



# VISION

VISIONARY INSIGHTS INTO THE STRATEGIC INQUESTS OF NATIONS

## SVI FORESIGHT

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 6

JUNE 2020

Compiled & Edited by:  
S. Sadia Kazmi

**Strategic Vision**Institute  
Islamabad

# SVI FORESIGHT

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 6  

---

JUNE 2020

**Compiled & Edited by:**  
**S. Sadia Kazmi**



**Strategic Vision Institute (SVI)**

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this edition are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Strategic Vision Institute.

## Strategic Vision Institute (SVI)

---

Strategic Vision Institute (SVI) is an autonomous, multidisciplinary and non-partisan institution, established in January 2013. It is a non-governmental and non-commercial organization, administered by a Board of Governors (General Body) supervised under a Chairperson and administered by a Management Committee headed by a President/Executive Director.

SVI aims to project strategic foresight on issues of national and international import through dispassionate, impartial and independent research, analyses and studies. The current spotlight of the SVI is on the national security, regional and international peace and stability, strategic studies, nuclear non-proliferation, arms control, and strategic stability, nuclear safety and security and energy studies.

## SVI Foresight

---

*SVIForesight* is a monthly electronic journal. It has a multi-disciplinary perspective highlighting on the contemporary strategic and security studies. The Journal is envisioned to be a collection of policy-oriented articles written by its Research Associates, Visiting Faculty and professional experts. The objective is to provide the readership with a concise all-round and real-time policy oriented discourse on contemporary strategic regional and international developments, highlighting their relevance to Pakistan.

## ***Contents***

Editor's Note .....	1
The Battle for Narrative over the Recent India – China Border Standoff	
M Waqas Jan .....	2
Debating the Current Dynamics of Nuclear Deterrence Equilibrium and Strategic Stability in South Asia	
Haris Bilal Malik.....	5
LAC: Avoiding Club and Fist Fight	
Shamsa Nawaz .....	8
Impact of Covid-19 on CPEC	
Irfan Ali.....	12
Future Nuclear Developments in South Asia: Implications for the Strategic Stability	
Sher Bano.....	14
China- India Standoff and Pakistan's Response	
Basma Khalil .....	16
Testing the Boundaries of India's Strategic Backyard	
M Waqas Jan .....	18
The Global Hypersonic Weapons Race and South Asia	
Haris Bilal Malik.....	20
Indo-Nepal Face off: Coercive vs. Soft Power Inter-positioning in Regional Politics	
Shamsa Nawaz .....	23
Sino-American Rivalry: Impact on South Asian Security	
Irfan Ali.....	26
Strategic Implications of Indian Defense Budget 2020-2021	
Sher Bano.....	28
Covid-19: Impact on Pakistan's Cyber Security	
Basma Khalil .....	30



## *Editor's Note*

This issue presents in-depth analyses of the current Indo-China standoff and guides the readers through various dimensions of the crisis. Three opinion articles titled “Battle of Narrative over recent India-China Standoff”, “LAC: Avoiding Club and Fist fight”, and “China-India Standoff and Pakistan’s Response” exclusively looks at the issue and offer unique insight. India’s hawkish and expansionist policies are increasingly coming into clash with its neighbouring state. Nepal, in this regard also came into the limelight with a rift over Lipulekh pass with India. One of the authors included in this issue discusses the “Indo-Nepal Faceoff” in the context of “Coercive vs. Soft power inter-positioning in regional politics”. In addition to these themes, the readers will also find a significant debate on India’s defence budget which was presented in July 2020. It is hoped that readers will find a good blend of articles focusing both on traditional as well as much needed non-traditional security debate. The SVI Foresight team invites and highly encourages the contributions from the security and strategic community in form of opinion based short commentaries on contemporary political, security and strategic issues. Any suggestions for further improvements are welcome at our [contact address](#). Please see [here](#) the copy of SVI Foresight electronic journal. You can find us on [Face book](#) and can also access the SVI [website](#).

Senior Research Associate  
Syedah Sadia Kazmi

# ***The Battle for Narrative over the Recent India – China Border Standoff***

***M Waqas Jan***

As news of the recent India-China border standoff continues to dominate headlines, there is a growing sense of unease which extending beyond the region is being felt across the globe. This holds all the more importance considering that while this unsettled border dispute goes as far back as the 1962 Sino-Indian War, its potential as a major flashpoint remains all the more threatening when taking into account the pervading uncertainty that has come to characterize an evolving world order. Be it as a result of the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, the highly polarized yet impending US elections, or the great power rivalries that have unfolded from the much touted 'Rise of China'; an international system in flux represents perhaps one of the most dangerous contexts against which Chinese and Indian soldiers have come face to face at an unprecedented scale since last month. Further adding

Further adding to this complexity is the fact that this faceoff, while unfolding in one of the remotest and least accessible regions in the world, is already fraught with its own difficulties when ascertaining ground realities. With both countries' militaries exercising strict control over the movement of people and information around their disputed borders, verifying each countries' claims and counter-claims regarding recent developments has almost been impossible. In the absence of any on ground media reports the standoff is as much a battle over narrative as it is about projecting force over a disputed border. A border which being 14,000 ft above sea level high in the Himalayas, stretches for more than 3,000 kms with areas that have remained undefined for decades.

Hence, the only reports that have come of the violent scuffles that have taken place are from either official statements, or from the grainy videos and stills shot by soldiers currently doing the rounds on social media. In the case of the latter, these videos too are more than likely to have been released only by official military sources after careful consideration of what message such footage is likely to convey both at home and abroad. Thus, communicating one's resolve and stance as part of a broader war over narrative where the battle-space moving beyond the remoteness of Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh extends across already volatile international news cycles and social media platforms.

Especially considering how these (as yet) non-lethal border scuffles have led to a significantly heightened military presence from both countries, the last few days have witnessed a highly targeted level of military posturing from both sides. While the initial response from both countries' foreign ministries was to downplay tensions whilst highlighting their long-established consultation and dispute resolution mechanisms; last week's



unprecedented meeting between high ranking brass from both sides marks the first time senior military generals at the corps commander level were required to help defuse tensions. A practice that has otherwise usually been carried by local tactical level commanders in the past. Even more worrying is the fact that both sides came out with seemingly different interpretations of the above meeting with Indian officials offering a more conciliatory tone while Beijing appears to be quite publicly aiming to set a new precedent with regard to managing such disputes with India.

This is further evident in the varying ways in which this standoff has been covered by the highly nationalist and tightly controlled media across both India and China. For instance, since the above referred meeting as well as other diplomatic engagements in the last couple of weeks, coverage of the standoff in Indian media reports has since offered a more conciliatory tone. This stands in stark contrast to the way the standoff had been initially covered across India where the same nationalist fervor and jingoism usually reserved for Pakistan was on full display against China. Videos of Indian soldiers pelting Chinese jeeps with rocks, maps outlining disputed boundaries and troop deployments, satellite imagery showing the recent construction of Chinese military infrastructure, as well as footage from past incidents such as from the 2017 Doklam standoff were all used to paint a picture of pre-meditated Chinese aggression that was being righteously challenged by a rising India. The last few days however have seen a greater emphasis being laid on mutual disengagement and the 'retreat' of Chinese forces from positions where troops from both sides were eyeball to eyeball for almost an entire month.

