Peace and Security
Review

I N S I D E

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Contents

Editor's Note

This edition of the Peace and Security review contains a selection of articles pertaining to both traditional and non-traditional security. In this issue, both state and human security concerns have been approached with special emphasis on recent crises and changing global dynamics. The discussion begins with an analysis of the conflictual ethnic relations inside Assam (India) and its regional consequences. The nature, determinants and implications of China's foreign policy towards the Taliban and the United States' unique threat balancing strategy against North Korea have been highlighted in this edition. It also provides a critical overview of the War on Terror and its repercussions on global peace and security. Finally, it discusses the importance of utilising air power to combat multidimensional human security threats. The review covers a range of topics and addresses multifaceted, contemporary themes that have significant implications for the state and individual.

The first article, by Kaliph Rehman, is titled **"Stateless Bengalis of Assam: Weaponising Identity, Migration and Border (In) Security"**. The article attempts to counter the dominant narrative in relation to the residence of Bengalis in the state of Assam. Much of the existing literature regarding the immigration of Bengalis contributed to the nationwide generation of anti-Bengali sentiments in Assam. These sentiments exacerbated the longstanding ethnic conflict and resulted in oppressive legislation as well as the statelessness of millions of Bengalis. The author argues against this narrative and attributes the conflictual ethnic relations between the Assamese and Bengali populace and consequent anti-Bengali sentiments to British colonial policies.

The second article, **"Changing dynamics of China's policy towards the Taliban: Analysing the underlying determinants & its implications for South Asia"**, by Sultana Yesmin, sheds light on the policies of China toward the Taliban in different time frames. Here, the nature and rationale behind

China's policy dynamics and their significant implications have been analysed. Throughout the years, security and economic interests have determined China's strategic relationship with other states. China's relations with Iran and Russia and its emerging role as a global power played an important role in shaping its policies toward the Taliban. The article also highlighted the competitive exploitation of Afghanistan by powerful regional and non-regional states.

The third article, **"The United States Unconventional Balancing Against North Korea: An Analysis by Balance of Threat Theory"**, by Md Ataur Rahman Talukder, provides essential insights into the United States' unconventional balancing strategy towards North Korea. It delves into the rationale behind the United States' need to balance North Korea, a relatively weak state in terms of size, aggregate power, and offensive capabilities. The exhibited behaviour does not align with the neorealist concept of Balance of Power; instead, it prompts discussion on strategies powerful countries often adopt to counter smaller states that they perceive as a threat to their security interests. The article utilises Balance of Threat as an explanatory tool to analyse this phenomenon.

Mahmud Hussain claims in the fourth piece, **"Geo-politics of South Asia in the post-Cold War era: The India Myth"**, that the United States' regional role has changed dramatically due to the creation of a unipolar world under its leadership. During the Cold War, India's most reliable ally was the Soviet Union. India and the United States have become closer in the post-Cold War era. The signing of the US-India peaceful nuclear deal in 2008 was the crowning achievement of their relationship. The United States has praised India for being a responsible nuclear power and the largest democracy in the world. The purpose of this research was to investigate the difficulties India has had to face in the post-Cold War age of South Asian geopolitics. A theoretical introduction is followed by an empirical portion and finally an analytical conclusion, making this study tripartite in nature. The research relies on a content analysis of historical case studies spanning from the ancient era to the beginning of the post-Cold war era.

The fifth article, **"Human security threats in the South Asian region and the application of air power to resolve those challenges"**, by Md. Mamunur Rashid puts emphasis on non-traditional human security threats and how they manifest in the South Asian region. With the Cold War ending, traditional warfare tactics declined noticeably, while 9/11 and the inception of the War

on Terror made South Asia vulnerable to external powers. Despite being a populated region, the economic development of South Asia was slowed down by the prevalence of terrorism, natural disasters, and ethnic conflicts. The author argues that if South Asian states participate in regional cooperation and share their air power resources, they will be better prepared against natural calamities and other multidimensional threats to human security.

Major General ANM Muniruzzaman, ndc, psc (Retd.)
Editor

Stateless Bengalis of Assam: Weaponising Identity, Migration and Border (In) Security

Kaliph Rehman[1]

Abstract

Reactionary literature has overwhelmed Assamese discourse on Bengali migrants. This article aims to argue against this and advocate on behalf of Bengalis in the state of Assam. Allegations of illegal immigration and mass immigration contribute to creating a neurotic atmosphere of suspicion and anxiety among minorities in Assam. This article aims to show that Assamese chauvinism is a British colonial legacy of their divide and conquer rule. Moreover, the demonisation of Bengalis has enabled genocidal-like policies and the statelessness of millions of Bengalis. Ultimately, the argument of this article is that much of existing scholarship suffers from narrow understandings of identity, hypernationalism and persistent racism. The hope of this article is to shed light on the neglected facts and stories of the Bengali experience and give voice to the Bengali people of Assam.

Introduction

Assam has had a troubled history with Bengalis within its own borders for a century now. Ethnic relations inside Assam have had important knock-on effects for the entire South Asia region and beyond. More recently, drawing condemnation from the UN for its human rights abuses, the demonisation

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[1] The author is a prospective MSc candidate in Political Thought at SOAS, University of London, United Kingdom; and a graduate in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from the University of Winchester. His research interests include political economy with a particular focus in political settlements theory.

of Bengalis in the state of Assam has led to consequential legislation and policies that may create rifts with Bangladesh and cause even more concern for the safety of the Muslim minority in India. This article is placed against the majority of the literature written on the subject of Bengali migrants and their "illegality" in Assam. While the security literature appears adamant that many Bengalis are illegal immigrants, representing a threat to the ethnic purity of the state, demographic data from up to the colonial period does not support much of these claims. Appraising the current security-centric and racist scholarship, this article seeks to dispel the standard narrative of Bengalis and their history in Assam. The pro-Assamese literature is the reason why a legally ambiguous situation for Bengalis in Assam persists today. The lack of advocacy for Bengalis in the overall literature has created an environment where Bengalis can only be described in negative terms. Ethnic hatred in the state traces its genesis to colonial divide and conquer rule, political impotence and hyper-ethnonationalism. Advocacy for Bengalis is important because support for Bengalis in security literature is practically non-existent; the appalling literature, more often than not, spells grave implications for the Bengali minority in Assam and Northeast, who are routinely harassed, and discriminated against and killed by the state for merely existing.

British civil servants in the British Raj produced increasingly belligerent reports of Bengali Muslim peasants, initiating a tradition of indigenous scholarship that remains to this, anti-Bengali and anti-Muslim. The overwhelming anti-Bengali sentiment is a British imperial invention, and it is also misinformed and based upon incorrect readings of demographic data and overly narrow conceptions of identity. However, despite this, the literature has informed policymakers about legislating ways to exclude the Bengali minority in the state and justify their statelessness, often disproportionately affecting Muslims too. It is not surprising that chauvinistic scholarship has led to a precarious state of affairs, given the lack of attention to other facts that may unsettle or challenge the dominant narrative in the Northeast. Consequently, this academic enquiry aims to contribute to an intellectually underexplored area in academic scholarship on Bengali migrants and their legal status in Assam.

Advocating for Bengalis: Argument and Structure

This article argues against the overwhelming literature that posits illegal immigration from Bangladesh as a persistent and manifestly obvious problem, not just in Assam but across India. This article will attempt to reveal how the ethnic conflict in the 21st century in Assam is a result of British

colonialism. Firstly, an overview of the literature should demonstrate the state of contemporary literature on Bengalis in Assam, followed by the status of securitising of Bengali migration and its success. Following next is a basic literature overview of scholars from various disciplines who have argued against the long-term trend of Assamese literature.

In the section entitled "Politics of Identity", this article delves into the colonial period to illuminate the point at which and the reason why Bengali migrated to Assam. This should uncover how Bengalis unassumingly ventured into Assam's virgin fields only to find themselves suddenly embroiled in ethnic conflict with the ethnic Assamese and other tribal groups in the region. In this section, the narrowing of Assamese is demonstrated to have adversely affected the unity of the state, leading to the break-up of Assam. Despite their involvement in facilitating the movement of Bengali peasants and administrators to Assam, British civil servants would take to foment differences between Bengalis and Assamese people towards the end of the British Raj. The consequences of which would manifest in numerous massacres in the post-colonial Indian state. The second major section of this article deals with the present state of how the electoral, legislative and Islamophobic forces come together to force millions into statelessness. The violence that minorities in the state experience is made possible by the convergence of interests between national and local parties in deporting Bangladeshis and an unfair preoccupation with Bengali Muslims, despite the findings of the problematic National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise.

In order to make the argument, this article firstly presents a historical overview, clearly delineating the forces that marked the initial instances of ethnic hatred. Thereafter, the argument becomes concerned with the present Islamophobia and statelessness that have sharpened the hatred heaped onto Bengali Muslims of the state.

Overview of Literature

Assamese Ethnonationalism

Myron Weiner[2] advanced the thesis that Assam's lack of homogeneity, due to overwhelming colonial Bengali migration and persistent Bangladeshi illegal migration, was leading to dangerous instability in the state that posed a risk to its fragile and still-nurturing institutions. Weiner's arguments rely

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[2] Weiner, M. "The Political Demography of Assam's Anti-Immigrant Movement", *Population Council*, Vol. 9, 1983, pp 279-292.

on Assamese intellectuals who resisted Bengali migration from the colonial period and participated in the *Bongal Kheda* (Bengalis Get Out!) campaign, which sought the expulsion of Bengali Hindus in administrative positions in the newly-postcolonial Assam. Thus, Weiner's contribution is set in a much broader literature which is totally and explicitly discriminatory towards Bengalis.

In addition to South Asia experts like Weiner, pro-Assamese interpretations of the "migrant crisis" have currency among Assamese liberals and Marxists.[3] Hiren Gohain[4] represents the latter view and argues that the legislation that is used to harass Bengalis, like the National Register of Citizens (NRC), is a product of the *Bongal Kheda* campaign and has currently left 1.9 million people stateless, is necessary to maintain peace and order. His denunciation of "regional chauvinism" and violence ignores the root cause of the violence, which is not only the inflammatory press coverage of Bengali migrants but includes intolerance of the very presence of Bengali-*origin* and Bengali-speaking people in the state, despite how well they do to assimilate into Assamese culture and society. Criticising Gohain is Sanjib Baruah Kumar,[5] who claims that Marxists like Gohain don't take Assamese demographic insecurities seriously enough. Kumar argues that unchecked Bengali immigration, legal or illegal, will only exacerbate current ethnic conflict and tension in the region. His rather nationalist solution is to yield control of Assam's border from the Indian central government over to the government of Assam. However, again, this does little to engage with the intolerance existing and documented Bengalis experience and the subsequent neurotic environment of suspecting anyone poor, Bengali and/or Muslim to be Bangladeshi, which is what principally animates this issue.

Security Literature

Political events in the 1980s brought the scholars of Assam to the national forefront; the issue of Bangladeshi illegal immigration hereon became quickly securitised and constructed as an existential security threat of national importance. As a result, there is no dearth of scholarships coming out of India calling for increased securitisation of the migration of Bengalis into Assam.

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[3] Pardesi, G. "Internal colony in a national exploitative system", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 15, 1980, pp 1001-1002.

[4] Gohain, H. "Cudgel of Chauvinism", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 15, 1980, pp 418-420.

[5] Baruah, S. K. "Cudgel of Chauvinism or Tangled Nationality Question?", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 15, 1980, pp 543-545.

Scholars from Assam have joined a chorus of politically charged voices from West Bengal,[6] Meghalaya,[7] Tripura,[8] Manipur[9] and Nagaland[10] (and, more recently, Mumbai, Maharashtra[11], and Delhi[12]) are seeking government intervention to deal with Bangladeshi illegal immigrants, whom they regard to be a serious and existential security threat.[13]

Monika Verma's[14] paper investigating the securitisation of "Bangladeshis" identifies that two referent objects can be determined. One, referenced by the Assamese ethnonationalism themselves, is ensuring the majority position of the Assamese people, a concern that finds expression in Clause 6 of the Assam Accord. The second potential referent object, best represented as the core concern of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, is the integrity of India's borders from untrustworthy Muslim neighbours (and allies) Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. A discord between these two objects of reference can be grasped with the recent fallout between Assamese nationalist organisations and the BJP-led government in Assam over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA).

Josy Joseph[15] seeks to understand whether securitisation improved the ability of the Indian government to identify and deport Bangladeshi illegal immigrants in Assam. Joseph discovers that the "violent anti-migration movements and massacres, the rhetoric how urgent measures by securitising actors have achieved very little" and recommends that India desecuritise and

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[6] Anand, K. "Depoliticising Illegal Immigration from Bangladesh to India", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 39, 2015, pp 22-26.

[7] Majaw, R. "Indo-Bangladesh borderland issues in Meghalaya". *South Asia Research*, Vol 41, 2020, pp 100-118.

[8] Bhushan, A. and Sharma, R. "Illegal Immigration of Bangladeshis into India: (National Security Challenges)", *Raj-Yashti Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 7, 2014, pp 46-79.

[9] Singh, L. B. "Influx of Immigrants in the North Eastern States of India: Exodus or Employment Evidence from Manipur'', *Kangla Lampung*, Vol. 2, 2017, pp 21-45.

[10] Achumi, I. H. "Perceived Illegality of the Body: Reclaiming the Space in Nagaland", *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 68, 2019, pp 204-220.

[11] Anandan, S. "Why Raj Thackeray will find no Bangladeshi in Mumbai", *Hindustan Times*, 2020.

[12] Ramachandran, S. "'Operation Pushback': Sangh Parivar, State, Slums And Surreptitious Bangladeshis In New Delhi", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, 2003, pp 637-647.

[13] Khanal, D. K. "Issue of Bangladeshi Immigrants and the Importance of NRC in Assam", *Mizoram University Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, Vol. 4, 2018, pp 12-21.

[14] Verma, M. "The Securitization of Migration: An Indian Stance on the Securitization of Migration", *Conflict, Justice, Decolonization: Critical Studies of Inter-Asian Societies*, 2021, pp 1-7.

[15] Joseph, J. "Securitization Of Illegal Migration of Bangladeshis To India", *Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies*, Working Paper, 2006, pp 1-28.

become more accommodative to Bangladesh's "needs and aspirations".[16] However, Ksenia Glebova's[17] study into English-language press coverage of Bengalis in Assam concludes that desecuritisation is impossible under the current security framework (in, then, 2008). Securitisation has shifted Assam's politics away from "normal" and thereby legitimised legal acts of discrimination and exclusion, which, lately, have manifested as state-enabled statelessness. Evidence of this is the forceful "pushing" and even killing of people suspected of being Bangladeshi in recent anti-encroachment drives.[18]

Non-Issue

Scholars who share the pro-Assamese perspective have admitted that sometimes genuine Indian citizens have been evicted from their homes in Assam.[19] The othering of Bengalis in the state has led to a culture of doubting the citizenship of poor Bengalis, particularly Muslims. Critical scholarship is emerging that challenges prevailing assumptions about the citizenship and history of Bengali Muslims in India. One example is Amalendu Guha[20] , who understood Assamese chauvinism to be "proto-fascist" and violently anti-minority. Guha also did not believe in the "migrant crisis" or illegal-infiltrator narrative, criticising it for misconstruing demographic data.[21] Against the Assamese chauvinist's claim, Guha argues that the growth of Bengali speakers in the state is modest compared to the larger increase in the growth of Assamese speakers. Another critic of the illegal-infiltrator argument is Navine Murshid,[22] who argues that Assam possessing a large Muslim population explains why the growth of Bengalis seems abnormal. Murshid also interrogates the popular and academic parlance in Bengali migrant discourse and uncovers Bengali Muslims has become the de facto "illegal Bangladeshis" as a result of xenophobically charged media reporting and

[16] Joseph. "Securitization Of Illegal Migration", 26.

[17] Glebova, K. "Media securitisation of migration: constructing Bangladeshi migration to Assam as a security to the Assamese identity", MA thesis, Department of Political Science, World Politics, University of Helsinki, Finland, Helsinki, 2008.

[18] Banerjie, M. and Choudhury, R. ""They Killed My Son": Assam Family Mourn Man Beaten To Death On Camera", *NDTV*, available at: https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/assam-family-mourn-man-beaten-to-death-on-camera-they-killed-my-son-2552168.

[19] Joseph. "Securitization Of Illegal Migration", 23.

[20] Guha, A. "Little Nationalism Turned Chauvinist: Assam's Anti-Foreigner Upsurge, 1979-80", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 15, 1980, pp 1699-1720.

[21] Ibid, 1710.

[22] Murshid, N. "Assam and the Foreigner Within", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 56, 2016, pp 581-604.

culture.[23] Malini Sur[24] furthers this line of argument by describing how mere accusations of illegality can have significant consequences on one's citizenship. Sur writes that "[b]ly leaving unclarified the contentious issues of land loss and identities in Assam, judicial processes make suspicion, rather than legal and procedural certainty, fundamental to the manufacturing of Indian citizenship in Assam".[25] In effect, what began as frenzied media speculation doubting the citizenship of Bengali (Muslims) has become concrete as minorities are forced into a condition of statelessness via unfair bureaucratic means produced by communalised politics.

Conclusion

The literature is overwhelmed by pro-Assamese prejudices reproduced by security analysts and South Asian studies scholars. Playing on religious and linguistic lines, the literature displays a significant gap in advocacy for Bengalis. Therefore, this article is one attempt to bridge this gap, which is something that will require vastly more literature in the future. Much of the Pro-Assamese literature reviewed suffers from five things: (1) conflating Bangladeshi with Bengali (Muslim) where such a conflation is baseless, unwarranted and contextually improbable; (2) failing to understand that apprehensions at the border often represent unauthorised crossings as a result of poorly marked borders, further obscured by economic activity at the border, as opposed to immigration; (3) exaggerating the threat of Islamism;[26] (4) xenophobically suspecting *every* Bengali residing in a *char* or border town to be an illegal immigrant; and finally, (5) many of the more academically unrefined articles sometimes do not hide their prejudice and represent little more than expressions of racism against people of Bengali heritage. At best, literature opposing the standard Assamese (and composite Northeastern) ethnonationalist narrative(s) will occasionally feature a denunciation of the violence against Bengalis but conclude that legislation to disenfranchise

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[23] Murshid. "Foreigner Within", 602.

[24] Sur, M. *Jungle Passports: Fences, Mobility, and Citizenship at the Northeast India-Bangladesh Border*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021.

[25] Ibid, 151.

[26] A far-right conspiracy, prevalent among some sections of Indian security scholarship, is the irredentist Greater Bangladesh theory. While most Indian security analysts reject Bangladeshi facilitation of illegal immigration to break-up India, many believe that some Bangladeshi politicians have interests in annexing the region. See Pramanik, B. "Indo-Bangladeshi Border Scenario and our National Security", *Dialogue Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 9, 2007, and articles by Anand Kumar in *South Asia Analysis Group*, Paper No. 1330, 2005; *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 35, 2010, 106-119, and *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 39, 2015, 22-26.

Bengali migrants and limit immigration is necessary for demographic reasons.[27] Or, more infrequently, elaborate xenophobic and Islamophobic concerns in technical academic vocabulary.

Consequently, the literature has given demographic anxiety a privileged role in determining India's national securities issues, making Assamese demographic anxieties a valid and established fact among Indian and South Asian experts outside of security. However, there exists a minority of the literature, which will be returned to later, that clarifies the overabundance of attention given to "Bangladeshi infiltration" reflects domestic Indian antagonism towards poor Bengali Muslims, who, due to increasing urbanisation, are becoming more noticeable in urban centres beyond their immediate ghettoised slums and *chars*.

Politics of Identity

Bengal in Assam

The modern history of Bengalis in Assam begins with British dominion over Assam in the 1830s when the East India Company transferred Bengali *amlahs* (officials of the court) over to newly annexed Upper Assam.[28] The language of administration and instruction was in Bengali, which alienated the indigenous Assamese but further precipitated a flow of Bengalis into the area.[29] The migration included Bengali elites involved in administration, followed by a significant influx of peasants who intended to cultivate Assam's fertile and underutilised fields. Both social classes were actively encouraged to migrate by the British and received institutional backing. In the backdrop of this British-led demographic change in the 19th century, Assam's demography had transformed by the turn of the 20th century.

Colonial schemes, with the purpose of making the state financially viable, encouraged Bengali migration to form settled communities on the floodplains across Lower Assam well into the 1930s. It was under this pretext that Sylhet transferred hands from the Bengal Presidency to the newly created Assam

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[27] Barua, S. K. *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 203-204.

[28] Misra, S. "Bengali Communities in Colonial Assam," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, 2019, pp 1.

[29] Misra, T. *Literature and Society in Assam: A Study of the Assamese Renaissance 1826–1926*, Guwahati, Omsons Publications, 1987, p. 68.

Province.[30] It is also for this reason that Bengalis would go on to overwhelmingly dominate jobs in colonial bureaucracy and became essential cogs in Britain's imperialist machinations in the so-called "North East Frontier".[31]

Assamese Cultural-Nationalism

In returning fire to the unfair privileging of Bengalis, the Assamese elite began to advocate for their unique language and identity, which had until then existed in a harmonious relationship with Bengali. Assamese intellectuals soon enough began producing important cultural works asserting a new Assamese cultural nationalism distinct from and opposed to Bengali people and culture.[32]

The victims of this Assamese cultural resurgence were people whose identities existed in the peripheries of Assam, like Goalpara, particularly outside the bubbles of the Assamese elite, who played a disproportionate role in its creation.[33] [34] As Bengal too underwent a cultural nationalist surge, Muslims and those contesting the emergent identity found themselves precluded from nationalist imaginations.[35] The seemingly small details of British imperial policy would have lasting consequences that have defined relations between Assamese and Bengali (and between Muslim and Hindu) people into the modern-day.

Origins of Assamese Chauvinism

Amalendu Guha described in relatively positive terms the migration of Bengalis and the point at which they encountered the Assamese, which was the source of future tension:

> Immigration was a welcome phenomenon for labour-short, land-abundant Assam from the economic point of view. Landless immigrants from over-populated East Bengal during 1901-51 - of

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[30] Hossain, A. "The Making and Unmaking of Assam-Bengal Borders and the Sylhet Referendum," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 47, 2013, pp 261.

[31] Choudhury, D. P. "British Policy on the North-East Frontier of India, 1865-1914", PhD thesis, SOAS, University of London, 1970

[32] Weiner, "Political Anti-Immigrant Movement" 286.

[33] Misra, "Bengali Communities", 3.

[34] Misra, S. *Becoming a Borderland: The Politics of Space and Identity in Colonial Northeastern India*, Delhi, Routledge, 2011, p. 142.

[35] Obtain a reference from zakir hossain raju's book

them, some 85 per cent were Muslims - found an el dorado in the jungle-infested riverine belt of government wastelands, remaining water-logged for many years. Used to an amphibious mode of living, they were industrious and hardy enough to come up the Brahmaputra on steamers and boats and reclaim these malarial areas. All that they wanted was land. When they pressed forward in search of new land to areas held by the sons of the soil, conflicts with the latter began to take place.

The vast bulk of the migration of Bengali Muslims consisted of peasants handpicked by colonial authorities for their superior cultivational skills and experience with newly introduced crops. Over-intensive agricultural production over shrinking arable land left many Assamese and Bengali cultivators struggling to pay rent and overburdened with debt amid ever-increasing competition. The competition was so intense that after the earthquake of 1897, which exacerbated the loss of agricultural land to river erosion, conflict broke out between the ethnically heterogeneous peasantry.

The real conflict between Bengalis and Assamese people began with the promulgation of the Line System in 1920. The Line System was thus introduced to control violent clashes over land.[36] However, instead contributed to concretising the differences between the Bengalis and Assamese in arbitrary ways and, as is still the case today, legitimised violent interventions in purging Bengalis from the area. Violations of the Line System were raised by the Assamese politicians in the Legislative Council, and subsequently, moral panic ensued.[37] M. Waheeduzzaman Manik reveals that this was due to the "selling of land by the Assamese to the immigrants [which] was widespread, and such land deals were openly and enthusiastically sponsored and financed by the Marwari and Assamese money lenders, and indigenous co-operative banks".[38] But because of this, popular sentiments against Bengalis ran high and justified hysterical rhetoric concerning ethnocide allegedly represented by the Bengali peasants.[39]

Despite the seemingly exclusive concern over Bengalis, some Bengali Hindu

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[36] Manik, M. W. "Maulana Bhashani's resistance against the infamous Line System and "Bongal Khedao" movement in Assam", in Anisuzzaman Chowdhury (ed) *Moulana Bhashani: Leader of the Toiling Masses*, New York, Bhashani Foundation, 2012, 171.

[37] Ibid, 173.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Misra, "Burden of History", 97.

legislators also advocated against the largely-Muslim Bengali migrants. It was this period in the 1920s where, Manik believes, the agitation against migrants developed an element of communalism.

British civil servants, in following a form of divide and conquer rule, engaged in increasing contempt for Bengalis and bolstered Assamese claims of demographic threat by producing false and hyperbolic information. C. S. Mullan has several very popular accounts of the supposed threat posed by Bengali migrants, which are frequently cited in contemporary security papers. One of the most common quoted pieces of his writing comes from the Census Report of 1931:

> Probably the most important event in the province during the last 25 years - an event, moreover, which seems likely to alter permanently the whole feature of Assam and to destroy the whole structure of Assamese culture and civilisation has been the invasion of a vast horde of land-hungry immigrants mostly Muslims, from the districts of East Bengal.[40]

One of the more colourful descriptions (and one of the most fantastical distortions of this period), also by Mullan, is where he said:

> [The Bengali] immigrant army has almost completed the conquest of Nowgong. The Barpeta subdivision of Kamrup has fallen to their attack and Darrang is being invaded. Sibsagar has so far escaped completely, but the few thousand Mymensinghias in North Lakhipur are an outpost which may, during the next decade, prove to be a valuable basis of major operations. Wheresoever the carcass, there the vultures be gathered together. Where there is wasteland thither flock the Mymensinghias.[41]

In spite of these dramatic assertions, in what even then was a very sensitive issue, the Governor addressing the Council in 1933, while citing Mullan's Census report, reduced the significance of Mullan's analysis:

> In spite of the [Bengali] language increase in the population of Assam at every Census since 1901, the percentage of speakers of Assamese to the total population has remained very steady. It is clear from the figures of increase in the speakers of Assamese at the Census that the

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[40] Manik, "Bhashani's resistance", 174.

[41] Ibid.

language is at present in no danger of supersession.[42]

With time the words of the Governor have proved true; Assamese is under no more threat today from Bengali as it was in 1930, and the gap between Assamese and Bengali speakers has only widened since then.[43] But it is Mullen's words that continue to have reverberations in academia and inform Indian policies at the state and central government levels. Fiery words by civil servants, like Mullen, followed increasingly belligerent legislation. The Line System organised Bengalis and the Assamese into segregated areas within a given district, disallowing Bengali or Assamese people to mix except in designated areas for mixing. It follows the model of British imperial racial segregation as part of its divide and conquer rule, which was used and led to similar bouts of intensive and enduring ethnic conflicts elsewhere in India, Malaysia and Nigeria. Soon, the Line System itself became intensified by the state to segregate, oppress and discriminate against the Bengali minority. Its use ruthlessly split families and communities and contributed to creating a culture of fear, disunity and suspicion among the Bengalis and Assamese.

It should become clear; therefore, that contemporary Assamese chauvinism and the perceived threat of Bengalis in the state are British inventions. British missionaries studied the rough Assamese vernacular and introduced the first works of literature, printing and grammar in the language. Armed with a distinct culture, art and history, Assamese identity was thus formed in opposition to the Bengalis who ruled over them. The important takeaway is that Assam is one such region where British imperial agents, in the form of missionaries and civil servants, engaged in colonial demographic engineering, and the subsequent xenophobic backlash was a direct consequence of this divide and conquer strategy.

Assam Agitation and Nellie

Demographic anxiety would receive nationwide attention during the Assam Movement from 1979 to 1985, led by the All Assam Student Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangam Parishad (AAGSP). Also known as the Anti-Foreigner Agitation or just Assam Agitation, the six-year period featured widespread ethnic violence and significant political unrest. A flashpoint of the Agitation was the massacre at Nellie in 1983, claiming more than 2,000 lives over six hours, with unofficial figures five times higher. Considered one of

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[42] Ibid, 175.

