



SVI FORESIGHT

August 2023 – Volume 9, Issue 8

Edited by: Amber Afreen Abid

Compilation & Design: Ghulam Mujtaba Haider

Strategic Vision Institute Islamabad

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 the 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 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 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 the SVI Research Officers, Visiting Faculty, and professional experts. The objective is to provide the readership with a concise all-around and real-time policy-oriented discourse on contemporary strategic regional and international developments, highlighting their relevance to Pakistan.

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Editor's Note..... | 4 |
| Indian Defense Minister's Lofty Claims <i>Muhammad Abu Bakar</i> | 5 |
| India's Military Turns Toward Integrated Theater Commands: A Rising Challenge for Pakistan <i>Usman Haider</i> | 8 |
| Pakistan: Understanding TTP's Modus Operandi <i>Syed Raza Abbas</i> | 12 |
| Parachinar: Challenges to Peace, And Opportunities in Region <i>Syed Raza Abbas</i> | 15 |
| What Is Driving Pakistan-US Security Cooperation After the War in Afghanistan? <i>Hamdan Khan</i> | 18 |
| China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: 10 Years and Beyond <i>Ayesha Shaikh</i> | 21 |
| BRICS Expansion and Key Takeaways from its 15th Summit <i>Ayesha Sikandar</i> | 25 |
| Amidst Discord and Dialogue: Assessing NPT Preparatory Committee 2023 <i>Sherbano</i> | 28 |
| A Closer Look at Recent US-China Diplomatic Engagement <i>Ahmad Ali</i> | 31 |
| Biden's Executive Order Curbing Tech Investments in China <i>Ahmad Ali</i> | 33 |
| US-China Tech War: Semiconductors at heart of Competition Driving World towards New Cold War <i>Shayan Hassan Jamy</i> | 36 |
| China's Generative AI Measures and the Need for Global AI Norms <i>Shayan Hassan Jamy</i> | 39 |
| Drones: A New Aspect in Warfare <i>Amber Afreen Abid</i> | 42 |
| Cluster Munitions Will Do More Harm Than Good in the Russia-Ukraine War <i>Saadain Gardezi</i> | 45 |
| Artemis and Chandrayaan-3: How Indo-U.S Space Cooperation will Impact Pakistan? <i>Akash Shah</i> | 48 |
| What Is Driving India's Entanglement in the Taiwan Strait Crisis? <i>Komal Khan</i> | 51 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| The NATO Summit and the Ukrainian Conundrum | |
| <i>Shamil Abdullah Saleh</i> | 54 |
| Why is Ukraine's Counter-offensive Destined to Fail? | |
| <i>Usman Haider</i> | 57 |
| Philippines under Geo-Political Spotlight | |
| <i>Muhammad Abu Bakar</i> | 60 |
| A Closer Look At Fragmented Unity Of Asia-Pacific | |
| <i>Shamil Abdullah Saleh</i> | 63 |

Editor's Note

SVI Foresight for the month of August brings with it another well-timed issue of the SVI electronic journal SVI-Foresight. Covering various contemporary topics of strategic importance, technology, role of international organizations, and political discourse happening around the world, it offers opinion-based short commentaries on a number of issues of regional and international importance, and they tend to the global politics and stability.

The issue entails discussion on the Indian's irresponsible and provocative remarks, boosting to cross the LoC, the integrated theater commands initiation by India and how such actions effects South Asian strategic stability. The discussion on innovative technology such as cluster munitions, artificial intelligence and drones have added a new dynamic to conflicts; the updated debates in the BRICS, NATO and NPT; the US-China competition and the ongoing war in Ukraine, have all being analyzed from different perspectives by varying scholars.

It is hoped that this issue will help readers in staying updated with the current strategic environment and they will find the analyses useful. The *SVI Foresight* team invites and highly encourages contributions from the security and strategic community in the form of opinion-based short commentaries on contemporary political, security, nuclear, and strategic issues. Any suggestions for further improvements are welcome. 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](#).

Amber Afreen Abid
Editor, SVI Foresight

Indian Defense Minister's Lofty Claims

Muhammad Abu Bakar

In a recent development Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh issued a highly irresponsible, unfortunate and provocative statement. He asserted that India is ready to cross the “Line of Control (LOC)” while addressing a Kargil War memorial in Ladakh’s Drass town.

This is not the first time that Singh has made such inflammatory remarks. It marks yet another instance in a series of such declarations that have resurfaced over the years. As reported by several media outlets, the defense minister has issued gratuitous remarks threatening to divide Pakistan into pieces, annex Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), and now, once more, to cross the LOC. This pattern of rhetoric provides insight into the BJP’s expansionist mindset, extremist ideology, hegemonic ambitions, and obsession with Pakistan. In addition to that, these remarks exhibit a concerning level of delusion and a pronounced hostility towards Pakistan. Moreover, such statements seem to be rooted more in falsehood and fantasies rather than a realistic assessment of the complex geopolitical landscape.

Pakistan responded strongly to India’s provocative remarks through a press release issued by its Foreign Ministry. It condemned India’s defense minister for “boasting about readiness to cross the LOC”, advising India to exercise utmost caution. Such belligerent rhetoric was deemed a threat to regional peace and stability, contributing to a destabilized strategic environment in South Asia. Moreover, it’s worth noting that this is not the first instance of India’s political leaders and military officers making irresponsible statements about Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB). Indian army’s Lieutenant General Upendra Dwivedi issued a similar provoking and unwise statement back in Nov, 2022 that “Indian army is ready to execute orders” to take portion of Kashmir under Pakistan’s administration. In response, Pakistan’s military’s media wing, slammed the statement and termed it delusional, lofty claims & surreal ambition, and intellectually insulting. Furthermore, Pakistan counseled India that such Jingoistic statements must stop immediately. At the same time, Indian leadership was reminded that Pakistan is fully capable of defending and thwarting any aggressive plans.

A similar pattern of statements emerged following the Pulwama attack in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). Occurring just before elections in India, the attack was exploited as a political tool to garner support and sway public sentiment. Moreover, irresponsible rhetoric and baseless accusations were employed against Pakistan. Despite the absence of any concrete evidence, India hastily attributed the attack to Pakistan sparking a surge in war hysteria and pressure within the country to retaliate. As a result, on February 26, 2019, India under Modi's leadership conducted airstrike on Balakot on a so-called militant training camp. Pakistan strongly condemned the Indian airstrike on Balakot and categorically denied the presence of any militant training camp. In response, Pakistan launched operation "Swift Retort" and during the intense aerial engagement, two Indian planes were shot down. To add to India's embarrassment, Pakistan captured the pilot of one of the downed planes, (Wing Commander Abhinandan). Pakistan as a gesture of peace and to de-escalate matters handed him back to India two days after he was captured. The events that unfolded on that day left a lasting impact, challenging the notion of Indian military superiority. Moreover, this decisive response stood as a testament to Pakistan's resolve in defending

its territorial integrity and thwarting any aggressive actions against its sovereignty.

Furthermore, Rajnath Singh's remarks seem to be strategically aligned with certain political objectives and challenges faced by the ruling BJP government. It is pertinent to note that upcoming elections are scheduled between April and May 2024, the BJP has historically benefited from anti-Pakistan rhetoric, as seen after the Pulwama attack and Balakot airstrike. The timing of the provocative remarks suggests a calculated move to capitalize on nationalist sentiments and consolidate public support. Moreover, the formation of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) as an attempt by the opposition parties to challenge the BJP has intensified the political pressure on Modi. Apart from that, Modi is facing internal challenges in Manipur, where ethnic violence between the majority Meitei and Minority Kuki has claimed numerous lives. A shocking and disturbing video also emerged of an attack when two Kuki women were paraded naked by Meitei men after their village was razed. The BJP government led by Modi may be resorting to such aggressive statements to divert attention from these pressing issues. In light of these complexities, the defense minister's

statement appears to serve as a strategic maneuver to reshape the narrative and garner support during a crucial election period.

As of the current moment, the prospects for meaningful dialogue between India & Pakistan appear uncertain. The bilateral relations have been strained for quite some time, especially following India's revocation of Kashmir's special status and the subsequent downgrading of diplomatic ties by Pakistan. Moreover, the political dynamics within India, including upcoming elections and the BJP's historical use of anti-Pakistan rhetoric for electoral gains, may also play a role in shaping the country's engagement with Pakistan.

Additionally, the US side rendered India the leading partner role to tame China; it might further solidify its current stance on avoiding dialogue with Pakistan. Given the complexities and challenges mentioned, achieving substantial progress towards peace in the region remains speculative at this juncture. Looking forward, while the road to reconciliation may appear challenging at the current moment, sincere intentions, sustained efforts, and genuine commitment to peace can overcome obstacles.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/06082023-indian-defense-ministers-lofty-claims-oped/>

Muhammad Abu Bakar

(Research Assistant, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad.)

India's Military Turns Toward Integrated Theater Commands: A Rising Challenge for Pakistan

Usman Haider

The Indian government is set to announce the establishment of long-awaited integrated theater commands (ITCs) in the upcoming weeks. After months of discussion, the Indian tri-services have in principle agreed to 99 percent of the working framework for proposed theater commands. Moreover, India's present chief of defense staff, General Anil Chauhan, recently hinted at the establishment of ITCs while addressing India's elite scientific community in Delhi, by asserting that "in the national security realm, the concept of theaterization is a fundamental change that is on the anvil,"

If the implementation phase commences in August as reported, it would enable the Indian military to effectively deploy the army's Integrated Battle Groups along Pakistan's border in synergy with Indian Air Force (IAF) assets, thus affecting Pakistan's national security by eroding conventional deterrence.

The Shift to ITCs

The concept of integrated theater commands was first formally proposed by the Shekatkar

Committee in 2016, which identified the lack of jointness within the Indian military as a concern. The committee's report recommended the establishment of three integrated commands: southern, western, and northern.

The recommendation got a jump start once General Bipin Rawat took over the office of the chief of defense staff. Rawat eagerly supported ITCs and proposed five commands, two more than the original idea. He fervently advocated for the creation of theater commands and secured popular support.

But the ITCs attained full traction only in the Indian Army, with some support in the Indian Navy. The IAF, for its part, resisted the novel concept back then, out of concern that the division of air assets will affect its doctrinal approach and adversely affect its operational capabilities. Moreover, comments by Rawat calling the IAF a "support arm" of the Indian Army, created a deadlock, because his comments antagonized the IAF leadership. This eventually slowed down progress toward ITCs.

However, with the appointment of General Anil Chauhan as chief of defense staff, the process resumed, and was put on track again. He silently worked behind the scenes and

removed the hurdles in the materialization of ITCs. He pointedly called the process of theaterization irreversible on the eve of the Combined Commanders Conference (CCC). This was a signal to the military commanders to start focusing on jointness and accept the incoming change.

Also, to operationalize the ITCs sooner, the Lok Sabha, India's lower house, put its weight behind the Inter-Services Organizations (Command, Control and Discipline) Bill 2023, which passed without any amendments on August 4. The bill would end the previous practices being followed within the Indian military, thus permitting the commander of each ITC to discipline personnel of all three services under his command. This measure indicates the seriousness of the Indian government on the operationalization of integrated theater commands.

The plan is to reduce the present 17 commands of the Indian military (three of the navy and seven each of the army and air force) into three commands only. Former Indian Army Chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane argued during his tenure that the process will ensure “tri-services synergy” and effective use of military resources.

Each theater command will constitute elements belonging to the army, navy, and air force, working under only one commander in a certain specific geography. This will ensure the availability of all resources at the commander's disposal in a crisis. To ensure effective command and control, theater commanders will directly report to the chief of defense staff, instead of services chiefs. This move toward the adoption of ITCs aims to end the lacunas that existed in the Indian military because of a lack of jointness among services.

Additionally, the theater commands are being created based on the notion of One Border One Force. They will be geography- and border-specific, with three to be created: two will be land-based and one will be focused on maritime boundaries. According to various media reports, the first phase will involve the establishment of two ITCs, with separate headquarters in Jaipur and Lucknow, that are specifically intended to counter Pakistan and China. In the second phase, a marine theater command (MTC), with its headquarters in Korwar, will be raised, with the job of protecting Indian economic and security interests in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions.

