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**Monthly Compilation of Views of  
VIF Expert Groups**

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**U.S Elections  
China-Japan  
VIF-ISAS Book Discussion  
West Asia  
Pakistan**

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Edited by Aayush Mohanty



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## Editor's Note

The month of September saw the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) hosting members of various Expert Groups via video conferencing. In spirit, the discussions' were about legacy as they elaborated on the upcoming U.S elections, Prime Minister Abe resigning as the Prime Minister of Japan, and Bangladesh celebrating 50 years of independence next year. Other deliberations also included the major events in Pakistan as well as significant developments in West Asia.

VIF and the Institute of South Asian Studies jointly organised the book discussion on *Bangladesh at 50*. The book acts as a primer for aspiring international relations experts, mainly focusing on South Asia to learn about Bangladesh's past, present, and future comprehensively. The VIF would again like to thank Prof. C. Raja Mohan, Director ISAS for giving his time to moderate and help co-organise this book discussion.

The U.S Expert's Group discussed various post-U.S election scenarios, while China Expert's Group delved deep into the legacy of Shinzo Abe, especially in the context of Sino-Japan relations. In detail, the newly constituted West Asia Expert's Group discussed

Abraham Accords that promises to stabilise the region further. The Pakistan Expert's Group meanwhile discussed the Pakistan Government's mismanagement of its economy as well as maintaining double standards on the newly instituted "anti-corruption" drive to achieve PM Khan's vision of "Naya Pakistan."

The Vivekananda International Foundation's Expert Groups and the researchers associated with this group have tirelessly worked over September to coordinate, collate research and later comprehensive reports in a pristine manner.

Aayush Mohanty

New Delhi

5 October 2020

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### The Legacy of Shinzo Abe

*Summary of remarks by Ambassador Deepa Wadhwa  
on Japan-China Relations*

*The Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) hosted the Experts Group of China on September 24, 2020. Amb Ashok Kantha moderated the meeting. Attendees of the Experts Group meeting were Dr. Arvind Gupta, Lt Gen Ravi Sawhney, Amb Deepa Wadhwa, Amb Anil Wadhwa, Amb Arun Singh, Mr. Jayadeva Ranade, Amb R. Rajagopalan, Amb TCA Rangachari, Prof Sujit Dutta, and Dr. Sanjeev Kumar. The agenda for discussion set by the Experts group on China for discussion was “Japan-China Relations: Legacies of Shinzo Abe.”*

Prime Minister Abe continued the Japanese policy of Seikei Bunri, the separation of politics and economics, as the guiding principle of Japan-China relations. The bilateral relationship has been characterised by some as ‘cold politics and hot economics’ while showing the capacity of both to compartmentalise relations. However, China violated it on occasion with violent protests following the Senkaku nationalisation, demonstrations when senior Japanese leaders visited the Yasukuni Shrine. In response, Beijing weaponised rare earth exports after a Chinese captain’s arrest following a collision with a Japanese Coast Guard ship in 2010.

On his return to office in December 2012, Shinzo Abe inherited the lowest point in bilateral relations. The DPJ government’s move to purchase three of the five islands on 11 September 2012, from the private owner, Kunioko

Kurihara, sparked off the Senkaku standoff between the two countries, seriously affected relations.

However, he has been credited with working assiduously to normalise relations, and succeeding in reinstating high-level exchanges from both sides, leading to his visit to Beijing in October 2018 and a proposed visit by President Xi Jinping to Tokyo in April 2020.

In the first year upon taking office in 2012, Abe focussed on deterrence and strengthening the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Forces (MSDF) and Coast Guards by framing a new island defence strategy. In Dec 2013, he visited the Yasukuni Shrine as the Prime Minister, sparking anticipated condemnation from China. Nevertheless, early 2014 saw a deliberate change of track, when in a policy speech at the Diet, Abe spoke of the need to improve relations with China. His tone was markedly conciliatory, and he followed this by sending senior pro-China LDP leaders, Yasuo Fukuda and Toshihiro Nikkai, to China. As a result of his efforts, high-level consultations on the Senkaku were held in November 2014, which produced a 'Four-point Principled Agreement' between Japanese NSA, Shiotaro Yachi, and State Councilor Yang Jiechi on improving Japan-China relations. On the Senkaku issue, the two sides' different positions were acknowledged in the otherwise anodyne document, which was principally meant to signal that the two sides recognised the need to end further deterioration in relations. This was also when Abe visited Beijing to attend the APEC summit and met Xi Jinping in the margins though the reception was apparently frosty. Abe tenaciously sought bilateral meetings with the Chinese leader at the opportunities provided by such multilateral events, including Hangzhou, in September 2016, which contributed to the eventual thaw. China's influence on North Korea has been cited as another reason why Abe gave primacy to improving relations with China. He believed China could prevail on North Korea on both the missile programme and return of Japanese abductees, two high priority issues in Japan.

The turning point came in 2017 when Abe sent Toshihiro Nikkai to attend the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation with a message which held out the promise of possible cooperation on BRI projects. Abe repeated this in the “Future of Asia Conference” in Tokyo in June 2017, predicating possible cooperation on four conditions; transparency, debt sustainability, economic viability, and the rule of law. This led the way to a telephone call between Xi Jinping and Shinzo Abe, during which a breakthrough was made to reinstate high-level bilateral exchanges. Abe paid an official bilateral visit to Beijing in October 2018 (after a hiatus of 7 years), to coincide with the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of signing the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between them. A total of 52 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) were signed during the visit for cooperation between Japan and China in third countries under Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). (Notably, they all remained unimplemented). Significantly, signaling collaboration in infrastructure financing, an MoU was signed between Japan Bank of International Cooperation (JBIC) and China Development Bank (CDB) to develop high-speed rail connectivity and a smart industrial park in the Thai Eastern Economic Corridor. Xi Jinping’s visit to Tokyo, planned for April 2020, had to be postponed because of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, China has kept up its relentless transgressions of the air space and East China Sea waters around the Senkaku islands. In 2019, there were 1004 intrusions recorded, and till August 2020, violations of Japan’s air space and water had been carried out for 111 consecutive days. This has not gone down well in Japan, leading to calls for the cancellation of Xi Jinping’s visit by a group of parliamentarians, some of whom have also proposed joint patrols with the U.S. Navy in East China.