[43] Guha, "Little Nationalism", 1715.

the worst pogroms in post-independence India, the Nellie massacre exposed unnoticed faultlines quickly developing in Assamese society. The perpetrators of the massacre of the Bengali Muslim village were not ethnic Assamese but Tiwa tribal people who had recently lost their land to the inhabitants of Nellie. Growing landlessness led to growing resentment and persuaded a number of tribal communities to turn to extreme violence and militant ethnonationalism. Of the several massacres that took place in the wake of the state elections of 1983, there was no one community that was singled out for violence. If any pattern could be discerned, it would be that the violence seemed to be between tribal and non-tribal people.[44] Many Assamese nationalists became disenchanted at this unanticipated change in events, particularly Assamese Muslims who took the massacre at Nellie and targeting of Muslims to mean the Assam Movement had been hijacked by the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). They also took this to mean that the Movement was ending, and the signing of the Assam Accord followed swiftly, in 1985, between the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi and leaders of AASU and AAGSP.

The Assam Agitation was successful in reorienting Indian politics and made "Bangladeshi infiltration" a national security issue. In doing so, the issue developed a communal character, and some Indian mainlanders were even more enthusiastic than the Assamese ethnonationalists themselves to get rid of the "Bangladeshis".[45] The securitisation of Bangladeshi illegal immigration, therefore, is intimately tied to the Hindu nationalist and Islamophobic politics of the BJP as well as the Assamese. In contrast to the mainland reaction, the ULFA, which grew out of the Assam Movement and was the principal organisation fighting for an Assamese nation-state, was not religiously fundamentalist and attributed Assam's woes to economic exploitation from the Indian Centre. As the BJP found common ground with the upper-caste Assamese Hindus, they entered into alliances with the leaders of the Assam Movement and their parties, causing a shift in Assamese ethnonationalist politics from the violent secessionism represented by the ULFA to electoral and Hindu nationalism.

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[44] Bhaumik, S. *Troubled Periphery: The Crisis of India's North East*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2009, 66.

[45] Ibid, 111.

Islamophobia and Statelessness

Electoral Background

"Ultranationalist" scholars and those more sympathetic to Bengali migrants both agree that illegal immigration was never taken seriously by the Indian central government and national parties in Assam.[46][47] The Modi administration has attempted to rectify this image problem of mainland policymakers and, since 2014, campaigned extensively on the migrant crisis, exposing the Congress Party as exploiting and benefitting from it. Corruption in the state was a great source of momentum for the BJP; the Assam Congress chapter had exploited Bangladeshis deprived of land due to the chaotic riverine geography by exchanging ID cards in return for votes, all the while doing nothing to improve the precarious legal situation surrounding migrants already settled there for generations.[48] It was for this reason that Congress had tried avoiding taking a public stance on the migrant crisis, even as and after it began creating significant instability in Assam. BJP's infiltration of Assam state politics comes after the decline of a powerful local Congress led by Tarun Gogoi, who helped Congress manage to obtain the widespread support of the ethnic Assamese and rule without a coalition for the first time since the Assam Accord. It was under Gogoi's leadership that then-future Chief Minister, Sarbananda Sonowal, fought in court to overturn the weak legislative powers of the police to report suspected illegal immigrants. The convergence of ethnonationalist interests and the BJP was the result of Assamese Hindu nationalist's, emboldened after the Assam Accord, scheming attempts to exert influence on national politics in order to obtain their ideological goals, with varying degrees of success. Congress' own doing incidentally served as an impetus for ethnonationalism to be co-opted and diffused into the politics of the BJP. For example, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), formed in the aftermath of the Assam Accord, is currently a junior coalition partner with the BJP in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Additionally, the BJP has collected the non-Congress parties from the region under its North-East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), which has so far dominated Northeast electoral representation in the upper and lower houses of Indian parliament and its respective Northeast state legislatures.

The marrying of Hindu nationalism with linguistic xenophobia has not always been a successful one. Because of the way Assamese nationalism was

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[46] Joseph, "Securitization Of Illegal Migration", 3.

[47] Sur. *Jungle Passports*, 14.

[48] Ibid.

so narrowly defined, contemporary Assamese racism has left many Bengalis feeling unwanted. Previously, this pushed Bengali Muslims to identify as Assamese (or, *Na-Asamiya*, meaning Neo-Assamese) in the Census and adopt Assamese as their native tongue, foregoing Bengali. But continued hatred against Bengalis and Muslims has contributed to fragmenting already disparate identities even further - the latest evolution of *Na-Asamiya* as *Miya* people, or *Miya Musulman* (Miah Muslim), is an embracement of the fact that Bengal-origin Muslims will never be accepted into Assamese society. But the Muslim component of Miya *Musulman* also underscores the lack of unity among Bengalis across religious lines. Well before the BJP's taking of the state in 2016, Bengali Muslims and Bengali Hindus multiple attempts to electorally unite have consistently resulted in clear failure, the last time being the short-lived United Minorities Front, Assam (UMFA), which emerged immediately and disappeared not long after the signing of the Assam Accord. The fourth-largest party in the state is the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), which draws significant support from Bengali Muslims, but it is notable that there is no Bengali Hindu equivalent. Seemingly, Bengali Hindu dominant areas generally elect BJP MPs and MLAs (state representatives), in line with national and state trends, which demonstrates how the BJP has successfully assured Bengali Hindus of representing their interests while simultaneously sharpening anti-Bangladeshi rhetoric to capture cross-ethnic appeal to Assamese Hindus. As stated before, the Hindu nationalist coalition is crumbling, and Assam state politics is reorienting itself in response to the BJP's failures on this front. The consequences of further aggravation and radicalisation may lead to a return to militancy that affected the state considerably in the 80s and 90s. Indeed, with the anti-encroachment drives as an example, the policies of the state are already becoming much more violent, causing great concern for the Muslim minority.

Muslim Insecurity: Systemic Discrimination and Harassment

The anti-Bengali sentiment is so high that Bengali communities regularly face attacks from the wider Assamese society, including aggressive expulsion campaigns led by non-Assamese tribal people.[49] The Assam 2012 violence between Bodos and Bengali Muslims was some of the most violent in the region's history, resulting in nearly 100 dead and up to 400,000 people displaced. The media response at the time was rife with the far-right "Greater

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[49] Gupta, B. D. "Media fueling the myth of Muslim infiltrators", *The Shillong Times*, available at: https://theshillongtimes.com/2012/08/13/media-fueling-the-myth-of-muslim-infiltrators/.

Bangladesh" conspiracy theory, alleging that Bangladesh aims to annex Assam using lebensraum-like tactics. Barun Gupta reveals how the media and spokespersons for the Bodos freely spread disinformation:

> "The spectre of a conspiracy to create a 'Greater Bangladesh' is being raised. People are being warned that Assam is soon going to be devoured by Bangladesh. Wild statistics are being concocted and bandied about on the incredible rise of the Bengali Muslim population in Assam without citing their sources. Sensational stories of a United Muslim National Army, formed in June, being behind the July riots are circulating freely".[50]

The frenzied rioting and frenzied reporting were combined in a positive feedback loop, one feeding and intensifying the other. The violence was heavily one-sided against the Bengali Muslims, but news reports continued outpouring sympathy for the Bodos, citing the danger illegal Bangladeshis posed to the other communities in Assam.

The violence in 2012 followed major massacres against Bengali Muslims, like the one in Nellie, 1983 and the 2014 Assam violence. Many other attacks, like the Khoirabari massacre also in 1983, were committed against the Bengali Hindu community. But where Bengali Hindus are concerned, they are not targeted for their religion. The fact that anti-encroachment drives take place in areas mostly occupied by Bengali Muslims illustrates how Bengali Muslims experience a form of "double oppression".[51] The stereotypical illegal immigrant is perceived to be a lungi-wearing Bengali Muslim who also comes from Bangladesh, a mostly-Muslim and mostly-Bengali nation. Dismissing the religious component of how Bengali Muslims are being pushed into statelessness ignores how being Bengali and Muslim automatically raises suspicion and, therefore, discrimination and harassment.

Bengali Muslims are targeted for being Muslim as much as they are for being Bengali; the potent mix of Islamophobia and anti-Bengali racism forms the basis for aggressive and terrorising policies of the state seeking to uproot communities that have lived there for generations.

Feelings of insecurity are compounded by police harassment of Bengali Muslims. Spontaneous pogroms against minorities are arguably enabled due to negligence by law enforcement authorities throughout the state. An issue

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[50] Ibid

[51] This term was coined by my friend in Assam, Iqra Fatima.

particularly acute during the Agitation period of 1979-1985 was the boycotting of state elections, which typically preceded episodes of ethnic cleansing. But these boycotts often had the support of electoral authorities themselves, and cases of polling agents refusing to perform their duties and even clashing with minorities wanting to vote are well documented.[52]

The violence that Bengali Muslims are so familiar with is exacerbated by wilful neglect and active participation of the law in criminalising their identity. Most clearly demonstrated by extra-legal mechanisms used by the state to punish and reclaim land from alleged illegal settlers, Muslims are disproportionately affected. There exists overwhelming evidence that proves that the people being targeted are not illegal immigrants - vindicating an argument made in this paper that the current security literature has enabled ethnic hatred to deprive millions of Bengalis of Indian citizenship. Without any clear recourse to appeal in legal institutions or repatriation agreements with Bangladesh, the legal situation for millions of Bengalis is extremely fragile. Those people who are "pushed back" into Bangladesh linger in no man's land in-between Bangladesh and India. They are refused entry into either country and usually "disappear" after a few days.

Malini Sur reports on a number of families and individuals forced out of Assam in the 1960s and who continue to live in Bangladesh.[53] Many were unable to be rehoused and absorbed into Bangladeshi society, with those who were born in Assam and whose ancestors had lived in Assam for generations experiencing trauma from when they were forced out. The subjects in Sur's fieldwork have not been able to assimilate into contemporary Bangladeshi society, insisting that they are Assamese, the land they used to own usually visible from the border.[54] Instances like this, where Bengali-origin Muslim peasants have totally assimilated into Assamese society and identity underscore the level of intolerance, racism and hysteria contained within Assamese ethnonationalism. An attitude that caused Amalendu Guha to describe as "genocidal" and "fascist".[55] However, the NRC has exposed that most of the illegal immigrants are not Muslim peasants but Hindus fleeing persecution and harassment in Bangladesh while also numbering well below sensationalist media numbers. This has caused the "political narrative in the state" to change to a "great

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[52] Baruah, S. K. "Immigration, Ethnic Conflict, and Political Turmoil - Assam, 1979-1985", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, 1986, pp 1199.

[53] Sur, *Jungle Passports*, 46.

[54] Ibid, 49.

[55] Guha, "Little Nationalism", 1707.

extent", demonstrating a greater focus on religious relations in Bangladesh.[56]

NRC, CAA and Statelessness

The power and institutions of the state are frequently used to harass, discriminate, antagonise, disenfranchise, segregate and deport the Bengali minority. The presence of Bengalis in *chars* and border towns especially arouses the suspicion of the state, and they are treated, in society and academia, as though they're "Bangladeshi citizens". As stated earlier in the literature review, scholars justify this racist vocabulary based on a misreading of demographic data. Assamese ethnonationalists tend to prioritise data on population growth to assert that illegal immigration is in the millions.[57] However, perceived unusual population growth is due to Assam possessing the third-largest Muslim population of any state in India. Otherwise, Muslim growth in Assam, which is higher than the national Hindu population growth, is in line with national trends among Muslim populations across India.[58] The misreading of the demographic data is extremely commonplace and is used to justify state violence against Bengalis.

The latest BJP government, receptive to the Assamese demands for stricter migration controls, passed a substantial citizenship reform bill that severely disenfranchises Muslims from acquiring Indian citizenship. The reform bill, called Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (hereon CAA), endeavoured to satisfy a shared political goal of the BJP (since the Assam Accord) and the Assamese ethnonationalists: identification and deportation of "Bangladeshi infiltrators'', which, to the BJP, meant Muslims.

However, there were large-scale protests against the CAA and accompanying the National Register of Citizens (hereon NRC) by the main opposition to the BJP, like Congress and the Bengali Muslim-led All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), and Assamese nationalist groups, including the BJP's coalition ally, AGP; and AASU and AAGSP, both organisations which spearheaded the Assam Agitation only five decades prior.

Preoccupied with the religious difference between Bangladeshi and Assamese

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[56] "Exclusion of Hindu Bengalis from Assam NRC changing political", Business Standard, available at: www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/exclusion-of-hindu-bengalis-from-assam-nrc-changing-political-119092200259_1.html.

[57] Sharma, C. K. "The immigration issue in Assam and conflicts around it", *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 13. 2012, pp 297.

[58] Murshid, "Foreigner Within", 609.

people, the BJP failed to acknowledge the linguistic difference, inducing the president of the AASU to declare that the bill continues to maintain Assam as "a dumping ground for immigrants".[59] The outcome was that the CAA turned out to be insufficiently radical for most of Assamese society. But it also indicates a continuous pattern of undermining political will and institutions in the Northeast, whether for good or bad, which is fomenting instability and, as in the past, militancy.[60] A potential factor behind the persistence of the belief in a "migrant crisis" can be attributed to the neocolonial relationship between the Indian centre and the peripheral Assam. The Assamese public does not feel in control of their borders and believes that national parties come into the state to legislate ways to authorise citizenship for their illegal immigrant vote bank, which is popularly imagined to be Bengali Muslim and Bengali Hindu for Congress and BJP, respectively.

With the given reaction by mass Assamese society, uniquely crossing political lines, it can be said that the BJP's rollout of the NRC and CAA was a failure. However, it enabled even more radical policies, namely the proliferation of detention centres to detain the 1.9 million stateless people (also in anticipation of furthermore illegal immigrants as NRC is expanded to all of India) and extrajudicial anti-encroachment drives, not too dissimilar to the Minuteman Project in the US-Mexico border. These drives are driven by suspicion and antagonism towards poor Bengalis by the police and wider society; as such, the people they target are often mistakenly labelled illegal immigrants.[61] The violent nature of the extrajudicial anti-encroachment drives gives no room for justice or possible course of action to its victims.

With the looming fear of statelessness of potentially tens of millions of people, not including the millions already made stateless, international organisations and foreign countries have aired their dissatisfaction. Since the mass protests, the UN has upgraded India, and Assam in particular, into its Genocide Watchlist.[62] The biggest causes for concern are the anti-Muslim legislation supported by the Hindu nationalist BJP and the anti-Bengali violence and legislation inducing statelessness in the state of Assam. Bangladesh seems to have weighed in on the issue as well; in the past, have kept quiet or, at most,

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[59] AASU intensifies anti-CAA protests, *The Hindu*, available at: www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/aasu-intensifies-anti-caa-protests/article34155211.ece.

[60] Baruah, S. K. *India*, 202.

[61] Sur, *Jungle Passports*, 151.

[62] India's Assam Evictions Heighten Insecurities of Muslims, *Genocide Watch*, available at:www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/india-s-assam-evictions-heighten-insecurities-of-muslims.

non-confrontational. Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, voiced confusion but neglected to condemn the NRC and CAA legislations.

Non-Issue

The consequences of securitising Bengali migrants, or "outsiders", have led to little nuance in public debates and public knowledge of the issue. Local prejudices become objects of fact used to mislead successive Indian national governments. Or, as in the current case with the BJP, it is used to justify bigoted common interests with national governments. The politicisation of the Bengali migrants has had consequences elsewhere in India, where Bengali Muslims are seen as Bangladeshi illegal immigrants in states as far as Maharashtra.[63] But emergent literature, like Murshid's, reveals that politicisation and securitisation have obscured the fact that Bangladeshi illegal immigration is likely significantly lower than media estimates, which can number in the tens of millions.[64] Sur's fieldwork concludes that movement and apprehensions at the border to states like Meghalaya are likely dominated by non-Bengali Garo and Khasi people inhabiting northern Bangladesh.[65]

A number of reasons can be given for the over-politicisation of the issue. Feelings of impotence due to lack of direct control over borders is one argument. Another argument is neocolonial economic relations are pushing Assam towards ethnic rivalry for economic dominance. In his analysis of the Assam Agitation, Amalendu Guha found that the rioting and violence of the Agitation can be attributed to the Assamese ruling class who owned the news presses.[66] Their interest was simply that they participated in the Agitation in order to assume monopoly in industries where Bengalis and other non-Assamese people were dominant. The issue was less to do with Bangladesh and illegal immigration and simply the deportation of dissident minorities who stood in the way of total monopoly for the Assamese upper classes, who were embarrassed by their relatively impoverished condition compared to other elites in India.

The border between Bangladesh and Assam also represents a wealth border. On

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[63] Anandan, "no Bangladeshi in Mumbai", 2020.

[64] Two crore illegal Bangladeshi living in India: Govt, *Business Standard*, available at: business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/two-crore-illegal-bangladeshi-living-in-india-govt-116111601110_1.html.

[65] Sur, *Jungle Passports*, 132.

[66] Guha, "Little Nationalism", 1701.

the one side, there is the informal economy of Assam, run by Bengali Muslims and some Bengali Hindus, mostly illegally trading cattle to be consumed in Bangladesh. On the other side is a markedly more formalised economy where trade is subject to certification and licensing for specific subspecies of cows coming into Bangladesh.[67] Cattle trading is not a respected profession in Assam, usually requiring bribing border officials and travelling under cover of night. Workers involved in the practice lead precarious livelihoods sustained by seasonal demands for large cows in time for Eid-ul-Adha celebrations. But in Bangladesh, businesses selling cattle make over six times what their suppliers in Assam make for the same cow or bull. Incidentally, this wealth disparity defies the economic incentive argument for Bangladeshi immigration. It doesn't make sense for Bengali Muslims to remain in Assam, where they're discriminated against, to enter Bangladesh, a country where they enjoy significantly more privileges, that is if they do not have kin and feel belonging to the land in Assam.

Possibilities and Recommendations

Bangladesh cannot change policies in the Indian state of Assam, but it can pressure India to produce mutually beneficial outcomes for both nations and communities. Protecting the interests of minorities and those who have lived where they have for generations is paramount. This article suggests the following policy proposals:

a. Officially complain and condemn the use of "Bangladeshi" as a derogatory term in India.

b. Bangladesh must practice a delicate balancing act in maintaining dialogue with the Indian centre with persistent issues in the Indian Northeast. This means keeping diplomatic channels open and establishing rapport with state Chief Ministers and their opposition. Bangladesh already does this to a certain extent, and informal relations between parties, organisations and individuals do exist.

c. Advocate for the rights of Bengalis and the danger posed by statelessness and genocide in Assam and elsewhere in the Northeast. Given the magnitude of the problem, Bangladesh, recognising that it is a nation of Bengalis, ought to shift its institutional weight towards recognising the issue of Bengali discrimination and encouraging

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[67] Ibid, 85.

security scholars and academics to take note of what is happening to people in the vicinity of Bangladesh's borders. This concerns not only India but also Nepal, Myanmar and incidentally Pakistan, given the large population of Bengalis in the slums of Karachi. However, it is doubly important to promote advocacy for the Bengali minority, considering the reactionary state of the current literature.

   d.   Bangladesh must lobby India to provide clarity over citizenship to Bengalis living in the *chars* and border towns. Moreover, Bangladesh must lobby India to sort out the irregularities involved in the NRC and quickly rectify legal statuses for those hastily made stateless.

   e.   Policies regarding ethnic relations have implications for Bangladeshi domestic policies, too, chiefly with regards to adiboshis and the CHT region.

Conclusion

Assam is often said to be India in miniature because of the vast ethnic and tribal diversity in the state due to the mixing of cultures and peoples from faraway regions in its rich history.[68] In the past, this history has led to occurrences of atrocities between competing ethnicities in a Hobbesian war of all against all. A repeat of tribal and ethnic differences can be demonstrated since the post-colonial period against populations brought over by the British. The atrocities that were committed and continue to be committed under the guise of legality and encroaching genocide foreground the urgency of my argument in this paper - want for ethnic purity and dominance, things that should widely be seen as fascist beliefs, have forced Bengalis into statelessness. Rather than opposing this fascistic predisposition in Assam, academics and policymakers have privileged demographic anxiety in law and policy, leaving minorities vulnerable to the genocidal tendencies of inhabitants of the state of Assam. This has resulted in the NRC exercise leaving 1.9 million people stateless in Assam, the forceful pushing into Bangladesh nearly millions of people since 1947 and the murderous anti-encroachment drives. In order to hope for a reversal of this sad state of affairs, the existing xenophobic and genocide-enabling literature must be challenged.

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[68] Mohammed, T. "The Peopling of Assam and contemporary social structure", in Aijazuddin Ahmad (ed) *Social Structure and Regional Development*, New Delhi, Rawat Publication, p. 201-218.

Changing Dynamics of China's Policy towards the Taliban: Analysing the Underlying Determinants and its Implications for South Asia[1]

Sultana Yesmin[2]

Abstract

This study offers a comprehensive analysis of China's policy towards the Taliban in Afghanistan in three different periods: 1996-2001, 2001-2020 and in 2021. While utilising the qualitative approach of social science research, it attempts to describe China's diverse policies and measures implemented with the Taliban, post-Taliban and the new Taliban regime of 2021. It also examines the changing dynamics of China's policies towards the Taliban from the perspective of national interest. The study finds that security and economic interests have been the key determinants of China's policy shifts toward the new Taliban regime. It also shows that the withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and China's deep engagement with the new Taliban have significant geopolitical and geo-economic implications for the South Asian region. These findings have been instrumental for the policymakers to figure out the changing nature of the influence of the great powers in Afghanistan and its implications on South Asian geopolitics.

[1] The earlier version of this paper was presented at Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (BILIA) Online Lecture, held on October 30, 2021.

[2] Sultana Yesmin has obtained her Ph.D. from Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China. She is a former Visiting Research Fellow at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences (YASS). Her research interests include China affairs, international political economy, diplomacy, foreign policy and refugee studies. Email: sultanayesmindu@gmail.com.

1. **Introduction**

Afghanistan has become an arena of foreign interventions for a long time.[3] The world has witnessed the military involvement of Great Britain, Russia and the United States in Afghanistan over the last two centuries. The Great Game or confrontation of the two empires--Great Britain and Russia as their spheres of influence in Central Asia began in 1830 and lasted throughout the 19th century. Given that Russia's influence in Central Asia was a key concern for Britain, Afghanistan was used as a buffer state by England to protect British India from Russian invasion that led to the First Anglo-Afghan War (from 1838 to 1842); the Second Anglo-Afghan War (from 1878 to 1880) and the Third Anglo-Afghan War that began in May 1919 and lasted for a month.[4] The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan on December 24, 1979, and withdrew its troops from Afghanistan in 1989. Afghanistan once again became the arena of conflict among regional powers such as Pakistan versus India, Russia and Iran and a zone of competition over pipeline routes among the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Iran.[5] Afterwards, the United States' combat mission made its longest war in Afghanistan. The U.S. invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as a great power reflecting its hegemony and unipolarity.[6] The withdrawal of the U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces from Afghanistan has long-term strategic consequences and major implications across the world. Many assert the U.S. withdrawal as the defeat in Afghanistan that has greatly diminished its power and prestige.[7] China declares the hasty withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan as the failure of the U.S. policy toward Afghanistan.[8]

The world is also likely to see a significant shift in the geopolitics of South Asia and a potential rise of a new phase of regional cooperation in the region. While the West and other democracies like India made alignment with the democratic government in Kabul, following the U.S. withdrawal from

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[3] Dawood Azami, "World powers jostle in Afghanistan's new Great Game", *BBC*, January 12, 2017.

[4] Cynthia Smith, "The Great Britain and Afghanistan", *Library of Congress*, 2021, at <https://www.loc.gov/ghe/cascade/index.html?appid=a0930b1f4e424987ba68c28880f088ea> (accessed October 20, 2021).

[5] Barnett R. Rubin, *Afghanistan: What everyone needs to know* (U.S.A.: Oxford University Press, 2020), p.2.

[6] Hina Butt *et al.*, "US/Afghan War: Great-power politics", *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt*, Vol.17, No.11, 2020, p.341.

[7] Martin Jacques, "Defeat in Afghanistan a complete humiliation for the US", *Global Times*, August 15, 2021.

[8] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Wang Yi meets with head of the Afghan Taliban political commission Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar", at <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1895950.shtml> (accessed October 19, 2021).

Afghanistan, the outright involvement of China, Pakistan, Russia and Iran in Afghan politics can be witnessed.[9] Russia, which was the supporter of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, also known as the United Front, in September 2001, showed a warm attitude towards the new Taliban government.[10] Iran, one of the most important neighbours of Afghanistan, cooperated with the U.S.-led international coalition to topple the Taliban regime and provided considerable financial support to the anti-Taliban government in late 2001.[11] However, like Russia, Iran is warming up relations with the new Taliban government. China is seeking a common stand with Iran as a common neighbour of Afghanistan to intensify its growing role in the war-torn country.[12] China is also coordinating its evolving policy with its all-weather ally Pakistan and Russia to strengthen cooperation on the Afghan Taliban issue. Consequently, Pakistan, China and Russia agreed to maintain constructive contacts with the Taliban in the interests of Afghanistan's peace, prosperity, regional stability and development.[13] The security and economic interests driven by national interest are causing China's changing policy towards the Taliban. The withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan has also security implications for South Asia. Instability in border areas, the potential rise of militancy and the transition in security alliances are perceived to be the major implications of the resurgence of the Taliban.

While considering the backdrop, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the nature of China's policy towards the Taliban?
2. What explains the changing dynamics of China's policy towards the Taliban?
3. What are the major implications of China's engagement with the new Taliban in South Asia?

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[9] Vikas Pandey, "Afghanistan: The Taliban's victory will test India, and peace in South Asia", *BBC*, August 18, 2021.

[10] Thomas Withington, "The early anti-Taliban team", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol.57, No.6, p.13; *Al Jazeera*, "Russia welcomes Taliban efforts to stabilize Afghanistan", October 20, 2021.

[11] Bruce Koepke, "Iran's policy on Afghanistan: The evolution of strategic pragmatism", *SIPRI*, 2013.

[12] *The Business Standard*, "China seeks common stand with Iran on Afghanistan under Taliban", September 05, 2021; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Wang Yi Speaks with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on the phone", September 03, 2021, at <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1904628.shtml> (accessed October 20, 2021).

[13] *The Business Standard*, "Russia, China, Pakistan agree to maintain contacts with Taliban", September 22, 2021.

In accordance with the research questions, the objective of the study is to analyse China's policy toward the Taliban. This paper attempts to examine the nature of China's policy towards the Taliban during the group's rule from 1996 to 2001. It also describes China's engagement with the new Taliban-led Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO forces from the war-torn country. The study explores the reasons behind the changing dynamics of China's policy towards the Taliban. The study has employed the qualitative method of social research. The data generated for the study are based on available secondary literature, including books, journals, media reports, newspapers, and online materials.

The article is structured as follows: after the introduction, the paper conceptualises national interest with a particular focus on the Chinese perspective. The third section of the paper discusses a historical overview of the rise and fall of the Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001. It also analyses the resurgence of the Taliban following the withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Afghanistan in 2021. Section four describes China's policy toward the Taliban and the post-Taliban regime. This section also observes China's policy shifts towards the new Taliban-led government. The next section examines the reasons behind China's policy shifts toward the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. It also analyses the Challenges of China's engagement with the Taliban. Section six analyses the implications of the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in South Asia. The paper ends with concluding remarks focusing on the key analyses of the paper.

2.   Conceptual Framework: National Interest

One of the key concepts of international relations is the national interest, which particularly encompasses security interests, economic interests, political interests and cultural interests of a country. National security with the concern of state sovereignty is the most fundamental element of national interest.[14] A state's foreign policy incorporates the legitimate goal of pursuing national interests.[15] The concept of national interests can best be explained from Hans J. Morgenthau's realist perspective. Morgenthau mentioned, "The concept of interest is defined in terms of power….national interests are permanent

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[14] Liu Zongyi, "The concept of national interests", Chapter 3, in Jiemian Yang (ed.), *China's diplomacy: Theory and practice* (U.S.A.: World Century Publishing Corporation, 2015), p.121.

