomfortable about tilting towards the US.⁹¹ The Australian expert emphasised the necessity for Australia, India, and Japan to work together on economic measures. They also discussed how the two could, in future, discuss

things among themselves as a trilateral coalition and then present their consolidated position in meetings with the United States during a Quad meeting or Indo-Pacific strategy sessions. This hints at their discomfort about the Trump administration's steady pull to a Cold War posture.

As the 2020 elections approached, the confrontation, combined with the trade war, began to look like a traditional cold war with an added factor of 'race' when the Chinese ambassador to the United States commented that the US could not accept China as a major power because it was not ready to accept an 'Asian country' as such. Signs of the onset of a cold war became clearly manifest via several events such as the closing of consulates and intensifying pressure to choose sides. The Indo-Pacific was at the centre of Trump's foreign policy although it may seem to be a collective policy initiative proposed by Japan. It did not remain a gentle deterrent as soon as Donald Trump became well ensconced. Isolationist attitudes and pressures exerted on US allies notwithstanding, the image-making and centring of Chinese containment became a prominent feature in the Trump administration policy framework. The Indo-Pacific became the foundation of a win or lose attempted cold-war type containment that had bipartisan support. Trump's audacious, even reckless, "Bull in the politico-economic China Shop" image is a well-crafted product created to instil apprehensions equally among friends and foes.

The American foreign, military, and business elites began to rhetorically step somewhat away from the aggressive, anti-China phase of the Indo-Pacific. This strategy mutated again. This time around, moving closer to the Obama administration's policy with a more mature understanding of the nature of the global transformation. Lectures, conversations, and interviews with the US political elites before and after the 2020 US elections including those with Kurt Campbell, Michele Flournoy, Henry Paulson, to name a few, revealed that they were keenly interested in the Trump

administration's policy towards the Asia-Pacific. They were basically in agreement that it would be wrong to articulate a China policy with a cold war mindset. They believed that things had to change and could not continue as in the Trump administration.

Campbell and Flournoy, both former important Obama administration officials—Flournoy was under consideration for Biden's Defense Secretary—stressed that the US needed to focus more on domestic rejuvenation. The Biden administration needs to see that Research and Development (R&D) get enough attention and the competition between China and the US takes place in the economic field and not the military arena although the military has to be in the background, indicates Campbell.⁹² Indeed Democrats and Republicans (Henry Paulson, for instance) are emphasising almost the same policy themes. Their themes are

- i) The US should listen more carefully to allies and be more receptive to allies' input;
- ii) Modernisation efforts need to be directed to the US domestic economy;
- iii) Diplomatic capacity building must be emphasised;
- iv) The United States cannot afford to disengage from the Indo-Pacific;
- v) A better understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by China's rise is necessary.

But the theme that eclipses all others is:

- v) The United States is falling behind and the old methods that the Trump administration was using are not working and may even have been counterproductive.

Flournoy thinks that there exists bipartisan consensus on the Indo-Pacific strategy and the rise of China poses challenges. The US-China competition is in all fields: political, economic, and military. Hence, it is the issue of which model is better.⁹³ Americans need to invest in science, education, and research as well as technology

development. In addition, a smart immigration policy is necessary so that talented people find a home in the US. The infrastructures have to be modernised to the level of the twenty-first century. There has to be long-term strategic planning, for a 5-10 year vision in mind. There should be a proper division of labour among allies. American military aid can be leveraged and the smaller states should know what is expected of them. Engagement with China is crucial. "How do you address climate change without China?" asks Flournoy. She believes that the new Pacific Initiative modelled after the European Initiative is a good start by the US Congress although funding for it is only \$300 million whereas the price tag for the European Initiative was \$4.5 billion.

Paulson believes that the competition between the US and China is structural because one is a predominant power and the other is a challenger with a different economic system and ideology.⁹⁴ US decision-makers have serious concerns about China's rise and it is bipartisan as Campbell and Flournoy affirm. There should exist competition but it should not spin out of control into conflict. He hopes that the Biden administration will be more predictable. He articulates a concept of 'targeted reciprocity'. For him, the Trump administration used blanket reciprocity of payback to the Chinese. Retaliation, he emphasises, has to be very specific on particular sectors and not all out. Total decoupling and all-out retaliation end up hurting all parties: China, the US, and the rest of the world. He believes that if there is total decoupling, the US would be knocking out its own major companies from being suppliers in the supply chains for the fastest-growing markets and not participate in global research and global standard-setting. Paulson's inclination as reflected from the above points towards his focus on business concerns.

From what three important members of the Democratic and Republican political elite Campbell, Flournoy, and Paulson, stress, it seems that there has emerged a consensus that the cold war-like

retaliatory policies followed by the Trump administration could no longer continue. But 'China represents a strong challenge' part of the consensus is going to remain. Cooperation and competition must go hand-in-hand whilst bearing in mind that the United States businesses will benefit and have benefitted from selling to the growing market. The Chinese policymakers have been stressing the themes of cooperation and competition from the very beginning. Paulson specifically stresses that the United States will do well in China, selling financial services as well as green services and products to China. None of them advocates disengagement, as a matter of fact, Campbell even talks about the resurgence of engagement that Orville Schell declared was dead. This comes close to an elite consensus to veer away from the aggressive retaliatory posture of the Trump administration while keeping the Indo-Pacific intact.

Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific strategy has been a fast-morphing effort since its conception under the Obama administration. The policy was pulled towards a cold war that many warned, both in the US and China, was no longer possible because of several factors. Two of the most important factors in this regard were China's economic growth and its close relations with the US. It is hard to believe that this was a sudden pull to the extreme, led by an erratic businessman. Ever since there has been a bipartisan consensus on the policy and Trump's image has been a facilitating factor. However, the economy of the United States has taken a hit as many state governors who advocate sub-national level relations have emphasised. Many US policy elites now are advocating a more specific focus for the strategy instead of its complete dismantling. They also advocate dedicating more attention to domestic development, i.e., education, R&D, and infrastructure modernisation. Frequent and louder calls for the need to listen to allies are probably a sign that a move toward a milder balancing mechanism

is the goal the US allies had been advocating for long, notwithstanding Australian Prime Minister Turnbull's cold war speech.

Taking the world economy on a downward spiral while trying to hold and strengthen a coalition is difficult even for a country like the United States. Covid-19 has paradoxically shown what decoupling from China can mean for Japan, the United States, India, and certainly for Australia. Meanwhile, foreign policy conduct in each of the aforesaid states has been rather glaringly different. India seems to be nostalgic about its strategic autonomy before it entered the Indo-Pacific. Japan swings away and towards China in its foreign policy. Abe's period can be seen as a period of swinging away from China. US business interests have been hurt. China is willing to rebuild relations.

The United States is shifting gears in the sense that it is perhaps not going to dismantle the strategy because that will mean political pressure from hawkish elements from both parties. It can be argued that things will now be soberer, that is, fewer surprises and sudden pulls to the extremes. Trump administration's dramatics will be missing to the relief of the Germans and even the Indo-Pacific allies. The Biden administration might accommodate the emerging consensus from both the Democratic and Republican parties that it is important to focus on domestic necessities like education, technology both civil and military, social harmony and inclusion of minorities, and a more liberal immigration policy. Externally, it would respond more positively towards the Chinese position that cooperation and competition can coexist and foreign relations do not always have to be a zero-sum game. But it should be kept in mind that the two governing parties in the United States are not very different. Yet, global reality has changed and Biden's milder style with the same policy is a reflection of that. However, this does not yet mean a change of heart. Smaller countries may find themselves under more and focused pressure by the US under Biden.

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BALAKOT STRIKES: DECEPTION AND REALITY THROUGH THE LENS OF MEDIA

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“Developments in information technology and globalized media mean that the most powerful military in the history of the world can lose a war, not on the battlefield of dust and blood, but on the battlefield of world opinion.”

Timothy Garton Ash, British historian and author

Abstract

A state's behaviour towards another state depends on the information it receives. If information becomes disinformation, the results could be devastating. Pakistan and India have been at loggerheads since independence. Any disinformation or even wrong perception can lead the two countries to war. In this fragile relationship, it is very easy to fan war jingoism in both states. This paper aims to cover the flow of fake news in both states following the Pulwama attack in February 2019. Mainly three spells of fake news dispersal are analysed in this paper. News regarding Balakot strikes, use of F-16 aircraft by Pakistan, and a round of LOC violations. The paper discusses how both states reacted to these instances of widely spread fake news. The paper argues that the two states came to the verge of a war owing to the fake news, which was perpetrated by Prime Minister Modi to gain popularity and win elections that were scheduled to be held in April 2019.

Keywords: *Fake news, Pulwama Attack, Balakot Strikes, India-Pakistan Conflict*

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Regional Studies, 38:4, Winter 2020, pp.43-65

Introduction

Disinformation has been used as an instrument for defaming an adversary for several years through the course of history. Pakistan and India, in this regard, share an uncomfortable history that is chequered with mistrust even after over seventy years of independence. The current Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi is pursuing policies of hatred towards Pakistan to win support from the local junta. It has been actively engaged in making coordinated efforts to create a certain narrative on Pakistan and has done so by adopting strategies to undermine Pakistan's credibility as a stable country. On 14 February 2019, for instance, a vehicle carrying Indian paramilitary security personnel in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) was attacked by a suicide bomber, killing 46 people.¹ India not only blamed Pakistan for the attack but also audaciously launched an airstrike alongside threatening to isolate it internationally.²

The Government of Pakistan on the other hand acted with restraint and responsibility. Instead of outrightly denying the claim, the government of Pakistan demanded that the Indian government provide credible evidence for its accusation.³ Imran Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, took a bold stance and offered to act upon 'actionable evidence' in case the Indian government could produce one for the alleged occurrence.⁴ The Indian government failed to provide any evidence whatsoever despite its claims of having 'incontrovertible evidence' about Pakistan's involvement.⁵

Similarly, the Pulwama attack provided an opportunity for the Indian government to instigate the sentiments of the Indian population against Pakistan. Modi emerged as a populist leader on the political scene of India who optimally used the sentiments of the local population to gain domestic political mileage. To avenge the attack on Indian paramilitary forces, the Indian government, right after the Pulwama attack, played a very dangerous move. On 26 February 2019,

at midnight, 12 Indian Mirage aircraft entered Pakistani territory and attacked a ground target near the town of Balakot in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province before they were pushed back by Pakistan Air Force.

The Foreign Minister of Pakistan called the Indian incursion, an act of 'grave aggression' by India. The Pakistani government did not act hastily, however, and allowed the Indian jets to turn back unharmed. The following day, Pakistan retaliated by 'shooting down two Indian jets and capturing one Indian pilot.' Right after the incident, the Foreign Office of Pakistan gave an official statement declaring that the sole purpose of such befitting response was "to demonstrate our right, will and capability for self-defence. We have no intention of escalation but are fully prepared to do so if forced into that paradigm. That is why we undertook the action with clear warning and in broad daylight."⁶

This incident led to a series of false claims by the Indian government. India claimed that its jets had destroyed a Jaish-e-Muhammad madrassa in Pakistan and killed 300 militants. This claim was denied by Pakistan as soon as it was made. Later, this claim was hurled by the international media as well. Another round of fake news emerged in the Indian media on the use of F-16 by Pakistan in the retaliation phase. Pakistan denied using F-16, while Indian media kept on disseminating it. The third round of fake news was related to LOC violations. LOC violations continued even after the de-escalation of tensions between the two countries. This paper gathers and analyses the information shared on electronic media in the post-Pulwama scenario.

Balakot Strikes in Pakistan

On 26 February 2019, *The Hindu*, a leading English language daily in India, proudly reported that twelve days after the Pulwama attack, the Indian Air Force bombed Jaish-e-Mohammad's biggest

terror-training camp in Pakistan's Balakot.⁷ According to the report, "200-325 militants had moved to Balakot from LoC sites after Pulwama attack. 12 Mirage-2000 fighter jets were used in the operation, which unleashed five one-tonne bombs on the camp, based 70 km inside the Line of Control (LoC), in the Pakistani province of Khyber Pakthunkhwa."⁸ The Indian media also claimed that Pakistan moved the militants to Balakot, as it expected that India would not consider the area for attack.

This blatant Indian claim of the killing of 200-325 militants was rejected by Pakistan immediately. Pakistan very wisely invited international media to the site to show them first-hand the damage the Indian planes had inflicted on the forest. The Director-General of Pakistani military's Inter-Service Public Relations (ISPR), Major General Asif Ghafoor, led a group of foreign journalists, which also included journalists from India, to Balakot to verify Indian claims of killing 300 madrasa students. The print media of India was not alone in spreading the fake news, it was also supported by the Government of India. The complete statement by the Indian Foreign Secretary regarding the Balakot strikes shows an utter display of deception by the Indian government.

Following is the full statement of Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale:

On 14 February 2019, a suicide terror attack was conducted by a Pak-based terrorist organization Jaish-e-Mohammad, leading to the martyrdom of 40 brave jawans of the CRPF. JEM has been active in Pakistan for the last two decades, and is led by Masood Azhar with its headquarters in Bahawalpur. This organization, which is proscribed by the UN, has been responsible of a series of terrorist attacks including on the Indian Parliament in December 2001 and the Pathankot airbase in January 2016.

Information regarding the location of training camps in Pakistan and PoJK has been provided to Pakistan from time to time. Pakistan, however, denies their existence. The existence of such massive training facilities capable of training hundreds of jihadis could not have functioned without the knowledge of Pakistan authorities. India has been repeatedly urging Pakistan to take action against the JeM to prevent jihadis from being trained and armed inside Pakistan. Pakistan has taken no concrete actions to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism on its soil. Credible intelligence was received that JeM was attempting another suicide terror attack in various parts of the country, and the fidayeen jihadis were being trained for this purpose. In the face of imminent danger, a preemptive strike became absolutely necessary.

