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VIF Expert Groups Reports



Edited by Naval Jagota



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Editor's Note

In November six expert group discussions were organized by the Vivekananda International Foundation through webinar on events and topics extending from India's neighbourhood to West Asia to USA. Each of the members of the expert groups brought rich flavour and knowledge on the topic through their varied professional backgrounds (military, diplomacy and academia). This issue contains reports of the U.S, Pakistan, West Asia, and China Expert Groups. In addition two more country specific topics relating to Nepal and Myanmar in India's neighborhood were discussed.

The discussions ranged from "Elections in Myanmar and India's Way Forward", to the Israel's strategic outreach in West Asia and exploring the options for India, in the Pakistan group the discussions were on the recent Gilgit Baltistan election and fallout, TLP protest, LOC escalation, the dossier on India, and Afghanistan peace process, in the China expert group the highlights of the Fifth Plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC): Implications for the Region and India were discussed, while in the US group it was the likely trajectory of the India-US relations under the Biden administration and in the Nepal round table it was the exploring of positive ideas between

the two neighbours to ensure a thaw in the chill that exists between the neighbours.

The West Asia group invited Amb. Ron Malka, Israel's Ambassador to India who presented his views in West Asia as well as on Israel and India ties. For the India-Nepal discussions the Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA) was the joint organiser with participation from Mr. Sunil KC, CEO AIDIA, General Rookmangud Katawal (retd), Mr. Uday SJB Rana and Dr. Deepak Prakash Bhatta participated.

The coordinators and researchers associated with these Expert Groups have put unfaltering efforts to coordinate the meetings and collate the notes for the reports in this issue.

Naval Jagota

New Delhi

December 2020

Contents

Elections in Myanmar and India's Way Forward.....6

- *Compiled by Dr. Sreeradha Datta*

Israel's Regional Outreach in West Asia and
India's Options.....9

- *Compiled by Hirak Jyoti Das*

Report of the Discussion held on the Fifth plenary
session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist
Party of China (CPC).....15

- *Compiled by Dr. Teshu Singh*

India-US ties under the New Biden Administration.....20

- *Compiled by Dr. Himani Pant*

Developments in Pakistan.....25

- *Compiled by Dr. Yatharth Kachiar*

Indo Nepal Bilateral Relations: The Way Ahead.....30

- *Compiled by Dr. Sreeradha Datta*

Elections in Myanmar and India's Way Forward

Compiled by Dr. Sreeradha Datta

On 10 November, VIF organised a discussion on 'Elections in Myanmar and India's Way Forward'. Dr Arvind Gupta, Director VIF, welcomed the participants and delivered the opening remarks followed by brief presentations by Amb Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, Mr Sanjay Chadha, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Mr K Yhome, Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, and Mr Sanjay Pulipaka, Senior Fellow, Delhi Policy Group.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) led by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi has received the largest mandate in the national parliamentary elections in Myanmar's latest election held on 8 November 2020, winning 396 of the 498 contested seats in the bicameral parliament (***results declared on 16 Nov***). This win was larger than the 2015 election with NLD garnering 258 (out of 330) in the Pyithu Hluttaw (lower house) from its previous 255 seats, and 138 seats (out of 168) in the Amyotha Hluttaw (upper house) from its previous 135.¹

With more than 6,900 candidates from 90 political parties fighting for 664 seats in the national parliament (166 seats are reserved for the military), Myanmar had more than 37 million eligible voters, including 5 million first-timers. The 08 November 2020 election had an additional 800

1. Official Results Show Another Election Landslide for Myanmar Ruling NLD; The Irrawaddy, 16 November 2020 at <https://www.irrawaddy.com/elections/official-results-show-another-election-landslide-myanmars-ruling-nld.html>

candidates over the 2015 election and was double from the elections held in 2010, with the number of political parties almost tripled from 37. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) managed to win 71 seats.

The main points that emerged from the discussion about Myanmar's election and increasing India's presence in Myanmar, revolved around few broad points. While the election results have not been announced as counting continues, it appears that NLD will enjoy a landslide victory, more emphatic than the previous one of 2015.

- There are four broad ways ahead for India. It needs to pursue close mutual economic engagement; pursue close integration with ASEAN; formulate policies that benefit the rural population and ensure to limit the role of China. Indeed, Myanmar is cautious about China's moves and motives and would appreciate closer engagement with India.
- The bilateral trade remains low and Indian investment has dipped over the years, and the border trade despite an ICP, at Moreh-Tamu border is barely functional. The border trade has many issues which have been identified but have not been resolved. India needs to work more with the agriculture and mineral sector and support SMEs that would reflect India is on the side of the people.
- Developing the borderlands is imperative in engaging with local population on both sides, the security interests would be served better through deeper interaction at the ground level and reaping mutual benefit of accessing local border resources. Implementing small incremental measures would ensure sustained India's presence with the local and ethnic population.
- On the recent visit of the Indian Army Chief and Foreign Secretary to Myanmar, an announcement of grant of USD 2 million for the construction of the border Haat bridge at Byanyu/Sarsichauk in

Chin State was made. This strategic Haat will enhance economic activity between Mizoram and Myanmar. India also proposed to invest USD 6 billion towards an oil refinery near Yangon.