[15] Yong Deng, "The Chinese conception of national interests in International Relations", *The China Quarterly*, Vol.154, June 1998.

conditions which provide policymakers with a rational guide to their tasks."[16] According to Morgenthau's realist perspectives, the fundamental national interest of every state contains the protection of its physical, political and cultural entity, referring to territorial integrity, political institutions and cultural mores against infringement by other nations.[17]However, Ernst B. Haas challenged Morgenthau's notion of "fixed" and "objective" national interests referring to that:

> There is no unified, immutable and stable conception of national interest. Different groups entertain different policy motivations at any one time and tend to change their motivations over a period of time.[18]

Different nations adopt different concepts of national interests based on their traditions, values, ideologies and other characteristics.[19]The formulation of national interests in China's foreign policy has drawn significant attention in the study of international relations over the past few years. China is a socialist country that is ruled by the Communist Party of China (CPC). Chinese socialism has historically been developed by Chinese leaders in different timeframes with their own unique means and own distinctive characteristics. In this regard, the country neither grasped Soviet-style bureaucratic socialism nor accepted peripheral capitalism. Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949,[20] the five-generation leaders, e.g., Mao Zedong in the first generation, Deng Xiaoping in the second, Jiang Zemin in the third, Hu Jintao in the fourth and Xi Jinping in the fifth generation have adopted different policies as well as initiated comprehensive but distinctive theoretical approaches at different timeframes to pursue national interests of China. China's national interests include some key goals, e.g., national security, sovereignty and territorial integrity and the continuation of stable development of the Chinese economy.[21]

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[16] Scott Burchill, *The national interest in international relations theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, third edition, 2005), p.36.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Scott Burchill, *op. cit.*, p.36.

[19] Liu Zongyi, *op. cit.*, p.121.

[20] Sharad K. Soni, "China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor: Opportunities and Challenges", Chapter 9, in B. R. Deepak (ed.), *China's Global Rebalancing and the New Silk Road*, (Singapore: Springer, 2018), p.104.

[21] Terrence K. Kelly et al., *The U.S. Army in Asia, 2030–2040* (Santa Monica, Calif, USA: RAND Corporation, 2014), p.11.

However, some changing dynamics can be observed in foreign policy strategies to pursue China's national interests since the 1980s. During the 1980-the 1990s, China pursued a national defensive interest in the bipolar world system between the two superpowers, the U.S. and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). China was a relatively weak power during that period. Given that the USSR with overwhelming military capabilities and aggressive behaviour posed an "increasing threat" to China's national security, dealing with the USSR's "aggressive expansion" and making an alliance with the U.S. became the key priority in China's foreign policy strategy.[22] The strategy of *taoguangyanghui*, keeping a low profile (KLP), was adopted by Deng Xiaoping on 4 December, 1990, addressing economic development, independent foreign policy of non-alliance, non-hegemony and offensive behaviour as the basic principle of China's foreign strategy. As per the strategy, Deng Xiaoping stated some key set of principles in Chinese foreign policy to deal with the international situation:

> Some developing countries would like China to become the leader of the Third World. But we absolutely cannot do that; this is one of our basic state policies. We cannot afford to do it, and besides, we are not strong enough. There is nothing to be gained by playing that role; we would only lose most of our initiative. China will always side with the Third World countries, but we shall never seek hegemony over them or serve as their leader. Nevertheless, we cannot simply do nothing in international affairs. We have to make our contribution. In what respect? I think we should help promote the establishment of a new international political and economic order. We do not fear anyone, but we should not give offence to anyone either. We should act in accordance with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and never deviate from them.[23]

Deng's strategy reiterated the continuation of economic development with cooperation and non-confrontation with all countries as the core national interest of China. Deng said:

> In determining relations between two countries, each party should proceed from its own long-term strategic interests and, at the same

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[22] Xiaodi Ye, "Rediscovering the transition in China's national interest: A neoclassical realist approach", *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, Vol.48, No.1, October 11, 2019.

[23] Joseph Yu-Shek Cheng and Franklin Wankun Zhang, "Chinese foreign relations strategies under Mao and Deng: A systematic and comparative analysis", *Philippine Journal of Third World Studies*, Vol.14, No.3, 1999, pp.100-101.

time, respect the interests of the other. Each country, whether it is big or small, strong or weak, should respect others as equals…in studying and handling problems both of us place.[24]

In the U.S.-led unipolar system after the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, China, as a rising power, adopted the strategies of internal balancing and soft balancing. Economic development, military modernisation, bilateral as well as multilateral partnerships and economic diplomacy were the major strategies to pursue Chinese interests.[25] With that vision, China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and became the world's second-largest economy overtaking Japan in 2010.[26] All these developments put forward a "pro-active" and "outward-looking foreign policy" for China instead of Deng Xiaoping's KLP strategy.[27]

Along with the persuasion of a strategy of cooperation, assertiveness in dealings with the U.S. and the power of challenging the actions of the U.S. on bilateral, regional or global issues represented the rise of China as a "confident global power" and the end of the unipolar system.[28] The 2012 report by the U.S. National Intelligence Council cited, "the era of American ascendency in international politics that began in 1945-is fast winding down".[29] *Euromonitor International* reported that "2014 is a landmark year for the world economy, one when the dominance of the USA appears to be over as China becomes the world's largest economy. China and the USA may be economic rivals, but beyond the headline figures, divergent trends in both countries are apparent."[30]Chinese President Xi Jinping formally presented the strategy of *fenfayouwei*, striving for achievement (SFA) to deal with diplomatic relations, at the foreign affairs conference of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on

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[24] Jiemian Yang (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.xxvii.

[25] Yuan-kang Wang, "China's response to the unipolar would: The strategic logic of peaceful development", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol.45, No.5, p.555.

[26] *BBC*, "China's economy is now the world's second largest", February 14, 2011.

[27] Baohui Zhang, "Chinese foreign policy in transition: Trends and implications", *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, Vol.39, No.2, p.40.

[28] Ibid, p.42.

[29] Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt, "India's rise, the European Union and the BRICS: An uneasy relation", in Marek Rewizorski (ed.), *The European Union and the BRICS: Complex relations in the era of global governance*, (Switzerland: Springer, 2015), p.138.

[30] *European International*, "China overtakes the U.S. as the world's largest economy: Impact on industries and consumers worldwide", at <https://forms.iimk.ac.in/libportal/reports/China-Overtakes-US-Worlds-Largest-Economy-White-Paper-Euromonitor-Report.pdf> (accessed October 8, 2021).

October 24, 2013.[31] The transition of China's foreign strategy in terms of national interests reiterates China's focus on strengthening political support than economic gains alone.[32]

3. Historical Overview

3.1.   Rise and Fall of the Taliban Rule

The then Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to support pro-Soviet leaders in Kabul facing internal threats, and Afghanistan became the last great battleground of the Cold War.[33]The Russian intervention was largely rejected by the Afghan Muslims. The Afghan Mujahideens, with support from the U.S. and other countries, including China, Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia, fought the Soviet troops and their Afghan allies. To be noted, China was involved in the conflict to counter the Soviet encirclement around China, and its neighbours, driven by China-U.S. friendly ties and Sino-Soviet strained relations.[34] China collaborated with the U.S. in financing and arming Afghan Mujahideens.[35]Eventually, the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989 after a guerrilla campaign by Mujahideens leaving the country as another battleground for the U.S.' longest armed conflict.[36] Seven years after the withdrawal of the Soviet Army from Afghanistan, the communist regime in Afghanistan backed by Russia and India completely collapsed in 1996.[37]

The Taliban came into power for the first time in 1996 and declared Afghanistan an Islamic emirate. Only three countries-Saudi, Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Pakistan, recognised the then Taliban-led government.[38] In the accusation of the Taliban's links with al-Qaeda, the United Nations (U.N.) imposed an air embargo and financial sanctions on the Taliban in

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[31] Xuetong Yan, "From keeping a low profile to striving for achievement", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol.7, No.2, 2014.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Benjamin Parkin, "Afghanistan: A history of failed foreign occupations", *Financial Times*, August 19, 2021.

[34] Steven I. Levine, "The unending Sino-Soviet conflict", *The Soviet Union*, Vol.79, No.459, 1980, p.70.

[35] J. Mohan Malik, "Dragon on terrorism: Assessing China's tactical gains and strategic losses post September 11," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol.24, No.2, August 2002, p.256.

[36] Petr Kozlov and Anna Rynda, "Afghan crisis: Russia plans for new era with Taliban rule", *BBC*, August 21, 2021.

[37] J. Mohan Malik, *op. cit.*

[38] *Al Jazeera*, "The history of the Taliban", August 18, 2021.

1999.[39] Later, in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, although none of the Afghans was involved in the terror attacks.[40] It was reported that al-Qaeda, led by Osama Bin Laden, was responsible for the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington.[41] The U.S. launched "Operation Enduring Freedom" and invaded Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, less than a month after the September 11 attacks, in the accusation of giving shelter to Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan by the Taliban and its refusal of handing him over to the U.S. The Taliban was toppled from power in a U.S.-led invasion and had collapsed by December 2001.[42]

3.2.   Return of the Taliban

The toppled Taliban started regrouping and mobilising fighters to battle against the foreign forces by 2006.[43] The year 2014 was crucial for the Taliban to come into power, which marked the end of NATO combat operations in Afghanistan. The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was ended at the end of 2014, and full responsibility for security was provided to the Afghan forces.[44] It led to the imminent drawdown of foreign forces in Afghanistan and gave the impetus to the Taliban to seize more territory, although the security situation continued deteriorating.[45] After that, the Doha peace process (from 2019 to February 2020) made the turning point for ending the years-long conflict.[46]On January 28, 2019, in Qatar's Doha, the U.S. and Taliban agreed in principle to make a framework for the eventual withdrawal of the U.S. forces. Subsequently, on February 29, 2020, the U.S. officials and Taliban representatives reached an agreement in Doha for the withdrawal of the U.S. forces by May 01, 2021, that formally commenced the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations.[47] U.S. President Joe Biden set the date of August 31,

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Imtiaz Ahmed, "The return of the Taliban in Afghanistan: A critical assessment", *CGS Peace Report*, 2021, p.4.

[41] *BBC*, "Taliban are back - what next for Afghanistan?," August 30, 2021.

[42] Ibid; *Al Jazeera*, "Timeline: How September 11, 2001 led to US's longest war", September 6, 2021.

[43] *Al Jazeera*, "The history of the Taliban", *op. cit.*

[44] *NATO*, "ISAF's mission in Afghanistan (2001-2014) (Archived)", <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69366.htm> (accessed on September 26, 2021).

[45] *BBC*, "Taliban are back - what next for Afghanistan?", *op. cit.*

[46] Imtiaz Ahmed, *op. cit.*

[47] *Al Jazeera*, "Timeline: How September 11, 2001 led to US's longest war", *op. cit.*

2021, for the withdrawal of the American troops from Afghanistan.[48]After the complete withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan, the Taliban returned to power in the country for the second time in mid-August 2021.

4.   China's policy towards the Taliban

4.1. China's policy towards the Taliban and Post-Taliban Regime

4.1.1. Diplomatic Ties

After the Taliban seized power in 1996, China suspended constructive engagement and formal relations with the Taliban-led Afghanistan. China did not recognise the Taliban's rule (1996-2001).[49] As early as February 1993, a few years before the Taliban came to power, China closed its Embassy in Kabul because of the outbreak of the civil war in Afghanistan in 1992 and kept its shut under the Taliban's rule.[50] China's non-engagement with the then Taliban regime becomes obvious from the following statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China:

> It is baseless to claim that China has regularly sent diplomats to Kabul. The reports that China has provided advice on building dams and built telephone networks for the Taliban and that China has signed an MOU with the Taliban on economic and technical assistance are also groundless…… China has not established any form of formal relations with the Taliban. The Embassy of the Islamic State of Afghanistan (Anti-Taliban Alliance) in China has normally been working in Beijing. China supports the leading role of the United Nations in a peaceful settlement of the Afghan question. We also support all efforts contributing to the peaceful settlement of the Afghan question.[51]

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[48] The White House, "Remarks by President Biden on the end of the war in Afghanistan", August 31, 2021, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/08/31/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-end-of-the-war-in-afghanistan/> (accessed September 12, 2021).

[49] Zhao Huasheng, "China and Afghanistan: China's interests, stances, and perspectives", *Center for Strategic and Information Studies (CSIS)*, March 2012, p.2; Claudia Chia, Kunthavi Kalachelvam, and Zheng Haiqi, "Exploring China's Afghanistan Policy", *IAS Insights*, June 25, 2021.

[50] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson on the reported relations between China and Taliban", September 15, 2001, at <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceun/eng/zghlhg/hphaq/fk/t26904.htm> (accessed October 2, 2021).

[51] Ibid.

Although China and Afghanistan established diplomatic relations on January 20, 1955, China had maintained good and friendly relations with the Afghan central government since the formation of the interim government headed by Hamid Karzai in December 2001.[52] Shortly after the fall of the Taliban, China was one of the first countries that establish a formal relationship with President Hamid Karzai's government. China has joined the peaceful reconstruction of Afghanistan since 2001.[53] China also reopened its embassy in Kabul in February 2002.[54] The then Transitional Administration of Afghanistan and the Chinese government signed the Kabul Declaration on Good Neighbourly Relations on December 22, 2002, and reaffirmed their commitment to build a constructive and supportive bilateral relationship based on the principles of territorial integrity, mutual respect, friendly relations, cooperation and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.[55]

Afghanistan's peace and reconstruction process in 2002 opened a new chapter of China-Afghanistan relations and increased China's engagement in Afghanistan.[56] China and Afghanistan maintained high-level official contacts. Soon after the formation of an interim government, the then Afghan President Hamid Karzai paid a three-day state visit to China in June 2002.[57] His visit to China in 2002 was remarkable as the visit was the first state visit by an Afghan head of the government since 1964.[58] Later, President Karzai paid several times official visits to China, such as in June 2006, March 2010, June 2012 and in September 2013. On the other hand, Zhou Enlai, former Premiere, was the

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[52] Zhao Huasheng, *op. cit.*, p.2; Adam Saud and Azhar Ahmad, "China's engagement in Afghanistan: Implications for the region", *Policy Perspectives*, Vol.15, No.1, January 2018, p.2.

[53] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Chinese contribution to Afghanistan obvious to all", at <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/t1719914.shtml> (accessed September 30, 2021).

[54] *People's Daily*, "China to reopen embassy in Kabul on February 6", 25 January 2002, at <http://en.people.cn/200201/25/eng20020125_89344.shtml> (accessed September 29, 2021).

[55] United Nations Security Council, "Afghanistan: Good neighbourly relations declaration", at <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/AF_021222_AfghanistanGoodNeighbourlyRelationsDeclaration_0.pdf > (accessed September 30, 2021).

[56] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, "Joint declaration between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on establishing strategic and cooperative partnership", June 08, 2012, at <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/201206/t20120608_679340.html> (accessed January 03, 2022).

[57] *CCTV*, "Afghan President Hamid Karzai starts 3-day state visit in China", March 23, 2010, at <http://english.cctv.com/program/newshour/20100323/102886.shtml> (accessed September 28, 2021).

[58] *China Daily*, "Hamid Karzai attests to steadfast friendship", November 01, 2019, at <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201901/11/WS5c37f743a3106c65c34e3df1.html> (accessed September 28, 2021).

only Chinese leader who visited Afghanistan in 1957. Since then, no Chinese leader has paid an official visit to Afghanistan.[59]

China and Afghanistan issued a joint declaration on establishing the China-Afghanistan strategic and cooperative partnership during Hamid Karzai's visit to China in June 2012. The strategic and cooperative partnership between the two countries further deepened in 2013. During Hamid Karzai's visit to China in September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping said:

> The Chinese side firmly sticks to the Afghanistan-friendly policy and stands ready to deepen the strategic and cooperative partnership with the Afghan side to benefit the people of the two countries and make contributions to promoting peace, stability and development in Afghanistan as well as the whole region.[60]

The declaration elevated their relationship from "comprehensive cooperative partnership" to "strategic and cooperative partnership" too intense cooperation in politics, economy, humanities, security and international as well as regional affairs.[61]

4.1.2. Economic Engagements

China and Afghanistan maintained smooth economic relations with the Afghan government from 2001 to 2020. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was a significant platform for boosting China's economic ties with Afghanistan. In May 2016, China and Afghanistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to boost cooperation between the two countries in diverse areas under the framework of BRI. The MoU stated:

> The two sides shall jointly promote cooperation on the One-Belt-One-Road Initiative in a bid to realise the goal of common development and translate the advantages of solid political ties, economic complementarities and people-to-people exchanges into pragmatic cooperation in an effort to promote increased economic growth.[62]

China, Afghanistan and Pakistan focused on a trilateral framework for

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[59] *Reuters*, "Factbox: Relations between Afghanistan and China", October 4, 2011.

[60] *Xinhua*, "Chinese president holds talks with Afghan counterpart", September 28, 2013.

[61] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, "Joint Declaration between The People's Republic of China and The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on Establishing Strategic and Cooperative Partnership", *op. cit.*

[62] RECCA, "Belt and Road Initiative and Afghanistan", at <https://recca.af/?page_id=2077> (accessed September 28, 2021).

extending the multibillion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) infrastructure project to Afghanistan. On December 26, 2017, at the first China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue in Beijing, China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, denoted China's interest in extending CPEC to Afghanistan under the principle of mutual benefit and win-win results.[63] Afghanistan also expressed willingness to become part of CPEC. Former Afghanistan Ambassador to Pakistan, Omar Zakhilwal, said, "CPEC is a great project that is equally relevant to Afghanistan, like Pakistan. Becoming a part of the project, Afghanistan can recover the damages it has suffered during its decades-long war."[64] Subsequently, landlocked Afghanistan opened an air trade corridor with China in November 2018 in order to boost its exports of dry and fresh fruits to the Chinese market and reduce the huge trade deficit with China.[65] In 2019, China became the fifth largest export destination and the fourth-largest source of imported goods for Afghanistan.[66]

Afghanistan is also a permanent member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The country joined the AIIB in October 2017 in order to facilitate cooperation on infrastructure development between the two countries under the BRI.[67] To be mentioned headquartered in Beijing, AIIB is a multilateral development bank that began operations in January 2016 with a mission to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia by addressing daunting infrastructure needs in the Asian region. The main activity of AIIB is to invest in high-quality, financially viable and environmentally friendly infrastructure projects in Asia and beyond with the vision of building a better future.[68] China became Afghanistan's largest source of foreign investment and the third-largest trading partner in May 2017.[69]

China intensified cooperation with Afghanistan in the energy sector. In November 2007, the China Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC Group), a state-owned Chinese company, won the right to develop a large copper

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[63] Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Croatia, "Wang Yi: To Discuss Extending CPEC to Afghanistan in a Proper Manner", at <http://hr.china-embassy.org/eng/gnxw/t1522540.htm> (accessed September 30, 2021).

[64] *The Express Tribune*, "Afghanistan expresses desire to become part of CPEC", October 15, 2016.

[65] Ayaz Gul, "Afghanistan opens air trade corridor with China", *Voice of America*, November 01, 2018.

[66] *China Briefing*, "China and Afghanistan: Bilateral trade relationship and future outlook", August 04, 2021.

[67] RECCA, *op. cit.*

[68] <https://www.aiib.org/en/index.html#> (accessed September 28, 2021).

[69] *Chinadaily*, "Hamid Karzai attests to steadfast friendship", November 01, 2019.

deposit and extract high-quality copper from the Aynak copper field near Kabul, which is called the Mes Aynak copper mine project.[70] In 2011, another Chinese company China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) which is the world's third-largest oil company, signed a deal with Afghanistan for 25 years (Amu Darya Oil Project) in December 2011 to explore for oil in three fields in the basin containing about 87 million barrels of oil.[71]

4.1.3. **Constrictive Role to End the War**

In the wake of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, China played an active and constructive role in ending the decades of conflict in Afghanistan. China was an important supporter, mediator and facilitator in the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan. China fully supported Afghan-led or Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process, actively participated in and promoted the Afghan peace and reconciliation process in bilateral and multilateral arenas and facilitated arrangements for building common understandings among the international community.[72] The China-Afghanistan-Pakistan foreign ministers' dialogue, the China-Russia-U.S. consultation, the China-Russia-Iran-Pakistan special representatives meeting and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): Afghanistan Contact Group were the significant platforms for facilitating the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan (See: Tables 1-3) China's active role in Afghanistan's peace and reconciliation process becomes more visible in post-2014 Afghanistan. Chinese officials had hosted the Taliban officials six times, e.g., in November 2014, May 2015, July 2016, June 2019, September 2019 and later July 2021, as a part of a bilateral initiative to make progress on the Afghan peace process.[73]

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[70] *Financial Times*, "China group wins Afghan copper rights", November 20, 2007.

[71] Mirwais Harooni, "REFILE-Afghanistan signs major oil deal with China's CNPC", *Reuters*, December 28, 2011.

[72] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China plays an active and constructive role in Afghan peace and reconciliation process", at <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/t1849847.shtml> (accessed September 26, 2021).

[73] Jason Li, "China's conflict mediation in Afghanistan", August 16, 2021, at <https://www.stimson.org/2021/chinas-conflict-mediation-in-afghanistan/> (accessed September 26, 2021).

Table 1: China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogues (2017-2021)

No. Dialogues	Date and Venue	Major Focusing Points
First	December 26, 2017, Beijing	a. China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi presided over the dialogue b. The three sides held talks on political mutual trust and reconciliation, development cooperation and connectivity and security cooperation and counter-terrorism under this mechanism
Second	December 15, 2018, Kabul	a. Consensus on promoting the realisation of the inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political reconciliation b. Pushing forward the pragmatic cooperation and deepening cooperation in fighting terrorism c. Promoting regional security, stability and development
Third	September 7, 2019, Islamabad	a. Agreed on the continuation of their joint efforts for building political mutual trust and supporting reconciliation, regional peace and stability, development cooperation and connectivity, security cooperation and counter-terrorism b. Took note of the talks between the U.S. and the Taliban c. Urged forintra-Afghan negotiations for bringing lasting peace to Afghanistan d. Underlined the need for an inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process for durable peace and stability in Afghanistan.
Fourth	June 3, 2021 (video dialogue)	a. Cooperation in fighting terrorism and forging closer-good neighbourly relations and partnerships.

Source: Compiled by Author

Table 2: China-Russia-Iran-Pakistan Special Representatives Meetings

No. of Meetings	Date and Venue	Major Focusing Points
First	May 18, 2020, Virtual Meeting	a. Reiterate their respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan b. Supported the" Afghan-led, Afghan-owned" peace and reconciliation process c. Called on the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan in an orderly and responsible way d. Raised concern about the rise of terrorism in Afghanistan and urged all sides in Afghanistan to take decisive action against international terrorist organisations
Second	September 16, 2021, Dushanbe	a. Urged for the implementation of the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and development process b. Reaffirmed their intention to promote peace, security and stability in Afghanistan c. Stressed the importance of bearing the responsibility of post-conflict socio-economic reconstruction in Afghanistan

Source: Compiled by Author

Table 3: SCO-Afghanistan Contact Groups (2017-2021)

No. of Contact Groups	Date and Venue	Focusing points
First	October 11, 2017, Moscow	a. Emphasised Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled national peace and reconciliation b. Continued assistance for socio-economic development based on the priorities of the people of Afghanistan
Second	May 28, 2018, Beijing	a. Discussed the situation of Afghanistan and its neighbouring regions, the reconciliation process in Afghanistan and role of SCO and measures for cooperation between SCO and Afghanistan b. Urged for Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled national peace and reconciliation
Third	April 19, 2019, Bishkek	a. Discussed the current military-political situation in Afghanistan, the process of intra-Afghan reconciliation, the development of cooperation between the SCO member states and other matters
Fourth	July 14, 2021, Dushanbe	a. Reaffirm their respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan b. Emphasised the development of Afghanistan terrorism-free country c. Focused on the common interests of Afghanistan and other countries in the region d. Five proposals from the Chinese side: the U.S. to take the responsibility with regard to aid; prevention of the resurgence of terrorist forces; joint efforts on Afghanistan's reconciliation process; strengthening multilateral coordination; and continuation of peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan

Source: Compiled by Author

China's role in intra-Afghan negotiations, direct negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban, is also remarkable. The country also mediated between the two sides of the Afghan peace talks. On June 25, 2017, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, during his visit to both Pakistan and Afghanistan, remarked China's policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan as "shuttle diplomacy" as a part of easing tensions between the two neighbours and promoting the Afghan reconciliation process through mediation.[74] These developments show that China has made significant efforts in ending long-term conflict and promoting peaceful reconciliation and development in Afghanistan.

Although China was an active supporter and promoter of the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process and rebuilding of Afghanistan, China maintained low-key positions in the U.S.-led military intervention in Afghanistan. It is important to note that among all the great powers, China refrained from military involvement and refused to join the U.S.-led ISAF and send troops or to collaborate openly with the U.S.-China did not have a strong and dominant influence on Afghan issues, unlike the West.[75] It is apparent that China was not engaged in any military operations in Afghanistan's war to avoid direct confrontation with the Taliban and long-term American presence in the region.[76]

4.2. China's Policy towards the New Taliban

China's engagement with the Taliban has become visible since 2014 after the end of the NATO combat missions in Afghanistan mentioned earlier. Soon after the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan in mid-August 2021, China is one of the first countries that has expressed interest to develop friendly relations with the Taliban.[77] China showed its respect for the choices of the Afghan people and willingness to give "cautious support" to the Taliban-led government.[78] However, China has been taking a pragmatic, cautious and

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[74] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Wang Yi Talks about shuttle diplomacy towards Pakistan and Afghanistan", June 25, 2017, at <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1473785.shtml> (accessed September 26, 2021).

[75] Zhao Huasheng, *op. cit.*, pp.1-2.

[76] Tiffany P. Ng, "China's role in shaping the future of Afghanistan", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Policy Outlook*, September 01, 2010, p.4.

[77] Abigail Ng, "'Hedging their bets': Political experts weigh in on China's growing relations with the Taliban", *CNBC*, August 23, 2021, at <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/08/23/china-and-taliban-relations-with-afghanistan-are-tricky-analysts-say.html> (accessed September 17, 2021).

[78] *Financial Times*, "China to respect choices of Afghan people following Taliban takeover",

collective approach toward the new Taliban.

While China is realistic in its approach to international affairs, it is usual to observe China's engagement with the new Taliban government in a rational and pragmatic manner. Hua Liming, China's former ambassador to Iran said, "Afghanistan is a neighbour, and China has no choice but to engage with it."[79] Helena Legarda, a lead researcher at the Berlin-based Metrics Institute for China Studies, mentioned China's growing ties with the Taliban as a part of the pragmatism and ideological flexibility of Chinese foreign policy. She said:

> "Clearly, there are ideological and political differences between Beijing and the Taliban, which means Beijing is not necessarily happy that the Taliban have emerged as the victors of the crisis and now controls the entire country. But now that they are in power, China is likely to be willing to work with the Taliban."[80]

Derek Grossman, a senior defence analyst at the RAND Corporation, denoted China's recognition of the Taliban as inevitable and said, "The geostrategic and economic benefits of closer relations are too great for Beijing to ignore."[81]Although China has not yet recognised the Taliban-led government, the possibility of extending formal recognition to the Taliban as Afghanistan's new government from the Chinese side can be observed. China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Hua Chunying, said:

> "The Afghan Taliban said on multiple occasions that it hopes to grow sound relations with China, looks forward to China's participation in Afghanistan's reconstruction and development and will never allow any force to use the Afghan territory to engage in acts detrimental to China. We welcome those statements. China has all along respected Afghanistan's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, adhered to non-interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs and pursued a friendly policy toward the entire Afghan people. China respects the Afghan people's right to decide on their own future independently. We are ready to continue to develop good neighbourliness and friendly cooperation with Afghanistan and play a constructive role in Afghanistan's peace and reconstruction."[82]

August 16, 2021.

[79] Shi Jiangtao, "China and Afghan Taliban set for closer interaction, as US urged to be pragmatic", *South China Morning Post*, October 27, 2021.

[80] *Deutsche Welle*, "China seeks stability in Afghanistan", September 13, 2021.

[81] Derek Grossman, "Chinese recognition of the Taliban is all but inevitable", *Foreign Policy*, August 27, 2021.

[82] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi mentioned the Afghan Taliban as an important military and political force in Afghanistan that is expected to play a significant role in the peace, reconciliation and reconstruction process of Afghanistan.[83] Therefore, while the U.S. and its NATO allies have evacuated their embassy staff from Afghanistan, the Chinese embassy in Afghanistan is functioning normally.[84] China has also reaffirmed its position of providing financial aid and support for rebuilding Afghanistan. The country announced US$31 million worth of emergency aid to Afghanistan, including food supplies, medicines and coronavirus vaccines.[85] China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, urged for the lifting of unilateral sanctions and restrictions on Afghanistan at a video conference of the foreign ministers of the Group of 20 (G20) on September 23, 2021.[86]

Second, China has adopted a cautious approach towards its policy with the Taliban in line with the strategy of a "wait-and-see approach". Hua Liming, China's former ambassador to Iran, said, "China believes in maintaining communication with the Taliban but, like other countries, including the United States, we will have to watch and see…."[87]As per this strategy, China may not be the first country to take the lead in recognising the Taliban government. In this regard, Hu Shisheng, a South Asian expert at China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICR), the official think-tank of China's national security apparatus, said, "We will not be the first".[88] Yun Sun, a senior fellow at Stimson Centre, said, "If the Taliban continues to support Uyghur militants and provide them with protection, China will be less keen to help legitimise the Taliban regime in return".[89] It signifies China's careful tread in navigating the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan.

Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference on August 16, 2021", August 16, 2021, at <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1899785.shtml> (accessed September 24, 2021).

[83] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Wang Yi Meets with Head of the Afghan Taliban Political Commission Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar", *op. cit.*

[84] *Global Times*, "Chinese embassy in Afghanistan operating normally; Taliban promises safety of embassy: ambassador", August 17, 2021.

[85] Cao Desheng, "Beijing pledges US$31m in Afghanistan aid", *China Daily*, September 09, 2021.

[86] The State Council of the People's Republic of China, "FM urges lifting economic sanctions on Afghanistan at G20 meeting", September 23, 2021, at <http://english.www.gov.cn/statecouncil/wangyi/202109/23/content_WS614c5c49c6d0df57f98e0ba2.html> (accessed October 10, 2021).

[87] Shi Jiangtao, "China and Afghan Taliban set for closer interaction, as US urged to be pragmatic", *op. cit.*

[88] Yew Lun Tian, "China will not be the first to recognise Taliban government, scholar says", *Reuters*, October 30, 2021.

[89] *The Guardian*, "China will tread carefully in navigating the Taliban's return", August 17, 2021.

Third, China seeks a collective approach toward its engagement with the Taliban. China urged Russia, Pakistan and Iran to strengthen communication and coordination, exert positive influence and play a constructive role in order to stabilise the situation in Afghanistan at an informal meeting in Tajikistan's Dushanbe on September 16, 2021.[90] China also seeks cooperation from Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) members to enhance collaboration to form an inclusive political framework and curb all forms of terrorism in Afghanistan.[91] Therefore, the Moscow format meeting in October 2021 highlights the significance of China-Russia coordination on the Afghan crisis.[92]

5.   Determinants of China's Policy Shifts towards the Taliban

It is important to note that China never established an official relationship with the Taliban during the group's rule from 1996 to 2001 in Afghanistan.[93] So, what are the major reasons behind China's remarkable policy shifts towards the Taliban in post-U.S. Afghanistan?

5.1.   Security Interests

Protecting security interests is one of the key reasons behind China's willingness of building good relations with the Taliban. The Chinese government perceives the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), referring to the Uyghur extremist group, as one of the most dangerous and extremist terrorist groups that aim to divide the Muslim-dominated Xinjiang province from China. According to the report from Chinese media, the ETIM is accountable for committing hundreds of terror attacks in China, particularly in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.[94] Thus, the ETIM is considered a direct threat to China's national security and territorial integrity. With regard to the question of national security and the issue of the Taliban, China is concerned about the ties

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[90] Shi Jiangtao, "China lobbies Russia, Iran and Pakistan to show unity on Afghanistan", *South China Morning Post*, September 17, 2021.

[91] *The Times of India*, "Xi Jinping asks SCO countries to encourage Afghanistan to have inclusive political framework, shun terrorism", September 17, 2021.

[92] Liu Caiyu, "Moscow format talks highlight China-Russia coordination on Afghan issue, conspicuous US absence", *Global Times*, October 20, 2021.

[93] Nike Ching, "China says it's ready to work With Taliban", August 17, 2021, *Voice of America*, at <https://www.voanews.com/a/east-asia-pacific_china-says-its-ready-work-taliban/6209667.html> (accessed September 17, 2021).

[94] *Global Times*, "Will Afghan Taliban honor its promise to China to make clean break with ETIM?", September 16, 2021.

between the Taliban and ETIM and the potential rise of terror attacks within its borders.[95] Chinese news agency Xinhua reports that there are currently 200-300 ETIM members in Afghanistan.[96]

As a matter of fact is that Afghanistan shares a 90 km border with China at the end of the Wakhan Corridor, a narrow strip of territory in Afghanistan. Wakhan Corridor shares a border with China's Xinjiang province. The strategic geographic position of Xinjiang is highly crucial for China's BRI. The province is the exclusive gateway for central Asian oil and gas imports connecting China with Western markets.[97] For this reason, China seeks clear assurance from the newly empowered Taliban to make a clean break from all kinds of international terrorist organisations.[98] China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, remarked, "We hope the Afghan Taliban will make a clean break with all terrorist organisations including the ETIM and resolutely and effectively combat them to remove obstacles, play a positive role and create enabling conditions for security, stability, development and cooperation in the region".[99] Wang Yi mentioned about the protection of China's "legitimate interests" in Afghanistan and urged the Taliban to take responsibilities for the protection of Chinese nationals, institutions and enterprises.[100]Earlier on different platforms, China raised its concern about the serious threat of terrorism existing in Afghanistan and urged taking decisive actions against international terrorist organisations. China is trying to ensure that a Muslim separatist group in a western Chinese region cannot build a network with the Taliban after the withdrawal of the western forces from Afghanistan. At a meeting of foreign ministers of the SCO-Afghanistan contact group held on July 14, 2021, in Dushanbe, Wang Yi said:

> Afghanistan should never again become a source of terrorism or a
> gathering place of terrorist forces. The SCO should give full play to

[95] Kinling Lo, "What is the Wakhan Corridor and why is China worried about it?", *South China Morning Post*, August 27, 2021.

[96] *Global Times*, "Will Afghan Taliban honor its promise to China to make clean break with ETIM?", *op. cit.*

[97] Fabio Indeo, "A comprehensive strategy to strengthen China's relations with Central Asia", Chapter 2, in Alessia Amighini (ed.), *China's Belt and Road: A Game Changer?*, (ISPI Publications: Italy, 2017).

[98] *Xinhua*, "China expects new Afghan regime to break with terrorists," August 18, 2021, at <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-08/18/c_1310132971.htm> (accessed October 12, 2021).

[99] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Wang Yi Meets with Head of the Afghan Taliban Political Commission Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar", *op. cit.*

[100] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China and Russia should strengthen strategic communication on Afghanistan", August 17, 2021, at <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1899946.shtml> (accessed on September 24, 2021).

the function and role of regional anti-terrorism institutions and make every effort to prevent the three forces of terrorism, separatism and extremism from infiltrating and spreading into the surrounding areas of Afghanistan. The SCO should step up counter-terrorism cooperation with Afghanistan and urge the Taliban to honour its commitment to break with international terrorist organisations.[101]

The Taliban mentioned China as a friend of Afghanistan and promised not to allow or host any forces, including Uyghur Islamic militants, to use Afghanistan's land to endanger China or pose a threat to China's interests. The statement of Muhammad Suhail Shaheen, Taliban spokesperson, can be referred to as:

> The Taliban sees China as a friend to Afghanistan and is hoping to talk to Beijing about investing in reconstruction work as soon as possible. The Taliban would no longer allow Uygur separatists, some of whom had previously sought refuge in Afghanistan, to enter the country. The Taliban would also prevent al-Qaeda or any other terrorist groups from operating there.[102]

In this regard, China urged the new Taliban government to honour the promise of the Afghan Taliban and make effective measures to crack down on terrorism within its territory. Neil Thomas, China and Northeast Asia analyst at Eurasia Group, said. "Chinese authorities may also be trying to protect their country from terror attacks by building a relationship with the Taliban. Beijing hopes that offering economic assistance and possibly diplomatic recognition to the Taliban will persuade them to protect China's security interests in Afghanistan."[103] Thus, the Afghan Taliban attaches importance to China for ensuring Afghanistan is an ETIM-free territory and reducing the risk of a spill-over of instability into Xinjiang.

5.2. **Economic Interests**

China's economic interests in Afghanistan range from infrastructure projects to the exploitation of Afghanistan's mineral deposits.[104] It is noted that

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[101] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization holds meeting of foreign ministers on Afghan issue", July 14, 2017, at <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1892261.shtml> (accessed September 25, 2021).

[102] *The Economic Times*, "Afghan Taliban says it sees China as a friend promises not to host Uyghur militants from Xinjiang: Report", July 10, 2021.

[103] Abigail Ng, *op. cit.*

[104] *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, "The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: Regional

enhancing economic engagement with Afghanistan in sectors such as utilities and mining has long been of significant interest to China for years. Earlier, China was involved in copper mine projects and oil projects with Afghanistan, although those projects had been stalled due to instability and security concerns in Afghanistan. China is interested in gaining access to Afghanistan's untapped reserves of rare-earth metals, estimated at between US$1–3 trillion in value under the Taliban rule.[105] Amid the dramatic power shift with the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, Chinese firms eye the resumption of projects in Afghanistan. China also seeks to start new projects to extract rare earth metals and minerals. In this regard, China plans for boosting cooperation in the energy sector with the mineral-rich country.[106]

As Afghanistan has been facing daunting challenges and uncertainties, China is considered to emerge as the best partner in Afghanistan's reconstruction process. Chinese companies seek investment opportunities in Afghanistan's severely damaged infrastructure.[107] It attempts not only to expand Chinese business through establishing an industry platform in Afghanistan but also to facilitate the development of economic corridors across the region under the framework of China's most ambitious BRI project. While building cross-border infrastructure connectivity remains the prime agenda of China's long-term strategic investment plans, the investment opportunity in Afghanistan's reconstruction can accelerate the former's efforts to finance and build infrastructure across the region.[108] It opens the door for the potential expansion of CPEC into Afghanistan and the successful completion of China's BRI in the region with full support from the Taliban. The geostrategic location of Afghanistan connecting South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia is significant to China's BRI projects. The vision of the potential New Silk Road is gaining geopolitical importance in the region. Given that China's previous BRI projects in Afghanistan faced immense security risks and had stalled due to security concerns, ensuring peace and stability remains inevitable for the successful completion of BRI projects. The Taliban has expressed the desire to join CPEC to protect the overseas investment.[109]

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responses and security threats", at <https://icct.nl/publication/the-rise-of-the-taliban-in-afghanistan-regional-responses-and-security-threats/> (accessed October 13, 2021).

[105] BM Jain, "China's geostrategic engagement in a new Afghanistan", *East Asia Forum*, October 08, 2021.

[106] *Global Times*, "Chinese firms eye resumption of projects in Afghanistan amid power shift", August 17, 2021.

[107] *Global Times*, "Why China is best positioned to help Afghanistan reconstruction", August 26, 2021.

[108] Zhou Bo, "The US is gone, the Taliban are back and China is ready at the door", *The Economic Times*, August 22, 2021.

[109] *The Times of India*, "Taliban say they desire to join China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Project",

6.   Challenges of China's Engagement with the Taliban

There are some challenges to China's engagement with the Taliban. First, the lack of inclusiveness in the Taliban-led interim government remains the key challenge for China to develop relations with the Taliban-led Afghanistan. In this regard, China has pressed the Taliban interim government to demonstrate openness and inclusiveness and particularly to effectively protect the rights of women. China has also called on all parties to engage with the Taliban in a rational and pragmatic manner and to lift international sanctions against Afghanistan.[110] The lack of an inclusive political arrangement that is acceptable to all can be the key setback for the Taliban to gain global recognition and support from the international community. Thus, it can also be challenging for China's soft policy toward the Taliban.

Second, the instability in Afghanistan can also threaten China's engagement in the Taliban-led Afghanistan. China's concern about the rise of external separatist forces in the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan can pose challenges to China's engagement with the Taliban.[111] Given this concern, China has repeatedly urged the Taliban to crack down on terror outfits and break off with all terrorist organisations on different occasions.

Third, following the Taliban takeover, Tajikistan's long and porous borders with China and Afghanistan have become an obvious security concern for Beijing. As a matter of fact, is that Tajikistan shares a 1,357 km (843-mile) border with Afghanistan and a 447 km border with China's Xinjiang province. China is concerned about the potential use of mountainous terrain passing through the borders of these three countries by the Uygur fighters and other extremist groups operating in Afghanistan and Syria as a route to enter China.[112] Therefore, tensions have arisen between Tajikistan and the Taliban. Tajikistan has refused to recognise the new Taliban government and accused the Taliban of further complicating the region's already complex geopolitical process. In return, the Taliban warned the neighbouring nation against meddling in its domestic affairs.[113] The Tajik President Emomali Rahmon previously ordered

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September 07, 2021.

[110] Ayaz Gul, "China Urges US-led West to engage With Taliban, lift sanctions", *Voice of America*, October 26, 2021.

[111] Jianli Yang, "China's political calculations and potential options in Afghanistan", *The Diplomat*, August 19, 2021.

[112] Linda Lew, "Why China is funding a base in Tajikistan", *South China Morning Post*, November 07, 2021.

[113] Catherine Putz, "Tensions rise between Tajikistan and the Taliban", *The Diplomat*, October 05,

the deployment of troops to protect the Tajik-Afghan border region.[114] The growing tensions between Tajikistan and the Taliban can increase security concerns for China's western Xinjiang region, which shares a border with both Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

7. Implications for South Asia

There are crucial implications of China's friendly relations with Afghanistan under the Taliban rule. First, China's engagement with the Taliban is likely to cause a noteworthy shift in South Asian geopolitics. The Taliban's return to power and China's engagement in Afghanistan can emerge a new pattern of a geopolitical alliance, e.g., the China-Pakistan-Afghanistan axis in South Asia. To be noted, both China and Pakistan have welcomed the Taliban's return to power. They are also providing support to the Taliban. Therefore, Pakistan has welcomed China's engagement with the Taliban. The collaboration between the decades-long "all-weather" partners in Afghanistan worries India, while the latter has strained relations with both Beijing and Islamabad. The Taliban has referred to China as a "trustworthy friend" and underscored its willingness to promote China-Afghanistan friendly ties.[115] There is also a huge prospect of collaboration among these three countries in the South Asian region under the framework of China's BRI.

Second, China's emerging role in Afghanistan has significant implications, particularly for India's economic interests in the region.[116] China's long-term strategic investment plan in Afghanistan is about to raise a concern about India's economic interests in the region. It is important to note that India had a huge advantage over the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. India has invested more than US$3 a billion in diverse infrastructure and development projects in Afghanistan over the past two decades.[117] India has been losing its strategic leverage in Afghanistan since the U.S. withdrawal. Zhao Gancheng, director of the Center for Asia-Pacific Studies at the Shanghai Institute for International

2021.

[114] Jon Shelton, "Russia says Tajiks, Afghans amassing troops at shared border, urges solution", *Deutsche Welle*, September 30, 2021.

[115] *The Economic Times*, "Taliban leader meets Chinese FM; assures not to allow terrorist forces to operate from Afghanistan", July 28, 2021.

[116] Pranay Sharma, "China-Pakistan alliance in Afghanistan worries India, as Taliban offensive continues", *South China Morning Post*, July 27, 2021; Derek Grossman, "China and Pakistan see eye to eye on the Taliban—almost", *Foreign Policy*, September 20, 2021.

[117] Roshni Majumdar, "What is the future of Indian investment in Afghanistan?", *Deutsche Welle*, October 13, 2021.

Studies, said, "India cannot get rid of its anxiety as its influence in Afghanistan may plummet after the U.S. withdrawal… India has always been opposed to the Taliban, and the Taliban does not trust India very much".[118]

Beijing's vision for smooth operationalisation of BRI projects through the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and its respective geo-economic objectives to exploit Afghanistan's rich minerals are considered to pose a threat to India's strategic leverage in Afghanistan. The Taliban described China as its "most important partner" and anticipated China's investment in war-torn Afghanistan. The Taliban also promised for creating a suitable investment environment in Afghanistan to get more Chinese involvement in the economic development of the war-torn country.[119]

The Taliban spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid said:

> China represents a fundamental and extraordinary opportunity for us because it is ready to invest and rebuild our country. There are rich copper mines in the country, which, thanks to the Chinese, can be put back into operation and modernised. In addition, China is our pass to markets all over the world.[120]

Since the beginning, India has been severely sceptical about CPEC that passes through Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Hence, the possible CPEC tension in Afghanistan under the Taliban rule raises new concerns for India.[121] Given this context, the Third Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan, known as the Delhi Declaration with the participation of India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Russia, was organised on November 10, 2021. One of the main objectives of the Delhi Declaration on Afghanistan is to hinder China and Pakistan's geopolitical strategy in Afghanistan.[122]

Third, China's engagement with the Taliban is supposed to enhance opportunities for Pakistan, particularly through the possible extension of

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[118] Wang Qi, "With China, Pakistan's absence, India-hosted Afghan meeting unlikely to yield tangible results: expert", *Global Times*, November 09, 2021.

[119] *Global Times*, "Chinese firms eye resumption of projects in Afghanistan amid power shift", *op. cit.*

[120] *Business Standard*, "China our most important partner, ready to invest in Afghanistan: Taliban", September 04, 2021.

[121] *The Times of India*, "China eyes Belt & Road extension in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, raising concern for India", September 03, 2021.

[122] Nalin Kumar Mohapatra, "Geopolitical importance of the Delhi Declaration on Afghanistan", *The Economic Times*, November 12, 2021.

CPEC to Afghanistan. While Pakistan was unhappy with the mounting ties between the U.S. and India in Afghanistan, China's pragmatic relationship with the Taliban can reduce India's leverage in the South Asian region.

Fourth, the implications of the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan and China's engagement with the Taliban for Bangladesh are quite different from India and Pakistan. Unlike India and Pakistan, Bangladesh has no border with Afghanistan and China.[123] Bangladesh's Foreign Minister mentioned that Bangladesh would not be affected in a big way by any change of government in Kabul.[124]Afsan Chowdhury, a Bangladeshi Liberation War researcher, columnist and journalist, cited:

> The Indo-PAK situation is very different, and for them, it is not Afghanistan but the games the two play over their borders. While India has to worry over Kashmir mostly, Pakistan will have to think about its internal scenario with many Talibans inside…. Mercifully, Bangladesh has no such concerns.[125]

Therefore, Bangladesh has been maintaining an independent policy toward Afghanistan, not to be influenced by India or Pakistan. Regarding the recognition of the new Taliban, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, AK Abdul Momen, indicated Bangladesh's preference for a democratic government while extending its support to Afghanistan.[126]

However, any shift in South Asian geopolitical alignment can have significant implications for Bangladesh. Bangladesh is an emerging player in Asian geopolitics located in the immediate neighbourhood of India and China. The likelihood of escalating tension in the region, particularly with the power vacuum in Afghanistan, can increase the existing rivalry between the two Asian giants, which can be a great concern for Bangladesh. In this regard, Bangladesh's balanced ties with the two regional giants remain crucial to successfully navigating the complex geopolitical and geo-economic

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[123] *UNB*, "Bangladesh to take its policy towards Afghanistan independently: FM", September 06, 2021.

[124] Humayun Kabir Bhuiyan, "Taliban advancement: Bangladesh not worried but monitoring situation", *Dhaka Tribune*, August 15, 2021.

[125] Afsan Chowdhury, "What Taliban's return means for Bangladesh", *UNB*, August 18, 2021.

[126] There is a concern that the Taliban's return power can give rise to some home-based extremists in Bangladesh, energize the networks among the extremists and spread radicalization among Rohingya refugees that can led to terrorist activities. See, *The Economic Times*, "Dhaka carefully observing Afghan situation; speculation on Bangla extremists joining Taliban", August 16, 2021; Iftekharul Bashar, "Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: Security implications for Bangladesh", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol.13, No.4, September 2021, pp.22-24.

circumstances in South Asia.[127]

8.   Conclusion

China has maintained the KLP strategy in Afghanistan during the Taliban's rule from 1996-to 2001. It has also followed the same strategy since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001. China refrained from participating in the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan but maintained good relations with the anti-Taliban government. To be noted, in the last decade of the 20th century, China emerged as the fastest-growing major economic power.[128] For this, diplomatic and economic inducements instead of deployment of forces were the major priority of China to safeguard its national interests. China maintained peace in sounding areas for the successful continuation of its economic development.

However, China started involving in Afghan affairs soon after the decline of the U.S. unipolar power. Since 2014, China has pursued the strategy of ending the war in Afghanistan by playing a key role as a mediator and supporter of the Afghan-led peace process. Therefore, maintaining good relations with the anti-Taliban Afghan government and supporting the Afghan-led peace process was crucial for China to bring peace and stability to the region. China also sustained its soft image by providing millions of dollars of aid to Afghanistan. Therefore, the enhancement of economic cooperation fostered stranger trade relations between the two countries, making China one of the largest trading partners of Afghanistan. China's active participation in the Afghan-led peace process has largely facilitated the negotiation for the end of the long-term war in Afghanistan.

Bringing stability to Afghanistan and to the wider region remains one of the key priorities of China in order to reduce potential threats and advance its strategic interests in the region. While the withdrawal of the U.S. forces has long-term strategic consequences, China attempts to safeguard its national interests, particularly security interests and economic interests in Afghanistan. China's gradual engagement with the new Taliban-led government has both geostrategic and geo-economic significance for the country. As Afghanistan is one of the neighbouring countries of China, the restoration of long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan's territory is crucial for safeguarding China's border security. Therefore, there is immense potential for the resumption

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[127] *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)*, "Bangladesh in the new geopolitics of Asia", November 03, 2021, at <https://asia.fes.de/news/bangladesh-geopolitics-lab>

[128] J. Mohan Malik, *op. cit.*, p.255.

of China's previous stalled projects as well as the extension of its ambitious BRI projects to Afghanistan. China's significant economic ambitions paved the way for Beijing to improve its ties with the Taliban. Ensuring stability in Afghanistan is thus of great interest to China not only for the safeguard of internal security and stability but also for the resumption and continuation of Chinese projects in Afghan territory. So, security concerns and economic motives are the two key driving factors behind China's deep engagement with the Taliban and growing footprint in the Central Asian landlocked country. Needless to say, all of these wills, of course, depend on China's successful diplomacy with the Taliban. As there is no past record of war between China and Afghanistan, there is also a huge possibility of mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries. Therefore, the common interests of China and the Taliban can enhance their ties.

> However, the withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and China's deep engagement with the new Taliban have long-term strategic implications for South Asia. It has already been a major issue of concern for India's policymakers about the potential rise of insurgency in the disputed region of Kashmir. The enhanced China-Pakistan cooperation in dealing with Afghanistan under the Taliban has also intensified India's worries regarding the possibility of external interference over Afghanistan's natural resources. India's bitter rival Pakistan is perceived to be benefited from the Taliban's victory despite the remaining concern of the porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although the consequences of the Taliban's victory for Bangladesh are somewhat not similar to India and Pakistan, the experts on South Asia raise the possible rise of militancy and extremism in Bangladesh. Whatever the consequences are, it is apparent that any kind of instability in the wider region would damage the interests of all the involved actors. Given that Afghanistan is a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and an integral part of South Asia, stability in Afghanistan is inevitable for ensuring peace and security in the whole Asian region.

The United States' Unconventional Balancing Against North Korea: An Analysis by Balance of Threat Theory

Md Ataur Rahman Talukder[1]

Abstract

The United States (U.S.) is the hegemon of the contemporary international system. North Korea, on its part, is not even a regional power, let alone a hegemonic contender to the United States. Yet being a presiding power, the United States perceives North Korea—comparatively a weaker state as a threat and tends to balance it. Traditional realist understanding of the Balance of Power cannot explain this phenomenon. Balance of Power prescribes the weaker states to balance against relatively powerful countries, not vice versa. It is a unique situation where a strong state (the U.S) balances against a weaker state (North Korea). This article examines the United States' unconventional balancing behaviour toward North Korea. The paper argues that the United States seeks to balance the threat it perceives from North Korea. Stephen M. Walt, the proponent of Balance of Threat, pointed out that states balance the relative power gap and simultaneously seek to balance perceived threats. This paper demonstrates North Korea's aggressive intention, offensive capabilities, and geographical proximity, and lastly, aggregate power cumulatively generates a sense of insecurity in the United States. Hence the United States, despite being relatively a powerful country, seeks to balance a weaker North Korea.

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[1]   **Md. Ataur Rahman Talukder** is Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Bangladesh University of Professionals, Dhaka. His e-mail contact is: talukder.ataur.rahman@gmail.com

Key Words: Balance of threat, Balance of power, Unconventional Balancing, United States, North Korea.

Introduction

At the end of the cold war and the subsequent collapse of the former Soviet Union (USSR), the United States (U.S) emerged as the most dominant country in the international system. The absence of any real challenger in the global system solidified the United States' hegemony over time. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the growing Chinese economy seem to weaken the U.S. hegemony.[2] Nevertheless, till now, it has been the most influential country in the international system.

North Korea is not even a regional power, let alone a hegemonic contender to the United States. While the United States ranks first in the global firepower ranking, North Korea held the 28th position in 2021.[3] The United States has the world's largest economy in terms of GDP, whereas North Korea is ranked 117th. These facts indicate the relatively weaker position of North Korea concerning the U.S.[4]

As the U.S is a relatively powerful country, conventional neorealists would argue that North Korea possesses no threat to the U.S. The United States, however, unconventionally perceives North Korea as a threat to its security. The U.S considers North Korea's nuclear weapons a massive risk to the U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific region[5] (Lee, 2020). Thereby, wherever and whenever possible, the United States tends to balance North Korea.[6]

As part of its balancing manoeuvres, the United States Treasury has imposed unilateral sanctions guidelines on North Korea.[7] They are, in general,

[2] Rozman, G. 'Xi Jinping's Geopolitical Framework for Northeast Asia,'Joint U.S. - Korea Academic Studies 31, no. 2,2020 pp 36–51.

[3] Globalfirepower.com. 'North Korea Military Strength,' 2021. [online] Available at: <https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=north-korea> [Accessed 5 April 2021].

[4] Hackett, J. and Mark, F. 'The conventional military balance on the Korean Peninsula,' International Institute for Strategic Studies, 11, 2018.

[5] Lee, J. South Korea's Strategic Nondecision and Sino-U.S. Competition. In: A. Tellis, A. Szalwinski and M. Wills, ed., Strategic Asia 2020 U.S.-China Competition for Global Influence, Washington D.C, National Bureau of Asian Research, 2020.

[6] Pak, J. 'The education of Kim Jong-un,' 2018. [online] Brookings. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/the-education-of-kim-jong-un/> [Accessed 18 April 2021].

[7] U.S. Department of Defense. 'Report to Congress on Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,' December 15, 2017, pp. 09-13.

designed to obstruct North Korea's improvement of high-tech weapons and delivery systems. The U.S. Department of Defense has prepared operational plans called OPLANs to counter any potential threat. In the Korean Theater of Operations (KTO), a chain of OPLANs has been laboured out.[8] The U.S. and South Korea established a combined forces command (CFC) constituting U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) and South Korean soldiers.[9]

In mid-2015, the U.S. and Korean commanders authorised a brand new strategy (OPLAN 5015) that requires precision moves in opposition to North Korea's nuclear, missile, and command and management facilities, including decapitation raids. These pieces of evidence strongly indicate that the United States is balancing against perceived North Korean threats everywhere possible.[10]

Balance of power in International Relations is a realist prescription for the weaker states to balance against sturdy opponents. It prescribes the weaker states balance the relative power gap against the powerful states to ensure survival.[11] Nonetheless, the United States balancing attitude against North Korea presents a conceptual anomaly for the Balance of Power. It is a unique situation where a strong state (the U.S) balances against a weaker state (North Korea). Balance of power is conceptually inadequate to explain this phenomenon. Hence this article investigates why does a relatively powerful United States balance against a weaker North Korea?

This paper demonstrates that the United States is balancing threats it perceives from North Korea. As the U.S balances perceived threats instead of the relative power gap, the logic of Balance of Power becomes obsolete. Resultantly, this article uses Stephen M. Walt's Balance of Threat as a conceptual framework to unfold this unique phenomenon.

Walt identifies four components to explain the threat perception of any country. For Walt, aggressive intention, offensive capabilities, geographical proximity, and aggregate power cumulatively generate threat perception

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8   Panda, A. 'Exclusive: Revealing Kangson, North Korea's First Covert Uranium Enrichment Site,' Diplomat, July 13, 2018, at https://thediplomat.com/2018/07/exclusive-revealing-kangson-north-koreas-first-covert-uraniumenrichment-site/

9   U.S. Department of Defense. 'Report to Congress on Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,' December 15, 2017, pp. 09-13.

