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Strategic Vision Institute (SVI)

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Strategic Vision Institute (SVI)

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

SVI Foresight

SVI Foresight is a monthly electronic journal. It has a multi-disciplinary perspective highlighting contemporary strategic and security studies. The Journal is envisioned to be a collection of policy-oriented articles written by 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
<i>CPEC Never Slowed Down Rather it is Expanding</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Hamdan Khan</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Nijjar's Assassination is Not the First Instance of Modi's India Acting Rogue</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Hamdan Khan</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>The Geopolitical Cost of American Engagement in the Israel-Palestine Conflict</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Syed Raza Abbas</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>US Aims to Counter Nuclear Weapons Amid Growing Tensions with China</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Shayan Hassan Jamy</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Philippines and the Quad States: A United Front against China's Influence</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Muhammad Abubaker</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>CTBT Conundrum: Russia's Withdrawal and the Road to Nuclear Disarmament</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Sher Bano</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>The BRI White Paper: Deciphering China's Global Code in the Context of US-China Rivalry.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Ayesha Shaikh.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>The Indian Army's Boosted Logistic Capabilities in Kashmir</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Usman Haider</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>The Missing Piece: How the Exclusion of Palestine Doomed the Middle East Normalization Plan.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Shamil Abdullah</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Maintaining Status Quo or Resuming Testing: Russia's Plans to Revoke Ratification of CTBT</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Ayesha Sikandar</i>	<i>35</i>

<i>3D Printing: A Game-Changer for Militaries.....</i>	38
<i>Ahmed Ali</i>	38
<i>The United States vs. China: Who is winning the Space Race?.....</i>	41
<i>Akash Shah</i>	41
<i>MIRV: Technology to Maintain Strategic Balance in South Asia</i>	44
<i>Amber Afreen Abid.....</i>	44

Editor's Note

SVI Foresight for the month of October brings with it another well-timed issue of the SVI electronic journal SVI-Foresight. We embark on a journey of insightful exploration into the multifaceted landscape of South Asian and international affairs. In this edition, we proudly present a collection of opinion articles that delve into critical issues, offering diverse perspectives and thought-provoking analyses.

The issue entails discussion on the emerging technologies and their role in the modern warfare, the ongoing crisis in the Middle East, continued Indian atrocities in Kashmir, and the great power challenging global environment have all being analyzed from different perspectives by varying scholars.

As we navigate through these narratives, we encourage readers to appreciate the complexity of South Asia's geopolitical landscape and the diverse voices that contribute to its evolution. 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

CPEC Never Slowed down Rather it is Expanding

Hamdan Khan

The year 2023 marks ten years since the inauguration of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as the flagship project of Chinese President Xi Jinping's signature Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Out of more than six land corridors envisioned under the initial scheme of BRI, CPEC is the only corridor hosted by one country, Pakistan. The grand scheme aims to connect China's Western Xinjiang region to the port of Gwadar in Pakistan's Northwestern Balochistan province through a network of highways, railways, oil and gas pipelines, and optic fiber cable.

In addition, dozens of industrial zones, Information Technology (IT) Parks, and energy projects are part of the short and long-term plans of the CPEC. The deep-sea port of Gwadar acts as an anchor to CPEC and, owing to its prized positioning at the crossroads of different geographical zones, has the potential to elevate the once small fishing town to a bustling industrial and business hub.

Since its launch, CPEC has made noteworthy strides by attracting an investment of around

\$30 billion from China in a range of sectors, but primarily in infrastructure and energy projects. The auspicious results of the grand scheme are visible on the ground in Pakistan. Road infrastructure in Pakistan has undergone massive upgradation: under CPEC, 510 kilometers of highways and 932 kilometers of roads have been built, which have massively improved connectivity of the distant areas with major urban centers thereby contributing to uplifting the socio-economic standard of these regions. The investments in energy projects have led to the addition of 8,000 MW to the national grid, thereby assuaging the energy crisis that once mired Pakistan. The laying of 820 kilometers long optic fiber cable to enhance digital connectivity and the creation of more than 200,000 jobs are other dividends of CPEC.

Despite the discernible benefits of CPEC, the scheme has been the subject of adversarial and cynical commentary from domestic and international naysayers. The international players, especially the US, have sought to discredit CPEC as part of their larger campaign against BRI, which they consider as the harbinger of the Chinese-led economic order to rival the existing global economic architecture dominated by the US. CPEC (and other projects of BRI) were framed as a

“debt trap” — a characterization that ignores the factual reality that Pakistan owes more than 70% of its debt to Western countries and institutions and that CPEC remains primarily an investment-oriented scheme.

On the domestic front, although CPEC enjoys a national consensus, it has fallen victim to vested political interests. To discredit their political rivals, the top echelons of the last government made erroneous claims that CPEC has been either rolled back or has been slowed down by their predecessors — a claim that starkly defied the reality on the ground. Such was the intensity and frequency of such motivated claims that Chinese officials had to reject the impression of CPEC slowing down and emphasize on multiple occasions that CPEC has been making steady progress — notwithstanding the occasional hiccups caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and security challenges.

In July 2023, the Chinese Vice Premier traveled to Pakistan to attend 10-year celebrations of CPEC. During the visit, Islamabad and Beijing expressed satisfaction with the remarkable achievements of CPEC and affirmed their resolve to further build upon the milestones of CPEC achieved during the last decade.

Recently, during a media talk, Pakistan’s Caretaker Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani firmly rejected the rumors that CPEC could be rolled back. The veteran diplomat added that CPEC has entered into Phase II, which would usher into a new era of multidimensional cooperation between Pakistan and China. Phase II of CPEC includes the upgradation and expansion of the railway network in Pakistan, the modernization of the agriculture sector, the operationalization of industrial zones, cooperation on combatting climate change and green development, and the development of science and technology and IT sectors.

To put it succinctly, the steady progress on CPEC projects discernible on the ground in various parts of Pakistan and the categorical statements from Pakistan and China rejecting any notions of the scheme slowing down provide enough ground and reasons to cast off the unfounded rumors about the grand scheme. CPEC never slowed down and has made noteworthy progress during the past 10 years, thereby contributing to the socio-economic development of Pakistan. Moreover, with the commencement of Phase II, the CPEC is expanding to cover many new areas, which would further deepen the cooperation between Pakistan and China and would consolidate the position of CPEC as a

symbol of the Pakistan-China all-weather strategic partnership.

<https://en.wenews.pk/cpec-never-slowed-down-rather-it-is-expanding/>

Hamdan Khan

(Research Officer, Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad).

Nijjar's Assassination is Not the First Instance of Modi's India Acting Rogue

Hamdan Khan

Modi's India has made yet another textbook display of how a far-right regime charged with aggressive nationalism blatantly embarks on the roguish path. Although BJP's governments at the center and in different Indian states have made a charade of whatever was left of Indian democracy, it is the first that Modi's hurricane of rogue behavior has hit the shorelines of a Western country.

On September 19th, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, speaking in the House of Commons, said that Canadian security agencies are "actively pursuing allegations of a potential link between the agents of the government of India" and the assassination of a Canadian citizen, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who was shot dead on June 18 this year in Surrey, Vancouver. Trudeau added that the involvement of a foreign government in killing a Canadian citizen constituted "an unacceptable violation" of Canada's sovereignty.

Startling as it was, the revelation pushed India and the Modi regime among the headlines in the Western media — of course, subject to deleterious reportage — and

ignited a diplomatic spat between Canada and India. While India continued to reject the allegation disparagingly and resorted to diplomatic bluster against Ottawa, a series of leaks were made by Canadian authorities to the media, which revealed that Canadian authorities had signals and human intelligence linked to the killing. The intercepted communications were categorized as "smoking gun," which linked Indian diplomats based in Canada with the assassination of Nijjar. Moreover, a media leak claimed that the intelligence wasn't gathered by Canada alone (later confirmed by the US envoy to Canada). Rather it also included intelligence inputs from the Five-Eyes Intelligence Alliance, most notably from the USA, which helped Canada establish the context and subsequently go public with the disclosure.

Given how much the US-led West is banking on India to counter-balance against China, it is highly unlikely that Canada's Five-Eye intelligence allies would have advised the Trudeau government to go public with the revelations without having maximum confidence in the veracity of the intelligence. Media reports also claim, citing Canadian government sources, that in private, Indian officials didn't deny murder allegations.

For the Western world, autocratic regimes' killings of political activists on their soil have precedents. Still, it is a first that India — a self-professed democracy but essentially a sham with which the West appears willing to live to create a pretense of shared values and principles against China — has undertaken such an egregious transgression on Western soil.