Implications for Pakistan

The news coming from India indicates that Pakistan-specific Western Theater Command will be the first to be operationalized, with the China-focused Northern Theater Command coming second. This highlights the fact that regardless of the recent hot engagements with the Chinese military at Galwan Valley, and increasing cooperation with the United States against China in the Asia-Pacific region, India still considers Pakistan to be its primary adversary.

This was reaffirmed by the recent belligerent statement coming from Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh, last month in which he repeatedly threatened to cross the Line of Control (LOC). Singh never used such language against the Chinese even at the peak of the Galwan Valley crisis. Even the recent China-India clash at the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh didn't invoke such hawkish comments.

Once the Western Theater Command becomes functional, it would provide a suitable launching pad for India's Pakistan-centric proactive strategy, commonly known as Cold Start Doctrine. The doctrine is grounded in the concept of rapid and swift employment of Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs). It requires jointness between the

Indian Army and IAF because the ground-based IBGs would not be able to fight alone without adequate air cover and close air support from the IAF. The IAF has resisted this job in the past because it believed that it had the distinctive skill of carrying out independent strategic missions. However, implementing an ITC under one command authority would bring an end to this hesitancy and enhance the synergy between the two services, which was lacking in the past because of their different doctrinal postures.

Moreover, the theaterization will reorganize the old Indian Army units and convert them into tailor-made IBGs, as argued by Indian Army Chief Manoj Pande earlier this year. The operationalization of an ITC would allow these IBGs to carry out their operations in a shorter timeframe, while retaining the required IAF air cover. The presence of one theater commander would lead to the "unity of command," enabling effective coordination and direction of all military forces toward a common objective. It would remove the operational hurdles that hindered the smooth launching of the Cold Start Doctrine.

This should be a serious concern for Pakistan because it would pave the way for "Cold Start" to go hot at any time. It would enhance the temptation, already existing in the Indian

politico-military establishment under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, of crossing the LOC and international border with Pakistan if a new crisis arises. Looking at the Modi government's previous track record, India could initiate another misadventure.

The Indian theater command initiative will challenge Pakistan's national security. This new development will pose a significant challenge to the Pakistan Army's war fighting capabilities, as its last doctrine came in 2011 and didn't foresee the operational challenges posed by theater commands. India's shift to ITCs requires new doctrinal thinking on paper, in military training grounds, and during military exercises. To counter this emerging challenge, greater jointness is required within Pakistan's military at each level of war.

Finally, Pakistan may have to come up with a new military strategy to nullify the advantages that India is likely to get in the near future. This should be done sooner rather than later.

<https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/indias-military-turns-toward-integrated-theater-commands-a-rising-challenge-for-pakistan/>

Usman Haider

(Research Assistant, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

Pakistan: Understanding TTP's Modus Operandi

Syed Raza Abbas

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has been a constant challenge for the security agencies of Pakistan, since its inception.

The state of Pakistan first initiated peace talks with insurgents in May 2004 in South Waziristan and inked an agreement with Nek Muhammad Wazir the former Mujahedeen commander in Shakai. The agreement was that Nek Muhammad would expel foreign fighters from South Waziristan in return the Pakistani army would stop military operations and withdraw troops from the region. However, the agreement only lasted for 50 days before being violated by insurgents and Nek Muhammad utilized the truce with the Pakistani state to further intensify the presence of trained foreign fighters in the region. The second major peace agreement was signed in February 2005 in Sararogha famously recalled as Sararogha Peace agreement. The government entered into a peace agreement with the hope of containing further Taliban expansion.

Another peace agreement was signed with the former chief of TTP Baitullah Mehsud in 2006 under the supervision of Governor K.P Ali Jan Orakzai, TTP started violating the

terms of the agreement within a few weeks' time. Additionally, one more peace agreement was signed in 2008 with the TTP Swat chapter to end the hostilities. Following a series of meetings and discussions between Taliban representatives and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government both in the Swat Valley and in Peshawar, on May 21, 2008, the two sides reached a 16-point agreement to bring an end to violence and restore peace to the valley but it was bound to fail.

It is important to note that TTP has a history of breaking peace agreements. When they get weak they try to negotiate some sort of settlement and then use this window of opportunity to regroup, restructure, relocate, and rearm to launch further attacks on security forces and citizens of Pakistan. They did a replica with Pakistan when they pretended to engage in talks but in reality, they needed that time to relocate their fighters and reorganize, after the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021.

On Monday, the army chief said, "Pakistan would not seek talks with the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)" in a major policy statement that would put pressure on the Afghan Taliban to take action against the terrorist safe havens. It is pertinent to note that after several attempts in the past now, the security agencies have

given up on the idea of having talks with the TTP and are looking for potential solutions to end this menace which is lingering for almost two decades.

The current regime of the Taliban in Afghanistan has a deep-rooted ideological affiliation with TTP because of so many factors. Firstly, TTP pledges allegiance to the emir of the Taliban in Afghanistan and wants a replica of the Islamic Emirate in the former tribal belt of Pakistan. Secondly, they fought together against the Soviets in the Afghan jihad from 1979 to 1989. Lastly, they have tribal affiliations, they speak the same language, same culture, same religious sect and they intermarry into each other tribes, so it is safe to say that Afghan Taliban TTA and Pakistani Taliban TTP are cousins and are the two sides of a same coin. TTP occupies no physical territory in Pakistan currently and they are based out of Afghanistan.

However, they have a good amount of sympathy in the former tribal belt of Pakistan which is concerning. On top of that, TTP has now established links with Baloch insurgents also and they have intensified attacks on security forces in Baluchistan in the last year. Interestingly, the TTP and Baloch insurgents developing nexus arise suspicions of Indian involvement. India has a history of supporting Non-State actors in Pakistan and

using those proxies as a geo-political tool to further their hawkish foreign policy goals.

Moreover, TTP under the leadership of Nur Wali Mehsud has reformed its organizational structures after the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban. TTP has set up different “Wilayas” provinces which mean areas of operations under different “Emirs” commanders. They have changed their operational approach and now they most of the time target military and law enforcement agencies personnel in a deliberate approach to draw a wedge between public and security agencies. According to some experts of the Afghan-Pak region, TTP has approximately recruited 2500 to 6000 hardcore fighters based out of Afghanistan, mostly confined in the Khost, Paktia, Logar, and Nangarhar provinces of Afghanistan which run across the Durand line.

It's high time for both the political and military leadership to come to terms on the issue of TTP specifically and on various terrorist threats generally to formulate clear policy guidelines with implementation time frame. As a native of the region where TTP used to operate, I can safely say that TTP has nothing to do with Islam neither they have an iota of understanding of the Sharia law. The majority of the founding fathers of TTP were ex-Mujahedeen commanders who after the

Jihad in Afghanistan set up their private militias in the former tribal belt to make their fortunes. Some local criminals also joined them and became Taliban overnight, just to continue their criminal activities of cultivating hemp, kidnapping wealthy and influential people, taking extortion money from businessmen, smuggling weapons, drugs, and the list goes on. To conclude, TTP is a criminal syndicate and must be dealt with the way the state deals with criminals without ifs and buts.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/29082023-pakistan-understanding-ttps-modus-operandi-oped/>

Syed Raza Abbas

(Research Assistant, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

Parachinar: Challenges to Peace, And Opportunities in Region

Syed Raza Abbas

Parachinar is the last border town of Pakistan with Afghanistan and a capital town of Kurram district former tribal agency. Parachinar holds immense strategic importance for Pakistan because of its location from an economic and security perspective. Parachinar necks into Afghanistan by sharing a border with four Afghanistan provinces: Khost, Paktia, Logar, and Nangarhar.

Parachinar holds immense potential for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia due to its connectivity and is the closest border town of Pakistan with the capital city of Afghanistan Kabul, just 65 miles away from Kabul. The mighty Koh e Sufaid hovers over the city of Parachinar with its highest Peak known as Sikaram (4755 m) locals in Pashto call it Spin Ghar which means white mountain because of its glaciers and high altitude which has immense potential for tourism, mountaineering, and expeditions.

The Kurram Valley possesses fertile soil and abundant water resources because of melting glaciers and natural springs and people living on the peripheries of Kurram Valley mostly

depend on agriculture and livestock. Parachinar having immense economic potential, which can positively contribute to the overall economy and GDP of Pakistan, has instead been in the news for the wrong reason varying from sectarian conflicts to terrorism and military operations and is the second most affected city by terrorism after Peshawar due to its close proximity to Afghanistan and surrounding tribal belt which were under the control of TTP and other banned sectarian outfits.

President Pervez Musharraf in his book In the Line of Fire stated that Osama Bin Laden slipped from Tora Bora into Koh e Sufaid mountain range to dodge the American forces who invaded Afghanistan to apprehend the masterminds of the 9/11 terrorist attack since the geography that should have been a blessing for the people of Parachinar and Pakistan has turned into a curse and the region fell prey to perpetual terrorism, sectarian conflicts, and military operations.

The recent takeover of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2021 has rejuvenated the terrorist threat in the Kurram Valley and since then border security has been a challenge for Pakistan because of the usual intrusion from the Afghan side into Pakistan and rooting out the border fence by Afghan Taliban on the basis of their so-called

historical claim that Durand line is not an International border between Pakistan and Afghanistan and that Pashtun belt stretching till Baluchistan belongs to Afghanistan.

The eastern Nangarhar Province of Afghanistan, which is a stronghold of (ISKP) Islamic State of Khorasan Province an affiliate terrorist faction of the Islamic State, is very close to Parachinar and due to its close proximity, they have been successful in carrying out major terrorist attacks in Parachinar since 2016. Islamic State has a sectarian agenda there and Parachinar is a soft target for them where they can easily flare up the sectarian tension thereby manipulating the sectarian fault line.

Talking of sectarian issues, we must not forget that this region has been deprived of the very basic education that one needs so religious madrassas have filled that vacuum, and their textbooks are also not regulated by the state which mostly contain hate speech and the primary focus of madrasas are on teaching Jihad to juveniles by cherry-picking Quranic verses and misinterpreting them, which results in extremist tendencies in the youth and minds like these can be easily manipulated to fight for the sectarian cause. The underlying reason for extremism in the Kurram Valley is poverty, lack of education, and foreign influence.

The silver lining in the whole of this man-made mess is that dynamics are changing. The local population, and most importantly youth, is now rejecting the extremists and they want peace, development, education, and economic opportunities now. Young vloggers from Parachinar are promoting the beauty of Kurram Valley to attract tourism from all over Pakistan and shed the negative image that has been portrayed due to the war on terror. People here have learned conflict resolution on their own and whenever some dispute arises the Jirga's from both sides sit in an agreed-upon place and decide the terms on which peace be established and cease-fire take place, for instance, the recent sectarian clashes that took place in Lower, Upper and Central Kurram after the killing of teachers in Tari Mangal Government high school were controlled by Tribal elders in a peace Jirga and cease-fire was established within a week after rigorous meetings.

Challenges to peace and development are many in Parachinar, but so are the opportunities, after successful military operations by the Pakistan army against terrorists now they are working on different social welfare projects which include schools, hospitals, communication, small dams, tourist resorts, and poverty alleviation

projects to better integrate the tribal society into the mainstream.

As we know that the strategic location of Parachinar offers potential trade routes with Afghanistan and Central Asia so there is a long-term project of connecting Pakistan and Afghanistan via a railway line and 4-lane motorway further to central Asia and this project comes under the ambit of flagship project CPEC, upon successful completion these projects can change the future of this conflict-ridden region for good.

The tourism industry is another potential revenue-generation source, Young social media vloggers from Kurram Valley and adjacent districts promote and showcase the beauty of Parachinar and the valleys of Koh e Sufaid but the primary responsibility of developing proper industry is of the government. For instance, Mount Sikaram

which is the highest peak of the Koh e Sufaid range was last summited by British surveyor George Batley Scott in 1879 when he was surveying for the campaign of Afghanistan since then nobody has gone on the expedition to summit Mount Sikaram.

The state of Pakistan can benefit economically from the natural resources and strategic location of Parachinar through inclusive policies, which will attract domestic and foreign investors to invest in different potentially profitable sectors in the region.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/04082023-parachinar-challenges-to-peace-and-opportunities-in-region-oped/>

Syed Raza Abbas
(Research Assistant, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

What Is Driving Pakistan-US Security Cooperation After the War in Afghanistan?