On the other side, coverage of the standoff in Chinese media instead continues to emphasize China's military superiority and technological prowess as the key to its power projection capabilities. At least that is what appears from the latest action movie style footage of the PLA's high-altitude, night time infiltration exercise that was recently carried out in Tibet. The exercise's timing, location and choice of tactics and equipment leave little doubt as to who such posturing was being directed towards. Similarly, the PLA's latest 'mobilization maneuver' which was conducted just two days after the high level military meeting represents a clear reference to India's own long known mobilization challenges. An aspect which while long evident in India's recent confrontations with Pakistan, has been discussed at length in the latest iterations of India's own military doctrines. In addition, there has also been a concerted effort from Chinese commentators to de-link the dispute from any third-party interests such as those of the US. Thus, not only shunning offers of US mediation but emphasizing the importance of such dispute resolution mechanisms remaining well within India and China's bilateral relationship.

At the moment, with both countries eager and willing to step back from any risks of further escalation, there is nevertheless a definite trend that has emerged in terms of the increasing frequency and severity of such border standoffs between both powers. It appears

that there is still a lingering sense of unease from the 2017 Doklam standoff during which (state sponsored) media from both sides had accused each other of needlessly sensationalizing such incidents. This time however, while Indian media attempts to restrain itself from the jingoistic saber-rattling it almost instinctively resorts to when reporting on its border conflicts (such as those with Pakistan), China seems to be following a carefully calibrated strategy of aggressive military posturing in addition to its long-standing diplomatic engagements with India. Both countries' approaches thus belie a starkly changed geo-political context which despite all previous attempts to downplay such tensions has increasingly become a matter of preserving one's prestige and credibility – even if the fight is limited to simply dominating the narrative for the time being.

<http://southasiajournal.net/the-battle-for-narrative-over-the-recent-india-china-border-standoff/>



## *Debating the Current Dynamics of Nuclear Deterrence Equilibrium and Strategic Stability in South Asia*

*Haris Bilal Malik*

The debate around the existence of nuclear deterrence equilibrium and its relevance vis-à-vis strategic stability in the South Asian region has been a dominant regional and global concern over the last few years. Several factors, such as conventional asymmetry, burgeoning arms race, and India's gradual shift in its nuclear doctrine, all have collectively created a dangerous atmosphere of instability throughout the region. Pakistan has faced significant challenges in recent years as a result of Indian conventional and unconventional military preparedness and its preemptive war strategies. Specifically, this has been characterized in the absence of a non-proliferation regime and crisis stability mechanism in South Asia. Moreover, India's military modernization drive and provocative strategies have served as the destabilizing factors that adversely affect the contemporary dynamics of credible nuclear deterrence in South Asia. These factors have contributed to the creation of an action-reaction spiral between India and Pakistan. All this would likely have long-lasting implications for regional security, stability, and strategic equilibrium.

In addition to its conventional force posture enhancement, India's military modernization is also aspired to maintain a provocative and offensive counterforce posture at the unconventional level. In this regard, it would be quite significant to consider the recent technological advancements carried out by India at the unconventional level aimed at enhancing the preemption capabilities. Capabilities such as the development of supersonic and hypersonic missiles, acquisition of missile defence systems with enhanced range, nuclear submarines to ensure second-strike capability, and to achieve presence in space for intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance (ISR) purpose. Furthermore, the anti-satellite (ASAT) weapon test, which India conducted in March 2019, is also evidence of enhancing such capabilities. With these advancements, it seems that India is deliberately trying to undermine the nuclear deterrence framework in the region.

The notion of splendid first strike based on preemption, under the nuclear scenario, is proclaimed as a 'new normal' by Indian strategic circles. Evidence comes from how India's political and military leadership has recurrently threatened Pakistan with such preemptive strikes rhetoric on different occasions. Coming to the doctrinal level, India's much-hyped Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) of 2004 and the recent Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces (JDIAF) released in 2017 and the Land Warfare Doctrine (LWD) released in 2018 provide documented evidence of India's provocative war strategies and notions of preemption against Pakistan. India also believes that such provocations would likely remain below Pakistan's

nuclear threshold. These doctrinal notions are immensely important to be considered when the situation in the disputed territory of the Kashmir is to be analyzed. In this regard, the Pulwama-Balakot crisis and the resultant military escalation between Indian Pakistan in February 2019 have already highlighted the complexity of the situation.

The current state of strategic stability in South Asia, which is primarily based on nuclear deterrence equilibrium, faces considerable challenges arising from India's offensive proactive strategies. In such circumstances, Pakistan would likely continue to face a major threat coming from its eastern border. An equation of conventional asymmetry in South Asia has encouraged India to embark upon a limited conventional war against Pakistan. This equation, as per Indian estimates would not challenge the threshold of Pakistan's nuclear capability. Consequently, Pakistan has continued to rely on nuclear weapons to overcome this asymmetry in case of any limited war or breach of its sovereignty. In this regard, Pakistan's nuclear deterrence has effectively been able to cover various spectrums of threats. The doctrinal evolution witnessed 'full spectrum deterrence' FSD in line with the 'credible minimum deterrence'. This deterrence approach is aimed at deterring India from all types of conventional or unconventional aggression against Pakistan.

Pakistan, being a relatively smaller state with limited resources and conventionally at a disadvantageous position considers its nuclear capability as an economically viable option to deter India. Pakistan's nuclear capability has no doubt created stable deterrence equilibrium in the region to serve the purpose of desired strategic stability. Moreover, based on India centric threat perception, Pakistan's 'full spectrum deterrence' was ensured with the operationalization of the tactical nuclear weapons. At present, nuclear deterrence equilibrium in South Asia, guaranteed by Pakistan's nuclear capabilities would likely dissuade India to indulge in a low-intensity conflict with Pakistan. Having taken such effective measures, Pakistan has proven its resolve to restore the long-desired peace and prosperity in the region. However, Pakistan would preserve its territorial integrity and sovereignty at any cost even if it is in disparity with India's hegemonic strategic objectives.

The South Asian contemporary security environment is continuously in a state of flux due to India's provocative strategies and hegemonic aspirations. Likewise, the conventional asymmetry in South Asia has compelled Pakistan to maintain a reliable nuclear deterrence posture based on the principle of credible deterrence. The fact remains that, Pakistan's nuclear deterrence is only India specific and is not aspired to be an offensive or provocative doctrinal posture. Therefore, it is critically important for Pakistan to maintain a stable and credible nuclear deterrence posture. Moreover, Pakistan needs to remain compliant with its assertive principled stance that its nuclear capability is purely a response to India's nuclear weapons program as well as its provocative conventional strategies. For this purpose, an apparent manifestation of Pakistan's nuclear doctrinal posture coupled with technological sophistication



seems to be a plausible policy. This would likely ensure a credible nuclear deterrence equilibrium and stability of the region.

<https://foreignpolicynews.org/2020/06/13/debating-the-current-dynamics-of-nuclear-deterrence-equilibrium-and-strategic-stability-in-south-asia/>



## ***LAC: Avoiding Club and Fist Fight***

***Shamsa Nawaz***

Though ensured that the differences will not escalate into disputes, inconclusive but unprecedented Lieutenant General-level talks were held at Chushal on June 6, 2020, between India and China, declaring the disengagement of their troops and infantry combat vehicles in the Eastern Ladakh area, started from early June. Both moved back their forces to 2.5 km, with China's People's Liberation Army restraining itself in Galwan area, Patrolling Point 14, 15 and 17 (Hot Springs) north bank of Pang Tso and Chushul area out of the five areas of conflict. Chushul still has to be declared in the public domain. While keeping all the hotlines open, it was also decided to continue with the lower commanders meetings more frequently. The Chinese foreign Minister's spokesperson, Mr. Hu Chunying has also declared that "the diplomatic and military channels of China and India held effective communication on the situation along the border and reached positive consensus."