Before becoming India's PM in 2014, Modi ruled the state of Gujrat for 13 years (2001 – 2014). In 2002, Gujrat witnessed a pogrom of Muslims under Modi's watch, which, as the Chief Minister is reported to have directed police to pull back, which enabled what a United Kingdom Report labeled as a "systematic campaign of violence" against Muslims having "all the hallmarks of ethnic cleansing" at the hands of Hindutva extremists. It was because of Modi's involvement in the Gujrat pogrom of Muslims that the US government denied Modi a visa to the US — a ban that was only lifted after Modi became the PM of India.

After raking reins in New Delhi, Modi furthered his far-right Hindutva agenda and embarked upon a mission to convert India into a fascist autocracy. Modi strangled the media in India and tamed most of it to bandwagon with the far-right

ideology of the BJP. He oversaw the systematic corrosion of Indian institutions, including the judiciary, military, and civil service, to render those subservient to BJP's majoritarian agenda. Various strong-arm tactics were employed, weaponizing state machinery to coerce opposition politicians, making them desert their parties and join the BJP. This resulted in what is colloquially and rather euphemistically labeled as "democratic backsliding" in India.

Under Modi BJP's rule, Hindutva hooligans were given an open license to carry out vigilantism and lynch people belonging to minorities with immunity. Given the BJP's declaratory anti-Muslim agenda, Muslims — the biggest minority in India — became primary targets for Hindutva ruffians. Thousands of Muslims have been killed in separate incidents of lynching and pogroms by Hindutva hooligans belonging to BJP & RSS (ideological patron of the former), dozens of Mosques and houses of Muslims have been demolished (by state machinery and Hindutva groups) and Muslims are being subjected to ghettoization through discriminatory legislation and prejudiced treatment on political and socio-economic accounts.

Given Pakistan poses the only hurdle in India's way to regional domination, the relationship between the two neighbors remain particularly antagonistic. The addition of nuclear weapons in 1998 introduced relative stability to South Asia, but added a perilous dimension to the regional calculus fraught with cataclysmic nuclear risks and thus demanding responsible behavior from involved nuclear actors.

In 2019, in an attempt to turn the electoral landscape in his favor, Modi resorted to perilous nuclear brinkmanship, pushing South Asia almost to the brink. Pakistan's calculated response & international intervention averted what could have been a cataclysmic escalation. The crisis, however, once again underscored the limits of recklessness to which a far-right jingoistic can push just to secure an electoral victory.

The aforementioned instances constitute what the West would generally label as unacceptable behavior flouting international norms and endangering regional and global peace. Leaders resorting to such behavior are normally labelled as reckless and irresponsible, and are subjected to international sanctions or at minimum, international opprobrium. However, in case of India, West didn't bother to take any steps

to change India's roguish attitude, primarily because the Western capitals didn't find it auspicious to antagonize cantankerous India, which they aim to pitch as a counterweight to China. Such is the attitude of impunity adopted towards India that despite ample evidence of persecution of minorities under the Modi government, the US State Department didn't include India in the list of "countries of particular concern" vis-a-vis religious freedom.

It may be safe to conclude that the attitude of impunity adopted by the West towards India's rogue behavior under Modi at home and in the immediate neighborhood provided New Delhi with the audacity to carry out a state-sponsored assassination on Western soil with the anticipation that either the assassination wouldn't be traced back to India or would be overlooked in the Western capitals.

<https://stratheia.com/nijjars-assassination-is-not-the-first-instance-of-modis-india-acting-rogue/>

Hamdan Khan

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The Geopolitical Cost of American Engagement in the Israel-Palestine Conflict

Syed Raza Abbas

On the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, Hamas, a Palestinian militant faction fighting against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, launched Operation “Al-Aqsa Flood.” Israel was caught off-guard by this surprise attack from Hamas, and the fighters successfully made inroads into Israeli territory. Hamas fighters operate just a few miles from the West Bank and Jerusalem. U.S. President Joseph Biden has pledged to support Israel amidst the terrorist onslaught, and his exact words are, “Let there be no mistake: The United States stands with the State of Israel.” U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) has announced they are moving the USS Gerald Ford, their biggest aircraft carrier striker group, towards the Eastern Mediterranean to aid the Israelis.

Reportedly, Iranian proxies operating out of Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon have announced that in case of direct American involvement in the conflict would make the American assets and bases in the Middle East legitimate military targets. Wall Street Journal also claimed that the Iranian Quds force generals and Hezbollah commanders planned Operation Al-Aqsa Flood months ago.

Iranian officials have refuted the claims about their involvement in the recent conflict. It is important to note that before the conflict erupted in occupied Palestinian territories, Saudis were very close to recognizing Israel and joining the Abraham Accords. In an interview, Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman accepted that we are engaging with Israel. In the wake of recent conflict, Saudis have informed U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken that all talks are off with Israel.

“The first Geo-political casualty of this ongoing conflict is the Saudi-Israel diplomatic normalization. The question arises as to whether this conflict can spread horizontally in the Middle East.”

The United States has unequivocally pledged support to Israel amidst the so-called terrorist onslaught on Israel. If the U.S. intervenes in the battle to save the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) from capitulation, Iran would likely respond via its proxies out of Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. The most important and well-trained of those proxies is Hezbollah, which operates out of South Lebanon and shares a contiguous border with Israel. Hezbollah has 20,000 active troops and approximately 1 lac reservists who are not well-trained as active fighters but can aid the regulars in an all-out war. Reportedly, Hezbollah possesses

an arsenal of 2 lac short-range rockets, Short-range ballistic missiles SRBM) and scud missiles. Hezbollah's maximum range of the Scud-B/C missile in its arsenal is 500 km. This missile can even go beyond the Israeli territory and strike deep into the Sinai Peninsula. Similarly, Khaibar-1 has a range of 100 km, Zelzal 2 has an effective range of 210 km, and Fateh-110 has an effective range of 300 km.

Iran has proxies in Syria and can launch attacks from the west into the Israeli-occupied territories. It is crucial to remember the Golan Heights, which Israelis occupied in the 1967 Arab-Israel war, and the Israelis have never vacated from those heights. The reason for the Israeli occupation of the Golan height is the military importance of those heights. Below the Golan heights are vast flat lands of Syria, and IDF can easily observe and neutralize any movement originating from Syria. The second most important reason for the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights is because they are critical to the water security of Israel. The water that flows from the Golan accumulates into the Sea of Galilee, and Israel depends heavily on this only fresh water source, which is available to Israelis. Along with Iranian militias, the Syrian Arab army may vouch to regain

control of strategic Golan heights for the same reasons as the Israelis.

"Americans and Israelis may respond to this escalation by going for counter-value and counter-force targets."

Counter-value targets include Iranian oil and natural gas deposits and reserves because the Iranian economy relies heavily on the exports of petroleum products. Iran's Oil revenues in 2022 were figured at 42.6 Billion dollars. The counter-force mark includes the Iranian command and control structure, ballistic missile sites, and nuclear enrichment facilities. They may go for the decapitation strike to eliminate Iran's complete political and military leadership of Iran, but it's easier said than done.

Iran would likely respond to this horizontal escalation by targeting American assets and bases in the Persian Gulf. The U.S. has stationed at least 44000 active troops in their headquarters across the Persian Gulf. The three largest among those widespread U.S bases are in Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait, which houses 33000 soldiers alone. Iran has a robust ballistic missile program and would likely respond to American and Israeli strikes by launching ballistic missiles at U.S. bases in the region and Israeli heartland. Iran would likely mobilize its SRBM and Medium-

Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBM) arsenal. The range of those missiles varies between 300 km to 2000 km. Emad-1 and Ashura MRBM could target Israeli territory, and various SRBM could target U.S. bases next door to Iran in the Persian Gulf.

“This conflict’s geopolitical and economic repercussions would be catastrophic for the whole world.”

The geopolitical cost would be the spread of conflict to the whole of the Middle East, the end of normalization deals with Israel as evident, the likely use of nuclear weapons, a surge in terrorism and militancy, the end of American presence in the region, and very likely become a catalyst for the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region.

The economic cost of this likely escalation in conflict would be enormous on the global supply chain of fossil fuels, which are already under strain due to the Russia-Ukraine war. Persian Gulf countries produce 17 million barrels of oil and 3.5 billion cubic feet of natural gas daily, accounting for 20% of global fossil fuel needs. All of this gas and fossil fuel passes through the Strait of Hormuz.