10   Ibid

11   Schweller, R. 'The Balance of Power in World Politics,' Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, 2016. [online] Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306091384_ The_Balance_of_Power_in_World_Politics> [Accessed 5 January 2021].

among the states. Walt demonstrated that even the most powerful countries could perceive a threat from the weaker states.[12] Therefore, powerful states such as—the United States—play the balancing game against weaker states like—North Korea.

To recapitulate, this article investigates the rationale of the United States' balancing attitude against North Korea. The Balance of Threat concept is employed as an explanatory tool to unfold this unique situation. It is an unusual situation because, contrary to the conventional wisdom of neo-realism, a powerful state is unconventionally balancing against a weaker state.

The following section of the article explains the conceptual framework, Balance of Threat. The third section illustrates the threat components of North Korea. The final section demonstrates the rationale of the U.S balancing attitude against North Korea.

Balance of Threat

Neorealism, a reinvented version of Realism, conceptualises the international system as anarchic by structure. The theory argues that every state is equal in this anarchic international system. However, the states are only comparable in terms of their sovereign status but unequal in power distribution. Some states are naturally more powerful than others. This inequality creates a relative power gap among the states. Neorealists point out this relative power gap as a source of threat.[13]

Kenneth Waltz, the progenitor of Neorealism, theorises that states always compete for power. Since a conflict in the anarchic structure can break out at any time, states want to maximise power to secure survival.[14] Hence, the idea of power balancing is an inbuilt prescription of this theory. Balance of Power implies that if one state is weaker than its counterpart, the weaker must neutralise this power gap by forming alliances or enhancing self-competence.[15]

Nevertheless, the Balance of Power fails to explain why powerful states tend to balance relatively weaker states. As a result, the United States balancing

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[12] Walt, S. The Origins of Alliances, New York, Cornell University, 1987.,pp.21-28.

[13] Nexon, D. H. 'The Balance of power in the Balance,' World Politics, 61(2), pp330-359, 2009.

[14] Kaufman, S., Little, R. and Wohlforth, W.'The Balance of Power in World History,' London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 1st ed.

[15] Waltz, K.Theory of international politics, London, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979.

strategy against North Korea generates an analytical inefficacy for the Balance of Power concept. To conceal this neorealist inadequacy, Stephen M. Walt proposed his Balance of Threat Theory.

Stephen M. Walt introduced the Balance of Threat thesis in 1987. In his magnum opus 'The Origins of Alliances' (1987), Walt demonstrated that states react to threats they perceive from others. Walt recognises four segments of threat perception—aggregate power, geographical proximity, offensive capabilities, and aggressive intention.[16] Cumulatively these four elements construct the threat perception of any given country. The following paragraphs illustrate the impacts of these elements on the threat construction of any country.

Aggregate power

A nation's overall capacity to inflict harm on others is crucial assess to how dangerous it is. If all other factors remain constant, the higher a state's total resources are, i.e. demography, military-industrial capacity, superior technology—the more significant a danger it can represent to others. Hence, the aggregate strength of a state may lead to bandwagoning or balancing. Understanding this reality, Walter Lippmann and George Kennan framed the goal of the U.S. grand strategy as preventing any single country from owning more industrial resources than the U.S.[17]

Iran, a state in the Middle East, presents itself as a classic example. It wants to portray itself as the regional hegemon. Its seizable aggregate power well backs up Iran's intention. The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Israel are balancing against the perceived Iranian threat. Signing off the Abraham accord (2020) between Israel, UAE, and Bahrain is a glaring example of threat balancing.[18] But it is important to remember that aggregate power is only a component of threat calculation. It alone does not represent much of the threat.

Geographical proximity

Closer countries pose a more significant threat than more distant ones since the ability to apply force declines with geographical distance. Generally speaking, states will more likely choose alliances in response to neighbouring powers

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[16] Walt, S. The Origins of Alliances, New York, Cornell University, 1987.,pp.21-28.

[17] Ibid

[18] Narayanan, N. 'Balance of Threat in the Middle East,' Diplomatist, 2021. [online] Available at: <https://diplomatist.com/2021/04/24/balance-of-threat-in-the-middle-east/> [Accessed 15 April 2021].

than to distant ones. History suggests the British Foreign Office responded to German naval expansion while reluctantly observing the Brazilian navy's development. It is because Brazil is geographically far away from the British Isles.[19]

To cite another example, China and Pakistan were drawn to one another because they are geographically connected with India. India could launch an attack on both China and Pakistan because of its military posture and geography. For this same reason, Saudi Arabia is always concerned about Iran's intentions.[20]

Offensive capacity

The ability to threaten another state's sovereignty or territorial integrity is specifically referred to as offensive power. Even if everything else were equal, nations with significant offensive capabilities are more likely to trigger an alliance. But of course, proximity and offensive capabilities go hand in hand. Thus states near one another may threaten one another more readily. The offensive power is linked to aggregate power. A state can transform aggregate power into offensive power with relative ease. To summarise, the ability to challenge another state's sovereignty or territorial integrity while financially being feasible is termed an offensive power.[21]

The attacking capacity of one state creates a powerful incentive for others to balance it. For this, England perceived the German naval fleet as a serious offensive threat during the First World War. Consequently, it deepened ties with France and Russia while reinforcing its naval efforts (Ibid). The same logic applies to Azerbaijan's deep relationship with Turkey. Armenia's offensive capacity pushed Azerbaijan toward Turkey for balancing the former. In the second Nagorno-Karabakh war, Turkish military assistance turned the tide of war, favouring Azerbaijan.[22]

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[19] Walt, S. The Origins of Alliances, New York, Cornell University, 1987.,pp.21-28.

[20] Watson, M. 'BALANCE OF POWER vs. BALANCE OF THREAT: THE CASE OF CHINA AND PAKISTAN,' Masters, Marine Corps University, 2001.

[21] Walt, S. The Origins of Alliances, New York, Cornell University, 1987.,pp.21-28.

[22] Keddie, P. 'What's Turkey's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?,' Al-Jazeera, 2020. [online] Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/10/30/whats-turkeys-role-in-the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict> [Accessed 17 April 2021].

Aggressive intention

Perceptions of intent are likely to be essential in alliance decisions. Aggressive states cause others to counterbalance them. For example, Bismarck protected the status quo in favour of Germany after 1870; his successors' expansionist intentions worried the other European countries. Changing German goals helped create the Triple Entente. Despite the rise of German strength, no European powers could underestimate the importance of Germany's aggressive aims. Equally, Nazi Germany faced an overwhelming opposing coalition due to its vast power and bold intentions.[23]

Even states with limited capabilities might cause others to balance if considered aggressive. Egypt, Israel, France, the U.S., Chad, and Sudan have coordinated political and military reactions to Libya's expansionist agenda.[24]

To summarise, Walt recognises four segments of threat that make a state a threat (Walt 1987, 21–28). The expression aggregate power alludes to "a state's complete assets".[25] The higher the total power, the more apparent the peril a state may depict. Geographic vicinity alludes to the distance between potential contenders; the more prominent the distance, the more restricted "the ability to project power" and thus the potential risk.[26] The "offensive limits" size decides offensive power; the higher the offensive power, the greater the risk a state may offer.[27] A state's offensive power is inseparably connected to total power and geographic area. Walt defines aggressive intents as how states see a prospective opponent.[28]

North Korea's Threat Components

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), popularly known as North Korea, is in East Asia. It comprises the entirety of the Korean Peninsula's northern portion. Run by an authoritarian communist regime, this country is bounded by South Korea, Russia, and China. It has a total land area of 120,538 square kilometres, making it the world's 99th largest country. Ethnically homogenous, North Korea is the 54th most Populated country having a

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[23] Walt, S. The Origins of Alliances, New York, Cornell University, 1987.,pp.21-28.

[24] Ibid

[25] Ibid

[26] Ibid

[27] Ibid

[28] Ibid

population of 25,831,360. DPRK has vibrant demography with a 100 per cent literacy rate and a median age of 34.6 years.[29]

The majority of the North Koreans live in urban centres. Almost a quarter of the total workforce is unemployed.[30] 'Juche' or the idea of 'national-self reliance' dictates North Korea's economy. It practices a mixed economic model where state-owned enterprises play a critical role.[31] However, nowadays, private enterprises are increasingly making their places. The country does not have any independent central bank. Instead, the supreme leader manages the economy.[32] The economy is structured in such a way as to bolster the regime's dominance. The supreme leader has the authority to issue business licences. Only government loyalists are authorised to administer company permits. The supreme leader directly controls foreign trade.[33]

There are serious doubts about the reliability of the National Income Accounts data produced by North Korea. The nation's GDP per capita—assessed somewhere in the range of $700 and $2,000—puts North Korea close to the lower part of the world rankings.[34] The administration spends an enormous portion of GDP on its military, and relatively little goes to individuals' utilisation. Individuals keep on experiencing deficiencies in food, fuel, power, running water, and different necessities.

The nation runs a huge product import/export imbalance, financed by limited quantities of an unfamiliar guide, illegal economic exchanges. In the absence of a global market exchanging system, the WTO has implied high taxes on North Korean products, making them uncompetitive internationally. Pyongyang's long-term financial and political inconveniences give a restricted pathway to changes that could unshackle the economy.[35]

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[29] CIA The World Factbook, 2021. [online] Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/korea-north/> [Accessed 7 February 2021].

[30] Ibid

[31] Ibid

[32] Silberstein, B. 'The North Korean economy in June 2018: an overview,' 2018. [online] N.K. Pro. Available at: <https://www.nknews.org/pro/the-north-korean-economy-in-june-2018-an-overview/> [Accessed 5 February 2021].

[33] Lee, S. 'North Korea's economy is recentralised and China-reliant,' 2021. [online] East Asia Forum. Available at: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/04/10/north-koreas-economy-is-recentralised-and-china-reliant/> [Accessed 11 April 2021].

[34] CIA The World Factbook, 2021. [online] Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/korea-north/> [Accessed 7 February 2021].

[35] Pak, J. 'The education of Kim Jong-un,' 2018. [online] Brookings. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/the-education-of-kim-jong-un/> [Accessed 18 April 2021].

Sixty-three per cent of North Korea's total workforce is in the industrial sectors. Yet, its industrial growth is around one per cent only. It holds a powerful position in terms of industrial growth. Watches, false hair, iron alloys, instructional models, and tungsten are the main exports from North Korea. Its industrial failure is evident in its electricity production. So far, its electrification drive could cover only 26% of the total population. In terms of electricity consumption, it ranks 87th globally.[36]

Geographically, North Korea is not proximate to the U.S. But the U.S critical allies in East Asia, i.e., Japan and South Korea—are under the North Korean nuclear weapon range. Even Hawaii and South Carolina are under the coverage of Kim Jong Un's nuclear missiles.[37] [38]

Former South Korean President Moon Jae-in has proposed that his nation cannot depend on Washington for security in these circumstances. He argued that a military thrust from nuclearised North Korea would create a disastrous situation for South Koreans and 230,000 American citizens living in South Korea.[39]

The U.S military bases in Japan function as a deterrent for Pyongyang. However, this is also the soft bally for the U.S security apparatus.[40] A preemptive North Korean attack would likely first hit the U.S bases. Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pointed out that Japan would suffer significantly because of its geographical closeness if the U.S and North Korea engaged in a war. Therefore, it is evident that Japan and South Korea have a high risk of geographical proximity to North Korea.[41] The United States cannot

[36] Worlddata.info. Energy consumption in North Korea, 2021 [online] Available at: <https://www.worlddata.info/asia/north-korea/energy-consumption.php> [Accessed 16 March 2021].

[37] Dreazen, Y. 'Here's what war with North Korea would look like,' Vox, 2018. [online] Available at: <https://www.vox.com/world/2018/2/7/16974772/north-korea-war-trump-kim-nuclear-weapon> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

[38] Day, J. 'Utter Devastation!' North Korea's Plan to Start War with Nuclear Weapons Unleashed,' Express, 2020. [online] Available at: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1307246/north-korea-latest-kim-jong-un-biological-weapons-world-war-3-south-korea-spt> [Accessed 16 January 2021].

[39] Lee, J. South Korea's Strategic Nondecision and Sino-U.S. Competition. In: A. Tellis, A. Szalwinski and M. Wills, ed., Strategic Asia 2020 U.S.-China Competition for Global Influence, Washington D.C, National Bureau of Asian Research, 2020.

[40] BENNETT, B., CHOI, K., G.O., M., BECHTOL, B., PARK, J., KLINGNER, B. and CHA, D. 'Countering the Risks of North Korean Nuclear Weapons,', 2021. [online] Santa Monica: RAND Corporation. Available at: <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PEA1000/PEA1015-1/RAND_PEA1015-1.pdf> [Accessed 3 April 2021].

[41] Reuters. 'Japan says North Korea developing warheads to penetrate missile defenses,' 2019. [online] Available at: <https://news.trust.org/item/20190827172007-6o1ds> [Accessed 21 March

change this harsh reality.

China, too shares a border with North Korea and has a significant stake in the U.S. - North Korean conflict. China considers the Korean peninsula as its sphere of influence. Its extensive ties with North Korea reinforce Pyongyang's sense of unassailability. History demonstrates that China won't tolerate any military action in its strategic backyard.[42] Chinese geographical proximity and willingness to protect North Korea make the threat calculation more complicated.

North Korea is a conspicuous threat as far as offensive capacity is concerned. It flaunts the world's fourth-biggest military, with about 1.3 million military individuals or about 5% of the whole populace, and is known to have chemical weapons.[43] [44] [45] As per the U.S. State Department sources, North Korea burns through one-fourth of its GDP on its military. Numerically the amount would be $3.6 billion per year.[46]

Apart from a large army, North Korea has one of the world's most powerful conventional military machines. North Korea's military comprises roughly 1,300 aeroplanes, nearly 300 helicopters, 430 troop vessels, 250 ocean boats, 70 submarines, 4,300 tanks, and 5,500 rocket launchers. Specialists guarantee that North Korea has up to 1,000 rockets of differing ranges.[47] Pyongyang's conventional abilities to stay a significant threat to its southern neighbour are reinforced by missiles focused on Seoul.[48]

2021].

[42] Albert, E. 'The China–North Korea Relationship,'Council on Foreign Relations, , 2019 [online] Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-north-korea-relationship> [Accessed 19 December 2020].

[43] Globalfirepower.com. 'North Korea Military Strength,' 2021. [online] Available at: <https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=north-korea> [Accessed 5 April 2021].

[44] Varriale, C. 'North Korea's Other Weapons of Mass Destruction | Arms Control Association,' Armscontrol.org, 2018. [online] Available at: <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2018-09/features/north-koreas-other-weapons-mass-destruction> [Accessed 16 January 2021].

[45] Albert, E. 'North Korea's Military Capabilities,' Council on Foreign Relations, 2020. [online] Available   at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/north-koreas-military-capabilities> [Accessed 2 March 2021].

[46] Jo, H. 'North Korea: sidelining economic development to prioritise strategic weapons?,' [Blog] Military Balance Blog, 2020. Available at: <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2020/07/north-korea-defence-policy-strategic-weapons> [Accessed 6 August 2021].

[47] Albert, E. 'North Korea's Military Capabilities,' Council on Foreign Relations, 2020. [online] Available   at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/north-koreas-military-capabilities> [Accessed 2 March 2021].

[48] White, J. 'Russia' has repeatedly supplied fuel to North Korea in violation of sanctions', Independent, 2017.[online] Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/

North Korea has a reserve of biological weapons too. Estimates indicate the stocks are between 2,500 -and 5,000 tons.[49] North Korea supposedly can deliver germs like Bacillus anthracis, smallpox, and aggravation (plague).[50] However, the U.S. and its partners in Asia's combined forces can deter a North Korean conventional attack. What makes North Korea an existential threat is its nuclear capacity.

North Korea has effectively built up an arms stockpile of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles under Dictator Kim Jong-Un. North Korea possesses around sixty nuclear bombs equipped for conveying a strike on the United States and its Asian accomplices. Under Kim Jong-Un, North Korea's nuclear program sped up significantly in late 2011. The authoritarian system conducted multiple atomic tests from July to November 2017.[51]

Pyongyang claimed its Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM); the Hwasong-15 can fly around 10,000 kilometres and arrive at a stature of 4,475 kilometres over the International Space Station The Hwasong-15 has a hypothetical scope of 13,000 kilometres and, whenever dispatched the other way, could arrive at any place in the United States.[52]

In October 2020, North Korea displayed another ICBM—the Hwasong 16—more extensive than the Hwasong-15. The Hwasong 16 contains weapons-grade uranium or plutonium. Apart from ICBM development, North Korea advanced on portable weapon delivery systems simultaneously.[53]

North Korea also has a history of selling rocket arrangements and nuclear know-how to nations like Libya, Iran, Yemen, Egypt, United Arab Emirates,

politics/north-korea-russia-oil-sales-sanctions-violation-latest-a8134126.html> [Accessed 28 March 2021].

[49] Baumgaertner, E. and Broad, W. 'North Korea's Less-Known Military Threat: Biological Weapons,' The New York Times, 2019. [online] Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/15/science/north-korea-biological-weapons.html> [Accessed 30 January 2021].

[50] Chanlett-Avery, E., Manyin, M., Nikitin, M., Campbell, C. and Mackey, W. 'North Korea: U.S. Relations, Nuclear Diplomacy, and Intenal Situation,' Congressional Research Service, 2018. [online] Available at: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R41259.pdf> [Accessed 16 January 2021].

[51] BBC. 'North Korea: What we know about its missile and nuclear programme,' 2021. [online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41174689> [Accessed 16 April 2021].

[52] Dahlgren, M. and Chin, J. 'Hwasong-15 (KN-22) | Missile Threat. [online] Missile Threat,' 2021. Available at: <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/hwasong-15-kn-22/> [Accessed 7 March 2021].

[53] SCHILLING, J. and KAN, H. 'The Future of North Korean Nuclear Delivery Systems,' Washington D.C: US-Korea Institute, 2015. [online] Available at: <https://www.38north.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/NKNF_Delivery-Systems.pdf> [Accessed 3 February 2021].

Myanmar, Vietnam, and Syria.[54] Considering North Korea's poor financial status, there is an inescapable worry that North Korea may fall back on selling extranuclear material and information, expanding the opportunities for nuclear proliferation.

Aggressive intention refers to the translated threat signals of one state from another state. North Korea shows aggressive intent targetting the United States and its allies—Japan and South Korea. While Pyongyang labelled Washington as the greatest enemy, it threatened invasion against Tokyo and Seoul.[55] [56] [57] School textbooks of North Korea depict the U.S and its allies as existential threats to the North Korean way of life.[58] [59]

Kim Jong-Un's sister, a hardliner Kim Yo Jong, named South Korea as an enemy. North Korea's nuclear offices are near the boundary with Seoul, demonstrating North Korea's solid eagerness to strike Seoul whenever. The threatening language from North Korea follows a consistent acceleration in nuclear activities, including exploding the liaison office that it had set up with South Korea a few years back.[60] [61]

North Korea blamed the U.S for its misfortune and attacked Japan's and South Korea's naval ships on multiple occasions.[62] North Korea has pledged

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[54] Dalton, T. 'The Most Urgent North Korean Nuclear Threat Isn't What You Think,' Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021. [online] Available at: <https://carnegieendowment. org/2021/04/15/most-urgent-north-korean-nuclear-threat-isn-t-what-you-think-pub-84335> [Accessed 16 April 2021].

[55] Kim, J. and Takenaka, K. 'North Korea threatens to 'sink' Japan, reduce U.S. to 'ashes and darkness,' REUTERS, 2017. [online] Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-idUSKCN1BP0F3> [Accessed 27 January 2021].

[56] Straub, D. 'North Korea Policy: Recommendations For The Trump Administration,' Academic Paper Series. Washington D.C, Korea Economic Institute of America, 2016 p.2.

[57] BBC. 'North Korea threatens Japan with 'real ballistic missile,' 2019. [online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50613051> [Accessed 4 January 2021].

[58] Illing, S.' America, explained by a North Korean propaganda book,' Vox, 2018. [online] Available at: <https://www.vox.com/world/2018/1/9/16773364/trump-kim-summit-sign-agreement-denuclearization-propaganda> [Accessed 7 February 2021].

[59] Jeong, A. 'North Korea's New Must-Read? Kim Jong Un's New Biography,' The Wall Street Journal, 2019. [online] Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/north-koreas-new-must-read-is-kim-jong-uns-biography-11614780001> [Accessed 16 March 2021].

[60] Panda, A. 'North Korea Demolishes Inter-Korean Liaison Office in Kaesong,' The Diplomat, 2020.[online] Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/north-korea-demolishes-inter-korean-liaison-office-in-kaesong/> [Accessed 5 February 2021].

[61] KIM, H. 'Kim's sister warns S. Korea-US drills will rekindle tensions,' AP, 2021. [online] Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/health-coronavirus-pandemic-22fe3cbfe166e3765a48 6d8c7a558a61> [Accessed 4 August 2021].

[62] BBC. 'North Korean torpedo' sank South's navy ship – report,' 2020. [online] Available at:

to use nuclear weapons against the United States, claiming that such unprecedented measures are being taken to confront the danger posed by the U.S. administration.[63]

Balance of Threat theory proposes that states balance the relative power imbalance and balance perceived threats from other states. The next section of this article discusses the rationale for the U.S's unconventional balancing toward North Korea.

The Rationale of the U.S Balancing Against North Korea

North Korea presents the most straightforward case of why the hegemon (read the U.S), which is much more significant in power, peruses small power (read North Korea) in the system as a threat. A Balance of Threat viewpoint demonstrates that the U.S. should fear an aggressive, nuclearised North Korea.

North Korea's aggregate power is not a match for the U.S. However, because of North Korea's geography, American interests in the East Asian region are significantly threatened. South Korea, an ally of the U.S, shares a border with Noth Korea. The country also shares uneasy relations with North Korea for around 50 years. The U.S. has kept up its military presence in South Korea to discourage a second North Korean attack.[64] In case of any preemptive North Korean aggression, these U.S military personnel in South Korea will be no less than a sitting duck. The loss of American lives in East Asia will mimic the scenario of the Vietnam war. The region will turn into a second Vietnam. The U.S. security establishment can't let this happen. Therefore, it becomes essential for the U.S to balance North Korea.

Furthermore, North Korea is geographically close to Japan. After the second world war, the U.S. has become the security guarantor of Japan. For Japan, the U.S's primary goal is to deny any North Korean nuclear missile entry on Japanese soil. The U.S. has 23 military bases all around Japan.[65] A North Korean salvo would jeopardise American lives stationed in Japan. Apart from the loss of human lives, the U.S. would lose its face as a security guarantor too. Consequently, the U.S. hegemony would decline further.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/10129703> [Accessed 24 January 2021].

[63] BBC. 'Kim Jong-un pledges to expand North Korea's nuclear arsenal,' 2021. [online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55598880> [Accessed 1 February 2021].

[64] U.S. Department of State. 'U.S. Relations With the Republic of Korea - United States Department of State,' 2021. [online] Available at: <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-the-republic-of-korea/> [Accessed 17 March 2021].

[65] Military Bases. U.S. Military Bases in Japan | 23 U.S. Bases | MilitaryBases.com, 2021. [online] Available at: <https://militarybases.com/overseas/japan/> [Accessed 10 March 2021].

The threat perception becomes more rational once China is included in the threat calculation. Unlike South Korea or Japan, China is not an ally of the U.S. rather, the U.S. perceives a rising China as a revisionist state and a key challenger for its hegemony. Since the end of the Korean War Chinese Communist Party (CCP) committedly supported the fellow North Korean Communist party. China, multiple times, blocked U.N. Security Council's resolutions against North Korea.[66] Nalapat (2003) concluded North Korea is a proxy nuclear state of China[67]. China entered into the Korean War to protect its proxy in 1950, and in future, it will not hesitate to do the same.[68]

An aggressive proxy nuclear state (North Korea) of a revisionist power (China) is the deadliest security threat a hegemon could ask for. Hence, rationally the United States considers North Korea's nuclear weapons a worldwide security concern.[69] The U.S. specialists agree that North Korea has an enormous reserve of long-range missiles just as critical Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) capacities. The actual amount of weapons shifts fairly; however, the numbers of the weaponries represent a massive risk to U.S. interests in the Pacific area. Even if a single North Korean missile coupled with a nuclear head reaches the U.S. territory, the result would be catastrophic.

To establish a credible deterrence, Kim Jong Un threatened to present Washington with a gift it won't like.[70] North Korea also released missiles over Japan and threatened to sink it into the sea. If anything as such happens, the U.S would have no option but to engage in a full-fledged nuclear war. A nuclear war in East Asia will drag China automatically. As per the law of the domino effect, this could be the triggering event of a Third World War.

Apart from a probabilistic nuclear war, the U.S. has legitimate fear about nuclear

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[66] The Sydney Morning Herald. 'China blocks U.N. action against N Korea,' 2020.[online] Available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/world/china-blocks-un-action-against-n-korea-20101201-18fz3.html> [Accessed 5 January 2021].

[67] Nalapat, M. 'NORTH KOREA: A "PROXY" NUCLEAR STATE?,' China Brief, 3,6,2003. [online] Available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/north-korea-a-proxy-nuclear-state/> [Accessed 7 March 2021].

[68] Yufan, H. and Zhihai, Z. 'China's Decision to Enter the Korean War: History Revisited,' The China Quarterly, no. 121, 1990, pp 94-115. Accessed May 9, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/654064.

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proliferation too. The North Korean regime did not sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and withdrew from NPT. There are suspicions that North Korea is involved in the smuggling of fissile materials. If North Korea sells nuclear technology on the black market, it could reach countries like Iran or terrorist groups like Al Qaeda or Islamic State. This would increase the insecurity of the U.S. further.

As a rational actor, the United States would try to avoid these scenarios at all costs. Hence, for the U.S balancing against North Korea becomes an unavoidable choice. The overall assessment would foresee that the U.S. fears an eccentric North Korean system for each of these variables. Despite being a smaller country, North Korea presents a significant threat to the United States. Therefore, contrary to the conventional understanding of the Balance of Power, the Unites States balance perceived threats against North Korea.

Conclusion

The United States, a much more powerful country than North Korea, perceives the latter as a security threat. This threat perception challenges the conventional wisdom of Neorealism. Neorealism preaches that only the powerful states pose a security threat to the weaker states, not vice versa. Neorealism's panacea for weaker states is the Balance of Power. However, Balance of Power fails to explain the balancing attitude of the United States against a weaker North Korea.

This paper demonstrated that the United States is not balancing the relative power; rather, it is balancing against perceived threats from North Korea. For its aggregate power, geographical proximity, offensive capacity, and aggressive intention, North Korea projects a genuine threat to the U.S. and its allies in the East Asian region. If unchecked, North Korea will pose an existential threat. Therefore, against the conventional wisdom of Neorealism, the United States' Balance against North Korea.

Geo-politics of South Asia in post-Cold War era: The India Myth

Mahmud Hussain[1]

Abstract

The end of the Cold War placed India in a new strategic thinking. The emergence of the unipolar world presided over by the United States had greatly transformed its regional position. India's strongest ally in the Cold-War period was the Soviet Union. The post-Cold War era saw India coming closer to the US. The panache of their relationship came with the signing of the US-India peaceful nuclear agreement in 2008. The US hailed India as the world's largest democracy and a responsible nuclear power. However, many strategic thinkers opined that the nuclear deal had key underlying geo-strategic objectives. It had a far-reaching vision of regional security by India desiring to replicate "unipolarity" in South Asia with US approval, and to counterbalance China. But in recent years, the geo-strategic landscape of the world has undergone a paradigm shift with the rise of China as an economic giant combined with the potential of great military power. The world is now multipolar. India is the most powerful state in South Asia, and occupies the central position with regard to its geo-strategic underpinnings. This article focuses on the geo-politics of India in the post-Cold war era. In doing so, the paper enunciates the power politics of China and India that circumscribe the South Asian order.

Keywords: Post-Cold war, Multipolarity, South Asia, Realism, Liberalism, Power politics, Hard and soft power, Military balance, Regional order, Geo-politics, Geo-strategy, SAARC.

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[1] **Air Vice Marshal Mahmud Hussain (Retd),** Distinguished Expert, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Aviation and Aerospace University (BSMRAAU). E-mail:mahmudbangali@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

The period of benign US hegemony in the post-Cold war era that facilitated the brief pursuit of liberal order has come to an end. India's desire in that kind of geo-political atmosphere was to create an image of a great nation. But the rise of China in the last decade as a robust contestant in South Asian geo-politics has raised critical concerns for India in its so-called geo-strategic area. In dealing with China, India faces extraordinary challenges and prospects in its military and economic power that tests India's material and moral capabilities. A great nation, in order to prove its political spirit, must also demonstrate its power in a manner that epitomizes its success as a legitimate leader. Regional leadership, in that sense, is both a display of power's real disposition and its adherence to standardized ethical principles.