- While improvement of cross border connectivity infrastructure may improve the economic activity it will be China which will be able to put these roads and infrastructure to greater use.
- Managing the ethnic groups and ensuring the peace process continues will be another challenge in the days ahead. About the stalled Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, Chief Minister Zoramthanga (Mizoram) in his last meeting with the Foreign Secretary (January 2020) had expressed his keen desire to see the project finalised which he believes would also benefit the Zo communities of both Mizoram and Chin State of Myanmar. His experience in similar negotiations and knowledge about the rebel groups, including the Arakan army would be a key input in trying to resolve this issue.
- Signing a bilateral Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement involving trade in services and investment and extend the same with BIMSTEC may be the big idea that would give India the edge in Myanmar. A majority of domestic actors in Myanmar view India as a welcome partner. India needs to scale up the level of engagement for it to create a greater sphere of influence on the different stakeholders in Myanmar.
- The Army and Aung San Suu Kyi have not been very favourably disposed towards each other and the current results in NLD's favour may move Myanmar towards a civilian ruled state, which the Army would resist whole heartedly. India needs to be prepared for that and may have to be deal with a confrontational situation between Suu Kyi and the Army. The Civil-military relations in all likelihood will be problematic in the days to come.

Israel's Regional Outreach in West Asia and India's Options

Compiled by Hirak Jyoti Das

The Meeting of the West Asia Study Group was held via video conferencing on 11 November 2020, to discuss on Israel's strategic outreach in West Asia and exploring the options for India. The Abraham Accords can be counted as one of the foreign policy successes of the US administration under President Donald Trump. The potential impact of the peace agreements in the region and the Middle East peace process requires serious attention. Notably, Israel through its ties with Sudan could expand its influence in Africa. In light of the upcoming Joe Biden presidency in the US, the policy changes including the US' likely entry in the JCPOA would deepen engagement between Israel and the Persian Gulf states. The discussion touched upon the factors motivating the Persian Gulf states to open ties with Israel and its impact on the region and India. The meeting was attended by Amb. Ron Malka, Israel's Ambassador to India; Dr Meena Singh Roy; Lt. Gen. Syed Ata Hasnain (retired); Amb. Sanjay Singh; Amb. D P Srivastava; Lt Gen Ravi Sawhney (retired); Ambassador Anil Trigunayat and Director VIF, Dr. Arvind Gupta.

Israel's Regional Outreach

The proposed goals of the Abraham Accords are based on building on the "Peace to Prosperity" initiative especially through further collaboration

on emerging technologies, particularly on food technology, expanding diplomatic, trade and security cooperation and boosting security cooperation against common threats. The UAE and Bahrain have expressed hope that the normalisation process would benefit the Palestinians.

The peace treaties draws attention to the scope of developmental diplomacy; medical & healthcare diplomacy; role of technology and usage of soft power that has diluted the Arab states' commitment to the Palestinian cause. The public opinion in the region continues to remain in favour of the Palestinian cause; however economic instability, unemployment, corruption, inflation, growing inequality, freedom of expression etc have taken precedence.

The Abraham Accords have dispelled the myth about the eternal conflict between Jews and Muslims and Israelis and Arabs. The peace agreement reflects the desire of the states in the region to achieve peace, prosperity and stability. Israel would commit to any compromise on the two-state solution provided its security is ascertained and it will find a way to make peace.

The competitive interests of the regional powers have facilitated a new arms race and the Abraham Accord has widened the UAE and Bahrain's incentives to procure advanced weapons from the US. Meanwhile, defence sales from Russia and possibly China are likely to increase to the region. Israel despite its increasing trade and educational partnership with China is aware of the risks. It does not want to be loan dependent on China. China at the same time offers a huge market for Israeli military goods and technology products, therefore, engagement is likely to continue in the future.

Israel's Pivot to Africa

In terms of Israel-Sudan relations, it has come a long way from the Arab League resolution agreed in Khartoum after 1967 Arab-Israel war stressing on "No Peace with Israel; No Recognition of Israel; No Negotiation with Israel". For Sudan undergoing political tensions and economic instability,

diplomatic opening with Israel was a crucial precondition by the US to remove the war torn state from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism. It could help the state to attract foreign funding needed for national development and agreements in the fields of agriculture, economy, trade, aviation, migration are expected to be signed in the coming days. It is seen as a huge political win for Sudanese Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok. He promised to shed the legacy of Sudan's terrorist past and reintegrate in the international community. The interim government backed by the military does not enjoy the support of several political parties and the general population continue to stress on Palestinian reconciliation. It has to be seen how the transitional government pacifies the domestic pressure and deliver the economic benefits promised by the peace deal. Israel through its ties with Sudan could expand its influence in Africa.

Regional Geopolitics

The Abraham Accords marks Israel's formal entry in the Saudi Arabia led coalition along with the UAE; Egypt; Jordan. On the other side, despite diverging strategic interests, Iran, Qatar and Turkey have aligned on issues of common concerns. Moreover, China and Russia has both intensified its engagement in the region.

Currently, Iran's regional strategy are, firstly, to resist the US foothold in the region; secondly, to increase and sustain their regional interests through its strategic assets i.e. Hamas and Hezbollah; thirdly, to counter 'Takfiri' terrorist groups such as Islamic State (IS), Al-Qaeda, Jabhat Al-Nusra etc.; fourthly, to counter balance against Saudi influence; fifthly, to confront Israel for its occupation and supporting Palestinian resistance groups.