In war, the supply would be completely cut off, or Iran may deliberately block the Strait

of Hormuz by placing sea mines or targeting ships and tankers passing through this narrow Strait. The saner voices in the Middle East and globally should call for an emergency UN Security Council meeting to develop the framework to end the hostilities because if this conflict spreads, everyone will suffer, whether close or far away from the Middle East.

<https://stratheaia.com/the-geopolitical-cost-of-american-engagement-in-the-israel-palestine-conflict/>

Syed Raza Abbas

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US Aims to Counter Nuclear Weapons Amid Growing Tensions with China

Shayan Hassan Jamy

Over 75 years since US nuclear weapons caused devastation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear deterrence has held firm. Despite nuclear-armed states now understanding the wide-ranging consequences of using nuclear weapons, the threat of their use still exists today. In many ways, this threat has significantly increased in recent years, largely due to advances in Emerging and Disruptive Technologies (EDTs), the changing geopolitical landscape, and an overall deterioration of the global nuclear order. It is within this context that the US Department of Defence (DOD) released its 2023 Strategy for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD) on 28 September 2023.

The CWMD strategy outlines how the DOD views the pursuit, development, and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Although WMDs include chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons, it is the nuclear domain which understandably holds the greatest significance, with nuclear weapons being considered as the ultimate deterrent. The strategy gives valuable insight into how the

US views nuclear weapons, its global competition with China, and the future of the global nuclear order.

The CWMD strategy outlines how the US intends to deal with current and emerging WMD challenges, with specific mention given to the role of EDTs, such as big data, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and biotechnology, which could pose significant threats regarding WMDs. Although the strategy largely refers to the use of these technologies in the chemical and biological domain, EDTs pose significant threats in the nuclear domain as well.

The US has successfully portrayed China as its biggest threat and seems to be preparing for a future confrontation. With both states modernizing their nuclear forces and investing heavily in EDTs, this confrontation could very well cross into the nuclear domain.

The strategy also states that the DOD must disrupt and degrade “a WMD-armed competitor’s efforts to grow and improve their indigenous WMD programs”, as well as a state’s WMD capability “prior to use in conflict”. Again, such statements become much more significant when focusing solely on the nuclear domain. The disruption of another state’s nuclear program can be done in multiple ways, such as through sanctions

or trade restrictions, but also through the strategic use of EDTs. The strategy goes on to mention that “improved kinetic and non-kinetic options provide additional tools to disrupt WMD capabilities”.

Cyberspace technologies are an example of a non-kinetic option that the US could use to disrupt another state’s nuclear program. The US has already demonstrated this capability through the strategic use of the Stuxnet worm in 2010, which wreaked havoc on Iran’s nuclear program and damaged around 1,000 centrifuges in their Natanz facility. The Stuxnet worm was reportedly created by the US and Israel with the sole purpose of disrupting Iran’s nuclear program.

These days, nuclear weapons and facilities rely heavily on cyberspace to function. However, how the US would react if its nuclear facilities faced a cyber-attack is an interesting question. In their 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, the US expanded the role of nuclear weapons to be used against “significant non-nuclear strategic weapons” and “attacks on the US, allied, or partner civilian population or infrastructure”.

Likewise, AI could pose new challenges for the nuclear domain. Although no state has indicated its desire to incorporate AI into nuclear weapon systems so far, the possibility

certainly exists. As the use of AI systems in the military grows and states gain confidence in their efficiency and accuracy, it is only a matter of time before AI gradually becomes integrated into nuclear weapons, particularly for command and control. Although this might prove useful in the short term, giving control of nuclear weapons over to machines would only increase the risk of nuclear escalation in the long term.

Additionally, the strategy refers to China as being the “most comprehensive and urgent” challenge for the US. The DOD lists the modernisation of “nearly every aspect” of China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA), its pursuit of a nuclear force expansion and modernisation program, and the ambiguity surrounding its no-first-use (NFU) policy as the greatest cause for concern.

It further states that China will likely “deploy at least 1,000 nuclear warheads by 2030 and 1,500 nuclear warheads by 2035”. This is not the first time the US has accused China of this. This claim, however, is difficult to believe. According to SIPRI, China currently possesses 410 nuclear warheads. For China to more than double its current stockpile to 1,000 by 2030 seems quite far-fetched.

It is also important to note that China’s estimated nuclear weapons spending

in 2022 was \$11.7 billion, around a quarter of US spending at \$43.7 billion. The US and Russia also still possess a much greater nuclear weapons stockpile than China, with both states having over 5,000. Ultimately, though, it does not matter whether the US estimates about China's nuclear ambitions are correct or not. The US has successfully portrayed China as its biggest threat and seems to be preparing for a future confrontation. With both states modernising their nuclear forces and investing heavily in EDTs, this confrontation could very well cross into the nuclear domain.

Also of interest was what the strategy had to say about US allies and partners. The strategy mentioned that the DOD aimed to both protect its allies and partners from WMD use and to enable them to counter WMD use. Clearly, the US understands that the use of WMDs, particularly nuclear weapons, in a potential future conflict with China is not entirely out of the question. Its extension of support for its allies and partners, however, could prove to be problematic if applied in the nuclear domain.

With US-China tensions rising over the Taiwan issue, the rapid pace of advancements being made in military EDTs, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict showing states that they cannot rely on external powers for their

security, the likelihood of nuclear escalation seems alarmingly possible.

<https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/us-aims-to-counter-nuclear-weapons-amid-growing-tensions-with-china/>

Shayan Hassan Jamy

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Philippines and the Quad States: A United Front against China's Influence

Muhammad Abubaker

The China-Philippines relations appears to be tense and it seems that things are not going well in the region. The Philippines and China have an ongoing conflict over the South China Sea, a long standing issue that continuous to create problems in the region. There have been multiple alarming and dangerous developments in the South China Sea (SCS) dispute since the beginning of this year. Reportedly, there was a recent incident in which a China Coast Guard (CCG) vessel came within 1 meter of colliding with the Philippines Coast Guard (PCG) vessel near Second Thomas Shoal (known as Ayungin Shoal in the Philippines and Ren'ai Jiao in China). As Manila was conducting a resupply mission to a deliberately grounded rusty World War-II era warship BRP Sierra Madre. It is widely believed that the Philippines side uses it as an outpost of the Philippines Marines Corps to assert sovereignty in the disputed territory. The major concern is that the regular confrontations between these two regional powers have become a routine practice. The worry is that this pattern may ultimately lead to increased tensions or a more significant incident. Additionally, both states maintain

uncompromising positions on the matter. The Philippines side under Marcos Jr. refused to relocate the grounded ship and China continuously exerting pressure for its removal. The Chinese side repeatedly highlighted and emphasized that it has irrefutable sovereignty over the area.

The competing claims and escalating tensions between China and the Philippines have drawn the attention of the US. Each Chinese action that appears aggressive provides the US a chance to position itself as a guardian against Chinese coercion and intimidation in the region. The US has consistently criticized Chinese actions and reaffirmed its commitment to protecting a free and open Asia-Pacific region, promoting international law, and upholding a rules-based order. Simultaneously, this volatile situation in the region has provided a rare opportunity for the US to further strengthen its ties with the Philippines while also encouraging its allies such as Japan and India to enhance their relationships with the Philippines. The objective or purpose is to present a united front in response to China. The interesting part is that these Quad states have different strategic imperatives for increasing their engagement with the Philippines, but they are all motivated by concerns about China's actions, which they

depict as assertive and aggressive. However, there is also the concern that this united effort by the Quad states and their engagement with the Philippines might provoke China. China has often accused the US of stoking tensions and sowing discord among regional countries for their own vested interests.

The Biden administration recognized that the Philippines were under pressure from China regarding the SCS issue. In response, the US has repeatedly reiterated its commitment to the Philippines under the Mutual Defense Treaty. Moreover, the US expressed its support for the Philippines defense modernization efforts and has been actively expanding operational cooperation in the maritime domain, notably in the SCS. On the other hand, it appears that the Marcos administration has inched closer to the US. The Philippines side invited the US to increase its military footprint in the country. A move aimed at signaling to the regional power – China. This year, the Philippines granted the US access to four strategically located bases. Three of these bases are on Luzon, the main island, with proximity to Taiwan and the fourth is on Balabac Island, strategically positioned facing the SCS. This move has solidified defense ties and grants the US unprecedented access to critical Philippines military

facilities. It allowed the US to potentially influence matters concerning Taiwan and intervene in the contested waters of SCS. This development is viewed as a win-win situation for both the US and the Philippines. However, there are opposing voices suggesting that this development has unnecessarily put the Philippines in between two great powers who are at odd with each other. The fear is that any conflict between these powers could have long-term negative consequences for the Philippines.