Hamdan Khan

The only feature that has remained consistent throughout the history of the Pakistan-U.S. relationship is inconsistency. During the last 75 years, there have been phases of mutually beneficial convergences of interests yielding broader-based cooperation, but each such peak in the ties was followed by extended periods of estrangement. Accordingly, the Pakistan-U.S. relationship has been given many different characterizations – most notably, “transactional,” epitomizing “magnificent delusions,” and “riding the roller coaster” – all underscoring its consistently inconsistent quintessence.

Nevertheless, in the most recent case, following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Pakistan-U.S. relationship didn’t hit a nadir like in the previous instances when a proximate cause for cooperation was removed. Despite the dark shadows of deep divergences over the war in Afghanistan and resulting wariness, the two sides have maintained and, in some areas, bolstered cooperation across a range of fields including health, clean energy, disaster response, trade, and investments. The

Pakistan-U.S. trade volume grew to reach \$12 billion in 2022, and Washington maintained its status as one of the biggest foreign investors in Pakistan. Furthermore, following devastating climate-induced floods last year, the United States was among the top suppliers of relief goods to Pakistan, besides pledging a hefty sum of humanitarian aid.

In addition, the two sides have maintained security ties, though on a relatively modest scale. While the Trump administration had resumed the once-suspended military training program for Pakistan, the Biden administration went further. In September 2022, the State Department approved a foreign military sale worth \$450 million for the maintenance of Pakistan’s F-16 program.

In February 2023, an inter-agency delegation from Pakistan visited Washington to attend the second round of the Pakistan-U.S. Defense Dialogue, which focused on bilateral defense and security cooperation. This month, media reports claimed that Islamabad has given a nod to the signing of the Communication Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CIS-MOA) with Washington, which came days after the latest in a series of visits to Pakistan by General Michael “Erik” Kurilla, the commander of U.S. Central Command. The CIS-MOA was signed in 2005 for 15 years;

its reinstatement now, after a three-year hiatus, coupled with the other defense interactions noted above reflects both sides' willingness to maintain some degree of security cooperation.

Following its withdrawal from Afghanistan, the United States remains concerned about terrorist groups finding a foothold again in the Taliban-ruled country. Despite pledges by the Taliban not to allow Afghan soil to be used against any other country, serious question marks remain about the group's willingness and capability to fulfill its promises. The United States is particularly worried about al-Qaida – whose chief was killed by an American drone strike in the heart of Taliban-controlled Kabul – and the Islamic State, which after the rout in the Middle East is trying to gain a foothold in poorly governed Afghanistan.

On the other side, Pakistan has witnessed a massive upsurge in terrorist violence, mostly attributable to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which has deep-rooted links with the Afghan Taliban and uses Afghan soil to carry out attacks against Pakistan. Despite continuous urging by Pakistan to rein in the TTP, the Taliban regime appears unwilling to act against the terror group, which has resulted in a major security concern for Pakistan along its western border.

From Washington's standpoint, the desire to maintain security cooperation with Pakistan comes against the backdrop of the growing threat of terrorism from Afghanistan. As a priority, the United States would prefer the Taliban to fulfill the pledge made in the Doha Accords of not allowing terrorist groups to use Afghan soil. But should the Taliban fail to live up to their promises, Pakistan ought to be capable and willing to deal with the Afghanistan-based terrorist groups for its own sake – and to ensure that they don't pose any serious threat to U.S. Interests in the region or elsewhere.

For Pakistan – already dealing with the aftermath of the botched U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan – the continuation of security cooperation with Washington keeps alive the prospects of resuming foreign military financing and the sale of military hardware (ideally new procurements apart from maintenance packages), besides the continuation of military training programs. In addition, occasional statements by U.S. State Department officials reiterating that Washington will hold the Taliban to their counterterrorism commitments – and underscoring Pakistan's right to defend itself against terrorism – are the desired music to the ears of Pakistan's policymakers, who are seeking much-needed diplomatic support

against intransigent Taliban. Not least, the resumption of the Pakistan-U.S. security ties augments Islamabad's push for strategic neutrality (or nonalignment) in line with its pronounced and regularly stressed policy of aversion to getting entangled in bloc politics.

Notwithstanding the alignment of relatively short-term interests, the strategic chessboard offers a rather gloomy picture for the future of Pakistan-U.S. relations. Washington's strategic priorities in South Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific region are shaped by its rivalry with China. India – Pakistan's arch-rival – is pitched as a counterweight to Beijing in the larger anti-China balancing coalition that Washington aims to assemble in the region. New Delhi, for its part, is steadily jettisoning its long-proclaimed policy of strategic autonomy. Despite proclamations to the contrary, India is maneuvering itself to enter into a de facto alliance with the United States spanning a multitude of spheres.

Given the breadth and depth of its multidimensional relationship with Beijing, Pakistan is unlikely to become part of the anti-China balancing coalition. Pakistan is also not inclined to accept a geopolitical role secondary to India, even in a U.S.-led geopolitical dispensation.

Although so far Islamabad can rightfully claim some success in treading a fine line in balancing between the opposite power blocs, we are only at the beginning of viciously cruel zero-sum interplay between great powers, wherein middle powers are given stark choices. Washington has already made its European and Asian allies choose sides in the intensifying China-U.S. technological war. Given the zero-sum essence of the great power competition, it is only a matter of time before the countries vying to avoid choosing between opposite power blocs are put on notice to make tough and presumably undesirable choices.

<https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/what-is-driving-pakistan-us-security-cooperation-after-the-war-in-afghanistan/>

Hamdan Khan

(Research Officer, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: 10 Years and Beyond

Ayesha Shaikh

On 21st April, 2015, in the inaugural ceremony of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), President Xi Jinping addressed the parliament of Pakistan. During his address, he signified the nature of the relationship between China and Pakistan with a Chinese saying: “Strong wind reveals the strength of grass, and genuine gold stands the test of fire.”

CPEC has been in place for a decade now, and it has made significant advances in the promised sectors; however, it has also posed certain internal and external challenges. On 1st August 2023, China and Pakistan celebrated the completion of a decade of CPEC. Chinese Vice Premier, He Lifeng, paid a three-day visit to Pakistan. He narrated an official letter from President Xi Jinping, congratulating Pakistan on the achievement of this milestone, and encouraging it to enhance cooperation with China across multiple fronts.

Both sides concluded a series of six new documents, including the document on the formulation of joint cooperation committee on CPEC, the document on the export of dry chilies from Pakistan to China, the document on the final report on the feasibility study of

KKH-II (Thakot-Raikot), as well as MOUs on industrial workers’ exchange program, export exchange mechanism under CPEC, and findings of the 21st conference of ML-1 commission were also acknowledged.

The development has been significant not only because it determined the official launch of the second phase of CPEC, but also because it debunked the myths surrounding the feasibility and success of CPEC. The success of CPEC can only be determined against the set standards (initial blueprints) as well as the broader implications of the accomplished projects. After the decade-long development, it is safe to say that CPEC has withstood strong winds of criticism and false propaganda. Future prospects, nevertheless, depend upon its progress through the existing challenges.

What CPEC Is and What It Is Not

The evaluation of the success of CPEC first requires the facts to be uncoiled to determine what CPEC is and what it is not. CPEC is the pioneer project of China’s grand project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). BRI aims at paving the way for economic cooperation and inter-regional connectivity that will lead towards collective prosperity. CPEC, thus, focuses on developing a trade corridor from Kashgar to Gwadar.

Blueprints for the initial plan of CPEC constituted three important phases; the short-

term phase, the medium-term phase, and the long-term phase. The first phase of CPEC was supposed to focus on energy and infrastructural projects to nurture the ground for the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and industrial build-up in the second and third phases.

Overall, the project holds equal significance for both states. For Pakistan, investment coming from China is crucial to survive the ongoing economic crisis. On the other hand, it holds significance for China because the success of CPEC will determine the success of BRI at large. This complimentary nature of commitment is one significant factor that has ensured the progress of CPEC despite numerous challenges.

In addition to the bilateral benefits that CPEC promises to China and Pakistan, it holds good fortune for other regional actors as well. In July 2020, the Iranian ambassador to Islamabad proposed the idea of the “Golden Ring” of connectivity between China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. CPEC can prove to be a useful linchpin for this proposal.

However, CPEC has also stirred discontent in some of the states, which have construed it as a security threat. In the Raisina-dialogue 2020, the Indian Naval Chief claimed that CPEC is an intrusion into India’s sovereignty. This air of security dilemma,

surrounding China-Pakistan relations in general and CPEC in particular, has added to the number of challenges that it is facing already.

Milestones Achieved in the First Decade

Through the first decade, China has made an investment of around 25 billion dollars. In the energy sector, 14 projects have been completed, 2 are under construction, and 5 more projects are under consideration. A total of 7280MW of energy has been added to the grid, while an additional 4428MW of energy is in process. In the infrastructure sector, a total of 6 projects (1656km) have been completed across provinces, with 18 more projects underway (4244.6km).

In addition to this, CPEC has created more than 192,000 jobs, and the employment rate of Pakistan will further be boosted, as it has an overall potential to generate 1.2 million employment opportunities. Moreover, 4 of a total of 14 projects to develop the Gwadar Port have been completed, including Gwadar Port and free-zone, Gwadar Smart-port city master plan, Pak-China Technical and Vocational Institute at Gwadar, Pak-China Friendship Hospital and Gwadar Eastbay Expressway.

| Phases | Objectives | Major Projects Completed (by 2023) |
|----------------------|--|--|
| Phase I: 2015-2020 | Energy and Infrastructure developments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1320MW Sahiwal Coal-fired Power Plant • 1320MW Coal-fired Power Plant at Port Qasim Karachi • 1320MW China Hub Coal Power Project • Hub Balochistan KKH Phase II (Havelian-Thakot Section) • Peshawar-Karachi Motorway (Multan-Sukkur Section) • Orange Line Metro Train – Lahore • Cross Border Optical Fiber Cable (Khunjrab – Rawalpindi) • Pilot Project of Digital Terrestrial Multimedia Broadcast (DTMB) • Hakla – Development of Port and Free Zone (7 energy and 18 Infrastructure projects in process) |
| Phase II: 2021-2025 | Industrial development, Special Economic Zones | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gwadar Smart Port City Master Plan, Pak-China Technical and Vocational Institute at Gwadar, Gwadar Eastbay Expressway |
| Phase III: 2026-2023 | Tourism and Human Resource cooperation | – |

Table 1: Initial plan of CPEC and projects completed (2023)

Some of Phase I projects, which were supposed to be completed by 2020, are still in progress. Therefore, Phase I cannot technically be considered completed, despite a delay of 3 years. The milestones achieved are significant enough to consider its progress but the challenges that CPEC faces, cannot be denied.

Internal Challenges and Cross-Border Exploitations

The delays in the actual plan of CPEC are subject to numerous challenges. Internally, political and economic instability in Pakistan has hindered the smooth development of the projects, considering the fact that the upcoming visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping is delayed till after the elections in Pakistan. China, however, has ensured support to Pakistan to overcome the challenges.

Recently, China provided a relaxation of 2 years to Pakistan, to pay back the loan of 2.5 billion dollars. Nevertheless, a temporary internal state of affairs provides space for external actors to take malign actions. Penetrating terrorist elements from across the border as well as implicit and explicit opposition from India and the United States are key external challenges, posed to the timely completion of CPEC.

CPEC: Opportunity or Priority for Pakistan?

External discontent against CPEC is manifesting itself in the form of anti-CPEC propaganda, or alternative security engagement. The day after the 10th anniversary of CPEC, the federal cabinet of Pakistan approved a proposal for signing a

security pact with the United States. This does not imply that Pakistan is being appealed by alternative baits, rather it determines clear security and economic preferences of Pakistan.

Critics of CPEC do not have any alternative proposal to promise regional connectivity and economic cooperation that the CPEC looks forward to ensuring. Therefore, despite all the challenges, CPEC will be the uncontested priority for Pakista

<https://www.paradigmshift.com.pk/cpec-decade/>

Ayesha Shaikh

(Research Assistant, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

BRICS Expansion and Key Takeaways from its 15th Summit

Ayesha Sikandar

The consortium of major emerging economies under BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) held their 15th summit in Johannesburg from 22nd to 24th August 2023. The meeting is held annually, where leaders of respective countries participate. Alongside constituting 40% of the world population, this grouping accounts for 32.1% of global GDP as it recently surpassed G-7 countries in their combined GDP share at the global level.