The economic dimension of the relationship has continued to thrive and grow, despite a brief downward trend soon after the Senkaku dispute erupted, followed by violent demonstrations and attacks on Japanese businesses in China with official patronage, no doubt. Japanese Foreign Direct Investment in China stands at US\$130 billion, contributing to the presence of around 35,000 Japanese companies. Two-way trade is around

US\$350 billion, with China accounting for 20 per cent of Japan's trade. Out of 32 million tourists visiting Japan in 2019, 9 million were Chinese with high spending capacities. Notably, one-third of international students in Japan are Chinese. In 2018 there were reportedly 800,000 Chinese residents in Japan, many who have come as students and stayed on, or those brought under the Technical Intern Training Programme (TITP).

During the initial phase of the COVID19 outbreak, great empathy was exhibited by both countries with exchanges of medical supplies, equipment, and poetry in appreciation of each other. Japanese were evacuated from Wuhan on priority. However, later, there was a realisation in Japan that COVID19 had affected essential supply chains, which revealed a high level of economic dependency on China. PM Abe then spearheaded some course correction calling for re-shoring Japanese companies in China, dealing with critical goods and diversification of supply chains. He set up a US\$2.2 billion fund to assist Japanese companies to move back to Japan, 10 per cent of which has been allocated for their move to ASEAN countries. Bangladesh and India have been added to the list recently. In the debate on the decoupling of economies leading Japanese industrialists, including Keidanren's current head, have publicly disagreed with the government.

Simultaneously, seeking to bring Japan-China relations back on track, PM Abe, mindful of growing Chinese military assertiveness, continued to shore up Japan's security and military responses by strengthening the US-Japanese alliance. Abe worked hard to deepen relations with the U.S. under both Presidents Obama and Trump. Competing with China's BRI and targeting China's rise, Abe articulated his Free and Open Indo Pacific vision. After an initial unsuccessful attempt in 2007, Abe, upon his return, resurrected the QUAD. During his eight years in office, Japan has pursued naval and military exercises with the U.S., Australia, and India and joined the Malabar exercise as a permanent participant. Alongside this, Abe also steadily increased Japan's defence budget, including strengthening capabilities in "new spheres" of cyber, outer space, and electronic warfare. Plans were initiated to start fighter aircraft development to succeed the

F-2s in cooperation with the U.S. and U.K. While plans for the U.S. Missile Defence Aegis Ashore system had to be abandoned due to technical and cost-related reasons, PM Abe has ensured that alternate options will be pursued before leaving office. He left alive the idea of missile interceptors with controversial pre-emptive strike capabilities on missile bases in other countries under the rubric of self-defence.

It is interesting to follow how India figures in the Japan-China equation.

Statements on the Doklam stand-off, the deaths in Galwan valley, and Chinese attempted incursions in East Ladakh have been issued by the Japanese ambassador in New Delhi, using the mantra that “Japan opposes any unilateral attempts to change status quo.” Japan continues to be cautious about Chinese sensitivities when it comes to development cooperation projects in Arunachal Pradesh. Post COVID19, with the talk of diversification of supply chains, and Atmanirbhar Bharat, the pressure will build on Japanese companies that manufacture in China for the Indian market, especially in the automotive sector.

To sum up, PM Shinzo Abe was able to further Japan’s economic and security interests and balance both Japan’s dependence on China for economic growth and that on the U.S. for security. He improved relations with China while recognising it as a growing and major security threat and acting by strengthening alliances, building new partnerships and strengthening Japan’s military preparedness.

## **The U.S, European and Transatlantic responses to the China Challenge**

Compiled by Himani Pant

*The growing assertiveness of China amid the COVID-19 pandemic has been a cause of concern for Washington and the major European capitals. However, owing to their growing antagonism and differences of approach, both sides are yet to develop a common transatlantic strategy in dealing with China. To understand the U.S, European, and the scope of transatlantic responses towards China, the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) organised interaction of the U.S. Expert Group with a senior researcher associated with a prominent think tank in Berlin on September 2, 2020. The discussion was moderated by VIF Director, Dr. Arvind Gupta. Participants included distinguished members of the group, including Amb. Arun K Singh, Lt. Gen. Ravi Sawhney, Amb. Anil Wadhwa, Amb. Kanwal Sibal, Lt Gen Anil Ahuja, Vice Admiral Satish Soni, Prof. KP Vijayalakshmi, Dr. Rudra Chaudhuri, Dr. Harinder Sekhon, and Mr. Pranav Kumar.*

### **Evolution of European debate on China**

Europe's misgivings about China gained momentum some five years ago as the latter began to make considerable inroads in the European market without reciprocating with the same access to its domestic market. Based on the thoughts that emerged during the discussion, the resultant debate over China's economic engagement in Europe could be divided into three phases.

*The first phase* in this context began in 2015-16 and lasted up to early 2019. China, which was viewed as a lucrative market in Europe, released its “Made in China” strategy. The policy was aimed at increasing Chinese state control in key industries to solidify its economic control domestically. This effectively limited the scope of European companies in the Chinese market. At the same time, Beijing began to acquire stakes in some of Europe’s major companies, the most notable being the 2016 acquisition of German robotics maker Kuka. This was a crucial moment of reckoning for Germany and other European countries about the lack of a level playing field in their economic engagement with China. At this juncture, countries like France and Germany began a pushback and advocated for some checks and controls to limit China’s expansion in the European market. These efforts culminated in establishing a framework for the screening of Foreign Direct Investments by the European Union in March 2019. Another notable event in this phase was the launch of an E.U. Connectivity strategy in 2018. It was seen mainly as the bloc’s response to China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), enabling it to make further economic inroads in Europe. Furthermore, this phase also witnessed the beginning of a debate about Huawei and the 5G network. Finally, in March 2019, the European Commission and the European External Action Service jointly released a strategic outlook on China, describing China as a partner, a competitor, and a ‘systemic rival.’

