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Index

The silent annexation of West Bank.....	2
Virtues of planning: The Hindu Editorial on the Vision India@2047 plan	5
Mint.....	7
NITI Aayog organises Workshop on ‘India-AU Collaboration for a Better Inclusive World’	9
The revenge of old West Asia.....	11
Scapegoating: The Hindu Editorial on Afghan refugees in Pakistan.....	14
‘G20 Standards Dialogue’ starts off under India’s Presidency.....	16
India-France Letter of Intent in Public Administration and Administrative Reforms signed.....	23
Much to lose if the ‘Indian veterans in Qatar’ case festers.....	27
Mint.....	30
The Canadian dream is not waning.....	33
The cult of operational superiority, from Israel to India.....	36
G20 Workshop series by NITI Aayog.....	39
In troubled waters in Qatar.....	43
Closer together: The Hindu Editorial on the India-Bhutan talks and the plans ahead.....	46
Cease fire: The Hindu Editorial on the danger of Israel turning Gaza into an open prison on fire	48
Raksha Mantri & US Secretary of Defence to co-chair India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue & hold bilateral talks on November 10, 2023.....	50
Taiwan, a Malacca blockade and India’s options.....	51
The U.S.’s signal of a huge digital shift.....	54
Minister for Food Processing Industries holds bilateral meeting with Governor of the state of Mato Grosso of Brazil.....	57
6th High-Level Meeting of the India-OPEC Energy Dialogue.....	61
India will host 33rd Conference of WOA Regional Commission for Asia and Pacific at New Delhi from 13th to 16th November.....	64
The Qatar death row and India’s options.....	66
A Norwegian perspective of India’s digital journey.....	69
Bridge to nowhere: The Hindu Editorial on India’s voice, Israel and the Palestinian cause	72
As Gaza war rages, waiting for the other shoe to drop.....	74
War in Myanmar: The Hindu Editorial on the junta and restoring democracy.....	77
DAY 2	79
Building the floor: On the U.S.-China summit meeting, lessons for India.....	85
The geopolitical fallout of the Israel-Hamas war.....	87
India and Japan Converge in Southeast Asia.....	90
Glimmer of hope: The Hindu Editorial on the Israel-Hamas deal.....	93
End the secrecy: The Hindu Editorial on the actions of Indian agencies abroad.....	95
It is an inhumane decision to expel Afghan refugees.....	97

THE SILENT ANNEXATION OF WEST BANK

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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November 01, 2023 01:22 am | Updated 01:22 am IST

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Relatives of Rawhe Sawafta, 70, who was killed during clashes with Israeli forces, mourn his death in Tubas in the occupied West Bank. | Photo Credit: AFP

My first experience of Israeli occupation was in 2016, when I found myself squatting on my luggage, without food or water for eight hours, after crossing the King Hussein Bridge from Jordan into the West Bank. Fear ran down my spine as I saw other Palestinian Arabs entering in long queues. The Israeli authorities brutally frisked them and seized or threw away their luggage. After [Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7](#), this border crossing has been closed by the Israelis. As Palestinians in Gaza face genocide, the silent annexation of the West Bank receives less attention. Since October 7, reportedly 114 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank, and 1,200 arrests and rapid raids have taken place.

I wonder if those I knew in the West Bank are still alive. I remember Hami Amer's house in Mas'ha village in Qalqilya district. The house was located between the West Bank fence (apartheid wall) and the Jewish settlements. I remember the young Palestinian children who had never met their mothers because they were never given the permit to travel within the West Bank. Thousands of Palestinians never get a chance to pray at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem. Today, West Bank is facing another Al Nakba (exodus). In the worst-hit cities and refugee camps such as Jenin, Aqabat Jaber, Qalqilya, and Qalandiya, smaller Bedouin communities are being evacuated, land is being grabbed, and farms are being vandalised.

It is deplorable that the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) had to start an investigation when soldiers and settlers arrested three Palestinians from the West Bank village of Wadi as-Siq, stripped them naked, and sexually assaulted them. West Bank, which is 'home' to three million Palestinians and 5,00,000 Settler Israelis, is in turmoil. Many of the settlers sport the visible Tzitzits (tassels) along with long side-locks — typical of the Zionist radical groups — while carrying out the rampage. Most of them reside in the illegal Israeli settlements of Yitzhar and Har Brakha. According to B'Tselem (the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories), 552 people, including 173 minors, had to leave their homes for safety since October 7. Where did they go? They have no way to generate income or obtain water and food. Meanwhile, in East Jerusalem, as Omar Haramy, the Director of the Palestinian ecumenical organisation Sabeel, states: "Several hundreds of Palestinians in East Jerusalem have had their phones searched — and, in some cases, even destroyed — by Israeli police in recent weeks."

How and why is the Shomron Regional Council, located north of West Bank with 35 Israeli

settlements under its jurisdiction, in the process of distributing 300 assault rifles to civilian security squads? Does state-sponsored violence have legitimacy in illegal Israeli settlements? Yossi Dagan, the head of the Council, says he has raised “millions” of shekels from donors around the world to purchase the rifles. Who are these donors? What is the surveillance on such funding? The conversation about the complicated nature of the Israeli occupation has been replaced with a debate between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. The Hamas attack of October 7 cannot be justified, but we need to ask why Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu propped up Hamas, primarily after 2009, gave unhindered access to funds flowing in from Qatar and Iran to the Gaza Strip, and thereby created his Frankenstein monster.