In an intelligence led operation in the early hours of today, India struck the biggest training camp of JeM in Balakot. In this operation, a very large number of JeM terrorists, trainers, senior commanders and groups of jihadis who were being trained for fidayeen action were eliminated. this facility at Balakot was headed by Maulana Yousuf Azhar (Alias Ustad Ghouri), the brother-in-law of Masood Azhar, Chief of JeM.

The Government of India is firmly and resolutely committed to taking all necessary measures to fight the menace of terrorism. Hence this non-military preemptive action was specifically targeted at the JeM camp. The selection of the target was also conditioned by our desire to avoid civilian casualties. The facility is located in thick forest on a hilltop far away from any civilian presence. As the strike has taken place only a short while ago, we are awaiting further details.

The Government of Pakistan had made a solemn commitment in January 2004 not to allow its soil or territory under its control to be used for terrorism against India. We expect that Pakistan lives up to its public commitment and

takes follow up actions to dismantle all JeM and other camps and hold the terrorists accountable for the actions.⁹

Subsequently, however, when people began asking questions about the bodies of the killed militants, the Indian government refused to answer. A Pakistani newspaper, *Express Tribune* reported that India “conceded for the first time that there were no casualties in the Balakot strike.”¹⁰ On the Indian side, the Union Minister, Surinder Singh Ahluwalia reiterated that the air strikes by India were just a warning and that neither Prime Minister Narendra Modi nor any government spokesperson had given any figure on the casualties of air strikes.¹¹ He also accepted that it was “the Indian media and social media, where the unconfirmed figures of terrorists killed were being calculated.”¹² Samaa TV of Pakistan reported the damage on the Pakistani side by sending its representative to the site of the attack. They reported that Indian jets had destroyed 15 pine trees in its surgical strike and not a terrorist camp.¹³

Later, a high-level meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan was held on 26 February 2019 in Pakistan in which the Indian claims of targeting an alleged terrorist camp near Balakot were rejected.¹⁴ “A handout released after the NSC meeting stated that the forum strongly rejected Indian claims of targeting an alleged terrorist camp near Balakot and the claim of heavy casualties.”¹⁵ The handout also condemned the irresponsible behaviour of the Indian government by stating, “Once again Indian government has resorted to a self-serving, reckless and fictitious claim, the handout added. This action has been done for domestic consumption given the election environment, putting regional peace and stability at grave risk.”¹⁶

The *Dawn* news team in Pakistan also visited the location, where it asked the villagers about the airstrikes and reported that villagers near Balakot had not witnessed any casualty or even an injury

to someone. Instead, the team found out that the “villagers in Jabba were woken up by successive explosions in the morning when Indian aircraft reportedly dropped bombs on a hill overlooking their small hamlet, thirty kilometres to the north-east of Balakot.”¹⁷ After getting fact-based reports by the Pakistani media, the international media also got sceptical of the Indian claims.

Doubts on Indian Claims

Soon after contentious reports of the event, questions premised on ascertaining the reality and truth behind Indian claims quickly began circling the media circles. “A Satellite imagery, acquired by Planet Labs Inc. on the morning of February 27 and accessed by Australian Strategic Policy Institute, further endorsed doubts on the Indian claim.”¹⁸ According to an expert on satellite data, Nathan Ruser, “No evidence of damage to the facility or nearby areas is visible in the images. Local media has visited the site and published photographs of multiple small craters in the vicinity, but they haven’t been granted access to the facility that was reportedly targeted. Satellite imagery, presented and analyzed, provides no apparent evidence of more extensive damage and on the face of it does not validate Indian claims regarding the effect of the strikes.”¹⁹

A report by *Reuters* also refuted the claims made by the Indian media that its air force had hit a Jaish-e-Muhammad Madrassa.²⁰ “High-resolution satellite images reviewed by *Reuters* show that a religious school run by Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) in north-eastern Pakistan appears to be still standing days after India claimed its warplanes had hit the Islamist group’s training camp on the site and killed a large number of militants. The images produced by Planet Labs Inc, a San Francisco-based private satellite operator, show at least six buildings on the madrasa site on March 4, six days after the airstrike.”²¹ In the report, interviews of the villagers were also included, stating that they could not find any dead bodies in the area.

The Indian government refused to share proof of militant deaths in Pakistan.²² Nor did it accept that its forces missed the target and that there was no casualty on the Pakistani side. In the twenty-first century, India tried to fool the entire world by making false claims. The images released by a private American earth imaging company based in San Francisco, named Planet Labs, can show “details as small as 72 cm (28 inches) and offer a clearer look at the structures the Indian government said it attacked... The image is virtually unchanged from an April 2018 satellite photo of the facility. There are no discernible holes in the roofs of buildings, no signs of scorching, blown-out walls, displaced trees around the madrasa or other signs of an aerial attack.”²³

Subsequently, *Reuters* sent an email to the foreign and defence ministers of India to ask whether the Indian government still stood by its claims in the presence of satellite images. The Indian foreign and defence ministries did not reply to the emailed questions.²⁴ Other than *Reuters*, the international media also rebutted the Indian claims based on satellite imagery.²⁵ Interestingly, another amusing lie was created by the Indian media to justify the false claim of killing militants. The Indian media reported that dead bodies were shifted from Balakot after the IAF strike.²⁶

Retaliation by Pakistan

On the very next day of Indian strikes, while chasing Indian air planes, Pakistani fighter jets shot one of the Indian planes. An Indian pilot Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman was captured by Pakistan in the process. This development led to another round of fake news both in India and Pakistan.

Earlier, it was reported that two Indian pilots were held by Pakistan. This fake news was refuted by the Pakistani army. Hundreds of stories spread about the injured pilots on social media. According to fact-checker websites, social media became a “hotbed of unverified

news."²⁷ Partik Sinha, the co-founder of one such fact-checking website, Alt News, said that they had "received requests to verify news about the Pakistan India stand off and the claims made by both sides from journalists and people on social media."²⁸

Sinha, in his account of the event also revealed that a Facebook group supporting the Indian Home Minister Amit Shah had posted images of the alleged destruction caused inside Pakistan by the Indian air strike. "Three photos posted on the group page showed debris from a destroyed building and bodies and have been shared hundreds of times."²⁹ However, Alt News found that "the pictures were from a 2005 earthquake in Kashmir."³⁰

Similarly, in Pakistan, a video of a second captured Indian pilot was widely circulated. "Fact-checking website Boom noted that the clip was from an air show in the southern Indian city of Bengaluru, where two planes crashed on February 19."³¹ The challenges associated with disinformation are not restricted to a certain dimension. Instead, irresponsible information sharing and its wrongful dissemination can prove to be lethal in some situations. In 2015, one Muhammad Akhlaq was mercilessly killed by a mob in Bisra village near New Delhi because, as rumour had it, he had stored cow meat in his fridge. This is just one example of fake information leading to mob lynching in India.

After the revelation of the truth about false Indian claims of destroying a madrassah and killing 300 militants, it became difficult for the Indian government to justify its claims.

The Difficulty for the Indian Government in Justifying the Fake Claims

Senior Congress party leader Kapil Sibal asked for proof of the Indian Air Force's strike destroying the biggest camp of Jaish-e-Mohammad in Pakistan and accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of politicizing 'terror'. "Modi ji must answer as the international media

like *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, London-based *Jane Information group*, *Daily Telegraph*, *the Guardian* and *Reuters*, are reporting that there is no proof of militant losses at Balakot in Pakistan," Sibal said.³²

Congress's chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala also asked the prime minister to clear the doubt as one of his ministers was denying TV news that 300 terrorists were killed in the air strike on 26 February. He wrote on Twitter, "Modi ji, your central minister is denying TV news that prime minister Modi has never confirmed the killing of 300 terrorists in IAF air strikes in Pakistan. Is it true. If not, the prime minister should tell the truth to the country."³³

Punjab minister and Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu said, "300 terrorists dead, Yes or No? What was the purpose then? Were you uprooting terrorists or trees? Was it an election gimmick? Deceit possesses our land in guise of fighting a foreign enemy. Stop politicizing the Army, it is as sacred as the State," he said, adding "Oonchi Dukaan, Pheeka Pakwan (big talk, no delivery)."³⁴

Congress leader and Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath asked the government to reveal images of the operation carried out by the IAF in Balakot.³⁵ Congress leader and Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot asked the PM to tell the country how many terrorists had been killed. He wrote on Twitter, "The claims are of 350 terrorists. BJP president Amit Shah is saying that 250 terrorists got killed – from where did he receive this information? A minister of Modi government (SS Ahluwalia) stated that the aim of the strike was to send a message and not taking lives... What is the fact, Modi should clarify?"³⁶

West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee reiterated that she stood by India's armed forces but wished to seek proof and a clarification about the damage done and the number of casualties in Balakot. "I am ready to face any consequence for raising these questions but I will continue asking them," she said.³⁷ Irritated in the face of repeated questions regarding

the incident, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, lashed out at the opposition and said "Will you (people) do anything that appeases Pakistan or makes Pakistan clap."³⁸

The government representatives also failed to answer questions posed by journalists about hitting a Jaish-e-Muhammad camp in Pakistan. Foreign secretary Vijay Gokhale left a press briefing and refused to answer the media questions about Balakot strikes.

The government of India has still not clarified its position on making the dubious claim of killing 300 militants in Pakistan. As most of the rural population of India does not have access to international media and mostly relies on domestic electronic media, which flaunts the claims made by the Indian government, the fake news and misinformation disseminated concerning the Balakot strike deeply influenced the voting patterns during the Indian elections. Interestingly, the Indian government did not stop here. It went on to make another false claim that Pakistan resorted to the use of advanced F-16 fighter jets in retaliation to the Indian incursion.

The F-16 Controversy

Indian Media accused Pakistan of using F-16 in the aerial dogfight against India. This claim was levelled to sabotage Pakistan's relations with the US. The sale of F-16 to Pakistan was curtailed by the US in the aftermath of Pakistan's nuclear explosion in 1998. It was resumed following 9/11 on the condition that they would only be used in counter-terrorism operations, i.e., to assist with the US global war on terror.³⁹ Therefore, the Indian government projected to the Indian media that some parts of the Pakistan Air Force's (PAF) F-16, downed by the IAF, had been recovered.⁴⁰ However, Pakistan rejected the claims and, unlike India, also clarified its position. Later, Major General Asif Ghafoor, the then DG ISPR, iterated in a press conference that JF-17s were used in the operations instead of F-16s.⁴¹ CNN also endorsed

the fact that it was a "JF-17 fighter jet that brought down an Indian warplane in Azad Jammu and Kashmir."⁴²

A *New York Times* journalist Maria Abi-Habib also posted a set of tweets saying that "Pakistan may not have violated its F-16 sales agreement with the US even if it used the American-made fighter jets to shoot down Indian aircraft last week."⁴³ She tweeted, "The US says if Pakistan used an F-16 to shoot down an Indian MiG, it may not have violated sale agreement."⁴⁴ "They say if India entered Pakistani airspace for a second day, and Pakistan used the jet defensively, the contract wasn't violated. But, if Pakistan used an F-16 to attack India first, only then deal was violated."⁴⁵

A Chinese analyst, Jin Yinan from the elite National Defence University (NDU) of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) also attributed the Indian claims as baseless. His take on the events that unfolded following the Indian strikes states;

The Indian side tried to find reasons for its loss, saying that Pakistan had dispatched its most advanced F-16 fighters, which was denied. Pakistan's saying is more reliable for three reasons". "First, the sales of F-16 fighters had been cut off by the US, so Pakistan now has only less than 20 such aircraft left, not to mention how many of which could still perform a flight mission. Second, Pakistan had signed an 'agreement' with the US, which banned the use of F-16 fighters in offensive operations. This time, Indian warplanes flew into the Pakistani airspace and attacked ground targets first, and then Pakistan sent aircraft into India's airspace for retaliation. From this perspective, it was a retaliatory, offensive operation conducted by Pakistan, in which the F-16 was inapplicable according to the aforesaid agreement." Indian Air Force is well aware of the capabilities of the US-made jets including firepower and radar frequencies. Third, the Indian military had already obtained basic data about the F-16 jets. The U.S. planned to export the F-21 - an

upgraded version of the F-16 - to India, so it had informed the Indian side of all performance parameters about the aircraft. For this reason, India is familiar with the combating performances of the F-16, including its fire-control and searching radar frequency. Given all this, Pakistan was unlikely to use its F-16 fighters in the air battle because there was a small chance to win even if it sent out the aircraft.⁴⁶

Other than the aerial fight, much was happening on the Indian side of the LoC in the backdrop of the Pulwama attack.

The Unending Volatility along the LOC

Violations of the ceasefire agreement of 2003 in case of heightened Indo-Pak tensions has become a recurring pattern. In the post-Pulwama standoff too, the LOC became another domain of fighting between India and Pakistan. The table below shows the LOC skirmishes between India and Pakistan since 26 February 2019.