This year, the summit was attended by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. The absence of Russian President Vladimir Putin was due to an arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court for the alleged execution of war crimes in Ukraine. On his behalf, the summit was attended by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. The summit was hosted by South Africa with a focus on the theme of "BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development, and Inclusive Multilateralism."

Though there are internal challenges in the BRICS, the very existence of this grouping demonstrates a need for a comprehensive and more representative form of global order. It advocates a system where voices that deviate from a Western perspective must also be heard. The most recent example of such deviation is the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was highly condemned by G-7 members. However, none of the BRICS members seemed willing to impose sanctions while denouncing Russian behavior. This year, multiple issues were under discussion. However, the most contentious matter was the expansion of BRICS and the varying views of respective members on its expansion. This article will discuss the interests of BRICS members in its expansion while analyzing the key takeaways.

On 24 August, six countries, namely Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates(UAE), Egypt, and Ethiopia were invited to join BRICS. Expansion was aimed at granting this block a greater weight in International affairs. With the addition of these countries, BRICS now accounts for a total of 31 trillion of GDP. The most important development to notice is that BRICS now consists of countries that control 90% of the oil exports. Besides this development, 40 countries have shown interest in being a part of this block.

The expansion comes with difficulties that this grouping already faces as decisions are made on a consensus basis. For India and Brazil, the expansion of BRICS will lessen their influence in this block while challenging their non-aligned foreign policies. As per pre-dominant notions in West Russia and China, this expansion is an effective counter-weight to Western-led G-7. Such notions were denounced by Chinese Premier Xi Jinping as he stated that “China doesn’t want to engage itself in block confrontation.”

This year’s summit highlighted several takeaways that can possibly reshape the future of International trade and cooperation. The first thing was de-dollarization, which was aimed at reducing dependence on the US dollar for trade. In a pre-recorded statement, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that “De-dollarization is irreversible within this block and is gaining momentum.”

Currently, China and Saudi Arabia are exploring possibilities where they can carry out their oil trade in yuan, which, if materialized, can be a significant step towards oil’s de-dollarization. The possibilities towards de-dollarization were discussed, and the suggestion of creating a common currency topped the debate. While this debate is valid, to which extent de-

dollarization is possible is debatable. As per the US Federal Reserve Research, 88% of global trade is performed in dollars. Alongside this, the presence of India in the block prohibits the chances of any such development as it is more inclined toward the West. The second important thing on the agenda was the expansion of BRICS.

Other things on the agenda are trade and investment, Agriculture, green economy, entrepreneurship, and SMEs, as well as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA). All these discussions were aimed at enhancing unity and cooperation within the group. In this particular setting, one important institution is The New Development Bank(NDB) or BRICS Bank, which will enhance this integration. The objective of this financial institution is to mobilize resources for infrastructures and sustainable development projects not only within BRICS but also for other Emerging Markets and Developing Countries (EMDCs).

Xi Jinping announced that the financial institutions of China will contribute a fund of \$10bn for development purposes, which was a significant development. One factor here that is worth mentioning is that the BRICS bank works on a no-strings-attached lender process contrary to the conditionalities of

International Monetary Fund(IMF) and other western financial institutions. Dilma Rousseff, president of NDB, in her statements, mentioned that this bank will finance projects in local currencies in order to protect borrower countries from fluctuations. In 2021, the bank officially ceased to provide loans in USD and Euros. This is attractive, especially for smaller and developing nations.

While BRICS countries suggest an alternative to the Western-dominated international financial system, the interests of countries within this group are divergent. Though the expansion of BRICS is a win for major players Russia and China, other countries like India and Brazil may face challenges while they welcome ‘clearly anti-west countries’ in the block. There is growing skepticism about BRICS as countries within the block have profound differences that can hinder its progress. Such differences can definitely obstruct its progression into a cohesive identity.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/29082023-brics-expansion-and-key-takeaways-from-its-15th-summit-oped/>

Ayesha Sikandar

(Research Assistant, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

Amidst Discord and Dialogue: Assessing NPT Preparatory Committee 2023

Sherbano

The failure of several Review Conferences of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to reach an agreed outcome has been primarily has primarily stemmed from substantial disparities among participating States. The States parties have however recognized the potential for enhancing the efficacy of the preparatory cycle.

This recognition prompted the decision reached on August 26, 2022, during the culmination of the 10th NPT Review Conference, which established a Working Group tasked with fortifying the review process. This Working Group's mandate encompasses deliberating and formulating recommendations for the Preparatory Committee, with the aim of enhancing various aspects such as effectiveness, efficiency, transparency, accountability, coordination, and continuity within the Treaty's review process.

The inaugural Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meeting for the 11th Review Conference of the NPT transpired from July 31 to August 11, 2023, in Vienna. Amidst a

backdrop of formidable challenges encompassing the Ukrainian conflict, heightened nuclear risks, escalating rhetoric, and renewed discourse regarding the utility of nuclear armaments, this meeting held substantial significance in shaping the direction and ambiance of the forthcoming 11th review cycle.

However, the Preparatory Committee encountered an impasse in achieving a unanimous agreement, a prerequisite for adopting the final document. This deadlock arose due to opposition from Iran, Russia, and Syria. Consequently, to facilitate the adoption of the PrepCom's procedural report and create a record of the meeting, the Chair decided to withdraw the summary. The Chair had already concluded that consensus for adopting it as a PrepCom outcome was lacking. However, similar to previous PrepCom Chairs in 2017, 2018, and 2019 review cycles, the Chair had intended to submit the summary as a working paper under his authority. Yet, this approach encountered resistance from Iran, supported by Russia and Syria, who objected to even listing the summary as a working paper.

The principal concern articulated by the Iranian delegation pertained to the

summary's perceived negative portrayal of Iran, particularly concerning the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), thereby presenting a skewed perspective. Iran further criticized what it deemed to be a Western bias that pervaded the entire summary. This bias was construed as a manifestation of preferential treatment given to the viewpoints of Western Group delegations, which, in the view of Iran, was at the expense of other participating delegations.

Russia's objections centered on the Chair's recommendations for the subsequent PrepCom. The Russian delegate characterized the recommendations paper as novel and potentially disruptive to the ongoing review cycle. In this context, it was highlighted by the Canadian delegation that the current Chair's approach, while perhaps more direct in framing reflections as recommendations, did not truly constitute an innovative departure. Furthermore, as underscored by numerous delegations, it is customary within multilateral processes for Chairs to present documents and reflections in their individual capacity, raising concerns about a limited number of delegations questioning this established practice.

The interventions made regarding the draft factual summary encompass a range of many

other concerns. Brazil, followed by Cuba, China, and Iran, raised an issue regarding the repeated use of "states parties," suggesting that it might create a false impression of unanimity. The United States concurred, noting that this phrasing didn't accurately represent the existing divisions. The United Kingdom interpreted "states parties" as an open-ended term devoid of consensus implications. Paragraph 1, characterizing the NPT as the cornerstone of non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament, was contested by Brazil and several other nations for implying a hierarchy between these two objectives. China supported the inclusion of paragraph 25 about No First Use, while France opposed it. France sought to insert that Iran's highly enriched uranium lacked civilian justification in paragraph 87, supported by Germany, but Iran and Russia resisted. Russia argued against paragraph 88, alleging lack of evidence in the accusations, a stance shared by Syria which also criticized its omission of condemning the Israeli attack. Iran further challenged paragraph deletion, asserting that it did not accurately reflect the discussions.

China and Iran underscored the absence of reference to AUKUS in the summary, despite voiced concerns about its non-proliferation and safeguards implications. Likewise, Iran protested the omission of concerns regarding

Japan's plan to release contaminated water from Fukushima. During deliberations on paragraph 23, which enumerates Preparatory Committee documents, Iran opposed the inclusion of the draft factual summary. Russia and Syria aligned with Iran, while Canada recalled the past inclusion of Chair's summaries as working papers. Austria clarified that the factual summary didn't signify consensus and would be presented under the Chair's personal capacity. Iran opposed listing it as a working paper, fearing a negative spotlight, leading to the Chair's decision to retract the draft factual summary. The Chair stressed their prerogative to submit working papers, clarifying that this action shouldn't hinder future Chairs' authority to do the same.

The PrepCom 2023, initially viewed as a potential turning point for states parties to momentarily set aside lingering debates surrounding the nature of nuclear risks, aimed to initiate a concrete plan to actively diminish these risks leading up to the 2026 RevCon. Regrettably, the anticipated consensus remained elusive, signaling that the critical stride toward steering the global course towards increased safety remains a contested endeavor. As the challenges persist and opinions diverge, the imperative for

collaborative action to reduce nuclear risks stands undiminished.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/25082023-amidst-discord-and-dialogue-assessing-npt-preparatory-committee-2023-oped/>

Sherbano

(Research Officer, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

A Closer Look at Recent US-China Diplomatic Engagement

Ahmad Ali

In a recent turn of events, the United States has formally invited the newly appointed Foreign Minister of China, Wang Yi, to Washington. Previously, a number of high-level meetings between the US and Chinese officials have taken place in the past few months. Washington's recent efforts for diplomatic engagement with China is aimed at maintaining open channels of communications and reducing the risk of miscalculation considering the growing competition between the two countries. However, many scholars believe that the US-China diplomatic engagement might not have any productive outcome in near future considering the divergence on number of issues.

In June 2023, the US Secretary of State first extended the formal invite to then Chinese Foreign Minister, Qin Gang, who has been replaced by Wang Yi due to health reasons. However, Washington has now invited Director of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, to visit Washington during a meeting between the US Assistant Secretary Daniel Kritenbrink and Yang Tao, Director General of the Department of North American and

Oceanian Affairs at Foreign Ministry of China.

It is pertinent to note that the US secretary of state Antony Blinken visited China in June this year where he met a number of senior Chinese officials including President Xi Jinping and then Foreign Minister Qin Gang. This was the first visit by American top diplomat since 2018. Additionally, the US Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen visited China last month and had meaningful meetings with Chinese officials including Chinese premier, Li Qiang, and Vice Premier He Lifeng. Also, some other high level visits to China are expected by the US officials in the coming months.

This recent engagement between the US and China is taking place when the relationship between both countries are at lowest since establishment of formal relations. The tensions between China and the US started to flare during the early months of the Trump's administration and since then the US has made limited efforts to ease the growing tensions. Number of flare-ups, including the allegations of a Chinese high-altitude spy balloon over the US territory and alleged cyber-attacks attributed to Chinese hackers, played a role in further deterioration of the already delicate relationship.

While the invitation to Foreign Minister Wang Yi is an encouraging step towards dialogue, the success of these efforts remains uncertain. The US and China have stark differences on multiple issues, from trade to geopolitics, and technology. Navigating these contentious issues will require significant willingness to compromise. For China the engagement with the US will be meaningful if Washington is willing to seriously consider converging on the issues like Taiwan and trade war. Otherwise, the only point of convergence left will be climate. Presently, maintaining open channels of communication to avoid miscalculation is the primary objective of this engagement as highlighted by the US.

China believes that maintaining an open line of communication will enable the US provocative behavior in the Western Pacific. Considering this, China might not actively engage in dialogue with Washington with hopes to make the US more cautious about crossing Beijing's red lines. This suggests that the underlying goal for China, despite any temporary engagements or dialogues, is to limit the US military activities in areas concerning China.

Keeping this in view, it can be argued that this recent diplomatic engagement between Washington and Beijing might not have any

productive outcome in near future. In order to have productive results out of this engagement, both countries would have to identify the key areas of cooperation and address the issues that might increase hostility in future. These key issues include Taiwan, cyberspace, trade tariffs and technology.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/18082023-a-closer-look-at-recent-us-china-diplomatic-engagement-oped/>

Ahmad Ali

(Research Assistant, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

Biden's Executive Order Curbing Tech Investments in China

Ahmad Ali

On August 09, 2023, the Biden administration issued an executive order restricting certain US companies from investing in China. This revenue rule will forbid private and venture capital firms from investing in Chinese high-tech sectors that generate more than half of their revenue from technologies. These include quantum information technologies, artificial intelligence, computer chips, and micro-electronics. The Biden administration is making this move to curb Chinese access to sensitive technologies considering the growing competition between the two countries.

