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EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVE

Changing Strategic Environment of South Asia
MAJ. GEN. AFSIR KARIM (RETD)



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CENTRE FOR SECURITY AND STRATEGY
INDIA FOUNDATION, NEW DELHI

EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVE

Changing Strategic Environment of South Asia

MAJ. GEN. AFSIR KARIM (RETD)

CHINA–PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR: SUPPING WITH THE DEVIL

The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor needs to be protected from various terrorist groups, rebels, and others marauders, all the way from the high mountain passes to the sea. China is reported to be offering lucrative terms to various groups active in Punjab and Sindh and Baluchistan. Jihadi groups operating from Punjab and Sindh may readily cooperate if enough money is paid to them, but keeping the Baluchi rebels under control may be a difficult proposition. The Chinese doles to jihadi terrorists may create further problems for India as these groups will surely use the funds received from the Chinese to buy sophisticated weaponry and increase attacks on India.

Gwadar Port is an emerging business hub and a symbol of the close Chinese-Pakistan collaboration in this region. This port and its hinterland are situated in a zone where it will not be possible for the Chinese to safeguard their assets without coming to terms with Baluchi militants. The Chinese ambassador in Islamabad in a BBC interview on 2 February 2018, said, ‘that militants in Baluchistan were no longer a threat to the economic corridor’: but a recent attack in which at least three Chinese engineers were seriously injured shows that Baluchi rebel groups will not be easily tamed.¹

CHINESE ADVANCES INTO INDIA'S BACKYARD

China is increasing its strategic footprint in various South Asian countries. It is gradually extending its strategic reach in Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Maldives and is working hard to gain political influence in Bhutan. All such moves follow lucrative offers to build infrastructure under the One Belt One Road initiative.

The first joint military exercise between China and Nepal was held in July; the second exercise is scheduled to be held next month. This new Chinese initiative shows efforts of rapid Chinese strategic penetration in this sensitive region.²

AFGHAN IMBROGLIO

A study on Afghanistan ordered by US Congress and conducted by CNA Strategic Studies, a federally funded research group, made in 2014 said that ‘the country could revert to a terrorist haven unless United States and international partners underwrite a larger – and more expensive – Afghan security force than is planned beyond 2014. The study concludes that this larger force and the government ministries to support will require international trainers and advisers at least through 2018’.³

President Donald Trump in pre-election utterances on Afghanistan indicated he would prefer to pull out of Afghanistan because ‘it’s not America’s war’, but as of now he seems determined to fight and win this war. Winning a shadowy war is not easy; much larger resources and taming of Pakistan will be necessary. Induction of about 4,000–5,000 additional troops as planned will bring American troops to only about 12,000. This contingent is obviously too small to subdue the Taliban, which holds sway over 60 per cent of Afghan territory and has safe havens in Pakistan. In these environments, US troops will be hopelessly outmanoeuvred; but given the present Pakistani stance, inducting a larger number of troops may not be logistically viable. As Pakistan is unlikely to abandon its pro-Taliban policy, a prolonged and indecisive war will be on the cards.

India is expected to help the war effort with investments in infrastructure, but this will have little impact on the ongoing war. There is also no possibility for the Afghan forces to gain enough strength or ability to be able to defend Kabul and other key towns.

However, some changes introduced recently by the US in the rules of engagement may make things more difficult for the Taliban and its supporters. Unlike in the past, American forces will be pursuing and attacking the Taliban, seeking out and destroying their strongholds.⁴

At the end, it may be pertinent to quote from an article on Afghanistan by Douglas A. Livermore (US Special Forces Officer): ‘The Taliban is far from defeated, and they will definitely remain a formidable foe to the Afghan government in 2015 and beyond. The world will witness a protracted and extremely violent struggle for dominance between the legitimate Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and the fundamentalist Taliban insurgency vying to reinstitute the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which was overthrown by the US-led effort in late 2001. On one side, the Afghan government will do everything in its power to remain firmly entrenched as the central national authority governing from Kabul, the capital city. Opposing them, the Taliban will continue to strike out from safe havens in Western and Southern Pakistan, attempting to undermine the Afghan government and reemerge as the dominant power in Afghanistan. The Taliban seeks to reclaim the central national authority currently held by the Afghan government and once again exercise near-complete political and spiritual control over the entire population of Afghanistan.

‘What is not entirely clear to casual outside observers is the “hidden hand” that directs and ultimately benefits from the Taliban’s efforts to destabilize Afghanistan. Pakistan, and specifically its Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI), has been engaged in an incredibly long-term unconventional warfare campaign that provides an illuminating view into how such a strategy can be used to indirectly achieve a state’s national

objectives. By employing the Taliban as a proxy force, Pakistan has achieved key regional objectives without the bulk of its conventional forces becoming decisively engaged in Afghanistan.’⁵

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NRC Update in Assam: The Process, Controversies, and Future Scenario

RAJEEV BHATTACHARYYA

The update of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam is the outcome of a long sequence of events that can be traced to the colonial period and the subsequent policies unveiled by the government after Independence. Occasional agitations and agreements to stem the influx of immigrants from East Pakistan and Bangladesh failed to produce the desired results. The issue became highly politicised, and no political party could ever dare to initiate the process of detecting the immigrants. It was only after the Supreme Court passed an order that the exercise to draw up a list of citizens was initiated in the state in 2015.

It is necessary to delineate certain developments in Assam since the colonial period for understanding the reasons why the NRC is being updated in the state more than six decades after the list was first compiled, in 1951. The British encouraged migration from East Bengal to Assam for two reasons – for manning the clerical posts in the government departments and for bringing the vast unoccupied tracts under cultivation. While the first category comprised Hindus, the latter were Muslim peasants settled in different regions in the state. Cheap labour was also imported from central India for the tea gardens that began to mushroom in the eastern districts of the state from the second half of the nineteenth century. But the local communities were more concerned with the continuous influx from East Bengal, which only increased after Independence.

By 1961, Assam accommodated approximately 6.5 lakh Bengali Hindus after they were forced to flee their homes in East Pakistan after Partition. The state government had begun to make repeated pleas to the centre for distribution of the refugees to other states in the country. It argued that

the state had already undertaken to rehabilitate 2.5 lakh of refugees and further settlement would only harm the interests of the local landless cultivators since there was scarcity of land. But Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was not only upset over the reluctance of the state government but also threatened that Assam could expect financial help only if it liberally accepted refugees and granted them lands. He was unwilling to accept the decision of the state government to allot land to local farmers displaced from their homes due to floods. For the centre, the rehabilitation of the Bengali refugees took precedence over the locals and at one time it had even finalised its own plan to settle them along vacant railway lands, which was vehemently opposed by the state government. Nor was the state government's proposal to introduce a permit system for the region to check migrants given importance.

By 1962, the alarming situation in Assam compelled the Intelligence Bureau to conceive the Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan Scheme (PIP), which began to be implemented two years later as a centrally sponsored scheme to detect and deport illegal migrants from the neighbouring country. But the exercise was abruptly stopped by the government five years later due to the apprehension that a sizeable vote bank would be lost in the general elections. Also, the untimely death of Assam chief minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha left the state without any leader who could have convinced the centre to continue with the scheme. Not surprisingly, there was no official estimate of the numbers that landed in Assam following the genocide in East Pakistan in 1971 (the unofficial figure is 10 lakh). Continuation of the PIP scheme could have also helped firm up a plan for distributing the refugees all over the country. Moreover, Bangladesh might have also taken them back if a clause had been inserted in the Indira-Mujib Accord, which Prime Minister Indira Gandhi never considered.

But the situation in Assam grew only worse, with immigrants landing continuously even after the war. That they were able to enrol their names in the electoral rolls became evident when the state government decided to launch an operation to identify them. In 1978, the police had identified 47,658 voters of doubtful origin in Mangaldai Lok Sabha constituency. Around 6 lakh more cases were detected when the exercise

was extended to 80 assembly constituencies. The operation was called off after the Janata Party government was toppled in 1979 and President's Rule imposed in the state. But all this was enough reason for the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and other civil society groups to launch the anti-foreigners' movement, which concluded in 1985 after the signing of the Assam Accord.

The Asom Gana Parishad, which won the assembly polls a few months later, failed to deliver on its promise of detecting the alien nationals. Further damage was done when the controversial Illegal Migration (Determination by Tribunals) (IMDT) Act was passed in 1983 exclusively for the state, which made the task of detection of foreigners even more difficult. The law shielded the illegal migrants since the onus of providing evidence was on the government agencies. This meant that there were two laws for detection of foreigners in the country, with the Foreigners Act 1946 applicable in the other states. Alarmed over the demographic change in many districts of Assam, governor Lt. Gen. S. K. Sinha (retd.) dashed off a 42-page report titled '*Report on Illegal Migration into Assam*' to the president on 8 November 1998. The BJP-led government at the centre found it convenient to leak the report to the media, which was carried on the front page of most national dailies at that time. Hopes were raised in Assam when the BJP was finally able to secure the magic number to form the government with its allies after the general election of 1999. But as it turned out, the BJP was not too bothered to check the menace in the border state.

There were two important developments in 2005 which were to have a significant impact on Assam in the years ahead. While repealing the IMDT Act, a three-judge bench comprising Chief Justice R. C. Lahoti, Justice G. P. Mathur, and Justice P. K. Balasubramanian said that the presence of such a large number of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, which runs into millions, was an 'aggression' on Assam which has also contributed significantly to serious internal disturbances. Next, a tripartite agreement was inked between the centre, Assam government, and AASU for implementation of the 1985 accord and update of the NRC. The current exercise of updating the NRC is the consequence of a PIL in the Supreme Court in 2009 by a Guwahati-based NGO, Assam Public Works, which

claimed that 4.1 million illegal Bangladeshis had found their way into Assam's voter list.

CONTROVERSIES OVER THE UPDATE

The process of updating the NRC was begun by the Registrar General of India in May 2015 under the supervision of the Supreme Court, with 24 March 1971 as the cut-off date for determining citizenship (as per the cut-off date in the Assam Accord). The NRC is being updated as per the Citizenship (Registrar of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules 2003 as amended in 2009. An elaborate mechanism to accept applications and examine their veracity was created to ensure that all genuine citizens were included in the list. People whose names appear on the 1951 NRC, on any voter list in the state up to 24 March 1971 and their descendants, and registered migrants from Bangladesh who settled in Assam between 1 January 1966 and 24 March 1971 were declared by the Foreigner Tribunal as Indian citizens, in addition to all Indian citizens, including their descendants, who moved to Assam after 24 March 1971 (but they need to furnish proof of residence in another part of the country as on 24 March 1971). The NRC secretariat specified a total of 15 documents that could be submitted as citizenship proof. The exercise has involved door-to-door verification by officials on deputation from other departments and despatching documents to other states and institutions across the country for establishing their authenticity. As many as 6.5 crore documents were received by the secretariat from 68.27 lakh families across the state.

The first draft, which was published on the night of 30 December last year, included the names of 1.9 crores out of the total of 3.29 crore applicants. The second and final draft was scheduled to have been released on 30 June but was delayed by a month. The draft published on 30 July excluded 40,70,707 applicants, including the names of 1.5 lakh people that were deleted from the first list. The applications of 2.48 lakh people were kept on 'hold' who belonged to the following four categories: D (doubtful)-voters, descendants of D voters (those who have drawn descendency from D voters), people whose cases are pending in the Foreigners' Tribunals, and descendants of these persons.

The exercise of updating the NRC has been dogged with controversies from the outset. The first was the confusion over the ‘original inhabitant’ category despite the clarification from the NRC coordinator Prateek Hajela that the register would consist of a list of only Indian citizens and no categorisation such as ‘original inhabitant’ shall be made in the draft and the final NRC list. The All Assam Minorities’ Students’ Union, opposition parties like the Congress, All India United Democratic Front, CPM, and several organisations from Barak Valley in the state were opposed to identifying applicants with that tag since there was no definition of ‘original inhabitants’ in the state. On the other hand, the AASU and 28 other organisations of different ethnic communities were of the opinion that ‘original inhabitants’ must be used for the updated NRC. Finally, the apex court ruled in November last year that ‘original inhabitant’ would not be used henceforth in the exercise.

The first and final drafts have revealed surprising and weird cases of exclusion and inclusion from the register which cuts across different communities and linguistic groups in the state. Among the prominent personalities excluded from the final draft were two legislators, Ramakanta Deori from the ruling BJP and Ananta Kumar Malo of the opposition AIUDF, and former Congress legislator Archana Paul. There have been innumerable cases of exclusion from the same family although the same set of documents had been submitted by all the members. Cases have also emerged about ‘D voters’ who were given a clean chit by the Foreigners’ Tribunals but whose names did not figure in the final draft. After the final draft was published, deputy commissioner of Morigaon district Hemen Das declared that 200 suspected foreigners belonging to 39 families have managed to enrol their names in the register. A few days later, it was found out that an Assam government employee named Khairul Islam, who was declared a foreigner in 2015, was involved in the process of compiling the register. He was subsequently arrested from Morigaon and sent to a detention centre.

Some officials are of the opinion that the numbers of genuine citizens excluded from the final draft could be ‘huge’ and in this category are also people who never applied for the NRC. The process of filing claims and objections is expected to begin soon after the standard operating

procedure is finalised and the green signal given by the Supreme Court. But many civil society groups are also of the view that a large chunk of foreigners have somehow managed to get their names enrolled with genuine documents which were procured through fraudulent means over the past several decades. The Assam government has also decided to file an affidavit in the Supreme Court seeking an order for the reverification of the list that has already been compiled. Many petitions have been submitted in the Supreme Court by civil society groups and individuals alleging anomalies in the procedure adopted to update the register. The apex court has ruled that the process of claims and objections would be allowed for two months from September 25 for applicants who have been excluded. However, claimants would have to rely on 10 instead of the 15 documents allowed earlier for inclusion in the NRC. The documents that have been barred are the NRC of 1951, electoral rolls up to 24 March 1971, citizenship certificates, and refugee registration certificate and certified copies of the pre-1971 electoral roll. NRC coordinator Prateek Hajela has also been asked to offer his views on the deletion of the five documents following the centre's insistence on revised modalities and standard operating procedure to deal with the process of claims and objections.

THE FUTURE SCENARIO

It is not known when the exercise would finally draw to a close although there are indications that it might get delayed beyond the expected time frame. The possibility of further agitations in Assam cannot be ruled out if the final list is published ahead of the general elections next year. Civil society groups are very much likely to demand that people whose names do not figure in the register be not allowed to cast their votes in the polls. However, it must be mentioned that the update of the NRC is an exercise to compile a list of citizens in the state. And it is the mandate of the Foreigners' Tribunals to judge whether a person is a foreigner or a citizen. Only after a person is declared a foreigner can the government decide whether to send the person to a detention centre or deport that person to Bangladesh if the neighbouring country agrees. Although it is quite early to hazard a guess about the actual number who would be left out

of the NRC, it is quite likely that a majority of them would approach the Foreigners' Tribunals. There are only 100 functioning tribunals in the state, and it could take many years before all the cases are finally settled.