At the same time, trust in the President of Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, is waning. He indefinitely delayed the first Palestinian national elections, happening for the first time in 15 years, in April 2021. Mr. Abbas’s concern regarding his long-standing foe Mohammad Dahlan, a former Fatah chief, continues. After being expelled following a political dispute with the Ramallah government in 2011, Mr. Dahlan had to seek refuge in Abu Dhabi. In his sweet revenge, Mr. Dahlan, who is now a regional strategic mastermind and confidant to several Arab rulers, is helping them strategise peace deals with Israel. But the internal factions within Fatah and trust deficit have also caused the rise of smaller militant movements in the West Bank. A mass demonstration erupted in Tubas city in West Bank after the ‘assassination’ of local Hamas official Omar Daraghmeh on October 23 by the IDF in the name of ‘counter-terrorism activity’. Several other groups of armed resistance have cropped up, namely al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, Jenin Brigades, Lions’ Den in Nablus, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Most of the leaders of these militant groups have already been killed by the IDF. In short, Israel does not have any credible opposition in the West Bank, unless it pulls Hezbollah and Iran into the war. Remember, Hezbollah too was created after the 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

Therefore, as long as the ‘Palestinian question’ is not resolved, any form of peace-building with Arab states would just create carceral geography and “spacio-cide” of the Palestinians. The ‘feasible’ prospect of a two-state solution has long expired. It is urgent that Mr. Abbas chooses a successor. The world should call for an immediate ceasefire of Israel’s ground invasion of Gaza and adopt a strong boycott, divestment and sanctions policy. The human-rights approach and ‘right to return’ of Palestinian refugees needs to be considered. Above all, Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs, Gazan Palestinians, and West Bank Palestinians should be involved in a referendum to choose their own future.

Shubhda Chaudhary is a West Asian political analyst and Editor at the Centre for India West Asia Dialogue, New Delhi

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VIRTUES OF PLANNING: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE VISION INDIA@2047 PLAN

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In early 2024, [Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to unveil a road map](#) to transform the country into a developed nation with a \$30 trillion economy by the time it completes 100 years of Independence. The Vision India@2047 plan, as it is officially named, has been in the works for nearly two years with officials across ministries brainstorming on how to take the country from its current level of development to where it aspires to be. The NITI Aayog, in the process of giving this vision document a final shape, will soon run its central ideas and goals past top minds across sectors, including World Bank President Ajay Banga, Apple chief Tim Cook, as well as Indian industrialists and thought leaders, to finetune them and factor in any blind spots. Coming ahead of the Lok Sabha election, the plan may well be viewed as the government's policy playbook promise for prospective voters. But irrespective of electoral outcomes, future governments would do well to keep an earnest outlook towards the broad agenda. India's rise from 1991, when it accounted for 1.1% of the global economic output, to the 3.5% share it now commands as the world's fifth largest economy, has been driven by governments of varying political hues largely sticking to the reform and liberalisation agenda. Blips in the pace and vigour of reforms have also been visible across governments, including the present coalition-independent regime, especially on the trickier changes needed in factor markets such as land and labour.

The final plan should have some ideas to help navigate such challenging reforms and ensure policy certainty for global investors keen to bet on India's growth story. Minimising the government's role to that of an enabler rather than a micro-manager, is another detail that would be critical, especially as some recent decisions have marked a hark back to habits of the past, be it production-linked incentives, import licensing or overtly zealous taxation. A stated focus area of the vision document that splices its action points and outcome goals into two periods — 2030, and the 17 year-period from then till 2047 — is to ensure that India does not slip into a middle income trap a few years from now. That requires hastening the long-pursued structural shift in the economy from farms to factories, and arresting a widening trend of income inequality. While the Five-Year Plans have been abandoned, the 2047 plan must be revisited at suitable intervals to recalibrate goals based on evolving global trends and Black Swan events. Aiming for a high 9% growth rate between 2030 and 2047 is laudable but factoring in alternative scenarios and changing course when warranted, is also advisable.

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Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The India-United Kingdom (UK) Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations are currently at a very crucial juncture. Both countries are moving closer to signing the deal. Contentious aspects of the agenda, such as intellectual property rights, rules of origin and a bilateral investment treaty (BIT) have been under discussion. At its monthly trade briefing in early October, India's ministry of commerce said that talks were at an advanced stage and efforts are currently underway to resolve the differences. The two countries seem to have moved towards common ground on dispute settlement, which was the most controversial part of the BIT, in an effort to ensure that this treaty is finalized at the same time as the FTA for goods and services.

The first-generation BIT between India and the UK was signed in 1994, which also happened to be India's first experience with such a treaty. However, in the aftermath of the White Industries case, involving the alleged violation of a BIT with Australia, India decided to terminate all its 83 [BITs](#) with foreign countries; termination notices were sent to 77, including the UK, in 2016, and the Indian government decided to revise its model BIT. Several BITs that were to be terminated had "sunset clauses," which provided for continuing protective effects up to 10 or 20 years after their termination. The India-UK BIT is still under the sunset period.

Notably, while investment protection is not a chapter under the proposed FTA, it is being negotiated separately, and it was a few provisions of the BIT that the two countries were reported to have been at loggerheads on, with dispute resolution one of the most prominent disagreements. While India was insisting on the inclusion of a clause on exhaustion of local remedies (ELR), for example, the UK was not keen on this clause under provisions of dispute settlement. The ELR clause requires that an investor should first lodge its claim with the competent domestic courts or administrative authorities and exhaust all judicial and administrative remedies before initiating an international arbitration process. Once that effort is made for a period of at least five years, the investor may commence international arbitration proceedings by transmitting a notice of dispute to the defending party. An ELR clause, which has become a customary rule of international law, aims to safeguard the sovereignty of countries that are investment destinations, and international scholars like M.C. Porterfield, who have advocated the use of local remedies before resort to international arbitration, argue that this requirement strengthens the rule of law in host states.