With the Chinese having a deployment of fighter bombers, Rocket forces, air defence radars, jammers etc at a few km from the Line of Actual Control( LAC), where does the actual issue lie? Will both be able to halt any major build up or maintain the status quo ante April 2020 and continue to seize the tactical gains in piecemeal? After all, Doklam Pateau is in control of China. China, India and Bhutan do not agree where their borders meet. Similarly, the standoff continues in the contested Fingers area on the north bank of Pangong Tso where Chinese troops are not allowing Indian patrols beyond Finger 4 — it is 8 km west of Finger 8 which India says denotes LAC.

These recurrences of episodic conflicts; Depsang 2013, Chumar 2014 and Doklam 2017, are however, all peddled by the differing perceptions on strategic and political interests of both China and India. Launched in 1991, a marked strategic shift in India's foreign policy; the Look East Policy extends India's economic and strategic linkages in Southeast Asia to solidify its regional influence. It is undoubtedly aimed at counterweighing China in the region with the aligned support of US. Similarly, a competitive defence force in the border areas by both India and China is keeping the paradox in peace alive. The Indian Army has moved its battalions of three Infantry Divisions, based in Leh, forward but the country is also looking for a quick diplomatic resolution. Significantly, Chinese President Xi Jinping also asked the People's Liberation Army to scale up battle preparedness during the parliamentary session being held in Beijing. The region of South Asia, hosting the flagship project of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is particularly destabilized in this atmosphere of "fist and club fight."

Nonetheless, the question remains if it would step up into a full-fledged armed conflict in these difficult times of COVID 19. Any dissection and understanding of the consequential

implications of the current standoff in view of the historical, political and the geographical configuration of the border between India and China is mandatory. Unlike mutually agreed Line of Control (LoC) between Pakistan and India, the LAC is neither clarified nor confirmed by the two countries. Except for the middle sector, even the mutual exchange of maps about their respective perceptions has not taken place between India and China. This has led to different perceptions of the LAC for the two sides, and soldiers from either side try to patrol the area up to their perception of the LAC. Essentially, what Indians believe to be 'their side' is not the same as what the Chinese believe to be 'their side'.

Divided in three sectors, the LAC falls in the western sector and falls in the union territory of Ladakh. It is 1597 km long. India tried to launch itself in the region by constructing 225 km long Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) all weather road. It is less than 10 km west of the LAC at Aksai Chin with a significant strategic importance. It connects Leh to DBO, virtually at the base of the Karakoram Pass that separates China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region from Ladakh. DBO is the northernmost corner of Indian Territory in Ladakh, with the world's highest airstrip. The Indian Air Force (IAF) revived it in 2008, as one of its many Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) along the LAC, with the landing of an Antonov An-32.

In August 2013, the IAF once again landed its newly acquired Lockheed Martin C-130J-30 transport aircraft at the DBO ALG, doing away thereafter with the need to send helicopters to paratroop supplies to Army formations deployed along the disputed frontier.

On the other hand, the Chinese build-up along the Galwan River valley region overlooks, and hence poses a direct threat to the DSDBO road. It is to the West of DSDBO where China enjoins the Gilgit-Baltistan area of Pakistan. This is very critical for the flagship project of

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), to which India is unjustifiably objecting persistently.

The unprecedented high levels of tension at multiple locations in eastern Ladakh on the disputed India-China border owes also much to India's increasing infrastructural developments in the border areas of Ladakh as well. China is particularly sensitive about the Indian activity around Galwan as well. This leads us to dig into the comparative force posture of both the countries.

Hence, an eyeball to eyeball situation at two places in Ladakh, with strong statements coming from both sides, can't be interpreted as an auspicious situation. During his comments in Mandarin Tuesday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has once again reiterated that "Chinese border troops are committed to upholding peace and tranquility in China-India border areas. At the same time, we will resolutely defend the sovereignty and security of our homeland."



# INDIA & CHINA- MILITARY COMPARISON

SUBJECTS	INDIA	CHINA
TOTAL MILITARY PERSONNEL	3,462,500	2,693,000
DEFENCE BUDGET (USD)	\$ 55.2 BN	\$ 224 BN
TOTAL AIRCRAFT	2,082	3,187
HELICOPTERS	692	1,004
FIGHTERS/INTERCEPTORS	520	1,222
ATTACK AIRCRAFT/HELICOPTERS	694/17	1,564/281
TANK STRENGTH	4,184	13,050
ARMORED FIGHTING VEHICLES	2,815	40,000
TOTAL NAVAL ASSETS	295	714
SUBMARINES	16	76



SOURCE: [WWW.GLOBALFIREPOWER.COM](http://WWW.GLOBALFIREPOWER.COM)

**TIMES  
NOW** ACTION  
BEGINS  
HERE  
[TIMESNOWNEWS.COM](http://TIMESNOWNEWS.COM)

Both China and India are nuclear states sharing a 2,167 mile long border. Together their populations are about 2.7 billion, more than a third of the world's total population live in the two countries. Both have achieved speedy economic development in recent decades. India has significantly expressed its territorial ambitions not only in the border areas but is also denying the long standing rights to its own people such as, by revocation of Article 370 of its own constitution which provided independent status to the Indian Occupied Kashmir. Ending of inconclusive dialogue between the two states in the throes of aggressive presence, statements and ambitions by India is particularly destabilizing for the South Asian region. More so, the premise of bilateral issues of the two countries is now multi-pronged. The anti-China



institutionalization for competitive national interest of US in the region is further worsening the situation. Emboldening one against other can cause immense damage not only to the region, but to the entire world.

<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/06/14/lac-avoiding-club-and-fist-fight/>

## *Impact of Covid-19 on CPEC*

*Irfan Ali*

The world has been going through the most fatal, dangerous and disastrous pandemic, i.e. Covid-19. The social, political, economic, and financial structure of the whole world has been massively disturbed because of Coronavirus. Since December last year the pandemic has halted the smooth running of most of the sectors all over the world. Therefore, projects and development works have been experiencing hardships and hurdles in their successful implementation. Because of the disturbance created by the spread of Coronavirus the projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) also face delays. Pakistan, just as most of the nations of the world, also announced lockdown amid the spread of deadly virus. Resultantly the CPEC projects were also stopped because of the absence of local labour who were forced to stay at home to avoid further spread of Covid-19. In addition, the government of Pakistan also announced the travel restrictions which hindered the availability of Chinese workforce from travelling.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, the recent statistics portray that Covid-19 is spreading rapidly throughout the country. The patients of Coronavirus have crossed the one lac mark which is quite an alarming situation for the country. In this regard, the government is very much concerned about the impact of Covid-19 on the construction of the projects under the CPEC. However, the antagonists of CPEC are criticizing the CPEC projects. They believe that Coronavirus will spread through the CPEC projects if works continue on them. Thereby serving as a source of spread of Coronavirus. Nonetheless both the Chinese and Pakistan governments are committed to continuing the work over CPEC projects with the same pace as before Covid-19.

Since the outbreak and fast spread of Coronavirus both the Chinese and Pakistani governments have remained very much conscious about the CPEC projects and hindrances faced by multiple projects amid the Covid-19. Despite the challenging conditions, the government of China is committed to restarting work over the development projects under BRI. Furthermore, it is confident that once the crisis is over, Chinese BRI will lead the global economic recovery. Many countries have benefitted throughout the world from building of the “Health Silk Road” by China. When the world was suffering from the global shortage of medical supplies, Beijing was providing help to various nations in the form of medical equipment and protective gears despite challenging circumstances in China that increased the trust of countries in China.

