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Compiled & Edited by:
Haris Bilal Malik

Strategic Vision Institute
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Strategic Vision Institute (SVI)

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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 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

SVI Foresight is a monthly electronic journal. It has a multi-disciplinary perspective highlighting 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.

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Editor's Note

Pakistan's relations with its long-standing allies in the Middle East have become strained since, in the last few years, geostrategic compulsions have compelled Pakistan to adopt a balancing act to safeguard its core national interests. However now, both Pakistan and the Middle Eastern states seem to have realized the changing regional geostrategic dynamics. Both Pakistan and the Middle East can complement each other since they share a long history of cooperation. Similarly, during the last two months, the security environment of South Asia has gained significant attention in the regional and international security debates. This is all because of the recent notions of rapprochement between these two nuclear-armed rivals of South Asia. However, the prospects of peace and stability in the region lie within the peaceful settlement of all the outstanding disputes including Kashmir. Though the recent quest for peace in the region is a positive development, it should be unconditional and broad-ranged from the Indian side as well.

In March 2021, as reported in the media, the Indian Navy is all set to acquire three indigenously built nuclear-powered submersible ships (SSN), commonly known as nuclear-powered attack submarines. India has been deliberately enhancing its naval capabilities to become a dominant regional naval power. In pursuit of this, it has indigenously developed and also acquired some of the advanced naval platforms aimed at increasing its offensive naval capabilities. The author maintains that, in such a hostile regional situation, Pakistan would likely be compelled to follow the same suit. Similarly, on 30th March 2021 two ships of the French Navy 'assault helicopter carrier-Tonnerre' and 'frigate Surcouf' reached Kochi to participate in the three-day joint naval exercise 'La Pérouse'. It has been insinuated that French ships arrived in India with the purpose to further strengthen the military cooperation between the navies of the two countries. For the past few years, maritime cooperation has gradually become a significant aspect of the strategic partnership between India and France. India's enhanced strategic cooperation with France and Quad states would have long-lasting implications for the broader regional security.

Recently, China and Iran formally signed a 25-Year comprehensive cooperation agreement to boost their partnership. The agreement holds great significance for both countries — since they are believed to be adversaries of the US. The agreement contains twenty articles and broadly covers political, economic, security, strategic, military, trade, telecommunication, energy, and cultural areas. Both the countries going into deep cooperation could change the balance of strategy and geography in the Middle East in the future. There are widespread deliberate speculations that the China-Iran deal would undermine the CPEC however, these claims are baseless as the nature of CPEC is quite different from the agreement

that China signed with Iran. Besides, there is no land connection between Iran and China which makes these claims baseless

One of the articles analyzes that due to technological developments, the enhanced role of air and air defense systems has increased and today these systems can change the basic dynamics of warfare by adding asymmetry and nonlinearity. South Asia is widely known as a volatile region primarily because of the ever-existing hostility between the two nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan. In this regard, the military escalation of February 2019 highlighted the importance of air and air defence systems, where both countries were involved in an aerial dogfight. The most important takeaway for Pakistan out of this crisis was to improve its air defense system and deploy a more advanced air defense system at its eastern border. During the recent Al-Bayza-II army air defense exercise, different weapon systems other than LY80, FM-90 missiles with the capability to launch air to surface missiles were tested. To maintain deterrence stability in the complex regional security environment especially during crises it would be important for Pakistan to strengthen its air defense capabilities.

Despite their long history of a troubled relationship that was based on certain dynamics, the bilateral relationship between Russia and Pakistan is seemingly on the path of improvement since the last decade in particular. During the recent visit of Russian Foreign Minister Mr. Sergey Lavrov to Pakistan, both countries agreed on cooperation in various fields including cooperation in defence and counterterrorism. This would likely help Pakistan to further ensure its security in the complex regional security environment. Further, both states can work collectively to fight the common menace of terrorism. Similarly, the Russian foreign minister's recently concluded visit to South Asia heralds a new era in Russia's South Asian policy. Russia and India are strategic partners; while Moscow was once Pakistan's predominant security concern. However, the regional security architecture is rapidly evolving and it has compelled the regional powers to realign their objectives and interests. The emergence of new alliances is reshaping the regional strategic orientation, and this has compelled Russia to review its South Asia policy and develop a balancing act between Pakistan and India.

History is poised to witness a second superpower's exit from Afghanistan in four decades. Earlier this month, when US President Joe Biden announced that it was "time to end the forever war", he was standing in the same Treaty Room as George W Bush when the latter had informed the American people of the retributive strikes on Afghanistan as payback for 9/11. Much time has been unnecessarily wasted especially since both the Trump and Biden White Houses failed to prioritize intra-Afghan talks. Had this happened, the May 1 deadline for US complete and unconditional troop withdrawal would have been achievable. However, all is not lost. If President Biden supports the Doha peace talks and sticks to the new and revised exit date then peace might have a chance.

Coming towards Indian space weaponization, very significant analysis is provided in this volume the *SVI Foresight*. The space weaponization debate is getting a foothold in the international security environment. India, in its aspiration, to pursue power, global status and regional hegemony didn't lack behind in the quest and has thus followed the suit. The Indian pursuit of space weaponization is detrimental to the deterrence stability in the region, which entails two nuclear power states. Thus, the space weaponization in South Asia needs all ears before the region gets further destabilized.

The contemporary security environment of South Asia has gained considerable significance within the discourse surrounding international security. The South Asian region still holds significant weightage in the threat assessments based on intelligence reports that are being carried out by key US security organizations. Very recently, the National Intelligence Council in its global trend report for the US; has warned about the possibility of war in South Asia. Even though the current security environment of South Asia seems to be a bit stable as compared to the last two years, uncertainties still exist. At one time in history, after the overt nuclearization of South Asia, one of the former presidents of the US had very rightly described the South Asian region as the most dangerous region in the world. Even today, this deliberation about South Asia appears to be more or less the same in the US perception of regional security.

It is hoped that readers will find a good blend of articles focusing on various aspects of the contemporary security discourse in South Asia.

The *SVI Foresight* team invites and highly encourages the contributions from the security and strategic community in the 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 the *SVI Foresight* electronic journal. You can find us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) and can also access the SVI [website](#).

Research Associate

Haris Bilal Malik

Why Has There Been a Shift in Pakistan's Relations with the Middle East?

*Khawaja Dawood Tariq**

Pakistan's relations with its long-standing allies in the Middle East have become strained since it decided to remain neutral in the Yemen war. The Middle East, for decades, has been one of the primary sources of financial and monetary support for the Pakistani state as well as the Pakistani people. Based on strong and deep religious affection, Pakistan has provided security for the Holy Places, sensitive installations, and other critical infrastructure in the region – especially to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, in the last few years, geostrategic compulsions have compelled Pakistan to adopt a balancing act to safeguard its core national interests.

The recent [telephonic conversation](#) between Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan and the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman is the first step towards rehabilitating this strategic relationship. For the last few years, misgivings and misperceptions have developed between Pakistan and its allies in the Middle East. It is necessary to identify and address them if a sustainable and comprehensive rapprochement is desired. The recent geostrategic developments have allowed the old allies to once again recalibrate their strategic orientation. While there are challenges that would need to be avoided, there also exist opportunities that need to be seized.

In order to understand what has compelled the Middle Eastern states to revisit their Pakistan policy, it is necessary to assess the changing regional security architecture because the geostrategic environment is changing in the greater Middle East. During Donald Trump's presidency, the United States applied the full spectrum of coercive tactics against Iran. The Joe Biden administration on the other hand is seemingly attempting to revive Iran's nuclear deal.