Since India has been a witness to many investment treaty arbitrations as a respondent, of late, it's unease with regard to investors directly going for international arbitration is understandable.

The pursuit of domestic remedies by investors has been criticized for leading to delays and increasing costs, in particular, as in many states it can take several years and multiple judicial reviews before a final judgement is delivered. According to one critic, an ELR clause could also carry disadvantages for the host state, as "public proceedings in the domestic courts are likely to exacerbate the dispute and may affect the host State's investment climate." The UK might have had similar concerns. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that both sides have been open to changed positions in the ongoing negotiations, ensuring flexibility, and India may back away from its approach under the model BIT in negotiations with the UK and may also drop the ELR clause insistence as both countries seek to reduce the time frame for settling investor-state disputes.

Another issue that is seen to bother foreign investors is India's narrowed-down definition of

'investment' needed to qualify for BIT protection, from an 'asset' based to an 'enterprise' based one. The first-generation BITs signed by India had an 'asset' based definition of investment, which was replaced in India's model BIT by an 'enterprise' based one. Investment can be defined either way. The latter formulation defines investment as the establishment or acquisition of an enterprise in the host state. By contrast, the asset-based definition is broader, covering more than just capital or resources that have crossed borders with an intent to create an enterprise. Experts point out that an asset-based definition of investment means that every kind of asset, moveable and immovable, could qualify as 'investment' and enjoy protection under bilateral treaties, irrespective of whether such assets contribute to the development of host countries, whereas the purpose of having an enterprise-based approach is to narrow the scope of protected investments and reduce the potential liability of the state in case of investor-state dispute settlement claims. India has had its own share of ordeals that prompted it to switch definitions.

As reports suggest, Indian policymakers have indicated that the department of economic affairs in the ministry of finance would have to make concessions on the model BIT, and they have also stipulated tweaks for some of the country's important trade partners. This demands some boldness, as moving away from the model BIT may possibly prove to be something of a challenge. If, however, both India and the UK eventually manage to ink a BIT that's mutually acceptable, it could prove to be a major win for India, as the country has not signed any BIT with a major economy after the model BIT was adopted.

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NITI AAYOG ORGAISES WORKSHOP ON 'INDIA-AU COLLABORATION FOR A BETTER INCLUSIVE WORLD'

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

NITI Aayog organised a workshop on India-AU Collaboration for a Better inclusive World in partnership with the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) at the Taj Palace, New Delhi today. The workshop focused on deliberations to implement the commitments laid out in the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration (NDLD) which was signed recently concluded G20 Conference.

Dr. V K Saraswat, Member, NITI Aayog, analysed the various aspects of India-AU cooperation and said that India and the AU have a lot to offer each other in terms of knowledge, skills, and resources. He urged the participants to come up with concrete proposals for cooperation in the three key areas of inclusive growth, sustainable infrastructure, and migration management.

Prof. Ramesh Chand, Member, NITI Aayog, spoke about the importance of agricultural growth and potential mutual learning between the two regions. He said that India and the AU can learn from each other's experiences in agriculture and agribusiness. He also highlighted the need for cooperation in areas such as agricultural research, technology transfer, and market access.

Shri Dammo Ravi, Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) highlighted the importance of India-AU cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, and development. Addressing the participants, Shri Sudhendu J. Sinha, Advisor, NITI Aayog emphasized the importance of India and the African Union (AU) to work together to achieve the goals of the NDLD.

The workshop brought together over 50 experts and participants from prominent National and International think tanks, academia, and diplomats from India and the African Union (AU). The participants had in-depth discussions on three key themes:

The workshop received immense interest from the participants who gave valuable inputs. NITI Aayog will endeavour to use these inputs to develop an Action Plan that would facilitate in the implementation of the commitments laid out in the NDLD.

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THE REVENGE OF OLD WEST ASIA

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A recreated war scene at the 6th of October War Panorama museum and memorial of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, in Cairo | Photo Credit: AFP

“There was no such thing as Palestinians,” Golda Meir, the then Labour Prime Minister of Israel, told The Sunday Times on June 15, 1969, on the second anniversary of the Six-Day War. It was during the 1967 war, Israel brought the whole of historical Palestine under its control. In the 1948-49 first Arab-Israeli war, Israel had captured 23% more territories, including West Jerusalem, than what the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine had proposed.

In 1967, it seized the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan and the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria. Ever since, Palestinian territories have remained under Israel's military occupation and control (it pulled back both troops and Jewish settlers from Gaza in 2005 after the second intifada, but has laid siege to the enclave since 2007).

After Hamas's brutal October 7 Sabbath attack on Israel, killing at least 1,400 people, mostly civilians, Israel has launched a devastating bombing campaign on Gaza, leaving over 9,000 Palestinians dead in 27 days, most of them women and children. Israel's narrative is that it has the right to respond to Hamas's terror attack. And the use of disproportionate force against the enemy, deliberately targeting civilians, is a well-known Israeli method (the Dahiya doctrine). General Gadi Eisenkot, a former Israeli Chief of General Staff, once said about the Israel Defense Forces' bombing of Dahiya, Lebanon, “We will apply disproportionate force on it and cause great damage and destruction there. From our standpoint, these are not civilian villages, they are military bases.” Israel's current President Isaac Herzog echoed Gen. Eisenkot (now a Minister), when he said on October 14 (after Israel ordered over a million people in northern Gaza to evacuate), that there are no innocent civilians in Gaza. “It's an entire nation out there that's responsible,” Mr. Herzog said in a press conference.