Expectedly, Iran has called the peace deals as stab in the back and Turkey has mentioned the peace deal as betrayal of the Palestinian cause. Notably, Turkey continues to operate its embassy in Tel Aviv. Qatar has developed firm ties with Israel especially for financial and administrative coordination in Gaza. It has stated that in the absence of progress in the peace process

or territorial concessions, the peace deals would not be able to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict. All Palestinian groups have condemned the move calling it treachery, betrayal and political sin.

Insights into Joe Biden's Policy in West Asia

In the context of the upcoming Joe Biden presidency, the Israeli government expects that the bipartisan support would continue and nothing dramatic is in the offing. The US role in the region is likely to transition from buyer and seller relationship under Donald Trump to strategic partnerships. Israel is hoping that the US would reclaim its global leadership role to counter China's ambitions and Iran's regional outreach. The US relations with the European Union (EU) states are likely to improve under Joe Biden.

Israel, Abraham Accords and India's Options

India is adapting to the changes in the region by activating its "Act West" policy and increasing the number of high profile visits (since 2014) resulting in enhanced economic diplomacy; strategic and defence cooperation with the Persian Gulf states. In case of Israel and Palestine conflict, it has sought to de-hyphenate the relations by developing cordial relations with both sides. India while expanding the range of cooperation with Israel has also deepened its engagement with Jordan, Palestine, Oman, Qatar and Iraq, while with Iran it has managed to sustain engagement despite US sanctions. It has adopted a new energy policy shifting from buyer seller relationship to joint collaboration. It is also seeking to intensify cooperation in counter-terrorism especially in the sphere of terror finance and illegal migration.

India has developed extensive ties with Israel since 1992 in the sphere of agriculture, military goods, homeland security, science & technology and health. This relationship with Israel is based on historical connection, trust, political will, leadership role, personality factor, common strategic concerns, liberal democratic model and cooperation during critical times.

Within the US, there is high level of bipartisan support for India-Israel ties assisted by the Indian diaspora which over the years have developed political relevance in US policy-making circles.

India's engagement with Israel has entered a new phase after the visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in July 2017. The growth of Fintech (Financial Technology) or designing and provisioning of financial services by using new technological innovations has huge potential to increase access to finance and promote the growth of MSMEs in the state. India's current priorities with regard to the region are promotion of joint production and co-production in a third country; counter terrorism and homeland security; energy security; cooperation in health and medical research, tourism, water security, disaster management and media and film industry. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, India has significantly contributed in research on testing and vaccine and scope for joint collaboration is likely to grow in the coming months.

The health ministers of Israel and the UAE have reached understanding for cooperation on health issues especially on the coronavirus. Meanwhile, Israel and India have also been cooperating on joint research and development for rapid testing of Covid-19, as well as new technologies to combat the pandemic. The Israeli government has sent 20 scientists to India and collected 25,000 samples to be used for four different kinds of technologies to quickly detect COVID-19 i.e. breath analyser, voice test, isothermal testing, and test using poly-amino acids that seeks to isolate proteins related to COVID-19. In this regard Israel is keen on joint development and capitalise on the significant relative advantage of India in manufacturing and up scaling that can bring promising results for the sake of humanity and the whole world. The shared efforts completely harmonises with the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "Making in India, for India, and for the world" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat". Israel is confident that the UAE can complement India and Israel's joint efforts in rapid testing by contributing much needed financial backing.

Israel's peace agreements have occurred with the advanced economies in the Persian Gulf states and is keen to develop comprehensive strategic alliance with India and the UAE. The three states are leaders in innovation and the Abraham Accords have offered impetus. The Israeli ministry of economy and industry has estimated that Israeli exports to the UAE would reach US \$500 million per year and the UAE investments in Israel at US\$ 350 million per year. Both states are working in the fields of cyber-security, medical, financial, and communications industries. Both states are India's strategic partners and it could harness this promising potential.

Report of the Discussion held on the Fifth plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC)

Compiled by Dr. Teshu Singh

The Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) hosted the Experts Group of China on November 12, 2020. Amb Ashok Kantha moderated the discussion. Attendees of the Experts Group meeting were Amb Kanwal Sibal, Lt Gen Ravi Sawhney (Retd), Lt Gen S L Narasimhan (Retd), Amb TCA Rangachari, Amb R. Rajagopalan, Prof Srikanth Kondapalli, Prof Madhu Bhalla, Prof Sujit Dutta, Cmde Gopal Suri and Dr Sanjeev Kumar. The agenda set by the Experts group for the discussion were the highlights of the Fifth plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC): Implications for the Region and India.

The Fifth plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) was attended by 198 members of the CPC Central Committee, 166 alternate members of the CPC Central Committee as well as the members of the Standing Committee of the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection as well as several delegates of the 19th CPC National Congress who work at the grass-roots level.

The plenary session adopted the CPC Central Committee's proposals for the formulation of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) for National

Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives through the Year 2035. The document was divided into 60 points further under 15 sub-headings. It will be put for approval in the March 2021, at the Party Congress.

Highlights of the Communiqué

In the communiqué, China is projecting its achievement of a moderately well-off society/Xiaokang. It stated: “the decisive victory in building a well-off society in all respects.” It deliberates on the guidelines and goals for economic and social development during the 14th five-year plan.