“The Executive order aims to prevent American capital and expertise from helping the development of technologies that could support China’s military modernization.”

This measure is likely to set the stage for further restrictions on investments in the future. The revenue rule might also impact the recent diplomatic engagement between the US and China. The Biden administration, while citing the national security threats, issued the executive order that states that

“countries of concern” are engaged in long-term strategies to advance sensitive technologies and products critical to their military, intelligence, surveillance, and cyber capabilities. These countries aim to eliminate barriers between civilian and military sectors by acquiring cutting-edge technologies that pose a significant threat to the national security of the US. The order declares a national emergency prescribes regulations requiring notifications and prohibits transactions involving these technologies.

For months, the Biden administration has been preparing these restrictions on the investments that American companies are making in China, especially in technology-related areas. Many lawmakers were of the view that the present system allows American capital to flow into China and fund technologies that could ultimately pose a threat to the national security of the United States. Additionally, Emily Benson, the director of the project on trade and technology at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank said, “There is mounting evidence that US capital is being used to advance Chinese military capabilities and that the US lacks a sufficient means of combating this activity.” Senior officials in the administration asserted that these efforts were driven by national

security goals, not economic interests, and that the categories they covered investment restrictions were narrow in scope.

“The order aims to limit China’s ability to use American investments in its technology companies to modernize its military while maintaining a broader level of trade that is vital for the economies of both countries. However, it is pertinent to note that these restrictions might be narrow in scope and other financial flows are untouched, but they have a strategic value.”

This decision would be one of the first significant steps the US has taken amid a trade war with China to limit outgoing financial flows. This could pave the way for the imposition of additional restrictions on investments between the two countries in the coming years. In this context, the Biden administration has talked to allies in recent months to urge other governments to enact similar restrictions on China. With this development, Washington’s move to limit financial flows can be seen as a signal of its willingness to decouple certain economic aspects from China to protect its own interests. Many scholars believe that the decoupling will be a slow and steady decline in their economic interdependence. Considering this it can be argued that this

revenue rule will likely set the stage for further investment restrictions in the future.

While the primary objective of this decision is to limit Beijing’s ability to leverage American investments for military modernization, it also has broader implications for the already delicate US-China relationship. Washington has recently increased its efforts to ease US-China tensions through diplomatic visits to Beijing. However, this revenue rule could undermine these efforts. The visit of US Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen to China in July was focused on investment restrictions that the Biden administration imposed on August 9. This action is likely to upset China and it would be the first test for the recent diplomatic engagement that aims to maintain open lines of communication channels. In response to the investment restrictions, the Foreign Ministry of China stated, “China strongly deplores and firmly opposes the US’s single-minded rollout of restrictions on investments in China. We have made serious demarche to the US”. China is already resistant to engaging with the US considering the divergence on several issues. With this development, the outcome of diplomatic engagement is becoming more and more uncertain. Many scholars already believed that Washington’s diplomatic outreach was

unlikely to result since the US was unwilling to give in to Beijing's demands to eliminate tariffs, technological restrictions, and bans on products made with forced labor.

<https://stratheaia.com/bidens-executive-order-curbing-tech-investments-in-china/>

Ahmad Ali

(Research Assistant, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

US-China Tech War: Semiconductors at heart of Competition Driving World towards New Cold War

Shayan Hassan Jamy

The US-China semiconductor competition has entered new territory, with key US allies and partners now firmly siding with Washington and forcing Beijing to change course to achieve its strategic objectives.

Last month, Japan imposed export controls on 23 items required for manufacturing advanced semiconductors in what was another major blow to China's technological ambitions. These items now require governmental approval before being exported, meaning Japanese exporters are likely to prefer to find alternative buyers.

The export controls included restrictions on lithography equipment, which is crucial for producing cutting-edge microchips.

Although Japan did not mention China by name in its announcement, the move appeared to be targeted at Beijing. Mao Ning, a spokeswoman for China's Foreign Ministry, said during her July 24 press conference that "despite China's serious concerns, Japan went ahead with its export restrictions that explicitly target China. China

is deeply dissatisfied and finds Japan's action regrettable."

The move by Japan was just the latest in a series of export control measures imposed by the United States and its allies in the hope of curbing China's technological progress, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence. Semiconductors are crucial elements in civil and military technology. Advanced semiconductors, which have been a primary focus of restrictions by the US and its allies, are essential building blocks for AI and other key emerging technologies.

As AI and computer software continue to advance and become more complex, the hardware will have to keep up with it. If China's semiconductor supply is halted, this would certainly disrupt its AI progress.

There's a global semiconductor shortage and this is why it matters

In June, the Netherlands announced additional export control measures on certain advanced semiconductor equipment, which were similar to the ones imposed by Japan. The Netherlands is home to ASML, which is one of the most important semiconductor companies in the world as it makes the machinery required to produce advanced microchips. Although these restrictions won't come into effect until September 1, their impact has already been felt.

Together, the US, Japan and the Netherlands provide most of the equipment for semiconductor factories globally. By getting Japan and the Netherlands firmly on its side, the US has dealt China a massive blow in the race for technological supremacy.

These recent developments stem from October 7, 2022, when the US announced a new export control policy that essentially blocked US companies from selling semiconductors and relevant equipment to Chinese companies. Since then, the US has encouraged its allies to follow suit. China has called these actions “sci-tech hegemony”, accusing the US of pushing for decoupling and blockading the progress of Chinese companies.

Meanwhile, India could potentially become a key player for the US in its semiconductor competition with China. Through a joint statement in June, the US and India signed a memorandum of understanding to coordinate their semiconductor incentive programmes. They also announced that, as part of a combined US\$2.75 billion in investment, Micron would invest US\$825 million to build a semiconductor assembly and test facility in India.

India and Japan also signed an extensive agreement for semiconductor development in July.

Visitors gather at the Applied Materials and Micron Technology kiosks before the start of SemiconIndia 2023, India’s annual semiconductor conference, in Gandhinagar, India, on July 25. Photo: Reuters

Visitors gather at the Applied Materials and Micron Technology kiosks before the start of SemiconIndia 2023, India’s annual semiconductor conference, in Gandhinagar, India, on July 25. Photo: Reuters

Putting the pieces of the puzzle together, the overall picture becomes clear. The US is essentially attempting to block China from acquiring both semiconductors and the equipment required to manufacture them while also trying to exclude China from the global semiconductor supply chain.

In response to these developments, China announced export control measures of its own in July. China placed restrictions on exports of gallium and germanium – rare metals needed for manufacturing semiconductors – stating this was intended to “preserve security and national interests”. China accounts for about 80 per cent of the global production of these metals.

Although these measures were not as significant as those imposed by the US and its allies, it gives a clear indication of things to come. With microchip demand only expected to increase as AI becomes more complex, major states will almost certainly

clash in the quest for advanced semiconductors. This competition is likely to have spillover effects in other domains such as national security.

The US-China semiconductor competition is also inherently linked to the AI competition between the two. China has announced plans to become the global leader of AI by 2030, while the US aims to halt China's rise and maintain its current advantage in technology. Exactly what these restrictions on semiconductors mean for China's AI goals remains in question. There seems to be a consensus that China is still decades behind in terms of advanced semiconductors, and that a chip ban would largely halt its AI progress.

So far, China has been heavily reliant on chip imports from the US and its allies. However, it still plans to domestically develop its own semiconductors as part of its "Made in China 2025" strategy.

With AI becoming more advanced, the importance of semiconductors will only increase. With technological supremacy considered of paramount importance in both Washington and Beijing, the global race for semiconductors is certain to intensify.

Who exactly will win this race is yet to be determined, but one thing is clear: the current tensions between the US and China indicate that a second cold war has begun, with

semiconductors being at the heart of it. Whichever side gains a significant edge in the semiconductor competition will take a big step towards attaining technological supremacy in the future.

<https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3230626/us-china-tech-war-semiconductors-heart-competition-driving-world-towards-new-cold-war>

Shayan Hassan Jamy

(Research Officer, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

China's Generative AI Measures and the Need for Global AI Norms

Shayan Hassan Jamy

Almost a year since the public release and mainstream popularity of ChatGPT, the global debate surrounding the need for artificial intelligence (AI) norms and regulations has gained significant traction. Generative AI applications such as ChatGPT, Bard, Dall-E and more have shown the world just how simple it is to generate text, pictures, audio and video content within a few seconds, and simulate human intelligence and ability. With AI capabilities advancing at a rapid pace, the content generated from AI applications will only improve and become more difficult to differentiate from actual human-created content. The use of deep fakes, disinformation, and other malicious applications of generative AI will pose a number of ethical, moral and philosophical questions to humanity in the near future.

To deal with such challenges, China announced measures for the regulation of generative AI on 15th August 2023. The measures were intended to “promote the healthy development and standardized application of generative AI, safeguard national security and social public interests,

and protect the legitimate rights and interests of citizens, legal persons, and other organizations.” The regulations were quite comprehensive in nature, certainly more so than any previous AI regulations had been, from China or any other state for that matter.

The AI measures aimed to balance between “development and security”, ensuring that although the malicious uses of AI are stopped, the progress of China’s technology sector is not. Through the recently announced measures, China believes generative AI services should “adhere to the core values of socialism, and must not generate incitement to subvert state power, or endanger national security and interests.” It aims to ensure this by monitoring generative AI providers at essentially every step of the process, from algorithm design, data selection, training the AI model, content moderation, user protection, and during the actual use of the application. This would be quite a monumental task, and certainly easier said than done. The measures also mandate that labels should be placed on all AI-generated content, including photos and videos.

At the same time, China wants to “encourage the independent innovation of basic technologies such as generative artificial intelligence algorithms, frameworks, chips, and supporting software platforms.” It also

wants to participate in the formulation of international rules related to generative AI. This is in line with China's overall AI ambitions, as outlined through its New Generation AI Plan. China aims to become the global leader in AI by 2030, while also developing global AI norms. There is certainly a need for global AI norms, not just for generative AI applications, but AI as a nascent concept. So far, however, any such global attempts to regulate AI have failed.

The US has responded to China's AI measures by launching its own generative AI task force on 10th August, largely to evaluate its use for defence purposes. Task Force Lima, as the US Pentagon dubbed it, will "explore the use of this technology (generative AI) and the potential of these models' scale, speed, and interactive capabilities to improve the department's mission effectiveness while simultaneously identifying proper protection measures and mitigating a variety of related risks". The US Department of Defence (DOD) clearly views generative AI as having a range of military applications.

The announcement went on to state that Task Force Lima will "develop, evaluate, recommend, and monitor the implementation of generative AI technologies across DOD". By indicating that generative AI will be

applied 'across the DOD', the US has given a clear indication of exactly how it views AI; as an enabling technology that has value in all aspects of the military. By leveraging generative AI across the DOD, the Pentagon hopes to enhance its operations in areas such as warfighting, readiness, health and policy. Again, this is consistent with the previous US strategic approach towards AI. The US sees AI as a major strategic technology, and one that could ultimately decide its future global competition with China.

With the US and China being locked in a global AI competition, and advancements in AI coming at a rapid pace, the need for global AI norms and regulations is stronger now than it ever has been. The reality, unfortunately, is that states currently have completely different perspectives on how AI should be governed. The US, for example, has given a free reign to its technology sector, and has so far been hesitant to introduce any AI curbs, despite significant pleas from its own industry leaders. China, on the other hand, prefers to have total state oversight on all generative AI applications. This difference in approach makes any sort of progress towards global AI norms extremely difficult. The likely scenario is that states will develop their own AI norms and regulations within their own borders, such as the ones

China announced. The European Union has also proposed its own framework for the regulation of AI, and other states will likely follow suit.

Still, having a lack of global AI norms will certainly be an issue in the near future. During a crisis situation, deep fakes and disinformation could easily wreak havoc and cause serious misinterpretation of an adversary's intentions. States seem to be waiting for a major AI catastrophe to happen before working towards global AI norms. Imagine if a modern Cuban Missile Crisis were to occur between the US and China, and malicious deep fakes were spread throughout social media. In the midst of a crisis, minutes would feel like hours, and serious escalation would always be a possibility. Global AI norms, then, are the need of the hour.