What is most certain is the absence of the option to deport the declared foreigners to Bangladesh. The neighbouring country has never accepted that its citizens have been surreptitiously crossing the border and settling in India, although occasionally small groups have been deported in the past several years. But the demand from local groups in the state for the expulsion of the foreigners could become intense once the process is completed. So far, the centre has not spelt out a concrete plan to deal with the post-NRC scenario in Assam. There are sporadic media reports indicating that the government is examining the feasibility of long-term visas and long-term work permits for the foreigners. This could mean that the NDA regime has firmed up separate policies for the Muslim and non-Muslim foreigners, which was also apparent from the tabling of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016 in parliament two years ago. Protests opposing the bill swept Assam when the Joint Parliamentary Committee visited the state in a clear message that foreign nationals cannot be distinguished on the basis of religion. The fate of the bill is uncertain, but there are indications that the BJP-RSS could support granting citizenship to non-Muslim migrants from the neighbouring countries. On 3 August, BJP's chief whip in Rajya Sabha Narayan Lal Panchariya tabled a Private Member's Bill titled 'The Illegal Immigrants (Identification and Deportation) Bill, 2018'. Clause 10 of the bill says that 'the Central Government may, if it considers so in national interest, exempt any illegal immigrants or any class of illegal immigrants from deportation or any other provisions of this Act'. It also proposes establishing commissions for identification and deportation of illegal migrants.

The outcome of the NRC notwithstanding, it is quite likely that the demand for constitutional safeguards for the indigenous communities of Assam would grow in the coming months. Clause 6 of the Assam Accord already mentions the provision, but it has not been implemented so far. A committee headed by former chief election commissioner Hari Shankar Brahma, which was tasked to examine these issues by the Assam government, has warned that the indigenes could become a

‘landless class of people’ if effective constitutional, legal, and administrative measures were not implemented soon. The same argument also found mention in the ‘charter of demands’ submitted by the pro-talks ULFA faction engaged in talks with the government for a negotiated settlement. These charters and reports have referred to the policies implemented in the hill states of the North East towards safeguarding land and resources of the ethnic communities. The advantage of these states is that they are governed by Inner Line Permits, which restricts outsiders and foreigners from settling permanently. The uproar in Assam over the NRC has made the hill states more alert over the influx of Bangladeshi nationals. Meghalaya and Manipur are two states that do not have the Inner Line restrictions, but there exist laws that protect the land of the indigenous communities.

Another issue that could have a significant bearing on the issue of citizenship in Assam is a writ petition filed in the Supreme Court by Assam Sanmilita Mahasanga, a conglomerate of organisations belonging to several indigenous communities of the state, which argues for the declaration Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, as ‘discriminatory, arbitrary and illegal’ and striking down of the ‘impugned provision as ultra-vires’. It is of the view that citizenship laws in the country have to be the same for every state and there cannot be a separate law for Assam. It has made a case for accepting 1951 as the cut-off date for determining citizenship in the state and is opposed to the update of the NRC with 24 March 1971 as the cut-off date. In 2014, the court had decided to refer the issue to a constitution bench to decide whether the cut-off year for the detection of foreigners in Assam ought to be 1971 or 1951.

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The North East: Negative Mood Swings

PINAKI BHATTACHARYA

As Nagaland had been reaping the dividends of 'peace' for the last three decades, with the country's oldest separatist movement mostly shunning guns, adjacent Manipur had been reaping the deadly harvest of insurgencies, much of which has turned to pure criminalism.

Worse, everyone in power was complicit with them: politicians of all hues, bureaucrats, businessmen, and even the security forces. The politicians bought their security from the 'groups with guns'. The officialdom paid their own share of what can at the very best be called the 'rangdari tax'. And the security bought was, in turn, used for looting the state's exchequer, which would routinely be refilled by various special financial packages the centre accorded them, ostensibly for obliterating insurgency/criminalism.

Interestingly, the seven sisters, as the states of the North East are called, are for the first time being ruled by the BJP or local parties who are allied to the BJP. This is significant because for the first time in the last 70 years that India has been independent, the party has made significant inroads in this remote frontier of the country. Has this brought any change in the style of politics and governance of this region? Sanjoy Hazarika, a renowned scholar focusing on the North East – his own backyard really – says: 'The people of Assam, indeed the region had great deal of optimism once these governments took over. But how much of those expectations have been fulfilled?'

Let us expand this engagement of burgeoning fortunes of the BJP with the 'lot' of the people of Manipur and observe whether any change has occurred. Consider this: the state is strangely quiescent at the moment. While seeking reasons for this development, two sets of response emerge.

One, the new BJP government has given time for the groups to take a measure of it. And two, with the departure of Irom Sharmila from the scene, the focus has shifted from a live issue like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, the infamous AFSPA, especially after the centre has shifted the responsibility of extending or withdrawing the operation of the act to the state government in Imphal. Also, adjacent Assam has been similarly empowered. But on that a little later.

In recent times, the new chief minister of Manipur, N. Biren Singh, who took office in 2017, just over a year ago, has sought to focus on this ‘quiet period’ to seek an image makeover from being a militancy-ridden state. He has firmly tied the destiny of the region with the ‘Act East, Act Fast’ policy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In an interview to the *Hindustan Times* newspaper, in New Delhi, he had said in November 2017 that Moreh – the border trade town in Chandel district of the state – could be one on the trade route of the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC). Myanmar anyway has been trading through the town for all this while.

There were some reports that the mandarins of New Delhi had some reservations about the BCIM-EC because it gave additional access to China. They thought the Chinese economy – the Giant Panda of the region – five times the size of the Indian economy, could swamp the territories on the trade route. But with the PM’s successful ‘philosophical engagement’ with the Chinese president for life, Xi Jinping, at Wuhan early this year, the technical reservations of the ‘mandarinate’ in the Indian capital could evaporate as soon as they cropped up.

In fact, in the North East Council development meeting held in Guwahati in May this year, the last session was chaired by the Minister for External Affairs Sushma Swaraj. Assam CM Sarbanand Sonowal told his six brother CMs plus Sikkim’s CM, Pawan Kumar Chamling, that the Stillwell Road passing through Arunachal Pradesh to Kunming in south-east China could even be revived as a part of the BCIM-EC.

Now, that demand has strategic ramifications. Most important is the obvious historical route of the Stillwell Road cutting across Arunachal Pradesh, which is still called southern Tibet by the Chinese authorities. But the fact that Sonowal made this demand sent a signal to all across that

the centre might be thinking in terms of changing the status quo. That speculation has to lie at rest for the present.

Meanwhile, an appreciation of the militant/criminal organisations' approach towards the crucial state of Manipur is important. After the BJP-led government took office, there was a sharp spike in killings by the criminal insurgents – as the South Asian Terrorism Portal (SATP) saw it, in 2017, a 66 per cent spike in fatalities had occurred over 2016.

This can be partly viewed as a phenomenon when the militants put on notice the resolve of the new government to get peace for the troubled population of the state. The SATP has recorded that in 2017, the number of civilians killed and the number of criminal insurgents killed equalled 23. Surprisingly, in the previous year, when Congress Party's Idobi Singh was still in power, there were remarkably low levels of deaths (33) in the state. Was this a product of a particular style of political management? The other question is, did the BJP-led government come to power prepared?

Since the BJP's political plan for the state was based on the party positioning itself in the Imphal valley, its post-poll coalition partners the National People's Party and the Naga People's Front were to manage the hills of the state populated by the Nagas and Kukis and some smaller tribes. But this did not stymie the human toll in the hills either.

To quote the SATP again, seven hill districts of Manipur accounted for 74.5 per cent of the total of 55 deaths caused due to insurgency/criminalism. This certainly shows that even though the hill districts voted for the tacit partisan alliance (pre-poll), the killings did not stop.

On the flip side though, the dramatic decline within a year can be a reflection of either the Naga parties' ability to turn the tap enough to stop the violence or the breather that the insurgents themselves have declared to see how the brand-new coalition acts.

One crucial point that Mr. Yumnam Rupachandra, an editor-journalist running a television news channel of repute across the state, pointed out: 'Human Rights (HR) issues which had been created by over six decades old conflict has improved to a large extent. While Irom Sharmila's extraordinary effort has raised the bar and drew international attention [to human rights situation], it failed to move the government and the AFSPA

1958, seen as fountainhead of conflict-related HR violations continue to be operational in many parts of the state except Greater Imphal area.¹

The AFSPA 1958 seems to be at the top of the mind of an equally erudite and well-connected security analyst/editor, Mr. Pradeep Phanjoubam. According to him, ‘The central government needs to rethink its strategy about declaring Disturbed Areas Act and AFSPA especially considering that the Supreme Court has recently looked at the Act found it out of synch. It had earlier ordered in 2016 that the CBI investigate few cases of alleged human rights violations by the security forces reported from Manipur and Jammu and Kashmir.’²

The acclaimed newspaper *Hindu* observed in an editorial early this year that Manipur has faced the ‘brunt’ of the human rights excesses. Understandably, the state, having been challenged by rampant lumpenisation that went totally unrecognised by the authorities both at the centre and the state earlier, had found the clampdown imposed locally to be ‘heavy-handed’ at the very least. Yumnam had quoted an estimate of human rights violations over a period of time. He had talked about 1,500-plus cases.

This figure has now been confirmed by the voluble chief of army staff, General Bipin Rawat, in an interview to the Kolkata-based *Telegraph* newspaper. But Rawat also had reiterated the same old trope about how the act’s operation is required for the army to work unfettered in the state-government-categorised ‘disturbed areas’. But Rawat has acknowledged that existing cases in Manipur need to be disposed of as quickly as possible.

On another plane, Assam has become a simmering cauldron with the beginning of the enrolment exercise of the ostensible National Register for Citizens (NRC). This exercise was promised by Rajiv Gandhi as the prime minister when he concluded the Assam Accord with the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) in mid-1980s. Had Gandhi been alive, some progress would have taken place. But after his assassination, successive Congress Party governments at the centre and the state had left it possibly for a propitious moment for the many tribunals they had been set up to do their job. That unfortunately is the story.

But Sonowal had no such compunction. While he was a minister in the NDA II government at the centre in New Delhi, the ‘Vision Document’ of 2016–2025 – in place of a state legislative assembly poll manifesto – was released and he was made the chief ministerial candidate. The document had said the NRC process would be taken up in right earnest.

Some observers, like Udoyan Mishra, Prasanta Rajguru, and Akhil Ranjan Dutta, had noted that the BJP’s victory in 2016 was a direct result of the increased reaction to the political space that the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) was occupying. The AIUDF was viewed as a party of the Bengali Muslims who the BJP had been complaining about for long as immigrants that were changing the demographics of the state. Thus was born the social coalition of ‘Assamese-speaking Hindus, ethnically indigenous people, Tea Tribes, Bengali speaking Hindus and Assamese Muslims,’ Dutta had noted in a paper.³ This coalition had been fearful of the AIUDF and the segment of society it represented.

On the other hand, the BJP made alliances with the Bodo People’s Front and the leaderships of tribes of the hills and the plains. Sonowal thus garnered more than a two-thirds majority – 86 seats out of the 126-seat legislative assembly. And he lived up to the most important promise of his government – the enrolment of citizens in the NRC. But the exercise was carried out so ham-handedly that the Supreme Court had to intervene. As a writer, human rights activist, and analyst, Sanjoy Hazarika says that even some of his ‘family members and friends had not figured in the NRC’.

LATER ABOUT THE BILL, IT WAS A DRAFT WORK PERMIT LAW FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO REVIEW

Hazarika developed and published in *Rites of Passage*, his book on migration, a draft proposal for a law on work permits that could enable, for example, Bangladeshis and Indians to work in each other’s countries without visa regulations in specific occupations and which would be time specific. ‘The idea was to prevent permanent settlement or virtual citizenship by illegal means.’

He developed a more detailed framework for the National Security Advisory Board, which took in suggestions from the late K. P. S. Gill, the

late B. G. Verghese, and Prakash Singh, a veteran police official from UP. That was 18 years ago.

This logjam had initially excluded 3.29 crore people of the population, of whom, 2.89 crore names were included in the NRC. About 41 lakh people were permanently excluded. Now that the Supreme Court has asked for any 10 documents from a list of 15 that could establish a person's citizenship, the state government personnel doing the exercise will be watched by the highest court closely.

The simmering tension was best described by Hazarika when he said that the Assam government now has extended the operation of the AFSPA across the state. Evidently, the people's discontent has a possibility of boiling over. Fear of those who have been excluded from the NRC that they will be interned in relocation camps is palpable. They probably fear that they will be pushed back to Bangladesh – into the despair they had fled earlier.

This writer and Hazarika had been advocating an immigration policy for the country that would accommodate all people from nations of the Indian subcontinent in a manner by which they can be productive parts of this country. While this country, with a settled population of 1.3 billion people, cannot see a major accretion of migrant population, the country's authorities surely can afford to have a skilled working class amongst the visitors from other parts of the subcontinent. Those people can be issued work permits and allowed to stay under controlled conditions by which they enjoy some of the privileges of being legitimate quasi citizens.

Hazarika says that he had even drafted a bill to be presented in parliament to make into a law. But he has only negativity to report even on that issue. In one of the latest assessments on the North East, a young researcher of the Institute of Conflict Management (ICM), M. A. Athul, has written in ICM's high-quality journal, *Faultlines*, about the cosy arrangement between the politico-securocratic regime of the region and the insurgent groups that have now mostly morphed into criminal gangs.

But Nagaland is a different kettle of fish. Running the oldest insurgency of the region, the Naga militants received some initial support from the rulers of China, but that was a reluctant arrangement. And at the first opportunity, Beijing ceased and desisted. The National Socialist Council

of Nagaland (Isaac Muivah), or NSCN (IM), became the true inheritor of the mantle of the ‘most accepted, best organised’ group.

So when the central government decided to negotiate for attaining peace in the state and neutralise the mother-lode of all insurgencies in the north-east of the country, the government engaged the NSCN (IM). The first real breakthrough came during A. B. Vajpayee’s NDA I government, with the ceasefire that was struck in 1997 formalised and periodic extensions becoming automatic. In 2005, when Isaac Chishi Swu, the chairperson, and Thuingaleng Muivah, the general secretary, returned from their self-imposed exile in Thailand and declared they would now be encamped at the sprawling Camp Hebron, about 40 km away from Dimapur, situated at a vantage point on a hill.