In this regard, on 02 April 2020, the Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan called the meeting of the National Coordination Committee (NCC) to discuss the Covid-19 situation in the



country and its impacts on the economy. In the meeting the NCC decided for the opening of CPEC projects with the resolve that their progress on project should remain unaffected by the pandemic. In that meeting, Pakistan's PM Imran Khan reviewed the overall situation of the spread of Covid-19 throughout the country. However, an increase in the number of Coronavirus patients in the country caused PM Imran Khan to decide to open the work on the projects of CPEC, including the opening of the construction industry. Similarly, Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi (Pakistan Ambassador to China) while talking to China Global Television Network (CGTN) said that because of the coordination, cooperation and struggles of both China and Pakistan, 90 per cent of the first phase of CPEC was completed and remaining projects would be completed soon. She further explained that Pakistan would complete all the projects under CPEC on time amid Covid-19 because all the preventive measures were taken by the government to decrease and stop the spread of pandemic.

As PM Imran Khan has stated multiple times that virus is not going anywhere, people have to live with virus adhering to the SOPs otherwise the survival of nations like Pakistan is too difficult because of its weak economic conditions and instability. If all industries, factories, and development works remain closed for extended time period, Pakistan's economy will collapse and people will die of unemployment and hunger. Therefore, the government of Pakistan is in full consultation with the government of China as well as companies working on the CPEC projects. In this regard, Pakistan's government has also taken effective measures to provide full protection to the Chinese workforce working on CPEC. In addition, the Chinese workers who are returning to Pakistan have to undergo double quarantine system for their safety as well as the safety of other workers.

For further strengthening of CPEC, both countries have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with regard to increasing cooperation in areas such as healthcare, education, technology and agriculture under the ambit of CPEC. Furthermore, Gwadar, the key port project of CPEC remained operational during Coronavirus and is functioning well. The primary reason behind the functioning of Gwadar Port is the local employs and a limited number of Chinese staff. Nonetheless, Covid-19 has vastly impacted the global shipping, and most possibly Gwadar Port would not remain unaffected. For now, it is operating well as several ships have dropped by at the Gwadar port. Despite these challenging circumstances owing to Coronavirus, both Beijing and Islamabad are working hard to minimize the effects of a pandemic in an effort to keep the progress on the CPEC project remain unaffected.

<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/06/15/impact-of-covid-19-on-cpec/>



## ***Future Nuclear Developments in South Asia: Implications for the Strategic Stability***

*Sher Bano*

The rapid modernization of strategic weapons in South Asia has become the cause of increasing rivalry between India and Pakistan. With India's quest to achieve nuclear triad that includes the development of submarine launched ballistic missile, land based ballistic missiles and fighter bomber aircrafts; it aspires to attain the global power status. India in order to strengthen its nuclear force is rigorously working on building strong naval force and is also developing short range ballistic missiles that are nuclear in nature. India is also expanding its capabilities in the outer space by developing its fleet of satellites and is building anti-satellite missiles that can be used for both military and civilian purposes. This shift in India's nuclear posture along with strategic modernization will pose a huge threat to Pakistan's nuclear threshold and will increase the risk of nuclear escalation in South Asia.

On January 8, top Government officials of India said "The BMD program has been completed". Under this program India has developed homegrown ballistic missile defense (BMD). DRDO and IAF are now looking for the government's approval in order to activate and install the system. But according to the sources the complete installation of the system will still take three to four years. This air defense system was tow tiered, PAD (Prithvi Air Defense) and PDV (Prithvi Defense Vehicle) interceptors are the first layer that is designed to destroy the missiles that are at exo-atmospheric altitude of 50-180 kilometers. Single stage solid rocket propelled AAD/Ashin interceptor is the second layer that is designed to destroy enemy missiles coming from endo atmosphere at the altitude of 15-40 kilometers. This BMD system of India can reportedly intercept medium range ballistic missiles. Even though ballistic missiles are used for defensive purposes but in South Asian region these developments will further increase the security dilemma for Pakistan. The Indian leadership and military might get false sense of security from this and they might launch an offensive operation against Pakistan. In response to this Pakistan has already developed Ababeel (surface to surface ballistic missile) that has a range of 2200 kilometers. But still India has a technological edge over Pakistan due to its indigenous developments and India's ambitious goals of increasing its military capabilities are also quite threatening for the strategic stability of the region.

In order to attain the assured second strike capability and complete its nuclear triad, India will be spending massive amounts of money to strengthen its naval nuclear force. According to its current defense budget India would be spending US \$14 billion on the development of Arihant class Submarine fleet and mobile Agni-V intercontinental ballistic missile. India has also successfully tested the k-4 missile that has the range of 3500 km with

help of which India can target Pakistan from much safer distance. It is further working on the development of k-5 (5000km) and k-6 (6000km). In order to counter India's growing submarine capabilities Pakistan has developed Babur-3 with MIRV capabilities. India and Pakistan being the most important actors in the Indian Ocean Region would determine the future of IOR that whether it would remain peaceful or not. The Indian Naval nuclearization will become the cause of disturbing the strategic balance of the region. It would initiate arms race in the region and will increase the risk of nuclear engagement.

India is also rapidly enhancing its space related technologies which will be very alarming for the regional and global peace. On March 27, 2019 India successfully conducted anti-satellite missile test (ASAT). India tested this missile by destroying one of its own satellite located about 300 kms above the earth's surface. Indian space program started in 1960s and has developed with the passage of time. Since 2016 India has been working robustly on its cruise missile related technologies and other space launch vehicles. India also collaborated with its ally Israel in order to get all such weapon systems and technologies to counter Pakistan's cruise and ballistic missile deterrence. Even though India claims that operation "Shakti" was defensive in nature, it can have huge impact on the strategic stability of the region. Pakistan has variety of ways to deliver nuclear devices but the cruise missile and ballistic missile capabilities still are the fundamental means. With ASAT capabilities, India now has a tested technology with which it can kinetically destroy the incoming offensive ballistic missiles. This successful test can also motivate the Indian scientific and strategic community to move from NFU (No First Use) to FU (First Use), which is an ongoing debate in India. Moreover, India's overconfidence in its ability to destroy Pakistan's ballistic missiles could motivate India to go for more offensive preventive or preemptive nuclear strike.

In the absence of any regional arms control mechanism, the South Asian strategic circumstances will further deteriorate and will move toward a complete gridlock. With the increasing unconventional and conventional imbalances, deterrence stability of the region is under a lot of pressure. Moreover, the nuclear threshold is becoming blur and chances of war have increased.

<http://southasiajournal.net/future-nuclear-developments-in-south-asia-implications-upon-the-strategic-stability/>



## ***China- India Standoff and Pakistan's Response***

***Basma Khalil***

China and India have a history of border disputes with each other. In 1962, both countries found themselves in war over fringe of Aksai Chin. Later in 1967 pressures raised as a result of Nathu La and Cho La military conflicts at the Himalayan border. Similar incident occurred which almost looked like a military stalemate in 2017 at Doklam. Recently, China and India engaged in a border skirmish at the Galwan River valley where India constructed a road. China claims Galwan River as part of Chinese territory. The dispute formally started in first week of May 2020 along the Himalayan region of Ladakh but had been taking shape over the past few weeks, at multiple locations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC); a facto border, raising tensions between the two nuclear-armed neighbors.