<https://strafasia.com/chinas-generative-ai-measures-and-the-need-for-global-ai-norms/>

***Shayan Hassan Jamy**
(Research Officer, Strategic Vision
Institute, Islamabad).*

Drones: A New Aspect in Warfare

Amber Afreen Abid

The evolution of technology has always played a pivotal role in shaping the nature of warfare. From the invention of the trebuchet in medieval times to the development of tanks and fighter jets in the 20th century, each leap in technology has brought about significant changes in how conflicts are waged. In the modern era, one of the most groundbreaking developments in military technology is the rise of drones, which have introduced a new aspect of warfare that is reshaping strategies, ethics, and the very nature of engagement on the battlefield.

Drones, also known as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), are aircraft operated without a human pilot onboard. They can be controlled remotely by operators from safe distances, reducing the risk to human lives. The development of drone technology gained momentum during the late 20th century, initially for surveillance and reconnaissance purposes. However, the capabilities of drones quickly expanded, encompassing a wide range of applications, including intelligence gathering, target tracking, and even offensive operations.

Understanding the matter better

The integration of drones into military arsenals has revolutionized traditional warfare strategies. Drones offer unprecedented advantages in terms of flexibility, agility, and persistence. They can loiter over a target area for extended periods, providing real-time intelligence to commanders. This data allows for more informed decision-making, as commanders can assess situations without putting soldiers' lives at risk.

Having appeared in various conflicts in recent years, notably in Nagorno-Karabakh (2020) or Syria (since 2011), drones have taken on a new dimension since the start of the war in Ukraine, which was triggered by Russia on February 24, 2022. They have gradually established themselves as an essential weapon for both sides. Ukraine and Russia are using drones in a wide assortment of missions in Ukraine, Russia and the Black Sea. While both combatants entered the war with drones, there has been a Cambrian explosion in missions and types of drones over the past 18 months.

Since the start of the Russian invasion, both armies have been using several hundred unmanned aerial vehicles every day. According to a report published on May 19

by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), a British think tank specializing in defense issues, the Ukrainian military is now losing some 10,000 drones a month on the battlefield, or more than 300 a day. Recently, on August 30, 2023, the Russian state news agency reported that Ukrainian drones hit an airport near Russia's border with Estonia and Latvia, causing a huge blaze and damaging four Il-76 military transport planes.

Hence, drones have reshaped the concept of asymmetrical warfare. Smaller and less technologically advanced forces can now pose significant threats to larger, conventional armies. Drones equipped with precision-guided munitions can carry out surgical strikes against high-value targets, eroding the conventional force's advantages. This dynamic has compelled military thinkers to adapt and develop strategies that can counter or mitigate the drone threat effectively.

Drones have fundamentally changed the nature of engagement in warfare. Traditional battles often involve visible confrontations between soldiers or equipment on the ground, at sea, or in the air. However, drones have introduced a layer of invisibility and unpredictability to conflict. A drone can strike without warning and disappear before retaliation can be initiated. This has led to an

increased emphasis on anti-drone technologies and the need for rapid response systems to counter this new form of threat.

The design and software innovations, as well as mass dissemination of piloting know-how, are also likely to influence the way drones are used far beyond the war in Ukraine, with serious implications for governments confronting separatist militias, drug cartels and extremist groups seeking to gain a technological edge. "This is a 24/7 technology race," Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Mykhailo Fedorov said in an interview at his office in Kyiv, the capital. "The challenge is that every product in every category must be changed daily to gain an advantage."

As technology continues to advance, the capabilities of drones will likely become even more sophisticated, posing new challenges for international security and diplomacy. Striking a balance between the advantages offered by drone technology and the ethical responsibilities of warfare remains a complex endeavor. It is crucial for governments, international organizations, and scholars to engage in discussions that address these issues and establish norms and regulations for the use of drones in conflict.

In conclusion, the rise of drones as a new aspect of warfare marks a significant turning point in military history. Their impact on strategies, ethics, and the nature of engagement underscores the need for comprehensive and thoughtful approaches to harness their potential while mitigating their potential downsides. As we navigate this new frontier, it is essential to ensure that the lessons of the past guide us in shaping a more secure and ethical future on the battlefield.

<https://www.globalvillagespace.com/drones-a-new-aspect-in-warfare/>

Amber Afreen Abid

(Research Officer, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

Cluster Munitions Will Do More Harm Than Good in the Russia-Ukraine War

Saadain Gardezi

Ukrainian forces have recently advanced toward the key port city of Mariupol as part of their ongoing counteroffensive against Russian positions, marking the second advance in two weeks. Meanwhile, the recapture of the Urozhain village in the Donetsk region, announced by Ukraine's Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Maliar on August 16, appears to be partially facilitated by the use of United States-supplied controversial cluster munitions.

Ukraine began employing cluster munitions supplied by the United States on the battlefield against Russia in mid-July to support its counteroffensive against the Russian defensive positions. The United States termed their usage "effective," while Russia warned of responding in kind, with President Vladimir Putin stating that Russia has a "sufficient stockpile" of several kinds of cluster munitions of its own, which could be used in a tit-for-tat manner. However, both Kyiv and Washington are downplaying the long-term implications of the introduction of cluster munitions in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which could outlive the conflict

itself, as is evident from previous examples of their usage where unexploded bomblets continue to affect ordinary citizens despite the passage of several decades. Their utilization for short-term military utility can thus be considered counter-productive, with long-term impacts outweighing their short-term benefits.

Cluster munitions, also known as cluster bombs, are weapons that open up mid-air, releasing tens or hundreds of explosive submunitions, killing or seriously injuring targets indiscriminately through explosives and shrapnel over extended periods of time and across an area equivalent to several football fields. They can be launched from air, ground, or sea through warships, aircraft, artillery, or rocket launchers.

There are two main issues with the employment of such weapons. Their inability to discriminate between military and civilian targets, as evidenced by the fact that they have caused serious harm to civilians, including women and children, wherever they have been employed in conflicts. Secondly, they are notoriously unreliable given their high failure rate, also known as the dud rate. Given the fact that their scattering over a wide area is a key characteristic that incentivizes states to employ them, bomblets that fail to explode

continue to act in a similar way as landmines. They also result in loss of eyesight and limbs as they stay dormant for years and decades until exploding as soon as any individual steps up on them, leading to death or severe injuries from explosives or shrapnel.

The usage of cluster munitions thus renders areas unsafe to live on, affecting the lives of ordinary citizens. Farmers may accidentally trigger the bomblets while working in their fields, children may mistake them for toys, and the public, in general, has to live in a constant state of fear and paranoia.

Given these implications of cluster munitions, the introduction of such weapons in the Russia-Ukraine conflict can cause disastrous consequences for civilians. The U.S. Department of Defense claimed that the munitions being sent to Ukraine have a dud rate of below 2.35 percent. However, it is important to note that assessments collected from experiments in controlled environments significantly deviate from those recorded under combat conditions. Moreover, despite the Pentagon receiving assurances from Kyiv in writing regarding the calculated usage of cluster bombs to break Russian defensive positions in non-urban areas only, there have been reports of Ukraine using them in attacks on Russian villages in the Belgorod region. Furthermore, with artillery units having these

weapons in their inventory, the risk of unauthorized or accidental usage amid the fog of war will continue to linger.

However, even before the latest provision of cluster bombs by the United States, human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) accused both Russia and Ukraine of using such weapons in the conflict. An HRW report suggested that both sides used cluster bombs in Izium city and its surroundings in 2022, while the city remained under Russian control, which caused deaths and serious injuries to civilians. “Cluster munitions used by Russia and Ukraine are killing civilians now and will continue to do so for many years. Both sides should immediately stop using them and not try to get more of these indiscriminate weapons,” HRW’s acting arms director Mary Wareham had said. Both sides have, however, continued to blame the other for such usage while denying their own.

From a military point of view, cluster munitions can be viewed to have great utility. The main rationale given by the United States and Ukraine for the explicit provision and usage of such weapons is their utility in breaking the Russian trenches, which have continued to slow down Ukraine’s counteroffensive. The United States has provided over 2 million rounds of its traditional 155mm howitzer munitions to

Ukraine, which has a range of 24-32 kilometers, an ideal choice for Ukraine to hit Russian targets from a distance. However, with Ukraine having to fire 7,000 to 9,000 rounds on a daily basis amid an intensifying counteroffensive, cluster munitions appear as an attractive option to hit more targets using fewer rounds.

Nonetheless, the long-term implications of these weapons have prompted international efforts to ban their use, stockpiling, production, or transfer, according to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which opened for signatures in December 2008 and entered into force in August 2010. So far, a total of 123 states have joined the convention, with 111 state parties and 12 signatories. However, almost all major countries, including the United States, Russia, and Ukraine, still remain outside its ambit.

There is a dire need for both Russia and Ukraine to stop using cluster munitions in the conflict given the long-term implications of these weapons, which outweigh both parties' short-term military goals. Moreover, all major states that remain outside the ambit of the Convention on Cluster Munitions should proceed with signing the treaty, starting with the major powers, to put an end to the decades-long sufferings inflicted on ordinary citizens by cluster munitions. The goal might

seem far-fetched given the current atmosphere of polarization and mistrust, but it is still a goal worth pursuing.

<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/cluster-munitions-will-do-more-harm-good-russia-ukraine-war-206749>

Saadain Gardezi

(Research Assistant, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

Artemis and Chandrayaan-3:

How Indo-U.S Space

Cooperation will Impact

Pakistan?

Akash Shah

In an extraordinary feat, India has carved its name into the celestial record books by achieving a remarkable milestone – the successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the moon's South Pole. This achievement not only places India among the exclusive club of lunar explorers but also makes it a pioneer nation to conquer the moon's South Pole.

The mission's success can be attributed to accomplishing its key objectives, including a soft lunar landing, rover deployment, and on-site scientific experiments. This achievement gains added significance when contrasted with the Russian Luna-25 mission's crash at the moon's South Pole. This stark comparison highlights the remarkable strides of India's space program, particularly considering Russia's historical prowess in space exploration.

India has also joined hands with the United States in the pioneering Artemis Accords, an innovative initiative aiming to extend human presence on the Moon. This strategic collaboration is a significant stride towards

NASA's ambitious goal of establishing a human settlement on the lunar surface.

While these accords lay out a non-binding framework for space exploration, India's participation speaks volumes about the growing partnership between the two nations. It is highlighted by the fact that the Artemis program places particular emphasis on exploring the Moon's South Pole – a goal that positively resonates with India's successful Chandrayaan-3 mission.

Extension from civilian to defense capabilities

There has been a historic overlap between Indian civilian space program and reuse of foreign technologies for defense purposes. India and NASA have collaborated on the development of Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) technology for Earth observation satellites. This collaboration has helped India acquire advanced SAR technology, which has both civilian and military applications, including surveillance and reconnaissance. India and NASA have signed agreements for the sharing of Earth observation data.

This collaboration has allowed India to access high-resolution satellite imagery and other data, which can be used for various defense applications, including border surveillance and monitoring of military

installations. NASA has also provided training and capacity-building support to Indian scientists and engineers in the past. This collaboration has helped in enhancing India's technical expertise in space technology, which can be applied to both civilian and defense programs.

In April 2023, the U.S. Department of State's Export Control and Border Security (EXBS) and the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) hosted a U.S.-India Space Technology Industry Workshop on Export Controls. The objective of this workshop was to build the capacity of Indian firms venturing into space exploration towards the export control and technology transfer processes of the United States to enhance the collaboration between U.S. and Indian entities, both official and private, to expand India's commercial and defense cooperative engagement in the space sector.

Although all space technologies are inherently dual-use, there is an explicit cooperation between India and the United States on the security dimension of space as well. For instance, in the Space Situational Awareness (SSA) domain, the Network for Space Object Tracking and Analysis (NETRA) set up in Bengaluru in 2020 by ISRO and the United States' Combined Space Operation Center (CSpOC) aims at

protecting the Indian and U.S space assets from all kind of threats.

Implications for South Asian security dynamics

While the Indo-U.S. collaboration is fueled by the collective response to the priority one challenge of the United States to counter China, its implications for South Asian security are far-reaching. This collaboration undoubtedly magnifies India's technological advancements in the realm of space, which already eclipse those of Pakistan. It has the potential to significantly impact the security imbalance in the region.

Given the protracted animosity between India and Pakistan, the developments arising from the Indo-U.S. partnership could have profound implications. India's sophisticated space capabilities, including Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capacities and robust communication systems, could disrupt the delicate balance.