During the NDA II’s early date with the two leaders, Narendra Modi concluded a framework agreement. Contents of that agreement are largely unknown as both the government and the NSCN (IM) have kept a complete silence about the accord. Earlier, as the protracted consultations continued, the NSCN (IM) had given the various interlocutors – K. Padmanabhaiah, Swaraj Kaushal, and R. N. Ravi – what they called ‘30 competencies’, dealing basically with their demands.

Still, the Modi government seems to have lost steam after the initial breakthrough. The political class in Nagaland is becoming restive. During these times, when a longstanding conflict goes through a long period of lull, and the insurgents take a breath freely, the people who constitute the ecosystem of the conflict – either embracing violence or seeking peace – are in a constant state of animation, hoping for the period of peace to deliver on their desires; they understand the ennui of an established state and tend to accelerate the process. That is the cycle through which the state of Nagaland is passing. The situation does give a sense that the Modi government has run out of ideas and has no end state in its schema.

Thus, when my acquaintance Okenjeet Sandham in Kohima states, ‘The peace needs to be institutionalised quickly,’ what he is actually

meaning to say is that the public goods and services need to flow not at the current pace but at the accelerated pace of a genuine ‘peace dividend’.

The steadiest rock of the Naga insurgency, Isaac Chishi Swu, died in 2016. He could not be in attendance when the framework agreement was signed by his long-time-comrade-in-arms, Muivah. The latter must have felt the bite of limited mortality himself at the death of Isaac. One can’t imagine that Muivah is hankering for more power. In his almost idyllic state of having most power without too much of responsibility is an individualised experience for him. But even he would like a ‘final’ resolution of his life’s mission, the future be damned. At least that is the idea Okenjeet, on the troubled telephone connection, seemed to impart.

Consider this: The cognitive dissonance has already set in, as yours truly had predicted at a Delhi Policy Group seminar in New Delhi 2004. A couple of months ago, one of the senior NSCN (IM) representatives told a public gathering that there could be a ‘passport’ which identifies them as people of Nagaland. That stirred up a hornets’ nest. Do we need the hornets to really stir up out of their relative slumber?

What can be given to the people of Nagaland through the good offices of the NSCN (IM)? Greater Nagalim is off the table. NSCN (K), a common bugbear, is trounced and wound up in Nagaland and sent packing to Myanmar. The issue of sovereign symbols is on the cards. There is some more meat that is needed to be added to Article 371 A of the Constitution.

Sovereignness is key to the solution. This is a new experience even for the Indian republic. For, while Article 370 had promised a lot to the people, it had delivered little for the Kashmiris. Over the years, there has been a dilution of the sovereign symbols of the people that could underlie their Kashmiriyat.

When identity is the keystone to a public philosophical edifice, if that goes missing, the people gasp to survive beyond the suffocation. A great churning takes place amongst the people at that time, which tests the capacity of the state to maintain its independent capability in the

greater scheme of things it considers to be its remit to maintain. And that becomes the final frontier for the state.

“An earlier version of this article by the same author was published by Imphal Free Press. That early part thus can also be found at (<http://www.ifp.co.in/page/items/50044/how-the-bjp-carved-out-a-space-for-itself-in-the-ne>). Necessary permission for republication has been obtained verbally from the Editor, IFP, Pradip Phanjoubam”.

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Kashmir: Managing Complexity in 2018, Preview

RAHUL BHONSLE

The year 2018 has seen some seminal developments in Jammu and Kashmir in multiple spheres, from the political to the security, which denotes some future trends and prospects for management of the insurgency and terrorism presently restricted to the Kashmir Valley mainly in south Kashmir. The perceived outcome of these developments, however, does not give confidence regarding restoration of normalcy, be it in the political sphere or the security sphere, in the near future. There are multiple schisms that have emerged in the Valley that would need an intense period of confidence and trust building in political and socio-economic terms, and with Pakistan ever willing to play the spoiler – witness the release of stamps commemorating the terrorist leader Burhan Wani by that country on 20 July – it appears to be a long ‘battle’ ahead. Importantly, there is an element of denial of alienation of the people in the Valley amongst the policymakers in Delhi – both civil and military – which may lead to a delay in addressing of the core political issues. A brief overview of the developments as per succeeding paragraphs would thus be in order.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

From the peak of the ceasefire during Ramazan to resignation by the state government coalition, led by the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), to the establishment of governor’s rule in the state, there has been a see-saw course in political developments in Kashmir in 2018. The high point was the announcement of a period of non-initiation of offensive operations

(NIOO) by the government unilaterally for the month of Ramazan, starting on 17 May 2018.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, in Delhi, announced on 16 May that in view of the holy month of Ramazan, which signifies purity and peace, and to provide relief to the people at large, the ‘Government has issued instructions to the security forces and army not to undertake offensive operations’. Even though there was no response from the terrorist groups in Kashmir, the central and the state government supported the move for NIOO, forcing the miscreants to be on the backfoot. Operations were only undertaken by the security forces for the protection of the lives of the people.

The call for suspension of operations had come during an all-party meet by Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti. Separately, Mufti also appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to implement the Agenda of Alliance between the coalition partners PDP and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in letter and spirit. The two parties entered into an alliance in Jammu and Kashmir to form the government in 2014. Some of the critical components of the agenda were dialogue at external and internal levels for a Kashmir solution, demilitarisation, and revocation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. To create conditions for the latter, there was a need to ensure violence was eliminated and it was believed that the Ramazan cessation of offensive operations could contribute to the same.

As the state and central governments were deliberating extension of the ceasefire, which was supposed to include, if the situation was conducive, the Amarnath Yatra period starting on 28 June, terrorist groups launched a spate of attacks, including a fatal one on Mr. Shujaat Bukhari, Kashmir’s respected journalist and news editor. This led the government to announce revocation of the order for cessation of operations as the threat to Amarnath Yatra, when thousands of pilgrims visit the holy caves in the Valley, was considered too high.

During this period, there were some hopes after Home Minister Rajnath Singh’s announcement that the central government is ready to talk to every stakeholder, including the separatist Hurriyat Conference. Mehbooba Mufti, the then chief minister, described Mr. Rajnath Singh’s remarks, made during an interactive session with a TV channel, as a

welcome step to initiate dialogue and reconciliation in the state, adding that given the positive outcome from the ground on the Ramazan ceasefire, the peace constituency in the country and the state should feel encouraged to start the much-needed process of peaceful engagement with all stakeholders.¹

Chairman Hurriyat Conference (G) Syed Ali Geelani said Hurriyat leaders were never against dialogue and if New Delhi really means business this time, it must first accept Kashmir as a dispute and accept the five-point proposal basis for fresh talks made by the group in 2010.²

Days after the revocation of the NIOO, on 19 May, the PDP–BJP alliance broke down, with Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti announcing her resignation. While pressure had been building up with differences emerging over a number of issues, the revocation of the NIOO and a case of venal rape and murder of an eight-year-old girl in Kathua proved the last straw. Ironically, it appears that this came about when there was hope of political engagement after years of discord and violence on the streets in the Valley.

While most Kashmiris appreciated the fall in civilian killings and stone-pelting incidents during the ceasefire, its sudden unilateral announcement and abrupt revocation gave the centre a chance to claim that it had given the militants an opportunity for moving towards peace but that they failed to grasp it and this was seen by some as a *fait accompli* for the central government to continue the status quo of its conflict management approach.

The political equations between parties and the legislative assembly numbers denoted that there was no scope of formation of a government in Srinagar and governor's rule was imposed in J&K. Mr. N. N. Vohra, the governor who had completed the tenure, was replaced by Mr. Satya Pal Malik, who took oath as the 13th governor of Jammu and Kashmir.³

He became the first political appointee to hold the high office since 1967, after Dr. Karan Singh. The governors thereafter have been primarily former military and civil service officers, undoubtedly highly proficient but lacking a political veneer. Mr. Malik is a seasoned political leader of the BJP. He is not a hardcore member of the BJP as well as the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh and thus was seen acceptable to the people of the

state. Mr. Malik has an onerous task ahead as governor's rule has been in place in the state for more than two months, following the collapse of the Mehbooba Mufti-led government on 19 June.

Kashmir faces a number of challenges, from the threat to police officials, particularly in south Kashmir, where the government writ is weak, to the impending challenge to Article 35A of the Constitution in the Supreme Court. The holding of the panchayat elections in the state appears to be the immediate task before Governor Malik. The government plans to undertake panchayat elections in the state, which is likely to require some heavy security arrangements, while the 2019 state and national elections are looming large; thus, the veteran political leader may find himself in the eye of the storm.

While the local leaders, such as members of the All J&K Panchayat Conference, are keen to participate in the elections, the nationalist parties in the state – National Conference and the PDP – have openly boycotted the elections or have threatened to do so. The Indian National Congress meanwhile is seeking participation along with the BJP, which is hoping to cash in on the absence of the two main state parties.

The local polls may be testing the waters for assembly and parliament elections in the near future, as low voter turnout, at 7.5 per cent, during parliamentary bye-polls for the Srinagar seat on 9 April 2017 and the perilous security situation in south Kashmir, which has prevented holding of bye-polls for the parliament in that constituency, have raised serious concerns.

In his first interaction with his advisors and bureaucrats at the secretariat in Srinagar on 30 August, Governor Satya Pal Malik said he hasn't come with any political agenda for J&K and his focus would be governance as per Greater Kashmir. 'I want to make it clear that I haven't come with any political agenda. I am here to provide better governance and reach out to people by ensuring development,' Malik said. 'I am not here for political resolution of Kashmir. Whatever has to be done on that front, it will be done at Prime Minister's level. My focus is governance,' a senior official quoted Malik. 'It is not my domain to work on the political front.'⁴

Thus, the central government appears to have been resigned to the fact that any resolution can come about only after the central elections in April–May 2019, as well as the state elections, which may be held concomitantly.

Another political challenge faced by the state and central governments is the writ challenging Article 35A, which defines permanent residents and grants special status to the same in the Supreme Court of India. While separatists – the Hurriyat Conference and the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front amongst others – raised the ante, even nationalist parties in Kashmir (the National Conference and the PDP) are strongly opposed to any bid to set aside Article 35A. Conscious of the challenges that are likely to be faced in case a decision on the writ is given, with panchayat elections in the Valley set for November, the Supreme Court has postponed the decision to January 2019.

ENGAGING THE YOUTH

With over half the population in J&K as per the 2011 census below 25 years, there is a need to keep the youth away from the path of violence, be it stone pelting or militancy. At present, there are said to be over 230 militants who are active in the Valley, with almost an equal number who may be waiting across the Line of Control for induction. According to data compiled till 31 July, around 131 youths have joined various terror outfits, with south Kashmir's Shopian district contributing the largest number, 35, in 2018. The number of local recruits last year was 126. The officials say that many youths are joining the Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, a group which claims support of al-Qaeda and is headed by Zaqir Rashid Bhat, alias Zaqir Musa, who hails from a village in the Tral area of Pulwama district. He has been influenced by Anwar al-Awlaki, a Yemeni-American preacher killed by allied forces attack in Afghanistan in September 2011. Musa has been mainly focusing on recruitment for his outfit and brainwashing the youths to pick up arms.

There has been a steady rise in the number of youths taking up arms in the Valley from 2014 onwards as compared to the period from 2010 to 2013, when the figure stood at 54, 23, 21, and 6, respectively.⁵ In 2014,

the number shot up to 53, and in 2015, it reached 66, before touching the highest mark, 88, in 2016, as per the *Hindustan Times*. This year, youths who joined militancy include Junaid Ashraf Sehrai, 26, an MBA degree holder from Kashmir University and son of Mohammed Ashraf Sehrai, who took over as chairman of the Tehrek-e-Hurriyat from Syed Ali Shah Geelani. The list also includes 26-year-old PhD scholar Mannan Bashir Wani, hailing from Kupwara. Shamsul Haq Mengnoo, younger brother of an IPS officer of the North East cadre, also joined the terrorist outfit.⁶

While the number of youths joining the militancy has grown, the surge in the mass of people that support the radicals through protests and stone pelting is very large, indicating a degree of alienation amongst this social group. There are two ideologies for radicalisation that are being fostered – separatism and radical Islam. The necessity to strengthen the narrative of Kashmiriyat has been felt due to the video by Zakir Rashid Bhat, the Hizbul Mujahideen commander who claimed that they are not fighting for independence, or restoring democracy, or nationalism in Kashmir but for the establishment of Khilafat.⁷ There is also a fear of growth of Salafism versus the Sufi Islam that is practised by the Mirwaiz and his order in Kashmir, who are supporting the All Parties Hurriyat Conference.

Social media has been an active medium to spread the message for the militants. The J&K police are also making their presence felt. According to former J&K police chief S. P. Vaid, who was relieved in September this year, ‘Our neighbouring country has launched a major campaign on social media to lure youths into terrorism and violence through wrong information. . . . We have taken measures to cover it and, accordingly, media cells have been created at the range, district and zonal levels. We have opened 26 Facebook pages at the district level, 189 at the police station and zonal levels and 31 twitter handles and have occupied the social media space to counter the malicious campaign.’⁸

A number of measures are being taken for engaging the youth, varying from National Integration Tours to schemes such as Udaan, but there has been limited recompense so far. For instance, the Indian army has a programme known as the National Integration Tour. These are, as per the military press release, educational and motivational tours for the youth of Jammu and Kashmir and the north-eastern states, with an aim to

provide an insight into the rich heritage of the country as well as various developmental and industry initiatives that are underway. Programmes having an appeal to a larger span are necessarily using modern means of communication, such as social media, on which ironically the militant groups seem to be active and have a broader reach.

STATE OF SECURITY AND VIOLENCE

The dynamics of militancy in Jammu and Kashmir has a number of tracks, such as training and support by Pakistan, with camps across the Line of Control and the International Border. Infiltration is supported by ceasefire violations by the Pakistan army and Pakistan Rangers and sporadic terrorist attacks in the Valley, mostly against security forces and soft targets, such as policemen and army personnel on leave or on isolated picquets.

On the infiltration front, 69 militants had infiltrated into Jammu and Kashmir from across the border till June this year as per a report to the Lok Sabha. There were 133 attempts of infiltration by militants from across the borders, Union Minister of State for Home Hansraj Gangaram Ahir said in a written reply to a question. Ahir said that till June this year, 14 militants had been killed while 50 others were returned from the border.⁹

In comparison, 123 militants could enter Jammu and Kashmir following 406 infiltration attempts from across the border in 2017. Thus, it is evident that cross-border support to the militancy will be sustained by Pakistan even though there is a change of government, with former Pakistan cricket captain Imran Khan taking over as the prime minister in August this year and promising to move two steps forwards for every one step taken by India towards engagement.