South Asia comprises Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It is a huge landmass of geo-strategic wealth with roughly the high Himalayas to the north, the Indian Ocean to the South, the Hindu Kush range to the west, and the Myanmar borderline to the east. But its topographical richness is also besotted with its demographic plight. It is the home of the world's one-fourth population. Being the most densely populated geographical territory, it is also the world's second most impoverished region after Sub-Saharan Africa, with the world's one-third of extremely poor living in South Asia. This stands in strange paradox to South Asia's military spending, which is $95.1 billion above many prosperous regions, such as South East Asia, South America and East Europe (Statista 2022). Two of its member-states, India and Pakistan, are nuclear-powered and possess a formidable military arsenal. South Asia, as a region, fits adroitly into the classical concept of the security dilemma.

After the Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962, the Chinese move toward Pakistan was seen as normal in the context of Indo-Pak rivalry. In 1971 Pakistan's pivotal role in bringing the US and China closer together further led China to put its wager on Pakistan in South Asia. In 1971, the Sino-US role was antithetical to Bangladesh's independence. During the Cold War period, South Asia was a sizzling ground of great power politics. The birth of Bangladesh demonstrated how great powers, namely the US, the USSR, the UK and China, played politics in their own interests to preserve influence in South Asia. During the Cold War, the politics of South Asia was the grand chessboard of western powers. The post-Cold War period has brought about a new dimension to geopolitics in South Asia. The reason is simple: the rise of India as a power in South Asia. But India's concern is the rise of China, whom it considers a great disrupter of the Indo-centric South Asian order.

This article deals with the rise of India as a regional power and the prospects and challenges it faces in preserving its geo-political ambitions. In doing so, its comparison with China in power politics will be an important feature of the article.

1.1 Rationale of the Study

During Cold War, it was a lot easier to understand which power bloc India preferred. The intellectually preferred mood was anti-Western because the West was symbolized by the stigma of colonialism and imperial hubris. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Indian prime minister, was deeply impressed with socialism and the Russian revolution (Nehru, 1991). The social and economic structure of the Soviet system inspired the Indian leaders and was bound to have an effect on framing India's outlook on internationalism. This trend in India's foreign policy was more or less present till the end of the Cold War. The debacle of the Soviet Union brought a paradigm shift in global power politics. It opened up the opportunity for India to come closer to the US. India's economic potential started thriving. It also started producing its indigenous military arsenal as a nuclear-powered country. With the world gradually becoming multipolar, India's usual place for dominance as a regional power was South Asia. But India's great concern in the post-Cold War era is the rise of China and its relation with other South Asian states.

India is the largest country in the region which straddles the centre of South Asia's geo-strategic landscape. India cannot be at rest with its security being threatened by an external power. For India to put South Asian order "the India way" is natural. But in order to do so, it must prevent another great power from increasing its capabilities in South Asia and oppose it from forming a coalition that assumes a position of predominance, offsetting its hegemony in South Asia. Undoubtedly, the counterbalancing power for India is China.

The power of a "great power" comes from its military and economic capabilities. A comparison of Chinese and Indian power potentials is necessary to situate the geo-politics of South Asia in its true perspective. Besides, in the post-Cold war era, with the rise in cosmopolitan cultures among the citizens of the world, the attractive features of the soft power of a state are an asset. The post-Cold war period, as it passes through uncertain times, is also a moment of self-reflection for the regional states, with India at the centre. How far India can maintain South Asia as a turf of its own geo-political lead needs an objective assessment of its power potential vis-à-vis its arch-rival.

1.2 Research Questions

Today's multipolar world presents a challenge to the rising regional powers in global politics. As India rises, questions will naturally be asked about how strong its elements of power are and how much it is able to lead its region toward meaningful security and economic partnership. This leadership role creates expectations of "order" in regional politics. If not, the region's experience with China in developmental projects will certainly prompt India's incapacities. On this basis of cross-examination, two questions are formulated:

> 1. What are the significant features of India's hard and soft power?

> 2. Can India play the role of a leader in South Asia?

These are simple questions. The first question will give us a picture of India's position as a powerful state in terms of its material and moral capabilities. The second, following the first, is the deduction from an analysis of the first.

1.3 Methodology

The study is based on content analysis and is qualitative in nature. It makes use of secondary sources, which include books, journals, papers, documents and internet sources. The methodology constitutes three steps. First, it is an attempt to study India from its historical perspective and situate its centrality in South Asia. Second, India's hard and soft power are studied and compared with that of China. Third, a deduction is drawn on India's leadership stature based on its power parameters. To analyze the subject, a critical study of India's ancient epics and present military balance has been the lynchpin of this method. The two classical theories of International Relations, namely realism and liberalism, are put into discussion in the context of South Asian politics.

2. Theoretical Framework

Theories provide us with the basic logic to explain the geo-political realities. Historical data can be conveyed to fit into general principles to prove the behaviour of states as it is supposed to be.   Theories of geo-politics belong to the classical school of realists, wherein *realpolitik* is the bedrock for a powerful state in its national interest to manage other lesser states. The benefit of using classical theories is that their approach toward understanding inter-state relationships is based on national interest expressed in terms of power, which is an undeniable fact in the life of great power.

2.1 Realism

Realism as a theory of geo-politics is about power politics. *Realpolitik* is the term used for geo-politics. The concepts of anarchy and security-dilemma in realism represent the state-system, and help to understand the reality of international politics.

Kautilya of India is the advocate of realism. His main arguments focus on "national interest" and "state's elements of power" (Kautilya, 2015). The power of a state, Kautilya says, depends both on its political sagacity and economic science. This is particularly true for a rising power that competes for hegemony and prestige in geo-politics. As a realist, Kautilya pre-dates modern day Machiavelli (1997) and Morgenthau (1998). His six-fold policy with other states: (1) Asana (neutrality); (2) Yana (threat); (3) Samsrya (alliance); (4) Vigrah (war); (5) Sandhi (treaty of peace), and (6) Dwidibhava (making peace with one and end the war with another) conceptualizes the instruments of *realpolitik*.

Kautilya lived in 300 BCE but is still considered the pioneer of the *episteme* of political science in India. His monumental work, *Arthashastra*, is thought of as an important harbinger of modern-day India's role in South Asia. Between and among states, there is no supra-national authority to exercise command over them. So, their relationship symbolizes anarchy which makes inter-state relations a highly complex affair. In that kind of political uncertainty, Kautilya preaches prudence blended with chicanery as an informed source of political wisdom (Kautilya, 2015).

2.2 Liberalism

Liberalism as a political philosophy is oriented toward moral justice. In inter-state relations, its doctrine is geared toward the spirit of cooperation and avoidance of conflict. Its core tenet in international politics is peace, and its basic ideas in inter-state relations revolve around free trade, globalization and liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 1998).

India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, embodies liberalism in international relations. Emerging as the distinctive liberal statesman of de-colonization in the post-World War II period, he was at the heart of the non-aligned movement at the Bandung Conference in 1955. For Nehru, non-alignment was not an organization like US-bloc and Soviet bloc but a spiritual principle to untie the third world from the physical and economic hegemony

of great powers. He considered the self-interest of the realist too limited in promoting friendship among nation-states. Friendship is an important facet of international relations to keep conflict at bay. Nehru's doctrine of creating a liberal world order was to achieve a greater global inter-dependence on the norm of egalitarianism (Nehru, 1991).

In the shadows of Nehru's liberalism is discovered India's contemporary approach to soft power anchorage of political realism.

2.3 Analytic Approach

In traversing the road from Kautilya's ancient *realpolitik* to Nehru's modern liberalism, one encounters a long history of a great nation. India's exotic history is rich and mind-boggling to a modern-day reader who can be thrown off balance by the locations of its ancient civilizations surviving to this day in three countries: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The worlds of Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, Taxila and Indus River, which so much adorn the grand chessboard of India, has a genuine claimant of common inheritance in another state named Pakistan, which straddles their myth much more strongly than India by gaining their "property right" after partition in 1947. In a way, the independence of India and Pakistan as separate nations is an erasure of India's grandiloquent history.

Of India, where the land has been so malleable through a succession of enemy raids, domestic civil wars, religious conflicts, outside dominion, regal internecine battles, and lastly, foreign rule that the intractability of oneness of the territory is lost forever. History has demonstrated that India as a territory has been breached. So, "History as such" becomes the best laboratory for supplying sources for analyzing the behaviour of India in modern times. India's belief in its greatness is embedded in its mythic wisdom. So, its position of "Great Power Status" in regional order is a relic carried from the past and an aspirant to be operationalized in future. The way to explore India's political mission is to follow a deductive model of its intermittent paradigm shift between realism and liberalism that works to produce regional balancing.

3. Discussion on Geo-politics of South Asia and India's Challenges

The term "South Asia" and "Indian sub-continent" are often used interchangeably. The term "South Asia" makes sense to differentiate this region from South East Asia, East Asia or the larger Eurasia. But this notion

of placing "India" as a prefix for the Indian sub-continent as a political reality of British India composed of present-day Bangladesh, Pakistan and India is often confusing to lay readers. South Asia must include other peripheral states also. Yet there is no denying the fact that India, Bangladesh and Pakistan form the "core" of South Asia, whose "centrality" is occupied by India. It is in the Indian sub-continent that geo-politics has caused one of the greatest casualties both to human lives and political institutions. There is no reason to believe that the post-Cold War era has de-securitized South Asia by freeing it from the shackles of bi-polar rivalry.

The geo-politics of South Asia has a typical profile, with India as the exemplar. The following discussion will analyze the strategic dynamics of India as the principal referent actor in South Asia.

3.1 The Centrality of India

Even a bird's eye view over the map of South Asia reveals the centrality of India. It straddles 72 per cent of South Asia's territory, 77 per cent of its population and 78 per cent of its resources (Brecher, 1966). Jawarharlal Nehru described its geographical position as:

> India is big and happily situated ….. An invasion or attack on India
> ….. will give (other countries) no profit (Nehru, 1991).

In November 2017, *Foreign Affairs* brought out a special supplement on India's 70th anniversary of independence. In one of the articles, the writer pointed out the time when the world started to take notice of India's rise to power. It was when President Bush jr. signed a nuclear pact with New Delhi in July 2005. It was also the time when the world was turning from a unipolar to a multipolar world in the post-Cold war era. There was a radical change in India's attitude after being accorded "global power" status by the Bush administration. India could be used as a "swing state" to counterbalance China. But India's policymakers are also aware of its power limits and, therefore, in the foreseeable future, intend to influence only the immediate neighbourhood. This may be seen as India reproducing the "Unipolar Indian Order " in South Asia in the post-Cold War multipolar world.

India has complained that the United States is intolerant of independent regional powers and has traditionally preferred loyalist client states such as Pakistan. This is true, but in the face of emerging China, it is in America's interest to build a strategic relationship with India for the long run. India

has much to resent an unchallenged US influence in South Asia because that belittles India's stature as a regional power. A unipolar South Asia with India at its geo-political centre is what India dreams of in global politics. Post-Cold War security challenges are replete with India's psyche. This psychic trait is what gives India its indigenous doctrinal identity emanating from "pre-historic nationalism". This highlights India's order of constructing a strategic model of concentric circles. India sits at the core; the inner circle belongs to Pakistan; the outer circle situates Bangladesh; and Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Afghanistan occupy the peripheral circle. The most important feature of this centrality is that if the core is cracked, the region returns to a "Balance of Power" system, which India will never challenge.
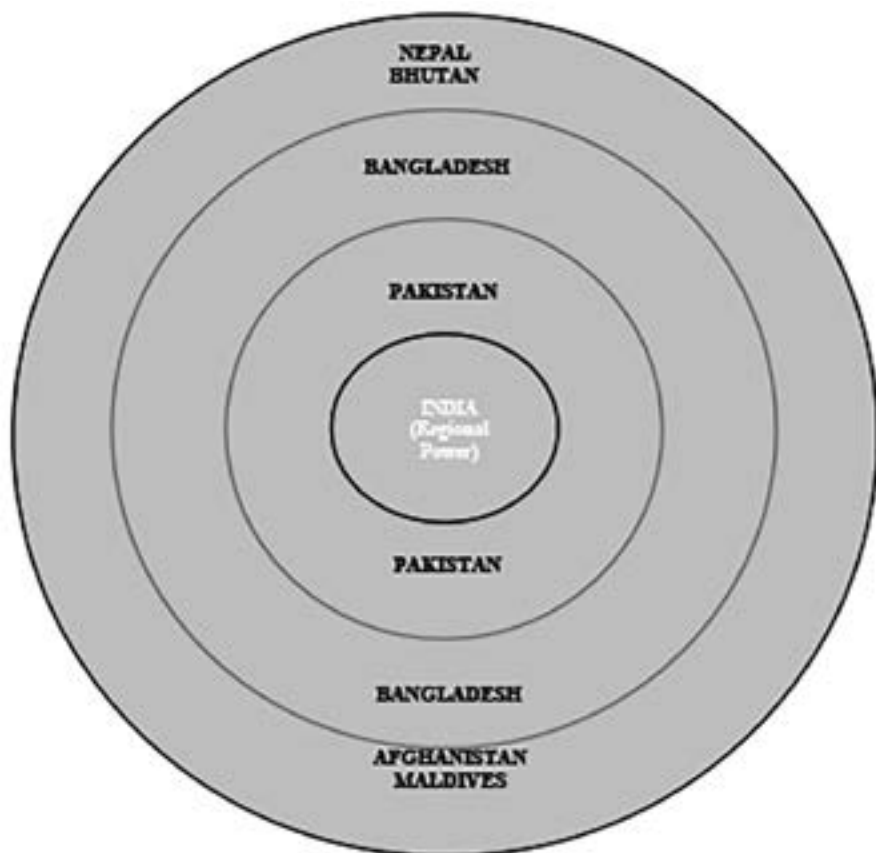

FIGURE 1: STRATEGIC MODEL OF INDIA's CENTRALITY IN SOUTH ASIA

(Source: Author's Own Formulation)

3.2 The India Myth

Mahabharata is one of the most outstanding colossal works in world literature. No other time has occupied so much space about India's genesis of tradition, politics and sociology whence modern India derives its provenance. *Mahabharata* is a timeless message of the essential unity of India (Nehru, 1991). The epic marks the origin of the conception of India as a whole and its overlordship of "Mahabharat" (Great Bharat). The *Bhagvat Gita* is a part of the *Mahabharata* but stands apart as a moral scripture. Its universal appeal to justice, non-violence and brotherhood speak of timeless acts of societies to build a harmonized nationhood.

Of lesser length but equal merit, the other epic to which the Indian psyche searches for its glorious past is the *Ramayana.* The protagonist, Rama, an incarnation of the God Vishnu, represents a historical fact to the Hindus. It is a great moral story of the war between good and evil and produces a priceless document for a society prescribing a code of conduct. What is ignoble of the recent phenomenon with the Rama story is its politically religious orientation. From the stature of a legendary hero, Rama has been transfigured into a political emblem of power and discord.

In Indian politics, both the *Mahabharata a*nd the *Ramayana* point up to the resurgence of neo-nationalism. While the *Mahabharata* may be casting its spell about an "undivided Bharat", it is the *Ramayana* that stokes a fire in an otherwise secular past of ancient India. Rama's living hatred finds utterance in the sanctum of Ayodhya, whose supposed defilement by the presence of a mosque can be a sufficient cause for Hindu xenophobia to ignite religious fanaticism of the saffron-clad Hindu activists in 1992 (Andersen and Damle, 2019). This has not only plunged the proud heritage of India's secularism into deep crisis but also led to the "regionalization of sectarian insecurity" in South Asia.

The eclectic phenomenon of Hindu atavism sees the Muslim empires that ruled India as "foreign elements". Thus, ancient India, with its grandiloquent literary stock, is taken to be the essence of Indian culture and is privileged over its living embodiment. The bi-furcation of Indian history along communal categories of "native" and "foreigner" also affects the rest of South Asia because both the neighbouring Bangladesh and Pakistan are Muslim states. The tragic part of the such obsessive reading of the literary past is that it degenerates "History" into myth-making. For Bangladesh and Pakistan, India's march into the future as a rising Asian power entails security implications as far as

India's myth-making subsumes itself into regional power politics. When the past scholars forced upon India an imposing textual character, the ancient civilization of India with all its glory emerged in a sharply demarcated Sub-continent that divided it from the rest of Asia and the world (Keay, 2010). Bangladesh and Pakistan, the modern nation-states, as the breakaway parts of the Indian Sub-continent, are recent phenomena. This hard truth is not lost on Indian politicians craving to revive India's glorious past clothed in religious passion.

3.3 India's Elements of Power

The present "South Asian Order," like any international system, is anarchic for the absence of a supra-national state with centralized authority. However, the centrality of India may be hypothesized to create a hierarchical order. But that kind of regional order would pre-suppose a "hegemon". A hegemon cannot sustain itself in isolation without the material and moral capabilities embedded in its military, economic and soft power.

3.3.1 India's Military Power

India is the world's third largest military. It has 1.4 million troops on active duty and nearly 1.2 million reservists. It became the world's fifth largest military spender in 2016, ahead of France and the UK. It is a member of the select group of "nuclear powers" with advanced technology, including a nuclear weapons programme (Ayres, 2017 & Hewit, 1997).

India's naval modernization programme has received an extraordinary boost under Prime Minister Narender Modi. He has clearly spelt out India's evolving approach towards Indian Ocean Region (IOR) in the form of a five-fold "maritime panchamrit" (Singh, 2017). The essence of his idea is that the growing integration of economic and security interests of Asia has reshaped strategic perspectives that now view the Pacific and Indian Oceans as a single geo-strategic space. China's interest in the western Pacific has begun to stimulate India, and its increasing reliance on the Indian Ocean for trade and India's strategic interests in the Pacific has now led to the increasing use of the term "Indo-Pacific". This intersection of maritime interests of a rising China and an emerging India on the one hand, and the existant power of the US on the other, has begun to give "Indo-Pacific" a historical character (Mahan, 1890). This geo-political scenario with two Asian powers interceded by a non-Asian giant is euphemistically termed as "Asian Order".

The changing perspective of the Indo-Pacific demonstrates four serious positions of the Indian approach. First, India's economic might is turning from territorial to maritime importance due to geo-strategy. Second, India perceives China's attempts to encroach the Indian Ocean through Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Maldives and Pakistan as a threat to its geo-political ambition to create a "South Asian Order". China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) or Maritime Silk Route (MSR) initiatives are strategic challenges to India as a rising power. Third, India's shift toward the "Look East Policy" is oriented toward ASEAN and East Asia. This pragmatic approach is to stymie other powers' attempts to exclude India from playing a major strategic role in Asia. Fourth, India wants to compete with China's more assertive presence in Africa. This is clearly seen in the way previous secondary areas of interest in Africa have now become primary areas of interest for the Indian Navy, such as the Red Sea, the Gulf of Oman, the Gulf of Aden and their littoral regions, the Southwest Indian Ocean including Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) island states therein, and East Coast of Africa littoral regions. Fifth, the US policy to set a balance of power against China in Asia provides an opportunity for India to project power through the Indian Ocean (Baruah, 2015 & Rej, 2019).

China has the world's second-largest air force, with almost twice the inventory of India's air fleet. With its eyes set on the Indian Ocean, as discussed above, India's parallel ambition is to be the leading aerospace power in Asia. Space could be its next war-fighting domain, given the expansion of the Chinese military-based space research programme (Lewis & Litai, 1999). Interestingly, it placed a vehicle in orbit in 2019 at a fraction of the cost of NASA's latest Mars orbiter (Ayres, 2017).

India has slowly built up its missile programme, a formidable weapon with inter-continental reach. The Integrated Guided Missile Defence Programme (IGMDP) was formed in 1983 with the aim of achieving self-sufficiency in missile development and production. The strategic purpose was to achieve a posture of "credible deterrence". As of now, it comprises seven core missile systems: (1) the strategic *Agni* ballistic missile, (2) the supersonic *Brahmos* missile, (2) the tactical *Prithvi* ballistic missile, (3) the *Akash* theatre defence missile, (4) the *Trishul* surface-to-air missile, (5) the *Nag* anti-tank guided missile and (6) *Astra* air-to-air missile. The Agni *missile* family is considered to be the mainstay of India's missile-based strategic nuclear deterrence. The *Brahmos* can be launched from submarine, ship, aircraft and land-based Mobile Autonomous Launchers (MAL) and is primarily used as an anti-ship missile. (Lahiri, 2007., Rajagopalan, 2016., and Thorpes, 2012).

THE MILITARY BALANCE

INDIA	CHINA	BORDER OF DISCONTENT
MILITARY STRENGTH: Over 13,25,000	**MILITARY STRENGTH:** 2,255,000	■ The 4,057 km Line of Actual Control (LAC) is undefined
AIRCRAFT: Around 3,500 out of which 1,334 are combat jets	**AIRCRAFT:** 9,500 out of which 3,382 are combat jets	■ There is difference of perception about LAC between Indian Army and People's Libera- tion Army
WARSHIPS: Around 150	**WARSHIPS:** 285	■ The LAC is divided into three sectors. Western section com- prises Ladakh, middle sector is boundary along Uttarakhand and eastern sector is Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh
NUCLEAR WARHEADS: Around 50-70	**NUCLEAR WARHEADS:** More than 200	■ The least disputed is the middle sector
MISSILES: India's longest range ballistic missile is Agni-V with a range of 5,000 km	**MISSILES:** DF-41 has a range of more than 10,000 km	■ Frequent incursions reported in the west- ern sector particularly in DBO and Nyoma
SUBMARINES: 12	**SUBMARINES:** 60	■ Aksai Chin, the east- ernmost part of J&K, is one of the main con- tested areas which is under illegal occupa- tion of China. The
TANKS: Around 600	**TANKS:** Around 3,000	other contested area is Arunachal Pradesh, which is part of India. China claims it to be
AIRCRAFT CARRIER: 1	**AIRCRAFT CARRIER:** 1	part of Tibet

FIGURE 2: THE MILITARY CAPABILITIES OF CHINA AND INDIA

(Source: Military Balance 2019)

Even today, in the heyday of air power and naval power, land power is the dominant form of military power, especially for a continental state. China and India are obvious examples of continental states, as are France, Germany and Europe (Mearsheimer, 2014). Figure 2 shows a stark military asymmetry between India and China. Indian army's biggest challenge is to formulate a doctrine that would enable its forces to fight parallel wars against China and Pakistan. This is a colossally forbidding task though the land warfare doctrine 2018 states that in the possibility of a collusive threat "primary front will be dealt with all resources" while a "strong strategic defensive balance" will be maintained on the secondary (Mitra, 2019). This means three things: first, the combined threat from China and Pakistan is a paradigm shift from a single-front centric threat that had dominated the Indian military's grand strategy towards a dual-front strategy; second, the doctrine suggests, though ambiguously, a possibility for breaching "nuclear threshold" in the face of

asymmetric offensive potentials of combined Sino-Pakistan capabilities; third, Indian army's "force structure" must embellish a programme that fights with brain rather than brawn.

In a realist world, military power is a premium on creating an order for states to co-exist in a particular geo-political setting. India's military arsenal is formidable but taking on two adversaries of the kind like China and Pakistan simultaneously is subject to real-time testing. Notwithstanding India's supposed inferiority to China, the urge to build a military power that could geo-strategically make its presence felt as a great power wanting to "shape an Order" in the Asia-Pacific is what the Indian strategists have in mind. India may be over-ambitious, but it has a geopolitical rationale for reclaiming its past glory.

FIGURE 3: GLOBAL MULTI-DIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX 2018

(Source: UNDP & Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative)

INDIA IS VERY UNHAPPY

DROPS 7 SPOTS IN HAPPINESS RANKINGS

YEAR	RANK
2013	117
2015	117
2016	118
2017	122
2018	133
2019	**140**

*No report for 2004

TRAILS BEHIND ITS NEIGHBOURS

RANK	COUNTRY
67	Pakistan
93	China
95	Bhutan
100	Nepal
125	Bangladesh
130	Sri Lanka

HAPPY 10 **UNHAPPY 10**

HAPPY 10		UNHAPPY 10
Finland	1	South Sudan
Denmark	2	Central African Republic
Norway	3	Afghanistan
Iceland	4	Tanzania
Netherlands	5	Rwanda
Switzerland	6	Yemen
Sweden	7	Malawi
New Zealand	8	Syria
Canada	9	Botswana
Austria	10	Haiti

HOW SUPERPOWERS RANK

RANK	15 UK	17 Germany	19 US	58 Japan	68 Russia

KEY VARIABLES: Income | Freedom | Trust | Healthy | Life Expectancy | Social Support | Generosity

Source: World Happiness Report 2019

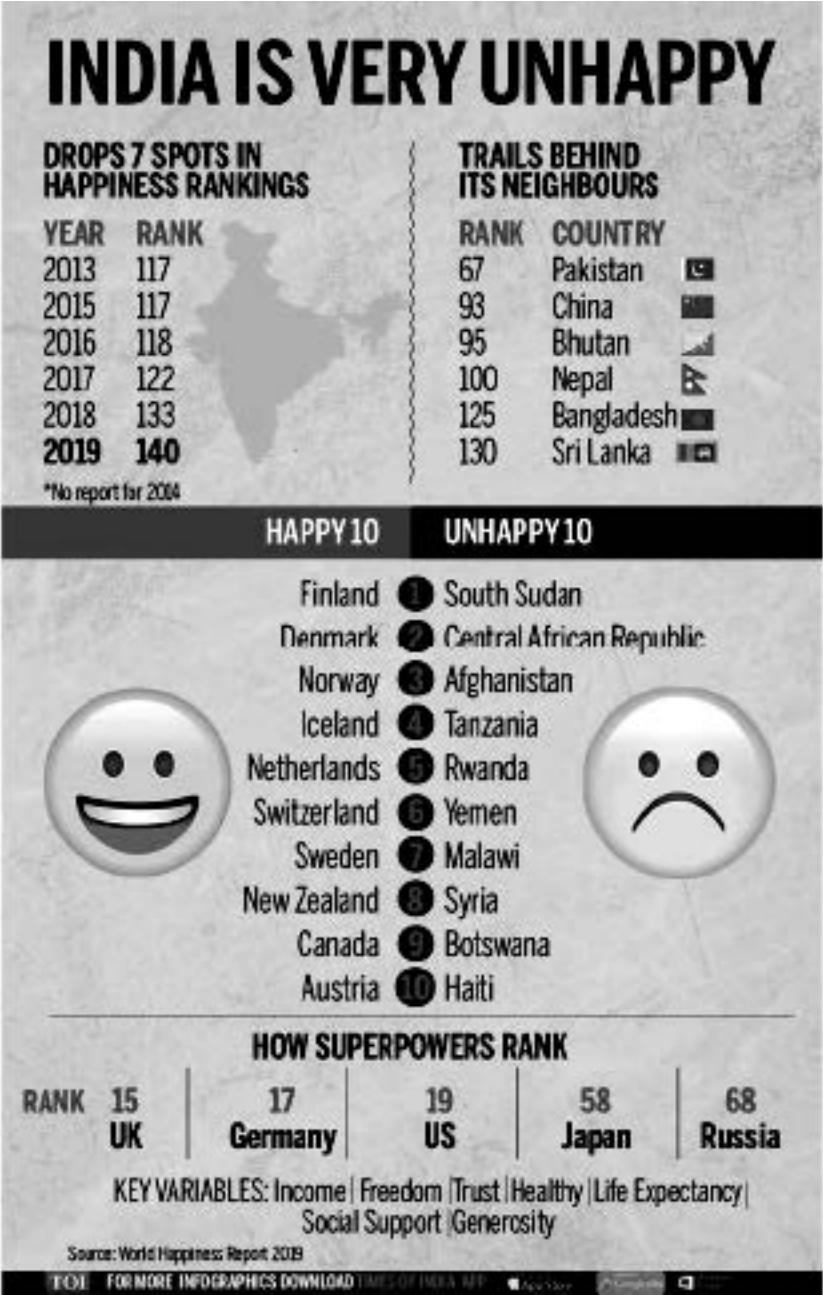TOI FOR MORE INFOGRAPHICS DOWNLOAD TIMES OF INDIA APP

FIGURE 4: SOUTH ASIA's HAPPINESS INDEX

(Source: Times of India.com, updated Mar 22, 2019 & produced by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network)

India is the home to 364 million poor people according to the 2018 Global Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index report, prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. The recent slowing down of India's economy may also explain the failure of expected results in India's fight against poverty. The mood is reflected in the disparagement of the Indians. In 2018, in a Gallup survey, their happiness index was alarmingly low: only 3% said they were "thriving", compared with 21% Chinese. The happiness index is a measure of a country's socio-economic well-being as internalized by its population.