Both the states claim certain areas along the LAC, which contributes to the border clashes between them. In this clash the major concern of China is to stop India from building road infrastructure and increasing military concentration along the LAC. Heavy military concentration can pose a threat to the trade routes because such road infrastructure can increase Indian access and movement towards LAC. Across the LAC Aksai Chin is an important connector between Xinjiang and Tibet for China. It has certain importance as trade routes of BRI and is equally important for CPEC project. In the recent standoff, troopers from the two sides have camped out outdoors in the Galwan Valley in the high-elevation Ladakh setting, over the intrusion by Indian forces in the contested fringe. On both sides of LAC, India and China have burrowed down emplacements. Chinese trucks are moving its arms into the zone which is raising apprehension of a long faceoff. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson's office stated that China has committed to provide the security to its national territorial sovereignty and will also ensure peace and stability in the China-India border areas.

To resolve and to control border dispute, military talks between Indian and Chinese commanders have failed. Observing this situation the US President offered to mediate between China and India but China rejected Trump's offer for mediation saying that there was "no need for a third-party intervention". Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian also said that China and India can mutually resolve their issue through dialogue and consultation between them. He also stressed that there is proper border related mechanism and communication between China and India. In Sunday's release on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2020, Indian authorities stated that; to ensure peace and tranquility in the border areas both countries agreed to continue the military and diplomatic engagements

In the whole scenario it will be logical to see how Pakistan reacted to the situation. As a matter of fact, there was no considerable response which came out from Pakistani side but as



an ally state to China; it was obvious that Pakistan will show its support for China. It was evident in the statement of foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi where he said that China cannot remain ignorant towards India's illegal constructions of roads in Ladakh. He also warned about India's aggressive behavior towards its neighbors that could put regional peace and security at stake. Prime Minister of Pakistan also criticized the Modi regime and Hindutva Ideology and expansionist policies of India. He stated that India's aggressiveness is a threat to India's neighbors. India has border disputes with Nepal, China, and Pakistan and is being constantly threatened with false flag operation. Such continuous arrogant behavior will not be tolerated. These statements from the senior leadership of Pakistan are an effort to awaken international community and be vigilant about Indian actions. India is being encrusted with embarrassment at every level and the best policy it has adopted to divert attention from all these issues is to take action against Pakistan, to win hearts of Hindu nation through anti-Pakistan policies and hide their failures. Keeping in view the nature of present Indian government, DG ISPR stated that; "Indian aggression aimed towards Pakistan will be responded with full capacity and no one should have doubt about this". We are ready to respond in any situation that India might create. Mainly the concerns of Pakistan is to preserve its internal and external security and sovereignty and the other to reserve its triumph in terms of CPEC as a party to Chinese great economic project and security of CPEC is the biggest concern of Pakistan and China. The illegitimate constructions by India are biggest concern for China especially because it's a security threat for China's road networks of Belt and road Initiative and CPEC as well.

<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/06/16/china-india-standoff-and-pakistans-response/>

## *Testing the Boundaries of India's Strategic Backyard*

*M Waqas Jan*

For a country that has since its inception based its very identity on resisting external pressures and influence, India has itself maintained a policy of playing a highly dominant role within its own immediate neighborhood. As the self-appointed heir to the British Raj, India has used this approach to consistently consolidate its influence over the entire South Asian landscape by successfully limiting the role of extra-regional players. This holds particularly true following the Post War and Cold War eras, where India's commitment to non-alignment has since served as a defining characteristic of its foreign policy. Hence, while the likes of Pakistan, China and Afghanistan have remained a different story; India has for the better part of a century enjoyed free reign over directly influencing and dominating its smaller Eastern neighbors with minimal outside interference. Countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in whom India has fostered a deep entrenched economic and military dependence stand as some of the most pertinent examples of what India has long carved out as its 'strategic backyard.'

However, bolstered by its rapid economic rise over the last three decades, India has since been aspiring towards what it perceives as even further greatness. In doing so it has sought to considerably expand its role and influence beyond its immediate peripheries. For instance, the diplomatic inroads India has been consistently seeking in the Middle East/Persian Gulf to its West, and in the ASEAN states and Japan further East, present one of the clearest indications of these aspirations. They represent India's attempts at consolidating past gains whilst envisioning an even greater role for itself outside of South Asia. Thus, laying the foundations for effectively projecting power beyond the Arabian and Andaman Seas.

There is however a certain catch to this that is worth discussing. While India's desires for more expansive influence might be justified as a logical consequence of its great power ambitions, they present a serious challenge to its historically non-aligned approach to diplomacy. The above mentioned diplomatic in-roads India has sought into the Middle East, as well as in East and South-East Asia have taken place under the direct aegis of the last few US administrations. They also just happen to be in geo-strategic areas where the US has historically remained a major power broker. As such there has been a steadily growing alignment with US interests and foreign policy, which to no one's surprise coalesces almost perfectly with the latter's China Containment Policy.

Yet, whereas India's dominant influence within its immediate periphery was built on its own commitment to non-alignment and limiting the influence of extra-regional actors, India's forays outside of South Asia have been arguably built directly on US endorsements. Be it in the form of Mr. Modi's Link West policy or his Act East policy, there lies an inescapable correlation



with US interests in spite of however many times the word bilateral gets thrown in. In other words, pointing to India's eventual succumbing to that very Faustian Pact which its age-old legacy of non-alignment was to meant to safeguard against.

If some of the most recent developments coming out of South Asia are of any indication, then India as a result of this policy shift has directly given way to the entry of great power competition in its own backyard. It has in essence made the much vaunted threat of Chinese encirclement (String of Pearls) a self-fulfilling prophecy. What's more, India's increasingly hardline attitude, and its new-found confidence in overtly pushing through with its expansionist and hegemonic agenda, has only further played into Chinese hands. At the diplomatic level, all that Mr. Modi's electorally driven foreign policy has done by annexing J&K, and through his religiously driven immigration reforms, is present China as an even more attractive alternative to an intolerant and increasingly myopic Indian leadership.

The recent map controversy with Nepal, growing security and immigration disputes with Bangladesh, the ghosts of Sri Lanka's Tamil insurgency having returned in the form of ISIS, and the lingering tensions with Bhutan over Doklam all represent a dangerously fast-growing list of grievances that require a more tactful appeal to diplomacy. Add to that the ongoing border standoff with China, and there lies the opportunity for an unprecedented near collective rebuke of India's credibility and power projection capabilities right within its strategic backyard.

Hence, where India had once enjoyed a near unchallenged acceptance of its role as a regional power, India's newfound aggressiveness, poor timing and complete detachment from the reality of the situation have in a short time considerably rolled back years of diplomatic efforts and hard-won gains. Its as if Mr. Modi and his cabinet's own hubris and growing exceptionalism has almost mirrored the failures of 'America First' by squandering away age-old allies and friends. What's worse, he has put himself in a desperate position where if even if he is forced to back down now due to international pressure, he would be facing political suicide considering the violent fervor and radicalism he himself has whipped up.

No matter how his government spins the tale of a victimized India warding off Chinese aggression and encirclement, the consequences of Mr. Modi's electorally driven sabre rattling are thus, still primarily of his own making.

<http://southasiajournal.net/testing-the-boundaries-of-indias-strategic-backyard/>



## *The Global Hypersonic Weapons Race and South Asia*

*Haris Bilal Malik*

Over the last few years, some of the prominent nuclear powers in the world have been involved in a race to develop hypersonic weapons. Countries like the US, Russia, and China have up till now developed hypersonic weapons systems comprised mainly of hypersonic cruise missiles (HCMs) and hypersonic glide vehicles (HGVs). In South Asia, India too aspires to develop hypersonic weapons aimed at enhancing its offensive counterforce military capabilities and achieving the status of great power. Given the evolved nuclear weapons dynamics, the emergence of hypersonic weapons seems to be significant for international security architecture. In this regard, the race in hypersonic weapons would likely serve as the destabilizing factor as it would provoke a new global arms race. Furthermore, it would also likely trigger the development of laser weapons, hypersonic anti-missile systems, and unmanned delivery systems as a first strike option at the global and regional levels.