There were 308 incidents of violence in Jammu and Kashmir till July this year, in which 113 militants were killed in 90 encounters. So far this year, 49 forces personnel have also been killed. There were 73 incidents of violence during the period of suspension of operation in the month of Ramazan, in comparison to 34 such incidents during the previous month. A total of 23 militants, 8 forces personnel, and 3 civilians were killed during the Ramazan ceasefire, while 14 militants, 5 forces personnel, and 8 civilians were killed in the previous month. On 22 June 2018, four

militants belonging to the Islamic State of Jammu and Kashmir, an outfit influenced by ISIS ideology, were killed in Anantnag district, raising concerns over the rising presence of the group in the Valley.

As a result of successful operations, the number of militants has also gone down. Pulwama, Awantipora, Kulgam, and Anantnag districts have 25, 23, 20, and 8 militants, respectively. Shopian had witnessed a sudden surge in militancy following the killing of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani in July 2016, with the number of militants rising to 32. With 12 militants killed on 1 April, the number has dropped to 20.¹⁰

While the Indian army and other security forces, including the Jammu and Kashmir Police, have been conducting effective counterterrorism operations, resulting in considerable losses to the terrorist groups, mainly targeting the leaders, a significant challenge faced by the security forces is the attempts by locals to disrupt the cordon and search operations (CASOs). From 1 January this year till 20 July, 22 civilians were killed at encounter sites, the majority of them in southern districts of Kashmir.¹¹

Large crowds are seen collecting at the site of a CASO and indulging in stone pelting, sloganeering, and raising physical barriers to the movement of troops. In some cases, civilian bystanders and protestors are killed when security forces are undertaking reaction in self-defence. The security forces are conscious of the need to avoid such casualties and have been holding joint consultations between the army, which undertakes CASOs, and the J&K police, who support the same. The need to avoid civilian casualties has also arisen given the release of a special report on Kashmir by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights). While the same has been rejected by the Government of India, security forces have become more conscious on the issue.¹²

CEASEFIRE VIOLATIONS & SECURITY OF CITIZENS ON THE BORDER

Civilians on the Line of Control and India-Pakistan border are vulnerable to cross-border firing by Pakistan, at times directed at causing civilian casualties. As indicated, the primary purpose of these violations is to support infiltration. Till June this year, 1,252 ceasefire violations by Pakistan

were reported. For containing the unrestricted firing, there are a number of de-escalation measures, including flag meetings and a hotline between the director generals of military operations of both countries. This hotline has been activated a number of times from May to July this year. However, cases of infiltration and attacks by Border Action Teams (BATs), such as the one on 19 September, with mutilation of the body of a Border Security Forces (BSF) jawan, are indicative of the interrupted nature of these endeavours for maintaining peace on the borders.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has, in turn, approved ¹ 415 crores for the construction of more than 14,000 bunkers in Kathua, Samba, Jammu, Rajouri, and Poonch districts. Work on the construction of 1,431 community and more than 13,000 individual bunkers is expected to commence, undertaken by the National Building and Construction Corporation.

DEVELOPMENT & TERROR FUNDING

Significant efforts were undertaken for development in Jammu and Kashmir. The Prime Minister's Development Package comprises various projects worth ¹ 80,068 crores, of which ¹ 24,000 crores (31%) have been released and over ¹ 20,000 crores (26%) utilised. Till May this year, 13 projects were completed/substantially completed, and it is expected that the pace will catch up after monsoon.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has been following up on the trail of funding of terrorist groups through separatist leaders and overground workers. The NIA, for instance, has charged Syed Shahid Yusuf, son of Hizbul Mujahideen chief Syed Salahuddin, for indulging in unlawful activities and raising funds for terror operations in a 2011 case. The final report has alleged that Yusuf had hatched a conspiracy to receive funds from Pakistan through hawala channels to spread terrorism. Similar charges have been levelled against other leaders, and these measures are expected to lower the funding support to terrorist groups in the Valley.

ENGAGEMENT WITH PAKISTAN

Given the role of Pakistan in fostering militancy in the Valley, there have been attempts to engage with the government in Islamabad after a new

political party, the Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf, led by Mr. Imran Khan, came to power. After a series of exchange of letters and telephone calls, on 20 September 2018, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs announced that a meeting between the Indian external affairs minister and the Pakistani foreign minister would take place on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly, where both were to be present in the last week of June. However, the Indian side retracted the offer just a day later, after discovering the mutilated body of the BSF soldier and the fact that Pakistan Post had issued 20 special postage stamps on 24 July eulogising terrorist leader Burhan Wani, killed in an encounter in July 2016. With the election season in India commencing in a couple of weeks, there is unlikely to be any more moves for engagement between Islamabad and New Delhi and a year-long hiatus, till a new government is formed in May 2019, could be anticipated.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Low-intensity violence and yet seemingly sizeable local support to militancy in the Valley have emerged as the major portend in the past couple of years. While the central and state governments have demonstrated a sincerity of approach in reaching out to the people and the security forces have been effectively targeting terrorists, the outcome of these endeavours is presently uncertain. There are differing estimates, with some agencies claiming that the support of the people to the militants is coercive and obtained through the barrel of the gun and the others being more sceptical, given the series of attempts to resist CASOs, particularly in south Kashmir, and the continuing stream of youths joining the militant ranks. The emergence of a radical Islamist element which has greater resonance with the global terrorist groups as the ISIS is another phenomenon of concern. The first marker of the popular support or otherwise to the militancy may be evident during the panchayat elections, which will create an atmosphere for the state and national polls. The focus in Kashmir will thus continue to be on management of the militancy, while conflict resolution seems some way off for now.

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Uyghur Militants in Eurasia: Are They a Potential Threat?

RAMTANU MAITRA

Turkestan. And what do you know about Turkestan? It is a wounded body with swollen eyes and bitter agony. Although the West commits crimes against the Muslims from time to time, and their crimes become known to media outlets (people hear and see about the crimes), Muslims rise to aid their brothers with every method and trick. However, the crimes committed by the pagan Chinese against the Muslims in Turkestan are carried out in silence and in the most despicable ways. ... It is a duty for Muslims today to stand by their oppressed and wounded brothers in East Turkestan, and support and aid them with everything they can.

—Sheikh Abu-Yahya al-Libi, al-Qaeda: No. 2 commander, 6 October 2009 (video entitled *East Turkestan: The Forgotten Wound*)

After years of low-intensity media coverage of Uyghur militants' activities in Syria, in Eurasia, and even in China's western province of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), increased activity by Chinese authorities in XUAR recently to tamp down Uyghur nationalism has begun to push the issue of Uyghur militancy into the spotlight. Beijing's intent is apparently to prevent further growth of militancy among the Uyghurs, and China is perhaps reacting to the reported presence of more than 5,000 Uyghur militants in Syria fighting against the al-Assad regime under the banners of the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM).

Although neither the size nor the fighting ability of the Uyghur militants in Syria can be fully corroborated, Eurasian policymakers worry that the migration of these dedicated fighters to Eurasia could set back efforts to bring stability in Afghanistan. And since these militants have

long identified the Chinese authorities as their principal enemy, they could make China's Belt and Road transport links, running through Eurasia on their way to Europe from China, wholly dysfunctional.

Moreover, in Afghanistan and in the central Asian countries where pockets of militants operate using a variety of slogans and objectives (and are financed via drug trafficking and smuggling activities in the region), the addition of another group of militants dedicated to undermining China's efforts in the region could prove detrimental for all nations in the region.

In the following, we review the evidence and discuss how the potential threat of Uyghur militancy could become a real threat to Eurasia.

WHAT WE KNOW

There are reports that the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) – the Afghan version of the Arabia-based Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) – is firming up its foothold in eastern Afghanistan, particularly in Nangarhar province, and was recently working to set up an enclave in northern Afghanistan's Jowzan province, bordering Turkmenistan. Since ISKP is a sworn enemy of both the Taliban and the Kabul government, it is likely that the group either is already in league with TIP militants or would team up with the TIP in the future.

Another militant group active in northern Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). In 2014, IMU pledged its allegiance to the ISIS caliphate in Iraq and Syria. Uzbekistan has also become a recruitment hub for the ISIS in the Middle East. It was estimated that in 2017, approximately 1,500 Uzbeks travelled to the Middle East to join ISIS ranks. The gains the ISKP group has made in northern Afghanistan can be attributed to the IMU's pledge to the ISIS and its close proximity to the ISIS franchise in Afghanistan. The IMU already had a presence in northern Afghanistan, courtesy of porous Afghan–central Asia borders. Still further north, near Russia, Kazakhstan is considered a potential recruitment pool for the ISIS. More than 300 Kazakhs have joined ISIS ranks in Iraq and Syria.¹

There are also reports that the IMU has allied with the TIP. IMU members have previously fought alongside the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, and they currently fight alongside the ISKP. Fergana Valley, where the Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik borders converge, has always been a fertile recruiting ground for the IMU, which successfully exploited the widespread poverty in the region in its recruitment strategy. The IMU's ability to draw recruits has increased following its alliance with the ISIS. The IMU has generated funds through drug trafficking, racketeering, and solicitation of donations abroad. A decade ago, in May 2008, French, German, and Dutch authorities detained 10 individuals suspected of running a network to funnel money to the IMU in Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. On 8 January 2013, a French court sentenced Turkish/Dutch national Irfan Demirtas to eight years in prison for leading a network that French prosecutors said had raised at least 300,000 euros for the IMU, with more than half of that specifically designated for jihad. Eight others belonging to the group received lesser sentences.²

In addition to the presence of these larger terrorist organisations, the Eurasian region is also host to many smaller terrorist groups. Writing in *The New York Review of Books*, Ahmed Rashid said, 'U.S. intelligence reports cite more than 20 terrorist groups now active in Afghanistan and Pakistan, many of them originally from Central Asia. Groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan are allied with the ISIS, yet also fight for the Taliban. The United States is deploying up to 1,000 more Special Forces and trainers to help the Afghan army, bringing total US-NATO strength to an estimated 15,000 troops.'³

WHO ARE THE UYGHURS?

The origins of the Uyghur people may be traced back to the Uyghur khanate of the eighth century AD. The khanate broke away from the Turkic Empire and settled across the Tian Shan Mountains, in the area of the modern-day Chinese cities of Urumchi and Tarpan. In 1932, a local Uyghur warlord, who turned out to be a downright rascal, established the group's semi-autonomous status during China's Qing dynasty. The mess created by this warlord resulted in widespread rebellion in 1933 and brought

into the rebellious group Chinese of various ethnicities who lived there at that time. The short-lived and ill-administered rule of this warlord ended with takeover by a military commander. According to some observers, this commander survived with the blessings of the then Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin until 1944, when he was finally replaced by a Kuomintang (KMT) governor of Xinjiang province.

The KMT retained control of the south until the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) takeover in 1949, when the KMT governor surrendered, leaving the Uyghur leaders as the CCP's only rival for power in Xinjiang. Following a July 1949 meeting in Ghulja with a representative from the new People's Republic of China (PRC), the Uyghur leadership was invited to Beijing for further consultation. Reports indicate that the plane carrying the Uyghur leaders crashed en route on 3 September 1949, killing all aboard. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) had already moved into the province, taking control of northern Xinjiang.

The arrival of the CCP led to the departure of many thousands of Uyghurs who were dedicated to the concept of 'pan-Turkism' and its goal of recreating a band of Turkic-speaking states stretching across central Asia from the homeland of Ankara to Xinjiang. Although many thousands of Uyghurs have left China, about 11.5 million still live in Xinjiang and elsewhere in the country. It is not clear how many live outside of China; but a majority of the Uyghur expatriates live in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, along China's western borders.⁴

In essence, the Uyghurs are Turkic people native to central Asia who inhabit parts of the Tarim, Junghar, and Turpan basins. Uyghurs themselves refer to this area as variously 'Uyghuristan,' 'East Turkestan,' and, sometimes, 'Chinese Turkestan.' The area encompasses some 2,000 km from east to west and 1,650 km north to south – bordering Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, as well as China's Gansu and Qinghai provinces and Tibet Autonomous Region.⁵

SPOTLIGHT ON THE UYGHURS

On 10 August in Geneva, during a two-day annual review of human rights in China, vice-chairwoman of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) Gay McDougall expressed ‘deep concern’ over the situation facing Muslim Uyghurs in China. She said credible reports suggest that China’s approach to combating religious extremism ‘has changed the Uyghur autonomous region into something that resembles a massive internment camp that is shrouded in secrecy, a sort of no rights zone.’ McDougall also claimed that as many as 2 million more Uyghurs in China’s XUAR were being forced into ‘political camps for indoctrination’⁶

UNCERD’s 30 August report on the ‘discriminatory’ situation in XUAR noted the following:

‘(a) Numerous reports of detention of large numbers of ethnic Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities held incommunicado and often for long periods, without being charged or tried, under the pretext of countering terrorism and religious extremism. The Committee regrets that there is no official data on how many people are in long-term detention or have been forced to spend varying periods in political “re-education camps” for even nonthreatening expressions of Muslim ethno-religious culture like daily greetings. Estimates about them range from tens of thousands to upwards of a million. The Committee also notes that the delegation stated that vocational training centers exist for people who committed minor offences without qualifying what this means;

‘(b) Reports of mass surveillance disproportionately targeting ethnic Uyghurs, including through frequent baseless police stops and the scanning of mobile phones at police checkpoint stations. Additional reports of mandatory collection of extensive biometric data in XUAR, including DNA samples and iris scans, of large groups of Uyghur residents;

‘(c) Reports that all XUAR residents are required to hand in their travel documents to police and apply for permission to leave the country, and that permission may not come for years. This restriction impacts most heavily on those who wish to travel for religious purposes;

‘(d) Reports that many Uyghurs abroad who left China have allegedly been returned to the country against their will. There are fears about the current safety of those involuntarily returned to China.

‘(e) While acknowledging the State party’s denials, the Committee takes note of reports that Uyghur language education has been banned in schools in XUAR’s Hotan (Hetian) prefecture.’