Another important approach visible in the region is that the US is actively encouraging the engagement of its allies. In that context, Japan and the Philippines are deepening their defense ties. Both nations decided to enhance the defense capabilities of their countries and strengthen overall security cooperation, which includes aircraft visits, reciprocal port calls, and the transfer of more defense equipment and technology. Additionally, there are media reports suggesting that Japan and the Philippines are working towards a new Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), indicating a deepening commitment to security collaboration. These discussions are important because they are part of a broader emerging trilateral alliance known as JAPHUS. This alliance could be central to the success of US China strategy.

Apart from Japan, India is also deepening its relationship with the Philippines. We can see a noteworthy shift in India's approach. Under the Modi's leadership, New-Delhi for the first time has officially expressed support for the 2016 Tribunal ruling in favor of the Philippines. This is an important development particularly in light of the ongoing conflict between India and China over the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Moreover, it underscores India's aspirations to take on a larger and more proactive role as a credible security partner in Southeast Asia. It also aligns with the broader global narrative of democratic states taking a stance against actions that challenge established norms and rules. When they express that it is evident that they are primarily referring to China.

Along with that, the Philippines side was the first foreign nation to acquire the Indian-Russian BrahMos supersonic anti-ship missile. The purpose behind this was to safeguard its sovereign claims in the SCS, strengthen the country's military capabilities, anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD), and coastal & island defense operations. The sale of BrahMos missiles by India to the Philippines was a significant development, as it is evident that the action is directed against China.

The developments mentioned above, along with the involvement of multiple regional and extra-regional powers with different agendas have complicated the geopolitical dynamics in the region. Any minor or major escalation could potentially lead to heightened hostility with unimaginable consequences for the entire Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, it is quite evident that China is displeased with the US and its allies approach in the region. It has accused the US and its allies of exaggerating the "China threat theory" and views their actions as detrimental to its long-term interests. China has repeatedly signaled its unease and cautioned the US many times using a Chinese saying that "Those who play with fire will perish by it". This is a matter that deserves the US and its ally's thoughtful deliberation. They should examine the situation with caution to avoid inadvertently provoking China. It is essential for all parties to work for regional stability and to seek practical & effective solutions.

<https://policywatcher.com/2023/10/philippines-and-the-quad-states-a-united-front-against-chinas-influence/>

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CTBT Conundrum: Russia's Withdrawal and the Road to Nuclear Disarmament

Sher Bano

The recent decision by Russian lawmakers to withdraw Russia's ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is a significant development that warrants close attention. The CTBT, an international accord established in 1996, has primary objectives aimed at restraining the development of nuclear weapons and mitigating the adverse health and environmental consequences of nuclear tests. Russia's expedited withdrawal from the CTBT, despite the requirement for two additional readings in its lower parliament, the Duma, raises crucial questions about the motivations behind this decision and its implications for global nuclear disarmament.

The CTBT stands as an international treaty designed to comprehensively ban all forms of nuclear explosions, including those conducted underground and underwater. Its fundamental goals revolve around preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and reducing the health and environmental risks associated with nuclear testing. The treaty arose in response to a turbulent period spanning from 1945 to 1996 when over 2,000 nuclear tests were conducted, primarily by

the United States and the Soviet Union, as reported by the United Nations.

Despite substantial international support for the CTBT, its effectiveness remains hampered by the non-ratification of several key countries, including China, the United States, North Korea, Israel, and Pakistan – all of which possess nuclear weapons. The reluctance of these nations to ratify the treaty has prevented it from coming into full force.

Russia's decision to withdraw from the CTBT is a development that prompts critical inquiry. Russian President Vladimir Putin has framed this move as a response to “mirror” the position of the United States, without committing to a resumption of nuclear tests. This decision has sparked speculation, with some experts considering it a political maneuver, especially within the context of escalating tensions with the West.

Nikolai Sotov, a Russian nuclear expert and senior fellow at the Vienna Centre for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, views this action as Russia's attempt to send a strong political signal during a period of increasing hostilities. He highlights a shift in Russia's approach, suggesting that Moscow has become less concerned about potential repercussions from non-constructive negotiations.

Notably, Russia, despite its decision to withdraw its ratification, has expressed its intention to remain a signatory to the CTBT and continue providing data to the global monitoring system. Nevertheless, the act of withdrawal, whether symbolic or strategic, may be perceived as an implicit threat, particularly in the context of ongoing crises, such as the Ukraine conflict.

Turning to the United States, it is worth considering its position regarding the CTBT. While Russia's decision to withdraw from the treaty has garnered significant attention, it's essential to recognize the backdrop of the United States' stance. The U.S. signed the CTBT in 1996 but failed to ratify it following a Senate vote in 1999. At the time, U.S. officials cited concerns about their ability to assess the reliability of their nuclear stockpile without the option of occasional nuclear tests. Additionally, questions were raised about the treaty's verification mechanisms and its capacity to ensure compliance. Many of these concerns have subsided over time, primarily due to advancements in monitoring systems. However, despite these developments, the United States has shown little inclination to ratify the CTBT. A reluctance to embrace arms control agreements prevails in some segments of U.S. politics, where there is a

general wariness about relinquishing sovereignty to international treaties.

The withdrawal of Russia from the CTBT occurs within the broader context of nuclear disarmament challenges. Throughout Russia's conflict with Ukraine, there have been instances where Russian officials have made nuclear threats, raising concerns about the escalation of nuclear rhetoric. Earlier this year, Russia suspended the New Start Treaty with the United States, which is the last remaining arms control treaty between the two nuclear superpowers. This treaty limits the number of strategic nuclear warheads on both sides.

The concentration of nuclear warheads remains primarily within the arsenals of the United States and Russia. According to the Federation of American Scientists, these two nations possess nearly 90 percent of the world's nuclear warheads. President Vladimir Putin's statement, in which he asserts that Russia may use nuclear weapons in response to a nuclear attack or an attack involving "weapons of mass destruction" and reserves the right to deploy nuclear weapons when its existence is threatened by conventional weapons, underscores the challenges in achieving global nuclear disarmament.

Sotov, who was involved in arms control negotiations in Russia during the late 1980s and early 1990s, believes that Russia is unlikely to resort to using nuclear weapons on the battlefield in Ukraine. However, he expresses concerns that Russia might consider targeting a NATO country if the conflict escalates. Such a scenario illustrates the dangers of an escalation spiral that could unintentionally lead to nuclear conflict.

Importantly, it is imperative to recognize that the CTBT itself does not include a specific provision for “de-ratification” or withdrawal. Instead, the treaty outlines a mechanism for states to withdraw from it, as specified in Article IX. This provision is analogous to the principles articulated in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. Article IX of the CTBT states that a State Party may, by providing written notification to the Depositary (the Secretary-General of the United Nations), withdraw from the treaty while offering reasons for the decision.

The process of withdrawal from the CTBT is distinct for each state, as it may involve

complex geopolitical, strategic, and domestic considerations. Given the importance of the CTBT in promoting global nuclear disarmament, states contemplating withdrawal should carefully review the treaty’s provisions, its annexes, and any related agreements or resolutions by states parties.

<https://thegeopolitics.com/ctbt-conundrum-russias-withdrawal-and-the-road-to-nuclear-disarmament/>

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The BRI White Paper: Deciphering China's Global Code in the Context of US- China Rivalry

Ayesha Shaikh

On Oct. 10, 2023 the State Council of the People's Republic of China released its first-ever White Paper on the Belt and Road Initiative. The paper came out just a month ahead of the announcement of the Global Infrastructure and Development Plan (GIDP) by the U.S, and days before the 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. Keeping in view the critical timing of its release, the substance of the White Paper is crucial to understanding the Chinese position. Without addressing the developments directly, China has asserted that it has a historical legacy to claim global initiatives like the Silk Route, which is both inclusive and sustainable, it is not aiming at geopolitics or preferential development and it is already making substantial progress. Therefore, China's grand strategy BRI has an edge over the alternative proposed by U.S. President Joe Biden.

Release of White Papers is generally used by closed authoritarian setups to declare their official stance regarding matters of critical concern. In the case of China, the release of a

white paper has always followed some significant event, policy, or development, to indicate China's stance. For instance, China released a White-paper "China's Peaceful Development" (2011) after the U.S. Pivot to Asia strategy. It released the White Paper "The Facts and China's Position on China-U.S Trade Friction"(2018), in the wake of the trade war with the U.S. Following the same trend, the release of the White Paper on the Belt and Road initiative comes at a time, when domestically China is facing anti-corruption purges and internationally experts are anticipating slow-down of Chinese economy. There is a tech war going on between the U.S. and China, and in the middle of everything, U.S has proposed an alternative Global development plan to contest China's BRI.