Similarly, Iran and China have signed a 25-year [strategic cooperation agreement](#) recently in March 2021; with China pledging to invest \$400 billion in key Iranian sectors such as energy, infrastructure, defence, and banking. This cannot come as a shock to anyone in the Middle East, but it does change the regional strategic calculations. China is Saudi Arabia's largest trading partner, and now it has also emerged as Tehran's strategic partner in the region. How well the Chinese balance the tricky Middle Eastern political landscape is perhaps a debate for another time, but one thing is clear – there is a divergence of interest between the Middle

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Eastern countries and both America and China. This breeds insecurity amidst the Gulf nations and is one of the reasons for their rapprochement with Pakistan.

But before the rapprochement, the Gulf States must develop a balancing act between India and Pakistan. In the last few years, India has developed close strategic relations with most capitals in the Middle East, and often at Pakistan's expense. Riyadh's decision to sign a [strategic partnership](#) pact with India back in 2019 is a cause of genuine concern for Pakistan. Similarly, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)'s deliberate silence when it comes to condemning Indian atrocities in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) has repeatedly perturbed Pakistan – realizing that strategic compulsions have forced the GCC member states to practically do anything. But the council's decision to not even offer lip service in this regard has been seen by some as punishment for Pakistan's refusal to take sides in the Yemen war.

In the aftermath of India's decision to unilaterally change the status of the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir, the Pakistani leadership hoped to garner support from its allies in the Middle East. That support never came. Pakistan protested against the role of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) with regards to the Kashmir conflict. However, there are speculations that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has played an important part in deescalating the tension between India and Pakistan. In this regard, the joint declaration upholding the ceasefire agreement of 2003 is believed to be a result of back-channel [diplomacy brokered by UAE](#) officials.

Another reason for the rift between Pakistan and the Gulf states was Pakistan's decision to not boycott Qatar during the growing rift in the Middle East. But Pakistan could not afford to pick sides and this Pakistani compulsion to not pick sides is ideological in nature. Now that the Qatar-GCC conflict is over, both sides would be able to complement Pakistan's role in the mediation of the conflict.

Pakistan is in the midst of changing its priorities from geostrategic to geo-economic. Pakistan wants to strengthen its economy and requires foreign investment to shore up the economy. The Saudi Crown Prince was in Islamabad in 2019 and inked deals worth \$20 billion, which included an oil refinery and petrochemical complex in Gwadar. But these projects haven't materialized in the last two years. Hence, it is time that both states take comprehensive steps to ensure the financing for the project.

Presently, both Pakistan and the Middle Eastern states have realized the changing regional geostrategic dynamics. There seems to be an acceptance of the fact that the recent past cannot determine the future. Both Pakistan and the Middle East can complement each other since they share a long history of cooperation. Islamabad currently needs financial partners to implement its economic agenda, while the Middle Eastern states require a

semblance of regional security structure that protects their geostrategic interests – something which Pakistan can provide.

<https://tribune.com.pk/article/97358/why-has-there-been-a-shift-in-pakistans-relations-with-the-middle-east>

Recent India-Pakistan Rapprochement: Prospects for Peace in South Asia

Haris Bilal Malik *

Since the last two years, in particular, the prevalent security environment of South Asia has become more complex and the region has become even more vulnerable to conflicts. This is primarily because of the Indian politico-strategic adventurism and its continuous desire to dominate the escalation dynamics of the region. It all started with the Pulwama attack of [February 2019](#) which many argue was a false flag operation. In the pretext of its brinkmanship of so-called surgical strikes, India behaved very aggressively and reportedly entered Pakistan's airspace. Consequently, Pakistan was left with no choice but to give a [befitting response](#). Though, unlike India, Pakistan didn't violate any international legal binding and showed its [appropriate resort to respond](#). The resultant embarrassment for India both at the diplomatic and military fronts is part of South Asian history now. Later on, the [August 2019](#) Indian unilateral and illegal political annexation of the disputed Kashmir region has further added to the volatility of the situation. Despite the international criticism, India has imposed a brutal lockdown and communication blackout in the disputed region to suppress the voice of the Kashmiri people. Even now the lockdown remains partially imposed. These two most recent critical events along with the increasing military prowess of India with the acquisition of offensive weapon systems have continuously created a dangerous environment of hostilities in South Asia since then. This in turn had reduced the prospects of long-lasting peace and stability in the region with far-reaching consequences.

However, during the last two months, the security environment of South Asia has gained significant attention in the regional and international security debates. It has become a subject of utmost importance that has created considerable hype in the international media. This is all because of the recent notions of rapprochement between these two nuclear-armed rivals of South Asia. Many believe that this would likely make the region stable that might further result in the resumption of 'composite dialogue' between the two. Regardless of such hopes there still exist a lot of doubts on the outcomes of such developments because of the many destabilizing factors. Most significantly these include; lack of mutual trust given the previous track record and Indian desire for one-sided and conditional dispute settlement mechanisms among others. This is not for the first time that both countries have been seemingly involved in signaling for the betterment of their relations. Though this implies that both the countries have the realization of the fact that the negotiations and dispute settlement

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through dialogue is key to long-lasting peace in the region, it however requires a broader framework rather than selected terms and conditions, especially from the Indian side.

The recent rapprochement attempts have been initiated by Pakistan at the strategic level. There are various occasions in recent months where Pakistan's civilian and military leadership has signaled the desire for peace in the region. Pakistan's [foreign minister](#) has asserted that the country has shifted its priorities from geopolitics towards geo-economics. It hinted towards the desire for settlement of disputes with India. Likewise, on the occasion of the 2nd anniversary of the Pulwama- Balakot crisis between India and Pakistan, as reported by the ISPR, the Director General Military Operations (DGMOs) of both the countries have agreed to adhere to the [ceasefire agreement of 2003](#) and re-establish the hot-line connection between the two. It further involved the desire to address the core issues that have the potential to harm the peace in the region. Furthermore, the statement of Pakistan's army chief to [extend the hand of peace in all directions](#) has further endorsed Pakistan's desire to peacefully settle disputes in the region. Later on, in another statement, he emphasized the [resolution of the Kashmir issue](#) and maintained that "it's time to [bury the past with India](#) and move towards cooperation". These deliberations with a clear mention of Kashmir and India hold great significance in the context of the hostile contemporary regional security environment.

Another significant and unexpected assertion came from the Indian Prime Minister in his letter to Pakistan's Prime Minister on the occasion of Pakistan Day. He asserted that "India desires cordial relations with Pakistan under an environment of trust and devoid of terrorism as imperative". Ironically, there was not a single mention of the resolution of the Kashmir issue which stands as the core issue between the two countries. This indicates the Indian desire for conditional peace on specified terms and conditions. In response to this, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan has also written a letter to his Indian counterpart. He asserted that Pakistan also wants peaceful and cooperative relations with India in the region. He emphasized the resolution of the Kashmir dispute among others since peace and stability in the region are contingent on its peaceful settlement. This clearly shows Pakistan's unconditional commitment to regional peace and prosperity by solving all the outstanding issues between the two.

In all, it becomes quite apparent that since the last two years, the South Asian region has become more volatile than ever before. This is mainly because of the Indian adventurism; hostilities and its desire to dominate the region militarily and politically. However, the prospects of peace and stability in the region lie within the peaceful settlement of all the outstanding disputes. India still seems to be oblivious of the fact that Kashmir is the core issue in South Asia that requires a peaceful and concrete settlement. Though the recent quest for peace in the region is a positive development, it should be unconditional and broad-ranged from the Indian side as well. Only then the dream of a peaceful South Asian region can become true otherwise all the efforts might go into vain.