In South Asia, aside from Pakistan, Bangladesh is the closest to China in economic ties, so it receives the minimum foreign aid from India (MEA, India, 2019). For India to become an economic giant capable of playing a "zero-sum game" with China on a fiercely contested turf would require building and leading regional institutions in a harmony of interests. Otherwise, there will always remain a wide gap between utopian ambition and stark reality in the pursuit of creating a "South Asian Order".

Nothing succeeds like economic power. The doctrine of World Order emanates as much from military power as it does from economic power. In future, economic, rather than military, reasons will dictate how India will perform on the South Asian chessboard as a grand player.

3.3.3 India's Soft Power

The source of soft power emanates from the moral strength of a state's foreign policy. During the Cold War, India's foreign policy was based on Nehru's precept of non-alignment. Along with many other newly-born countries from colonialism, India preached and practised the norms of non-alignment and became a voice of the developing world (Mullen & Ganguly, 2018). The world witnessed the zenith of India's foreign policy when it called to attention the moral need for global intervention in the crisis of East Pakistan, which resulted in the independence of Bangladesh. India's soft power appeal manifested itself even in the 1990s when the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) brought India into its association, which saw the appeal of its growing economy and democratic values. But in the post-Cold War era, with the BJP government in power, the Indian foreign policy imperative is equivocal.

It is in South Asia that India has failed to impact its soft power touchstone. Its relations with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Maldives have been half-hearted, and India has not done much to strengthen the South Asian

Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to be revered as a "regional leader". Its relationship with Pakistan has always been hostile and traumatic. Extrapolating from perceptions of India's foreign policy, there seems to be a lack of understanding of what India wants from the rest of South Asia and what it stands to contribute.

The Soft Power 30 is an annual study produced by Portland, a strategic communications consultancy, and the University of Southern California's Centre on Public Diplomacy. The annual report is built around a composite index that assesses the soft power resources of the world's leading countries through a combination of objective matrices and international polling data. Surprisingly, India's position in 2019 was not among the top 30. It was predicted in the previous years that India's soft power ranking would improve if it built on the momentum of the sources of soft power. Its overall ranking has actually fallen since 2016. India is 8th among Asian countries and 41st overall. Japan is 8th, South Korea is 19th, Singapore is 21[st,] and China is 27th, within the top 30 (US Center on Public Policy, Portland, 2019). It only suggests that India has to go long before it can attain a respectable position as a soft power state. The "strategic culture" of India should concentrate on reinforcing its soft power relations with its neighbours in South Asia.

4. Deduction from Discussion

Discussion on geo-politics of South Asia and India's challenges in section 3.3 has examined the hard and soft power capabilities of India.

One of the primary objectives of Indian foreign policy is to shape and sustain a firm control in South Asia. This conception suits India's ancient outlook on *realpolitik*. But the perception of India as a "great power" is debatable. Militarily, undoubtedly, it is a power, but hard power also counts on economic power. Its economic growth is appreciable, but the benefits of such growth are yet to make an impact on its neighbours. A nation cannot simply translate its military muscle into something useful while one-third of its population languishes in poverty. It is clearly indicated by India's inability to form a strategic alliance in South Asia. India's massive poverty is a burden on its hard power. With poverty and communal politics as critical challenges, India's position as a great power will always be a question.

India's soft power has not accomplished what China, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore have shown in recent years. The strong penchant for articulating soft power by glorifying the ancient history of a civilization is an obsession

with no clear touch with the spirit of changing times. Instead of drawing into the fold of humanist culture with universal appeal, India's aggressive emphasis on its mythological past has given birth to fears of cultural colonization in South Asia. Soft power should not be sought just because it is the latest trendy fashion; it should be a part of the "grand strategy " of great power.

China has built good relations with South Asian countries in military and economic areas. India sees China as its competitor in its own geo-strategic kingdom. China's strong presence seizes India's initiative to build a South Asia Order of its own choice and supplants it with a regional balance of power system. The greatest challenge to India's rise as a great power is China. In all elements of power calculation --- military, economic and soft ---- India lags behind China. Therefore, given the sum of its hard power and soft power, how far India is a force in creating an order of peace and stability in South Asia is for the future to tell.

5.0 Conclusion

This paper was an attempt to study India's challenges in facing the geopolitics of South Asia in the post-Cold War era. In doing so, the study comprises three sections: one theoretical, one empirical and one analytical. The study is based on content analysis of the historical case studies both from the ancient period and since the start of the post-Cold war period.

In the beginning, I set the questions for inquiry. My purpose was to study the significant features of India's hard and soft power, which are essential for a state to claim its "great power" status, and second, to infer if India could play the role of a leader on the basis of power potentials.

In section 2, I have briefly linked classical theories of international relations ----- realism and liberalism ----- with Indian scholarship to elucidate the convenience of establishing the theoretical framework of my study. The benefit of using them is to understand the blend of *realpolitik* and liberalism in Indian thought. They fit appropriately with the nature of a rising power that practices both hard power and soft power.

Section 3 was the discussion of empirical content drawn from the case studies in the post-Cold War era. I have shown that the idea of India being at the centre of South Asia derives its strength from ancient Indian mythologies. *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* have unnerved and shaped India's political scholasticism till this day and play a strong role in foisting India's greatness

as a nation lost through the ages of foreign rule. This is an atavistic formula that has degenerated India's secular mould. In the post-Cold War era, India suffered the most in its image because of its obsession with the past during prime minister Modi's administration. This obsession has proved divisive both for domestic politics and regional relationships for its religious content. Then I placed the empirical content of India's hard power and soft power and compared them with China's. We have seen that India's military capabilities are formidable, and India wants to rule the Indian Ocean as a great power, but it lags behind China. India's economic growth is good, but poverty fails to make it China's worthy competitor. Even the international *Soft Power 30* survey shows that India's soft power attraction is behind China's in co-opting others, and this is particularly discernible in India's cold relationship with South Asian smaller states.

Section 3 thus satisfied the first of the two research questions, explained the significant features of India's hard and soft power, and compared them with China's.

Section 4 dealt with a deduction based on the discussion of section 3. This is based on an analytical approach. As China strongly enters the geopolitics of South Asia and subverts its geo-strategic space, particularly in military and trade matters, India is unable to establish a firm Indo-centric position. For failing to create a South Asian Order of its own choice, India is still unable to play the role of a regional leader in the true sense. This explains the second of the two research questions.

This does not mean that things might not change in future. India is a great nation, and great nations throughout history have demonstrated extraordinary abilities in forming alliances and institutions based on mutual trust and faith. A great nation is one that does preach not only realism but also practices liberalism. A powerful nation that pursues its national interests with a view to accommodating the interest of others in a mutually reinforcing environment is likely to be accepted as a leader. But that requires leaders of vision who can overcome the narrow boundaries of nationalism. For India, such a leadership role is the most important task in creating a geopolitical atmosphere of peaceful co-habitation in South Asia. Its exact nature and relationship should appropriately be the object of another, separate research study.

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Human Security Threats in the South Asian Region and the Application of Airpower to Resolve Those Challenges

Md. Mamunur Rashid, MPhil[1]

ABSTRACT

By the end of the Cold War in 1991, the risk of conventional war had reduced significantly. The fight between civilisations, cultures, ethnic groups and religions has increased with the Arab Spring, which gave birth to a new era of nontraditional security threats like terrorism. The other reason which we find in International Relations is realism and Neo-realism, where only superpowers play has made two of the dominant states of the Middle East (Iraq) and North Africa (Libya) into a failed and fragile states. From those countries, a new movement of terrorism like ISIS started giving birth to nontraditional security threats throughout the globe to a great extent. After 9/11, the USA, in their War on Terror, attacked Afghanistan and removed the Taliban Government from the helm of the affair of Afghanistan. This had a peripheral effect on Pakistan in particular and the South Asian Region in general. The Sea Line of Communication (SLOC) in the Indian Ocean comes under continuous threat from pirates, which disrupts the flow of ship movement, causing a global threat to the economy. Moreover, due to geographical location, some of the

[1] **Md. Mamunur Rashid** is Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP). This paper is based on the author's keynote paper presented in Air Symposium-2016 organized by the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) for the second time at Eagles' Lakeside Banquet and Convention Hall, Colombo, Sri Lanka on 01-02 December 2016. His email address is: mmrashid748@gmail.com.

countries of this region lie over fault lines consequence of which is frequent earthquakes. Countries in this region having access to the sea are frequently troubled by tsunamis, cyclones, hurricanes etc. All these threats could not be resolved by individual states, and the application of airpower can play a significant role in those kinds of military operations other than war (MOOTWA). As assets of airpower are very limited in this region, Regional Coordination Centre may be established for a coordinated effort for operation in this kind of situation, which can ensure optimum use of airpower. Area of Responsibility (AOR) may be demarcated based on the sovereign rites of the states, and Quick Reaction Force (QRF) may be developed for fighting against nontraditional security threats like terrorism.

Introduction

South Asian Region consumes 3% of the World's area, 21% of the World's population and 9.12% of the global economy as of 2020.[2] On Human Development Index (HDI), Sri Lanka, Maldives, India, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan are ranked 73, 103, 135, 136,142, 145, 146, and 169, respectively. Some 70% of the South Asian population and about 75% of the continent's poor live in rural areas, and they mostly rely on agriculture for their livelihood. South Asia is the second poorest region in the World, with 38.6% of the population living below the poverty line.[3] The South Asian region is one of the most volatile regions of the World due to nonconventional security threats and natural disasters. Most of the countries in the South Asian Region have a good population, and the economic conditions of those countries as per HDI and other indicators are not good compared to other developing countries. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established to reduce political differences among member states of South Asia and develop economically, keeping the interest of all states paramount. But due to distrust between India and Pakistan, SAARC could not function, and the potentiality of this organisation could not be explored. But this is the only platform for South Asian countries to resolve nonconventional security issues and disaster management in future.

Terrorism is one of the plagues that are killing most of the Middle East, Africa, South, Southeast and Far East Asian countries. The terrorist organisations and

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[2] Assessed from, http://currentaffairs.gktoday.in/tags/saarc, on 26 October 2016.

[3] Memon Naseer. (May 2012). Disaster in South Asia A Regional Perspective, PILER Centre, Karachi, Pakistan, P-6.

the elements of those organisations are using new tactics and techniques, which has made the War against Terrorism difficult day by day. Why is September 11, 2001, terrorist attack an important date in the history of terrorism? For the first time in the history of terrorism, passenger planes were used as a weapon of destruction. It was a simultaneous and coordinated terrorist attack that made huge casualties and generated huge international outrage. This attack on the U.S. homeland generated a worldwide response, which is something unprecedented, often compared with the 'Pearl Harbour' attack during World War II. This incident leads to a huge public investigation whether it was an intelligence failure or a policy failure. This is one of the common security threats for the SAARC Region, and airpower can play a significant role in this aspect.

Many SAARC Countries are located beside the Indian Ocean. Many are also located in and around fault lines which causes frequent earthquakes. Due to poor infrastructure, limited trained manpower, lack of resources and strength in terms of airpower, many countries in this region face difficulties in pre and post-disaster relief and rehabilitation activities. If all the countries in SAARC Region share their airpower resources for Military Operations Other than War (MOOTWA) and make a coordinated effort, then it would be easy to reduce damage and destruction of man and material from natural calamities.

Aspects of Human Security in the South Asian Region

The South Asian region holds 1.3 billion people, and ensuring human security in this region with a poor economy is a colossal task. The HDI of most of the countries other than Sri Lanka in this region falls within 103rd to 169th position out of 187 countries, Sri Lanka having 73rd position.[4] Though countries in this region have moderate economies, many countries of SAARC have infrastructure and platforms of airpower to fight nontraditional security threats. Participation of all member states of SAARC will be required to fight against nontraditional security threats. Figure 1 below shows the risks that have registered the highest increase and decline in the perception of likelihood and impact. It is noted that weapons of mass destruction and water crises are now rated as the most likely impactful aspects in geopolitical and societal aspects. Other risks gaining prominence in society include social instability and involuntary migration.[5] Involuntary migration is taking place

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[4] Poudel Homa Nath. (December 2014). State of Human Development: SAARC and Nepal", Economic Literature, Vol. XII (50-55), pp-3-4.

[5] The Global Risks Report 2020 15th Edition, P-5.

from Myanmar to Bangladesh. Due to ethnic conflict between Rohingyas and Government Forces in the Rakhine State of Myanmar, many Rohingyas are migrating to Bangladesh creating unfathomable socio-economic difficulty for Bangladesh. Figure 1 below shows the Global Shapers Risk Landscape 2020: Geopolitical & Societal.
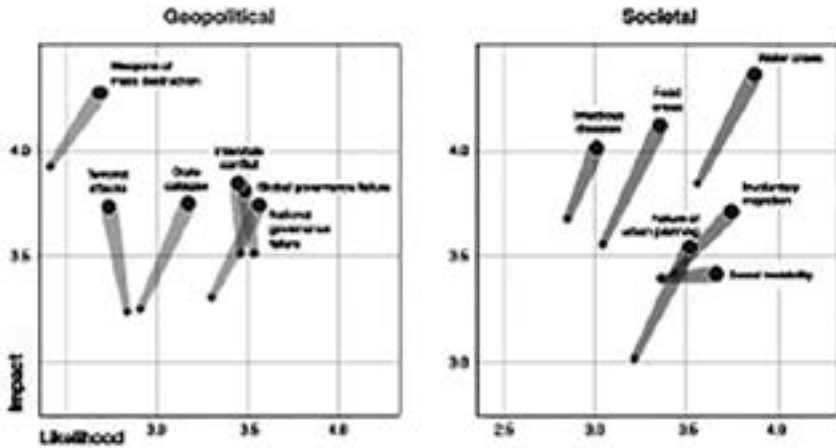

Figure 1: The Global Shapers Risk Landscape 2020[6]

Fragile State Index (FSI) is conducted based on three main indicators, Social, Economic, Political and Military. Social Indicators include Demographic Pressure, Group Grievances, Refugees, IDPs, Human Flight and Brain Drain. Economic Indicators include Uneven Economic Development, Poverty and Economic Decline. Political and Military Indicators include State legitimacy, Security Apparatus, Public service, Human Rights, Rule of Law, Factionalized Elites and External Intervention. FSI 2019 was conducted in 178 countries of the World. By assessing state fragility, out of 8 states of SAARC in the South Asian Region, Afghanistan (9) and Pakistan (23) are in High Alert State. Bangladesh (36) and Nepal (45) are in Alert State. Sri Lanka (46) is in High Warning State. Bhutan (72), India (74) and Maldives (96) are in Elevated Warning state.[7]

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6   Ibid.

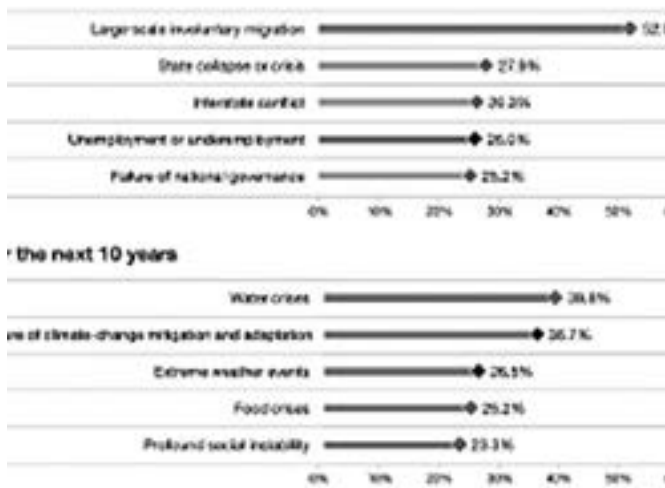7   Fragility State Index 2019, pp 5-13.

Figure 2: The Top Five Global Risks of Highest Concern for the Next 18 Months and the next 10 Years

## State of Political Security in South Asia

Today's conflicts are largely low-intensity civil wars or 'asymmetric' wars in which high-tech forces fight low-tech opponents. State repression and human rights violation by the state give an opportunity to non-state actors to conduct terrorist activities. Freedom of speech is a key component of democracy. Human rights abuses are measured in the Political Terror Scale given below. If the state government fails to ensure political security, it leads to terrorist activities and the burning example we have in front of us in Syria.

a. Level 1: The Secure rule of law; politically motivated murders are extremely rare.

b. Level 2: Limited amount of imprisonment for non-violent political activity.

c. Level 3: Politically motivated imprisonment, murder, and other forms of brutality are extensive.

d. Level 4: Murder, forced disappearance, and torture are common, and large sections of the population are affected by them.

e. Level 5: The entire population in a country are affected by government repression.

Threat Analysis in Fighting against Terrorism

Due to huge economic activities between countries of the Middle East, Southeast Asian Region and China, huge numbers of flights are being operated over the airspace of this region, including the Indian Ocean. Sea line of communication (SLOC) in the Indian Ocean remains very busy due to enormous movement of cargo ships carrying goods from Europe, Africa and the Middle East to South and Far East Asia and vice-versa. Due to geographical location, human security threats related to terrorism are enormous in South Asia. Individual and terrorist groups active in this region may take the weak areas of security into consideration and make the key point installations (KPI) similar to the international airport of SAARC countries non-operational. Before going into details of the security measures, we need to do a threat analysis given below.

a. **Aircraft and Ships being Hijacked**: There are many examples in the past that passenger airliners are being hijacked by terrorist groups and diverted to suitable destinations for ransom. In the South Asian Region, India had a good number of passenger aircraft hijacked by terrorist groups. Piracy and incident of ship hijacking (example: Pirates of Somalia) is still a threat though the number of incidents has reduced significantly. The map below shows the SLOC of China for Oil Supply. The figure below shows the Global Number of Airlines Hijacking and Fatalities.[8]
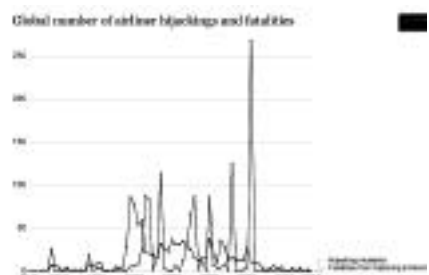
Map 1: SLOC of China for Oil Supply.   Figure 3: Global Number of Airlines Hijacking and Fatalities.

b. **Bombing in Strategic Locations:** Terrorist groups are bombing in a strategic location to show their might and frustration and also to damage the image of the government. Bombing at hotels, schools, mosques,

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8   Assessed from, https://ourworldindata.org/terrorism, on 17 November 2020.

government offices, and military installations is a very common terrorist activity nowadays.

c. **Man-Portable Air Defence System (MANPAD):** MANPAD poses a threat to aircraft during take-off, cruising, and landing. Many terrorist organisations have MANPAD, which can be launched from close proximity to passenger aircraft operations.

d. **Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV)/ Drone:** As technology is very easy to avail of nowadays, terrorist group have the capability to operate UAVs and drones, as such threat posed by UAV/drones must be taken into consideration.

e. **Cyber and Electronic Attack:** All networks used by South Asian countries for many reasons are prone to cyber-attack and electronic attacks. It has happened in the past that terrorist groups are conducting deliberate cyber attacks on many countries' important network systems, thereby making the country paralysed for some time.

f. **Sabotage**:   Sabotage by a terrorist group or by an individual aimed at weakening airspace management and airport operations is a great concern. False fire alarms, interfering, malicious pranks, malicious hacking, suspicious items, and false bomb alarm are examples of sabotage.

g. **Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN):** Today's advancements in life sciences and biotechnology changed the security environment. As such, the use of CBRN in South Asian countries by individuals or terrorist organisations cannot be ruled out.

The global terrorism index (GTI) systematically ranks all countries of the World according to terrorist activity. According to the GTI of 2019, out of SAARC, Afghanistan ranked first on the GTI with a score of 9.6 points, making it the country most affected by terrorism on earth. Pakistan is in the fifth position with a GTI score of 7.89, followed by India in the seventh position with a GTI score of 7.52. The other three countries of SAARC within GTI are Bangladesh (30th position, GTI score 5.21) and Nepal (33rd, GTI score 5.09)[9]. From the statistics of terrorism, the nonconventional security threat like terrorism gets the highest concern among SAARC countries, and we need to focus on that with due importance. Airpower can play a very effective role in

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9   Assessed from,   http://www.statista.com/statistics/271514/global-terrorism-index,   on 30 November 2016.

War on Terror in the South Asian region. The figure below shows the GTI of the top ten countries of the World.
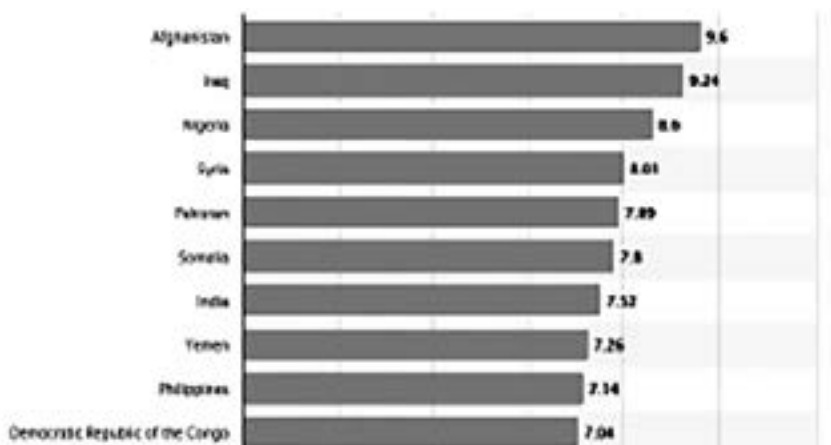

Figure 4: Top ten countries of the World according to GTI.[10]

Terrorist attacks by region in 2017

In 2017, the Middle East and North Africa suffered the highest deaths from terrorism, amounting to 10,819 deaths. South Asian countries, particularly India and Pakistan, have fallen victim to terrorist violence in recent years. The figure below shows the terrorist attack conducted by the region in 2017.[11]
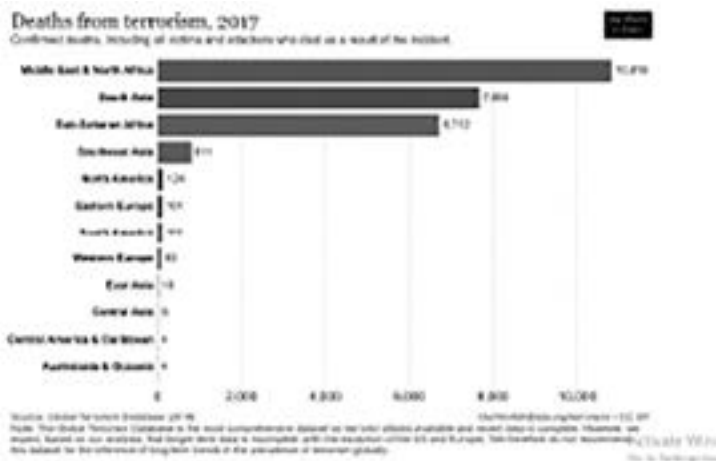

Figure 5: Total Number of Death by Region due to Terrorist Attacks

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Assessed from, https://ourworldindata.org/terrorism, on 17 November 2020.

Most deaths from terrorism in 2018 occurred in Afghanistan, accounting for 46 per cent of all deaths. In that year alone, terrorist incidents worldwide resulted in approximately 15,952 fatalities. The figure below shows the percentage of the death toll caused by terrorism in different countries of the World.[12]
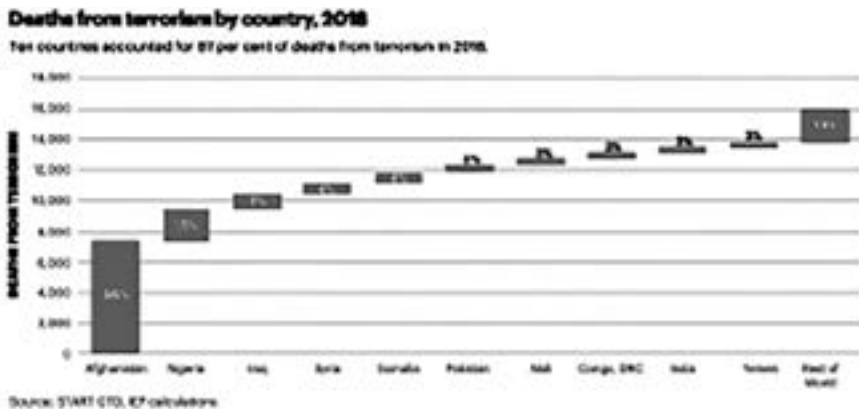

Figure 6: Percentage of the death toll by terrorism in different countries of the World.

Global economic costs of terrorism from 2000 to 2014 (in billion U.S. dollars)

The figure below shows the total costs of terrorism worldwide from 2000 to 2018. In 2014, the total costs from terrorism were the highest, amounting to 111 billion U.S. dollars. The figure below shows the economic impact of terrorism in US$.[13]
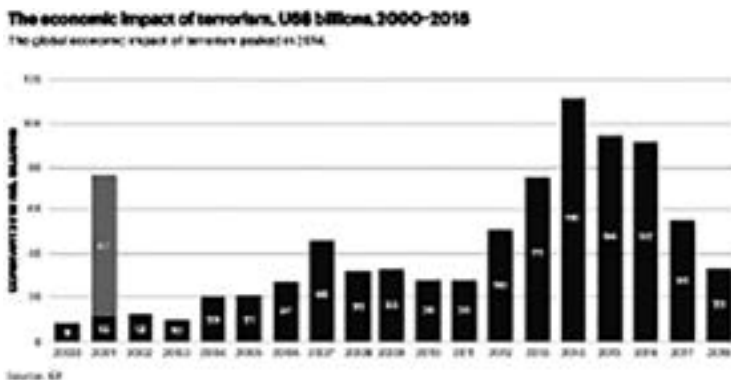

Figure 7: Total Costs of Terrorism Worldwide from 2000 to 2018

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[12] Global Terrorism Index, Institute for Economics and Peace, USA, P-12, available at, https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/GTI-2019web.pdf.

[13] Global Terrorism Index, Institute for Economics and Peace, USA, P-29, available at https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/GTI-2019web.pdf

Terrorist Activity in the Indian Ocean.

Map 1: Maritime Terrorism Incidents and Piracy Prone Areas 1990-2006

Pink shaded areas denote piracy prone areas, blue triangles denote terrorial incidents.
Source: ICC IMB & MIPT

Map 2: Maritime Terrorism Incidents and Piracy Prone Areas of the World.

The Indian Ocean, the locus of important SLOC, the World's third-largest ocean, is of great strategic importance for the supply of crucial energy resources. About 40% of the global trade transits through the Indian Ocean. It provides major sea routes connecting the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific Ocean[14]. The number of terrorist activities in the form of piracy in the Indian Ocean has increased significantly. Map 2 above shows maritime terrorism incidents and piracy-prone areas of the World. By the end of 2011, pirates had seized four ships off the coast of Somalia, attempted unsuccessful attacks on 52 other vessels, and 26 hostages remained in their custody as of 27 February 2015[15]. The piracy off the coast of Somalia was caused in part by illegal fishing by foreign boats taking advantage of the war, which resulted in the loss of fishing income for local communities. The dumping of toxic wastes in Somalia waters by foreign vessels also severely constrained the ability of local fishermen to earn a living. In response, the fisherman began forming armed groups to stop the foreign ships. They eventually turned to hijack commercial vessels for ransom as an alternate source of income. Pirates' attack success rate from 2008 to 2011 and the number of incidents and vessels hijacked by Somali piracy from 2008 to 2014 are shown in the figures below.

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[14] Jayawardane Professor Amal. Terrorism at Sea: Maritime Security Challenges in South Asia, P-1.