The White Paper, however, restores China's claims against all of these developments. The ten most cited words of the white paper are BRI (182 mentions), cooperation (168 mentions), development (164 mentions), win-win (156 mentions), shared future (152 mentions), High-Quality (144 mentions), open (136 mentions), inclusive (128 mentions), sustainable (120 mentions) and progress (116 mentions). Overall, the frequency of keywords indicated four major themes that the paper highlights; "Re-

imagining the Ancient Silk Route”, “High-quality Development”, “Open and Inclusive Global Economy” and “Mutual benefit and win-win cooperation”

Re-Imagining the Ancient Silk Route:

In August 2023, BRI completed a decade of success. The white paper, however, dates it back to 2 millennia, beginning from the ancient silk route. It has associated adjectives of win-win cooperation, inclusivity, mutual benefit, shared future, and economic globalization with both the ancient Silk Route and BRI. China has purposively claimed the legacy of 2 millennia, to establish that, unlike the U.S, China has a history of championing development. The paper also mentions that China was the first one to stand up for the UN vision of the Eurasian land bridge, proposed in 1980. It tends to denote that China’s vision was not based upon competitive motives, it was rather driven by the historical legacy and international demand for development. Considering the facts, U.S. has sponsored aid packages and Marshal Plan, but that have only been limited to its allies, that too with geopolitical motives during the cold-war.

Open and Inclusive Global Economy:

The paper criticizes that certain states have opted for “protectionism, hegemonism, and unilateralism” in the era of the Global Economy. It proposes that, unlike the ambitions of these states, BRI has proposed an open and inclusive plan that does not promote preferential development. Under the framework of BRI, China has signed agreements with around 150 states and 30 international organizations from all the regions of the world. On the contrary, the GDP of the U.S. is the plan that only includes the allies and partners of the U.S. China has apparently criticized it as a geopolitical venture that would only widen the gap between the developed and the developing world. The paper establishes that BRI has no geopolitical motives and it promotes an open and inclusive global economy. However, the paper has not been able to justify the strategic concerns regarding this development. For instance, it brushed-off the issue of military development on Djibouti port, as driven by logistic purposes.

High-Quality Development

To obtain legitimacy for the future of BRI, in contrast to the GDP, the paper states that it is not just a conceptual framework but a

practical roadmap that has achieved significant milestones. Chapter 2 and 3 of the white-paper explains the projects that have been accomplished under the land-based corridors, including the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the New Eurasian Land Bridge, the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, China-Mongolia Russia Economic Corridor, China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor, and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor. On the maritime front, it states that BRI has reached 117 ports in 43 different countries. Regarding the Air Silk Road, China has signed agreements with 104 countries and opened direct flights with 57 partner countries.

The developments up till now have led to an increase in trade between China and the partner countries, to \$19.1 trillion (Annual growth rate of 6.4%). China has engaged various regional and multilateral platforms for trade mobilization under BRI. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) are important. After the withdrawal of the U.S. from TPP, mention of Chinese willingness to join the platform is a noteworthy step. In addition to this, the paper did not forget to mention the successful Belt and Road summits held in Hong Kong SAR

and the Macao SAR, to strengthen its claim alongside signaling the inclusivity of these states.

Furthermore, in the context of the ongoing tech-war, the paper mentions the mile-stones achieved across the domain of technology sharing and the digital Silk Road cooperation. China has signed intergovernmental agreements on scientific and technological cooperation with 80 BRI partner countries and additional MoUs on the digital silk route with 17 countries.

To address the controversies regarding the climatic impact of development under BRI, the paper extensively highlights the element of sustainable development. It mentions that China has signed 47 south-south MoUs on climate change with 39 states. It has also focused on developing low-carbon demonstration zones, climate change mitigation projects, and Green Development Vision 2030. However the facts state that non-hydroelectric renewables account for only 11% of the total energy production, and Coal power plants still consume a lot of investment from China.

Mutual Benefit and Win-Win Cooperation

Encompassing the complete landscape of progress that the BRI has achieved, the paper

has also countered the criticism that it has faced. It has mentioned in a straightforward tone that no state under BRI has faced a debt crisis. However, the case of China's engulfment of the Hambantota port remains a reality that cannot be denied. Keeping the facts aside, the paper argues that BRI is a project of multilateral investment, and not an aid-based grant from China. It claims that the framework of BRI has been developed after extensive and in-depth policy coordination, promoting mutual benefit and win-win cooperation. For instance, the BRI obtained the consent of 192 states through the 71st session of the UNGA and the resolution 2344.

Furthermore, the paper mentions that China has reached the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement with the World Trade Organization, to keep the BRI abiding by the existing rule of law. To sum up, criticism posed towards the code of conduct of the BRI, will also hold the existing financial order questionable.

The paper is a deliberate and subtle attempt by the China to address the domestic and international questions regarding future of its Grand Strategy, in the wake of challenges coming from the transitioning world order. It has established that the BRI is an all-inclusive plan and holds no rival. However, it

has not been able to substantially address the concerns regarding strategic motives of China behind the project as well as the challenges that it will raise for the partner countries.

<https://policywatcher.com/2023/10/the-bri-white-paper-deciphering-chinas-global-code-in-the-context-of-us-china-rivalry/>

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The Indian Army's Boosted Logistic Capabilities in Kashmir

Usman Haider

Indian Army logistic capabilities have improved profoundly in the disputed region of Kashmir in the last 25 years, mainly thanks to infrastructure development. Previously, limited road communications hindered the Indian Army's supply lines in the mountainous region. The enhanced logistics holds considerable significance in mountainous terrain, such as Kashmir, where distances are measured in time, not space.

The recent construction and upgrades of roads and strategic tunnels have turned the tide in the favor of the Indian Army. Notably, the near completion of the new Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL), anticipated to be concluded either by the conclusion of this year or in the initial months of 2024, will further augment the logistics capabilities.

The prevailing Indian Army thinking of Proactive Operations, commonly known as the Cold Start Doctrine, following the conclusion of Operation Parakram, prioritizes expeditious deployment of military assets in wartime. Kashmir, being a mountainous terrain, poses severe mobility

challenges. The region is prone to landslides and harsh weather, and its roads are full of sharp turns and steep slopes.

In contrast, limited war – as envisioned by the Cold Start Doctrine – requires swift mobilization of war stores and personnel. To successfully execute the objective, it is imperative to possess a robust and efficient network of roadways and railway infrastructure. To fulfill that requirement, the Indian government allocated a colossal amount for road and rail infrastructure development in the disputed territory of Kashmir. These funds were primarily directed toward three key sectors: the expansion and development of national highways that traverse through the region of Jammu and Kashmir, the construction of strategically important tunnels, and the establishment of a railway connection between the Kashmir valley and the mainland of India.

The initiation of this endeavor can be traced back to the Atal Bihari Vajpayee administration in the early 2000s, with subsequent governments continuing the implementation of this policy. However, the current government led by Narendra Modi, which assumed power in 2014, has made substantial investments in development initiatives in Kashmir. On July 18, 2014, the

government of India established the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation (NHIDCL) as a new organization under the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. The organization was entrusted with the responsibility of constructing infrastructure in border and mountainous regions in addition to the existing infrastructure. This organization is known as the Border Road Organization (BRO) and operates under the jurisdiction of the Indian Ministry of Defense.

One significant development is the USBRL railway line, which aims to establish a vital connection between the Baramulla district and the rest of India. This infrastructure project is expected to facilitate efficient transportation of individuals, commodities, and security personnel, enhancing mobility and connectivity. Former Prime Minister of India Vajpayee officially designated the matter as having “national importance,” to expedite the region’s socioeconomic progress, foster national unity, and fortify India’s “security infrastructure.”

The construction of the railway line was considered a daunting task but now it is on the verge of completion. The key hindrance was the construction of the renowned Chenab Bridge, the highest railway bridge in the world. The bridge is almost complete and

will be open in either late 2023 or early 2024. It holds a special significance as it reduces by five to six hours the time it takes to travel from Katra in Jammu to Srinagar in Kashmir Valley. Additionally, the successful implementation of the rail project would grant Indian military forces an uninterrupted means of transportation to the valley, a strategic advantage that had previously been unachievable.