*The second phase* followed the release of the strategic outlook and lasted until early 2020. This period manifested wavering characteristics amid growing concern in Europe about the escalation in the US-China relationship. It was also felt that the tag of a ‘systemic rival’ was driving a negative narrative and needed to be scaled back. There was also a European desire to preserve a global balance to avert complete isolation of China.

*The third phase* began amid the spread of COVID-19 to Europe and other parts of the world earlier this year. China’s assertive behaviour, coupled with its disinformation about the origins of the virus and its mask diplomacy, met with a strong reaction in Europe. China was seen as leveraging its position as a mask and ventilator producer to its political advantage by

creating frictions within European countries. Also, statements by Chinese ambassadors against critics contributed towards a negative sentiment towards Beijing. At the same time, Europe has been observing China's assertiveness in different regions, including at the Himalayan border with India, its violations of human rights in Xinjiang and other regions, and the imposition of a national security law on Hong Kong closely. These factors have played a decisive role in forming Europe's opinion on China.

### **Scope of a transatlantic response towards China**

Both Washington and the major European capitals view China as a geopolitical and economic challenge and realise that China does not comply with fair and level playing rules. However, there are notable differences in their responses to the growing China challenge. While there is a recognition in Europe that China's economic engagement merits a relook, complete decoupling is seen as unrealistic. There is little consensus in Europe with respect to isolating China- popular opinion is to remain engaged with Beijing on a host of issues like climate change, public goods, health issues, etc. There is also a deep concern and resistance against the strong rhetoric emanating from the current U.S administration, which has fostered a narrative of the clash of civilisation, cold war, etc. In this respect, the future of U.S approach to China depends on the outcome of the presidential election in November. The election outcome would play a significant role in how Europe positions vis-à-vis the U.S. and China and the potential for transatlantic cooperation on China. Three scenarios could be envisioned in this regard:

1. *Trump wins*- Trump's second term in the Oval Office is likely to thrust Europe into a hedging role as it would lie squeezed between two hostile superpowers. It would be reluctant to confront China when it feels it cannot rely on the U.S. This would likely also accelerate the push for strategic autonomy for which it has traditionally depended on the U.S. Europe would attempt to build bridges with other democratic countries like Japan, Canada, Australia, and India. Thus, a growing rift in transatlantic

- ties would serve to China's advantage as it would ensure Europe's neutral position.
2. *Biden grand bargain scenario*- where Biden would win the election and recommit itself to NATO, to the E.U., and the transatlantic relationship and Paris climate accord. In exchange, Europe would raise its defence spending and pledge to work with the U.S. against China. This would facilitate a collective transatlantic action against China's BRI, FDI screening, technology, digital standards, and more security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.
  3. *Muddle through scenario*- where Biden wins, but there would be a divided administration. In this case, the inward focus promulgated under Trump would continue, and efforts to repair ties with Europe and other allies would be only moderately successful.

The likely outcome is largely expected to be somewhere between the second and third, that is, in between the grand bargain and the muddle-through scenarios. Biden is most likely to be preoccupied with domestic affairs, and there are even possibilities of a constitutional crisis in the country. Under this scenario, Washington would continue to be an unreliable partner for Europe. The European attempts towards strategic autonomy would be a key feature in this scenario. For instance, Paris and Berlin have already adopted their respective strategies for the Indo-Pacific region, reflecting a growing European sentiment to balance China. There is a realisation that Europe needs to engage with other countries in the Indo-Pacific both for economic and security reasons in order to offset China's growing presence in the region.

Nevertheless, there is no single European policy or position on China. The members of the European Union have different positions and differences of opinion on China. The East-West divide is also an essential factor owing to China's engagement with central and Eastern European countries. However, it has also been observed that these countries (part of the 17+1 group) have begun experiencing a certain extent of disenchantment owing

to China's less than the committed level of engagement with the group. For Europe to harness these opinions, it needs to come out with a coherent policy and single voice regarding China. Such response calls for a better relationship with the U.S. At the same time, the U.S. strategy on China would be more successful if Europeans were a part of it, and if there were a possibility of a common transatlantic strategy. Therefore, both sides need to work out a mechanism to effectively deal with China at the bilateral level and at the United Nations and other international organisations to counter China's advances. In turn, this cooperation depends on the course that the transatlantic partnership takes in the post-US election scenario. The exit of Angela Merkel from German politics is also an essential development in this respect.

## Bangladesh at 50: Development and Challenges

*Edited by S Narayan and Sreeradha Datta*

Compiled by Dr. Sreeradha Datta

*On 28 September 2020, the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) and Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore (ISAS-NUS) jointly organised a book discussion on “Bangladesh at 50: Development and Challenges” edited by Drs S.Narayan and Sreeradha Datta. The VIF’s Director - Dr. Arvind Gupta, welcomed the participants referring to Bangladesh’s journey of transition from a Least Developed Country (LDC) to a developing country as an ongoing and outstanding achievement. Prof. Raja Mohan, Director ISAS, moderated the discussion, and Prof Rahman Sobhan, who had a foreword, spoke at lengths about the growth trajectory and the political processes in Bangladesh.*

Bangladesh will be fifty years old in 2021, and the last fifty years has been a remarkable journey for that country. It had been given up as destined to remain in poverty, and yet, over the last five decades, has demonstrated an ability to grow and develop that has outpaced its South Asian neighbours ( including India) on several parameters. Today, it is one of the fastest developing countries in Asia is transitioning to a middle-income country. Interestingly, there is not much written about this country’s development story, apart from multilateral agency reports.