<https://foreignpolicynews.org/2021/04/14/recent-india-pakistan-rapprochement-prospects-for-peace-in-south-asia/>

Indian Nuclear Attack Submarines (SSN) and Security Calculus in the Indian Ocean

*Ahyousa Khan**

In [March 2021](#), as reported in the media, the Indian Navy is all set to acquire three indigenously built nuclear-powered submersible ships (SSN), commonly known as nuclear-powered attack submarines. Diplomat magazine has reported that the [Indian Navy has prioritized](#) the acquisition of the SSNs over the indigenously built aircraft carriers. Currently, India is operating only one aircraft carrier, "[INS Vikramaditya](#)", which is a revamped Soviet origin "Kiev-Class Ship" that was acquired in 2014. Further, India is operating only one SSN, '[Chakra](#)', which it got on lease from Russia in 2012. Likewise, the nuclear-powered and ballistic missile capable submersible ship (SSBN) '[Arihant](#)' which has been operational since 2018 has significantly enhanced India's deterrent capability at sea. Indian focus on enhancing its naval capability is premised on a view of itself as the sole custodian of the Indian Ocean. India considers Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as its backyard since it is one of the biggest littoral states to the Indian Ocean. Therefore, geography is one important factor for the Indian naval strategy. Analysis of Indian naval strategy reveals that its objective for the Indian Ocean is to seek and attain sea denial ability and capability, which would bring about Indian territorial claims with its neighbor China and Pakistan to IOR as well. In this regard, the fleet to hunter-attack submarines would not only provide India with the ability to hunt, tail, and attack submarines and vessels of other countries. But, these submarines would provide security to its SSBN from attack submarines of other states.

The plan to build and acquire SSN by India was under discussion for quite some time but recent border clashes with its neighbors and the interest of its military elite have paved the way for SSNs instead of naval carriers. Last year, [Gen. Bipin Rawat](#), Chief of Defense Staff, and former army chief in his interview to Times of India voiced his opinion in support of submarines instead of carriers by stating that anything which is on the surface would be an easy target. In this plan, India is set to build [6 nuclear-powered hunter-attack submarines](#), which would weigh around 6000 tons at Vizag Shipbuilding Center. But, initially, India's cabinet committee on security would approve the production of only three SSNs and the first of these three would be deployed by [2032](#). However, if one keeps in mind the process of Indian naval build-ups and their deployment and operationalization, it is expected that deployment will take more time than 2032. It was also reported in the media that India would commission its second-nuclear powered ballistic missile capable submarine (SSBN) "[Arighat](#)", this year. Unlike SSNs, SSBNs are of strategic importance and carry out strategic missions. Both Arihant and Arighat are capable

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of carrying and firing the advanced [K-15](#) sea-launched ballistic missiles with a range of 750 km. Although India claims that its naval nuclear deterrence is to provide it with second-strike capability against two front threats, with missiles that are only in the range of 750 km at the moment, India's second-strike capability is only against Pakistan. Secondly, it is to facilitate its ambitions of domination in IOR by sea denial. Apart from these two nuclear submarines and one leased SSN from Russia, India has [12 old SSKs](#) (diesel-electric powered) submarines. India is developing an SLBM known as [K-4](#) with a range of 3,500 km, but to facilitate these missiles India will need bigger SSBNs, which India is also building.

These developments by India, especially regarding SSNs would further complicate the security structure of IOR where already competition is increasing. Although, India claimed that its nuclear policy is based on "CMD" and "NFU" but the acquisition of offensive technologies like SSNs, UAVs, and cruise missiles reflects that its policies are more inclined towards preemption. Moreover, with the acquisition of SSBNs and SSNs, India would be in a position to tilt the balance of power of the region in its favor. In such a situation, to maintain deterrence so far Pakistan under its policy of FSD has tipped its cruise missiles with the nuclear warhead for its diesel-electric powered submarine. It has provided Pakistan with the option of second-strike capability or to launch a nuclear attack from the sea but there is a long way to go for Pakistan. Diesel-electric submarines cannot stay submerged for more than 12 to 21 days and have to come to the surface, which could become a challenge in the crisis for Pakistan. Since, other than building nuclear submarines, India has also improved its satellites and intelligence capabilities. This would give India an edge in locating Pakistan's submarines. Moreover, these developments in IOR between India and Pakistan have further blurred the lines between peacetime and wartime situations as no one would know which submarines have nuclear-powered cruise missiles. Although India has claimed that its SSNs would not perform strategic missions, SSNs are normally equipped with cruise missiles and at the moment India is pursuing hypersonic cruise missile technology and has already developed supersonic cruise missile 'BrahMos'; one of the fastest cruise missiles currently operational in the world.

In all, India has been deliberately enhancing its naval capabilities to become a dominant regional naval power. In pursuit of this, it has indigenously developed and also acquired some of the advanced naval platforms aimed at increasing its offensive naval capabilities. In such a hostile regional situation, Pakistan would likely be compelled to follow the same suit. Moreover, investment in satellite technology has become important for Pakistan. In this regard, it would be more rational for Pakistan to make investments in these domains. Since this would not only enhance its security vis-à-vis India but ensure its economic interest in the IOR as well. Moreover, indigenization will help in lowering down the costs of these technologies and in the longer term can create an opportunity for Pakistan to emerge as an exporter in the international market.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/15042021-indian-nuclear-attack-submarines-ssn-and-security-calculus-in-indian-ocean-oped/>

India and France Enhancing Their Strategic Cooperation In The Indian Ocean Region

*Sher bano**

Quite recently, on [30th March 2021](#) two ships of the French Navy '[assault helicopter carrier-Tonnerre](#)' and '[frigate Surcouf](#)' reached Kochi (a port city on the South-West coast of India) to participate in the three-day joint naval exercise 'La Pérouse'. Though the exercise was led by France, four other members of the Quad were also among the participants these include; the US, India, Japan, and Australia. It has been insinuated that French ships have arrived in India on a 'goodwill' visit with the purpose to further strengthen the military cooperation between the navies of the two countries. For the past few years, maritime cooperation has gradually become a significant aspect of the strategic partnership between India and France. The former wants to further enhance its naval capabilities by building strong security relationships in the 'Indian Ocean Region' (IOR) under its long-term aspiration of becoming a 'blue-water navy' and dominating the region. In this regard, France has emerged as a crucial partner for India to fulfill its quest to dominate the IOR.

As per the statement given by the [French embassy](#) in India; the purpose of these three-day drills was to provide the five like-minded nations with an opportunity to enhance their skills, promote maritime cooperation, and develop closer ties throughout an open and free Indo-Pacific. Moreover, according to an Indian defence and strategic affairs analyst [N.C. Bipindra](#) 'this maritime military exercise conducted between the five nations including the US, Japan, Australia, France, and India is an attempt to practice the naval maneuvers for interoperability among them whenever there is a crisis. It is significant to note that the presence of the US, Japan, and Australia in the Quad does not challenge Pakistan's interest but the inclusion of India in this alliance poses a severe security threat for Pakistan. This alliance would help India boost its policies of 'Extended Neighborhood' and 'Act East. This along with the Indo-Pacific strategy of the US to use India as a counter against China in the IOR can prove to be detrimental for both China and Pakistan. The US has been assisting and encouraging India to build its supremacy in IOR and South Asia. Hence these naval drills between France and the Quad grouping can be seen as an attempt to further solidify the alliance and also increase India's significance in the Indo-Pacific region. It also provides India with an opportunity to become a regional power by rising from its middle-power status.