Apart from railways, road and highway development also saw a surge, especially after Modi came to power in 2014. His government doubled the construction of highways in the region by constructing 889 kilometers in only the first tenure of its government, compared to just 450 kilometers built under Congress’ reign from 2010-14. Modi allocated an 800 billion rupee package for the “Naya Jammu and Kashmir” development project, of which a large amount was spent on road infrastructure.

Many mega projects were commenced, including the four-lane strategic Jammu-Akhnoor-Rajouri-Poonch national highway, NH-144A, passing near the Line of Control separating the parts of Kashmir under Indian and Pakistani control. The NH-144A will reduce the distance from 200 km to 168 km. It is a crucial defense road likely to be completed by 2025.

Moreover, the 304 km stretch of the main Indian National Highway NH-44 from Kanyakumari to Kashmir was upgraded as well. The key stretch from Srinagar to Qazigund and Jammu to Udhampur was converted into four lanes to make traveling easy and rapid. The upgrade reduced the journey time between Jammu and Kashmir from 10-12 hours to 5-6 hours.

Moreover, considerable development took place in the construction of strategic tunnels in the region. Various tunnels were constructed, and many are in the process of completion. The key ones include the Z-Morh Tunnel, the Zojila Tunnel, the Chenani-Nashri Tunnel, the Chattergala Tunnel, the Nandni Tunnels and T-5 Tunnel, and the Qazigund-Bannihal Tunnel. All are vital, but the 14.15 km long Zojila tunnel holds special significance. When completed in 2026, it will ensure a safe passage to army convoys going toward Kargil and Leh year-round. Previously, such a journey would require traveling via Zojila pass, which is closed in the winter due to heavy snowfall. The tunnel will provide all-weather connectivity. Besides this, the tunnel will bring down the distance from 40 to just 13 kilometers and reduce the traveling time by one and a half hours.

Besides the Zojila Tunnel, the 870-meter T-5 Tunnel along with the Nandni tunnels (T-1, T2, T-3, and T-4) have contributed to easing logistical constraints. They are being constructed between the Banihal to Ramban section along treacherous mountainous terrain, prone to landslides all year. They will reduce the traveling time from three hours to only 25 minutes, bringing Srinagar and Jammu closer to each other.

How will these developments enhance the Indian Army's ability to mobilize during wartime in the disputed region of Kashmir, aligning with its limited war doctrinal approach? First, the ongoing upgrades of road and rail infrastructure enables the Indian Army to promptly build up its forces along the Line of Control. It reduces the transit time for both troops and machines, a crucial factor during hostilities. India will be able to quickly replenish war stocks like armaments, ammunition, oil, lubricants, and petrol. The improved infrastructure will also allow for immediate casualty evacuation from the frontlines.

For the first time, the Indian Army will be able to sustain uninterrupted supplies. Constructing tunnels at locations prone to natural hazards limits the probability of unwanted interruption. Finally, the Indian Army's combat fighting capability will be

boosted because forces and equipment can now be swiftly moved to different theaters of the region during war and crisis.

The recent infrastructure upgrade now presents a serious challenge to the Pakistan Army, as the current circumstance gives the Indian Army an advantage in the deployment of personnel and materiel during a crisis. As a result of the upgraded infrastructure, India's logistics capability at the operational level of war is increased thanks to drastically lowered mobilization time in the mountainous Kashmir region. Previously, the Indian Army lacked this capability. In the event of a new crisis between the two states, the Indian Army will bring its resources to the border and sustain them effectively and quickly.

<https://thediplomat.com/2023/10/the-indian-armys-boosted-logistic-capabilities-in-kashmir/>

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The Missing Piece: How the Exclusion of Palestine Doomed the Middle East Normalization Plan

Shamil Abdullah

The recent infiltration by Hamas, i.e., “Al-Aqsa Flood” into Israel and the increase in escalation of conflict came in the wake of normalization efforts by Middle Eastern countries, especially Saudi Arabia’s recognition of Israel, which was drummed in the international media. The Middle Eastern leadership’s tendency to exhibit an ostrich-like attitude concerning the Palestine situation, wherein they hope it will either fade into oblivion or be entirely disregarded, stands as one of the most profound disappointments they could encounter. Now, the consequences of the ostrich effect have sprung up, which could potentially destabilize the region once again.

Several factors contributed to the recent meltdown in Israel and occupied Palestinian territories. These factors became a boiling point and increased frustration with the occupied territories and besieged Gaza.

Trump’s Peace Plan

Trump’s peace plan, which was proposed on 28th January 2020, was supposed to be the “deal of the century” to resolve the



Palestinian-Israeli conflict once and for all. This proposed plan, however, was rejected by the Palestinian authority ruling the West Bank. The plan proposed almost 30% of more Palestinian land annexed by Israel including the fertile Jordan valley, which is a lifeline for many Palestinian farmers. Annexation of Jordan Valley also means effectively cutting West Bank off from the rest of the world. In the plan, there will be a series of Palestinian enclaves surrounded by much larger Israeli enclaves. This means that already restricted Palestinian movement will further be restricted with more Israeli checkpoints and many Palestinian enclaves will be disconnected from each other. The plan also proposed complete demilitarization

of the Palestinian state which is unrealistic at best.

This proposed plan further reiterated the Palestinian point that Israel nor any Western state is serious about solving Palestinian issues. Former U.S. President Donald J. Trump also confirmed that Benjamin Netanyahu never wanted peace with the Palestinians. The West consistently overlooks the concerns of Palestinians and anticipates that Palestinians will not respond, while Palestinians should, on the other hand, tend to prioritize discussions about peace over asserting their demand for an independent state. This demand from the Palestinians for Israelis seems unrealistic and illogical.

Turning a Blind Eye to Outstanding Issues

The normalization wave spread through the Middle East, which dates back to 2020 when several Middle Eastern states normalized the relations and recognized Israel. Abraham accords, which were initially signed by UAE and Bahrain, and later by Sudan and Morocco started a normalization wave that the analysts say would eventually be completed with Saudi Arabia normalizing ties with Israel. This would encourage other Muslim states to recognize Israel and be treated as legitimate players in the Middle East.

Middle Eastern states often overlook the fundamental issue that their initial refusal to recognize Israel stemmed from the occupation of the Palestinian state. If the core of normalization does not address the statehood of Palestine, normalization efforts are likely to fail, leaving the Middle East in conflict again.

Saudi Crown Prince Interview

Less than a month ago, the Israeli tourism minister was on a 2-day visit to Riyadh to attend the UN World Tourism Organization event. The Israeli communication minister was recently in Riyadh to attend yet another conference. The final nail in the coffin might be Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Muhammad Bin Salman's interview with the American News Channel, where he acknowledged talks with Israel, saying "good negotiations" are underway. Although Palestinian rights are part of negotiations, it's difficult to say that the Palestinian state is on the table as Saudi Arabia does not aim to change the status quo in the Middle East nor does it seem from the interview that there were any talks about separate Palestinian state.

This might be seen as a source of betrayal among Palestinians, as it implies that the Palestinian cause has been abandoned. The

guarantee of Palestinian rights does not necessarily translate into the establishment of a Palestinian state where Palestinians can exercise their freedoms and make independent decisions.

On the other hand, Iran has always opposed the normalization plan, stating that Saudi-Israel normalization would be “detrimental” to the stability of the region. Also stated that a show of restraint “can’t be one-sided” meaning that Israel can’t continue to escalate the conflict by bombing Gaza while Palestinian fighters and allies show restraint.

It’s important to emphasize that this assault on Israel is not a result of unprovoked actions; instead, it can be viewed as a reaction to years of targeted killings of Palestinians and the occupation of their land. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 37/43 clearly states that it recognizes the “legitimacy of the struggle of peoples for independence, territorial integrity, national unity and liberation from colonial and foreign domination and foreign occupation by all available means, including armed struggle.”

The recent commencement of violence is simply a continuation of the reaction of Palestinians against Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories. The ongoing conflict is likely to persist unless a fair resolution to

the Palestinian issue emerges, though such a resolution appears uncertain in the near future. This conflict has the potential to escalate beyond Israeli borders, especially if Israel were to initiate a ground invasion of Gaza, with Iran threatening to open additional fronts.

Ultimately, this conflict is likely to persist between Israel and Hamas or potentially other entities until a just settlement is provided for the people of Palestine. As of yet, the people of Gaza face severe shortages of necessities like water and electricity, let alone the right to self-determination and statehood. Palestine is the missing piece of the normalization talks that will dictate the future of the Middle East. Without Palestine, these talks stand on shaky ground, prone to falter.