In the year 2011, the US had reportedly launched its first Advanced Hypersonic Weapon (AHW); a glide vehicle that successfully hit the target at a range of 3700 kilometers. In another landmark achievement, the US also developed Falcon Hypersonic Technology Vehicle, capable of Mach 20 speed. In addition to this, the Hypersonic Air-Breathing Weapon Concept (HAWC) missile is also under development, having a speed of Mach 5.

The said weapon came into the spotlight when recently on June 10 it was accidentally dropped by a US strategic bomber during a trail. US hypersonic weapons program also includes the development of Tactical Boost Glide (TBG) vehicle, which is believed to be in response to Russia's Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle, and the HyRAX unmanned craft projects respectively. With these developments, the US aims to neutralize both Russia's and China's significant developments being carried out in this sphere for the last few years.

In the same vein, Russia is known to have developed and deployed a hypersonic glide vehicle Avangard that too can reach an incredible speed of Mach 20. Moreover, Russia has developed 'KH-47M2 Kinzhal' hypersonic cruise missile with a reported range of 1200 kilometers and capable of achieving Mach 10 speed. China's hypersonic weapons inventory comprises of; DF-ZF hypersonic glide vehicle compatible with DF-17 ballistic missiles capable of reaching Mach 10, the weapons are expected to be operational by end 2020.

Also, China is reportedly developing air-launched CH-AS-X-13 missile, speculated to achieve a speed of Mach 10 speed with a range of up to 1500 kilometers. According to some reports in international media, Japan also intends to indigenously develop its hypersonic weapons. This includes Hypersonic Cruise Missile (HCM) and the Hyper Velocity Gliding

Projectile (HVGP) planned to be operational in the late 2020s. These developments are aimed at achieving a landmark in hypersonic capabilities.

In this context, the South Asian region also has significance where the emergence of hypersonic technology is quite visible. Most recently on June 12, 2020, India conducted its first on-field test under an indigenous project to develop a hypersonic unmanned scramjet cruise missile namely Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV). India is also reportedly developing another hypersonic cruise missile BrahMos-II in collaboration with Russia that too is aimed at achieving Mach 7 hypersonic speed.

As per the estimates, there is still a long way to go for India to get its hypersonic BrahMos-II missile operational. Still, India's hypersonic capabilities would likely bring new challenges to regional security. They will further embolden India resort to a counterforce first strike against Pakistan. It would also provide India a decisive edge vis-à-vis Pakistan's nuclear capabilities. In the same way, Pakistan won't be in a position to deter India from using hypersonic weapons in case of any future conflict keeping in view India's eagerness to develop hypersonic weapons.

It is pertinent to highlight that hypersonic weapons are widely considered to be deadly weapons based on their certain specifications. These include; incredible speed and maneuverability and long-range as compared to ballistic and cruise missiles. Similarly, hypersonic weapons can easily penetrate any advanced air defence shield currently available and in the near future as well.

In the South Asian context, if India gets its hypersonic weapons operationalized, the region would become more vulnerable and prone to a nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan. Likewise, it would further add to Pakistan's security to be at stake. Such a situation would increasingly become more complex given the short flight times and the 3,133 kilometers of the border (including LoC) between the two countries. At the hypersonic level, it would likely be a matter of a minute or two for India to initiate the first strike in absence of a credible countermeasure. These geographical circumstances would likely provide India an edge vis-à-vis Pakistan thus becoming a considerable challenge.

At present, the hypersonic race at the global level as well as its emergence in South Asia poses a serious threat to international and regional security. Currently, there is no credible anti-missile system or interceptor that could successfully detect and destroy hypersonic weapons. In addition to the US, Russia, and China's hypersonic rivalry, there are prospects of hypersonic weapons in South Asia based on India's aspiration of these dangerous weapons.

The prospects of the global arms control regime, to stop hypersonic proliferation seems to be very less likely. This is also evident from the abandonment of the INF Treaty, the ABM Treaty, and the likely fate of New START.



Similarly, India's likely acquisition of hypersonic weapons along with its other counterforce preemptive capabilities vis-à-vis Pakistan would disturb the strategic stability of South Asia. Though Pakistan's threat perception is mainly inclined towards India, it has relied on a credible nuclear deterrence approach. It would also encourage India to mold the South Asian deterrence equation in its favor. Pakistan needs to look into this threat more cautiously and come up with some plausible countermeasures to balance the strategic environment of the region.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/26062020-the-global-hypersonic-weapons-race-and-south-asia-oped/>

## ***Indo-Nepal Face off: Coercive vs. Soft Power Inter-positioning in Regional Politics***

***Shamsa Nawaz***

A new 80 km-long road was inaugurated by the Indian defence minister on May 8, 2020, at Lipulekh pass to connect its border with China at the backyard of India, however, without making any diplomatic consultations with Nepal. Originally, the territory became controversial in 1998 when the Nepalese government raised the issue over the location of river, and consequently its territoriality at Kalapani. The Indian act of May 8, was immediately contested and then followed by several retaliatory moves with Nepali police forces deployed in the region. Nepal even summoned the Indian ambassador in Kathmandu. A highly controversial conjecture between the two erstwhile friendly Nepal-India relations was resulted in the initiation of successful constitutional amendment by the pro-China government of the Prime Minister Oli from its parliament. His party credentials are predominantly pro-communist. Nepal decided to reclaim 400 sq km of approximate land from India. On the other hand, In a lukewarm reaction, India initially postponed its geo-strategic concerns till the end of COVID 19 contrary to the statement given by the India's Ministry of External Affairs whereby, recognizing that there is a dispute which requires a diplomatic solution. Nonetheless, the coercive tools have been appreciatively kept at bay much to the opposition of the worried demand in India itself.

In any case, emboldened by its increasing lineage towards China, much braver Nepal could logjam the bothersome crisis successfully. What made the Prime Minister Oli put up a brave face with a multifold greater military and nuclear power of India? Is India's claim of a regional power, backed by the US policy in Asia questioned? Are all comparatively smaller peripheral states of India clubbing together to challenge its expansionist policies or India could no more trample over the region and faces competitive challenger? India's overstretching in Maldives in the aftermath of 2017-2018 Doklam crisis, conflicts with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are all precedence to the non-compliance with the India's masque rated big brother intimidation. Ruling through causing fear is always counter -productive. Hence, is it a revolt against the much pronounced *Hindutva* ideology enwrapping India itself speedily with monolithic claims of ancestry? The counter claims could also be a fence against non-secular interventions in the young democracies at its backyard countries. In either case it is certainly a yet another constitutional and democratic expression of protest, perhaps not as emphatic and painful like the dissent in the Indian Occupied Kashmir after the unconstitutional abrogation of Article 370 which granted a special status to the Muslim state, gradually picking up the watershed status in the foreign policy status. Kashmir lies close to the neighborhood of Nepal in the peaceful and picturesque foothills of Himalayan Mountains. The domino effect is steady.