There was the persistent mention of the role of innovation in the Chinese modernisation strategy. Greater emphasis is being provided to the innovation aspect of the development because of the on-going US-China trade and technological friction. China is skeptical that key technologies will be denied to it, hence it has begun focusing on indigenous development. It highlighted Mao Zedong’s style of self-reliance. There was a thrust on accelerating the development of a modern industrial system and upgrading the economic structure. Notably, “Made in China 2025” has been conspicuous by its absence from the document. China has witnessed supply chain disruption in the first quarter of this year and therefore looking for its diversification from the main source to an alternate one.

The communiqué highlighted forming a strong domestic market and establishing a new development pattern. It stressed on the Dual Circulation (internal and external), implying that domestic circulation needs to be improved thereby decreasing the reliance on the external sources for consumption of its products. It further states that it wants to increase domestic consumption by increasing the welfare, raising the quality of life, rural welfare, agricultural development, health care and environment of the people of China. In all these sectors, China is bound to face challenges because they are dependent on production. There is a requirement for quality development rather than investment-led development, which

would imply changing the mode of production which will be a major challenge for the party itself.

The comprehensive reform is a quest for “a high-level socialist market economy” which was underlined in the communique. The development of agriculture and rural area, and comprehensively promote rural vitalisation was stressed. There was an emphasis on the use of land and coordinated regional and a new type of urbanisation.

The communique stressed on implementing high-level cooperation and open prospect for win-win cooperation. Implicitly, they are trying to open up the economy further. This was accentuated by the fact that Xi Jinping visited Shenzhen at the 40th anniversary of the Special Economic Zone. There was stress on improving Chinese people’s standard of living and devise strategies to address the issues of the ageing population. The communique is talking about the social system, education, employment and also a healthy society. China is facing large unemployment and at the time of COVID-19, the rate of unemployment was estimated to be between 6-20 per cent.

In addition to the military, economic, and political power, a new aspect of becoming a “Cultural Power” by 2035 is highlighted in the communique. The promotion of green development and a low-carbon achievement, harmonious co-existence of man and nature was stated to achieve a low carbon footing by the target year of 2060.

China is also gearing towards building a safer China and strengthening national security capabilities to deal with traditional and non-traditional security challenges. Accelerating the modernisation of National Defence and Military. In the communique, Xi Jinping has finalised the plan to build a modern military by 2027. The year 2027, marks the centenary of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). China aims to develop the military with the capability to defend national sovereignty, safeguard against security threats posed by the hegemons’ in the western pacific region and protect overseas development interests as its overseas economic presence

grows. China aims to maintain the long-term prosperity of Hong Kong and Macao and promote reunification of the Chinese mainland and Taiwan while pursuing peaceful cross-strait development. It further directed people to maintain a stable external environment and promote the building of a new type of international relations and a community with a shared future for humanity. Overall, the communique directed the party and the people of all ethnic groups in China to unite and strive for the long-term goals of 2035.

There was an indication that Xi Jinping is going to continue beyond 2022. If there has to be a change in the leader (Gen Secy), the Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission is inducted two years in advance so that he gets accustomed to the system. The plenum communique sent a strong signal that Xi Jinping's position is undisputed and it commended Xi Jinping's leadership and acknowledged him as "the core navigator and helmsman". Earlier, the title was used only for Mao but now it has re-emerged for Xi Jinping.

Besides the communique, Xi Jinping published an explanation of these goals. There are new six-goal that are highlighted as "six news"; creation of modern economy, new steps of reform and opening-up of the social market economy, improved level of society, creation of energy-efficient and improve the ecological environment, new levels of income and basic public services, improving governance socialist democracy and rule of law.

The four-day plenum underlined the fact that the party and country's policies and objectives would abide by "Xi Jinping thought on Socialism with Chinese characteristics for the New Era".

Implications for India

The CPC assessment of the external challenges has implications for India. The assessment states the need for reinforcing forces to balance challenges. Such attempts are visible in terms of China's relations with Russia and other powers. It is also becoming evident in India's Neighbourhood as Wang Yi has made trips to Sri Lanka and the Maldives and Yang Yechi

has visited Myanmar. Recently, the Chinese foreign policy concentration has been in the Neighbourhood and Europe. In India's Neighbourhood, there is a strong Chinese presence. Most of the countries are moving closer to China. For example; while India is looking towards Bangladesh, they are looking towards the Chinese for the submarines.

The defence and the PLA reforms suggested by Xi Jinping will affect India. It states: "We must speed up the modernization of national defence and the armed forces so as to realize the synthesis of a rich country and a strong army". The message passed on is that the Line of Actual Control (LAC) may remain active for some time. There is a possibility that India may face a more sophisticated PLA at the LAC.

The plenum mentions about the new model of International Relations. The "New model" implies multipolarity in organisations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS). Also, the concept of 'community of shared destiny' is forming soft alliances. This would also have implications for India. The reinforcement of alliances, especially in India's Neighbourhood will have implications in the long-term.