Between what Golda Meir and Mr. Herzog said lies the reality of the Palestinians — either they do not exist as a national category, or they are all culprits and punishable. Israel says its heavy response is necessitated by its circumstances. Its narrative is that it is living in a hostile regional environment faced with Islamist terrorism. There is a history of wars with the Arab world. Hamas is a Palestinian terrorist organisation with which political dialogue is impossible. Hamas and Hezbollah are directly supported by a Holocaust-denying Iran. So, this argument goes, Israel has to stay tough for its own survival. And being tough means continuing the occupation of the

Palestinian territories endlessly and responding with massive force and collective punishment to violence by Palestinians.

Let us look at these arguments one by one. Hamas, “the key impediment to peace”, was created only in 1988, 21 years after Israel started the direct military occupation of the Palestinian territories. In the 1970s and the early 1980s, the Islamic Centre, a Muslim Brotherhood offshoot and a precursor to Hamas, had Israel’s recognition as a charity which allowed the group to raise funds for their activities. Israel then saw Fatah, Yasser Arafat’s secular nationalist guerrilla movement, and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the coalition Arafat had built, as its main rivals. The PLO had used violence against Israelis, and Israel launched two wars (1978 and 1982) in Lebanon to fight the PLO (the late Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin once called them “murderous anti-Semites”). But during the Oslo talks, the PLO, which for long denied Israel’s right to exist and advocated for the liberation of the whole of Palestine (“from the river to the sea”), made a major compromise. Arafat recognised the state of Israel and accepted the formation of an independent Palestine state within the 1967 borders, which is just 22% of historical Palestine.

It was the collapse of Oslo in the subsequent years and continuing Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories that led to the strengthening of Hamas, which had always opposed Oslo. By the time the second intifada broke out in 2000, Hamas was already in the driving seat and the PLO’s non-violent campaign for statehood was seen as toothless by most Palestinians. So, from a historical perspective, it is not the Palestinian radicalism that prevented peace. Rather, it is the absence of peace and the continuing occupation that strengthened Islamist radicalism in Palestine.

Second, it is a fact that Iran remains a major rival of Israel in West Asia. Iran also backs Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which jointly carried out the October 7 attack. Thus, the crisis has a clear geopolitical angle. But is Iran the central factor of the Israel-Palestine crisis? Iran became a hostile nation to Israel only in 1979, after the Islamic revolution. Before the revolution, the Iranian monarchy was so close to Israel that both nations had agreed in 1977 to build a military co-production complex inside Iran to make ballistic missiles. Even after the Mullahs seized power in Tehran, Israel supplied the Islamic revolutionary regime in the 1980s with weapons, under United States supervision, during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

Iran did not have much of an influence among the Palestinians during the Oslo process. It was after Oslo collapsed and Hamas began rising as a key pillar of the Palestinian resistance that the Islamic Republic became a major player through its support for Palestinian non-state militias. What Iran did was to exploit the continuing occupation and lack of peace for its geopolitical benefits by supporting radical Palestinian Islamists.

Lastly, defenders of Israel’s disproportionate aggression always argue that Israel’s existence is at stake in a hostile neighbourhood. True, neighbouring Arab countries attacked Israel immediately after the new state was declared in May 1948 within historical Palestine. After that, it was Israel which launched the 1956 and 1967 wars. The last time an Arab country attacked Israeli troops was in 1973 when Egypt, along with Syria, launched the Yom Kippur war. Since then, six Arab countries have normalised ties with Israel, namely Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco. And it is hardly a secret that Saudi Arabia and Israel have very good backroom ties though they have not officially established diplomatic relations. Israel is now an undeclared nuclear power with massive air power, ballistic missiles and other weapons. It is also unconditionally supported, militarily, politically and financially, by the U.S., the world’s most powerful country. Israel is no longer the David; it is the Goliath of West Asia.

But Israel’s regional hegemony and deterrence against and friendship with Arab countries have

not brought peace for Israelis. Why? Because the Palestine question remains unaddressed. Palestine may no longer be an Arab-Israel problem, but it continues to remain an Israel-Palestine problem. Ever since its forced withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, Israel's approach has been to ignore the question of occupation, as Golda Meir articulated in 1969: treat Palestinians as a security nuisance and move on with Arab peace plans, shaping "the new Middle East", with the blessings of Washington. But Hamas's brutal October 7 attacks, the first invasion into Israel proper since 1948, shattered the foundations of the "new Middle East". Hamas's indiscriminate attacks and Israel's collective punishment of Gazans suggest that the Palestine question remains the source of all maladies in the region. It is the revenge of old West Asia.

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SCAPEGOATING: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON AFGHAN REFUGEES IN PAKISTAN

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The [Pakistan government's order to all undocumented migrants to leave the country by October 31](#) has thrown the lives of hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees in jeopardy. The interim government in Islamabad says its decision is not targeted at any particular nationality. But given the numbers of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, it is evident who is being targeted. Over the decades, millions of Afghans have taken refuge in Pakistan, mostly fleeing violence in their civil war-stricken country. According to the United Nations, about 1.3 million Afghans have been registered as refugees, while another 8,80,000 have legal status to stay. But Pakistan's Interior Ministry says some 1.7 million people are staying "illegally", a vast majority of them Afghans. At least 6,00,000 Afghans are believed to have fled to Pakistan after the [Taliban](#) recaptured power in Kabul in 2021. Many others had moved during the Soviet military intervention in the 1980s. Pakistan's order states that they should either leave on their own or face detention and deportation. Pakistan has already set up deportation centres to round up "illegal" migrants and deport them. Thousands are now stranded on the Afghan-Pakistan border, while others are in fear of arrest and violence in Pakistan, leading to the UN's warning of a "humanitarian tragedy".