On 29 August, 17 US lawmakers – led by Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fl.) and Representative Chris Smith (R-N.J.) – addressed a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin of the United States, calling for sanctions against Xinjiang’s regional party secretary Chen Quanguo, a member of China’s 25-member Politburo, who has helped create one of the world’s most restrictive security regimes after a series of attacks in 2013 and 2014.⁷

In Geneva, responding to Gay McDougall’s accusations on 13 August, the Chinese delegation categorically stated that there were no such things as ‘re-education centers’ in Xinjiang, nor was there any subjugation of religious freedom in the Muslim-majority region. A Chinese representative said that some minor offenders of religious extremism or separatism have been taken to ‘vocational educational and employment training centers with a view to assisting in their rehabilitation’, which had achieved success in correcting their beliefs. Even those people’s rights, said the representative, are ‘duly protected’. Xinjiang saw deadly ethnic riots break out in 2009, and officials also blamed Uyghur militants for a knife attack at a train station in 2014 that killed 29.⁸

China has categorically rejected the UNCERD report and reacted angrily to the US lawmakers’ appeal for sanctions against China. At a regular press briefing in Beijing on 31 August, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying stated, ‘These comments . . . were based on so-called information that is yet to be verified and has no factual basis.’ Hua added that China was acting as necessary to combat extremism and terrorism on the country’s western frontier. ‘The sense of security and the fulfilment of people in Xinjiang has been greatly enhanced. . . . As for all the preventive security measures we’ve taken, many countries around the world do the same,’ she added.⁹

A day earlier, the foreign ministry spokesperson had brushed aside the US lawmakers' allegations. Hua Chunying said that Chinese citizens enjoy freedom of religion according to the law and that the American lawmakers should not 'threaten to impose sanctions at every turn'. Chunying told reporters, 'I would like to advise the individual U.S. lawmakers to focus on and perform their duties well because they are spending taxpayer money. They should certainly serve the Americans properly instead of poking their noses in other countries' affairs and pretending to be a judge of human rights.'¹⁰

UYGHUR FIGHTERS IN SYRIA

The restrictive measures undertaken by Beijing to undercut Uyghur militancy may have been triggered by reports of the TIP's significant presence in Syria. There had been much speculation about the strength of the group. Of late, however, a number of reports claim the number to be close to 5,000. In December 2017, Russian agency Sputnik News quoted Syrian ambassador to Beijing Imad Moustapha, saying, 'Our estimated numbers—because of the numbers we fight against, we kill, we capture, we wound—would be around 4,000-5,000 Xinjiang jihadists. China, as well as every other country, should be extremely concerned.'

In fact, often said to be high, that 5,000 number is less than half of what some others claim. Christina Lin of *Asia Times*, citing an unnamed reporter's "undercover story" from Dubai-based Al Alan TV, reported in May 2017 that an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 Chinese Uyghurs are living in Syria, concentrated especially in Idlib province's towns of Zanbaq and Jisr al Shughour.¹¹

Christina Lin is not the only one who has reported this. At the time of this writing, as the battle for Idlib – the second one; the first was fought in 2012 – began shaping up between Damascus and the rebels, the Syrian press was reporting the presence of thousands of jihadists in the province of Idlib who have formed a large colony of Uyghur ethnic Chinese in the province. Although the information has not been confirmed, one article noted that the Uyghurs installed there have transformed the town of Zanbaq, on the border with Turkey, into a real fortress. Little is known

about what happens in that city, which no one has access to and where some 18,000 Uyghur people could be concentrated, including combatants and their families.¹²

These developments are not a secret. China has exhibited its worries and has shown its willingness to take on the Uyghur terrorists on Syrian soil before they decide to sneak back to destabilise China's XUAR region. On 1 August, the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) reported a statement of Qi Qianjin, Chinese ambassador to Damascus, to the pro-Assad regime daily *Al-Watan*: 'The Chinese military would be willing to participate "in some way" in the campaign in Idlib or in other parts of the country.' Ambassador Qi expressed his support for what he called 'Syria's war against the terrorists' and noted that there is cooperation between the Syrian and Chinese armies. The MEMRI report also quoted the Chinese military attaché in Syria, who said that the Chinese military wishes to enhance its relations with the Syrian military and expressed regret that Chinese Uyghurs are taking part in the fighting against the Assad regime.

In the same report, MEMRI also cited a similar statement to *Al-Watan* by the Chinese military attaché in Syria, Wong Roy Chang. When asked about 'the possibility that China would participate in some way in the Idlib [military] operation, the attaché said: "The military cooperation between the Syrian and Chinese armies is ongoing. We have good relations, and we maintain this cooperation in order to serve the security, integrity and stability of our countries. We—China and its military—wish to develop our relations with the Syrian army. As for participating in the Idlib operation, it requires a political decision."'”¹³

How many troops China has already sent to operate in Syria on behalf of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad is not clear; what is evident is the PLA's ongoing interaction with the Syrians. On 16 August, citing Xinhua News Agency, the *South China Morning Post* reported the visit of a Chinese military delegation to Syria. It said the delegation was headed by Chinese rear admiral Guan Youfei, director of international cooperation at the Central Military Commission. He met with Syrian vice-prime minister Fahd Jassem al-Frej and the Syrian minister of defence. 'They reached consensus on enhancing personnel training, and Chinese military offering humanitarian aid to Syria,' said Xinhua. Al-Frej thanked the Chinese

government, as well as the Chinese military, which stated, via Admiral Guan, that the Chinese PLA is willing to continue cooperation with the Syrian military.¹⁴

Another report, this one in 2017 from *Middle East Eye*, pointed out that China had sent 300 military advisors to Damascus in April 2016 with the stated aim of providing medical and engineering training for the Syrian military. Over the course of last year, the Syrian military also hosted several Chinese military delegations as China stepped up its aid to Syria.¹⁵

The Chinese aim to help quash the Uyghur fighting groups, who have received first-hand training in fighting in Syria, also stems from the fact that the Uyghur groups, under the banners of the TIP and the ETIM and linked to al-Qaeda, have issued threats to China. Joseph Hope, writing in the Jamestown Foundation's *China Brief* recently, cited an ISIS video from early 2017 depicting a group of Uyghurs issuing threats to China before ending with an Uyghur fighter executing a prisoner, while another Uyghur states, 'We didn't care how the fighting went or who Assad was. . . . We just wanted to learn how to use the weapons and then go back to China.'

Hope wrote, 'Notably, Malhama Tactical, a for-profit jihadist military training group, also made a threat against China in early 2017 and claimed to have added Chinese nationals to its instructor ranks. Importantly, the group is known to operate in Idlib, where there may be a large Uyghur population, and has trained numerous TIP fighters. While the group itself does not carry out terror attacks, it is providing training to Uyghur fighters and apparently marketing itself somewhat to Uyghurs in Xinjiang. While actual figures on fighters returning to Xinjiang are likely withheld from the media, Jacques Neriah of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs claims that the Chinese government has arrested around 100 returning fighters as of the end of 2017.' Moreover, the number of returning fighters intercepted at the Chinese border reportedly increased 'tenfold' in 2017, according to Ji Zhiye of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, although the actual number of arrests was withheld.¹⁶

According to Christina Lin, Beijing first noticed Chinese Uyghurs travelling to Syria for jihad in 2012. In October 2012, Major General Jin Yinan of the PLA National Defence University disclosed that Chinese

militants belonging to the ETIM/Turkistan Islamic Party were joining anti-government rebels in Syria, with the then Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei issuing a stern warning that these militants ‘seriously harm China’s national security’ as well as regional peace and stability.

THE TURKISH ANGLE

Because the Uyghurs belong to the Turkic stock, Turkey has repeatedly expressed its views on the Chinese handling of its Uyghur citizens in XUAR over the years. While this has created some bad blood between China and Turkey, the two countries’ economic cooperation, particularly on China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has kept the issue from getting out of hand.

Solidarity with the Uyghur struggle against Chinese assimilation has long been a part of domestic Turkish politics. And that explains the large number of Uyghurs in Turkey, estimated at some 50,000 people. In 2015, after reports came out that Chinese authorities had banned fasting during the Islamic holy days of Ramadan, demonstrations took place in Istanbul and Chinese flags were burnt in front of the Chinese Embassy. China issued a notice urging Chinese tourists to avoid visiting Turkey.

In July 2015, when Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited China, the issue of Chinese ‘repressive measures’ against the Uyghurs was very much on the table. Erdogan had repeatedly accused China of systematic oppression of the Uyghurs, who share close linguistic, cultural, and religious ties with Turks. The president had previously accused Beijing of ‘genocide’ in the region.

Though China-Turkey relations have improved significantly since 2015, Beijing will nonetheless have to acknowledge that it would receive little or no support from Ankara in its efforts to eliminate the TIP and ETIM fighters based in Idlib.

FROM SYRIA TO EURASIA

It is evident that the growing Chinese support to Syria is not meant simply to protect the al-Assad regime but is aimed at eradicating a potential

threat to China's internal stability. The fear in Beijing is that once the war in Syria comes to an end, the experienced TIP and ETIM fighters in Syria will move over to Eurasia. There, the fear is that they will join hands with other terrorist groups to stir up trouble in China's XUAR and also work toward undermining China's prime foreign and economic policy instrument in that region – the BRI. How credible is such a fear?

There have been some reports of Uyghur fighters returning to Xinjiang from Syria. According to a July 2014 report by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA), analyst Jacques Neriah said he believes that there are '1,000 Chinese jihadists' being trained at a base in Pakistan and that thousands more have joined the fighting in Syria. JCPA director Dore Gold (who is also a special foreign policy advisor to Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu) warned China that these fighters abroad will pose 'certain risks' when they return to China.

Again, in January 2018, the *South China Morning Post* reported a rising tide of Uyghur terrorists arriving in West China. Reporting on an international relations forum in Beijing in December 2017, the *Post* cited Ji Zhiye, head of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, saying that China faces a 'prominent' risk of terror attack. 'The number of jihadists captured on China's borders [in 2017] was more than tenfold the number of the previous year,' Ji said. Ji's estimates were echoed by Li Shaoxian, director of the China-Arab Research Institute at Ningxia University. Li told a forum at Renmin University on 6 January that Xinjiang was facing 'severe' terrorist threats.¹⁷

Since neither Ji Zhiye nor Li Shaoxian provided details, it is difficult to assess the extent of the threat. Moreover, the lack of transparency in China's internal policies vis-à-vis XUAR, in particular, makes any kind of assertion dubious. It is likely that China's expressed fear about the TIP and ETIM fighters' return to XUAR to rev up terrorist activities could also be a justification for it to clamp down further in Xinjiang and launch its 're-education' programs.

Michael Clarke, an associate professor at the National Security College of the Australian National University, expressed that view recently. 'Domestically, Beijing has used the threat of terrorism to justify the development of a well-documented high-tech "security state" in Xinjiang,

in parallel with an intensification of a “people’s war” against “terrorism” featuring the heightened presence of security forces and intense controls on Uyghur religious and cultural practice,’ Clarke stated, adding, ‘Increasingly, the state appears to be framing Uyghur identity itself as an almost biological threat to the health of Chinese society, with government officials variously describing Uyghur “terrorism” as a “tumor” to be eradicated and Islamic observance as akin to drug addiction.’ This is borne out by details of what occurs in Xinjiang’s ‘transformation through re-education’ centers, where detainees undergo enforced indoctrination, including singing of patriotic ‘red songs’, ‘study sessions’ on Xi Jinping Thought, Chinese language, Chinese law and the dangers of Islam, and ‘self-criticism’ sessions.¹⁸

At the same time, it is likely that the ‘securitisation’ of the XUAR may not prevent the Uyghur terrorists from operating in Eurasia. In early February, US forces conducted air strikes in Afghanistan’s north-eastern province of Badakhshan, in the Wakhan Corridor, supposedly targeting support structures of the ETIM. Questioning the veracity of the US assertion, the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) pointed out in March that according to its Afghan sources in Badakhshan, there were around 250 foreign fighters and 60 non-combatant family members of such fighters in the province, almost all of them in Warduj and Jurm districts, where the latest air strikes took place. Most of these foreign fighters were apparently from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, but Uyghurs were said to be among them. A former United Nations employee stated that, as of the end of 2016, between 50 and 100 Uyghur extremists were residing in Afghanistan or nearby Pakistani areas. Roughly 75 per cent of those Uyghurs were believed to be in Chitral or neighbouring Badakhshan. This source estimated that there are currently about 70 to 80 Uyghur fighters in Badakhshan itself.¹⁹

Notwithstanding AAN’s scepticism regarding the US claim, there are many reports that indicate China has in fact been keeping a close watch over that little sliver of Afghan land connecting Afghanistan to Xinjiang called the Wakhan Corridor. In 2014, Estonian political science student and China expert Kristina Ainuvec, who was then working at the Chinese Embassy in Tallinn, wrote: ‘There are several reasons for China’s active involvement, one of them being drug flow into China from Afghanistan

that brings along the spread of radicalism into China's most rebellious province—Xinjiang. The so-called Wakhan corridor is a gateway for heroin from Afghanistan to mainland China through rebellious Xinjiang province. The separatist movement in Xinjiang has ethnic roots, since the main actors in this movement are Uyghur Muslims. They demand secession from the People's Republic of China and the creation of an independent Uyghuristan or Eastern Turkistan on the basis of a relatively large part of China. The internal conflict is aggravated by the Muslim funding and training from abroad. Moreover, it is suspected that neighboring Afghanistan and Pakistan play a key role in destabilizing China's internal security by supporting local separatists.²⁰

CHINESE PRESENCE IN LITTLE PAMIR?

There is also evidence that China was aware that the Uyghur militants had developed links with al-Qaeda as early as the 1990s. According to Human Rights Watch in 2005, 'China claimed that Osama bin Laden and the Taliban in Afghanistan had provided the "Eastern Turkestan" terrorist organizations with equipment and financial resources and trained their personnel, and that one particular organization, the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), was a major component of the terrorist network headed by Osama bin Laden.' In other words, China realised long ago that Uyghur militancy was no longer confined within XUAR but had become a part of an international terrorist organisation.

Although both China and Afghan officials categorically deny the presence of any Chinese military personnel on Afghan soil, there is overwhelming evidence of joint patrols by Afghan and Chinese troops in the Little Pamir, a high plateau near the Afghan-China border, according to Franz J. Marty in a 3 February 2017 *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst* article, 'The Curious Case of Chinese Troops on Afghan Soil'. Marty wrote, 'The overwhelming evidence leaves virtually no doubt that patrols involving Chinese vehicles and troops were indeed conducted, one can only speculate about the reasons for the Afghan denial. One possibility could be that the central government in Kabul was not aware of what happened in the very remote Little Pamir or that certain Afghan officials

(local, regional or national) knew about the patrols, and maybe even gave permission to the Chinese side, but did not properly notify other responsible Afghan authorities.’

Beside the joint patrol by the Afghan and Chinese troops to prevent Uyghur militants moving into Xinjiang, there had been reports saying China is planning to set up a military base in Badakhshan. This report has been denied more than once by both Beijing and Kabul. Nonetheless, writing in the *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, published by the Jamestown Foundation in Washington, DC, and citing the Fergana News Agency, Paul Goble stated, ‘In January 2018, Afghan General Davlat Vaziri told the Fergana News Agency that Afghanistan’s armed forces were going to establish a new military base in the northern province of Badakhshan, which was made possible thanks to Beijing agreeing to finance and supply the entire project (Fergananeews.com, Jan. 3). The accord was reached when (acting) Afghan Defense Minister Tariq Shah Bahrami visited the Chinese capital at the end of last year.’²¹

Although reports of setting up military bases has been denied by Beijing, it is a fact that Bahrami visited Beijing. Goble wrote that Bahrami’s ‘representatives said in Kabul, on January 2, that China had “agreed on the construction of a military base in the northern province of Badakhshan.” Finally, Fergana notes, the Afghan defense ministry press office said at the time that China had agreed to assume all costs for the arming and equipping of Afghan soldiers at the new base. But now that China has disavowed any such agreement or commitment, Kabul finds itself in a difficult position; and both Afghanistan and neighboring Tajikistan appear worried about just what is likely to happen next (Fergananeews.com, February 6).’ Goble concluded that perhaps because Washington does not want to see a Chinese base in Badakhshan, China is denying plans to build one.