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To further analyze, for the past few years, IOR can be seen as a new venue of cooperation between India and France. In the [year 2019](#) French President Emmanuel Macron invited the Indian Prime Minister Modi to a two-day G-7 Summit. During the visit, the two leaders held various meetings to review and assess all the aspects of their bilateral relationship. By the end of the year, a series of announcements made by India and France confirmed that the Indian Ocean is about to become the next venue of cooperation between the two states. In [May 2019](#) after holding the Varuna exercise, the announcement was made by Admiral Christoph Prazuck (Chief of French Navy) that ships from India and France would undertake 'joint maritime security patrols' in the IOR. In [March 2020](#) the patrol took place using 'P-8' (Poseidon anti-submarine aircraft). The happening of the first such 'CORPAT' (Coordinated Patrols) shows India's willingness to militarily cooperate with France in the IOR in a manner that was earlier denied by India with any of the western power. Even the joint patrol offer by the US navy was deliberately dismissed by India in 2018.

In [July 2020](#) India received the first 5 out of 36 'Rafale fighter jets under a deal of US\$ 9.22 billion. The deal itself is a clear signal that two states have become materially closer. The acquisition of Rafale fighter jets is not only significant for Indo-French ties but also an attempt by New Delhi to counter the air capabilities of both China and Pakistan. Though instead of 126 Rafales that were originally envisioned, only 36 were bought by India, it is expected that India would buy more number of these advanced fighter jets soon. India is also acquiring other military hardware from France for instance, the 'Scorpene submarines'. Hence France has emerged as a major arms supplier for India.

Summarizing it all, the closer ties with France and then the appointment of Indo-Pacific ambassador by the French president Macaron can be seen as India's attempt to pursue its regional ambitions to counter China. In the same vein, firstly the sale of Rafale jets to India by France and then the latter's offering support to the former against the backdrop of Ladakh-Galwan crisis of 2020 are notably significant vis-à-vis their strategic partnership. At the same time, for many, it implies a shift in French policy towards China. Hence, an important aspect behind the security partnership between France and India is to counter rising China and increase their influence in the Indian Ocean region. Moreover, the rising Indian influence in the IOR and its increasing cooperation with Quad states would become a grave security concern for Pakistan as well. Hence, at the present, India's enhanced strategic cooperation with France and Quad states would have long-lasting implications for the broader regional security.

<http://southasiajournal.net/india-and-france-enhancing-their-strategic-cooperation-in-the-indian-ocean-region/>

Debunking China-Iran Comprehensive Agreement

*Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai**

Recently, China and Iran formally signed a 25-Year comprehensive cooperation agreement to boost their partnership. The agreement holds great significance for both countries — since they are believed to be adversaries of the US. The agreement contains twenty articles and broadly covers political, economic, security, strategic, military, trade, telecommunication, energy, and cultural areas. Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Tehran back in 2016 during which both the countries had signed a joint statement on deep strategic cooperation. Four years ago, the leading Chinese and Iranian strategists met in Zhongnanhai, the central government of Beijing and Tehran to map out the content and formulation of a treaty that could include the military, economics, energy, communications, industry, infrastructure, science, and education. Now in 2021, both the countries going into deep cooperation could change the balance of strategy and geography in the Middle East in the future.

In October 2020, the UN lifted the arms embargo on Iran under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). This enabled Iran to import regular military hardware. Even though Iran's Foreign Minister Mr. Javad Zarif while addressing the Parliament maintained that Iran does not want or allow China to establish permanent military bases or gain any long-term control of the territory in Iran to secure any economic agreements. However, while developing industrial or infrastructure contracts in Iran, China may seek to provide security for ongoing construction, especially in areas with security risks. Likewise, in the military sector, several developments have been made so far which would significantly enhance their military partnership. These include expanded military training, naval, naval, and air tests, such as last year's naval exercises in China-Russia-Iran in the Gulf of Oman, and also investment in new military installations and advanced technologies.

Following the lifting of the arms embargo, with an estimated budget of \$15-20 billion to protect Iran's military recruits for naval power, advanced missile development, aerospace technology, and other areas have made Iran's armed forces in the next decade. The strength of the Iranian military industry remains important despite years of the arms embargo being imposed by the US and the UN. Much of Iran's missile power comes from the production of custom-made missiles, although Iran retains the S-300 missile system purchased from Russia. The country saw the potential of Iranian missiles when the (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) IRGC on January 8 this year introduced 15-22 round arches made of Ayn al-Asad airbase in the

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Al Anbar province in western Iraq, in retaliation for the assassination of US Qasim Solaimani. Reports examining the Iranian missile attacks have revealed the attack with the highest quality.

In the economic sector, the China-Iran agreement is likely to cover a wide range of areas specifically in Iran's energy sector which includes: investment in oil, gas, and petroleum projects along with the provision of new pipelines. Further, Chinese banks can establish Iran's offices, reforms, and support for Iran's national banking sector and its private and public economic sectors. Iranian tourism would also get the benefit of this partnership; requiring investment in new hotels, restaurants, tourism infrastructure, and investment in new airports. Chinese companies would be in a position to enter emerging commercial and private markets throughout Iran. Chinese companies can offer advanced technology, robotics, and AI in a variety of industrial sectors. China and Iran must agree on how to deal with US sanctions to reduce risks in its strategic relationship. While exchange agreements that sell Iranian oil and gas contracts for Chinese industries, infrastructure, and power deals are emerging, other alternatives may emerge from negotiations between China and Iran.

Moreover, Iran's energy sector development is an important part of the industrial sector in the strategic agreement between China and Iran. While China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) is issuing an agreement to develop Iran's 11th phase in the South Pars gas sector, which is adjacent to Qatar's share of that gas field, a new strategic agreement between China and Iran could revive CNPC's entry. Currently, the Iranian energy company Petropars is developing Phase 11 in the South Pars gas sector.

A list of new energy deals including oil, gas, petroleum, and renewable energy could follow through a strategic agreement between China and Iran. Chinese companies can also contribute to new oil and gas pipelines connected to existing regional pipeline networks and create new pipelines. In the region, existing pipeline networks include the Central Asia – China gas pipeline, which connects to China's west-east pipeline grid which runs from the western part of China to the east and covers approximately 7000 km from Turkmenistan to eastern China. The Tabriz-Ankara pipeline runs 2,577 km from Tabriz in north-west Iran to Ankara in Turkey. The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline also known as the Peace Pipeline foresaw the construction of a pipeline from the South Pars gas field in Iran to Karachi in Pakistan. However, while the pipeline remains delayed, a strategic agreement between China and Iran may provide the necessary final push to complete the Iran-Pakistan pipeline. Currently, Iranian companies have built the 1100 km Goureh-Jask pipeline stretching from the Goureh Oil Terminal near Busher to Mobarak Mount in the western Jask region along the Sea of Oman, with 1 million barrels per day transfer capacity.

Also, Iran's telecommunications sector needs reform and new infrastructure. While Iran seeks 5G power, internal issues with Iran's Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) that controls 5G with a power of 700MHz and 800MHz remain as IRIB currently looks unwilling to

release the spectrum of future 5G services across the country. When the right internal problems are solved, Huawei's 5G network would likely gain momentum in Iran. Iran maintains a substantial manufacturing industry producing automobiles, electric appliances, telecommunications equipment, military hardware, industrial components, steel, and manufactured commodities for its energy sector. Chinese industrial players may enter to modernize Iran's manufacturing industry further. This combined with educational and scientific exchanges and partnerships between Chinese and Iranian universities and research institutes may drive educational, scientific, and innovative advances.

In the infrastructure field, Iran effectively enters into China's One Belt One Road strategy. Due to Iran's unique geostrategic location with a 2250 km coastline with the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Sea of Oman, and the Caspian Sea; in addition to a vast land border with Iraq, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan; Iran becomes a vital country in China's maritime One Road strategy and the land-based One Belt strategy.