Table 1

Variations in Reporting about LOC Violations
in Indian and Pakistani Media

Date	India Side	Pakistan Side	LOC/I B/WB	Source
16 March 2019	Mankote sector in Poonch		LoC	https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/jammu-kashmir/heavy-exchange-of-fire-on-line-of-control-in-poonch-district/744147.html
15 March 2019	Nowshera sector		LoC	https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/jammu-kashmir/army-porter-injured-in-pak-firing/743990.html

13 March 2019	Khari Karmara area of Gulpur sector.		LoC	https://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/pir-panjal/india-pakistan-trade-fire-along-loc-in-poonch-district-of-jammu-and-kashmir/316049.html
11 March 2019		Chakothei sector of Jhelum Valley	LoC	https://www.dawn.com/news/1469000
10 March 2019	Poonch district(Krishna Ghati), Balnoi and Mankote (both in Mendhar sector)		LoC	https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/jammu-kashmir/pak-resorts-to-heavy-shelling-in-poonch-targets-army-posts-villages/740957.html
10 March 2019		Pandu, Chakothei and Khilana sectors of Jhelum Valley district	LoC	https://www.dawn.com/news/1468806/man-killed-4-wounded-in-ajk-as-indian-firing-across-loc-resumes
9 March 2019	Sunderbani sector of Rajouri		LoC	https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/jammu-kashmir/pakistan-army-violates-truce/740643.html
8 March 2019	Qasba and Kirni areas of Poonch		LoC	https://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/pir-panjal/cop-injured-in-loc-firing/315593.html
6 March 2019	Nowshera, Suderbani and Mendhar KG areas		LoC	https://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/pir-panjal/-cross-border-shelling-continues-in-loc-areas/315353.html
6 March 2019		Bhimber district	LoC	https://www.dawn.com/news/1468091

5 March 2019		Hot Spring sector	LoC	https://www.dawn.com/news/1467794/indian-firing-targeted-at-civilian-population-across-loc-leaves-one-injured-ispr
5 March 2019	Kalal (Nowshera) and Minka Mahadev (Sunderbani) areas in Rajouri district, and in Degwar and Mankot areas in Poonch district		LoC	https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/jammu-kashmir/soldier-injured-in-rajouri-ceasefire-violation/738715.html
4 March 2019	Akhnoor sector and Poonch sector		LoC	https://indianexpress.com/article/india/jk-pakistan-troops-violate-ceasefire-in-akhnoor-sector-indian-army-retaliates-5609602/
3 March 2019		Neza Pir, Pandu, Khanjar Munawar, Battal and Baghsar sectors	LoC	https://www.dawn.com/news/1467607
2 March 2019	Nowshera of Rajouri		LoC	https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/pakistan-again-violates-ceasefire-along-loc-in-j-ks-rajouri/articleshow/68231100.cms
2 March 2019		Neza Pir, Pandu, Khanjar Munawar, Battal and Baghsar sectors	LoC	https://www.dawn.com/news/1467607

1 March 2019	Mendhar, Krishna Ghati, Nowsherasectors of Rajouri and Poonch's Balakote and Gawahalan, Chokas, Kiker and Kathi posts in Uri		LoC	https://www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/pak-violates-ceasefire-along-loc-in-mendhar-balakote-krishna-ghati-sectors20190301200800/#.XHn9WawH9fk.twitter
1 March 2019		Kotli District	LoC	https://www.dawn.com/news/1467008
28 February 2019	Krishna Ghati sector of Poonch		LoC	https://www.greterkashmir.com/news/pir-panjal/jammu-and-kashmir-heavy-firing-across-loc-in-poonch/314596.html
26 February 2019	Krishna Gati, Balakote, Khari Karmara, Mankote, Tarkundi in Poonch district, Kalal, Baba Khori, Kalsian, Laam and Jhangar areas in Rajouri and Pallanwala and Laleali in Jammu.		LoC	https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/heavy-shelling-firing-along-line-of-control-as-pakistan-violates-ceasefire-1999706
26 February 2019		Kotli, Bhimber and Poonch districts	LoC	https://www.dawn.com/news/1466171/4-ajk-civilians-dead-11-wounded-in-indiscriminate-indian-shelling-across-loc

Source: http://indopakconflictmonitor.org/yearwise_cfv.php?year=2019

As shown in the table above, the first violation was initiated by India on 26 February, as per the *Dawn* newspaper of Pakistan. However, the same incident was differently reported on the Indian side. The *Hindustan Times* claimed that Pakistani troops opened fire

along the LOC.⁴⁷ On 28 February, the Indian media once again claimed that Pakistan violated the LOC. On the contrary, Pakistani newspaper *Dawn* reported that Pakistan had to evacuate the villages in the Khilana sector in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, owing to indiscriminate firing of Indian forces.⁴⁸

Similarly, all the news items reported above shared a different story. India and Pakistan continue to violate the ceasefire along the line of control since 2003. The news of violations, though reported by both India and Pakistan, carry varying contents. Hence, no media outlet can verify whether the violations were committed or not because of the lack of access. In the post-Pulwama episode, there were numerous news reports on the LOC violations in both the Indian and Pakistani media. But it is uncertain that which country initiated firing operations.

Indian state policy is based on deception. Kautilya, the purported founding father of the Indian foreign policy also relied on the use of deception in statecraft.⁴⁹ Kautilya elucidates three primary categories of *yuddha* or warfare, namely, *prakashayuddha* (open warfare), *kootayuddha* (concealed warfare), and *tushnimityuddha* (silent warfare). Any one of these individually, or a combination of these three categories of warfare becomes part of a state's policy once it decides to go for *vigraha* (war/hostility) or *yana* (march) against another state.⁵⁰

Since independence, Pakistan and India have had irritations in their relationship mainly due to episodic conflicts and skirmishes over the LoC. Above in view, Balakot strikes were not only aimed at belittling Pakistan's military might in the eyes of the international community but also at deceiving the Indian nation by the wrongful projection of India's military might. Modi deceived his nation by orchestrating Balakot strikes against Pakistan to gain votes in the April 2019 Indian elections.

A senior-level member of the BJP unknowingly confessed about the dangerous election stunt of Modi during a speech. Karnataka BJP chief BS Yeddyurappa stated:

Just now we got news that a Pakistani jet which tried to enter our border has been chased back. Pakistan has been taught a lesson, after 40 years PM Modi has done it. PM said we'd reply to every drop of blood of our soldiers and he has shown that today. Youth are celebrating; all this will help us in winning more than 22 Lok Sabha seats (in Karnataka).⁵¹

Prime Minister Modi turned no stone unturned in trying to win the elections. Christophe Jaffrelot, an expert on Hindu nationalism wrote:

The Narendra Modi government has sought to use this crisis for political purposes, in the context of the current election campaign, at the risk of undermining national unity. Unlike previous Indian prime ministers who had to deal with a comparable situation (from the 1965 and 1971 wars to the 1999 conflict and the 2008 attacks), Modi did not bring together the political parties to inform them of the situation. Instead, he accused the Congress of underequipping the Army when it was in power and of demoralising the armed forces by requesting information on ongoing operations.⁵²

Arundhati Roy, a human rights activist in India also criticised Modi, calling him reckless on his media stunt to amuse the local junta that endangered the security of the entire region.⁵³ She said, "For the Prime Minister of this country to press its formidable air force into performing dangerous theatrics is deeply disrespectful."⁵⁴

Conclusion

Indo-Pak relations have been in a downward whirl since Prime Minister Modi assumed power, except for a few positive gestures like

the stopover of Modi in Lahore and invitation to former Pakistani Prime Minister to the swearing-in ceremony. Nevertheless, the worst card played by Modi is the latest standoff with Pakistan precipitated by the Indian airstrikes after Pulwama and the following interplay of fake claims. The use of fake claims by Modi's media partners to lure the masses was a sheer display of dishonesty on the part of a state's leader.

Karnataka BJP chief BS Yeddyurappa surprisingly confessed that Modi's strike on Pakistan could help BJP to get 22 seats out of the total 28 in the Lok Sabha elections in the state elections. Despite the Pakistani Prime Minister's mature stance on the tense situation, Modi, while addressing BJP workers, said that India would fight as one against the enemy, without naming Pakistan. This statement depicted that all he cares for is his victory in elections.

Compulsion, ignorance, or ill-intention leads to war. In the case of Balakot strikes, it seems that the ill-intention was at play. Modi created a warlike environment in the sub-continent for winning elections in India, putting the safety of all South Asian countries at risk. It may also be noted that Prime Minister Modi was facing criticism on the dubious Rafael deal at that time as well. In such an atmosphere, he desperately needed a catalyst for 'reframing' public opinion in his favour.

Modi went the extra mile in being irresponsible as a state leader by 'lying' about the IAF strikes. His government claimed that the Indian Air Force killed around 300 Jaish-e-Mohammad recruits in Pakistan. Pakistan denied the claims and the international media also cast doubts over the Indian claims. Senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh also pressed upon clarification of the claims of the Indian government. However, Prime Minister Modi's government remained silent.

A politician who prefers a party's interest over national interest would endanger the security of his country to gain any political benefit. The instability of a leader creates instability in the country.

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SWAYING THE STRATEGIC BELT: US-INDIA MILITARY PARTNERSHIP IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

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Abstract

Washington's rebalancing approach towards the Asia-Pacific came in the form of a strategic reliance on New Delhi to counter Beijing's rise. The underlying strategic logic behind the Pivot to Asia-Pacific policy and the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report is shared economic and security interests between the US and India in addition to an indispensable Indian role as a major power in the region. Both India and the US carried out a major overhaul in their respective foreign policies while considering China as a common threat. Indian military modernisation and its recent military doctrines have been influenced by the US and are in line with Washington's policy trajectory. Recent Indo-US military agreements and defence deals have altered the traditional alliance structures in the region. India has gained access to conventional and disruptive technologies by using the American military hardware in the form of autonomous weapons, cyber technologies, innovative intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, etc. Moreover, by joining the US-led alliance, India has managed to increase its sphere of operations and outreach in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Washington's strategic altruism, putting all eggs into one basket, might prove beneficial in tackling the Chinese economic and strategic rise. However, it remains highly probable that once India positions

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Regional Studies, 38:4, Winter 2020, pp.66-82

itself into a specific threshold in the world order, it might become more proactive and aggressive, which would be more detrimental for the American national interest than for China. This is evident from its policies in South Asia, which are now evidently manifest in the Indian Ocean too.

Keywords: *Asia-Pacific, strategic partnership, autonomous weapons, Quad, military, nuclear weapons.*

Introduction

The signing of the first Indo-US Strategic Dialogue on 1 June 2010 not only changed the security outlook of South Asia but also transformed the global security landscape. The arrangement strengthened Indian role across the Asia-Pacific following the award of a title of 'an indispensable partner' by the then Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. Former US President's avowal to the importance of the dialogue as "a defining partnership in the twenty-first century"¹ further reiterated the significance of India for the overall regional power (re)balancing. Asia-Pacific was termed as the engine for the growth of the United States in which India was selected as one of the emerging powers and partners for America in Hillary Clinton's article *America's Pacific Century*. Moreover, it was outlined that the two countries shared common values and interests, which served as the converging point for them. Indian *Look East Policy* was taken as a catalyst for safeguarding the interests of the two countries.² China's rise was taken as a mutual threat on which the two countries enhanced and further built their strategic partnership, encompassing collaboration in almost every arena, especially maritime, nuclear, and cyberspace domains. These developments were based on a multi-layered approach where the stand-alone significance of India covered one dimension, whereas its inclusion in bilateral and multilateral security arrangements concealed the national interests of the US, India, and other participating stakeholders. This research analyses how the US-India strategic relationship has transformed since 2010 while considering

various dimensions such as maritime military partnerships, cyberspace collaboration, technology transfer, etc.

Reconstructing the Asia-Pacific Strategic Belt

Initiation of the US-India strategic dialogue in June 2010 created a new bloc in international security architecture, which led to several tectonic shifts in the foreign and security policy of both the US and India. Shortly after the signing of the strategic dialogue, the Obama administration supported India in its bid for securing a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). It also paved the way for several other Indo-US deals encompassing defence and trade. Similarly, the genesis of India-US nuclear cooperation can also be traced to this strategic partnership.³ A glaring aspect of this US-India strategic partnership includes the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) intended to strengthen global cybersecurity cooperation and countering terrorism. The MoU facilitated exchanges of cybersecurity information and expertise that were developed among the Department of Information Technology, Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, and the Department of Homeland Security's United States Computer Emergency Readiness Team (US-CERT).⁴

The US National Security Strategy (NSS) 2015 made public under the Obama administration announced the country's new *Pivot to Asia-Pacific* policy enabling the US and India to further build upon their relationship. The strategy called for unlocking the relationship and strengthening strategic and economic partnerships with India, supporting its role as a regional security provider.⁵ The 2015 NSS proved as a catalyst for both the countries to consolidate their cooperation in many areas.⁶ As discussed earlier, maritime cooperation remained one of the primary components of shared interests between India and the US, following which the two countries established core shared security principles in the domain under the 2015 *Joint Strategic*

Vision for the Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean Region. The scope of the strategic vision widened the nature of Indo-US cooperation and its associated operations. In addition, various agreements, including the Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), and the renewed Defence Framework Agreement further expanded the joint naval exercises by India and the US with increased emphasis on technology transfer and interoperability.⁷ In the Indian Ocean, the joint naval exercises focused on areas surrounding the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Chinese emergence in the Asia-Pacific remains of critical concern for the US and India as it has the potential to define the security architecture of the entire region. With its current trajectory of military outreach and technological advancement, China is seen to strategically transform Asia-Pacific into a Sino-centric region. The two countries further outlined that the growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea (SCS) and the IOR in terms of its increased naval presence is a challenge for both. To address any contingencies, the countries resolved to develop joint structures and mechanisms, which would include integration at the strategic level in addition to policy and working-level engagement.⁸

Indian Military Modernisation: The US as an Enabling Partner

The year 2016 marked another landmark strategic shift and victory in the US and Indian policies, as India was designated as a 'Major Defence Partner' by the US. This gave India additional access to American military and dual-use technologies. The country also received Strategic Trade Authorization Tier 1 status (STA-I), allowing it to purchase the aforementioned technologies without the need for any license. America also engaged its Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) processes to facilitate defence sales to

India in which the role of COMCASA was crucial and was accorded great significance. Technologies such as aircraft, helicopters, howitzers, gas turbine engines, and electronics have been sold to India through both FMS and DCS processes. Moreover, the agreements also included the service and maintenance of this defence equipment.⁹

COMCASA's scope of application has increased and continues to expand with time. It remains critical for the interoperability of Indian and American forces in the Asia Pacific,¹⁰ as a huge disparity of technological implementation remains between both the militaries. In 2018, it was announced that the US Central Command (CENTCOM) would provide greater access to India in its operations for which a new tri-service exercise was launched to increase operational coherence between the two militaries.¹¹

Trends in increased military cooperation between the two countries have witnessed gradual escalation because of India's role as a key security partner. Some of the key developments that took place in the year 2020 are shown in Table 1.