There are different facets to this story. At one end, there has been considerable political turmoil, and it is only in the last decade that there is a continuity in Governance, and the opposition is driven to disarray. There

has also been a growth of fundamental Islam, mostly since the eighties when Saudi influence was palpable in developing madrassas and mosques in the wake of the oil boom. There have been challenges in foreign policy, with the BNP and the Awami League ideologies taking quite different views about engaging with India. There has also been a considerable rise in income inequalities. Women's role in society and institutions remains a concern, as is rising militancy.

Notwithstanding these, there has been remarkable progress in many areas of economic development. Fertility rates have dropped from close to 6 in 1971 to almost 1.9 in 2005. Female literacy, rural sanitation, drinking water supply coverage, and other essential parameters are close to, and in cases exceeding, those in India. In ready-made garment exports, it is second only to China, and far ahead of India. Inward remittances from overseas workers are high, and together with garment exports, they have kept the currency steady. There has been a steady six percent or above growth, consistently, over the last decade. It is a story of unexpected success.

The Institute of South Asian Studies, NUS, Singapore, brought together scholars from Bangladesh and India to discuss Bangladesh's development—a collaborative effort of scholars and policymakers from both countries. There has not been an attempt at similar collaboration for several years now.

Drs S.Narayan and Sreeradha Datta reached out to eminent scholars and intellectuals in Bangladesh and at the Institute of South Asian Studies, NUS, Singapore, to put together an edited volume 'Bangladesh at 50: Development and Challenges'. The book attempts to chronicle the development journey to examine how exactly Bangladesh could achieve such success. The book also identifies challenges in the political and religious environment that could slow down the development, and sectors where it could do better.

Mustafizzur Rahman of the Center of Policy Research, Dhaka writes about the parameters of development and the policies that enabled it to

occur. Salim Rehan and Amitendu Palit have contributed two chapters dealing with the success of the ready-made garments sector, how this came about, and the challenges that lie ahead. S.Narayan examines the role of multilateral agencies and NGOs, trying to examine the causes of success. Salehuddin Ahmed chronicles the monetary policies that have stood by this development story.

The chapters that follow outline some of the concerns. Sreeradha Datta examines the contemporary politico-social fabric, while Amena Mohsin looks at women's empowerment in the Bangladesh context. Amit Ranjan writes anxiously about growing evidence of militancy, and S.Narayan about concerns arising out of rising energy demand.

Bangladesh- India relations are discussed by Shamsher Chowdhury, former foreign secretary, Bangladesh, while Sreeradha Datta also examines the narrative of foreign policy development.

The editors make the interesting point that, to a great extent, the successes in the development story are due to the space given to multilateral agencies, NGOs, and the private sector to operate. After 1971, when institutional structures were weak, the Government allowed NGOs like Grameen Bank and BRAC free play. They also allowed the population programme to be managed and controlled by multilateral agencies. The garment story is a story of Government ceding space in the industrial development policy sphere. It is possible to argue that the Government and Government institutions' weaknesses enabled alternate development models to emerge and succeed. Such a situation is very different from India, where the Government was transparent on its development approaches and set up institutions in support.

The results of the alternative approaches are there for us to see and are chronicled in this book

## Newfound Peace in the Middle East

Compiled by Hirak Jyoti Das  
and Dr. Yatharth Kachiar

*The First Meeting of the West Asia Study Group was held via video conferencing on September 7, 2020, to identify the factors leading to the current development, dissect the critical aspects of the deal and analyze its implications on India's policies region. The discussion also touched upon the impact of the deal on the Palestinian peace process, the U.S. Presidential election, regional security architecture, and stability. The Meeting also offered a valuable assessment of key regional players' strategic postures, namely Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. **The Meeting was attended by the following,** Amb. M K Lokesh, Amb. D P Srivastava, Amb. Sanjay Singh, Amb. Arun Singh, Prof. P R Kumaraswamy, Dr. Meena Singh Roy, Lt. Gen. (R) Syed Ata Hasnain, Admiral Satish Soni, Ambassador Anil Trigunayat (Coordinator), Ambassador Arvind Gupta, Director, Ambassador Satish Chandra, Ambassador Kanwal Sibal, and Lt Gen (R) Ravi Sawhney.*

### Background

The historic agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was signed on August 13, 2020. It has opened the prospect of Israel's greater acceptance in the Arab world that may ease the path to normalization with Bahrain, Oman, Sudan, and possibly Saudi Arabia, who have all welcomed the deal. *(Bahrain has already agreed after a nod from the Saudis. The Deal is being signed on September 15 at Washington*

***DC along with that of UAE-Israel)*** The UAE has become the fourth Arab state to sign a peace treaty with Israel after Egypt (1979), Jordan (1994), and Mauritania (2009). After signing the peace deal, the UAE expressed hope that the thaw in relations with Israel can lead to progress in the Palestinian peace process through dialogue as envisaged by the 2002 Arab Peace Plan and various U.N. resolutions. The peace deal indicates a shift in regional concern from the Israel-Palestine Conflict to Iran's regional aspirations and the need to counter a resurgent Turkey, by Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Israel.

### **India's regional outreach**

As India's extended and most important neighbourhood, New Delhi has significant stakes in the security and stability of the West Asian region. Three principles guide India's policy in West Asia: non-detrimental, non-intrusiveness, and non-interference. Since 2014, the proactive visits by Indian leaders, especially since the onset of PM Modi in 2014 to the region, have cemented New Delhi's position in countries such as Jordan, Israel, and the GCC states. From the Indian perspective, the UAE-Israel peace deal is a positive development. It indicates a return to a state of normalcy in which national interests rather than ideologies guide state behaviour. New Delhi shares strong relations with both UAE and Israel, and the peace deal has opened many avenues of cooperation and outreach for Indian policy in the region, as explained below.