Pakistan's argument is that the presence of illegal migrants has led to rising crime and terror attacks and is straining its struggling economy. "There have been 24 suicide bomb attacks since January this year and 14 of them were carried out by Afghan nationals," interim Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti said on October 3, when he announced the deportation plan. Pakistan, which is to have its national elections in January, is also reeling under hyperinflation, a balance of payment crisis and high rupee depreciation. But the solution to these woes is not the forceful deportation of 1.7 million people. The responsibility for most of the problems Pakistan now faces lies with its rulers. When its military and civilian leadership continued to play power games, trying to outwit each other and maximise powers in their hands, its economy was neglected. The security crisis it is facing today is a result of its own dual policy on terror — fighting some outfits while supporting others. When the Taliban, which were backed by Pakistan's military-intelligence establishment, recaptured power in August 2021, it was largely seen then as a victory for Pakistan's generals. But the security crisis Pakistan is facing now suggests that the sense of victory did not last long. Skirmishes along the porous Af-Pak border are also common these days. What Pakistan is doing is scapegoating tens of thousands of poor Afghan refugees for the failures of its own policies.

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'G20 STANDARDS DIALOGUE' STARTS OFF UNDER INDIA'S PRESIDENCY

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: G20

The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), under the aegis of India's G20 presidency, is hosting the G20 Standards Dialogue 2023. The 2-day event commenced today at the iconic Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi. Shri Ashwini Kumar Choubey, Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Environment, Forest & Climate Change, inaugurated the event.

G20 Standards Dialogue 2023, is being organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, and the Ministry of Commerce & Industry of the Government of India.



While delivering the inaugural address the Minister said, “The theme of this G20 Standards Dialogue is ‘Zero Defect Zero Effect’ and I feel this is most appropriate and highly critical area for global community. I am very happy that we have participation from across the world as this is a consumer centric program and also because this dialogue will guide the world for best utilisation of resources for our sustainable future.”

The Minister also added, “Standards are critical for today’s world and deliberations among international stakeholders will define the future of standardisation. We are proud of BIS, especially the hardworking Director General, Pramod Kumar Tiwari ji for shaping BIS into a future oriented organisation.”





Shri Rohit Kumar Singh, Secretary Department of Consumer Affairs, GoI, while delivering the keynote address also discussed the important role that standards play in our lives, ensuring quality and facilitating global trade. Furthermore, the Secretary also mentioned that standards guide innovation, sustainability, and inclusivity for our collective future.



Shri Sunil Barthwal, Secretary, Department of Commerce, GoI, highlighted the importance of standards and how different countries establish their own standards. He also mentioned, “Standards are attained through determination and consistent efforts to ensure quality and

reliability.”

Sergio Mujica, Secretary-General, International Organisation for Standardization (ISO), participated in the event through virtual mode and highlighted the importance of standardization and increased global capabilities worldwide. He also discussed that standards benefit both the global community and businesses.

Philippe Metzger, the Secretary-General & CEO, International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), emphasised the role of IEC and the tireless contribution of establishing and upholding the standards. “These standardized benchmarks are instrumental in shaping and governing various aspects of our daily lives” he added.



Shri Pramod Kumar Tiwari, Director General, BIS, discussed the concept of G20 Standards Dialogue and deliberate upon the potential of standardization in facilitating productive discussions, gaining valuable insights, and addressing future challenges.

“The dialogue is engaging G20 member countries, alongside the World Standards Cooperation, consisting of the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to forge a path towards a more sustainable, inclusive, and regulated future, aligning with the broader vision of 'Zero Defect and Zero Effect'” stated the release.

As per BIS, the dialogue is providing a platform for industry leaders, government officials, standards professionals, regulators, and policy makers to congregate and foster advancements in standardization and global regulatory environments. It seeks to align with the G20 vision of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' and establish a foundation of standards to make this vision a reality. With a strong emphasis on sustainability, regulatory excellence, and stakeholder engagement, the event is set to shape the standards of tomorrow.

It was also mentioned that the Dialogue opening day of the event witnessed the presence of high-ranking officials from the Government of India and the World Standards Cooperation, followed by a session on Standards for Sustainability. On Friday, November 3, there will be sessions on Technical Regulations and Good Regulatory Practices, as well as Stakeholder Engagement for Standardization, all aimed at promoting sustainable development, economic stability, and inclusive collaboration in the standardization process.

The event will conclude on 3rd November with remarks from Hon'ble Union Minister of Commerce & Industry, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Textile, members of G20 National Standards Bodies and invitee delegates.

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INDIA-FRANCE LETTER OF INTENT IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS SIGNED

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

1. The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Government of India and M/o Public Sector Transformation & the Civil Service of the French Republic signed the Letter of Intent for Cooperation in the field of Public Administration and Administrative Reforms for three years. The Letter of Intent was signed by Shri V. Srinivas, Secretary on behalf of the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances and H.E. Mr. Thierry Mathou, Ambassador of France to India at a ceremonial function in New Delhi today. Senior Officials of Ministry of External Affairs, Embassy of India in France, Embassy of France in India and the Ministry of Public Sector Transformation and the Civil Service of the French Republic attended the event conducted in hybrid mode.