<https://theglobalpolitico.com/2023/10/24/the-missing-piece-how-the-exclusion-of-palestine-doomed-the-middle-east-normalization-plan/>

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Maintaining Status Quo or Resuming Testing: Russia's Plans to Revoke Ratification of CTBT

Ayesha Sikandar

Recently, in October 2023, Russian officials unveiled the country's plans to revoke its ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). This treaty was opened for signature in 1996, and today, it is signed by 187 nations and ratified by 178. This treaty, in principle, bans all nuclear explosions, whether they are for military or peaceful purposes. This step is significant, keeping into consideration the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, and will possibly aggravate tensions between Russia and the West.

Earlier this month, Mikhail Ulyanov, who is Russia's envoy to CTBT, said that his country will revoke ratification of this treaty. This move was denounced by the United States (US), which called it a step in order to disrupt existing 'global norms' against nuclear tests. Following Ulyanov's statement, the Russian Duma unanimously approved the de-ratification bill with a total of 412 votes in favor and no vote against it. This Article will discuss two main arguments which showcase Russian intentions behind this revocation. On one side, some analysts claim that revocation shows Russian

intentions to maintain the status quo with the US. Contrary to this argument, some suggest that this step is a clear indication of Russian plans to resume testing. If Russia resumes nuclear testing, it'll push the world into a new era of arms race between major powers who stopped testing soon after the disintegration of the former Soviet Union(USSR).

The first argument suggests that the revocation of CTBT is mainly aimed at maintaining parity with the US, which hasn't ratified the treaty yet. Firstly, when the Russian representative announced the de-ratification on X (former Twitter), he clearly stated that "the aim is to be on equal footing with the US who signed the Treaty, but didn't ratify it." This clearly indicates that the US is not bound by this treaty, even though it hasn't conducted any tests since 1992. As per the Russian officials, this shows the 'hypocritical' mindset of the US, which hasn't ratified the treaty but is expecting other countries to stand by the global norms and principles. In another statement, top Russian lawmaker Vyacheslav Volodin said: "For 23 years, we have been waiting for the United States to ratify this treaty, But Washington, because of its double standards, its irresponsible attitude to global security issues, has not done so". Secondly, this can also indicate Russia's signaling to the US that

Russia is not willing to be bound by any treaty, which it believes is unfair. Revocation can also serve as a negotiation chip for Russia with the US on other regional and global security issues.

The second argument suggests that Russia intends to resume nuclear testing after revoking ratification of CTBT. Since the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, many Russian officials gave mixed signals towards the use of nuclear weapons, prompting alarm in the West. Russian nuclear doctrine states that a country will use its nuclear weapons if there is a ‘.’ From mobilizing its nuclear forces soon after the conflict to deploying [tactical nuclear weapons](#) in Belarus in June 2023, there is increasing fear in the Western hemisphere about the resumption of nuclear testing. Earlier this year, Russia also pulled out from the [New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty](#) (New START), which aimed at limiting the deployment of warheads by both sides. Many policymakers in the US termed this move as a “Slippery slope” towards resuming testing. But contradictory to all these suppositions, Russian officials have not made any statement about the resumption of nuclear testing. Ulyanov, in his [statement](#), said, “Revocation doesn’t mean the intention to resume nuclear tests.” In another statement, he clarified, “We

simply revoke our ratification of the CTBT. All other aspects of our participation in the Treaty will [remain unchanged](#). In particular, we will continue to transmit and receive the relevant data.” Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, in his statement, held that Russia will ensure its readiness to resume testing activities, but it will do so only if the US decides to resume testing. While addressing Russian news agencies, he told them that “the [resumption](#) in practical terms is (only) possible after the relevant tests are carried out by the United States.” Russian officials, in their statements, show no intention to resume nuclear testing after the de-ratification of CTBT.

However, these developments have instigated fear in the West about possible Russian pressure over supporting Ukraine in its fight against Russian forces. US [State Department](#) spokesperson condemned this move and stated that “wielding arms control and irresponsible nuclear rhetoric in a failing attempt to coerce other states.” Russia [tested weapons](#) last time in 1990, and subsequently, the US did, and the US did in 1992.

Since the inception of CTBT, ten nuclear tests have been conducted; India conducted two tests in 1998, followed by Pakistan, which also conducted two tests. At the beginning of the 21st century, North Korean

ambitions further threatened the arms control regime as it conducted nuclear tests in 2006, 2009, 2013, 2016, and 2017, as per UN reports. In 2020, under the Trump administration, authorities in Washington discussed the possibility of resumption of nuclear testing for the first time after 1992, but the moratorium stayed in place. As per the statements from Moscow, it has no plans to resume testing unless the US does, which is good news as the US has no plans (apparently) to resume testing.

Since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, tensions between Moscow and Washington have increased while China on the sidelines is seeking to bolster its nuclear arsenal, which is eroding the credibility of such regimes. Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey recently publicized satellite images that show the increased activity at testing sites of the US, Russia, and China. Such developments question the credibility of such regimes. If all three major nuclear powers have conducted their tests, then what can possibly motivate them to resume testing? All three countries have different reasons for the resumption of nuclear testing. Firstly, China has conducted around [45](#) tests compared to the US and Russia, which have conducted 1030 and 715 tests, respectively. Another reason would be

the technology factor, as all these tests were conducted during the latter half of the 20th century. But, with the dawn of the 21st century, various technological innovations have raised the need for testing.

Overall, the global security landscape remains fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty. The slow erosion of international arms control regimes alongside ongoing tensions between major nuclear powers and the development of critical technologies in this domain is casting a shadow on the future of nuclear testing. The CTBT, which was aimed at global norms on nuclear testing, is losing its credibility. The future of CTBT and global security architecture is greatly dependent on the decisions of major powers.

<https://policywatcher.com/2023/10/maintain-ing-status-quo-or-resuming-testing-russias-plans-to-revoke-ratification-of-ctbt/>

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3D Printing: A Game-Changer for Militaries

Ahmed Ali

In a recent but significant development, the United States has supplied advanced 3D printers to the Ukrainian armed forces. These printers are meant for the manufacturing of critical components on the battlefield, such as for weapons or drones. This would be the first time that 3D printing would be done in an active combat zone. This development will provide new avenues for militaries in fulfilling their logistical demands. The introduction of 3D printing on battlefield will emerge as a game-changer by enabling on-site manufacturing, rapid equipment repair, and reducing reliance on traditional supply chains. Presently, the manufacturing of military equipment is only limited to the well-established industrial centers. However, this novel technology will bring a new revolution in military logistics.

The most prevalent form of manufacturing that was commonly recognized is subtractive manufacturing. The goal of subtractive manufacturing is to remove layers from a solid block of material in order to create the desired three-dimensional object. Subtractive manufacturing is completely opposed to 3D printing. The method of creating three-dimensional solid objects from a digital file

is known as additive manufacturing, also referred to as 3D printing. The creation of a 3D printed object is achieved using additive processes. An object is made by adding layers of material one after the other until the product is formed as a result of additive processes.

The U.S. Department of Defense has provided Ukraine with seven large-scale Spee3D printers as part of the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative. These cutting-edge metal 3D printers are expected to be strategically positioned near the frontlines with a crucial mission of rapid production of critical components, essential for the maintenance of armored platforms. Additionally, these printers will be employed to fabricate spare parts for a range of equipment, including armored vehicles and cannons. A number of these pieces have a history spanning over four decades and have ceased production, underscoring the critical role that 3D printing plays in generating replacement components to sustain the operational readiness of this aging equipment. Apart from that, these printers will also be utilized to provide medical care for victims of the conflict. Ukrainian engineers had recently completed their training, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge on how to operate these

printers. Impact of Spee3D printers on Ukraine's warfighting capabilities are yet to be seen; however, it is argued that these printers will make significant difference.

The impact of 3D printing on defense sector is not just a minor development; it is a paradigm shift that promises to revolutionize the industry. One of the most striking benefits of 3D printing in defense domain is the speed at which it can produce parts and equipment. At present, military forces depend on headquarters for the supply of spare parts. This reliance on headquarters can result in logistical delays and inaccuracies that have the potential to hinder the overall operational effectiveness of the military. 3D printing enables a level of decentralization and the ultimate scenario for forces is to possess the capability to independently manufacture ammunition and spare parts. 3D printers hold the potential to offer this strategic advantage to military forces. In the future, it is likely that militaries may consider industrial-grade 3D printers as essential equipment. These cutting-edge printers can prove invaluable in the establishment of Forward Operating Bases by facilitating the rapid creation of temporary storage facilities.