#### ***Israel-Palestinian Conflict***

In 2018, the U.S. administration's decision to shift its embassy to Jerusalem has legitimized Israeli annexation of the historical city, adding to the stalemate. With the strong U.S. military and diplomatic support, Israel does not have any incentive to return to the negotiating table with the Palestinians. Trump has accelerated Israel's annexation plans of the West Bank in the deal of the Century initiative proposed in January 2020. Collectively, all these factors have further jeopardized the fragile prospects of the two-state solution.

The in-fighting among Palestinian groups, especially between Fatah and Hamas, has caused frustration among the Arab states. The donor fatigue has gradually subsumed the Palestinian issue. The UAE has continued its funding towards Palestinians, and its contribution to the United Relief and Works Agency has remained stable. The UAE also has stakes in Palestinian domestic politics. It hosts a controversial Palestinian figure, Mohammad Dahlan, a credible challenger against Mahmoud Abbas. Mohammad Dahlan is currently the special advisor to the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and he reportedly played a crucial role in the normalisation process. The ruling Fatah views the UAE-Israel agreement as a conspiratorial attempt by Dahlan backed by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt to destabilise the Palestinian Authority (P.A.) administration.

The UAE-Israel peace deal and India's strong relations with both the countries give New Delhi ample space to play a larger role in the Middle East Peace Process. India has been an ardent supporter of the Palestinian cause. In the current situation marked by Israel's reluctance to concede its occupation and maintain political control over Palestinian control, there is a need for India to re-evaluate the viability of the two-state solution. India should, therefore, take measures to address the current geopolitical realities.

### ***Maritime cooperation***

The UAE-Israel peace deal offers New Delhi an opportunity for greater maritime engagement in the region in light of the possible U.S. strategic disengagement from West Asia. India will be more acceptable as a coordinator or quasi-leader among all the Gulf States because of New Delhi's equidistance policy. However, until now, India's naval cooperation with all the West Asian states is somewhat muted. India's equidistance approach in the region has made it reluctant to enhance naval cooperation. New Delhi has also steered clear from all the American and European naval

engagements in the region. As opposed to this, Pakistan has a more significant foothold in the region's security matrix because they were willing to partner with the US-led forces.

Here, India's absence from coordinating with the United Nations Interim Force's maritime element in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which came into existence in 2006, is worth noting. Being an UN-led force, UNIFIL gives India an excellent opportunity to show its maritime power and presence in the region. However, India has contributed one battalion strength of the army to UNIFL but has remained clear of cooperating with the maritime element. At the same time, it is crucial to strengthen already existing institutions such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) by expanding its membership to countries such as Saudi Arabia. India needs to be proactive and bring everyone together if it wants to assume the region's leadership.

### ***Human Resource***

Another area where India has tremendous potential to contribute to the growth and development of the West Asian region is the human resource. In the Persian Gulf region, contract soldiers play a significant role; for example, in Bahrain, 64 percent of national security agencies are non-Bahrainis. Pakistani citizens constitute 18 percent of the Bahraini Air Force. Nearly 10,000 Pakistanis are working in the Bahraini security apparatus. India has not tapped this opportunity despite having a more equipped workforce.

## **Iran**

In West Asia, India's primary concern is balancing its ties with Iran while pursuing strong relation with Israel and the GCC states. Indian Defence Minister's recent visit to Tehran indicates that New Delhi cannot be oblivious of geopolitical realities. Iran's geographic proximity to Pakistan makes it necessary for Indian interests, significantly when Afghanistan's situation worsens.

Before the Islamic revolution of 1979, Iran and the U.S., and Israel shared good relations. Iran's ideological tilt after 1979 strained the ties between the two nations. It will be interesting to see if, over a period, the role of ideology in Iran's foreign policy gets muted. However, to achieve that scenario, it is essential to recognize Iran's minimum requirements. Expecting a normal reaction from the Iranian regime when the JCPOA, negotiated by the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, has been suspended, and the state is once again fighting the American sanctions is inordinate. The Gulf States, including the UAE, will also be at ease if the tensions between the U.S. and Iran subside. Otherwise, the continuing tensions will threaten the peace and security of the entire Persian Gulf. There is no defence against the threat of missiles and drones for countries that are in such proximity. **India has done well by sending her Defence and Foreign Affairs Ministers to Tehran to follow up on the deal.**

### **Turkey's actions**

Turkey's interventionist foreign policy in West Asia and its growing nexus with Pakistan clashes with the Indian interests in the region. At present, Turkey is reinterpreting every conflict in religious terms to gain ascendancy of the Islamic world. Within this narrative, the conflict from Palestine to Kashmir has become the fight for Islamic Ummah's survival. By reviving religious issues, Turkey is vying for regional supremacy within the Arab world with which it shares historical enmity. At present, Turkey is an occupying power in Syria and has a contingent deployed in Libya. Turkey also quickly set up a base in Doha in the wake of the Saudi, UAE, Bahrain, and Egyptian blockade of Qatar's tiny but wealthy and independent state. The UAE's normalization of relations with Israel will further isolate Turkey in the region. It will also bring developing the Turkey-Pakistan axis into focus.

### **UAE's calculations**

As a middle power, UAE is projecting its image as a centre of modern Islamic culture and tolerance. From the UAE's perspective, it could have

long term benefits and boost its role in the region. After normalisation with Israel, the UAE is keen to increase the scale of collaboration with the U.S. The influence of the UAE government in the American policy-making circle is likely to increase. However, the peace deal should not be seen as a turning point in the region as it is not as consequential as the 1979 Camp David Accord. There is a need to evaluate the present agreement's context and identify whether it is defensive or offensive. It has already got a go-ahead from the U.S. for the supply of F-35s despite Israeli objections.