2. The Letter of Intent seeks to strengthen the bilateral partnership between the two countries through exchange visits focused on administrative reforms, good governance webinars, research publications, institutional exchanges, capacity building programs and replication of good governance practices. The roadmap for the bilateral collaboration will be drawn up by a Joint Working Group that will be established under the aegis of the Letter of Intent. Both sides agreed to strengthen the relationship through high level exchanges in the coming months. The Indian side presented the translation of the vision of Prime Minister Modi in adopting Next Generation Reforms being undertaken in the Amrit Kaal period with the implementation of the policy maxim "Maximum Governance – Minimum Government" under which India's public institutions have been transformed as fully digital institutions bringing citizens and government closer using technology. The best manifestation of the "Maximum Governance – Minimum Government" policy is a "Digitally Empowered Citizen" and a "Digitally Transformed Institution". India's Next Generation Administrative Reforms include Recognizing Meritocracy under the Prime Minister's Awards Scheme for Excellence in Public Administration, Benchmarking of Governance through the Good Governance Index, improving quality of e-services through the National e-Services Delivery Assessment and technology adoption in CPGRAMS with focus on timely and quality grievance redressal. The French side expressed interest in exchanging information on Effective Public Grievance Redressal, the Secretariat Reforms adopted for the digital transformation of the Central Secretariat and in the dissemination of award-winning Good Governance Practices.



SNC/PK

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MUCH TO LOSE IF THE 'INDIAN VETERANS IN QATAR' CASE FESTERS

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November 06, 2023 01:15 am | Updated 01:15 am IST

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'India's relationship with Qatar will head south if this diplomatic row is not settled on mutually acceptable terms' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

India was presented with a formidable diplomatic challenge on October 26 when [eight former Indian Navy officials held in Qatar on unknown charges since August 30 last year were sentenced to death](#) by a Qatari 'Court of First Instance'. Their families who were hoping that back-channel efforts might secure their release now face the most extreme prospect — the death row. The court's sentence left the Indian establishment "deeply shocked", as in the Ministry of External Affairs statement. Some prima facie assessments can be made. First, all the eight veterans receiving the maximum punishment seems to be an 'unexpected outcome'. Second, the opacity of charges and the complete secrecy under which Qatar moved from trial to conviction in under seven months seem to have taken the Indian side by surprise. Hopefully, the passage of time has allowed the Indian authorities to assimilate the full import of the judgment and weigh their options.

The veterans were working for an Omani company, Dahra Global Technologies, in an associated vertical based out of Doha. It is understood that the said vertical has now been shuttered. The company website was deactivated soon after news broke of the naval officials being incarcerated. If business rivalry had any role to play in the entire saga, its purpose has been singularly achieved.

The company and the kind of work it was doing since 2009-10 needs deeper examination. The area of expertise of Dahra at Doha was in training the Qatar Emiri Naval Forces (QENF). If we go back a few years, this space was largely filled by uniformed personnel from neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Bahrain. Qatar has a unique demography where expatriates and migrant workers make up almost 88% of the population.

One of the wealthiest countries today, the kingdom of Qatar has traditionally enjoyed a warm and cordial relationship with India. This writer is aware of requests made between 2006 and 2008 from various levels of the Qatari establishment and the QENF to provide training for their sailors and junior officers. This was always seen as a vital cog in the wheel of India-Qatar bilateral defence cooperation and foreign policy. However, incompatible solutions and the Indian side dragging its feet possibly led to private enterprise filling the gaps.

By this time, Commander Purnendu Tiwari (one of the eight men), a distinguished naval veteran, had created a successful enterprise in Singapore. The time was ripe to replicate the model in Qatar, with due adjustments being made to accommodate security concerns, and the culture and milieu of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC).

With leadership and cooperation from all sides, the model became an instant success, providing a valuable second career option for talented officers and men retiring from the Indian Navy. Contrary to speculative reports that have found their way into the discourse, Cdr. Tiwari and his team were engaged only in junior-level training and had absolutely nothing to do with any submarine project, let alone a classified one.

Cdr. Tiwari was conferred the Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Award by the President of India Ram Nath Kovind in January 2019 for “enhancing India’s image abroad”. Cdr. Tiwari is the first Indian armed forces veteran to be awarded this honour meant for non-resident Indians and a Person of Indian Origin.

India’s defence veterans were delivering a sterling product to the QENF and had blended in with Qatari society. Most of them lived with their families in Qatar, with some family members pursuing their own careers. Cdr. Tiwari’s team, like every Indian among the estimated diaspora of 8,00,000 Indians, was contributing its mite to building Qatar, under the leadership of HRH Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. In my opinion, the veterans had absolutely no interest or incentive in spying or espionage as is being made out in the case against them. What random acts of indiscretion or oversight led to the framing of such serious charges may never be known.

Since their incarceration in September 2022, India has provided the veterans with the best legal assistance. According to family members, three out of six charges stuck, leading to the sentence. There are just two levels left remaining in the legal rung of Qatar (the Court of Appeals and Court of Cassation). The Emir has the power to pardon or offer clemency and is known to have exercised this benevolence. Qatar does not have a long history of executing people, but the geopolitical backdrop against which this saga unfolds holds many uncertainties. Most of the eight veterans are in their late fifties and sixties. Even if the death sentence is commuted to life (25 years), they face the prospect of spending the rest of their lives behind bars.

The terrible turn of events could not have come at a more inopportune juncture for the veterans and their families. Dahra Global Technologies in Qatar is no longer a going concern, which means the personnel and their families have only the Indian government to turn to. India’s nuanced position on the ongoing Israel-Hamas war and support to the Palestinian cause will be put to the test against Qatar’s emerging role in working out a rapprochement between the Arab world and Israel, even as world leaders weigh their options. India’s relationship with Qatar will head south if this diplomatic row is not settled on mutually acceptable terms.

Despite the best legal and diplomatic assistance extended by India, the court has pronounced its judgment. Qatar is a friendly foreign country and there is an existing bilateral agreement to expatriate convicted citizens. However, Article 4 of the agreement excludes the death penalty. India’s status in the Global South, just as that of Qatar’s in the GCC, owes much to the visionary leaders of both countries. There is much to lose if this case festers. It will be far worse if the sentence is executed or the space left behind by Dahra Global is occupied by radical elements inimical to both countries.