There is practically no limit to the things that can be made with 3D printers. However, quality control, material limitations, and

certification processes remain critical concerns. Widespread adoption of 3D printing for end part production faces challenges, primarily centered around quality assurance and the absence of standardized industry practices. Overcoming the existing skills gap is crucial for fully unlocking 3D printing's potential in the military. The technology needs to mature further to meet the stringent requirements of military-grade equipment. Furthermore, there is a need for international standards and regulations to ensure that 3D-printed parts are safe and reliable. Additionally, the defense industry must grapple with implications of 3D printing, particularly in terms of misuse by non-state actors.

In conclusion, the impact of 3D printing on defense is nothing short of a paradigm shift. This revolutionary technology is accelerating the pace of innovation, reducing costs, increasing flexibility, and enhancing the resilience of our defense supply chains. As the technology continues to mature, it is essential that governments, industry leaders, and experts work together to harness the full potential of 3D printing while addressing the associated risks.

<https://policywatcher.com/2023/10/3d-printing-a-game-changer-for-militaries/>

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The United States vs. China: Who is winning the Space Race?

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The US and China are undeniably two of the world's leading nations when it comes to space exploration. While the ongoing developments are generally referred as a “space race”, a closer examination reveals that the United States enjoys a significant lead over China in this arena, to the extent that it may not be entirely accurate to call it a race. In 2022, the United States allocated a staggering \$69 billion for its space budget, with \$43 billion dedicated to military-related space activities. In stark contrast, China's total spending on both military and civilian space activities for the same year was \$16 billion. This vast disparity in financial commitment underlines the fact that the United States is currently the undisputed leader in space exploration. The U.S. boasts 3,415 active satellites in space, while China is a distant second with just 535 active satellites. However, while these numbers may suggest a clear dominance, it is essential to recognize the intricate interplay between civilian and military space initiatives that may give China an edge in certain areas.

While the United States maintains a commanding position in the space arena, it's

important to understand that most of its space satellites in orbit or planned for launch serve civilian purposes. These technologies are often developed by for-profit civilian organizations. Conversely, in the case of China, the line between military and civilian space exploration is not as distinct. This distinction reflects China's approach, which combines military and civilian space efforts more seamlessly. This approach allows China to leverage its military capabilities to support its civil space programs and vice versa, potentially conferring an advantage in certain aspects of space competition.

Both the United States and China have ambitious plans for lunar exploration. The United States unveiled its “Artemis Program” in 2020, with the goal of returning astronauts to the moon. This mission has two primary objectives: to explore the lunar surface for commercial purposes and to gather critical data on the effects of the space environment on human health during extended lunar stays. This information is essential for NASA's planned Mars mission, set for the future. Meanwhile, China has been actively engaged in lunar exploration through its Lunar Exploration Program (CLEP) since 2004, which has already resulted in five missions to the moon. Recently, China announced its intentions to establish a research station and

an operational moon base by 2050 for extended human habitation. Their immediate objective is to reach the moon's South Pole, where a critical resource for human survival is believed to be present: ice. Water extracted from this ice can serve multiple vital functions, including life support and fuel production.

A pivotal development in this space competition is India's participation in the U.S.-led Artemis Accords. As the first and, so far, the only nation to successfully land a rover and research equipment at the moon's south pole via Chandrayaan-3, India is poised to play a pivotal role in U.S. Artemis missions. Moreover, the United States has a history of collaborating with international partners, including the European Space Agency. These collaborations serve as a force multiplier, giving the United States a significant advantage over China, particularly in lunar exploration missions. NASA is confident that the U.S. will beat China to the moon, and this first-mover advantage will be crucial for securing access to resource-rich lunar spots, thereby positioning the United States for long-term success in space exploration. But they are cautious about Chinese growth in the space domain at the same time.

China, however, is actively building its network of partners for lunar exploration. Nations like Russia, Venezuela, South Africa, Pakistan, and Belarus have joined the program. While Russia, as China's most experienced partner, has historically demonstrated capabilities in space missions, it has not displayed the epitome of its Cold War era performance in space in the last few years. This implies that China's current partners may not be at par with the technical capabilities the United States has fostered over the past several decades. China is aware of this fact and has been actively working to enhance the capacity of its partners. Initiatives like the Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO), established in 2005, provide opportunities for member states to receive training and expand their knowledge base, thereby fostering collaboration among professionals of the field from diverse ethnic and geographic backgrounds.

As of now, the United States not only enjoys technological superiority thanks to its first-mover advantage but has also extended its technical capabilities through strong partnerships with countries worldwide. This global network of collaborators, including India and the European Space Agency, is a testament to the United States' ability to

forge alliances and leverage its collective strengths. This intricate web of partnerships provides the United States with a clear edge over China in the ongoing space race, particularly in the competition for lunar dominance.

While the United States may currently have the advantage in the space competition against China, it is essential to understand that this is a dynamic race. China's growing network of international partners and its more integrated approach to combining civilian and military space activities present formidable challenges to the United States' dominance. As the world watches this race unfold, the outcome remains uncertain, and the competition in space exploration is far from over.

<https://thegeopolitics.com/the-united-states-vs-china-who-is-winning-the-space-race/>

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MIRV: Technology to Maintain Strategic Balance in South Asia

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The South Asian region has long been characterized by a volatile security environment, primarily due to the enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan. In recent years, this rivalry has taken on new dimensions with India's development of a Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) system, which has raised concerns about the destabilization of the strategic balance in the region. In response to India's BMD system, Pakistan has developed and repeatedly tested its Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicle (MIRV) technology as a means to maintain strategic stability in South Asia.

India's development of a Ballistic Missile Defense system has been a matter of concern for Pakistan. The BMD system is designed to intercept and destroy incoming ballistic missiles, which, in theory, could neutralize Pakistan's nuclear deterrence capabilities. Missile defenses would negate the concept of deterrence. Deterrence works where both the sides have the fear of retaliation and remain vulnerable to the nuclear attacks. If one of the adversaries feels secure, and have no fear of

nuclear retaliation, it could go for a large scale attack, which would have a destabilizing influence on strategic balance. The other side in return will have to go for the effective countermeasures for neutralizing the defenses. In case of South Asian region, this scenario is observed, if India would go for the missile defense shield, it would undermine the deterrence capabilities of Pakistan, to a larger extent, and of China as well, to a minor level.

Furthermore, the development of BMDS would embolden India to go for counterforce temptations against Pakistan. As further supported by US, India will be in a stronger position to go for pre-emptive strike against Pakistan, while having reliance on its BMDS, as a shelter in response to the attack by Pakistan. This also indicates a deviation from India's stated No-First Use posture, set out in its Draft Nuclear Doctrine (DND) 1999, followed by India's first amendment in January 2003.

As Indian Nuclear draft 2003 depends on counterforce strategy, the introduction of BMD would entice the hawkish Indian leadership to go for counterforce surgical attack on the Pakistan's military bases, missile batteries and

other strategically important locations. Considering its capabilities, India can go for the pre-emptive or preventive nuclear strike against Pakistan, without the fear of retaliatory nuclear strike and would subvert the balance of terror which prevails between the two countries and is an essential ingredient for enduring South Asian strategic stability.

Though the credibility of Indian BMDS is still not viable, as there are fragments inside India, who are skeptical about the BMD technology, which isn't proven even, and the huge cost being spent on it. But considering India's hawkish behavior, Therefore, Pakistan has to make sure the credibility of its nuclear deterrent in face of emerging threats from India and to maintain the strategic balance in the region.

MIRVs are multiple warheads carried on a single missile, each capable of independently targeting different locations. This technology increases the survivability of a missile and presents a greater challenge to any missile defense system. MIRV is economically cheap and is an effective BMD countermeasure.

In response to India's BMD system, Pakistan has tested MIRV missiles, firstly in 2017, and

again recently on Oct. 18, 2022, Pakistan conducted a flight test of Ababeel missile, which is capable of carrying Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicle (MIRV). Pakistan aims to strengthen deterrence and enhance strategic stability in the region through the operationalization of Full Spectrum Deterrence in the overall construct of Credible Minimum Deterrence.

The strategic rationale behind Pakistan's pursuit of MIRV technology lies in its need to ensure the viability of its nuclear deterrent. By developing MIRVs, Pakistan aims to overcome the challenges posed by India's BMD system. MIRVs can potentially overwhelm or evade missile defenses, making it difficult for any interceptors to accurately target and destroy all the incoming warheads.

<https://thegeopolitics.com/mirv-technology-to-maintain-strategic-balance-in-south-asia/>

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