### **Regional stability**

While analyzing the UAE-Israel peace deal, it is crucial to understand how it considers the interest of both the parties involved. The historic 1979 Camp David accord, which marked the end of hostility between Israel and Egypt, survived for five decades because it was based on a community of interests, i.e., land for peace, not just on the rulers' personalities the time. The accord supported many Egyptian people who were tired of spending their country's blood and treasure to support the Palestinian cause. For the UAE-Israel agreement to succeed, it has to take into account the interests of various partners. Unlike Jordan, Egypt, and Syria, the UAE does not share any contiguous border with Israel. The lack of contiguous borders between UAE and Israel means that there is no bilateral dispute to resolve. However, at the same time, the UAE cannot detach itself from the regional context, which includes the battle for regional supremacy between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

After the UAE-Israel peace deal, is the GCC opening itself to an unwarranted situation which could emanate in the future? The Gulf States, such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar, have been mostly stable and unaffected by the post-Arab spring period's political developments. The GCC countries have benefited from the relative peace and stability, which is not present anywhere else in the region. By formalizing relations with Israel, these states might expose themselves to potential violent Islamic extremism and proxy-warfare by Iran. By hedging their bets on a

particular side, these countries will put themselves in a vulnerable position. Therefore, at present, not formalizing relations might be a better bet for the GCC states.

It is also crucial to ascertain the UAE's decision and the timing to formalize its relations with Israel despite a well-established informal partnership. Moreover, why countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are not following a similar course? Will there be any pressure from the U.S., UAE, and Israel on Riyadh to sign a similar peace deal.

At the same time, Qatar's role is also crucial since its policies align more closely with Turkey and Iran in the region. Like the UAE, Qatar hosts essential American military bases and assumes critical importance in the U.S. strategic framework. Here, the question is, can the Israel-UAE deal bring Qatar back to the GCC fold?

Some questions arise: For the UAE-Israel deal to succeed, other gulf countries must follow a similar course of action and formalize their relations with Israel. However, like the UAE, Gulf States already share robust relations with the US, the chief provider of security for these states. Therefore, it is difficult to determine what these countries will gain by formalizing their relations with Israel? If a Middle East peace plan with significant 'land for peace' clauses is resumed and Israel approves it, it will be easier for the Gulf States to formalize Tel Aviv relations.

### **The U.S. Presidential election**

The UAE-Israel peace deal combined with that with Bahrain is possibly the only notable foreign policy success for President Donald Trump in West Asia. President Trump is facing re-election and seeks to capitalise on the peace deal among its Jewish and evangelical support base. He bragged about it in his acceptance speech for re-election at the Republican Party platform. Moreover, now there is a claim for a Noble Peace Prize for him. In recent years, the U.S. has sought to decrease the military footprint in West Asia while maintaining the strategic hold. The UAE currently hosts 3500 US military personnel at Jebel Ali port, Fujairah naval facility, and

Al Dhafra Air Base. Moreover, the U-2, Global Hawk, and the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS); KC-10 refueling aircraft, F-15 aircraft; and the F-22 Raptor are located at the Al Dhafra Air Base. While the Gulf States would continue to remain under the U.S. security umbrella, the increased military control of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) could significantly reduce the U.S.'s direct military involvement in the region and significantly subside threats from the radical groups.

**Assessment :**

- Nearly after a quarter-century, this Peace Deal has taken place in the background of new geopolitical equations and regional dynamics, especially Turkish adventurism and Iranian persistence. It was in the offing for a while. UAE stands to gain in trade, technology, security, and fintech; thus, the UAE aims to become a regional leader in finance, A.I., space, and nuclear and renewable technologies.
- Fatigue on seven decades of Israeli-Palestine conflict with no end in sight and lack of clarity on the shape of things to come, combined with Trump's "Deal of the Century" effort, expedited the Peace Deal. We might witness some initial and recurrent protests and outbursts in Palestine, but to have a two-state solution, they need the Arab world's support irrespective of the course they take. Israel may have to take a more accommodative approach to resolve the issue. Mere diplomatic relations with the new countries in the region will not ensure peace, nor can the Palestinian issue become redundant. It has to be addressed but only through dialogue.
- Except for Kuwait, all other GCC countries have had significant interactions with Israel, and one could see others following in the UAE steps. Since Saudi Arabia is the custodian of two holy mosques, it might take a while /wait for an opportune time, but both UAE and Bahrain have done so with the Saudis' tacit consent. Riyadh also allowed El Al to fly over its airspace when

Kushner and high-level Israeli delegations traveled to Abu Dhabi. At odds with Saudi and UAE, Qatar has independently helped Israel simultaneously with a ceasefire between Hamas in Gaza and Tel Aviv. Sports diplomacy has been a fixture, especially in the context of FIFA 2022.

- For convenience, a certain Palestinian angle needed to be inserted for facesaving and assuage the Arab street. Hence, Netanyahu agreed to suspend ( temporarily) 30% of the proposed West Bank annexation.
- The hope is that Israel –Palestine dialogue may take place in due course, and some stable solutions may emerge, but without a fair deal between them, Peace is unlikely in the region.
- India has welcomed the Peace deal with the caveat that hopefully Israel –Palestine conflict will be resolved. Both are strategic partners, and collaboration in a trilateral format across the technological spectrum, defence, and security, physical, food, and energy, could be explored.
- In any case, it is a bit early to judge and presage the exact outcome as Turkey and Iran will become more vocal for the Palestinian cause, as was evident from their criticism.