However, China has reason to be worried. According to Goble, who cited unnamed Afghan officials: ‘Uyghurs in northern Afghanistan have developed close ties with their co-ethnics in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan; and having learned of those connections, the Chinese decided they needed a military presence to block a Uyghur resurgence in the countries of Central Asia and in China’s Xinjiang Province.’

Another incident of Uyghur unrest in central Asia was the suicide bomb attack in front of the Chinese Embassy at Bishkek. The suicide bomber whose car rammed the gates of the embassy on 30 August 2016 was an ethnic Uyghur who held a Tajik passport in the name of Zoir Khalilov, the Kyrgyz security service, GKNB, said in a statement. ‘The investigation established that the terrorist act was ordered by Uyghur terrorist groups active in Syria and affiliated to the terrorist organization the Nusra Front whose emissaries . . . financed the terrorist action,’ the GKNB said.²²

CONCLUSION

Despite all the evidence of Uyghur militants’ presence in Syria and likely migration of those fighters to various hiding places in central Asia, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, the situation is most likely not as grave as Chinese officials portray it. It is nonetheless the case that these militants, at least some of them, are receiving training across the border in Pakistan and are building a capability to conduct terrorist acts within China – and thus constitute an implicit threat to Beijing.

An important factor in whether or not this threat materialises is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which is more vibrant now than ever before, having included both India and Pakistan as full members. China is the top gun in the organisation, sharing authority with Russia. The SCO is beginning to emerge as a potential security provider for Eurasia. Along with all of the SCO members, both China and Russia are keen to stabilise the Eurasian region for both security and economic reasons. Under the circumstances, with all the regional countries pitching in to secure the region and the might of Russia and China backing such an effort, it is highly unlikely that a few hundred, or a few thousand, Uyghur militants will be able to destabilise the area.

The threat does exist; Uyghur militants, by aligning themselves with al-Qaeda, have made clear their intention to project themselves as an arm of the international Islamic jihad. Other than China, Russia, and India, all SCO members are Muslim-majority nations. Most central Asian nations practice a type of moderate Islam heavily based on Sufism. Nonetheless,

it is possible that the Uyghur militants, carrying their Islamic flag, could garner covert financial and arms support from wealthy Islamic countries and from wealthy individuals who for their own convoluted reasons would back the Uyghur militancy. That possibility should not be overlooked. Should such a possibility get coupled with the determination of a few thousand trained fighters, it could turn into a real threat.

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Pakistan Rebooted

ASAD DURRANI

Military being an important element of national power, it does have a role in every country's politics – politics here to be understood in the broader sense of making policy. The American and Israeli armies may never have taken over political power, but their input is often decisive in evolving national strategy. Pakistan army, having ruled the country at times directly, and even when not, supposedly shaping some key issues from behind the scenes, is indeed a political player. In my coming book – Pakistan Adrift – co-published by Amazon-Westland in Delhi, I have given my views on the basis of my own experience. Not denying its role, I still contend that the army's role has been exaggerated and its ability to influence Pakistan's politics is limited.

Other than that, I usually avoid writing about, even commenting upon, politics – here in its narrow sense as it plays out domestically. For me, it is too much of hot air and mostly 'more of the same'. And then, of course, my old flames – Afghanistan, India, and the region – keep burning and always have so much more to offer. Openings to Iran and Russia, for example, were so exciting. But indeed, a complete break from internal developments has not been possible. Besides the above-mentioned book, in The Spy Chronicles, which I co-authored with former RAW chief A. S. Dulat, I also had to talk about our party politics, even though only in passing.

Since this piece is primarily about Pakistan's policies in the aftermath of Imran Khan's election as our prime minister, a brief commentary on how it came about may be unavoidable – but the thrust would still be on the implications for the region. Indeed, these have been unusual elections in that the two traditional parties have been resoundingly defeated. And

then looking at the economic mess that the two previous governments have left, I am tempted to recall that during my time as the head of the ISI, I was looking at a similar situation India was facing in 1991. Finally, it seems to be a good platform to put down a few thoughts on what the Indo-Pak relations might look like under our new government. Let me still start with the bigger picture as I have followed it a bit more closely.

Thanks to some good work done by our security establishment during the last decade, Imran starts with a huge advantage on the external front. The equation with Iran has improved since 2010, when both countries joined hands to decimate Jundullah, a Pakistan-based Balochi militant group operating inside Iran with considerable external help. Turnaround in relations with Russia – considering that only about two decades back our countries were locked in deadly embrace in Afghanistan and were in opposite camps in the Cold War – is remarkable. Ironically, a major factor that has brought about this U-turn is our common interest in getting the region rid of the US military presence; the US, if we recall, was our major ally during the Russian occupation of Afghanistan. Of course, it is the fallout of this powerful presence that has compelled the three countries – Iran, Russia, and Pakistan – to forge a common front with China and, lately, with Turkey. And then the situation in Afghanistan is so far out of American control that it might seriously be thinking about getting out of there and is, therefore, no longer breathing down Pakistan's neck for its alleged support to the Taliban.

Though I will deal with our relationship with India in more detail a little later, suffice it to say here that our eastern front has been quiet for a while and Modi is in no mood to heat it up in view of the Indian elections next year. Also, Saudi resentment over Pakistan's refusal to support its doomed policies – confrontation with Iran and Qatar, intervention in the Syrian civil war, and its disastrous war against Yemen – too has cooled down. The Saudi factor in any case has been receding on our radar for some years now. The test of any government, new or old, is however always on the domestic front. Here again, Imran starts with a considerable advantage.

The last time it was nearly 50 years ago that people broke away from clan politics and voted for Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. In the July 2018

elections, this mini-revolution was led by the youth and has seriously dented the Sharif family's stranglehold over the crucial province of Punjab – and that despite the fact that the perceived support of the establishment, which in the past may have been an advantage, was not working in Imran's favour. This time around, the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and the Pakistan Peoples Party, especially the former, tried quite effectively to play the martyr of the military's high-handedness. But then the majority of the voters had been taken for a ride so often in the past that they still voted for the change.

However, Khan is no Bhutto, who was intelligent, experienced, and a universally known political figure and was backed by a competent team (not that his populist antics, feudal mindset, and fascist disposition helped him or us). Moreover, Imran may not be blessed with qualities that have stood many others in good stead: he is not a team player like Ronald Reagan nor a patient and inspiring thinker like Vajpayee; and some who have worked with him in the last two decades have left because of his low 'human relationship index'. But, of course, he has a few attributes that can still be helpful. That he is resolute can be judged by his relentless struggle for political power over the last two decades. He has charisma and some other leadership qualities that helped him in fields as diverse as sports, charitable enterprises, and street politics. And he certainly enjoys plenty of goodwill – a common advantage he shares with Bhutto in terms of what Bhutto had in his initial days in power. Masses are indeed prepared to give him a chance.

THE CHALLENGES ARE STILL DAUNTING

When I earlier referred to the India of 1991, it was because right now, Pakistan is faced with a comparable economic nightmare. The Mumbai stock exchange at the time was collapsing and a country of India's size was left with only a billion dollars in reserve. We thus had reasons to sit back smugly and gloat over the discomfiture of the 'arch rival'. Only two years earlier, we had helped Afghanistan free itself from foreign occupation, and though the American sanctions had been reimposed after the Soviet withdrawal and our democratic regimes were competing with each other to

undo the economic gains of the last three decades, the momentum of the past had not petered out – and the Pakistani rupee after a long time had overtaken the INR.

But before we knew Narsimha Rao, the prime minister elected when Congress won the elections after Rajiv Gandhi's murder, and Manmohan Singh, his finance man, started turning the Indian economy around. Our assessment was that Rao provided the requisite space to Dr. Singh to reform the system and also the political support that the latter needed to ward off resistance from the beneficiaries of the old order.¹ Ever since we have been awaiting such a combination to save our economy from an exploitative system. The Imran Khan–Asad Omer combine – though lacking the experience and the expertise of the Rao–Singh duo – may be the closest we have gotten so far.

Of course, the governance of a country is much more than fiscal reforms and discipline. After all, Ayub Khan's economic miracle that had triggered the aforementioned growth of three decades turned out to be a passing phase. Military power again has never on its own ensured continued stability or prosperity. People much wiser than us have, therefore, often counselled that the ultimate guarantor of sustained progress is an enlightened civil society. Most of our leaders – civil or military – have probably never heard of it. I have no idea how seriously the Khan-led dispensation would address the challenge of character building, but indeed after his electoral success, he has made all the right noises, internally and on the external front.

And that brings me to the subject that might interest the readers the most – Pakistan's relations with India under our new regime. There are reasons that these would not grab any headlines. In *The Spy Chronicles*, Mr. Dulat and I have extensively discussed how our bilateral relations are frozen in time. Essentially, we argued as follows:

Contrary to the prevailing belief, I think some very serious efforts were made during the decades that our countries have coexisted. Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, had accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan to avoid the break-up of India, a fact recognised by some well-known names on both sides of the divide – Maulana Azad, former Indian foreign minister Jaswant Singh, and historian Ayesha Jalal, to name but three. When that

didn't work, he *reluctantly* agreed to the partition but still believed that the two countries would find a way to peacefully co-exist and had, therefore, reportedly kept his house in Mumbai.

Though many developments thereafter were not very helpful, whenever there was a break in the tense environment, some of our wiser leaders would make an effort to open a window: on Kashmir, for example, when Nehru sent Sheikh Abdullah to Pakistan in 1964 or like Ayub Khan's offer of a 'no war pact'. The motivation, of course, came from the high cost of perpetual conflict. The most serious of these efforts resulted in the July 1997 agreement – masterminded I believe by I. K. Gujral, the then Indian prime minister – which became known as the Composite Dialogue. Its design logic was sound: improve the environment by resolving some minor irritants – *low hanging fruits*, as some people may prefer to call them – and then with the confidence gained, start addressing the more complex issues.

Indeed, it took us many years to overcome the teething problems and some other stumbling blocks before the process was formally launched in 2005, with a bus service between the two parts of Kashmir. But when there was no movement in its aftermath even on the simplest of issues like trade and visa regimes – and the bus travel too was impeded time and again – we all had to look deeper in the hole the two countries had dug themselves into.

Deep states are obviously reluctant to rock the boat. Sceptically, one could attribute it to avoiding the onerous task of chartering a new course or risking the comfort level. But then there may be sound grounds for any country to hold fast to a policy evolved over a long period of time – and that too by a strong establishment. Often called a 'status quo' power, also by many from its own strategic community, India indeed has reasons not to let the current equilibrium be disturbed past a manageable limit.

IN BOTH MY BOOKS, I HAVE ARGUED THIS THESIS AS FOLLOWS

'From the Indian view, if the status quo was upset beyond a point, the dynamics of change might spin out of control. Even improved environment could cause concerns in some quarters in Delhi. Pakistan would find more

space and the Kashmiris could become more vocal; might even start believing that under the new paradigm they could achieve something better.

‘India may thus be willing to forego some of the benefits of a more peaceful environment, but it would still be more comfortable vis-à-vis Pakistan. After all, despite the prevailing *no war no peace* atmosphere, India is doing well and being wooed by the world—even indulging in billions of dollars in trade with China. So, why upset the apple cart and not continue to live with the devil it has known! In fact, there was enough number of people from the West in whom some of the decision makers in Delhi confided that if they waited long enough, Pakistan would implode from within.

‘Moreover, peace even when desirable comes at a price: some compromises have to be made in the bargain. At times we find this price higher than that of the conflict. Both the countries have therefore learnt to manage and live with the deadlock.’²

But when Mr. Dulat repeatedly stated that the status quo was more helpful to Pakistan, I had to think again and looked at the post-Burhan Wani Kashmir. Initially, I believed that because of what was happening in the Valley, Pakistan could simply sit back and ‘watch the fun’. Perhaps India would be forced to change its entrenched policy – unless of course it managed to re-establish the status quo at another level!

Pakistan could still have waited out the unrest, but it was obvious that if it continued, and even if we made deliberate efforts not to get involved, there would be fallout on our side of the Line of Control. And it did happen after Uri in 2016 and was followed by what Delhi claimed was a *surgical strike*.

In our book, Dulat reminds me of a *brainstorming* session we had in 2011: ‘having learnt from the 2001 attacks on the Indian Parliament and in Mumbai in 2008 that the traditional responses were inadequate, how could India respond if there was another serious incident sparked by any of the many detractors of Indo-Pak peace efforts?’ Though the two countries had realised that the handle on the bilateral relations was not to be given to *the terrorists* and had already agreed in 2006 to evolve a ‘joint anti-terror mechanism’ (JATM) to address the problem, the fact is that the

JATM was a poor substitute for a political response if the incident was as serious as the one on 26/11. And that is when we came up with the idea of a ‘choreographed response’ to help the two countries tide over such crises.

Whether the post-Uri surgical strike was so strategized or not, I do not know, but Mr. Dulat did say on a TV programme that it was a *perfect surgical strike* – ‘because India needed to do something and Pakistan seemed quite relaxed about it’.

But once again, this stratagem too has an expiry date: may work a small number of times but would gradually lose its credibility. A more durable mechanism, therefore, was also discussed, and I am happy that my old friend Shiv Shankar Menon approved the formula during the discussion when *The Spy Chronicles* was launched in Delhi in May 2018. Its salient points are as follows:

- The two countries should establish a permanent backchannel that would be kept away from the public glare.
- Instead of a confidante of the prime minister from each side, the two countries should nominate someone acceptable to the major political parties, the foreign office, and the military (we were not only thinking of Pakistan but also about India, where the army is increasingly being used to play the bad cop). He/She should select a small team with expertise on foreign, security, and regional affairs.
- The primary tasks would include communication with the other side, exchange of ideas on crisis/conflict management, establishment of rapport to gain the confidence of decision makers, and pre-emption/prevention of panic reactions by either side.
- In crisis situations, harmful moves that might otherwise be politically expedient need to be prevented.
- Conceptually, the formula flows from the conventional wisdom of tasking some wise men to arbitrate between conflicting parties. It can be considered a modified version of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, a Cold War body created to prevent conflicts in Europe that had representatives from countries on either side of the East-West divide. It could also be considered

an adapted form of the traditional jirga, used to facilitate reconciliation between squabbling parties.