India had kept an effective possession of this territory for at least sixty years despite the fact that Nepal conducted census there in the early 1950s. It is also highlighted in a detailed and concretely researched essay by Sam Cowan. In fact, a part from Kalapani, there is also a second dispute with India in the Susta river border region. India had however, controlled this territory of Kalapani for long. Apart from conducting its administration and deploying military forces up to the border pass with China, India introduced several infrastructural changes as well uninterruptedly for several years. This strategically important link at the tri-junction of India, Tibet and Nepal in Kalapani provides one of the quickest accesses for thousands of Hindus trekking across the border to visit the sacred Mount of Kalash. The religious significance is as valuable for India and holds the civilian and the military control of the region.

Politically, at its home front, these structural changes by India in the region were a blessing in disguise for Prime Minister Oli's government who otherwise was under severe pressure of the opposition. They all got united and fueled an uproar across-partisan, nationalist opposition against India and decided to constitutionally approve the geographical definition of its boundaries in the region, unanimously. Although, Nepali government was closely monitoring the situation in Kalapani over the preceding months and years; the Indian government continued to include the territories claimed by Nepal; yet revocation of the Article 370 in August 5, 2019, made the watershed for the region as well. The blatant violation of the international law by an emerging economy of South Asia posed a pronouncedly destabilizing atmosphere. India was no more offering a comfortable harbor to the smaller nations in its neighborhood. Government in Kathmandu took it up officially and publically. Brewing for several years, it even became a popular issue in Nepal, with the hashtag #BackOffIndia trending on social media. Anti-Indian sentiments have already been running high amongst the predominantly young population of the landlocked country of Nepal though had been alleged as "at the behest of a third party", by the Indian Chief of Army Staff. He is obviously alluding China.

On the other hand, much to the disappointment of India, Nepal had already chosen not to attend a multilateral BIMSTEC counter-terrorism exercise hosted by India, in 2018. Nepal considers BIMSTEC as an anti-China military alliance driven by India. Similarly, the US sponsored MCC grant to upgrade the Nepal's electricity transmission system and connect it to the Indian power grid was also vehemently opposed. Conversely, China has been the only regional and the international power deepening its heels in the region with its massive BRI project along with several smaller supplementary projects for the smaller regional countries as its allies.

At the same time, Nepal's foreign policy has also been gradually embracing a motivational and futuristic curve for external balancing and diversification since the recent years. The leadership of its Foreign Minister, Pradeep Gyawali has given a new impetus to its

foreign policy. The participation in the Fourth Indian Ocean Conference, held in the Maldives in 2019, by Nepal's Foreign Minister further augments Kathmandu's widening and ambitious geostrategic horizons. They are meant to place Nepal as a critical connectivity pivot between China, South Asia and the Indian Ocean region.

One agrees with C. Raja Mohan no less, who has identified several choking points in the territorial dispute as "a symptom of the structural changes unfolding in the external and internal context of the bilateral relationship" between India and Nepal. India's reference to its exclusive sphere of influence or satellite statehood with a mindset of colonialism in the neighborhood no more holds the cogency particularly vis a vis China's soft power interpositions. The economic delivery will be certainly more powerful to make the mare go and hold a sustainable relevance to the regional politics in South Asia. India needs to come up with something as substantive to remain vital in the regional politics of South Asia.

<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/06/27/indo-nepal-face-off-coercive-vs-soft-power-inter-positioning-in-regional-politics/>



## ***Sino-American Rivalry: Impact on South Asian Security***

***Irfan Ali***

The US-China relationship is an extremely complex one; it is driven by many different dimensions each dimension has got its own logic. The United States of America, being a dominant power of the world, has engaged itself with many nations throughout the world. Mainly it has engaged itself in those regions of the world from where it considers any entity could pose a threat to its interests as well as its dominance. Washington has remained an influential state because of its active involvement in most parts of the world for its national interest, particularly economic benefits. However, China being a re-emerging power, wants to influence the world through its engagement with more nations employing initiatives such as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or via economic engagement with various nations. However, the nature of relations between Washington and Beijing has changed ever since Donald Trump's presidency. Under the Trump Administration, the US has shifted from viewing China as a strategic partner to a strategic competitor. There are multiple areas where Trump Administration has challenged Beijing, such as trade and economy, Asia-Pacific region, technology, Chinese military modernization, South Asian region, and Beijing's pursuit for alternative global markets.

In this regard, the South Asian region assumes much importance when it comes to great powers politics such as the US and China. Over the time, the occurrence of events, incidents and initiatives such as 9/11 and Chinese BRI have added more significance to the region for great powers politics. On one hand, the incident of 9/11 provided a reason for the US to engage itself in the region actively, particularly Afghanistan, under the pretext of the War on Terror or security issues. On the other hand, active Chinese involvement through BRI compelled the United States to increase its influence by engaging with more nations in South Asia for containing China and its initiative. When it comes to South Asian security, three countries, namely Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, hold much importance in determining the security of South Asia. The presence of American forces in Afghanistan after the incident of 9/11 has presented a dilemma for Beijing. Because it considers presence of the US troops at its backyard as a severe threat. In this regard, China wants the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan to fulfil its desires by engaging more actively with Kabul for its development and stability through BRI or other economic engagement.

Moreover, peace and stability in Kabul is Beijing's fundamental interest because chaos in Afghanistan could trigger extremism, terrorism, and fundamentalism resultantly that will threaten not only the peace, security and stability of the region but can spill over into the adjacent Xinjiang region of China. However, Afghanistan is considered the "graveyard of empires" therefore, China does not want to risk its position by getting involved in Afghan affairs

that are not in the interest of the people of the country. Similarly, China supported the “Peace Deal” between the US and Taliban representatives on February 29, 2020, in Doha, Qatar. After the US forces withdrawal from Afghanistan, it is highly likely that China is going to deepen its involvement in Afghanistan further because it fears the return of Uygur militants in Xinjiang after a withdrawal of US troops. While the United States wants to engage India in the region to counter China, in this regard, since long, the US has been supporting Delhi in defense and trade ties to minimize the influence of Beijing in South Asia. As the US former Secretary of State John Kerry said that America wants to see India in a more dominant role in South Asia. However, American support towards India and giving it special waivers not only generate serious threats for China but also for Pakistan. Similarly, China and Pakistan have been trying to further strengthen their relations by increasing cooperation in multiple fields via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

As far as the American history about problem-solving of this region is concerned, it portrays bad picture where the US has the most significant stake in spoiling the regional peace along with generating various problems such as the birth of terrorism, gun culture, deaths and destruction, economic instability and many other issues as well. The emergence of gun culture and terrorism within Pakistan started after its alliance with the US during Afghan War and in War against Terror. It is mostly believed that the growing Sino-American rivalry is one of the primary reasons behind the worsening security conditions in South Asia. However, the friction between both countries could trigger new conflicts resultantly it would push the region into turmoil. Any misadventure created because of American support and favour to India and its policies of sidelining Pakistan and China in Afghan issue at this stage could further escalate the tensions among regional states resultantly invoking threats for the peace and stability of the region. In this regard, there is a dire need that both the US and China review their policies concerning South Asia and try to avoid conflict or misadventure for the sake of peace, stability and development of the region.

<http://southasiajournal.net/sino-american-rivalry-impact-on-south-asian-security/>



## ***Strategic Implications of Indian Defense Budget 2020-2021***

***Sher Bano***

The Modi government in its Union budget of India (FY 2020-2021) has allotted USD 66 billion equivalent to INR 471,378 crores for the purpose of military and defense expenditures. There has been significant increase of 13.6 % in the amount allocated for the defense pensions in the new defense budget as the amount allocated is USD 16.3 billion. The overall increase in the military allocation as compared to defense budget of 2019-2020 is INR 40,367.21 crores which indicates 9.37% growth. Out of the central government's total expenditure for 2020-2021, the military budget is 15.49%. The marginal increase in the Indian defense budget every year depicts India's long term dream of becoming the regional hegemon. Moreover its neighbors especially Pakistan would need to revise its defense budget to counter the strategic threat posed by continued Indian military modernization.