## Troubled Waters Ahead for Khan's Government

Compiled by Dr Yatharth Kachiar

*A meeting of the Pakistan Study Group was held via video conferencing on September 9, 2020. The main items on the agenda were India-China standoff/Pak-China collusion, Postponement of the visit of Xi Jinping, Revelation about Asim Saleem Bajwa, and implications, Opposition unity?, FATF preparations, whither intra-Afghan dialogue, Amrullah Saleh, and the Durand Line. **The Meeting was attended by the following:** Ms. Shalini Charwla, Shri Sushant Sareen, Shri Rana Banerjee, Amb G. Parthasarthy, Amb Satish Chandra, Amb TCA Raghwan, Amb Gautam Mukhopadhyay, Amb DP Srivastava, Shri CD Sahay, Lt Gen (R) Ravi Sawhney, Lt Gen (R) Ata Hasnain, Gen. (R) N.C. Vij, Shri Tilak Devasher.*

### **India-China standoff/ Pak-China collusion**

For Pakistan, the India-China standoff is a strategically lucrative opportunity. The collusion between China and Pakistan will soon intensify not just militarily but also in all other dimensions. Both China and Pakistan will feel the need to project the strength of their relations much more. In his Defence day speech on September 6, Pakistan Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa stated: "efforts are being made to discredit the country and its armed forces and the army with the cooperation of the nation will win the fifth generation or hybrid war." The statement could indicate that the Pakistan army considers the recent corruption allegations against Asim Bajwa as a part of Hybrid Warfare. After the corruption scandal

came to public view, Asim Bajwa's son and trolls on Twitter labelled it as an R&AW operation and a conspiracy against CPEC. Pakistan will highlight the concept of "hybrid war" more frequently to counter any defensive or diplomatic move by India at the world stage. Islamabad interprets every Indian action in terms of hybrid warfare; for example, Rawalpindi also perceived the strengthening of India-US relations and the Indo-US nuclear deal as part of the hybrid warfare.

Pakistan, in all possibility, will be able to procure more military equipment from Beijing, which, in turn, will make its future posturing more assertive. In December 2019, the upgraded version of JF-17 Thunder, a single-engine multi-role light fighter jet, co-produced by China and Pakistan with engines supplied by Russia, made its maiden flight. The upgraded JF-17 Thunder boasts the technologies of China's stealth fighter J-20 and will be delivered to Pakistan soon.

In response to India's induction of Rafale fighter jets, Pakistan has asked China to provide 30 J-10C fighter jets. Although Pakistan had shown interest in procuring J-10C fighter jets from China since 2009, the acquisition never materialized because JF-17 fighter jets' co-production was given priority over other purchases. Along with the J-10C, Pakistan has also requested the PL-10 and PL-15 short-range and long-range air to air missiles.

### **The revelation about Asim Saleem Bajwa and implications**

An investigative report by Pakistani journalist Ahmed Noorani revealed properties and business worth millions of the close family members of former Corps Commander Quetta and Chairman of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Authority Lt. Gen. Asim Bajwa in Pakistan and abroad. The mainstream media in Pakistan blacked out the corruption issue of Asim Bajwa and his family. Due to the absence of coverage by mainstream news channels and newspapers, social media platforms were used extensively to discuss and provide additional information on the scandal. However, the all-pervasive deep state in Pakistan ensures that all Twitter handles and websites involved in any such discussion are

quickly blocked. After calling the whole story “malicious propaganda,” Asim Saleem Bajwa’s resigned from his post as the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Information and Broadcasting. Ironically, he retained his position as the Chairman of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Authority. PM Imran Khan has refused to accept Asim Bajwa’s resignation as his aide on information and broadcasting. Khan has also opened several corruption cases against the opposition party leaders, letting the expose on Asim Bajwa slip away speaks volumes about the current dispensation’s hypocrisy.

### **Opposition unity?**

On September 20, Pakistan’s People’s Party (PPP) hosted a multi-party conference (MPC) in Islamabad. All the major opposition parties such as PML-N, National Party (N.P.), Awami National Party (ANP), Qaumi Watan Party (QWP), Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP), Balochistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M), and Jamiatul Hadees attended the opposition meeting. Jamaat-i-Islami, however, distanced itself from the gathering. During the meeting, the MPC adopted a 26-point resolution and formally launched the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) to protest against the army’s domestic politics role and oust the “selected prime minister.” The opposition parties called for PM Imran Khan’s resignations and announced the launching of a three-phased anti-government movement starting from October 2020. The PDM decided to hold a series of rallies, public meetings, and protests throughout the country, culminating in a “decisive long march” towards Islamabad in January 2021. It was decided that the first rally under the PDM banner will be held in Quetta on October 11, 2020. Former President Asif Ali Zardari delivered the opening speech via video link. Further, former Prime Minister of Pakistan and the current leader of PML-N, Nawaz Sharif, who is in London for medical treatment since November 2019, also addressed the meeting via video conferencing.

The opposition unity is a welcome move for democracy in Pakistan.

However, there is still uncertainty about PDM's ability to mobilize the masses and create a mass movement in the country. Pakistan's history is not very promising when it comes to the removal of government through street agitation. Moreover, the opposition unity also seems fragile, and there is not much agreement among opposition parties on issues such as the 'Karachi Transformation Project.' Recently, Prime Minister Imran Khan unveiled Rs. 1.1 trillion packages to address the chronic infrastructure and municipal issues of Karachi- Pakistan's financial hub. Both PPP and MQM have adopted diverse approaches to the program since the PPP fears that the party's Sindhi base will be adversely affected if the transformation project helps urban households. Also, there is the spectre of President Rule hanging on the Sindh government. In the past few months, the rift between the Central government and Sindh has widened. Also, there is a growing demand, specifically from PTI and MQM-P, for carving more units out of the province - especially making Karachi a separate administrative unit. In August 2020, the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) led a protest march to raise its opposition against such proposals.

Nevertheless, in Sindh, what is difficult to overlook is the complete collapse of civic amenities. PTI government has made several promises of delivering better services to Karachi, which became the basis for it to erode the MQM's influence in the province. If MQM ends up regaining its lost power in subsequent provincial bodies or local elections, it will prove Imran Khan's continuous dismal performance on governance issues.