By including India in several multilateral security engagements, the US enabled the Indian military to not just develop new ties but also to further strengthen existing ties with several countries. This allowed India to get hold of advanced technologies and weapons. For example, India deployed robotic sentinels like SGR-A1 and the Super aEgis II jointly developed by Korea University and Samsung Techwin. These robots are capable of detecting border intrusions automatically. Super aEgis, additionally, is capable of auto-firing via a turret mounted on it.¹² Therefore, India has managed to exploit the linkages developed through the US for its national interests in addition to the common interests of India and the US.

Most recently, the US Department of State approved a possible foreign military sale of an Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS), which was requested by India. The Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) approximately costs \$1.867 billion and

includes 134 Stinger FIM-92L missiles, 118 AMRAAM AIM-120C-7/C-8 missiles, 5 AN/MPQ-64FI Sentinel radar systems, 4 AMRAAM Control Sections and 3 AMRAAM Guidance sections. India takes this deal as an opportunity to modernise its air defences against any potential aerial threats. According to the US, this deal “would not alter the basic military balance in the region.”¹³

Table 1

Trends of Military Cooperation between India and the US in 2020

Intensified Collaboration in the IOR	
US joining of Milan Naval Exercise 2020	A multilateral naval exercise conducted by India stretching from the Straits of Malacca to Andaman and Nicobar Island.
Increased Indian Cooperation with the US Central and African Command	This increased the horizon of Indian operations as its navy was attached with US Indo-Pacific Command.
Enhanced Information Fusion	For maritime situational awareness, information exchanges were intensified for practical implementation.
Exercise Tiger Triumph	Both the countries announced annual tri-service military exercises.
Substantiating Security Partnerships	
Industrial Security Annex (ISA)	The signing of the ISA enabled the exchange of sensitive American defence technologies with the Indian private sector. It also involves the co-development of these technologies in future.
Installation of Communication Facilities	Secure communication links and facilities were established and installed for protecting the confidentiality of information of the two armies and air forces.

Source: Centre for Strategic and International Studies

Other weapons and technologies included in the deal are Electrical Optical/Infrared (EO/IR) Sensor Systems, Multi-spectral

Targeting System-Model A (MTS-A), High Mobility Launchers (HML), Vehicle Mounted Stinger Rapid Ranger Air Defense Systems, Fire Distribution Centers (FDC), Dual Mount Stinger (DMS) Air Defense Systems, thirty-two (32) M4A1 rifles, forty thousand three hundred twenty (40,320) M855 5.56mm cartridges, Handheld Remote Terminals, AMRAAM Non-Developmental Item-Airborne Instrumentation Units (NDI-AIU), Canister Launchers (CN); communications equipment; tool kits; test equipment; range and test programs; support equipment; prime movers; generators; technical documentation; computer-based training equipment; training equipment; training towers; ammunition storage; training and maintenance facilities; infrastructure improvements; US Government and contractor technical support, engineering and logistics support services; warranty services; Systems and Integration Checkout (SICO); field office support; and other related elements of logistics and program support.¹⁴

BECA and the Regional Security Mosaic: The Question of Compulsive Engagement

In the backdrop of the recent transformation of South Asian strategic dynamics, the US and India entered a new phase of their alliance with the signing of the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) on 27 October 2020. BECA re-routed the strategic course of action vis-à-vis military cooperation between Washington and New Delhi. Complemented by previous Indo-US defence agreements such as COMCASA, LEMOA, and GSOMIA,¹⁵ the scope and applicability of the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) expanded and simultaneously reshaped the regional security mosaic. Formerly, the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) for Geospatial-Intelligence¹⁶ approved “the exchange of unclassified and controlled unclassified geospatial products, topographical, nautical and aeronautical data, products and services

between India and the United States (US) National Geospatial Agency.”¹⁷

The two countries, under the US-India Defense Framework Agreement, further strengthened the Major Defense Partnership (MDP) in which Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) was recognised as a significant step to build the partnership. Moreover, the recent signing, in the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue held in 2020, redefined its scope and the spill-over effects of the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in the maritime domain by including “maritime information sharing and maritime domain awareness” not only between the two navies but also provision of advanced real-time intelligence to the joint-services.¹⁸ Facilitated through agreement, with an enhanced Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) network, Indian armed forces would possess situational awareness spanning from strategic to battlefield level across the warfighting domains. In addition, advanced navigational aids, avionics, and associated logistics support would be entitled to the US aircraft supplied to New Delhi.¹⁹ Acting as a jumping pad for Indian armed forces, BECA also has the potential to improve Indian Geographical Information and Management Information Systems’ capability. An improvement of the aforesaid systems entails a boost in the accuracy of Indian autonomous weapon systems, automated hardware systems, and weapons including cruise missiles, ballistic missiles and, in the prospective scenario, armed drones as well.²⁰ Additionally, an upsurge of Indian investment in the strategic application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) assisted via BECA, in land, naval, aviation systems and nuclear, cyber and biological warfare,²¹ can broaden the usage of autonomous weapons and also result in their added lethality. Ultimately, the incorporation of autonomous weapons in military operations would embolden aggressive designs of the Indian armed forces.

The expected launch of the fifth geosynchronous Space-Based Infrared System satellite (SBIRS GEO-5) would enhance the ballistic missile launch detection capability of the US Space Force with worldwide coverage. The activation of SBIRS GEO-5 would create a global security dilemma and intensify the international missile race. Moreover, it also possesses the potential to transform the security architecture to New Delhi's strategic advantage. This advantage entails giving New Delhi detection capability of ballistic missiles deployed (and if launched) from both Beijing and Islamabad.²² Indian possession of such technologies not only disturbs the power balance in the region but also widens the asymmetry of conventional weapons between Pakistan and India, consequently, lowering the nuclear threshold in South Asia.

The Partnership, Asian Rebalance, and China

Part of the grand American Pivot to Asia-Pacific policy remains to transform the Indian military policies in coherence with the US national interests. This entails multiple aspects, which are relative to time and space. For example, the tri-services doctrines of India are undergoing a major transformation for shifting reliance from Russia to the US. However, due to ongoing India-Russia defence deals, execution remains rather constrained. The following paragraphs discuss some of the key facets of the policy.

Firstly, although India and the US have put in resources and developed and engaged new mechanisms for facilitating their defence cooperation, the growth of their cooperation in terms of application has remained rather sluggish. It has been widely argued that since the initiation of the Indo-US Strategic Partnership, the gap between India and China on the economic and military front has remained static, if not widened. The economic capacity of India and its policies do not align with its operational plans. Both of these components are significant prerequisites to settle in with the American posture. On the

other hand, Chinese military modernisation has widened the capability gap vis-à-vis that of India and the country remains unable to reverse it even with American support.²³

Secondly, the traditional relationship between India and Russia casts a dark shadow over the defence deals between India and the US. The presence of Russian political leverage and its roots in the Indian defence sector hinders the full-fledged transfer of sensitive defence technologies from the US. This creates a hindrance in the execution of policies and also in connecting the newly transformed doctrines with operational capabilities. Similarly, some of the defence agreements between India and the US are built on covering projects that have minimal or nearly no “operational utility or strategic value.” In this regard, the Defence Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI) is the best to be quoted as it primarily looked for jointly developing projects and technologies such as aircraft launch systems for aircraft carriers.²⁴ Aircraft carrier as a technological addition in Indian naval fleet does not seem visible in coming decades. Hence, such initiatives prove to be self-absorbing and jeopardise the potential fruitful projects.

Thirdly, the Indian military modernisation drive lacks in connecting with its cutting-edge, US-towed military doctrines. With an overwhelming amount of resources, technologies, equipment, ammunition, and policy advice being pooled in by the US, India authorised a new mountain strike corps with modernised battlefield gears, new lift-fighter aircraft and light infantry in addition to placement of cruise missiles at its northern borders to engage in a severer competition with China according to Washington’s expectations.²⁵ However, due to a lack of synergy in the tri-services and the failure to convert a manpower-intensive force into a technology-led firepower-centric force, India has not been able to meet Washington’s expectations so far. Pulwama crisis, in February 2019, depicted how the Indian air fleet is ineffective in contemporary military contingencies and is exposed to multiples vulnerabilities.

Similarly, on the southern front, the US seeks expanded India deployment and operations in which Indian sea-based nuclear deterrent remains the linchpin of the strategic vision. In the maritime domain, the US has been engaging India through various bilateral and multilateral security engagements, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) being the most significant of those engagements. India has also pressed the US for maritime military cooperation as around 60 per cent of its ships are becoming obsolete with a critical need to be replaced.²⁶ New Delhi's concerns over the two front or the two-and-a-half front threat have snowballed with heightened China-Pakistan military cooperation and its self-assumed threat spectrum. This has led the Indian strategic thinkers to a path of continuously reconstructing their military doctrines and developing associated capabilities.²⁷ In that, Washington's role as a potent supplier of dedicated weapons and equipment enhances as the US military has remained engaged in conflict situations in varied terrains and operational environments. This resulted in the development of terrain-specific and user-dedicated weapons and technologies, which is intensely needed in the Indian military.

During the process, however, India has continued to follow an appeasement policy. Since the 2018 Wuhan Summit, India embarked on the route to avoid an overtly confrontational policy against China while adopting a more hedging one between the US and China. It skidded away to a large extent from the Malabar naval exercise and decreased its participation in the Quad.

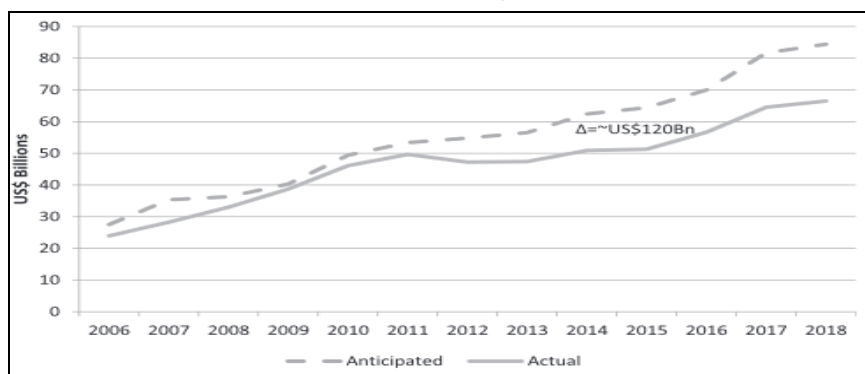
Finally, the Indian voting pattern in the United Nations has changed in the last fifteen years following the US attempts to rebuild ties with India. However, a sense of realisation prevails in the Indian ruling elite that the country is on its way to becoming one of the leading global powers. To show its political and military clout, India voted in a United Nations process in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which proved detrimental for the US interests in the Indian

Ocean Region. It also affected the American base in Diego Garcia and induced friction between the two countries.²⁸

Indian defence budget spending has not been able to match what was predicted by American reports even with resources dedicated by the US to minimise the said gap. The figure below shows how the actual defence spending differs from what was predicted:

Figure 1

Indian Defence Spending (2006 - 2018)



Source: Stimson Center

Based on the aforementioned statistics regarding Indian defence spending, it can be safely asserted that Indian security forces' capitalisation doubled during the stated period of engagement with the US, whereas that of China quadrupled. However, Indian investments in technology integration and synergy in forces have not proved beneficial for the country based on the huge disparity in its present doctrine and available technologies. This lack of appropriate utilisation of resources could be termed as a major determinant of the inadequate performance of the Indian military.²⁹

Conclusion

The strategic partnership between India and the US has undergone multi-vectored growth. From its primary focus on the rise of China in Asia-Pacific, the partnership has evolved into serving India's

national interests. For instance, the recent Indo-US deal of Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) came as a reaction to the Pulwama crisis whence New Delhi witnessed its weaknesses and realised that the possessed offensive aerial capabilities could not cope with the contemporary threats. In this regard, American-made air defence systems can prove as a viable option for defending against aerial strikes. This would directly impact deterrence stability in South Asia as the Indian military would pursue a more aggressive approach at the borders given the latest American technologies.

Another noteworthy aspect here is 'India's pick and choose policy' when it comes to weapons procurement. The country is procuring major offensive weapons and advanced technologies from the US as it is the leading country to develop and possess them. However, for defensive weapons, India seems more inclined towards Russia. Its tilt towards Russia for assistance is rooted in sophisticated Russian defensive technologies, which have tremendously grown over the years, in particular, the S-400 Triumph missile system.

Even though with India's multipolar approach in terms of defence ties, its significance for the US has strengthened, which is evident from the renaming of the US Pacific Command to 'Indo-Pacific Command' by the US Department of Defence. This has not only enhanced India's role in the region but also increased its relevance in the US foreign policy and its commitment to maintaining the status quo.

It can also be contended that the increased US insecurity vis-à-vis the rise of China has led to an intensification of the strategic partnership with India. Additionally, Washington's increased reliance on India and its desire to fill the capability gap in the Indian military to engage with China has not proven as beneficial as desired. As discussed earlier, the major focus of security agreements like the Defence Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI) has not only been irrelevant for the contemporary strategic settings because of its

expanded scope but has also proved deleterious for other ongoing initiatives like the Quad. However, under BECA, the potential provision of superior conventional technologies by Washington to New Delhi will lead to two outcomes. First, it will destabilise the strategic equilibrium between India and Pakistan. Two, it will account for an emboldened Indian military, aiming to confront its neighbour head-on given their ongoing territorial disputes.

Thus, the Indo-US defence partnership has adverse implications for the strategic stability of the Asia-Pacific, particularly South Asia. Indian acquisition of new weapons and technologies is accounting for the massive proliferation of weapons in the whole of the Asia-Pacific as the security dilemma continues to rise. These acquisitions also account for a more aggressive Indian military posture in the region, regardless of the nature of its ties with neighbours. The recent military escalation in Ladakh and surrounding areas is a practical manifestation of the situation getting out of Indian hands. Hence, India is pursuing an aggressive policy to dominate the regional states without even considering the repercussions or rebuttal in the form of a triggered nuclear escalation.