I have hope that the Indian political leadership will rise to the challenge and appeal to the Emir’s benevolence to consider a complete and unconditional pardon for all eight naval veterans. This will be in the best interest of both countries. Unprecedented situations call for unprecedented

leadership. The solution to seemingly complex problems is often just a few phone calls away.

K.P. Sanjeev Kumar is a retired Indian Navy test pilot. The views expressed are personal

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It is inappropriate, of course, for a US president to overtly intervene — or even be seen as overtly intervening — in another country's politics. At the same time, it's pretty clear that if Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stepped down, it would be a big boost not only to Joe Biden's domestic political standing, but to the Israeli cause in America.

So is it really that surprising that the Biden administration reportedly discussed the idea of Netanyahu stepping down with the Israeli government? Or that the prime minister's office swiftly denied the reports?

It is not. And as unlikely as Netanyahu's departure might be, it's worth considering the possibility, if only to help make sense of what's happening now.

After all, what people such as Biden (and, to be clear, me) want to say is that Israel has a right to defend itself against Hamas while also reaffirming the right of the Palestinian people to freedom, dignity and self-government. Hamas' message to Palestinians is that armed resistance is the only viable path forward. Netanyahu isn't saying or doing anything to disabuse them of that notion, and hasn't for his entire career.

Israeli leaders such as Shimon Peres, Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert, who made genuine efforts at diplomacy, made life easier for Israel's friends abroad even when their efforts failed. They created a clear distinction between Israel as a Jewish democracy and the occupation of Palestinian land as a practical reality.

Netanyahu's approach has made diaspora support for the two-state solution look hollow, forcing a polarized choice where the only way for young progressives to signal support for Palestinian rights is to back radical movements that would mean the end of Israel. That, in turn, has made it perilously difficult for Biden to straddle disagreement among his supporters.

So far he has sided with Israel against the left — dividing his own coalition but staying on the side of the majority of Americans. At the same time, Biden has sent Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who has called on Israel to pause its incursion into Gaza, to reach out to Palestinians, meeting with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah on Sunday.

Still, the internal split is politically damaging for Biden, and will likely cost him at least some support from younger progressives and Arab and Muslim Americans. That's not to say it would be wise, politically or substantively, for Biden to join the anti-Israel camp. Alienating elements of your base is bad, but alienating the broad middle of the electorate is worse.

As strong as Biden's rationale might be, from the Israeli perspective the case for a new prime minister is even stronger. And I'm not talking about Israel's domestic politics, where I'm no expert, but about Israel's ability to keep and cultivate support in the US.

That said, a quick summary: Netanyahu reacted to the outbreak of war by calling for a national unity government, as Israel has typically formed during moments of crisis. Yair Lapid, the leader of the largest opposition party, Yesh Atid, said he was willing to join only if Netanyahu kicked the small far-right parties in his coalition out of the cabinet. Netanyahu refused — he needs the far-rightists because they have backed him during his wars with the Israeli judiciary and in his

personal struggles with corruption charges — so Lapid declined the offer. Netanyahu did get Benny Gantz, the leader of the smaller opposition party Blue & White, to join the team. But without Yesh Atid, it's nowhere near a true national unity government.

If Netanyahu were not personally leading Likud, there would be much less need to maintain cross-right solidarity. Then Israel could have a proper national unity government without cabinet ministers casually tossing off tweets about their desire to permanently displace the entire population of Gaza.

Which brings us back to the issue of US support. The presence of these kind of characters in the Israeli government makes it much more difficult for Biden and other liberal Zionists to hold the line against leftists who insist Israel is carrying out ethnic cleansing rather than legitimate counterterrorism. It wouldn't necessarily make sense for America's newly confirmed ambassador to Israel, Jack Lew, to fly over there and make these points. But these are issues that Israeli voters and elected officials ought to consider.

Netanyahu personally has been comfortable over the years with turning support for Israel into a polarized issue in US domestic politics. But Israel will not be well-served in the current conflict if Biden's continued support becomes politically untenable. At the same time, House Republicans' plan to condition new aid to Israel with a demand for laxer tax enforcement is a reminder that everyone in the US has their own domestic political imperatives, which will almost always take precedence over foreign policy.

Israelis aren't going to arrange their domestic politics for the convenience of US presidents, of course. But the Biden administration is expending a lot of effort on Israel's behalf right now, even though doing so divides the president's supporters. Anything Israel can do to make that politically easier for him will benefit Israel itself. And finding a new prime minister who's less dependent on the far right, and more capable of leading a centrist coalition, would go a long way in that regard.

Matthew Yglesias is a columnist for Bloomberg Opinion. A co-founder of and former columnist for Vox, he writes the Slow Boring blog and newsletter. He is author of "One Billion Americans."

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THE CANADIAN DREAM IS NOT WANING

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November 07, 2023 01:30 am | Updated 01:30 am IST

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The Canadian national flag. | Photo Credit: Reuters

The geopolitical environment and international relations are critical in choosing international study destinations. Disruptions in the diplomatic relationship between two countries impinge on the free flow of natural persons. Thus, the deepening tension between India and Canada casts a dark shadow on the prospects of students.

Canada is home to about 1.3 million Indians who account for 4% of the country's population (Canadian Census, 2021). Indian immigration peaked in the 2016-2021 period. Indians who have become permanent residents in Canada increased from 32,828 in 2013 to 1,18,095 in 2022. A good proportion of Indians in Canada are on student visas.

Canada has thus emerged as one of the most sought-after destinations for Indians who wish to study abroad. The number of Indian students in Canada has sharply risen in recent years. In 2009, it was 31,665; this rose to 1,71,505 by 2018. And by December 2022, nearly 3,20,000 Indians were in Canada on active study permits, accounting for about 40% of the international students in that country.