- If wisely selected with the right political support and kept in business long enough to learn the ropes and establish mutual trust, this body could evolve an incremental process to move from conflict management to conflict resolution.
- It must not promise too much to score brownie points or seek any attention.
- Its most important attribute would be not to get stuck in an ingrained groove or with preconceived objectives; and it should calibrate its assessment to evolving circumstances.
- After Mumbai, for example, when both governments were stuck, I put myself in the Indian government's position to reflect upon its options. Even with the best of intentions and leadership in Delhi, one could not ignore the enormity and continue business as usual. That's when the recommended group would have come into action and communicate with the other side, and since in the environment obtaining overt moves was problematic, think of something that would keep the momentum on some innocuous track.
- For instance, someone could have suggested that since both Kashmir and terrorism were important issues, how about a joint hydel project in Kashmir to benefit the Kashmiris and the downstream Pakistanis? It would have lowered the temperature and provided the right distraction.
- Call it a fire brigade or some wise men keeping the process on track from behind the scenes. Instead of an out-of-box solution, it is an out-of-box arrangement. In tribal societies though, this is the usual way to address conflicts – some of them even more serious and deadly and which may have gone on for decades or more. Yet when reconciliation happens, it is because of a few people with credibility on both sides.

If Imran takes the suggested structure seriously, it just might be possible to initiate more sustained peace with India. In the long run, I do believe that some in the region would seriously contemplate a South Asian confederation or a European Union model. Since that would be a long way off – Churchill’s *United States of Europe* is still a halfway house – Imran Khan could get the discussion on such subjects going, if for no other reason than to change the mindset.

Notes and References

1. I think this is an effective remedy. Reagan, a man of average faculties, was adjudged the most successful American president of the twentieth century when he selected a good team and ensured that the team’s back was covered from the legislators’ political interests.
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South Korea's 'New South Policy': India's Act East Policy

ALOK KUMAR GUPTA

South Korea announced its 'New South Policy' in November 2017, which has considerable symmetry with the Act East Policy (AEP) that the Indian prime minister Narendra Modi announced immediately after coming to power by transforming India's erstwhile Look East Policy (LEP). Since then, India has been aggressively pursuing its relations with the countries on its east, especially the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members Japan and South Korea. Accordingly, the South Korean initiative has come as a supplement and life breath to Indian foreign policy, which has been making all efforts to improve its ties with the East. Moreover, South Korea has been trying to give a complete overhaul and facelift to its foreign policy with different regions of the world as well as in its extended neighbourhood. The timing of the South Korean change in foreign policy has been in complete synchronisation with India's Act East aspirations. There is also a shift in the strategic and political dynamics on the Korean peninsula, which has led to a change in the geopolitical landscape of north-east Asia. The shifts and changes have thrown a window of opportunities for South Korea as well as challenges. Hectic diplomacy is happening involving directly South Korea, North Korea, and the United States and indirectly China and Russia. Each of these powers is trying to recalibrate its ties with the Korean peninsula and with the others in this set. Economic diplomacy is preceding military diplomacy in this region, excluding otherwise the hot pursuit in South China Sea where China and the United States are standing like gladiators opposing each other. India and South Korea too are endeavouring to expand the ambit of their bilateral relations,

with major emphasis towards enhancing their economic engagement.

South Korean president Moon Jae-In is as dynamic and forward looking as Indian prime minister Narendra Modi. Both leaders have ambitions to provide a strong boost to their countries' economies, expand their global footprints, and strengthen their international and regional personalities. It is in pursuit of these foreign policy imperatives that they have been shaping their foreign policy choices in accordance to with vision. Modi visited South Korea in May 2015, in response to which Moon visited India in July 2018. The visits by both leaders to each other's countries speak volumes about their commitment to improving bilateral ties and redefine their roles in the regional context and the wider global context. A meeting between the two leaders and subsequent talks between them provided them the opportunity to review the entire gamut of India–South Korea bilateral relations and contextualise the same in terms of evolving new challenges and opportunities. This makes it imperative to explore the dynamics of their relationships to better comprehend the necessities for their convergence and future opportunities amidst changing regional and global political and strategic scenarios.

The fact that India and South Korea are endeavouring to expand their partnerships, particularly in the economic domain under the present political dispensation on both sides, is evident from the fact that top leaders from each country visited the other in the recent past. As stated above, Indian prime minister Narendra Modi visited South Korea in May 2015, in response to which South Korean president Moon Jae-In made his maiden four-day visit to India from 8 to 11 July 2018. Undoubtedly, ever since South Korea established formal ties with India in 1973, it has been a valued economic partner for India, with ever-growing bilateral trade and both countries' economic imperatives.¹ Moon's visit was on the 45th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic ties between the two countries. It was in 1950–1953 that India dispatched a medical mission during the inter-Korean war that did commendable work. India–South Korea ties during the Cold War era remained tepid. It was during this era that South Korea experienced a meteoric rise from being a dirt-poor country to becoming an

Organization for Economic Development member state.² South Korea's shift to democracy in 1987 and India's initiatives in terms of the LEP and economic reforms of 1991 provided a renewed momentum to their bilateral relations, especially towards enhancing their economic engagements. This has been given a further push by President Moon's Northeast Asia Plus Community (NEAPC) foreign policy choice, a promise that he made in his election manifesto.

NEAPC is the second arm of his idea of 'cooperative diplomacy' that he enunciated in his manifesto. Its objective is threefold: (i) strengthening Korea-China-Japan trilateral cooperation and assuming six-party talks, (ii) building NEAPC integrating multilateral security cooperation and economic community, and (iii) elevating ASEAN and India as economic, political, and strategic partners at par with four major powers: China, Japan, Russia, and the United States.³ Subsequent to this the Presidential Transition Committee prepared a report on NEAPC which had three components: (i) Northeast Asia Peace Framework, (ii) New Northern Policy, and (iii) New Southern Policy (NSP).⁴ While the first two were already an integral part of Korea's foreign policy, the third one, NSP, was a new addition that spelled out the priorities of South Asia in the foreign policy matrix of South Korea. It is in this context that an evaluation of the same becomes imperative to better assess the challenges and opportunities for India vis-à-vis South Korea.

South Korean companies are household names in India and are now partnering in many of India's flagship projects, like 'Make in India', 'Skill India', 'Digital India', and 'Start-Up India'. South Korea has also made a financial arrangement of \$10 billion for infrastructure development in India. India in order to facilitate and fast-track Korean investments in India's economic activities has set up a cell 'Korea Plus' within India.⁵ Therefore, there are increased activities on both sides to facilitate each other in a number of ways to enhance economic and strategic engagements. The growing convergence makes it imperative to explore and analyse the gamut of bilateral relations between the two countries and its future implications on regional geopolitics and the global order. This author, thus, makes an attempt to put the South Korean president's visit in the proper perspective for a better understanding of the dynamics of the convergence and

engagement between the two nation states as an imperative of Korea's NSP and India's AEP.

GROWING RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIA–SOUTH KOREA: SHIFTS AND CHALLENGES

Indian prime minister Narendra Modi came to power in May 2014 and unfolded his foreign policy choices one after the other. Alongside the 'neighbourhood first' foreign policy choice, his dispensation announced the transformation of the erstwhile LEP into the AEP. Since then, India has been strongly proactive towards expanding its outreach to and engagement with the countries of the east and ASEAN. Therefore, the strong partnership between India and South Korea is undoubtedly a logical extension of India's AEP. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited South Korea in pursuance of his AEP in May 2015. India had concluded the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2010 and a civil nuclear cooperation agreement in 2011 and established a defence wing at the Indian embassy in Seoul in 2012. Modi's visit had elevated India–South Korea's relations to a 'special strategic partnership'. It was during his visit that the Korean government agreed to provide \$10 billion to support India's priority infrastructure sectors.⁶ Since then, the relations between the two countries have expanded along several dimensions, including defence and security.

South Korean president Moon Jae-In came to power in May 2017. It was during his election campaign that Moon pledged that he would elevate ties with India to the level of Korea's relations with the four major powers in and around the Korean peninsula – China, Japan, Russia, and the United States – as stated above. This was a significant departure from Korea's traditional foreign policy and is a timely, even necessary, development.⁷ Even during his tour of three ASEAN countries, Moon outlined his '3Ps' (people, peace, and prosperity) vision to build a people-centred, peace-loving, and mutually prosperous community through the 'New Southern Policy' aimed at boosting ties with India as well as ASEAN member countries.⁸ This was further established during Moon's visit to India when he visited the Akshardham Temple in New Delhi on his first leg and said that India and Korea may be having different cultures, but

the two countries share commonalities in values such as peace, harmony, and unity in diversity.⁹ Therefore, it is an ambitious move by Moon to diversify his diplomatic engagement owing to the changing geopolitical scenario in his proximity and in larger Asia. Undoubtedly, South Korea's new foreign policy choice of 'New Southern Policy' is a hedging strategy amid the US-China tug of war in the region and partly a forward-looking move to address how Korea and India can together meet the demands of a dynamic future.

Both countries also share historical ties that date back over 2,000 years and have been building relations bit by bit since then. South Korean president Roh Moo-Hyun had visited India in 2004, which resulted in the establishment of the 'Long-Term Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity' that paved the way for the commencement of bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations.¹⁰ Therefore, Moon's endeavour is an extension of the close economic ties that the two countries have been sharing. His commitment to build and expand India-South Korea ties is further reiterated by the fact that the Korean National Diplomatic Academy has opened the 'ASEAN-India Research Centre' within its Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security in February 2018 and the government is currently working on an institutional framework that will oversee the development and implementation of the policy.¹¹

It is quite obvious that India and South Korea are moving closer at a fast pace since both countries came to be governed by new political dispensations. There seems to be a strong urge on both sides to enhance economic and strategic engagement, that too at an unprecedented speed. Given their commitment, it seems the relations will soon develop the potential to redefine the regional and global geoeconomics and subsequently the geopolitics. Simultaneously both countries will have tremendous opportunities to develop economically and generate employment for their citizens.

ECONOMIC CONNECTIVITY AND ENGAGEMENT

Bilateral trade between these two countries has remained quite low. This is in spite of the fact that India and South Korea are Asia's third- and

fourth-largest economies respectively. Trade between the two countries hit the \$20 billion mark in 2011, after signing of the CEPA. However, there is a huge trade deficit in South Korea's favour, which is a cause of worry for India.¹² It is this situation probably that is one of the strong reasons that have prompted India to further open up with South Korea. Moon's recent visit is thus an opportunity for South Korea to cultivate a new destination of investment for Korean business communities and an opportunity for India to attract investments in India as well as open windows of investments for Indian business communities. This is indeed the mutual need for both these countries.

South Korea has played a key role in India's economic growth story since the early 1990s, when India liberalised its economy and opened its market. Since then, their economic engagement has come a long way and is expected to grow continuously as there is renewed buoyed spirit on both sides. During President Moon's visit to India, India and South Korea signed 11 agreements to further enhance business ties and more than double their mutual trade, to \$50 billion, by 2030 alongside India's reiteration of its commitment to deepen strategic cooperation between the two countries. The agreements included Internet of Things, artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and anti-dumping,¹³ which are emerging new areas and have prospects of investment and employment.

Moon's visit to India has initiated discussion and engagement on many fronts. Leaders from both countries also asked their respective business communities to expand investment and promote joint ventures. Both sides discussed various issues in the realm of defence and security, AI, and trade besides resolving to work together for regional peace and prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).¹⁴ South Korea is indeed a valued economic partner for India as trade and economic relations have started to gather momentum following the implementation of the CEPA in 2010. Bilateral trade in 2011 crossed \$20 billion, registering a 70 per cent growth over a two-year period. However, bilateral trade declined to \$18.13 billion in 2014–2015, \$16.56 billion in 2015–2016, and \$16.82 billion in 2016–2017, which finally recovered and posted a positive growth of 30 per cent in the first seven months of 2017.¹⁵

According to Statistics Korea, a Korean agency, Indian exports to the country accounted for \$2.91 billion and imports accounted for \$8.707 billion during January–July 2017, marking a growth of 26 per cent and 30.1 per cent, respectively. Upgrading and revising the CEPA was mandated by both leaders in 2015, and both countries initiated negotiations to upgrade the CEPA to enhance bilateral trade between the two countries.¹⁶ Therefore, economic relations between these two countries have seen several ups and downs, yet willingness to arrest the decline and move forwards has never been lagging.

Investments from South Korea are increasing, despite the severe setback caused by the Posco experience. Posco is a South Korean steel giant that has not been able to execute a \$12 billion investment in Odisha and pulled out last year, after 12 years of waiting for approvals. Major conglomerates, such as Samsung, Hyundai Motors, and LG, have made significant investments in India, estimated at over \$4.43 billion (as of March 2017). Kia Motors, a sister company of Hyundai Group, has announced \$1.1 billion investment to set up a manufacturing unit in Andhra Pradesh, and Samsung Electronics announced a \$760 million investment to expand production facilities in India. There are 603 large and small Korean firms that have offices in India.¹⁷ Investments too have seen ups and downs, yet the spirit to work on the same with ever-greater vigour has never deterred the business communities on both sides because there is strong political will among political leaders on both sides for several reasons, discussed later. Korea has shown interests in India's 100 'smart cities mission' and industrial corridors. Moon's visit became a landmark in India–South Korea relations when heads of both these countries together inaugurated the biggest unit of mobile manufacturing 'Samsung' in the Noida city of Uttar Pradesh.

SAMSUNG INDIA: POTENTIAL FOR EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC BOOST

Samsung announced on 9 July 2018 that it will double the capacity of its mobile phone factory in Noida, making it the largest phone factory in the world. The factory is spread over an area of 35 acres. According to reports

in the media, this will provide 1,000 more jobs directly. Modi and Moon together inaugurated the plant, which will produce up to 120 million smartphones every year.¹⁸ About 30 per cent of all phones made in the new unit will be exported. India's growing middle class is a huge opportunity for mobile companies. Today, India is the second-largest mobile manufacturing hub in the world, with 120 mobile factories; it was just two in 2014. Out of the 120 factories, 50 are in Noida.¹⁹ Samsung is indeed a rare blend of South Korean technology and Indian manufacturing capabilities. The project is indeed an achievement and would provide a great boost to India's relations with South Korea. It will further raise the level of economic connectivity between the two.