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DYNAMICS OF GLOBAL JIHAD NARRATIVE: A CASE STUDY OF AL-QAEDA AND ISIS

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Abstract

The difference in approaches to jihad from Al-Qaeda to ISIS has created new transnational challenges. This paper explores the multiple narratives of ongoing global jihad and the multiple dynamics of each narrative manifested by Al-Qaeda and ISIS. However, it is agreed that the ultimate goal of each narrative and dynamic is rooted more deeply in furthering political agendas without having much to do with Islam. This paper argues that jihadist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS must be studied separately to draw reliable conclusions and further develop the knowledge surrounding violent Islamist groups. The paper suggests that to fight the existing narratives adopted by these and other jihadist organisations, an alternative narrative should be developed. However, this should be kept in mind that the alternative narrative cannot fully replace the existing jihadist narratives.

Keywords: Jihadism, Al-Qaeda, ISIS, narratives, self-proclaimed agenda.

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Introduction

The term Jihadism is a newly coined expression of the 21st century. Previous research from some of the Western authors links Jihadism with the militant Salafi strand. It is interpreted as, “the waging of global jihad,” i.e., a core feature of the Salafist ideology. The construct of Jihadism has often been viewed as challenging to define because it came to become a part of the discourse on Jihad as a buzzword; with no single broadly recognised meaning.¹ The term jihad along with various other Islamic notions is abundantly misunderstood globally. It fundamentally means ‘to struggle’ and not ‘holy war’ as interpreted by the West. The Arabic expression for ‘holy war’ would be ‘Harb-al-Muqadasa’. However, the West has come to interpret the term as such since it suited them better. For instance, in 2002, President George W Bush, during his State of the Union Address, used expressions like “axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world,” and words such as ‘crusades’ to point towards any potential holy wars. The word jihad appears frequently in the Quran with and without military connotations, often in line with the idiomatic expression “striving in the path of God (al-jihad fi sabil Allah).”² Enlightening about those who take the way of Jihad, the Quran goes on to say, “Those who believe, and have left their homes and striven with their wealth and their lives in Allah's way are of much greater worth in Allah's sight. These are they who are triumphant.” (Al-Quran, 9:20)

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is believed to have said that there are two types of Jihad. Jihad Al-Akbar, which is commonly known as the ‘Greater Jihad’ and involves an individual’s continuous and never-ending struggle against his *nafs* or soul.

Quran expresses the three kinds of *nafs* as follows;

- Nafs-ul-Ammarah (12:53)
- Nafs-ul-Lawwamah (75:2)
- Nafs-ul-Mutmainnah (89:27-28)

The first one incites a man to do evil, the second to do what is morally correct, and the third is considered closest to Allah, i.e., the one extremely pure. Defending oneself against harmful external influences, i.e., *Nafs-ul-Ammarah* is explained as 'Jihad Al-Akbar' in the Holy Quran.

One tradition holds that Prophet Mohammad said after returning from a war, "We now return from the small struggle (Jihad Al-Asghar) to the big struggle (Jihad Al-Akbar)." His companions asked, "O Prophet of God, what is the big struggle?" He replied, "The struggle against *nafs*." ³ Jihad Al-Akbar was said to be much more important than Jihad Al-Asghar, which is commonly referred to as the 'lesser Jihad'. This type of jihad includes the struggle by Muslims in building a fair Islamic society or broadly it could be a war against the infidels.⁴

The origin of modern jihad in the Muslim world can be traced back to two early 20th century figures who initiated powerful Islamic revivalist movements in their respective countries. Hasan al-Banna of Egypt (Muslim Brotherhood) and Syed Abul Ala Maududi (Jamaat-i-Islami) of Pakistan sought to restore the Islamic ideal of merging religion and state. Both blamed the Western idea of the separation of religion and politics for the decline of Muslim societies. This was, to a great extent, in response to colonialism and imperialist forces. The ideology of the two triggered movements in the two Muslim countries eventually leading to strong intellectual traditions.

Since 9/11, the West has been inclined to speak of jihad and its associated branches in terms of self-suiting interpretations. It is observed that the Western media and literature has been particularly linking all extremist and terrorist activities with the Islamist military movements. For the most part, only a few Western academic experts have spoken about the actual essence of jihad. Whereas the rest fail to understand the legitimate meaning of jihad and conveniently inherit the interpretations adopted and practised by a jihadist organisation like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).⁵

This paper aims to explain jihadism as a phenomenon in and of itself, by viewing and carefully analysing the essence and contours of the movement. This is a task that requires a deeper understanding of jihadism in singularity, subsiding its explanation as a subset of some other major structure. However, to do so, a thorough insight into the nuances of various frames of analysis, i.e., terrorism, Islamism, and violent extremism is imperative.⁶

Terrorist groups, particularly the ones that associate with self-proclaimed Jihad, can be divided into three types based on their approaches and relative capabilities. These associations are as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

First Level	Second Level	Third Level
<p>Activities of the terrorist groups are restricted within a state, however, if they are left unchecked they can affect peace at the international level as well.</p>	<p>Terrorists groups operate at the regional level or their offensive acts cross at least one boundary which is international.</p>	<p>Terrorist groups that operate at the international level.</p>
<p>Example: Afghan Taliban They do not have a global agenda and their focus has been on the local politics of Afghanistan</p>	<p>Example: Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan as it collaborates with the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.</p>	<p>Example: ISIS and Al-Qaeda as both have a global jihadist agenda.</p>

Categories of Terrorist Groups⁷

Referring to the figure above, the third level terrorist groups are transnational. Al-Qaeda and ISIS are their principal organisations as both have a global jihadist agenda. This research examines the jihadist

threats posed by these two groups by discussing their ideologies and strategies before it goes on to present a comparative analysis of the two groups.

Understanding the Dynamics of the Global Jihad Narrative

The term jihad came to be associated with terrorism in the West, particularly the US, following 9/11. This association can be traced back to the West's adherence to a single kind of Jihad, i.e., 'jihad bis saif' (jihad with the sword).⁸

Conditioning the recruits' minds against Americanisation and Europeanisation as devils' propaganda is a critical practice during the recruitment process of terrorist organisations. Brainwashing potential recruits with an attractive vision of heaven drives them to wage jihad against evil prevailing in their societies. These organisations then call themselves Mujahids to comfort themselves with the idea that all their actions are for the sake of Allah.⁹

When Prophet Muhammad was in Mecca, the revelations urged him to practice peace and tolerance. However, later on, when he was forced by the pagan tribes to migrate to Madinah, the revelations became more militaristic. Since it was the need of the time for him to unify all other tribes of Arabia and to fight back the infidels if attacked.

The passages from the Quran that were revealed later highlight the circumstances in which Muslims could resort to *Qital*, i.e., fighting. Conflated use of the terms 'Jihad' and 'Qital' has been influential in the prevalent confusion about jihad in the Madani verses as references to armed struggle. Jihad and Qital have significantly different connotations in the Holy Quran. However, they are seemingly referenced without the context of the original revelation by the Jihadists. The occasional (re)interpretation of the original text deviates the essence of the original meaning of the verses. Similarly,

sometimes, quoting just an excerpt of the original verse in an attempt to justify an act results in a misleading interpretation of the original meaning. For instance, the Verse of the Sword (9:5), which is the most commonly used Quranic reference is often shortened to “Kill the idolaters (polytheists) wherever you find them. . . lie in wait for them at every place of ambush,” leaving out the remaining verse “But if they turn [to God] . . . let them go their way.”¹⁰

Furthermore, the ‘contextual reference’ to a particular verse is either ignored or goes unquoted. For instance, in the aforesaid verse, the permission ‘to kill’ was put forth when Muslims were being persecuted at the hands of pagan Arabs and had reached a point of desperation. The Prophet’s (PBUH) companions were frustrated as to when will divine help reach them. The supplication of Prophet (PBUH) was thus answered.

The Quranic and Hadith citations often quoted by Jihadists depict only a minute fraction of these works, which ironically ends up becoming a representation of the entire set of Islamic teachings.

Different Frames of Analysis

Terrorism

The 9/11 US bombings were described by George W Bush as evil and shameful acts of terror. He declared Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) with the US at its forefront. The notion of terrorism and a deep-rooted knowledge about its various facets was integral to initiate such global combat. That said, many critics argue that focusing on the idea of terrorism can have its disadvantages given the fact that terrorism in the military sense cannot be regarded as a proper opponent. It is a destructive ploy that can be used by multiple actors.¹¹

The second recurring problem with terrorism is the challenge to fully define it as there is no single universally accepted definition of the term. The US Code of Federal Regulations defines terrorism as “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to

intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives."¹²

In the context of jihadism, there are two crucial limitations to the notion of terrorism. Firstly, terrorism cannot be regarded as the underlying reason or the justification for Jihadism. Terrorism is merely a tactic in the jihadist tool chest for the achievement of larger goals, which includes capturing territories, establishing the rule, and removal of governments inclined towards the West.¹³

Secondly, jihadists sometimes consider it dignifying to use the word terrorism as it is the translation of the Arabic word *Irhab*. What goes conveniently ignored is the fact that the word *Irhab* occurs in the Holy Quran in the passages that refer to warfare. The relevant verse of Surah Al-Anfaal (8:57), says: "If ye gain the mastery over them in war, disperse, with them, those who follow them, that they may remember." This part of the Surah urges the Muslims to act against *Mushriks*, the hypocrites, especially the ones who broke the truce with severity and resoluteness to serve as a deterrent for other enemies of Islam. Therefore, Jihadists often tend to state that Islam does not only allow a Muslim to perform terrorism but also encourages it.¹⁴

Violent Extremism

Violent extremism, just like terrorism, is difficult to define and paradoxically so, the two have been used interchangeably many a time. The US Countering Violent Extremism Act of 2015 explains violent extremism as ideologically motivated terrorist activities. Also, many other scholars who try to define violent extremism often end up linking it with terrorism.¹⁵

Theoretically, violent extremism is a rather ambiguous construct. While its advocates rightly emphasise the importance of ideology, basing their argument on a single ideology has been an enormous challenge. Thus, the concept comprises a wide range of revolting actors, from eco-terrorists to far-right extremists to jihadists. It is frequently suggested that those drawn to violent extremism are

socially isolated, mentally disturbed, or otherwise delusional. While taking such factors into account in a particular context might be important, jihadism cannot be explained or understood with such a psychological niche as its underlying driving force.¹⁶

Islamism

Those trying to look for a specific ideology that fundamentally explains the violent acts of Al-Qaeda and ISIS have evaluated several designations stretching from radical Islam to Islamism to Islamic fascism. The relationship between Islam and Islamism is contested within Islam itself. Islamism has come to be interpreted as 'political Islam' or 'radical Islam', at least in Western literature. In this context, Islamism is an ideology with a political agenda that differentiates it from the actual teachings of the religion Islam. It is, however, noteworthy that Islamism emerged as a powerful political force from 1980 onwards with the US-led efforts to oust USSR from Afghanistan. Islamists seek political power since, in their worldview, religion cannot be confined to the 'private' sphere alone but finds its highest expression in the politics of popular mobilisation and social reforms. The most controversial aspect of Islamism is its association with militancy and violence in general and terrorism in particular. Groups like Hamas, Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Boko Haram are viewed as exponents of Islamist terrorism. The principal argument of this Islamist militancy lies in the notion of Jihad, to be specific, Jihad Bis-Saif (Jihad by the sword).¹⁷

After 9/11, the term Islamism gained popularity, mainly in the American media. Islamism is a term encompassing several modern Islamic political movements. Thus, Islamism and Jihadism cannot be regarded as synonymous. All Jihadists can be called Islamists but very few Islamists can be grouped as Jihadists. Jihadists unlike Islamists renounce the legality of the state and warn, as a matter of doctrine, continual violence until they have their way.¹⁸

Jihadism

Before delving further into the nuances of Jihadism, it is noteworthy that the concept of Jihad remained dormant for several centuries (at least since the 12th century) until it was revived by the West, more specifically, the US, during the cold war. The simplest history of jihadism can be traced back to December 1979. US in its bid to confront the former USSR turned Pakistan into a training ground for the warriors or then called 'the Mujahedeen' from over 48 Muslim countries. The mujahedeen who received training on Pakistani soil were sent to Afghanistan. After successfully causing the Soviets to retreat, these groups began fighting for political ascendancy in Kabul. There has been no looking back ever since. They exploited the teachings of Islam and presented them as the justification for their brutal acts. The first group that emerged out of the Mujahedeen was Al-Qaeda. It developed its ideology on the basis of Jihadism, a distinct subset of Sunni Islamism carrying a unique approach to politics and religion.¹⁹

The jihadists consider that the Muslims and Muslim countries (who in the worldview of Al-Qaeda and Islamic State are like a brotherhood) to be under the influence of the Western culture. In their view, the ruling governments in most Muslim countries had comfortably aligned themselves with the Western structures to attain their defined goals. However, a thorough cleansing from Western styles of governance and state affairs was vital to restore the idea of a greater Muslim brotherhood to its former glory.