Chinese port developers may assume the development of Chabahar Port, which India failed to complete in recent years. Chinese port developers may also develop a range of other ports along Iran's 2250 km coastline along the Persian Gulf and in the Caspian Sea — which then facilitate port and shipping connections to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Azerbaijan. Combined with port modernization and port terminal development, Chinese infrastructure developers would likely modernize Iran's railway structure with high-speed railway networks. China's strategic infrastructure architecture thinking often combines its maritime ports and port terminals with railways and highways to different inland logistics clusters and special economic zones which form economic corridors enabling supply chain connectivity with countries across vast geographies.

China and Iran may also seek to connect the 3200 km long China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which stretches from Kashgar in the Xinjiang province in Western China to Gwadar in southern Pakistan along the Indian Ocean into Iran's inland infrastructure and maritime port structure networks. This appears increasingly plausible now as Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Tehran twice in 2019 to improve Pak-Iran relations further. Building infrastructure in the border region between Iran and Pakistan may also provide economic development in the tense Balochistan region, which has experienced unrest with various Indian backed groups including the Balochistan Liberation Army and the Baloch Liberation Front which regularly clash with Pakistan's security forces. Calming tensions in the Balochistan region through economic and infrastructure development may provide employment and new trade networks unlocking the economic potential of this important border region and herald a new economic era for Iranian-Pakistani relations.

In the longer run, a Chinese-Afghan-Iranian infrastructure initiative may emerge, pending negotiations with Afghan authorities and Taliban, constructing an infrastructure

corridor including a railway, highway, and a pipeline structure from Western China across the Wakhan Corridor in eastern Afghanistan through the Hindu Kush mountain range to Iran. This may form one of many initiatives driving Afghanistan's future economic development as US military forces complete their planned withdrawal.

Iran and China may also seek to develop high-speed railway and cargo railway networks across Iran with connections from Iran to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and onward to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, thus connecting Iranian transportation networks to the emerging Central Asian infrastructure architecture. This enables connectivity with the important logistics cluster — Special Economic Zone Khorgos Eastern Gate located 330 km from Almaty on the Kazakh-Chinese border about four hours from Urumqi, the capital in the Xinjiang province in western China. Connecting China and Iran via Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in addition to Afghanistan and Pakistan cement economic corridors across Central and South Asia. Fundamentally, the China and Iran strategic agreement forms a geostrategic economic architecture by connecting a China-Pakistan-Iran corridor, a potential China-Afghanistan-Iran corridor, and a China-Central Asia-Iran corridor into a geostrategic China-Iran Economic Corridor (CIEC). Although China and Iran face various challenges by entering a 25-year strategic agreement, both China and Iran constitute historical trading and merchant civilizations with substantial manufacturing industrial bases and traditions in advanced scientific innovation. This provides a unique historic opportunity for both countries to finally form what may become a new strategic economic theater from East to West Asia for the coming decades transforming the geopolitical equilibrium in the Middle East as it, in reality, negates large parts of the US sanctions regime; propels Iran's economic development eastwards, and grows the economic landscape from China to Iran. This strategic agreement shifts the political equality in Iranian relations with Saudi Arabia because it exacerbates the situation, which Saudi Arabia wants to maintain.

In short, the China-Iran agreement reportedly would likely bring certain benefits to Pakistan even though Pakistan is not the signatory to the agreement. There are widespread deliberate speculations that the China-Iran deal would undermine the CPEC however, these claims are baseless as the nature of CPEC is quite different from the agreement China signed with Iran. Besides, there is no land connection between Iran and China which makes these claims baseless. Mushahid Hussain Syed had negated these claims last year when the agreement was under discussion. Pakistan can benefit from this deal while playing Chinese cards. The strategic agreement would help Pakistan and Iran to meet the shortfall, improve their commitments, and begin joint efforts in addition to their joint Rapid Reaction Force program to address their joint security concerns. It would oust Pakistan on suspicion of Indian presence in Iran. China's comprehensive agreement with Iran forms the basis for the China-Iran Economic Corridor (CIEC) which could change the strategic equity and geographical structure in the Middle East in the coming years to create a tectonic strategic direction in the east of China.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/746018/debunking-china-iran-comprehensive-agreement/>

Al-Bayza II Air Defense Exercise: Pakistan's Move towards Improving Air Defense Systems

*Ahyousha Khan**

The emergence of strong aerial defense as an important component of warfare is the legacy of the 20th century. A careful analysis of the conflicts that occurred at the end of the 20th century and the start of the 21st century reveals the strategic importance of air defense systems. Due to technological developments enhanced role of [air and air defense systems](#) have increased manifolds in peace and wartime situation for states. Today these systems can change the basic dynamics of warfare by adding asymmetry and nonlinearity. In this regard, the ground-based air defense systems (GBAD) have emerged as the most lethal and reliable air defense systems. Initially, these systems comprised of guns that were used to targets the planes, and apparently, the success rate was low. However, with the development in aerial technology, GBAD also improved and the range of their targets include air-breathing targets (planes and helicopters), UAVs as well and different kinds of missile systems. Effective utilization of these systems could mitigate or deny the results to the adversary by the destruction of elements of its air power.

South Asia is widely known as a volatile region primarily because of the ever-existing hostility between the two nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan. In this regard, the military escalation of February 2019 is the most recent crisis that both countries have faced. Likewise, this recent crisis highlighted the importance of air and air defence systems, where both countries were involved in an aerial dogfight in aftermath of Indian aircraft's intrusion into Pakistan's air space. Since Pakistan was left with no choice but to give an appropriate response to such an Indian act; it shot down two Indian Air Force (IAF) jets while a helicopter of IAF became the target of friendly fire from its ground-based air defense. Although Pakistan successfully achieved escalation dominance and maintained the credibility of its nuclear deterrent in face of Indian aggression, during the crisis there were few takeaways, which were not missed by Pakistan.

The most important takeaway for Pakistan was to improve its air defense system and deploy a more advanced air defense system at its eastern border. Pakistan was cognizant of this gap in its air defense before February 2019 crisis and in January inducted the LY80 air defense system during [Al-Bayza 2019](#), two weeks air defense exercises. Pakistan ordered the first three units of [HQ16A](#) systems from China in 2014 which were delivered in 2015-16. These units were inducted and tested by the Pakistan army during the Al-Bayza 2019 army air defense exercises. The second of the Al-Bayza army air defense exercise is conducted very recently at the start of

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April 2021. During the [Al-Bayza-II](#) army air defense exercise, different weapon systems with the capability to launch air to surface missiles were tested at Karachi near army air defense test ranges. During the exercises other than LY80, FM-90 missiles were also tested. News of FM-90 missiles induction into Pakistan's army air defense came in 2015, with the ability to target cruise missiles and drones. Moreover, the system is also capable of operating under adverse/hostile electronic countermeasures against the [FM-90 missiles](#). LY80 missiles can also operate in all weather conditions, in strong electromagnetic interference, and has the ability to engage aerial targets at high altitudes. LY80 missile systems are based on inertial guidance and intermittent illumination with a range of 3 to 40 km.

[Reportedly](#) the LY80 air defense system is now deployed in Kashmir to thwart off any further Indian attempts. But, if the history and past behaviors of BJP leadership depict that India might try to ingress into Pakistan's airspace in any future crisis by sending its advanced jets like Rafale or armed drones which India is very keen to acquire from the US. The chances of Indian escalation under Prime Minister Modi are higher; the same is also predicted in the recent intelligence report by the US. Moreover, in the current era of standoff weapons (weapons that could be fired from a sufficient distance that evade adversary's defensive weapons/fire), it would be more appropriate for Pakistan to acquire a long-range surface to air defense missile system. According to media reports Pakistan has shown interest in procuring missile defense systems from Russia but then there are few hurdles in the feasibility of such procurements. These include; the Indo-Russia ties, fear of CAATSA sanctions from the US, and Pakistan's economic stringency. In such a situation it might be difficult for Pakistan to procure long-range ground-based air defense systems from Russia. Another option in which interest was shown by Pakistan is the Chinese long-range air defense system [HQ-9 system](#) with a range of 125 kilometers. Such acquisition would be a significant increase in the existing ground-based air defense capability of Pakistan.