According to the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) India is among the world's three biggest military spenders along with China and the US in the year 2019. According to SIPRI India's military expenditure has increased 6.8% to reach USD 71.1 billion surpassing both Korea and Japan in the past few years. The fact is that the actual military expenditure of India is much more in the past ten years than is shown on the websites and in the international media. India always uses deflated figures to deceive its contemporaries and international media. India also doesn't provide the hard copy of the memorandum to demands for grants which could provide details regarding India's mega purchases such as Mi-17 helicopters, carbine rifles, MiG 29 upgrade, advanced jet trainers, airborne warning and control system, low level transportable radar, weapon locating radars etc. Moreover the USD 3 billion defense deal between India and US during trump's visit to India in February 202 is also a significant step toward military modernization. According to the SIPRI report on global military expenditure, India spends 5 to 6 times more on its defense related purchases as compared to Pakistan. The purchasing power of Indian defense forces during (FY2019-2020) was 8 times greater than Pakistan. Hence while analyzing the Indian defense budget, actual demands for grants must be considered along with explanatory memoranda.

As compared to the defense budget of 2019-2020 there is 2% increase in the capital outlay of Indian navy and 10% increase in the Indian army. Whereas there has been 2.3% decrease in the budget of Indian air force as compared to the last year. The IAF despite the decrease still remains the force with most purchasing power. IAF is expected to spend a large amount of this capital on manufacturing of Tejas Mk1A aircraft and on Rafale fighter jets which are acquired from France. However, Indian military and defence analysts perceive the increase in defence budget not enough to pay for armor, artillery and air defense systems. Indian navy will also still not be able to acquire advanced submarines. According to the Indian experts the

current budget that comprises of 2.1 % of GDP is not sufficient to deter China and Pakistan. India considers the massive increase in the military pensions is the reason behind decrease in the expected GDP. India's long term dream to increase its influence in the Indian Ocean and enhancing its offensive capabilities seems a bit distant according to the recent defense budget, however India now might spend more amount on building tri-services capabilities in outer space, cyber and special operation domain.

As large amount of India's defense budget has gone to defense pensions, it has provided Pakistan with a great opportunity to think how to counter India's growing military developments. Pakistan must import advanced technologies from its friendly neighbors like China and Russia. Pakistan has also been working to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of its strategic arsenals in order to overcome the conventional superiority. India always has this misconception that it is impossible for Pakistan to increase its military budget vis-à-vis India's. It believes Pakistan cannot catch up with even half of the rise in Indian defense budget as any attempt at increasing in military spending would result in Pakistan's economic collapse. But all these perceptions of India have been proven wrong by Pakistan in the past. Pakistan has balanced this conventional asymmetry by going nuclear and by building tactical weapons e.g. Nasr.

Hence recent military budget of India shows no change in the strategic threat spectrum from India. But the government of Pakistan needs to revise its military budget in the future. The government has to give priority to naval force modernization in order to counter Indian naval ambitions in coming future. Pakistan must also strengthen its space cooperation with China.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/28062020-strategic-implications-of-indian-defense-budget-2020-2021-oped/>



## ***Covid-19: Impact on Pakistan's Cyber Security***

***Basma Khalil***

The Covid-19 pandemic still remains the most dominant factor affecting global scenario. Neither the superpowers nor the developing countries are spared of its curse. Whole world is in a crisis like situation whether it's a superpower or state like Pakistan, which has already been facing external threat and internal instabilities. Like every other state in the world to continue the routine activities, Pakistan has shifted its workload to online databases. The shift to online forum has increased dependence on internet making the country equally concerned about safeguarding its cyber security – as safeguards and security systems of our cyber infrastructure are not so protective keeping in view the dynamic nature of cyber security. The government has recently launched its Digital Pakistan Policy which has acquired renewed significance in the current pandemic. Although it is a good initiative to facilitate the public but there are some loopholes that need to be addressed as Covid crisis seems to have prolonged indefinitely. There is a need to adopt effective measures so the weakness in the system can be effectively resolved on priority bases.

The current crisis situation has adversely impacted the educational hubs and other academic institutes which almost stopped functioning for a while. The government encourages the online classes and examination system. This not only helped schools and universities, but the research thinks thanks and other organizations were also able to resume their functions by utilizing online forum. Here the challenge for a country like Pakistan is the provision of fast and smooth internet connections in all the districts of country. But now days, students of KPK, Balochistan, Gilgit Baltistan and even in some districts of Punjab are facing connectivity issues. Students have raised their voices through social media forum and student Unions. Other than smooth provision of internet facility, state need to have a robust independent network security systems during Covid-19 because of more dependence on computer and internet networks and keep up with the rapidly changing cyber technologies. Dependence on foreign developed applications like 'Zoom' can be harmful in the longer term for privacy. Recently, an intrusion occurred during the webinar of Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI) due to non-encrypted internet connection. In encrypted connection the risk factor still exists as the de-encrypted data is retained with the developers who can use it for their self-interest to harm the security of any state especially the states like Pakistan which is still in the nascent stage of acquiring and developing advanced cyber technology related tools. Another such incident occurred wherein the official website of Pakistan's Higher Education Commission was attacked by scammers but later on it was clarified by HEC that it was just that someone just took the screenshot and make changes in its HTML coding and uploads it , which seems to be , that website is hacked . Although this scam carried out in anger by internal rudiments was not so harmful and serious,

but still it's an alarm to be prepared for the rising threats and technological challenges that could be hazardous. It is, thus a big question mark on the Pakistan's preparedness to face such challenges in future that could be serious in their nature.

Covid-19 has quarantined the people inside their homes; activities are limited to internet and computers. This has provided the cyber-criminals with the opportunity to breach the privacy and use it for their own interests. During this quarantine, people to kill boredom are downloading different kind of applications in their mobile phones and PCs and agreeing to give that application access to mobile data. This can be harmful and data of people can be used to cause damage to personal as well as national security, because this is an era of information warfare and any entity or state can take advantage of the data provided to them unknowingly. Cyber criminals and hackers whether they are from within the state or outside; sponsored by rival states can easily exploit the loophole of the existing cyber infrastructure as previously before Covid-19 crises, Pakistani infrastructure has been attacked several times which includes the banking sector as well as armed forces infrastructure. For instance cyber-attacks carried out by Indian organization Rattle snake on Navy's Public relations Branch tried to manipulate the statements released by Public relations Branch. Above mentioned attacks carried out by India before Covid-19 were very alarming and threatening to national security. One can gauge the level of threat during Covid-19 when the whole country is working online. There have been efforts to digitize all the sectors of Pakistan with which whole data will be shifted to data clouds. This may lead to losing control over the data because once data is placed online, it will be available to everyone who can then penetrate easily and will be hazardous for national security.

To address the threats to data and preserve its national security, Pakistan needs a workable solution to protect its servers to store such huge bulks of national data. It also needs to maintain backup of the data to be on safer side. It needs to develop its own strong firewall security software against online viruses and Trojan horses to protect the data rather than being dependent on borrowed technologies and software because dependency in such domains in the longer runs can be harmful. So, keeping in view the upcoming technological era and Covid-19 has to some added acceleration in the process of doing so. At this very moment, Pakistan needs to have a formalized national cyber security policy as an important pillar of national security.

<http://southasiajournal.net/covid-19-impacts-on-pakistans-cyber-security/>