The jihadists set their approach of strict monotheism, i.e., *tawhid*, against all these flaws. Their approach preached no room for diversion from their strict beliefs and unswerving commitment to an armed struggle or Jihad against their state as well as other countries and people whom they deem to be non-believers. Thus, rejectionism is the Jihadist hallmark.²⁰

Jihad Narrative of Al-Qaeda

Ideology

The ideology of Al-Qaeda extends a single but unifying narrative, which dictates certain roles to its followers by reinforcing identity and mutualism in the Jihadists.²¹ Al-Qaeda's central message reads: the West is always at war with Islam. For the Al-Qaeda leadership, the lost fame, prestige, self-respect, and integrity of Muslims could only be reclaimed by following the strategies devised by the Al-Qaeda leadership. The basic characteristics of the Jihad narrative put forth by Al-Qaeda can be summed up as follows:

1. There is a basic grievance, i.e., the Muslim world is in chaos and a Zionist-Christian alliance is held responsible for most, if not all, that is wrong in Muslim countries and the way Muslims are humiliated, discriminated against, and/or mistreated in the world. The collusion of corrupt Muslim rulers with the West keeps Muslims impotent. That is to say that rulers of Muslim countries and those who follow them have turned away from True Islam by allowing Western ways in Muslim lands.
2. There is a vision of the good society, i.e., a single political entity—the Caliphate—that replaces corrupt, apostate rulers under Western influence. The Caliphate is and must be run in true accordance with the Sharia (i.e., Islamic Law) wherever there are Muslims so that Allah's will is enforced and order is restored.
3. There is a path from the grievance to the realisation of the vision, i.e., the eradication. This includes the heroic role of Al-Qaeda in overturning the Westerns influence and leading a nation into Jihad with the greater aim of restoring Islam and its followers to their former glory.²²

Strategy

The core strategy of Al-Qaeda revolves around progressive destabilisation. Gaining and controlling territorial areas has been less significant to the short-term strategy of Al-Qaeda, unlike ISIS. However, in line with ISIS, Al-Qaeda follows the Sunni Salafist school of thought and has little tolerance for Shiites and other minority groups in Islam. Another strategy that Al-Qaeda follows is the formation of Jihadist coalitions. These coalitions are formed when certain Jihadist groups espouse the ideology of Al-Qaeda.²³ The strategy of Al-Qaeda for calling Mujahids to action is that it allows them to stay at their native place. This allows them to act more efficiently since they are aware of the areas, economic sites, political leaders, and places and the more populated areas.²⁴

In 2010, Al-Qaeda launched its first-ever digital magazine, which was named *Inspire*. The level of advertisements and interactive pictures that were published in *Inspire* were of high quality and it had the potential to invoke lone wolf attacks against the West among the Jihadists. Furthermore, *Inspire* provided religious advice and justifications for carrying out these attacks. Most importantly and, in fact, most disturbingly, it reflected upon steps on how Mujahedeen could succeed in their missions. For instance, for encouraging lone-wolf attacks, *Inspire* dedicated an entire section of the magazine to teach the Mujahids bomb-making and on the handling of guns. This section was named 'open-source Jihad'. It openly provided guidelines for making bombs to inflict maximum damage upon the Jews and the West. For example, when the Tsarnaev Brothers prepared themselves for the Boston Bombings, they consulted this section of the *Inspire* magazine.²⁵

Jihad Narrative of ISIS

Ideology

ISIS ideology lays the foundations for its followers to devise policies and strategies. The Jihad narrative of ISIS is based on Jihadi Salafism and accords a general guideline for its activities including implementation of its ideology in recruitment and jihadist propaganda.

Salafism is a very conservative branch of the Sunni sect of Islam. It advocates a return to the culture and traditions of the Salaf who were the scholars of the first three generations that came after Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The doctrine of Salafism revolves around the concept of following all the traditions prevalent in the historical period of Islam and a belief that the present world should be based and ordered on those concepts.²⁶

ISIS rejects innovations in religion through *Bida'h* and supports the implementation of strict Sharia laws. Combining the ideology and tenets of Salafism, ISIS ideology is primarily based on carrying out Salafi Jihadism, which states that there is a need for Muslims to perform Jihad against apostates and return to the true beliefs of Sunni Islam.

Other noteworthy features of the ISIS ideology are as follows:

1. The caliphate of early Islam should be restored to purify Muslims so that they can come out of the oppression of crusaders and all Muslims should take an oath to pledge loyalty to the Caliphate;
2. Any Muslim committing apostasy should be killed;
3. Muslims should strictly follow the precepts that were given by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his immediate followers; and
4. Belief in purifying the world by killing all the non-believers.²⁷

Strategy

ISIS views itself in state of a war with the West, particularly in the Middle Eastern regions and assumes itself to be the sole protector of all the Sunni Muslims present around the globe. The primary goal of ISIS has always been territorial gains and establishing its government, unlike Al-Qaeda. ISIS launched its first digital magazine in 2014 named *Dabiq*, which gave a five-step process of how a Jihadi base could be established in a fragile state including recruitment of members and initiation of local chaos and disturbances. Although ISIS has successfully been able to form alliances with other armed groups in Syria and Iraq, it has always acted independently and unilaterally.

In the government of the Caliphate, ISIS was able to establish several schools, hospitals, courts, and other social services to facilitate people living under their commandment. The fighters who were foreigners were given administrative posts in the governments to encourage them to recruit more mujahids. In the initial phases of its Caliphate, ISIS engaged itself in the mass killings of the Muslims of other sects particularly Shiites and Yazidis. For instance, prisoners were often publicly beheaded and burned and their images and videos were posted on social media to generate more terror in the minds of people. Through the content in its magazine and social media, ISIS has actively encouraged lone-wolf attacks. Like Al-Qaeda, ISIS also provides detailed information on how bombs can be made in homes and where to stab a human to ensure that he will die.²⁸

Unlike Al-Qaeda, ISIS demands its members to migrate from their respective places and start living in the territory of the ISIS Caliphate and it portrays that Muslims are only safe under the shade of the Islamic State. Also, ISIS demands of all its believers to leave the lands of the West as they believe that Jihad is not possible when a person is living in the land of *kufr* or sin. ISIS uses different methods to motivate people to attract them to join it. For instance, it promises its members that they will enter paradise if they engage in Jihad and

sacrifice their lives. Another strategy ISIS adopts is that it overwhelmingly portrays all men as equal, whether they are black or white, rich or poor, Arab or non-Arab, a Westerner or Easterner.

Comparative Analysis of Al-Qaeda and ISIS Jihadist Narratives

For presenting a detailed comparison of the jihadist narrative of Al-Qaeda and ISIS, it is important to analyse the statements highlighting the acts and incidents perpetrated and claimed. Also, these statements shed light on their distinct jihadist goals. It is also important to understand the meanings created in light of these statements.

This section of the paper discusses the strategies of both Al-Qaeda and ISIS. In doing so, it compares and analyses selected texts statements and frequently used words by these jihadist organisations. The reviewed literature indicates that the most frequently used words by the leaders of Al-Qaeda and ISIS are Allah, today, Jihad, all, Islamic, people, and Muslims.²⁹

“Support the religion of Allah through jihad in the path of Allah.”

(Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, 2014)

It can be seen in the above statement by one of the ISIS leaders that it gives clear directives to its followers and encourages them to wage Jihad in the path of Allah. Thus, great emphasis is laid on the religious facets, which the ISIS leadership has seemingly moulded for its benefits and issued them as fatwas to justify their gruesome acts.

“By Allah, if you disbelieve in democracy, secularism, nationalism, as well as all the other garbage and ideas from The West, and rush to your religion and creed, then by Allah, you will own the earth, and the east and west will submit to you.”

(Al’Adnani, 2014)

As evident in the statement above, ISIS leaders frequently urge their followers that Allah has divided the world into two spheres, i.e., the East and the West. The West consists of nations that are disbelievers while the nations in the East are the followers of Allah and are true to his religion.

Additionally, ISIS often repeats the words Caliphate and earth and emphasises that Allah wants only Caliphate to be established on His earth. Thereby, ISIS always stresses the establishment of the Caliphate. For them, true expansion of their jihadist narrative is impossible until and unless they have a proper geographical area under their rule where they can establish the caliphate and invite their followers to lead their lives in the guiding light of Shariah.³⁰

On the contrary, the following is a statement by one of the leaders of Al-Qaeda, which shows how these leaders try to create an impact on the minds of their followers.

"...the name of the American government and the names of Clinton and Bush directly bring to our minds the pictures of one-year-old children with their heads cut off. The hearts of the Muslims are filled with hatred towards the United States of America...Our people in the Arabian Peninsula will send the president of America messages with no words because he does not understand them."

(Bin Ladin – Interview with CNN: May 12, 1997)

Al-Qaeda emphasises that Muslims have suffered due to American involvement in the Muslim world and also mentions that the US is being led by incompetent leaders. From the invasion of Afghanistan by the US and removal of the Taliban to the Iraqi operation, both these jihadist organisations have declared the US as their main target and aim at punishing and destroying the US as, presumably, the sons of Islam are prepared for this battle.

"I say to the American army, don't be cowards and attack us with drones. Instead send your soldiers, the ones we humiliated in Iraq. We will

humiliate them everywhere, God willing, and raise the flag of Allah in the White House and on entire Earth”.

(Abu Mosa, 2014)

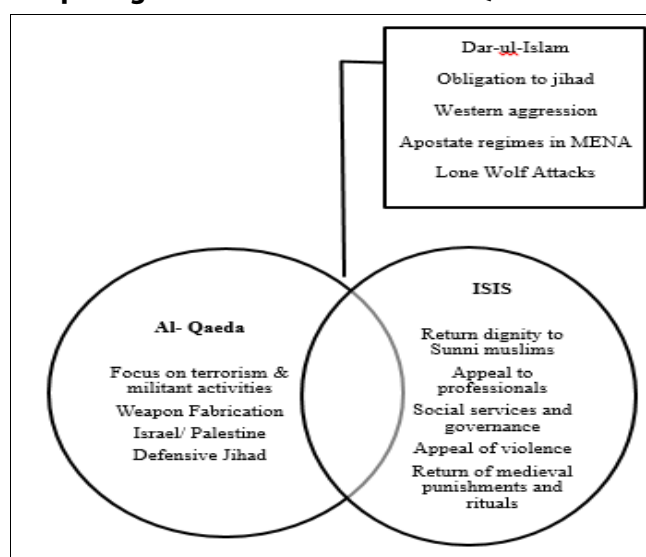
The repetitive use of the word ‘earth’ in the narrative of both these organisations is pivotal as it refers to the entire world. Al-Qaeda propagates that one of its goals is to spread Allah’s law and establish Islam everywhere on the earth. ISIS also enunciates that the whole universe belongs to Allah and it must submit to Allah as He alone is the master of this entire universe.³¹

After analysing the statements of many leaders of both these organisations, it is clear that they use religion as a political instrument to advance their agendas. Hence, it plays a very crucial role in their jihad narrative. Their methods to pursue their narratives are coercion, intimidation, violence, etc.

The following figure compares and summarises the jihadist narratives of Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

Figure 2

Competing Jihadist Narratives of Al-Qaeda and ISIS



Source: Compiled by the Author

Conclusion

While analysing the jihadist narrative of ISIS and Al-Qaeda, it can be concluded that no single analytical framework is good enough to predict the future course of Jihad and these jihadist groups. That said, these groups, especially ISIS, may further exploit the social and economic grievances in the conflict zones in the times that follow. Additionally, in future, the agendas of these terrorist groups will be shaped by how, where, and to what extent foreign powers are intruding in the domestic matters of a state. These Jihadist movements will continue to rise until the local, regional, and global flashpoints are not resolved.

Trump's declaration to shift the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem has virtually ended hopes for a two-state solution. The said decision will significantly impact the actions of these Jihadist groups as well. A commitment to Palestine binds the narrative of these jihadist groups together. Expelling Jews from Palestine is one of the main Jihadist narratives of Al-Qaeda as highlighted in Figure 2. Alternatively, ISIS has a less elaborate discourse on Palestine than Al-Qaeda. It often uses images depicting Al-Aqsa and the Dome of Rock Mosques in its propaganda videos.

The global and regional powers must take steps individually and cohesively to combat terrorism. A noteworthy factor to bear in mind while devising the combat strategies is that Al-Qaeda and ISIS are non-state actors, which makes their access to media outlets rather limited. As a result, the discourse based solely on their words of mouth holds less weightage for the general masses in comparison to the words of the state leaders. Also, since electronic media and social media are controlled and censored by state actors, attempts must be made at an institutional level to curtail posts such as speeches of jihadist leaders on social media outlets in the first place.

It can be argued that to fight the many existing narratives adopted by Jihadist organisations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, an

alternative narrative needs to be developed. Arguably, this alternative narrative must be able to satisfy and build bridges between people from all factions of society. Such dialogue should bring together all the stakeholders, i.e., Muslims and non-Muslims, religious and political leaders, victims, scholars, civil society representatives, and most importantly former militants. It should draw constructive outputs from the critical voices of all the relevant citizens who have an interest in becoming a part of designing solutions to the underlying problems that escalate extremism in the first place. However, this should be kept in mind that the alternative narrative cannot fully replace the existing Jihadist narratives.

Recommendations

Considering how complex and intense the jihadist movements have become, there is not a single policy that can help tackle the situation. However, to deal with these jihadist movements, crafting policies and implementing them is a complex challenge. One cannot end terrorism by simply fighting against it. A military approach can upset but cannot permanently disassemble these jihadist organisations, which are initially born out of deep political and social discontent. The following table provides a summary as to which policies should be adopted with a detailed description of each policy.

Table 1**Policy Options to Fight Jihadism**

Policy Option	Explanation
Collaboration	International co-operations and coalitions both with regional and international allies by keeping in mind that partnerships involve compromises and sacrifices.
Political Solutions	Attaining political stability through the collaboration of political figures and the military.
The Sectarian Divide	Policies targeting the diffusion of sectarian tensions should be adopted.
Regional Rivalries	Sunni Saudi and Shiite Iranian and regional rivalries should be addressed and peace talks should be initiated.
Human Factors	Social and economic indicators of growth should be addressed and improved.
Troubled Landscape	Extremists operate in areas that are usually remote and less accessible. So, while drafting policies these areas should be defined properly and should be targeted.
The Long View	It should be understood that defeating Jihadism is a time consuming and costly process, which needs addressing and eliminating the root causes such as the Palestinian issue.

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SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIAN OCEAN REGION FOR CHINA AND ITS REGIONAL AND GLOBAL IMPACTS

AMNA NISAR*

Abstract

The Indian Ocean is the third biggest sea of the world which is encircled by five landmasses and forty nations with a multitude of social, environmental, political, and vital complexities. Last two decades has seen the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) becoming the key field in worldwide governmental issues because of its expanding significance due to the presence of huge energy resources, vital energy transit and trade routes and developing rivalry in the zone of worldwide monetary exchange and security. China's 21st Century initiative to revive the old silk route in the form of (MSR) the Maritime Silk Road is dependent on the Indian Ocean Region which plays a critical role in its future development and setting up its predominance among other countries involving major overseas investments, growing international trade, vital oil and gas supplies, and maritime security. China's changing recognition of the Indian Ocean and its expanding predominance and vital security interests in the IOR form the key elements of China's international strategy to set up local strength and regional supremacy. The intent of this paper is to highlight China's efforts to establish dominance in the IOR and briefly discuss key challenges it is facing in progressing its strategy in IOR while looking at the risks and threats which are posed to its progress by the United States as well as India in context with the regional conflicts associated with land and energy resources.