As India is acquiring UAVs, advanced aircrafts, building supersonic and hypersonic weapons, and developing a detailed network of satellite systems its ability to locate, target, and attack its adversaries would considerably increase in years to come. Moreover, an increase in capability and capacity and alliance with the US has made India bolder in terms of taking offensive actions against neighboring countries. Therefore, to maintain deterrence by denial vis-à-vis India Pakistan must invest in air defense systems. For Pakistan, it has always been of immense importance to not indulge in arms race competition with India but at the same time attention was also given to the fact that strategic balance was never tilted by India in its favor. So, to maintain deterrence stability in the complex regional security environment especially during crises it would be important for Pakistan to strengthen its air defense capabilities. Last but not the least, this would also ensure the "denial strategy" of Pakistan against India during conflicts and crises.

<http://southasiajournal.net/al-bayza-ii-air-defense-exercise-pakistans-move-towards-improving-its-air-defense-systems/>

Russia and Pakistan to Boost Cooperation in Defense and Counterterrorism

*Sher bano**

Despite their long history of a troubled relationship that was based on certain dynamics, the bilateral relationship between Russia and Pakistan is seemingly on the path of improvement since the last decade in particular. The relationship has been further solidified through cooperation in the fields of economics, politics, and the military. During the recent visit of Russian Foreign Minister Mr. Sergey Lavrov to Pakistan on [April 7th, 2021](#), both countries agreed on cooperation in diverse fields. In this regard, the most significant outcome of the visit was an emphasis on cooperation in defence and counterterrorism. According to the statement by the Russian Foreign Minister, Russia is willing to provide Pakistan with special military equipment to further build potential in countering terrorism that would be in the interest of the whole region. In addition to this, both the states also agreed on having more joint military drills and exercises.

The interests of Russia and Pakistan are intertwined specifically as far as security is concerned. In the past, both states have suffered a lot due to terrorism; hence it's high time that they join hands in combating this threat. Since 2019 Pakistan has been taking part in the international 'multilateral military exercises' being held in Russia. The most recent military exercise that Pakistan took part in was '[Kavkaz](#)' held in 2020. Likewise, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of Pakistan, General Nadeem Raza during his visit to [Moscow in 2020](#) at the 'Defence and Security Cooperation Conference' has also discussed the importance of bilateral military cooperation among the two states in the context of regional security. Hence these joint military exercises between the two states have proven to be a testament to further increase the cooperation on counter-terrorism. In the future, there are prospects that Russia and Pakistan would form a joint mechanism for conducting joint operations and intelligence sharing. They can also create an '[anti-terrorism superpower alliance](#)' according to the statement made by the Russian analyst Andrew Korybko during joint military drills [DRUZBA](#) in the year 2017. He opined that these joint military drills in the presence of the contemporary challenges and threats can lead towards both states becoming the 'anti-terrorists superpowers' and would ultimately enhance regional security. Further, Russia's offer to provide special military equipment to Pakistan is significant vis-à-vis the enhancement of military cooperation. Since both states can benefit from each other by extending their expertise. This, in turn, would

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have a profound impact on counter-terrorism efforts at the regional and ultimately at the global level.

In past, both Soviet Union and the Russian Federation had a strict policy against selling weapons to Pakistan. Apparently, this was one of the reasons Pakistan was left with no choice but to rely on Chinese and Western weapons for its security. It was in the year 2014 that both countries had an agreement to cooperate in the defence field and Pakistan was allowed to purchase military equipment from Russia. Pakistan then bought four '[MI-35](#)' attack helicopters to be used in counter-terrorism operations. Other than that two '[MI-171E](#)' helicopters were also purchased by Pakistan. Later in the year 2015, Pakistan bought '[Klimov RD-93](#)' engines for its JF-17 Thunder jets which were previously supplied by China. These acquisitions, though less in number, hold great significance for Pakistan to further enhance its military cooperation with Russia.

During the recent visit of the Russian Foreign minister to Pakistan both the states agreed on conducting more joint military exercises in the future. Such military exchanges and exercises would lead to better operational and tactical coordination between the two states and become the symbol of 'emerging military relations'. Given the complex regional security dynamics, where India is the biggest arms importer in the region, the security of Pakistan is being undermined. In this regard, Russia has emerged as among the countries that hold great strategic significance for Pakistan vis-à-vis its increasing defence needs. For instance, Pakistan is reportedly in talks with Russia to purchase the state-of-the-art Su-35 jets to balance the Indian Rafale jets that it has acquired from France. Moreover, India's purchase of the Russian S-400 and Russia-India 'BrahMos' missile cooperation has been quite concerning for Pakistan. Having stronger military ties with Russia might create a possibility for Pakistan to procure S-400 from Russia in the years to come.

Hence, at the present, it becomes quite apparent that there is not too much being materialized if the bilateral relationship between Russia and Pakistan are to be analyzed. However, both the countries have time and again acknowledged the strategic significance of each other. The enhanced military cooperation between Russia and Pakistan for defensive purposes would help the latter to further ensure its security in the complex regional security environment. Further, both states can work collectively to fight the common menace of terrorism. The improved bilateral ties would not only create a market for Russian military technology and weapons but also allow Russia to import textile and agricultural goods from Pakistan. Lastly, as Russia is the second-largest nuclear weapon state in the world, it could support Pakistan in urging NSG 'Nuclear Supplier Group' to have a criteria-based approach for Pakistan's induction into the group. In this regard, Russia can also provide Pakistan with nuclear equipment and technology that can be used for peaceful purposes.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/26042021-russia-and-pakistan-to-boost-cooperation-in-defense-and-counterterrorism-oped/>

What Do Closer Russia-Pakistan Ties Mean For the Region

*Khawaja Dawood Tariq**

The Russian foreign minister's recently concluded visit to South Asia heralds a new era in Russia's South Asian policy. Russia and India are strategic partners; while Moscow was once Pakistan's predominant security concern. But the geostrategic developments in the last decade or so have resulted in a global strategic realignment. A change in Russia's South Asian policy is also visible. New alliances are being developed which would likely have serious implications for regional security and strategic stability. Before regional security implications are analyzed, it is important to assess what has compelled this change in regional strategic orientation. To deconstruct the change in Russia's South Asian policy, two important components require analysis.

First, there is a realization in Moscow that New Delhi is getting closer to Washington and that too at the expense of Russia-India relations. The National Security Strategy of 2018 declared Russia a revisionist state which presents a major national security threat to the United States (US). The Indian decision to develop a strategic partnership with the US has altered the regional strategic calculus and its relations with Russia. As the US and India realign their strategic objectives, they are increasingly at odds with that of Moscow.

A new regional strategic nexus is under development. India and Russia used to have mutual interests and objectives in the region, but now New Delhi is a member of the Quad and has a designated role as a regional bulwark against the rise of China. New Delhi's overtures to Washington haven't gone down well with Moscow. It has led policymakers in the Kremlin to expand their diplomatic outreach in the region to find new partners, which leads to the second component.

Russia and Pakistan share a murky history. Pakistan is Washington's oldest ally in the region. It was once a regional bulwark against Moscow's supposed expansionist designs. However, the times have changed now. The US and Pakistan have been gradually drifting apart for some time; while Pakistan and Russia are increasingly finding points of convergence of interests. The recent trip to South Asia by the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov laid down the holistic vision for the future of Russia-Pakistan relations.