India-US ties under the New Biden Administration

Compiled by Dr. Himani Pant

Weeks after the contentious Presidential election, some clarity is beginning to emerge over the next US administration and its priorities. Even though Trump has not conceded defeat formally, he has agreed to the formal transition process to Joe Biden administration. As President elect Biden prepares to take over the oval office as the 46th president of the U.S. in January 2021, his policies and priorities carry significant implications for India. To discuss the trajectory of the India-US relations under the Biden administration, the Vivekananda International Foundation organised an interaction of the VIF expert group on November 17, 2020. The opening remarks were presented by the VIF director, Dr. Arvind Gupta. The discussion was moderated by Amb. Arun K Singh and saw in attendance distinguished participants including Lt Gen Ravi Sawhney, Dr. Rudra Chaudhuri, Lt Gen Anil Ahuja, Lt. Gen Ata Hasnain, Vice Admiral Satish Soni, Prof. KP Vijayalakshmi, Gp. Capt. Naval Jagota, Mr. Sanjay Chadha and Mr Pranav Kumar.

Biden Administration

Biden's term begins at a time when the polarisation in the US is at its peak. The immediate challenges for his government are mostly domestic – a combination of health, economic and social upheavals currently plague

the country. These challenges also resonate in Biden's 08 Nov speech where he emphasised on dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, economic revival, dealing with the issue of racism within the US and tackling climate change as his main priorities. Given that Trump's legacy would continue to impact domestic policies for some time, it is likely that the America first policy would continue in some form or the other. While it is clear that his immediate preoccupation would be domestic, his administration also has a huge task in the sphere of foreign policy. To what extent it undoes Trump's policies and/or continues with some elements of it would have inevitable implications for India. Based on the observations made by participants, some of these aspects are outlined below.

Relations with China, Pakistan, Europe and Russia

Trump's approach towards China was to deal via disruption and obstruction which was almost aimed at creating an alliance against China. While there is general consensus in the Biden administration that China under Xi is not going to move towards political and economic liberalisation, the US policy would be containment via engagement. This would entail more dialogue and discussion between the two sides in contrast to isolationism practised under Trump. The Biden administration would most likely explore areas of cooperation in the sphere of climate change, on dealing with North Korea, and perhaps even in responding to the ongoing pandemic. The US efforts would also depend on how the Chinese political system plays out and how they respond to the former's outreach. It is apparent that China would try to take advantage and reach out into the system to create interdependencies as it has done in the past. It would be in India's interest to create more awareness about its concerns regarding China. A timely outreach to the US administration is important in this context.

Russia

Trump's efforts to engage more positively with Russia were constrained by the US congress, which among others included the introduction of CAATSA. While Biden may not face similar constraints, the democrats

still hold Russia responsible for meddling in the previous 2016 election which favoured Trump over Hillary Clinton. While active engagement between Washington and Moscow is not foreseeable in the near future, a period of thaw is nevertheless expected. It is in India's interest that their relationship comes on an even keel. This would be very crucial not only in terms of multilateralism and arms control, but also in terms of India's projects in Iran. This would also ease the pressure on the terms that India has to face while purchasing equipment and technology from either of these countries.

Europe

Under Trump, ties with Europe were largely strained due to Trump's views and actions relating to NATO. In this respect, Biden's take on this security alliance with Europe would be important. Biden would probably look at strengthening the transatlantic partnership. It is important to note that post emerging as the President elect, he made his first calls to countries like the UK, Germany and France which signal the importance his administration attaches to allies. Given Europe's increasing interest in the Indo-Pacific, a transatlantic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific hold significance for India.

Pakistan

The US policy on Pakistan has oscillated between incentivising and pressurising throughout history. This tendency was also true for Trump's tenure as he started with being hard on Pakistan (he went on to cut off security assistance in early 2018). His approach softened later as Pakistan emerged a key player in the U.S.-Taliban peace talks. A major shift in US policy towards Pakistan is unlikely as the US would continue to need Pakistan's assistance while dealing with Afghanistan. In this respect, India needs to be careful on Pakistan attempts to mobilise the US into the Kashmir issue.

Points of Concern: Issues of Trade, Data, Climate Change and Human Rights

Issues pertaining to labour and environment are close to Biden's heart. This implies that these factors would likely become a negotiating point for entering into trade deals with the US. It is likely that the US under Biden would push the milestone and markers in the Paris accord much harder than 2016. Given that India has been outperforming the goals, it may encourage the Biden team to reset goals. This will have implications for India's manufacturing and standardisation processes etc.

In addition, any new trade agreements with India is also not likely because the administration's focus is on the domestic front which includes initiatives on domestic skill development, infrastructure development, on-shoring of jobs to US, etc. Given that India too is moving towards self-reliance, how 'atmanirbharta' is perceived in the US administration would also play a role in trade negotiations. Thus, much headway on India's trade relations with the US is not likely.

Another matter of concern for India is the issue of data localisation. Biden team has a serious perspective on data when compared to that of Trump. While Trump was averse to data localisation for trade reasons, Biden is guided by ideological reasons. This may lead to a further pushback on data access and transfer issues.

Human rights' considerations would form an important part of the Biden administration's foreign policy. The proposed global summit for democracy is important in this context. From the outset, an alliance of democratic nations sounds favourable but this would not be an easy road for India given the commitments it would entail therein.

Conclusion

From the vantage point of India, how the Biden government's relations with China progresses would be crucial. A related issue would also be the US relations with Pakistan and views on Kashmir, human rights

and religious freedom, etc. The future of Quad and bilateral defence cooperation, trade and economic relations with India would shape the trajectory of India-US relations. Apart from these the larger issues of transatlantic relations, international organisations, multilateralism and climate change would define the environment around India's engagement with the US. US engagement in the Indo-Pacific is something that works in India's favour. India should encourage US engagement in the Indian Ocean in particular. However, at the same time, there is a need for India to push to move beyond the maritime domain in this sphere. There is a need for India to create greater awareness on the land borders. Furthermore, the importance of air power needs to be realised and subsequently utilised in enhancing diplomacy in the Indian Ocean region.