Key Words: Indian Ocean Region (IOR), Maritime Silk Road (MSR)

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Regional Studies, 38:4, Winter 2020, pp.105-129

Introduction

The Indian Ocean is a huge water body situated on 68.557 million sq. km (approx.) of area between the Asia, Africa, Australia and the Southern Ocean. The coastline is been shared by all the littoral nations stretching to 66,527 km (approx.) in total.¹ The Indian Ocean is completed by other significant oceans for the area that include the Arabian Sea, Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal, Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Strait of Malacca, Gulf of Oman, Persian Gulf, Great Australian Bight, Mozambique Channel, and other feeder water bodies.

The IOR is a global trade hub and bone of contention for global powers that have been in a continuous struggle against each other to control the region since last 30 years.² Almost a century ago, a US Admiral named Alfred Thayer Mahan mentioned that the Indian Ocean would have a significant place in the twenty- first century to the seven seas of the world. These waters will decide the destiny of the world as whoever achieves maritime supremacy in this region would be a prominent actor in the international arena. At that time probably little was known about the Indian Ocean, and the wealth of natural resources it holds within.

Significant trade routes of the world and the supply of oil resources from the Persian Gulf to many other destinations globally pass through the IOR. Indian Ocean Region also embraces the critical choke point of Malacca Strait through which oil and trade supplies passes to the western coast of US, Australia, China, Japan, and other South-East Asian countries. The Indian Ocean maintains significant and credible presence of oil resources. Since oil will remain one of the biggest resources of energy for the foreseeable future, the supply of gas and oil products from the Central Asian Republics and Middle Eastern Regions will have to be transiting through these ports of Indian Ocean Region.

Significance of Indian Ocean region for US and China

The Indian Ocean is extending eastward from the Persian Gulf, from the East African coast to southward towards the Malay Archipelago and the seashore of Australia³ accompanied by all its water tributaries (Red Sea, Persian Gulf, strait of Hormuz, strait of Malacca, and so on), each of its island and littoral states (Djibouti, Iran, India, Pakistan, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, UAE, Somalia and so on) as well as the non-coastal states for which the passage to the sea mainly towards the Indian Ocean constitutes the Indian Ocean Region⁴. This region is enriched with natural resources, containing proven world's 62% of oil reserves, world's 40% of gold assets, 35% of its natural gas reserves, approx. 60% of its uranium and 80% of the diamonds⁵.

The region is significant for the flow of energy globally and therefore has a major standing when it comes to the supply side of energy⁶. Indian Ocean is also a key transit route for oil supplies from the Persia to Europe⁷ and a large portion of oil is transported to Europe and America through the Suez Canal and the Cape of Good Hope. 20% of the world's oil supply which is approximately 17 million barrels of oil a day and 93% of oil exported from the Gulf States, transported by oil tankers transits through the Strait of Hormuz and into the western reaches of the Indian Ocean⁸. Since the Gulf oil meets nearly 75% of import needs of Asia, due to the importance of this route, now it is known as the 'new silk road.'⁹

After the Second World War, US developed key strategies to dominate the world. The US plan of attesting command over the entire Eurasian locale, with Oceania and African districts going about as peripheries had two key components: the Atlantic Ocean and Europe and second equation was; the Indian Ocean and Asia. The European part of the Eurasian equation was finally solved in 1949 with the

inception of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). Whereas in 1991, the Soviet empire was successfully eradicated which was the foremost obstacle for the dominance of the US¹⁰ and after the disintegration of the USSR, US/NATO got access to tremendous energy assets in Central Asia.

Throughout the Cold War era and until now the US has maintained a key position in the Middle East primarily because of its reliance on the Middle East petroleum resources. To maintain its dominance and hold on natural resources in the region, it has been involved in many wars and regional conflicts in last two decades. The conflicts consumed a great deal of valued national reserves especially at a time of financial crisis globally. "These wars have taken US to problematic and tough economic circumstances as it has had to raise its foreign debt ceiling to US\$16.2 trillion to avoid defaulting"¹¹.

Regardless of financial strains and embarrassment related to armed intervention in Iraq as well as Afghanistan, the United States has remained defiant in pursuing its key objectives, utilizing its political and discretionary mechanical assembly. "The Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia as well as the energy corridors are major areas of interest of the US"¹². As such, the US successfully established its military footprint in the strategic nerve points across Asia by using terrorism and war on terror as a justification for intervention in the IOR. The importance of Indian Ocean cannot be undermined in the entire US grand strategy of affirmation in the whole of Eurasia and the following conflicts. "It is incredibly significant to control Indian Ocean if any power round the globe wants to hold Oceanic regions and Africa under its influence "¹³.The US has maintained closed ties with the coastal nations of the Indian Ocean and its policy involves building good relations within IOR and its littoral nations as focal points.

Aside from its vital hugeness, the Indian Ocean is brimming with common assets, making it a characteristic fascination for the US

as well as for the provincial players such as China. Several years ago when US developed its regional policy, China was not considered as a major threat to regional dominance. In the last decade, the rise of China as a significant force player with large financial and military resources, has presented a genuine challenge to the US predominance in Asia. Besides China, India has come forward as an additional territorial player with worldwide desire and now is improving its capacity building abilities in the Indian Ocean. China and India are major consumers of energy and their energy needs rely upon these ocean paths. As such both India and China are in pursuit of military dominance in the region to take control of the Indian Ocean and its resources.

China has spent heavily to maximize the capacity-building of its forces. It has seriously retained the skills to improve its military tools and equipment especially to strengthen its navy. Robert D. Kaplan, an American military analyst, predicted that the Chinese navy will operate more underwater warheads than the US navy operates today within the next fifteen years¹⁴. In addition, China is the world leading country when it comes to fighter jet projects. They are working on a broad range of fighter jet models from the basic 4th generation jet models to the very advanced stealth bomber fighters belonging to 5th generation.¹⁵ Similarly, India has the fifth largest naval force of the world and within the next fifteen years, it would take third position following the United States and China.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the mounting gradient of China as a huge power player must not be misapprehended and while the US superiority and influence in the region has decreased in the last few years, it is not completely diminished and the US still maintains key alliances in the IOR, in particular with the oil producing nations.

Indian Ocean Region - Important Sea Routes, Straits and Channels and Seaports

The Indian Ocean region consists of 28 countries, and covers 17.5% of global land area and spans across three continents. These states include 21 members of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and Vietnam, Cambodia, the Maldives, Pakistan, Myanmar, Timor-Leste. This region was considered as a home of 35.1 % (approx.) of the world's total population¹⁷.

Any closure or rift between the rising actors on the global framework could choke the most significant global energy supply lines. These important sea routes and choke points of the Indian Ocean that connects Asia, Africa and the Middle East with the rest of America and Europe are:

- i. **Suez Route** connects Red Sea with Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Channel. Bab-al-Mandeb is an important choke point that connects Arabian Sea to Red Sea.
- ii. **Cape Route** links the Atlantic Oceans with Indian Ocean and provides an alternate route for the Suez Canal Route. This route is most significantly used by the bulk carriers and heavy tankers due to depth restraints in the Suez Canal.
- iii. **Straits of Malacca** is considered the most convenient as well as the shortest link between Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.

The Indian Ocean Region has thirty channels and straits in total bordering the Indian Ocean. The important ones are: Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, Bass Strait, Bab-el-Mandeb, Sunda, Lombok, and Bali Straits, Singapore Strait, and Mozambique Channel¹⁸. Whereas IOR has strategic seaports in the region dotted across Asia will play a fundamental role in future due to their multi-faceted nature. Major ports are: Qasim port Karachi, Gwadar, Chennai, Colombo, Jakarta, Chabahar, Hambantota, Kolkata, Mumbai, and Richards Bay. Most of

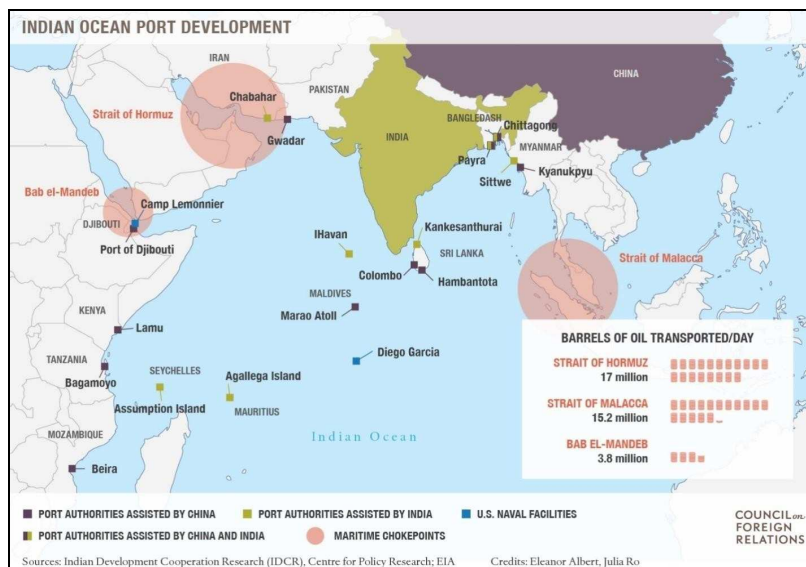
these ports are of significant importance. Some are chief gateways to the landlocked regions while others are crucial choke points for the international sea lanes of communications.

Why is Indian Ocean Region Important?

Big reserves of hydrocarbons have been found in the seaward zones of western Australia, Iran, India and Saudi Arabia. The Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf holds 45% of the world's energy assets. It is estimated that 39.98% (approx.) of the world's oil production comes from the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean also serves as the super expressway for exchanging petroleum products including Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) from this region to the rest of the world.

"The Indian Ocean holds 16.8% of the world's proven oil reserves and 27.9% of proven natural gas reserves. Indian Ocean economies accounted for 17.8% of world gold production and 35.5% of global iron production in 2017"¹⁹. The plenty of natural resources has facilitated growth that is connected to maritime trade. Indian Ocean is a major transportation hub and almost half of the world's sea-borne oil transits through it. Not only that it is a transit route but it also hosts world's top twenty three container ports.

Today, nearly 820 million shipping containers are moving around the globe.²⁰ Container traffic through the region's ports has increased fourfold from 2000 to 2017 but there was a decrease in 2018 and 2019. "According to the 2017 Lloyd's list, the top Indian Ocean container ports are Singapore (34 million TEUs), Port Klang in Malaysia (13 million TEUs), and Dubai (15 million TEUs), Between 2011 and 2017; the average annual growth of container traffic through the leading regional ports of Singapore and Dubai has averaged 2.6% and 3.8%, respectively".²¹



The Strait of Malacca is the second busiest sea lane of communication round the globe and a choke point in the Indian Ocean Region, “80% of Japan’s oil supplies and 60% of China’s oil supplies are shipped through the Straits of Malacca. US\$ 70 billion worth of oil passes through the strait each year”.²² Approximately half containerized world’s traffic passes through the 10-degree channel between the Nicobar Islands and Andaman.

China volumes of good transport through the Indian Ocean locale, represents 16.1% of its all-out merchandise exchange in 2017, up from 4.8% in 2000²³ Where as it is observed that there is a slight decrease in 2019 due to COVID. In comparison, the portion of goods transported has declined by other major exporters through the Indian Ocean regions during the same time period, for example, the EU (16.8% to 12.0%), the US (13.9% to 7.9%), and Japan (14.6% to 6.5%).²⁴

China’s Growing Gas and Oil Demand and Energy Consumption

The economic growth of China has been explosive and rapid in nature and this activity is driven by the energy. In the decades ahead,

it is expected that China's energy needs will continuously be increased. Some future forecasts predict two time increase of their energy consumption in the next three decades ahead. According to some statistics; the oil consumption of China stands at 578 million tons during 2015 with the production of 214 million tons (approx.) and its daily consumption lies 12 MMbbl per day.²⁵ Therefore, to meet its need of daily consumption, China had to import more than 70 % of oil.²⁶ The import rose 10.1% in 2018 and reached 9.25 million barrels of oil consumption per day (bpd).²⁷

China's energy import data shows that it imports Oil supplies from South America, Central America, the Middle East, Russia and West Africa. "China's reliance on oil importation continued climbing in 2018 and accounted for 69.8% of consumption according to a report released by CNPC. It is predicted that 80% of China's crude oil supply will be imported by 2030".²⁸ In 'Outlook 2014' the United States Energy Administration (USEIA) declared that the "China's liquid fuels consumption is predicted to double from its consumption of 10 MMbbl per day in 2010 to about 20 MMbbl per day in 2040"²⁹.

The consumption of gas is huge in China. 60 % of its natural gas imports came from Central Asia while the remaining was supplied from Qatar and Australia. "China's imports of natural gas soared to 125.4 billion cubic meters in 2018, which was a 31.7% year-on-year increase. This indicates that 45.3% of China's gas demand was met by imports in 2018 and it is estimated that China's reliance on imported natural gas will rise to 50% by the end of 2020"³⁰.

China's Global Aspirations, Overseas Investments and International Trade

Viewing through historical perspective, China has been a major trading nation. The ancient Silk Road was used as a key trade route for imports and exports by many traders through China. Currently, the china has been spending and investing in building

ports, infrastructure and railway line projects in those countries around the globe which has strategic importance.