Top of the list is their mutual interest in achieving a peaceful end to the Afghan war. Both Islamabad and Moscow [are apprehensive of the US](#) endgame in Afghanistan. They agree that the peace process must be Afghan-led. To facilitate this, both Islamabad and Moscow have

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provided the use of their good offices. Biden's decision to withdraw US troops by September 11, 2021, would leave a massive security vacuum, and the regional powers will be required to step in to ensure a peaceful conclusion to the intra-Afghan dialogue. Hence, on his recent visit, Foreign Minister Lavrov was accompanied by the Russian President's Special Envoy for Afghanistan Ambassador Zamir Kabulov.

Counterterrorism is another area of mutual interest. Both Russia and Pakistan find the prospect of terrorism proliferation in post-withdrawal Afghanistan a national security threat. Foreign Minister Lavrov offered Pakistan access to [special military equipment](#) to combat this threat. Both Islamabad and Moscow find it in their interest to ensure that terrorist organizations do not find any space in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is not the only point of convergence for Russia and Pakistan. There has been a shift in Pakistan's priorities from geo-strategic to geo-economics. Pakistan wants to develop itself as the regional connectivity hub and requires technical expertise and investments. Russia possesses the requisite technical expertise to help Pakistan strengthen its economic base. However, the sanctions placed by the US would likely make things a bit tricky to execute.

The return of the great power competition means that new alliances are being forged. The change in Russia's South Asian policy of rebalancing between India and Pakistan would have major security implications for the region. This change is primarily down to the fact that India, the erstwhile Russian ally in the region, is now part of the US-led alliance.

The Indian media is reporting that [New Delhi is worried](#) about the developing relations between Russia and Pakistan. The desire to further relations, as outlined by the foreign minister's visit, is overarching in nature and rightly worrisome for India. A core component of Narendra Modi's foreign policy was to diplomatically isolate Pakistan. However, Pakistan's strengthening of diplomatic ties with India's historical ally is a failure of that facet of Indian foreign policy.

However, by no means can it be concluded that developing Pak-Russian relations would have a major negative impact on Russia-India relations. Russia-Pakistan relations would evolve slowly given the historical baggage and current geopolitical environment, but they would continue to evolve. On the other hand, as India and the US further institutionalize their objectives and interest, it would force India to divest from its relations with Russia. The regional security architecture is rapidly evolving and it has compelled the regional powers to realign their objectives and interests. The emergence of new alliances is reshaping the regional strategic orientation, and this has compelled Russia to review its South Asia policy and develop a balancing act between Pakistan and India.

<https://tribune.com.pk/article/97370/what-do-closer-russia-pakistan-ties-mean-for-the-region>

US Missteps in Afghanistan

*Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai**

History is poised to witness a second superpower's exit from Afghanistan in four decades. Earlier this month, when US President Joe Biden announced that it was "time to end the forever war", he was standing in the same Treaty Room as George W Bush when the latter had informed the American people of the retributive strikes on Afghanistan as payback for 9/11.

Now, as then, the presidential speech was rather unclear in places, with Biden starting by echoing the original premise for war: "We went to Afghanistan in 2001 to root out Al Qaeda, to prevent future terrorist attacks against the United States planned from Afghanistan." In the next breath, he noted that the US had delivered justice to Bin Laden a decade ago while musing that "our reasons for remaining in Afghanistan are becoming increasingly unclear, even as the terrorist threat that we went to fight evolved". He concluded by saying that the US "cannot continue the cycle of extending or expanding our military presence in Afghanistan, hoping to create ideal conditions for the withdrawal".

The 9/11 attacks changed the course of US foreign policy. President George W Bush, who was at the helm at the time, wielded enormous power in his pursuit to defeat the enemy. Yet in doing so, he ended up overlooking important considerations such as Afghan reconciliation and the interests of major allies, holding the key to American success in Afghanistan. Pakistan, for its part, not only assisted the US by providing logistics, including access to airspace and military bases, as well as intelligence-sharing but also in determining the end of the war that is happening right now. Many factors have contributed to the effective US failure in Afghanistan. However, two stand out and if Washington had considered them, the closing chapter of the US-Afghan war would have played out very differently.

Both the Trump and Biden White Houses failed to prioritize intra-Afghan talks. Had this happened, the May 1 deadline for US complete and unconditional troop withdrawal would have been achievable.

Firstly, despite Pakistan being the US' most allied ally in the war on terror, Washington repeatedly disregarded the country's sensitivities, thereby irking Islamabad in the process. This precedent was established in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks when the Bush administration issued Pakistan with seven demands, including stopping Al Qaeda at the border; providing the US with landing rights to conduct operations against the terror outfit; sharing intelligence; helping the US destroy Bin Laden while also breaking off ties with the Taliban.

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Islamabad had no choice but to comply, fearing that neutrality would allow India to step into the vacuum.

Meanwhile, General Pervez Musharraf put forward three valid concerns to the US: evacuation of Pakistan's operatives from Afghanistan; no Indian influence in Afghanistan; and no major role for the Northern Alliance in Kabul. President Bush agreed to the points and cooperation began. Pakistan took little time to evacuate its operatives from Afghanistan but the latter two concerns had to be proven over time. Unfortunately, the Bush administration afforded India a major role in Afghanistan while Kabul fell to the Northern Alliance with US support. Moreover, in the post-Bonn landscape, major ministries went to the Northern Alliance, whom Islamabad still regarded as an adversary from the days of the Taliban regime (1996-2001).

All of which was of grave concern to policymakers in Pakistan, prompting Islamabad to prioritize Indian and other anti-Pakistan elements in Kabul. The country's strategic location and lawless border areas provided the Taliban with enough room to re-organize. Had Pakistan not been encircled and had it not supported the Taliban as a direct result of this — the situation would have been different for the US today. What Washington refers to as double-dealing was, in reality, nothing more than a defensive measure.

Secondly, the main factor behind the US failure in Afghanistan was Washington's miscalculation of the Taliban. The Bush administration used full force to dismantle the group while overlooking the role of the leadership in its earlier guise as part of the mujahedeen who fought the Soviets before going on to fight in Afghanistan's civil war.

President Obama recognized the need for reconciliation as part of a political settlement. Since then, President Trump entered into a bilateral agreement with the Taliban, and currently, the US-backed Doha talks are aimed at bringing Kabul and the Taliban to the table. This underscores how the Taliban is now recognized as a political and military force in Afghanistan. Although much time has been unnecessarily wasted. Especially since both the Trump and Biden White Houses failed to prioritize intra-Afghan talks. Had this happened, the May 1 deadline for US complete and unconditional troop withdrawal would have been achievable.

However, all is not lost. If President Biden supports the Doha peace talks and sticks to the new and revised exit date and if the Istanbul conference on Afghanistan is not again postponed because of a Taliban no-show — then peace might have a chance.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/749681/us-missteps-in-afghanistan/>

Space Weaponization: A Threat to Arms Race Stability in South Asia

*Amber Afreen Abid**

The space weaponization debate is getting a foothold in the international security environment. The aim to achieve global power status has urged the influential states to work on outer space. The militarization and weaponization of outer space have been in discussion for some time. The outer space weaponization is horrendous in the eyes of arms control provocateurs. India, in its aspiration, to pursue power, global status and regional hegemony didn't lack behind in the quest and has thus followed the suit. The Indian pursuit of space weaponization is detrimental to the deterrence stability in the region, which entails two nuclear power states. Thus, the space weaponization in South Asia needs all ears before the region gets further destabilized.