At present, Imran Khan Government is proactively targeting opposition parties and its leaders by reviving corruption cases. Driven by their self-interests, the opposition parties struggle to forge a united front against the PTI government. The major hindrance in uniting is the lack of a coherent roadmap on countering the PTI government. For a temporary period, the opposition might be able to keep the government at bay. However, without future roadmap and consensus on crucial issues, it will not be possible to challenge the growing despotism of the Imran Khan Government.

## **FATF preparations**

The pressure to comply with FATF conditions has forced Pakistan to admit for the first time that Dawood Ibrahim, responsible for 1993 serial blasts in Mumbai, is living in Pakistan. Further, conforming with the FATF conditions, Pakistan has enforced more restrictions on 88 leaders and members of terrorist groups, including Hafiz Saeed Ahmad (Jamaat-ud-Dawa), Mohammad Masood Azhar (JeM), and Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi.

In August 2020, the Pakistan Senate had passed The Anti-terrorism Act (Amendment) Bill, 2020, to satisfy the requirements of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). The government recently reintroduced another critical FATF-related Anti-money laundering (Second Amendment Bill) or 'economic terrorism' bill in the Parliament. After being passed by the National Assembly, the 104-member Senate, where the opposition is strong, rejected the bill. Now, the government will attempt to get the bill passed at the two houses' joint session.

The 'economic terrorism' bill enhances the Anti-Terrorism Act's applicability in transferring money through informal channels. The opposition fears that the draconian clauses in the bill- broad powers to law enforcement personnel to keep the accused under detention for three months, extendable up to another three months- will be misused by the 'deep state' to suppress any dissent and rights-based movements. Pakistan's poor human rights records- 'enforced disappearances,' the previous misuse of the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) strengthens such reservations regarding the bill. At one level, these bills satisfy the FATF conditions and show Pakistan's compliance. At another level, the government uses these bills to fix the legal system to prosecute the opposition. Despite the opposition to the bill, it will likely be passed since it gives the army in Pakistan a solid handle against the politicians.

## **Whither intra-Afghan dialogue**

On September 12, 2020, the opening ceremony of the intra-Afghan talks was held in Doha, Qatar. During the inauguration ceremony, the

envoys of over 15 countries and organizations gave opening remarks. Indian Foreign Minister, S Jaishankar, attended the ceremony via video conferencing. During the inauguration, he stated: “the peace process must be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled, respect national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, promote human rights and democracy, ensure the interest of minorities, women and the vulnerable, and effectively address violence across the country.”

After the ceremony, the first meeting between the Afghan delegation and the Taliban took place to arrange the talks’ agenda and achieve “mutual knowledge and understanding.” Since then, the Afghan government’s contact groups and the Taliban’s peace delegation met in a series of meetings in Doha to finalise the rules and procedures of the meeting. After a series of meetings in Doha, the negotiations are stuck on two significant issues: the use of Hanafi jurisprudence and the U.S.-Taliban agreement as to the basis for the negotiations. Taliban negotiator Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi reassured that using Hanafi jurisprudence is not an act of “prejudice” and will not cause differences between Shias and Sunnis in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the Afghan negotiating team has said they are willing to accept Hanafi jurisprudence but recommended respecting the Shia Personal Status Law and the religious jurisprudence of other minority groups.

Before the talks, the Taliban had appointed Mawlawi Abdul Hakim- the Chief Jurist of the group, as the head of their 21-member negotiating team for the intra-Afghan dialogue. The key reason behind the negotiating team’s restructuring is the changed purpose and opponent in the talks. After dealing with the U.S. in the first round, the Taliban will now negotiate and discuss critical issues with the Afghans, which requires a different strategy. Secondly, as the intra-Afghan talks proceed, there is a possibility that the Taliban will face inevitable backlash from within. The Taliban must have the old-time authority and religious credibility to create a consensus within the group on critical issues such as Islam’s role and the state- Afghans want to have in the future. Also, there are reports

of growing rift and rivalry between the Haqqani Network and Mullah Yaqoob.

The Afghan government has entered the negotiations with the Taliban without any leverage to counter the Taliban's maximalist position on all significant issues. The Kabul administration is probably waiting for the U.S. elections to get over, which might bring a change in the American position vis-à-vis Afghanistan and the Taliban. It is highly unlikely that a change in Washington will reverse the decision of troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, once the election cycle gets over, there is a possibility that the U.S. will have a greater political engagement with Kabul.

In another development, Amrullah Saleh, the Vice President of Afghanistan, recently stated: "No Afghan politician of national stature can overlook the issue of Durand Line. It will condemn him or her in life and the afterlife. It is an issue which needs discussions and resolution. Expecting us to gift it for free is unrealistic. Peshawar used to be the winter capital of Afghanistan." Saleh survived yet another assassination attempt on September 9 when a roadside bomb targeted his convoy in Kabul. His statement on Durand Line has undoubtedly riled up the establishment in Rawalpindi. Simultaneously, Saleh's stance on the Durand line challenged the Taliban to come out clear on the issue. Moreover, it resonated deep within the Pashtun hinterland, which has a long history of resistance against Pakistan.

## **About the VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION**

The Vivekananda International Foundation is an independent non-partisan institution that conducts research and analysis on domestic and international issues, and offers a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. Some of India's leading practitioners from the fields of security, military, diplomacy, government, academia and media have come together to generate ideas and stimulate action on national security issues.

The defining feature of VIF lies in its provision of core institutional support which enables the organisation to be flexible in its approach and proactive in changing circumstances, with a long-term focus on India's strategic, developmental and civilisational interests. The VIF aims to channelise fresh insights and decades of experience harnessed from its faculty into fostering actionable ideas for the nation's stakeholders.

Since its inception, VIF has pursued quality research and scholarship and made efforts to highlight issues in governance, and strengthen national security. This is being actualised through numerous activities like seminars, round tables, interactive dialogues, Vimarsh (public discourse), conferences and briefings. The publications of VIF form lasting deliverables of VIF's aspiration to impact on the prevailing discourse on issues concerning India's national interest.



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