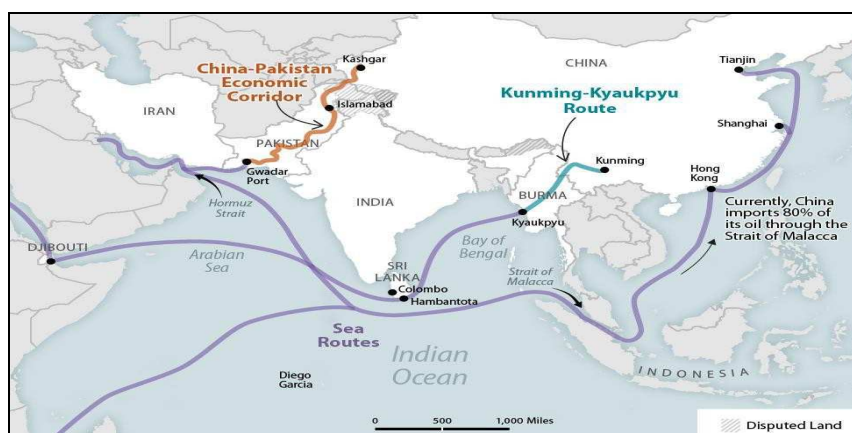
President Xi Jinping suggested two proposals in 2013, namely; the Maritime Silk Route and the Continental Silk Route, in order to fulfil the purpose of greater regional connectivity. These initiatives will expand Chinese influence into two belts; Silk Road Economic Belt and BCIM which would connect Chinese Yunnan and Kashgar province to the Bay of Bengal and the Gwadar port in Pakistan respectively.³¹

The last two decades has seen remarkable economic growth lead by tremendous demand in Chinese produced goods. In just over a period of ten years, "China's foreign trade went from \$2.560 billion in 2005 to an astounding \$4.5Trillion in 2018".³² Most of world's manufacturing hubs were transferred to China primarily because of the cheap labour and ease of materials availability.

Although China has been using the Indian Ocean dating back to the first millennium to approach various parts of Asia and Africa, the significance of these waters has only increased during the past two decades as China became the manufacturing hub for the rest of the world and sought the shortest possible routes to export its products to the global markets to ship the manufacturing good to the rest of the world. In addition, the growing energy needs of China and the presence of natural resources and energy reserves that lie in the shoreline of the ocean has also excited China's interest in the Indian ocean and explore for energy reserves in it.

In recent years, China's investment has seen a considerable jump in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Myanmar. These countries are situated along the shipping routes positioned East- West and considered the main arteries in Indian Ocean for energy supplies to Chinese territory. With the investment of Chinese companies especially in mineral smelters like bauxite and nickel, cement, steel industries and automotive, the country has been strengthening economic engagement in Indonesia.³³ In Myanmar, China is investing

280 million USD for building a deep-water port in the tensed South-Western province Kyaukphyu of Rakhine State.³⁴



Source: Graphic created by CRS. Map and information generated by (name redacted) using data from the South China Morning Post (2017); the Department of State (2015); Esri (2016); and DeLorme (2016).

China has developed strategic and comprehensive economic cooperation with the African nations with key partnerships in the Africa. In East Africa, Chinese investments are principally in the foundation sectors like oil and gas, railroads, ports and such. These projects include from major infrastructure such as Ports to building linkages with business hubs requiring development of streets and railroads. One of the most recent examples of such project is the railroad line linking capital of Ethiopia- Addis Ababa and the Port of Djibouti at a cost of \$3.4 billion.³⁵ Even china funded US\$14.4 billion for three year period (2010-2012) for 14 major infrastructure projects in Djibouti.³⁶

The economic growth and financial development of China has been energized by energy supplies and free progression of seaborne movement, majority of movement is done on the Indian Ocean transportation paths. China is constantly attempting to involve the predominant situations at various sea courses to make sure about is

exchange and furthermore to guard its sea limits. For finishing its one belt one street activities China is working with various nations to manufacture distinctive ocean ports and to keep up its key positions.

As the demand of cheap goods has increased in the last two decades, so is the volume of manufactured goods that are being produced in China and shipped throughout the rest of the world. The balance of trade favours China as many countries attached with the IOR are dependent on China's cheap imports because of its leverage over other countries of globe. China has relied heavily on the sea routes for shipping its products. In 2015, the estimates of world seaborne trade volumes exceeding 10 billion tons³⁷ with an average increase at 2.7 per cent in 2018³⁸, with China contributing a major share of it. China has the world's shipping fleet and its shipping accounts almost 15% share in the world. In 2015, China's trade summed nearly US\$ 4 trillion³⁹ most of which was carried on through waters. China has strong trade ties with its regional countries about 8-9% in 2019 though it is growing at about 10.4% annually.⁴⁰

Most prominently, some of the developed countries within the region like Australia have strong trade ties with China and Australia has intended its exports for China approximately 35%. Outside the IOR, China's trading volumes with other developed countries like Canada, UK, US and other European countries is huge and balance of trade favours China because of its ability to produced cheap goods. Moreover, many developed countries and their corporate companies transferred their manufacturing operations in China where they can make the same products at cheap labour and earn millions in profits versus producing same goods locally.

China has been renewing its relationships with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and establishing long term partnerships intended to boost its trade volume. Chinese investments in Africa has seen billions of dollars invested in recent years on infrastructure projects in several countries and entering into tactical

and strategic partnerships with a number of countries in Africa. In recent years, Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) also increased in other countries of South East Asia like Pakistan and Sri Lanka. China has spending billions of dollars in infrastructure upgrades such as ports and roads.

China Investment in the CPEC Project and Gwadar Port Development in Pakistan

China's Belt and Road Initiative is a major development project that China has commenced to fulfil its dominance in the 21st Century and has named it as Maritime Silk Road (MSR) initiative. This major project of links several intercontinental nation through various rail and road networks as well as sea routes and expands from Central Asia to South Asia and connects to Europe. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a major component of this project which provides access to China's goods to the waters of Indian Ocean through the Port of Gwadar, in Baluchistan.

Under the CPEC project China is building a road network, upgrading Pakistan's seaport of Gwadar by upgrading and building port infrastructure and providing investment for the economic zones along the road network. This strategy is to reduce the challenges from America and India in Indian Ocean, and will secure China's economic and strategic position in Indian Ocean by helping in following manner:

- Firstly, "huge investment of US \$45.6 billion in roads, railways, pipelines, energy and infrastructure would result in immense development in Pakistan"⁴¹. Especially, the remote areas of Baluchistan and KPK would get great value from these projects⁴².
- Secondly, the connectivity of Kashgar with Gwadar would provide a shortened trade route to Chinese imports of products and oil. China imports from Middle East around 60% of its total oil needs and 80% of the oil is traded from

Strait of Malacca which is a volatile trade route. The distance via Malacca Strait is 12,000 Km with additional 3500 Km within China. The route from Gwadar to Kashgar is mere 3000 KM. In this way China would save expenses and time of around US \$2 billion and 12000 Km respectively.⁴³

- Thirdly, China would get an easy access to the Southern Asia, Europe and the Middle East. The eastern side of China is already utilized for trade. Whereas the western China would be connected through the Gwadar port. Fourthly, the strategic goals of China would be materialized and their dream to become the largest economy of the world will accomplish in this manner. China's Power Projection and Stake in Regional Maritime Security.

The growing economic standing of China at large scale globally and in Indian Ocean Region predominantly imposes power projection. China and Russia are both trying to fill the vacuum, in the wake of the perceived declining power of the United States in the future ahead. In internal speeches, President Xi revealed to the senior military officials that China has great focus on becoming a maritime power that "we must adhere to a development path of becoming a rich and powerful state by making use of the Indian Ocean".⁴⁴It is this bearing that has directed ensuing advancements of China to explore the IOR capacities. This was trailed by the thirteenth five-year plan for monetary and social improvement of China (2016–2020) which was put out in the March of 2016.

Realizing the importance of the IOR and its worth in fuelling the engine of China's economic growth, China has been gradually trying to upsurge its dominance in the region. At the occasion of Galle Dialogue in 2012 Commander of East Sea Fleet- Vice Admiral Su Zhiqian said that; "Peace and stability of the Indian Ocean relates to

that of the whole world; freedom and security of navigation on the ocean is vitally important to the restoration of the world economy".⁴⁵

China is also the second biggest worldwide oil buyer. In order to support its monetary development, China's vital needs are to discover oil supplies and secure unrestricted sea passages. These growing monetary and key interests clarify the Chinese emphasis on military presence providing protection to its oil supply cargos along the sea routes from Persian Gulf to China.⁴⁶

Realizing the importance of the Indian Ocean in China's exports and the safety of its cargos, the presence of Chinese warships in the Indian Ocean region has increased in recent years. China's Navy has been countering robbery activities persistently in the Arabian Sea since December 2008. Liu Huaqing of Chinese navy envisioned that; by 2050 the Chinese Navy will become a global force⁴⁷. Another Chinese Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo quoted as saying, "Protecting the economic, political status and occupational safety of overseas is paramount to safeguarding China's domestic economic development and its reform and establishing such protection requires strong naval power like aircraft carrier battlegroups."⁴⁸

China has been immensely expanding its influence in various nations of the IOR shoreline, particularly in East Africa. Most of the governments in these nations seek China's help on a large number of projects and issues. Realizing the importance of these nations and the resources these nations have which can benefit China in the long term, China has adopted a policy of economic, financial and security cooperation. Liu Hongwu, director of the School of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University, said that the "security cooperation will be a key area in future cooperation between China and the African Union, since for many years African countries have asked China to take part in their security processes".⁴⁹

China is assisting the port of Djibouti in building military supporting facilities. The cooperation process will be likely prolonged

and stretched to assist the regular patrolling by the Chinese Naval forces near Africa.⁵⁰ China has already taking part in the anti-piracy escort missions in the region while conducting regular joint naval exercises with its regional countries. The Chinese Navy with their co-partners has also carried out some preeminent assignments to evict the civilians from divisive and troublesome regions. Under the China-UN Peacekeeping mission; evacuation of 225 civilians besides Chinese nationals from Yemen, Libya and other African countries is the example of their High-profile assignments.⁵¹

In the wake of maintaining regional dominance in the IOR and to safeguard interests in the region, China is modernizing its armed forces and rising with a limited show of power to create a more fortunate strategic position with more focus on increase in strength of military forces and resources on a need basis. Ongoing strategic and military activities, in the midst of regularly expanding financial commitment, will stay a foundation of its international strategy as China emerges to enormous force status.

Fears of Indian and American Intervention

China sees the US 'as the key rival to its interests in the Asia-Pacific region. The US has continuously made unending moves intended to build a circle of suppression around China. The past US activities such as, the deployment of the US Nimitz Battle Group in 1996 to the Straits of Taiwan and similar practices led by the US in the Yellow Sea have been seen by China as threats to China's security and tormenting the country into concessions⁵². China has expressed concerns over US activities like the Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI) which required the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to allow US Marines to watch the waters against robbery and psychological warfare.

China is also stressed over the US Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) that permits US work force to board unfamiliar vessel to

prepare for transportation of Weapons for Mass Destruction on the high Seas.⁵³ The US maintains a strong military existence in the IOR to protect its cargos and energy supply vessels and tankers. As a result of its presence in the Indian Ocean, some Chinese tacticians are additionally stressed over a situation where in the US could forbid Chinese energy supplies mainly in the Strait of Malacca.⁵⁴

Some hardliners like PLA Retd. Colonel Liu Mingfu stated that; the naval force of US is a significant danger to China.⁵⁵ US policy has also not taken any part in mitigating the fears but on various occasions, has actually confirmed Chinese perceptions. In a convention in 2015, at the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), Admiral Scott Swift, Commander US Pacific Fleet, referred the Chinese activity in the Spratly Islands as "Today the friction points may be at sea, over the horizon, seemingly held safely at a distance from our day-to-day lives ashore".⁵⁶

China is not only hostile to US in the Indian Ocean but also sees any nation that may present a risk to the renewed interest in the IOR. As India is trying to control the Indian Ocean, it is seen by China as unwelcoming to its interests in the IOR. India's mounting naval force and recent ventures into the Asia-Pacific region, with its gradual but frequent presence in the South East Asia, has further served to elevate Chinese concerns. Some Chinese strategists like Zhang Ming believe that "The Indian Subcontinent is a kin to a massive triangle reaching into the heart of the Indian Ocean, benefiting any from there who seek to control the Indian Ocean".⁵⁷ This observation is further reinforced by the wariness that India displays in its relations with China, which itself are a result of persistent suspicion about Chinese intentions.

Conclusion

After the end of Cold war, China has emerged as the new competitor who is showing its economic and military strength, and challenging the global position of the US. Rapid growth of China in the

last two decades have increased the significance of the Indian Ocean Region as this region is a major source of its energy needs as well as a consumer of its manufacturing goods. In this context, the race to establish control over IOR and its resources is a key element of China's strategy for 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) project which is also known as the 'China's Belt and Road Initiative'. China's future approach and its interest that sets the direction towards IOR assume that the Indian Ocean plays a critical function in China's future development and establishing its predominance among other countries within Asia.

The US strategy in the IOR will be to avoid armed conflict with China and use its alliances and relationships with other nations in the Middle East to keep China's progress limited as long as possible. However, the US administration has publically highlighted China's aggressive behaviour towards other nations competing in bilateral trade as well as using monopoly tactics to bargain its position because of the trade volumes whereby China would dump its domestically produced goods in huge volumes in exchange for a small amount of exported goods brought in country. US has continued to support Taiwan and raised human rights issues of China's treatment of the Uighurs, mostly Muslim, living in north-western China in the region of Xinjiang the forced suppression of the democratic movement in Hong Kong. US has also concerns of China's developing islands for military purposes in the South China Sea and doesn't recognize that territory to be a Chinese traditional land. China has disagreed with US position but remains careful to maintain its international image. US will probably maintain this pressure on China going forward while changing its strategy of regional dominance in the rapidly changing world and the political landscape in the IOR. While a major regional conflict is not possible, the conflicts may lead to small proxies in the region lead by either US or China to support their objectives of regional dominance and show of power to the others.

China's race to dominate IOR and its resources will see growing opposition from the US, as both powers challenge each other and each would like to keep a greater portion of the pie. Looking at the progress made by China in last decade it seems that China has a better strategy in the IOR and it is leading the race with its Belt and Road initiatives which could establish its dominance over US in leading the worldwide trade and this could result in tilting balance of power towards China and a game changer in favour of China that would help pave its dominance in the region.

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