JOINT VISION STATEMENT

Modi and Moon together announced a shared vision for building a new era of India-Korea special strategic partnership. The vision spells out a number of initiatives in the foreign policy and strategic realm. It reflects regional anxieties and tensions and a shared approach to address the same. Together they emphasised freedom of navigation, overflight, and unimpeded lawful commerce, resolving disputes on the basis of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and international law, as well as containment of the proliferation of WMD, which is a shared priority.²⁰

The two countries had signed a framework of cooperation in the areas of road transportation and highways and another MoU in maritime transport and logistics during Modi's visit to South Korea. The two sides are now eyeing development and infrastructure projects in countries such as Afghanistan.²¹ This symbolises a shared interest in the joint capacity-building programme in Afghanistan. The leaders of both interacting countries also pledged to strengthen various elements of military-to-military cooperation through areas like training, exchanges, and research and development. However, all is not smooth as Korean companies have been citing problems in doing business in India, despite a special 'Korea Plus' desk set up by the Prime Minister's Office in 2015, as stated above. Tourism between the two countries has always been low, and strategically

both are preoccupied with tensions in their immediate neighbourhoods and ties with the big world powers rather than with each other.²²

Therefore, what becomes obvious from the economic engagements and joint vision released during Moon's visit to India is that both countries have rightly identified the areas in accordance with their stated goals of national interests and regional environment and have been engaging each other to march forward. They have also identified the new areas in which they need to cooperate and work together to reap benefits in the future.

UNFREEZING GEOPOLITICS ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

Changing equations and strategic environment on the Korean peninsula on account of convergence between the two Koreas and the commencement of constructive engagement between North Korea and the US has thrown a new challenge before the Indian diplomatic community. Accordingly, India needs to comprehend and analyse the changing equations on the peninsula and start redesigning its diplomatic interventions in a manner that enables it to play its due role in peace making and nurturing its own relations to further national interest. Undoubtedly, the development on the Korean peninsula is a strategic one and would have major implications for India.

Accordingly, General V. K. Singh, minister of state for external affairs, Government of India, met North Korean officials in Pyongyang in May 2018 and held discussions on a host of issues with Kim Yong Dae, vice president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly; Ri Yong Ho, foreign minister; Pak Chun Nam, minister of culture; and Choe Hui Chol, vice foreign minister of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The discussion included political, regional, economic, educational, and cultural cooperation between the two countries. It has been speculated that Mr. Singh's visit was preceded by a historic diplomatic breakthrough when Moon Jae-In and his North Korean counterpart, Kim Jong Un, signed a peace treaty to remove nuclear weapons from their backyards.²³ However, later, India's external affairs minister, Ms. Sushma Swaraj, made it clear in a press conference that while India did not intend to play the

role of a mediator between the US and North Korea, it would continue to nurture its democratic ties with the former.²⁴ Thus India seems to have geared up its diplomatic machinery to play its role. On the other hand, Moon before his visit to India had sent former cultural minister Chung Dong-chea as special envoy to India to explain his diplomatic vision and deliver his wish for enhanced bilateral relations. This was followed by the official announcement of the NEAPC policy in November 2017.

India, on its part, has asserted its place as a 'stakeholder' in the Korean peace process and a beneficiary too, while South Korea has for the first time shown an interest in talking about an Indo-Pacific policy. This indeed is a welcome move for both sides.

There is another serious dimension of the North Korean nuclear proliferation that is a major cause of concern for India. There are reports of established linkages between north-east Asia and South Asia in the field of nuclear proliferation. The proliferation linkages between the two said regions is a serious security concern for India. The alliances between North Korea, China, and Pakistan have led to the building of the North Korea nuclear programme. It was in this context that Prime Minister Modi revealed to President Moon in a veiled reference that India too is a stakeholder in the Korean peace process.²⁵ India thus expressed its willingness to play its role in the on-going peace process on the Korean peninsula. President Moon, while discussing the peace process on the Korean peninsula with Mr. Modi, expressed his confidence about the positive outcome of the talks in spite of bumps and bruises along the way. This revealed his willingness that India too could play a constructive role in it and thus it provides an opportunity to India to further broaden its global footprint and Asian personality.

GROWING CONNECTIVITY: CAUSES AND IMPERATIVES

The recent visit of the South Korean president reveals South Korea's foreign policy development under Moon and its efforts to strengthen ties with regional states and has been cast as part of Moon's 'New Southern Policy', focused on India and ASEAN. This also gels well with Modi's

AEP and its recent aspirations in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, there are critical shifts in their foreign policies which have opened new vistas of immense possibilities for the future. Both countries agreed to upgrade their economic partnership CEPA, trade remedies, railway safety research, cyber strategy, and cultural exchanges and signed a joint vision statement on strategic ties in the region. There is thus a renewed spurt in the bilateral relations.

Therefore, it makes it important to understand what has made it imperative to enhance the level of engagement and top-level summits between the two countries in the recent past, especially under the present political dispensations. There are several reasons for the same.

One, despite formal announcement of a strategic partnership a decade ago, India and South Korea have struggled to impart any considerable real content to it. Now both Mr. Modi and Moon have an opportunity to change that scenario. On his part, Moon has announced a 'New Southern Policy' that looks beyond north-east Asia to focus on south-east Asia, Australia, and India.²⁶ Modi's AEP has a much wider theatre by now, that is, the Indo-Pacific, for which he had to extend his outreach to as many countries as possible. Accordingly, South Korea is one more in this keg.

Two, both countries urgently need to strengthen their economic partnership. As a trade war unfolds between the world's major economies, India and South Korea have an urgent need to liberalise their own bilateral trade relations. Amidst the unfolding technological disruption of the global economy, South Korea and India have a stake in binding the innovation ecosystems of the two countries.²⁷ Improving business and investment ties was one of the chief bilateral agendas of the recent visit in view of the fact that the bilateral trade witnessed a slump during 2014–2016, as enumerated above. Accordingly, both leaders agreed to double their bilateral trade from current level of \$20 billion to \$50 billion by 2030, as stated above. Moreover, India has been worried about its trade deficit with South Korea, which stood at \$12 billion in 2017, whereas the Korean business community was complaining about problems in the 'ease of doing business' in India.²⁸ Since both countries have been facing hiccoughs in their bilateral trade engagements, they needed to address this at the highest level.

Three, both these countries need to focus on expanding bilateral security and defence cooperation and working together with other countries to promote a stable Asian balance of power system. Therefore, they must focus on building flexible middle power coalitions in Asia to limit the impact of the current volatility in the relations between the US and China.²⁹ This is more relevant given the fact of Asian balance of power where India is continuously trying to contest China's attempt at keeping Asia as unipolar as it is in its favour, China being the sole super power on the continent. The US, under its 'Pivot to Asia' foreign policy choice, is improving ties with and supporting countries that have the potential to check Chinese dominance in Asia and its vicinity.

Four, Moon, as president of South Korea, was truly instrumental in breaking the ice between the US and North Korea, that is, in Trump and Kim meeting to ease the ever-tense relations and save the Korean peninsula as well as many other Asian countries. Moon may be still apprehensive about a disruption of the dialogue between North Korea and the US leading to further escalation of the conflict. The fact remains that it is quite difficult to synchronise the implementation of the American technical demands for a quick and comprehensive denuclearisation and the North Korean agenda on political and military trust building. Therefore, he is out on a diplomatic mission to ensure that North Korea's promise of denuclearisation is sustained and taken to its logical conclusion. India could be truly instrumental in that as India being the country with the second-largest population on the earth a favourable public mood in India in favour of denuclearisation of North Korea would really help Moon in his endeavour. The changing geopolitics of Korean peninsula has opened a new window of great opportunity for India where it can play a role and enhance its international personality as it has been instrumental earlier also. India maintained balanced relations with both North Korea and South Korea even during the Cold War. India has always maintained its diplomatic mission in North Korea and thus has influence on North Korea. India being a leading global power has great influence on world politics; it has a voice in the Korean peninsula as well and has always played a constructive role under situations of conflict and animosities. When North Korea suffered from famine, India provided food articles. Therefore, it has

leverage and considerable engagement in issues of Korean peninsula, which would be of great help to Moon's mission of peace and subsequent unification of South and North Korea. India thus can even today hammer out peace in the peninsula. Since Moon is seeking reconciliation with the North, India could be instrumental towards the realisation of that dream of Moon.

Five, when India adopted the policy of liberalisation to integrate its economy with the global economy and reap the benefits of globalisation in the 1990s, South Korea became an important participant in India's economic rejuvenation. However, post-Soviet Union, Russia and China stepped up their collaboration with the economic powerhouse that South Korea had become, thereby leading to the isolation of North Korea. Subsequently, North Korea started developing nuclear capability as an insurance against the loss of old communist allies. This made the South Asian subcontinent also a part of the strategy owing to convergence for atomic quest between North Korea and Pakistan. This worsened the relations between North Korea and India, with growing collaboration between North Korea and Pakistan for nuclear and missile cooperation. Therefore, when South Korea is trying to cement its ties with North Korea, even India may do so. Therefore, convergence between South Korea and India will lead to cementing of ties between North Korea and India as well.

The sixth rationale in the convergence of the two is that Moon is trying to diversify South Korea's relations, particularly with significant countries in the region beyond just China.³⁰ This indeed is a timely and necessary development in the Korean foreign policy to lessen its over-dependence on China, which has grown over the last couple of decades. This is obvious from the fact that when a comparison is made regarding South Korea's relations with India and China, it is found that South Korea's trade with China was \$240 billion while with India it was mere \$20 billion. Similarly, Korean investment in India was \$6.8 billion, including Samsung and LG, while in China it was \$57 billion. Therefore, South Korea is all out to seize the opportunities that the Indian market provides. Only the future will reveal the extent of potential that is there; for now, both are converging to even the score in their own favour.

Seven, the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific have been changing in the recent past, as is evident from the nomenclature itself. The expectation of both Modi and Moon would have been to drive the bilateral relationship from an economic and trade perspective to a security and strategic perspective. Though the bilateral engagements and agreements signed by the two sides reveal that economic and commercial ties dominated the relationship, there are strong overtones of security and strategic concerns given the changing geopolitical dynamics in South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific. Both South Korea and India need each other to extend their outreach to address their growing strategic concerns in the region.

Eight, recently there have been accusations of China flying military aircraft into the Korean air defence identification zone without providing prior notification. This may be a glimpse of China's combative reactions to the South Korean decision to deploy a US Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system in South Korea. Thus, Chinese actions have shaken South Korea's confidence in China. Though China and South Korea relations have shown signs of warming up, South Korea's quest for a broader foreign policy approach are quite obvious in Moon's endeavours to expand outreach. South Korea thus is in need of new strategic partners amidst the changing geopolitical scenario in its Asian vicinity. India is one such partner that could be cultivated to suit Korea's strategic national interest.³¹

Nine, given the scale of economic development that South Korea has achieved by now, it is also in dire need of new markets. This has come as a corollary of the previous reason as South Korea's business was hit hard owing to China's reactions to US THAAD deployment. Accordingly, it has forced South Korea to look for diversifying its economic presence and India offers plentiful opportunities to this effect.³² India offers a huge export market for South Korea, and this can indeed provide a strong boost to India–South Korea economic relations to reach newer heights.

Ten, both countries could also cooperate in areas of defence technology. South Korea's expertise in developing high-end defence electronics should be of particular interest to India. One of the agreements signed during Moon's visit to India pertains to defence industry collaboration. Last year, they signed an agreement for the development of

artillery guns under the 'Make in India' initiative.³³ They have also agreed to enhance their military exchanges and experience sharing and research and development, including innovative technologies, for mutual benefit. One Korean defence manufacturer Hanwha Techwin has partnered with Larsen and Toubro to produce K-9 Vajra artillery guns for the Indian army at a factory near Pune.³⁴ This is well in accordance with Mr. Modi's endeavour to promote his 'Make in India' programme. Though it won't be without hurdles, there are ample opportunities in the field of defence production to collaborate.

CONCLUSION

India and South Korea have suffered mutual political neglect for a long time. Meanwhile, South Korea has emerged as a large economic powerhouse and a member of the developed nations. The worldview of South Korea has largely remained riveted on north-east Asia. Both India and South Korea are now trying to recalibrate their ties with neighbours and the extended neighbourhood to provide a fillip to their foreign policy choice and vision of national interests in the fast-changing world and their respective priorities. India in the recent past has started nursing the notion of an Indo-Pacific and an aspiration to transform the Indian Ocean as its sphere of influence as also India's Ocean. South Korea, which was not at the top of its regional priorities in Asia for some time, has now acquired a renewed importance in view of its changing foreign policy priorities. Now both are in need of each other on account of their economic and strategic ambitions. Therefore, it is quite obvious that both are making efforts to expedite their multifaceted engagements.

India now seems to be a central pillar of President Moon's foreign policy choice of 'New Southern Policy', and he wants to elevate Korea's relations with India to the same level as it has with China, Japan, the US, and Russia, as discussed above. Therefore, it has opened a new horizon to Indian economy which needed to be tapped and put considerable substance into it. Moon's endeavour will certainly gear up the relationship between the two countries. The bilateral vision statement has also revealed commitment to building a peaceful, stable, secure, free, open, inclusive

and rules-based region, incorporating President Moon's slogan of 3Ps: people, prosperity, and peace. His visit will thus expand cooperation with India and would help develop strategic understanding, cultural appreciation, and people-to-people engagement. Once it succeeds, it shall have a tremendous potential to generate employment for both interacting countries. Both countries have tremendous opportunities to enhance cooperation in areas such as technology, cyber security, tourism, defence, and culture, which must not be lost sight of.

India's global footprint has been growing. India under the present political dispensation has been investing in relationship both in the region, which has been helping it to minimise the polarisation of confrontation, and also in the larger global community. India has set a goal for itself to become a \$5 trillion economy, for which it is in dire need of foreign investments and cooperation in the field of infrastructure projects, heavy industries, and skilled professionals. Undoubtedly, Moon's vision of people, peace, and prosperity is no different from that of Modi's *sabka saath, sabka vikas*. Under the given circumstances of both countries' needs and aspirations, it is an excellent move that the two countries are recalibrating their ties to further their national interests.

A clear road map is the need of the hour. Undoubtedly, Samsung will bring investments and create jobs in India. However, more Korean companies should be persuaded to invest by projecting a counter-narrative to the failed bid by the steel company Posco to set up its plant in Odisha. All is not lost because of the Posco fiasco, either for India or for South Korea. This should be treated as an isolated case and not a norm.

At a time when US foreign policy is capricious and unpredictable and China's is making purposeful moves towards global domination, it is important that the South Korea–India partnership grows and consolidates in order to contribute to stability in the region. Hurdles are there and will be there in future as well, but the spirit to move forwards is important. Leaders on both sides have the political will to prevail under all circumstances, and that shall pay rich dividends. India continues to be a new frontier for the Republic of Korea's strategic and business interests. Indeed, South Korea is yet another major addition to India's AEP. The AEP is thus on the right track and has been progressing. India has strong

leverages in terms of a huge domestic market, a large pool of labour, and relatively low wages and hence would be an attractive investment and production destination for multinational enterprises and economic powerhouses, like South Korea. Accordingly, the AEP has a better and progressive future, which would help India to maximise upon its economic national interests and enhance cultural connectivity.

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