The presence of space-based ISR capabilities, along with a Ballistic Missile Defense system reliant on satellites for early launch detection, might embolden India towards pre-emptive first strike against Pakistan's nuclear assets. In a scenario where Pakistan's space endeavors remain limited with no immediate signs of progress, the

expanding Indo-U.S. space collaboration would disturb the equilibrium and compromise South Asian security.

As India continues its journey through space, it should be careful about the effects of its actions. In a world that is dominated by offensive and defensive realism, there's a high chance Pakistan might interpret these advancements as posing a threat to its national security.

<https://www.globalvillagespace.com/artemis-and-chandrayaan-3-how-indo-u-s-space-cooperation-will-impact-pakistan/>

Akash Shah

(Research Officer, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

What Is Driving India's Entanglement in the Taiwan Strait Crisis?

Komal Khan

India is assuming a role in the South China Sea crises, to be particular, in the Taiwan Strait, as a part of the integrated deterrence strategy pushed by the United States to manage the burden of the conflict in terms of cost, defense, and diplomacy with regional stakeholders. A parallel of this strategy is evident in the Ukraine conflict; in the latter, the United States has been using its integrated deterrence strategy by means of European states providing Ukraine with defense equipment. The very purpose of the integrated defense strategy is to seek a regional management of conflicts in order to prevent a direct confrontation or two-front war of the United States with Russia or China.

India's escalating entanglement in the Taiwan conflict emerges, notwithstanding its geographical remoteness from the conflict's focal point. India's potential degree of involvement hinges upon three core determinants. First, the trajectory of bilateral trade relations between India and the entities involved directly or indirectly in the crisis holds pivotal significance. Second, the

intricacies of the strategic alliance shared between India and the United States weigh notably in shaping India's potential engagement. Third, the expansionary trajectory of India's military apparatus, with a pronounced emphasis on maritime domain enhancement, serves as a substantive security concern that India has diligently directed its resources toward.

The strategic reconfiguration undertaken by India during the early 2000s, entailing a shift from a framework grounded in threat assessment to one emphasizing capabilities, has yielded significant consequences for its maritime posture. This redirection of focus towards enhancing specific capabilities, as opposed to mere replication of adversaries' quantitative assets, underscores India's concerted shift to ensure the preservation of its maritime security across the expanse of the Indian Ocean Region. India intends to manage the Indian Ocean's militarization by China through India's military engagement in the Taiwan Strait Crisis.

Submarine warfare is a domain where India finds space to contribute to in the Taiwan Strait Crisis. The Quad countries are working together to counter China's gray zone tactics and prevent the balance of power from shifting in favour of China in the Taiwan Strait. Recently, India sent its naval warships

and P-8I Poseidon anti-submarine warfare aircraft to participate in the Malabar 2023 naval exercise, conducting anti-submarine warfare operations, practicing sea deterrence and operations, and interoperability as strategic signalling to balance China's power in the Asia-Pacific region, including the Taiwan Strait. In August 2022, India accused China of "militarization of the Taiwan Strait" following the docking of a Chinese military ship 'Yuan Wang 5' in Sri Lanka's Hambantota port, fearing that it could be used as a military base. Yuan Wang 5, is part of a group of ships operated by the People's Liberation Army that monitor satellite and missile launches. In 2019, China warned India and the US against assisting Taiwan in building submarines, emphasizing that countries with ties to Beijing should adhere to the 'One-China Principle' and refrain from establishing military connections with Taipei. Reported, six foreign companies, including one from India, submitted submarine design proposals for Taiwan. In 2021, Taipei acknowledged with hiring engineers, technicians and former naval officers from six states, including India to help in its submarine programme.

In addition to India in the Quad, it would also add to India's geo-strategic positioning as an international stakeholder in the Asia-Pacific

region. In the context of Quad, a crisis in the Taiwan Straits serves to concurrently position New Delhi as a significant balancer. Consequently, India stands to gain advantages from both China's challenges and the Quad's apprehensions. This perpetuated state of affairs aligns favorably with India's interests.

Besides international aspects of this involvement, it has an internal dimension as well which has a significant impact on India's territorial sovereignty. In October 2020, the Chinese embassy communicated to Indian journalists, urging them to adhere to the "one China policy" and refrain from contravening it when covering events related to Taiwan's National Day. Hence, India's intervention in the Taiwan Strait crises is a diplomatic maneuvering by Indian policy makers to manage India's territorial disputes with China, especially along the LAC in Ladakh.

Comprehending the shifting intricacies within this sphere assumes paramount importance, given India's potential to exert substantial influence upon regional stability. Given the case of submarine collaboration with Taiwan, India has a long way to go to be able to match China's advancement in submarine warfare and also to be a potential market for submarines in the region. India faces challenges in modernizing its

submarine fleet and the urgency of replenishing its naval inventory. Its operational conventional submarine count has decreased to 16, with many being over 30 years old and overdue for retirement. Efforts to increase this number, such as the P75 program with France to build Scorpene-class submarines, have faced significant delays. The first submarine was inducted in 2017, and the last one is expected to be inducted in early 2024. India's submarine strength is diminishing compared to China, which has over 50 diesel-powered submarines and 10 nuclear submarines, and even compared to Pakistan, which is acquiring new submarines with advanced technology. The Indian Navy hopes for an expedited tendering process to avoid further delays in acquiring new submarines.

Hence, India's accusation of militarization of Taiwan Strait by China, its strategic signaling through Quad, and potential military collaboration may be analyzed as a mechanism to create leverage for India in its negotiations with China over India's strategic interests in the Indian Ocean Region.

<https://strafasia.com/what-is-driving-indias-entanglement-in-the-taiwan-strait-crisis/>

Komal Khan

(Research Officer, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

The NATO Summit and the Ukrainian Conundrum

Shamil Abdullah Saleh

The annual meeting of NATO member and allies have brought significant frustrations for the Ukrainians. The visibly upset Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy shared his discontent with the lack of a timetable and criticized the “absurd” delay to accession. The use of ambiguous language by NATO members concerning Ukraine, compared with high-level discussions between NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, and Turkish President Erdogan regarding Sweden’s potential accession to the alliance, has contributed to Ukraine’s sense of disappointment. This stems from the perception that Sweden’s security environment differs significantly from that of Ukraine, yet significant efforts are being expended to facilitate Sweden’s entry into NATO. Despite widespread public endorsements for Ukraine’s membership, there remains a firm and unanimous consensus among 31 member states regarding the process and criteria for Ukraine’s prospective alliance affiliation. The rationale behind the Ukrainian disappointment can be attributed to NATO’s repeated attempts to consider Sweden’s

admission into the alliance. Additionally, member states’ use of vague language concerning future admission and the absence of a clear timetable for Ukraine’s admission has further contributed to this sentiment. However, the Turkish president’s remarks made after the deal hinted that Swedish accession may not be a done deal. The Swedish deal gave Ukraine a sense of suspicion and seriousness of NATO for Ukrainian accession into the treaty. The U.S. also called it premature for Ukraine’s membership and stressed that Ukraine is still not ready for membership as the U.S. views it too early for Ukraine to enter into the NATO alliance until the crisis is not resolved. Including Ukraine in NATO without solving outstanding issues would not just increase tension with Russia but could also potentially complicate the security dynamics.

The G-7 security assurances given to Ukrainians, which include advanced military equipment, training, intelligence sharing, and cyber defense are welcoming introduction to the Ukrainian military. However, this will not provide a significant security umbrella for NATO members to enjoy in the alliance and, it certainly is not a substitute for NATO membership.

However, the admission of Ukraine into the alliance could further increase hostility between Russia and NATO.

NATO's repeated failure to offer a timetable for Ukraine's membership may be a blessing in disguise, at least for the NATO alliance. NATO, possibly the most powerful military alliance in the world is keeping itself from engaging in an avoidable conflict. This is something Western leaders have in their mind as it would cause not just a prolonged conflict but also a protracted one. For the alliance to remain intact, this "fear and insecurity in every word" as defined by former U.S. diplomat John Kornblum, of NATO member states is justified. Russia could resort to significant actions in response to the potential expansion of NATO, particularly its former territories and near-abroad. This is a stance that Russia had conveyed previously, albeit with some level of acceptance in the past when several states from the Warsaw Pact joined NATO. Russia's concern about having NATO right at its doorstep is also justifiable, as the presence of a formidable military alliance at the border could lead to tensions and, ultimately, the risk of conflict. Additionally, John J. Mearsheimer already anticipated in 2014 that Russian President Vladimir Putin's ultimate objective was to reclaim the entire territory of Ukraine as part of his broader ambition to revive the old Soviet empire as well as other countries in Russia's near-abroad. He also argued that NATO's

expansion eastward is the cause of Russian aggression. In other words, the West cannot incorporate Russia's near-abroad into the sphere of influence without repercussions. Consequently, Russia's actions in this conflict have established a precedent that any future attempts to exert influence over its nearby territories will be met with severe consequences.

However, if the current conflict remains deadlocked, there's a possibility that dwindling public support in the West could pose challenges for Ukraine in terms of arms funding and supplies. For instance, in the U.S. public support has softened in 2023 as compared to last year. A similar trend can be seen in Europe as well and if the stalemate remains, this trend is unlikely to change. Consequently, this might pressure the states currently supporting Ukraine to engage in negotiations with Russia to seek a potential resolution to the conflict. Ultimately, if Ukraine were to become a NATO member, it would signify a colossal failure on Russia's part, given that the core objective of this conflict has been to prevent Ukraine from aligning with the Western security alliance. If negotiations do occur between Western nations and Russia, Ukraine's NATO membership could become a non-negotiable point for Russia.

In the end, NATO will persist in its reluctance and use of cryptic terms until this crisis is definitively resolved. The alliance is wary of being entangled in an avoidable conflict that could ultimately have global implications. Many experts view this conflict as long, and exhaustive which will unlikely end soon. This would mean the same will be the case for Ukraine's membership in NATO. Many states have joined the Atlantic alliance before Ukraine and some more may likely join ahead over time. Although the decision

of NATO to not give any timetable may be frustrating for the Ukrainians but it may be the one that makes the most sense until the conflict is not concluded and by the looks of it, the conflict is anything but concluded.

<https://strafasia.com/the-nato-summit-and-the-ukrainian-conundrum>

Shamil Abdullah Saleh

(Research Assistant, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

Why is Ukraine's Counter-offensive Destined to Fail?

Usman Haider

The much-anticipated Ukrainian counteroffensive was predicted to break through Russian echelon defenses swiftly, however, it turned into a stalemate. The operation was strategically planned and executed with misguided optimism, as Ukraine's defense strategists underestimated the strength of the adversary. It was launched under the wishful thinking of the Ukrainian government assuming that Russian soldiers would desert their positions and run away from their trenches in the first waves of the counterattack. However, the opposite happened, and Russians are holding their positions, occasionally launching counterattacks, and not allowing Ukraine's land forces to breach their defenses. Already two months have passed since the launch of the offensive and Ukraine's military has yet to make significant gains. With the current situation, the highly anticipated counteroffensive is destined to fail.

This prompts inquiry into why the counteroffensive has so far failed and will continue to produce unfavorable results for Ukraine and its allies. There are three main rationales for the failure of the

counteroffensive. Firstly, the decision to train Ukraine's soldiers to replicate the combined-arms tactics on the battlefield backfired. Secondly, Ukraine lacked the key component, air supremacy over the battlefield. Thirdly, the operation began too little too late.

Ukraine had high hopes from the 36,000 foreign-trained troops, organized into nine brigades to turn the tides and outmaneuvered the Russians through the employment of combined arms tactics. However, foreign-trained Ukrainian troops were unable to execute the combined arms operations to the desired effect. One reason was the lack of adequate training, as the units were trained in haste in a matter of months with no time to assess the training in formal large-scale military exercises before launching them on the battlefield. No force can undergo a complete transformation in its traditional way of warfighting in a matter of months. Besides, it was difficult for Ukraine's soldiers to leave behind the decades-old Soviet training and rapidly adopt the Western style of warfighting. To change such an endeavor requires years of training and not just months. For instance, the US combined arms fighting approach took approximately 100 years of training to refine tactics.