As New Delhi prepares to engage with the new Biden administration, there is a need for narrative control and early outreach to the US establishment. This includes reaching out to the members of the cabinet, advisors as well as the entire ecosystem of think tanks. There is also a need to watch closely the domestic aspects of US politics as they would play a crucial role in shaping the country's foreign policy. Furthermore, as a non-permanent member of the UNSC, India also has opportunity to engage actively with the US and focus on areas of convergence within a multilateral framework.

Developments in Pakistan

Compiled by Dr Yatharth Kachiar

A meeting of the Pakistan Study Group was held via video conferencing on 20 November 2020. The main items on the agenda were: Pakistan Democratic Movement, IG Sindh abduction report, Gilgit Baltistan election and fallout, TLP protest, LOC escalation, the dossier on India, and Afghanistan peace process. The Meeting was attended by Shri Arvind Gupta, Ms Shalini Chawla, Shri Sushant Sareen, Shri Rana Banerjee, Amb G. Parthasarthy, Amb Satish Chandra, Amb Gautam Mukhopadhyay, Amb Amar Sinha, Amb DP Srivastava, Lt Gen (R) Ravi Sawhney, Lt Gen (R) Ata Hasnain, Gen. (R) NC Vij, Shri TilakDevasher, Brig. (R) Rahul Bhonsle, Lt. Gen. Ranbir Singh.

Pakistan's Internal Developments

After successful rallies in Gujranwala, Karachi, and Quetta, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) has sharpened its attacks on the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government and the Establishment. The PDM could be a positive step for the democracy in Pakistan if it can stay the course and stay united. The multi-party alliance has managed to attract a massive following on the critical issues plaguing the country's political culture and economy. Acceptance of the PDM and its narrative by the people indicates the increased level of frustration and anger in the society primarily because of the policies of the PTI government and its failure to provide good governance. The massive crowds that the PDM

has attracted is discomfoting for the Imran Khan government as well as its military backers. It is assessed that the PDM and especially the belligerence of Nawaz Sharif has received the tacit support from one or more of the following elements- US, Saudi Arabia and/or a section of the army.

Nevertheless, the military at large is trying to sow the seeds of disunity within the PDM. Such an effort was visible during the abduction of IG Sindh, and the subsequent arrest of PML-N leader retired Captain Mohammed Safdar, son-in-law of former PM Nawaz Sharif and husband of PML-N vice President Maryam Nawaz. The Army's intervention and the subsequent inquiry in the matter seem to have satisfied the PPP, but the inquiry has been rejected by the PML-N. According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) officials of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Pakistan Rangers, Sindh, involved in the "Karachi incident" had been suspended pending further departmental proceedings for acting "overzealously". Nawaz Sharif has described the inquiry report as scapegoating of junior officers. The two major political rivals, PPP and PML-N, had handled the situation well to avoid any friction on the issue.

PDM's internal contradictions could surface as the movement proceeds further. Recently, Maryam Nawaz stated that they were ready to talk to the military on the condition that Imran Khan was sacked. Such a stance differs from that of Nawaz Sharif whose position is to end the military's role in politics. It is unlikely that the military will let go of Imran Khan so long as something drastic does not change on the ground. The option for the PDM would be to increase the pressure on the Khan Government that might unnerve him enough to commit mistakes. The PDM has already vowed to defy a government ban on its public gatherings, warning the district administrations that use of force to stop the protesting citizens could spark street battles.

Amidst the pro-democracy rallies by the PDM, Pakistan's far-right Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) led by religious leader Khadim Husain Rizvi started protesting on the issue of the steps taken by France that were

perceived to be against Islam. The major demands of the TLP included the expulsion of the French ambassador and breaking diplomatic ties over perceived Islamophobia. The TLP sit-in in at the Rawalpindi-Islamabad interchange had attracted more than 5,000 supporters, and the Islamabad administration had deployed over 3000 security personnel including police, Rangers and Frontier Corps at Faizabad — where supporters of TLP had clashed with the police. After hours-long negotiations headed by Minister for Religious Affairs Pir Noorul Haq Qadri and including Interior Minister Ijaz Shah, Islamabad Commissioner Aamir Ahmed and prime minister's adviser Shehzad Akbar, the PTI government succeeded in convincing TLP leaders to end their protests. The sudden death of TLP leader Khadim Husain Rizvi on 19 November has come as a shock to his followers throughout the country. The religious cleric made his last public appearance at the Faizabad sit-in. Nevertheless, the TLP protests came in handy for the PTI government to divert attention from the rigged elections in Gilgit-Baltistan and from the questions of governance, democracy and the army's interference in politics raised by the PDM in its rallies.

In recently held elections in Gilgit-Baltistan, the PTI won 11 seats, whereas the independent candidates bagged six. After six independent candidates joined it, the PTI's tally has reached 17 in the 33-member assembly, and the party is now in a comfortable position to form a government. PDM leaders including Bilawal Bhutto, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, and Maryam Nawaz have accused the PTI government of rigging the elections and several protests have been held.