[15] Assessed from, www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piracy_off_the_coast_of_Somalia, on 15 November 2016.
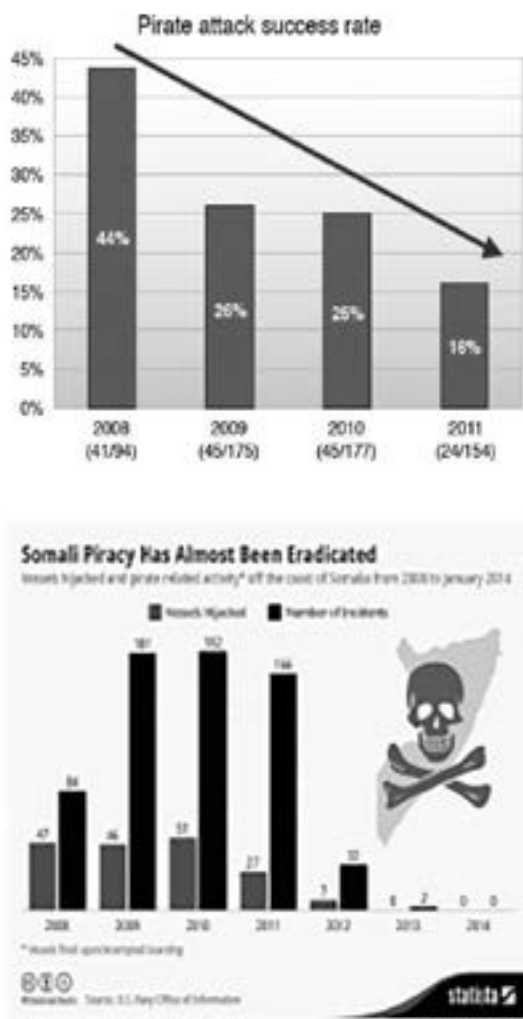
F ig.8 &9: Pirates attack success rate from 2008 to 2011 & number of incidents and vessels hijacked by Somali piracy from 2008 to 2014.

A survey conducted by Wardheer News found that approximately 70% of the local coastal communities "strongly supported the piracy as a form of national defence of the country's territorial waters". The pirates also believed that they were protecting their fishing grounds and exacting justice and compensation for the marine resource stolen. The disruption of the SLOC will have disastrous consequences on the global economy. The figure below shows the Piracy and Robbery at Sea.
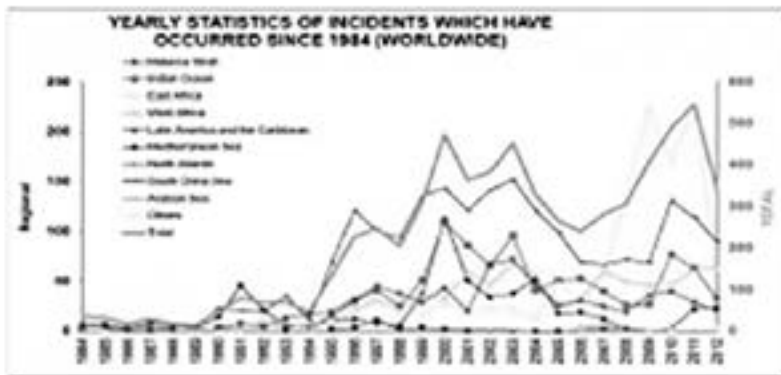
Figure 10: Piracy and Robbery at Sea

Environmental and Food Security in the South Asian Region

Environmental degradation, such as global warming, sea-level rise, loss of biodiversity, floods, droughts etc., create natural humanitarian disasters. South Asia is among the World's most vulnerable regions to both natural and manmade disasters. The region recorded 15 out of 40 major disasters in the World from 1970 to 2000. Over the last 25 years, natural disasters have killed nearly half a million people in South Asia besides inflicting colossal financial damages worth US$ 59,000 million. Over 60,000 people were killed by Tsunami in India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives[16]. Airpower plays a significant role in disaster management, ensuring the environment and food security. BAF conducted a good number of food and emergency medical support mission in disaster-prone areas of the world, especially in South Asian Countries. Even in the Covid-19 situation, BAF transport aircraft operated in different parts of the globe to bring overseas Bangladeshi workers back home and bring medical items and medicines from different countries of the World. The figure below shows the total number of natural disasters in South Asia.

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[16] Hussain Dr. Syed Rifaat. Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Challenges in South Asia, P-1.
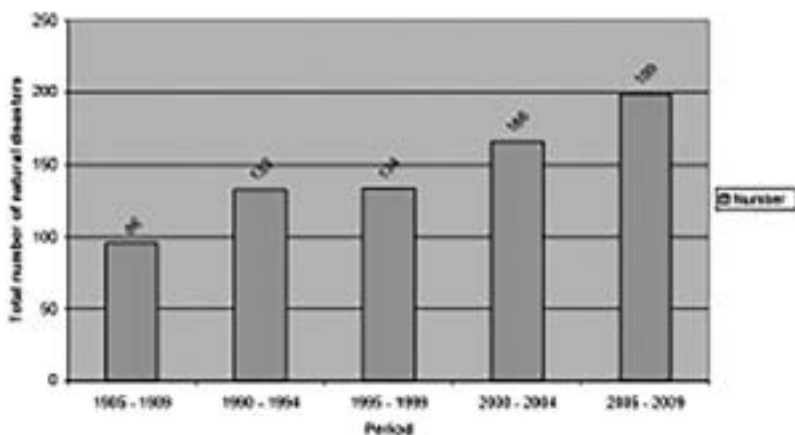
Figure 11: Total Number of Natural Disasters in South Asia[17]

Natural disasters affect household welfare in three distinct ways: loss of physical integrity, assets and income. Over the past forty years, South Asia faced as many as 1,333 disasters that killed 980,000 people, affected 2.4 billion lives and damaged assets worth US$105 billion. This loss is by far the highest among the recorded disasters in various geographical regions[18]. With a very large population base and an ever-increasing development deficit, countries in the region are scrambling to meet the target of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Climate change is a growing challenge which is manifested in frequent disasters. The HDI of the countries in this region is being overshadowed by disasters levelling off the meagre gains accumulated over the decades. The table below shows the frequency of natural disasters in South Asia from 2000 to 2009.

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[17] Gaiha Raghav, Hill Kenneth & Thapa Ganesh. (17 February 2010). Natural Disasters in South Asia, ASARC Working Paper 201006, Routledge Handbook of South Asian Economics, P-9.

[18] Memon Naseer. (May 20120. Disaster in South Asia A Regional Perspective, PILER Centre, Pakistan, P-6.

Table 1: Frequency of Natural Disasters in South Asia, 2000-09[19]

Year	Type Of Disaster	Country	Frequency
2000	Floods	India	6
2001	Earthquake	India	1
2002	Extreme Temperature, Earthquake	India Afghanistan	2, 3
2003	Extreme Temperature	India	2
2004	Earthquake, Earthquake, Flood, Flood	Sri Lanka, India, India, Bangladesh	1, 1, 6, 3
2005	Earthquake, Earthquake, Flood	Pakistan, India, India	1, 1, 17
2006	Flood	India	17
2007	Storms, Storms, Flood	Bangladesh, Bangladesh, India	2, 2, 17
2008	Storm	Afghanistan	1
2009	Flood	India	2

Source: The International Emergency Disasters Database (EM-DAT).

The tsunami of 2004 was a furious disaster in the recent past. The official death toll is 1,310, and about 5,600 were missing. Flood-affected areas in South Asia might increase because of climate change. In India, the areas affected by floods more than doubled between 1953 (19 million hectares) and 2003 (40 million hectares) and currently represent about 11% of that country's geographic area (World Bank 2007). Bangladesh is one of the disaster-prone nations in the World, with 15% of its land going under flood annually on an average.

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[19] Gaiha Raghav, Hill Kenneth & Thapa Ganesh. (17 February 2010). Natural Disasters in South Asia, ASARC Working Paper 201006, Routledge Handbook of South Asian Economics, P-7.

Table 2: Deadliness of Selected Natural Disasters in South Asia, 1990-2009[20]

Type	Country	Year	Deaths (Number of Persons)
Storm	Bangladesh	1991	138,987
Earthquake (seismic activity)	Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India, Afghanistan	2005, 2004, 2004, 1998	73,338, 35,399, 16389, 7,023
Extreme Temperature	India	1998, 2002, 2003	2641, 1930, 1610
Floods	India	1998, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009	2,131, 2129, 2051, 1590, 1,197

Source: EM-DAT

Drought, earthquakes, extreme temperature, floods and storms are the most common natural calamities in the South Asian Region. The figure below shows the total number of natural disasters by type in South Asia.
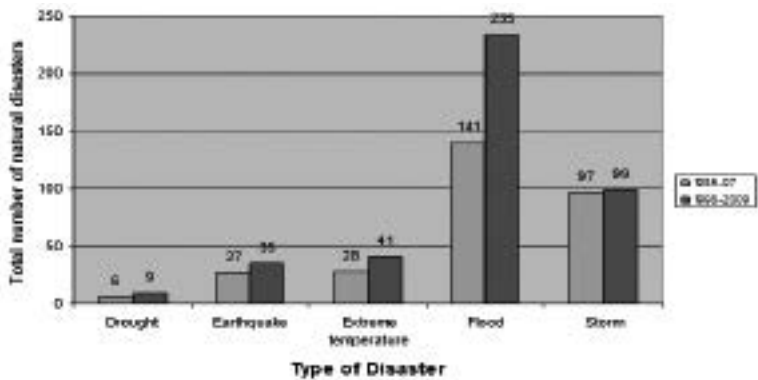

Figure 12: Total Number of Natural Disasters by Type in South Asia[21]

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[20] Ibid, P-8.

[21] Gaiha Raghav, Hill Kenneth & Thapa Ganesh. (17 February 2010). Natural Disasters in South Asia, ASARC Working Paper 201006, Routledge Handbook of South Asian Economics, P-14.

The total number of death due to drought, earthquake, extreme temperature, flood and storm are enormous in the South Asian Region compared to any region of the World. The figure below shows the total number of deaths due to natural disasters by type in South Asia.
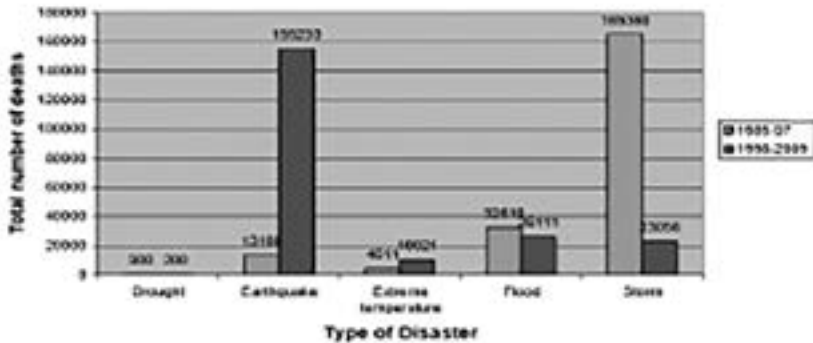

Figure 13: Total Number of Deaths Due to Natural Disasters by Type in South Asia[22]

Food Security.   Food is not adequately grown in South Asian countries. Due to the huge population in this region, food scarcity cannot be ruled out. The amount of agricultural land in many countries of South Asia is very limited. As such, the threat of food security cannot be ruled out.

SAARC In Resolving Security Threats

SAARC initially agreed on areas of cooperation in Agriculture, Rural Development, Telecommunications; Meteorology; Health and Population Activities. SAARC could not function effectively due to the Indian concern on security matters in South Asia, fearing of a regional organisation might provide an opportunity for smaller neighbours to renationalise all bilateral issues and join with each other to gang up against India. Pakistan, on the other hand, assumed that it might be an Indian strategy to organise the other South Asian countries against Pakistan and ensure a regional market for Indian products, thereby strengthening India's economic dominance in the region. To resolve security threats in this region, mistrust and disbelief must be removed between member states. All states must work hand in hand to make SAARC an effective platform. The Regional Offices of SAARC could be utilised for coordinating platforms of airpower in resolving nonconventional security threats in future.

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[22] Gaiha Raghav, Hill Kenneth & Thapa Ganesh. (17 February 2010). Natural Disasters in South Asia, ASARC Working Paper 201006, Routledge Handbook of South Asian Economics, P-14.

Map 3: Demarcation of SAARC Region in the World.

The SAARC Secretariat is supported by Regional Centers established in the Member States to promote regional cooperation. SAARC Regional centre for Monitoring Terrorists and narcotics, located in Colombo, Sri Lanka, acts as a core coordinating centre for identifying, monitoring, addressing, planning and finally fighting terrorist activities in the SAARC region. Mutual cooperation was achieved in disaster management to some extent, but SAARC failed measurably in resolving the one and only non-conventional security threats such as terrorism[23]. The Regional Centre of SAARC on different aspects and their locations are shown below.

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[23] Ashraf Dr. ASM Ali, Associate Professor, Regional and International Affairs, Dhaka University, Bangladesh, interviewed on 16 September 2016.

Regional Centre	Location	Country
SAARC Agricultural Centre (SAC)	Dhaka	Bangladesh
SAARC Meteorological Research Centre (SMRC)	Dhaka	Bangladesh
SAARC Forestry Centre (SFC)	Thimphu	Bhutan
SAARC Development Fund (SDF)	Thimphu	Bhutan
SAARC Documentation Centre (SDC)	New Delhi	India
SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC)	New Delhi	India
SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre (SCZMC)	Malé	Maldives
SAARC Information Centre (SIC)	Kathmandu	Nepal
SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC)	Kathmandu	Nepal
SAARC Human Resources Development Centre (SHRDC)	Islamabad	Pakistan
SAARC Energy Centre (SEC)	Islamabad	Pakistan
SAARC Cultural Centre (SCC)	Colombo	Sri Lanka
SAARC Regional Centre for Monitoring Terrorist and Narcotics	Colombo	Sri Lanka

Table 3: Regional Centers and their Location

Application of Airpower in Resolving Security Threats

Considering human security threats, the most dangerous aspects of human security in the context of South Asian countries are political (terrorism) and environmental. The three components of human security that airpower can contribute immensely are political, environmental and food. Airpower, with its unique characteristics of ubiquity, precision, lethality, speed and rapid deployment, can help ensure human security in any part of the globe. Airpower can neutralise asymmetric force as the force of choice when fighting an asymmetric battle. Comprehensive Planning in the application of airpower considering pre-attack, attack and post-attack consequences will help in reducing collateral damage to a great extent. The application of airpower in resolving security threats is explained below.

Political Security

Airpower can play a significant role in political security threats, more specifically against terrorism. To face international terrorism in applying airpower, we need to have inter-agency cooperation where the Regional Office of Colombo will take a leading role. The biggest challenges from terrorist activities are the use of WMD and Cyber/Information Warfare. Casualty

aversion becomes a critical issue in the war against terrorism. We must understand the strength, weaknesses and potentialities of airpower if we are to use it against our adversary's strategy and force him to do what we want him to do. New terrorist groups have no define-command structure; instead, it has loosely connected semi-independent cells to conduct terrorist activities and support their activities. Terrorists very often give their lives for their cause which are also very difficult to stop. They are more networks centric, and they are becoming more lethal than before. The fear is that new-generation terrorists are concerned with large body counts as such terrorist attack anywhere becomes breaking news all over the electronic media. Airpower response to terrorist threats must be thoroughly planned, and it should not be an ad hoc reaction to a crisis. We must expand and share our understanding, experience and training to include the factors that influence airpower's ability to successfully complete the counterterrorism mission. A disadvantage of the war on terror is that the targets are within a free and democratic society. With the proper documentation, international terrorists can move freely in an open society. Terrorists claim to conduct war, but they are not bound by laws of armed conflict (LOAC). The application of airpower in counterterrorism activities is explained below.

a. **Air Lift of Special Forces**: Out of eight SAARC countries, four countries have Air Transport Forces in their own Air Force. Many countries in the South Asian region are capable of airborne operations involving the movement of combat forces and their logistic support into the terrorist active area by air. Fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters can be employed for this purpose. Air Transport Forces will be responsible for airlifting Special Forces in the troubled areas where terrorists are orchestrating terrorist acts. Countries not having airlift capability may request SAARC Regional Centre for Monitoring Terrorist and Narcotics, Colombo, Sri Lanka, to make necessary coordination for getting the support of airlift from other countries. Countries not having Special Forces for counterterrorism operations may also seek help through Regional Office, but a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) are to be signed between states in this kind of cooperation. SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre (SCZMC), located in Male, Maldives, is to act as the leading regional office in anti-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean. As Indian Air Force has the highest number of aircraft for this kind of mission, it can help other member states in time of need.[24]

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[24] Air Commodore Indrapal Walia (IAF), "The Indian Air Force: A Stabilizing Force in the

b. **Counter Air Operations**:   Air superiority over own air space is a prerequisite for any state if she wants her state to be safe from air attacks by terrorist groups. To control a hijacked aircraft and to neutralise the threat from MANPAD of terrorist groups, Defensive Counter Air Operations (DCAO) play a vital role. Air defence measures such as intercepting hijacked aircraft and forcing the aircraft to land in a designated airfield where counterterrorism operations can be launched successfully would pay dividends. Deployed sites of MANPAD of terrorist groups must be neutralised by DCAO if we want to stop bigger damage done by the terrorists.

c. **Air Strike over Terrorist Positions**: Employment of airpower will be executed in preemptive and retaliation strikes. Launching of preemptive strike and Conducting surgical strikes can reduce the destruction caused by terrorists. Conducting precision strikes over deployed areas and the infrastructure of terrorist groups will create deterrence and reduce collateral damage. Applying an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) for such strike missions is frequently done by US forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan. South Asian countries having UAVs can utilise those to have effective results against terrorism to avoid face-on-face attrition in striking the terrorist's centre of gravity (COG).

d. **Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR)**: South Asian countries do not have any common platform for sharing intelligence information on international terrorist groups active in this region. Mistrust among SAARC countries did not allow such initiatives to be materialised in the past. But to destroy the route of terrorism from the South Asian region, intelligence sharing is a prerequisite. Routine surveillance through satellite UAVs (like "Bee Eye") can give prior information regarding terrorist groups' activities[25]. Reconnaissance conducted by aircraft, UAVs, and helicopters of SAARC countries can be utilised for monitoring the movement of any kind of terrorist activity effectively. It is a great concern for all if the nuke of WMD goes into the hand of a terrorist. Aircraft and sensors can be very easily used to sniff and detect nuclear explosions or monitor nuclear testing. UAVs can be used for real-time imagery intelligence (IMINT) if the nukes are shifted from one place to

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Region", Presentation Given in Air Symposium Organized by Sri Lanka Air Force on 02 December 2016.

[25] Air Commodore Md Mazherul Karim, Director of Air Ops, Air Head Quarters, Bangladesh Air Force, interviewed on 20 September 2016.

another. Signal intelligence (SIGINT) can help greatly in monitoring the conversation of terrorist groups. Human intelligence (HUMINT) is a very reliable source which can give accurate information in CT operations. Information received from those platforms may be coordinated by SAARC Regional Centre for Monitoring Terrorist and Narcotics so that the information can be analysed and utilised for future use.

e. **Special Air Operations (SAO)/Psychological Operation (Psyops)**: SAO can be conducted at any level of conflict for clandestine, covert and psychological operations. Countries that have the capability for SAO will contribute greatly to CT operations. Platforms of airpower can be used for Psyops in the terrorist-prone areas for disarmament, demobilisation and integration of terrorists into normal life. Throwing leaflets from aircraft or helicopters can be done effectively in those areas.

f. **Change in Tactics:** As CT is an asymmetric battle, such a balance of a mismatched force where technologically superior air weapons are abated by the tactics adopted by the terrorist groups. Terrorist groups may force us to fight with a restrictive set of rules of engagement (ROE) because of the dramatic effects of casualty on both sides involved in the conflict. Airpower forces must change their tactics exactly suitable against terrorist groups to avoid the pressure of international public opinion. Similarities can be drawn from the tactics used by international terrorist organisations in applying airpower platforms, and we need to change the tactics regularly in fighting the war.

g. **Other Support**:   Transport aircraft and heavy-lift helicopters can provide logistics support through resupply for the provisioning of CT forces in the field. Fighter aircraft, bombers, and gunships can provide fire support to CT hostage rescue attempts or equipment recovery missions. They can also conduct diversionary operations to focus attention away from the area CT forces are conducting or planning to conduct a mission.

Case Study on CT Operations

Bangladesh had experienced terrorist attacks a number of times since the late 1990s, when veterans of the anti-Soviet struggle in Afghanistan returned to Bangladesh. Udichi blast in March 1999, bomb blast at Ramna Park on Bangla New Year celebration on 14 April 2001, grenade attack on Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina on 21 August 2004, series simultaneous bomb blast at

63 of 64 districts on 17 August 2005 and attack on Holy Artisan Café on 01 July 2016 are some of the remarkable actions of terrorist armed groups (TAG) in Bangladesh. On 17 August 2005, Jammat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) orchestrated synchronised 459 bomb blasts in 63 out of 64 districts which killed two people and injured 115 others.[26] The most talked-about action of TAGs in Bangladesh was an attack on Holy Artisan Café, which got international media coverage because of casualties of foreigners, which include nine Italians, seven Japanese, an American and an Indian. On the evening of 01 July 2016, five TAGs burst into the Holey Artisan Café located in the Gulshan area, where most of the embassies and foreigners reside. The terrorists were armed with assault rifles, entered the café by opening fire and took dinner hostage at gunpoint. Victims of the militants were mostly foreigners who were shot or hacked to death. Two police officers died while fighting the militants, and at that point in time, Army commandos were called to take over the control of the situation.[27] To neutralise the TAGs in this anti-terrorist operation, airpower played a very significant role.

On 01 July 2016 at 2130 hours, an airlift mission demand was placed to Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) to bring 78 commandoes from Sylhet to Dhaka by transport aircraft. It was a pitch dark night with no light on the runway and adjacent area. Night landing facilities of the Sylhet International Airport were under construction at that time. BAF did not operate on such a dead night before, and BAF did not practice night landing at Sylhet Airfield by C-130 aircraft as there is no deployment of BAF air assets there as of now. C-130 Transport aircraft of BAF took off at 0100 hours at night from Dhaka and reached Sylhet at 0130 hours. The captain again took off from Sylhet with 78 commandoes of the Bangladesh Army (BA) at 0415 hours and reached Dhaka at 0445 hours. If BAF did not take the challenging mission of bringing the commandoes from Sylhet, it would be very difficult to neutralise TAGs at Holey Artisan Café.[28] The commandoes of BA, after landing at Dhaka, rushed to the café. They planned the counterterrorism operation in the café very well, and without any casualties, they stormed the building, rescued 13 hostages and killed all five militants behind the attack.

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[26] Report No:295/Asia. (28 February 2018). Crisis Group, Countering Jihadist Militancy in Bangladesh, and Islam Shariful, Aug 17 Series Bomb Blasts: JMB weak but still a threat, The Daily Star, August 17, 2020.

[27] Assessed from http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50570243 (Holey Artisan cafe: Bangladesh Islamists sentenced to death for 2016 attack) on 27 November 2020.

[28] Wing Commander MD. Zahid Ashraf (BAF), Captain of C-130 Transport Aircraft of BAF who transported the commandoes from Sylhet, Interviewed on 26 November 2020.

Environmental Security

Airpower can play a very effective role in ensuring environmental security, which is continuously threatened by climate change and natural disasters in the South Asian region. Air platforms are very effective tools that land or naval forces cannot reach very quickly and easily. Air platforms are the most effective means of moving personnel and cargo. During any natural disaster, food, supply, and medicine can be transported easily to natural disaster areas without delay. If a runway is not available, an airlift by helicopter can help in reaching necessary life-saving drugs, foods, and equipment. SAARC Disaster Management Centre, located in New Delhi, India, can act as the coordinating centre for sending logistics to disaster-hit areas based on the requirement. Platforms of IAF can help greatly in this kind of mission.[29]   SAARC Meteorological Research Centre (SMRC), located in Dhaka, Bangladesh, are to take a leading role in giving early warning by informing states likely to be hit by natural calamities. Air logistic support operations will be conducted by air platforms in a disaster-hit area to distribute and recover personnel and material. Aeromedical evacuations can be conducted to evacuate patients to medical treatment facilities by air transportation.

Food Security

Airpower can play a very effective role in ensuring food security which is continuously threatened by climate change and natural disasters in the South Asian region. Air platforms and aerospace equipment such as satellites are very effective tools in monitoring agricultural lands, crop development, distribution of seeds and pesticides in the land, and finally, watching the attack of insects in the final stage of crops. Satellite pictures also help in comparing the growth of crops in pre and post-flood and natural disaster-affected areas. The application of airpower in crop-dusting is a very old technique. The air platform provides a means of drafting seeds and pesticides on the agricultural land. Many countries in the South Asian region have the capability to distribute seeds and pesticides from the air. SAARC Agricultural Centre (SAC), located in Dhaka, Bangladesh, is to give an advisory role in ensuring food security in South Asian countries through giving expert opinions on agricultural land and crop development in the region. SAARC Meteorological Research Centre (SMRC), located in Dhaka, Bangladesh, is to take a leading role in giving early

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[29] Air Commodore Indrapal Walia (IAF), "The Indian Air Force: A Stabilizing Force in the Region", Presentation Given in Air Symposium Organized by Sri Lanka Air Force on 02 December 2016.

warnings by informing states likely to be hit by natural calamities, which can bring disaster to crops.

Conclusion

Human security is a very important aspect of any country's survival. Human security can help any country to develop in a comprehensive manner. HDI of South Asian countries are not in a promising state and needs positive improvement. South Asian countries need to give due attention to political security, environmental security and food security. Failure to secure political security by state or government leads to terrorism inside the country. In the South Asian Region, most of the countries are the worst sufferer of terrorism especially international terrorism. The death toll due to acts of terrorism is very high in this region compared to other regions of the World and remains in the second position. The global economies in general and regional economies in specific are being highly affected by terrorism in the South Asian Region. The other two aspects which need equal attention are environmental security and food security.

The challenges related to international terrorism need special attention by all victim states in the South Asian region. We need to analyse the threat from a South Asian perspective and make a comprehensive plan in coordination with other states to solve this menace forever. SAARC, as a regional organisation, has failed to solve this issue due to mistrust between different states. SAARC may solve other human security aspects, but terrorism which is the residue of political security, cannot be solved easily.

Airpower can contribute greatly to solving human security issues in South Asia. Airpower contributes to current CT capabilities by providing global mobility for SAO and CAO to protect those forces and precision strike capability to target terrorist infrastructure. It also provides intelligence by ISR missions critical to deterring, preempting and conducting surgical attacks and provides psychological operations in reducing terrorist will and popular support.

Recommendation

Following recommendations are made.

a. Countries of the South Asian region need to make CT a regional priority issue. Efforts are to be made to create an organisation and process to overcome transnational terrorism. Proper coordination is to be made by

SAARC Regional Centre for Monitoring Terrorist and Narcotics so that transnational terrorism cannot affect all states of South Asia. SAARC countries must build mutual trust and confidence between each state through their words, deeds and transparency.

b. Efforts must be taken by all member states of SAARC to make this organisation effective for resolving all issues related to human security.

c. All member states must try to enhance airpower capabilities so that platforms and types of equipment of airpower can be used effectively for war on terror, environmental and food security.

About BIPSS

Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS) is a leading institute in Bangladesh for informed analysis on all aspects of broad spectrum of peace and security studies in the region and beyond. It is a non-party, nonprofit organisation and independent think tank which provides significant platform for the leading strategic thinkers, academics, members of civil society, former members of the foreign and armed services and media persons to chalk out a comprehensive framework for peace and security issues. The Institute is headed by the President of BIPSS, Major General ANM Muniruzzaman, ndc, psc (Retd). He directs and coordinates all research and administrative activities of the Institute. A team of highly qualified full-time research-ers with varied social science background conduct research activities. BIPSS also maintains a pool of affiliated experts whom we engage frequently for different assignments.

BIPSS has also established two specialised centres within its frame-work named Bangladesh Centre for Terrorism Research (BCTR) and Bangladesh Centre for China Studies (BCCS). BCTR is the first centre of its kind in Bangladesh dedicated to the study and research on terrorism related issues. The Centre is headed by Mr. Shafqat Munir who has been engaged with various specialized centres on terrorism in the Asia Pacific region as well as other parts of the world. BCTR has been working in partnership with a number of international centres on terrorism research in South Asia, South East Asia, Europe and USA. On the other hand, Bangladesh Centre for China Studies (BCCS) has been established to understand, study and analyse Chinese Foreign Policy and Chinese strategic and security posture. It also aims to study Chinese economic advancement with a view to advocating greater economic and development cooperation between Bangladesh and China as well as China and the greater South Asian region.

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