Also, the soldier's training was inadequate, and Western security officials knew this from the beginning. Ukrainian fighters fighting on the ground acknowledged this issue as well. For instance, almost ninety percent of the 41st mechanized brigade soldiers joined the training program in 2023. The majority have been mobilized since January 2023; however, many joined the ranks as late as March. Moreover, the US and its allies didn't face any opponent like Russia in recent decades but rather remained engaged in fighting terrorism and insurgencies. Thus, regardless of their professionalism and modern training programs, the US and its allies were not suitable candidates for training Ukrainian soldiers on how to fight the large continental army.

Besides, dislodging the defenders from their entrenched positions required air superiority over the battlefield, along with effective close air support against advancing columns. It provides maneuverability to the assault troops to engage the enemy and remain secure from the enemy's air power components. Ukraine's assault forces lacked both, restricting their advance. They did not get air superiority or close air support rather they were continuously attacked from the sky because the Ukraine air force didn't have the firepower to challenge the incoming planes

and attack helicopters. Likewise, Russian K-52 attack helicopters significantly damaged Ukraine's armored vehicles and hindered their advance. This demonstrates that Ukraine was at a disadvantage from the very beginning of the operation.

Moreover, Ukraine's military planners forgot to keep in consideration that Russia learned a great deal from last year's successful counter-offensives of Kherson and Kharkiv, in which Ukraine recaptured a considerable number of lost territories. The setbacks made the Russians opt for a strategy in which they can retain the captured Ukrainian territory even if Ukraine launched another offensive. This led to the Russian adaption of the strategy of trench warfare commencing last November. The Russians had months to back themselves for the establishment of defensive positions along the entire 1000 km front. They created defensive barriers including trenches and various obstacles. These defensive barriers included mine fields, dragon's teeth, barbed wire, ditches, and layers of trenches to slow down the potential Ukrainian assault. A U.K. intelligence report released earlier this year called it "the most extensive systems of military defensive works seen anywhere in the world for many decades." This strategy forced Ukraine's counteroffensive to remain at a standstill

position even after the counteroffensive's deadline of two months.

It gave Russians ample time to strengthen their defenses, and Ukraine didn't have the fire power required to oust the Russians from their defensive positions. Ukraine received aid from allies, mainly frontline tanks (Leopards and Abrams) and infantry fighting vehicles for the offensive, but the numbers were on the lower side. To launch and sustain offensive along a 1000 km frontage requires more than just a few dozen tanks. Also, Ukrainians do not have an adequate amount of demining equipment required to promptly demine the whole area. Not just the equipment but personnel shortage is another problem as latest report revealed that only 13 men are operational in one section while on paper the strength remains at 30.

Only a miracle can turn the defeat into success because Ukraine has lost a vast amount of Western frontline equipment during the counteroffensive. The extensive mining is a problem that will not go away soon, and it will take considerable time and effort to resolve. Maybe a squadron or two will be provided to Ukraine in coming months but they will not alter the balance in favor of Ukraine. Ukrainian air force pilots were historically trained to fly Soviet planes and suddenly adaption of Western aircraft

would not be easy, and a few dozen planes won't make much difference. With winter coming soon, the Ukraine Counteroffensive is destined to fail.

<https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2023/08/22/why-is-ukraines-counteroffensive-destined-to-fail-974465.html>

*Usman Haider
(Research Assistant, Strategic Vision
Institute, Islamabad).*

Philippines under Geo-Political Spotlight

Muhammad Abu Bakar

Recently, China has been accused of using a water cannon on a Philippine boat in the South China Sea (SCS). A concerning incident that has reverberated across global media outlets. Armed Forces Chief Gen. Romeo Brawner said “An attack – even with water cannon – on a navy ship would be tantamount to “aggressive actions against a military ship and that could be interpreted as an act of war already.” The confrontation marks the most recent escalation in the ongoing territorial dispute between China and the Philippines adding another layer of complexity to their longstanding conflict. In response, Manila summoned China’s ambassador Huang Xilian and presented a strongly worded diplomatic protest over the tense hours-long standoff near Second Thomas Shoal. A submerged reef where Philippines troops live on a rusty World War-II era warship BRP Sierra Madre.

It is widely believed that the Philippine’s side deliberately or intentionally grounded the BRP Sierra Madre in the Spratly Islands in 1999 to serve as an outpost of the Philippines Marines Corps to assert sovereignty in the disputed territory.

Moreover, the Chinese Foreign Ministry, in a statement, urged the Philippines to immediately “remove” the warship (BRP Sierra Madre) and restore it to its unoccupied state. It is unsurprising that President Ferdinand Marcos Jr and National Security Council (NSC) Assistant Director General Jonathan Malaya both, in a separate statement, firmly stated that they won’t abandon BRP Sierra Madre. It is noteworthy that BRP Sierra Madre is necessary for the Philippines to protect its interests in the West Philippines Sea. It is worth mentioning that the South China Sea is critical for military, economic, and strategic purposes and is rich in resources like gas and oil. The competing claims between Manila, Beijing, and other regional states over this territory and waters of the South China Sea make it one of the world’s most controversial and contested regions. The Philippines continues to struggle with China’s continuous efforts to assert its irrefutable sovereignty over SCS. Moreover, due to its strategic location, this region is significant for regional and global powers, including China, the US, and Japan. It is also the hub of economic maritime passage from the west to the East.

The ongoing maritime dispute between China and the Philippines is increasingly linked to geopolitical competition between China and

the US. It is worth highlighting that specific Chinese actions have afforded the US a strategic opening in the Asia-Pacific region. It is alleged that China's assertive behavior in the SCS and increased military presence near the Island of Taiwan allowed the US to play a significant security leadership role. Numerous regional countries contesting over the SCS intended to become US allies to ward off the overwhelming Chinese influence in the region. They opted for a dynamic equilibrium to discourage both coercion and conflict.

The US's engagement in the Asia-Pacific region to keep a close eye on the maritime status, navigational freedom, and its commitment to regional countries infuriated China.

Simultaneously, it is progressively evident that China is not content with maintaining the current status quo of the US within the regional balance of power. Former Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte pursued a pragmatic approach, avoiding confrontation with China in the hope of reaping economic benefits. Throughout his presidency, he minimized territorial sovereignty in the SCS and sought economic gains from China. He downplayed a 2016 arbitration victory that rejected China's extensive sovereignty claims in the sea. The

purpose was to prevent the maritime dispute from damaging its bilateral relationship with the region's dominant military and economic power. President Marcos Jr assumed the presidency in June 2022 and emphasized an independent foreign policy prioritizing the Philippines' national interests.

This foreign policy rejects the "Cold War mentality" that forces more minor powers to pick sides between more considerable competing powers. Initially, he adhered to this policy but shifted towards closer ties with the US. Due to the pressure from the US, he attempted to amplify the arbitration case initiated by Aquino III. He also approved the establishment of 4 additional US military bases, bringing the total count to 9. These actions led to the perception that the Philippines aligned itself with the US under President Marcos. Other pivotal developments reinforcing this perception include the US granting the Philippines the status of Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA). Manila now joins the selected group of 19 MNNAs. On average, the US offers around \$120 million annually in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to the Philippines, with this year's support exceeding \$200 million. Additionally, the largest-ever military exercise, "Balikatan," conducted from 11-28 April 2023 between the two countries,

involved more than 17,600 soldiers as a solid commitment to external defense contributed to solidifying this perception.

All developments mentioned above revealed that under the Biden administration, the US desperately tries to pull the Philippines into its orbit to undermine China's position and power.

China opposes the formation of aggressive blocs in the region; it strategically employs economic and trade relations to neutralize the US role and attract US allies and partners. This approach aims to integrate the neighboring small and middle powers like the Philippines into Beijing's economic ventures, a realm where the US falls short. The effectiveness of China's approach can be measured by its success in attracting US allies in the region to participate in its economic initiatives. This approach was

evident during Philippines President Marcos's state visit to China, where despite existing disagreements, efforts were made to cultivate cooperative ties in economic sectors. He secured investment pledges of \$22.8 billion and infrastructure financing loans. In the foreseeable future, China will likely employ diplomatic strategies to ease tensions in the SCS. It will also leverage its economic clout to alleviate the security concerns of states such as the Philippines, aiming to lessen their reliance on US security commitments in the region. Therefore, neutralizing the stances of allies in the Pacific region will question the undue security leadership of the US in the region.

<https://strattheia.com/philippines-under-geo-political-spotlight/>

*Muhammad Abu Bakar
(Research Assistant, Strategic Vision
Institute, Islamabad.)*

A Closer Look At Fragmented Unity Of Asia-Pacific

Shamil Abdullah Saleh

The Prime Minister of Japan and the President of the Republic of Korea were welcomed by the United States president at the first-ever trilateral summit at Camp David, where in a joint statement all three states condemned China and agreed to deepen military and economic cooperation. All states agreed to consult in terms of crises in response to regional challenges, provocations, and threats affecting common interests. The rise of China has seriously imbalanced the U.S. hegemony in the Asia-Pacific and the U.S., along with its allies is trying to encircle China.

The U.S. expectation in the Asia-Pacific is that all states should put aside their differences against each other to oppose a much larger contender. However, it is easier said than done as many states have outstanding issues against each other and these issues cannot certainly be ignored to oppose China in the region. From historical issues to territorial disputes, some of the most powerful allies of the U.S. in the region do not see eye to eye on certain regional issues.

Despite numerous endeavors to address the relationship between South Korea and Japan, a certain level of mistrust continues to exist, primarily arising from the annexation of Korea by Imperial Japan from 1910 until the culmination of the Second World War. Along with this, outstanding disputes still exist over volcanic islets, known as Dokdo in Korea and Takeshima in Japan, where both states claim to the islands. There have been multiple attempts by the U.S., and bilateral means, to mend ties, but the process has been on the slower side. Still, any misstep will take the bilateral ties back to square one, something which the U.S. cannot afford at this moment. However, there have been various normalization efforts as South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol visited Japan in March of this year.

Similarly, due to concerns in the South China Sea, the Philippines have moved towards the U.S. in recent period in the administration of President Marcosas, compared to Former Philippines President Duterte, who aligned more with China and was confrontational towards the U.S. On the other hand, Vietnam although ideologically more in line with China due to the South China Sea dispute has moved towards the U.S. In fact, the U.S. calls Vietnam its “Leading Regional Partner” in the 2022 “Indo-Pacific Strategy”. However,

both Philippines and Vietnam have disputes over the Spratly Islands claimed in their entirety by China, Vietnam, and Taiwan and portions of them are claimed by countries like the Philippines and Malaysia.

The recent events between China and the Philippines, where China used water canon in the disputed region of the South China Sea in an area of Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands, were criticized by Vietnam citing a violation of its sovereign right. This although not a major confrontation could potentially become a flashpoint of conflict between the Philippines, China, and Vietnam. In the past, clashes between Vietnam and the Philippines have emerged sometimes resulting in casualties.

This along with the lack of unity and limitations of ASEAN states has further complicated U.S.'s approach towards the region. As long as there are intra-state disputes within ASEAN, especially regarding the South China Sea, along with limitations in ASEAN, there is little ASEAN can do against Chinese claims. Divided ASEAN is beneficial for the Chinese leadership, it makes uniting against Chinese claims difficult.

The fragmented unity of Asia-Pacific would make it difficult for the U.S. to compete with

Beijing. This also highlights the problem with the U.S. strategy in Asia-Pacific as the U.S. seeks hegemony in the region through security alliances and treaties but ignores the change in global order from unilateralism to multilateralism. This along with the policy of solely countering China, while ignoring military modernization and the economic rise of China could be the perfect recipe for disaster.

Certainly, it's evident that China has significantly disrupted and challenged the U.S. presence in the region, and there are no indications of China intending to step back from this stance. Importantly, China's aggressive position on the South China Sea might be in response to the United States' assertive policy in the Asia-Pacific region, bolstered by its allies. The U.S. not only seeks to limit Chinese influence but also restrict access through the Pacific Ocean. Much like the United States concerns about open communication and sea access in Asia-Pacific, China could maintain similar anxiety due to its proximity to the region, in contrast to the more distant positioning of the U.S.

As of yet, states within the Asia-Pacific do not possess the capability to counter nor contain China even with U.S. backing. The intrastate problem, be it is historical or contemporary may also remain in the future,

if bilateral problems are there to stay, so is China.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/30082023-a-closer-look-at-fragmented-unity-of-asia-pacific-oped/>

Shamil Abudallha Saleh

(Research Assistant, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).