Pakistan's External Developments

In its external relations Pakistan is working with a three-fold objective: to isolate and put pressure on India by fabricating terrorism charges, to build a narrative in order to change the image of Pakistan as a state sponsor of terror at the global level, and to lay down the groundwork to woo the Biden administration in the US. On November 14, Pakistan foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and director-general of inter-services

public relations (ISPR) Major General Babar Iftikhar held a joint press conference in which they released a dossier containing alleged details of evidence of Indian terrorist activities in Pakistan. The dossier was an attempt to achieve the aforesaid objectives.

The Ministry of External Affairs in a statement on November 15 “dismissed the charges as having no credibility, are fabricated and represent figments of imagination.” It also stated that “it is a deliberate attempt on the part of the Pakistani establishment to shift focus from its internal political and economic failures.” Internationally, Pakistan has acquired the reputation of being the center of terrorism. The global community has repeatedly asked Pakistan to relinquish its policy of state-sponsored terrorism and eliminate the terrorist groups on its territory, however this has not achieved the desired result. Pakistan’s linkages with the terrorist groups have also led to its grey-listing by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

Furthermore, in November 2020, the LOC has experienced heavy ceasefire violations (CFV) throughout the Kashmir frontier extending into the Poonch sector. On November 7, an infiltration attempt in the Machil sector on Shamshabari range was foiled by the Indian army. During the operation, India lost three of its soldiers and neutralised three terrorists. In 2020, there have been only 26-30 confirmed infiltrations in Kashmir. That is why Pakistani frustration and anger has now resulted in heavy ceasefire violation on the LOC. The number of CFVs has gone up from 3,168 in 2019 to 4,052 in 2020, of which 394 occurred in October and 128 in November.

Afghanistan Peace Process

Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan recently visited Afghanistan where he met senior Afghan officials including President Ashraf Ghani. The talks between the two leaders were focused on the Afghan peace process and bilateral relations. At a joint press conference with President Ashraf Ghani, PM Khan said: “Pakistan has played an important role in initiating talks between the Taliban with Afghanistan, but violence has increased in

Afghanistan even after peace talks begin.” PM Khan’s visit was an attempt to reinforce Islamabad’s strategic position in Afghanistan for the coming Biden administration in the US.

Like India, Afghanistan too rejected the recent dossier by Islamabad on external actors sponsoring terrorism in Pakistan. The dossier claimed that India was using Afghan territory for terror attacks against Pakistan. Afghanistan’s Foreign Ministry stated that Pakistan should raise its concerns through existing mechanisms such as the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) or allow an UN-appointed delegation to verify its claims.

President Trump has announced that before leaving office, he will cut the number of US troops in Afghanistan to 2500. The decision has garnered mixed reactions within the United States as well at the international level. Within the US, Congressmen are divided over the decision. At the global level, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg stressed that the withdrawal of US and Allied forces from Afghanistan could prove to be a costly deal. On the other hand, Moscow’s special presidential representative for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov said that the US forces withdrawal would have little impact on the ground situation in Afghanistan while adding that it was not possible to withdraw all the US forces from the country.

After almost two and a half months of talks and stalemate between the negotiating teams, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo travelled to Doha to push for a breakthrough. Mr Pompeo, in a meeting with the Afghan government and the Taliban in Doha, has asked them to expedite the peace talks as America prepares to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. However, the increasing level of violence in the country and the Taliban’s refusal to accept a ceasefire indicates that the insurgent group does not believe in the spirit of peace talks. Given a chance, the Taliban would like to establish its control in Afghanistan by force. The Taliban’s victory will have a disastrous impact on the stability and security of the whole region, including Kashmir, where the Islamist elements will get inspiration from the fundamentalist regime in Afghanistan.

Indo Nepal Bilateral Relations: The Way Ahead

Compiled by Dr. Sreeradha Datta

On 23rd November 2020 Vivekananda International Foundation India (VIF) and Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA) organised a round table discussion on India-Nepal Relations. Director Dr Arvind Gupta chaired the session while Gen Ravi Sawhney delivered the welcome comments. Mr. Sunil KC, CEO AIDIA delivered the opening remarks followed with remarks by Amb Ranjit Rae, General Rookmangud Katawal (retd), Lt Gen (Dr) Rakesh Sharma (retd), Mr. Uday SJB Rana, Mr. Sanjay Chadha, Dr. Deepak Prakash Bhatta, Mr. Purshottam Ojha and Dr. Nihar Nayak. From VIF, Gen Ravi Sawhney (retd), Dr Sreeradha Datta and Amb Satish Chandra attended the round table discussion.

This was the second India-Nepal Relationship round table discussion that was being held between the two Institutes. India's relationship with Nepal is perhaps the most important and unique relationship in the neighbourhood due to our shared history and also because of the geography of the region. The webinar examined positive ideas between the two neighbours to ensure a thaw in the chill that exists between the neighbours. Some of the points that emerged.