In the existing global power paradigm, it has become the prerequisite to achieve success in outer space, to have a more dominant role in the decision-making process at the global level. Sustaining a modernized and up-to-date army and weaponry has always been the indispensable element of state power. The advanced weaponization of the military is believed to be an essential tangible factor in the foreign policy-making of a state and the pursuance of its national interest. India, in order to attain global status and in its pursuit to attain escalation dominance on Pakistan, is actively mobilizing its space-based activities. The Indian officials and scholars are insisting upon their government to utilize space for deterrence purposes as well. Thus, the offensive space-based capability increases the chances of any misadventure and could pursue the Indian officials to take hawkish steps against Pakistan, once they'll have contentment over its deterrence capability, which leads to instability in the region.

The developments in the international arena, entailing the US' withdrawal from the Open Skies Treaty, creation of its space force, and increased testing and development of the ASAT program by the major powers, has unwrapped ways for space weaponization. India considerably is pursuing its outer space program, which particularly is antagonistic towards Pakistan. Indian intentions appeared to be hazy when US President Ronald Reagan presented his [Star Wars Program](#), and India showed ambiguity of its space program to be civilian and purely pacifist or otherwise. In [March 2019](#), when India conducted its ASAT weapon test, it appeared to be a surprise to the international community, and considered that to be a peaceful

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space program, but not to Pakistan who reiterated many times about India's intention of space weaponization.

Furthermore, the missiles don't just cross or target the space-based assets, but could also be stationed in space, and the stationed space-based assets could also target each other in space. The militarization of space has increased the data conveyance and information availability to the states in no time, and states could gain real-time information about their adversary as well. This kind of information could be used to target the military assets of the adversary in pre-emptive attack, excessively. This would amplify uncertainty between the states and a security dilemma would be created at the adversary's end, especially those lacking in space technology.

India has also signed an agreement with the US, which is the latest of the agreements between the two states for enhancing military cooperation. BECA ([Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement](#)) would allow India to get its hands on satellite data, sensitive information, and real-time access to the US geospatial intelligence. This cooperation by a superpower would tremendously increase India's space-based capabilities and give India an edge over Pakistan in case of conflict scenario. It would also provoke India to go for a pre-emptive strike against Pakistan.

Pakistan, on the other hand, has a nascent space-based program; nevertheless, it has a space vision by 2047. Even though Pakistan is not in a contest with India over the outer space program, but the security concerns of Pakistan have always been India centric, which necessitates the espousal of concrete steps to be taken in the future for enhancing the security of the country in the context of outer space too, for maintaining the minimum credible deterrence against India. Satellites, in the technical domain, have a principal role to play and are considered as the most significant tool in case of conventional conflicts. The ASAT, on the other hand, also relentlessly affects the adversary's capability of a second strike attack, in case it would be engaged against its C4I2SR satellite (Command, Communication, Control, Computer, Information, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Satellite). The sound Outer Space Program has become essential for Pakistan, for maintaining deterrence, which includes the development of remote sensing satellites, communication, and early warning satellites, and uninterrupted communication. Both the South Asian states, with bilateral mistrust and war-prone history, have found themselves in yet another competition, and a new zone of conflict has been opened by India, which could be detrimental to peace and security in the region.

<http://southasiajournal.net/space-weaponization-a-threat-to-arms-race-stability-in-south-asia/>

US Intelligence Report on South Asia: Dynamics and Probability of War and Escalation between India and Pakistan

*Haris Bilal Malik**

The South Asian region is widely regarded as one of the most volatile regions in the world. This is primarily because of the hostile nature of the relationship between the two arch-rivals India and Pakistan. The regional security dynamics have remained complex given the asymmetric military equation between India and Pakistan. Over the years, both countries have remained involved in various conflicts ranging from full-fledged wars to limited conventional conflicts and even now sub-conventional conflicts. Likewise, the overt nuclearization of South Asia in 1998 has since then emerged as the most crucial dynamic for the broader regional and international security calculus. This is further complemented by the existence of the unresolved issue of Kashmir between the two countries which has been widely regarded as a 'nuclear flashpoint' in the region. Based on these, the contemporary security environment of South Asia has gained considerable significance within the discourse surrounding international security. All these factors combined have further complicated the dynamics and probability of war and escalation in South Asia.

The international community; especially the US, has remained deeply concerned regarding the ever-increasing fears of escalation that exist in the region. Similarly, the South Asian region still holds significant weightage in the threat assessments based on intelligence reports that are being carried out by key US security organizations. Very recently, the National Intelligence Council in its global trend report for the US; has warned about the possibility of war in South Asia. It noted that India and Pakistan might engage in a large-scale war; though both sides don't want to indulge in conflict as of now. However, the probability of war would become more likely following a terrorist attack that India would consider significant. The report has further insinuated towards the Pulwama-like attack in the future as a potential flashpoint for which India would blame Pakistan. In such circumstances, India's resolve to retaliate and consequently Pakistan's compulsion to defend itself and ensure its sovereignty would be the decisive factor; which seems to be persistently increasing particularly in the next five years. It holds that under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, India seems to be more likely to respond by using its military force as compared to the past.

Even though the report has acknowledged the existence of nuclear deterrence equilibrium in the region that has prevented major conflicts in the past. However, at the same time, it has been feared that any miscalculation by either of the governments might fail the

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deterrence. This would likely bring disastrous economic and political consequences for the region. The report further elaborates that the US' withdrawal policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan and its likely impact on the region are key factors that would create uncertainty in the region. It highlights that the US actions in Afghanistan specifically in the upcoming year would bring significant consequences for the whole region in general and India and Pakistan in particular. In a post-US withdrawal situation, the security vacuum within Afghanistan would further encourage India to wage unrest in Pakistan's western parts. It is notably important to know that India has been using its network of operatives in Afghanistan to fuel its hybrid war against Pakistan. Hence, as the report predicts, the US exit strategy from Afghanistan has the potential to increase the hostility between India and Pakistan. The probability of this becomes more relevant since US President Joe Biden has recently talked about the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan by September this year.

To further analyze, especially, at a time when there is an ongoing debate within the discourse surrounding the regional and international security about the recent attempts of rapprochement between India and Pakistan, this assessment is notably important to be considered. Pakistan has already affirmed its desire for long-lasting peace and stability in the region at the highest strategic levels. In this regard, the recent deliberation from the top brass of the military; to extend the hand of peace in all directions and to bury the past with India, and moving towards meaningful cooperation is quite significant. Likewise, the goodwill letter of the Indian Prime Minister Modi in which he asserted the desire for cordial relations with Pakistan was perceived as a positive development by the latter. Though the emphasis on the resolution of the Kashmir issue seemed to be intentionally ignored by Mr. Modi, his Pakistani counterpart responded with a more realistic and holistic approach. In his letter to Mr. Modi Prime Minister Imran Khan desired peaceful and cooperative relations with India while emphasizing the peaceful resolution of the core issue of Kashmir; since regional peace and stability is dependent on its peaceful resolution. Against the backdrop of the recent rapprochement attempt, though which appears as a conditional desire from the Indian side, the dynamics and probability of war and escalation in South Asia cannot be ignored at least in the longer term.

Hence summarizing it all, South Asia is no doubt a region that is more vulnerable to conflicts and wars. Even though the current security environment of South Asia seems to be a bit stable as compared to the last two years, uncertainties still exist. Given the complex security and escalation dynamics, a secure future cannot be guaranteed as predicted in the recent intelligence report issued by the US. At one time in history, after the overt nuclearization of South Asia, one of the former presidents of the US had very rightly described the South Asian region as the most dangerous region in the world. Even today, this deliberation about South Asia appears to be more or less the same in the US perception of regional security.

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