From the Nepali participants

- 2020 has seen a low point in the bilateral ties. Especially since the border dispute. Both sides need to be practical and discuss the outstanding issues and offer corrective measures. Why should dialogues not continue?
- The EPG report has not been accepted despite the two years since it was drawn up. The 1950 treaty provisions need revision, PM Modi had mentioned this will be undertaken. Nepal India relations needs to be revisited and beyond the government ties.
- Why did the Nepal PM meet with the RAW Chief on a one to one basis? Why were his counterpart and other government officials included in the visit itinerary? Although it was a much-publicized visit, it became a controversial issue and the timing of the visit is also being brought into question.
- Indo- Nepal relations fall prey to domestic politics. Nepali Nationalism often equated with anti-Indianism. However, India should avoid reacting and responding to some Nepal media outburst. The anti-India narrative exists. They receive political dividends, and this is often shrewdly played by the political leader. but India is often reactive and accords too much relevance to media reports
- Nepal has to balance India and China. China is supporting major projects in Nepal and is their largest FDI partner.
- Connectivity issues and cargo delays occurs at the border points. Although 2 ICPs are operational however major problems exists. Parking facilities for trucks are not adequate and there is no space to divert traffic. The standard turn-around time at ports is large due to congestion at the Kolkata port. Nepal traders lose financially due to large time duration for the cargo movement, (20-21 days) and in the return of empty containers (for 42 days),

they also incurs detention charges at the port. Even though the ICP memorandums were signed 15 years ago, Bhairahawa ICP is still to be operationalised.

- Indian funded projects delayed inordinately. Few of the key projects are in cold storage such as the Kathmandu- Raxaul railway line, the Biratnagar -Jogmani links etc were initiated almost 20 years ago. Implementation is slow and subsequently people start to lose interest. This is then played up by the Indian detractors in Nepal.
- Why is the BBIN seamless cargo movement project delayed despite years of discussion and signing of agreement? Of all the projects this is the low hanging fruit available and could be harnessed.
- The trade imbalance is unsustainable. Several tariff and NTBs needs to be rationalised. Transit issues continue and ease of doing business needs more focus. E-commerce needs to be fully implemented.
- Free borders should continue and should be managed not locked. Advantages outweigh the disadvantages. In this regard the borderland communities are vital.
- Nepal also believes India tries to micromanage affairs in Nepal. Indian support to Maoist created misgivings etc. But India as larger neighbour needs to be more generous.

From Indian participants

India expressed its keenness to further bilateral cooperation despite the domestic instability in Nepal, many high-level visits have thus taking place. The Joint Commission meeting at Foreign Minister Level scheduled in few days will be a positive development.

- On the domestic political front, the heating up of internal

dynamics within the Nepal Communist Party as well as reports of China being highly active in managing this confusion by meeting the NCP leaders during this volatile period was a cause of concern.

- The announcement of the Pancheswar Project would convey a positive message. Substantial agreement was required to catch the imagination of the people. The Mahakaliriver should be an area of cooperation and the DPR (Detailed Project Report) should be completed soon ironing out the few outstanding issues. This project would transform the economies of the region of Kumaon, Uttarakhand and far Western Nepal, a relatively backward area.
- The Hydro power projects would bring in huge investment, while the Arun C project is doing well in Eastern Nepal, the GMR projects needs to be pushed by India government.
- Nepal keen to start FS level talks on the boundary, but given the Constitutional amendment that has taken place, India would need some assurance that the dialogue/talks settlement will meet the parliamentary approval. The 2/3 majority in the parliament should endorse any recommendation that emerges from the high level dialogue.
- EPG report has not been received by both the governments as confusion persists on whether the recommendations are binding. While it is now clear that it is not, the two governments should accept the report and decide what is implementable or not. India has difficulties with the report, and it could explain the problems to people of Nepal.
- There is need to shift the focus on economic cooperation from the political cooperation. The economic cooperation impetus is required in regards to the Joint project and review committee which met only after a year, they should meet every three months to resolve the outstanding issues which was the purpose for which it was commissioned.

- China factor is an irritant. China defence minister visit to Nepal during this period seems insensitive. The need to balance the two neighbours seem out of place during the present circumstances. There is no clarity what this visit signifies?
- China has provided the largest FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) in Nepal. But Nepal should not use its soil for anti-China or India projects. The USA \$500 million project is held up by the China supporters like Oli etc as it is assumed to be under the Indo-Pacific project which adds another element to the political confusion.
- There is a trust deficit and therefore the need to identify the problem? A diagnosis is required. There is a need to delve into the perceptions and mind set. Perceptible political anti-India narrative exists in Nepal. Many occasions when Nepal has displayed lack of sensitivity to Indian concerns.
- Strategic geography and changing infrastructure developments with roads and railways, Himalaya is being denigrated. There is a cultural shift occurring in Nepal with migrations taking place resulting in Nepal becoming more cosmopolitan. Security challenges will be posed with this transformation.
- While few key projects in cold storage- delays are caused by Nepal too. Nepal has 15 land related Acts, and lack of experts and technical knowledge of land has hampered land acquisition issues. Also Nepal domestic problems and lack of political will still hampers the progress in projects. Nepalganj ICP work has started but should not be delayed. These projects needs integration with hinterland for more meaningful trade and commerce to take place.
- Buddhist circuit tourism has huge potential and thus needs formalised structures and arrangements. Integrated tour with train and roads would be immensely beneficial.

- India can buy Nepal food products etc. Food processing can have synergy. India is looking for agriculture research and development partners in Nepal.
- Irrespective of political differences and deepening Sino-Nepal engagement, Indo-Nepal cultural and social comfort cannot be replaced by any other. This multifaceted component lends a flavour that is unique and needs to be harnesses further. Political issues need to be ironed out for maximising the economic potential.

About the VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

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

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

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



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