In September, following a severe strain in ties between the two countries, India updated its advisory urging its citizens residing or planning to travel to Canada to exercise utmost caution. Young Indians pursuing higher education in Canada are bound to suffer extreme anxiety on hearing such warnings. The situation is particularly vexatious for those who have just secured admissions to Canadian higher educational institutions. Canadian colleges and universities have, however, been reassuring students that they are as safe and welcomed as before.

Indian students, especially those pursuing master's and research degree programmes, prefer destinations that promise fee waivers and offer scholarships and stipends. Besides paying fees, international students contribute towards the host countries. In 2020, international students contributed over 22.3 billion CAD to the Canadian economy and supported more than 2,18,000 jobs. This is one of the main reasons why most countries want to attract international students. Canada is no exception.

The decision to study in Canada has other dimensions as well. Students see it a potent route to settle abroad for better career and income opportunities. A survey by the Canadian Bureau for International Education in 2021 revealed that only 7.4% of international students in Canada

intended to return to their home countries, while 72.6% intended to remain in Canada after completing their studies and the remaining 20% were not sure if they wanted to stay or return home. The pathway to Canadian citizenship is known to be cheaper and faster in comparison to other Western countries. Thus it is the prospects that lure people to the 'Great White North'. Canada's Express Entry Program and Provincial Nominee Program might not work for all those wishing to relocate to Canada. However, entry via a study visa has emerged as an accessible and promising route to reach the dreamland. That is the impression that emigration agents and consultants send out to their prospective clients.

However, the study route to settling in Canada is not always lucrative. A recent report by Senators Ratna Omidvar, Hassan Yussuff, and Yuen Pau Woo points out that since 2000, only 30% of international students have been able to get permanent residence within a decade of their arrival. The report asserts that studying in Canada may brighten and enhance career and income prospects, but it does not guarantee a seamless transition from being an international student to becoming an immigrant.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that international students find it increasingly difficult to get jobs. Social media sites have been showing long queues of Indian students looking for part-time jobs, suggesting a moderate to severe job crises for Indian students. There are also indications that prospective students are already looking for alternatives to Canada.

Within Canada, many believe that the continuous influx of emigrants and international students has been exerting pressure on the housing sector, leading to skyrocketing rental prices. The price and rentals of the single-family accommodations are particularly stressed. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation believes that the nation must build 5.8 million new homes by 2030 to restore affordability. Housing shortages have occasionally triggered demands for restricting university admissions by making the process more competitive. The government has not ruled out the possibility. In fact, it may consider this as a viable option to ease housing rentals.

Yet, the charm of Canada for international students is not waning yet. The averages are often deceptive. People perceive reality based on their interactions with friends and relatives who went to Canada to study. First-hand knowledge usually gets more credence than data and statistics. All students yearn for quality higher education, which many find difficult to get within their own country. Aspiring for better career prospects and income opportunities, they are willing to travel across seven seas.

Indian students are no exception. In some sense, they might be more impassioned. Sadly, those who wish to go to Canada are now compelled to negotiate clouds of uncertainty in order to chase their dreams.

Furqan Qamar is a Professor, Faculty of Management Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, and has been an Advisor (Education) in the Planning Commission; Sameer Ahmad Khan is pursuing a PhD in the Faculty of Management Studies of Jamia Millia Islamia; The views expressed are personal

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THE CULT OF OPERATIONAL SUPERIORITY, FROM ISRAEL TO INDIA

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November 07, 2023 01:45 am | Updated 01:45 am IST

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An Israeli army battle tank in the upper Galilee region of northern Israel near the border with Lebanon | Photo Credit: AFP

Israel's prevailing security policy has collapsed. For decades it projected a mirage of ruthless sophistication, as it repeatedly and confidently cut its Palestinian enemies down to size. But the unspeakable horrors of October 7, 2023 have prompted a visceral retaliation in Gaza, that brings still-unknown risks of escalation on other fronts, and the unprecedented suffering of innocent civilians that will ricochet through generations. The catastrophe should prompt a fundamental rethink of [Israel's strategic concepts](#) — and carries dire warnings for India, too.

Every couple of years, starting in 2008, Israel launched limited air campaigns into Gaza, to degrade the military capabilities — from rocket launchers to tunnels — of Hamas and other militants. Every couple of years, it would kill and destroy just enough of Hamas's people and power to keep the rockets silenced, and the threat contained. A tenuous peace would return to the skies over Israel. This strategic "concept" based on periodic attrition seemed to work. But in fact Israel's military virtuosity masked the reality that its approach was bereft of a political plan.

Israel was managing, not seeking to solve, the problem of Palestinian resistance, from which its terrorist enemies sprouted.

In parallel with the routine military campaigns, the government of Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu abandoned the two-state solution and actively undermined it. His cynical ploy was to sabotage politics, by strengthening extremists such as Hamas at the expense of more credible and popular Palestinian forces, especially the Palestinian Authority (PA) that nominally ran the West Bank. Mr. Netanyahu sought to keep the Palestinians hopelessly divided, the PA weak, and to thereby stall the political process for addressing the Israel-Palestine dispute. And he succeeded.

Managing a strategic threat through purely military means can work — until the adversary finds a way in. Israel's strategic concept of periodic attrition only ever addressed Palestinian groups' capabilities, never their political intent. It was based on an assumption of unassailable Israeli power — a belief that operational superiority alone can deliver strategic effects.

Indeed Israel's operational superiority does provide something of a guarantee — Hamas poses no existential threat to Israel. But short of that, as Hamas showed on October 7, a weaker and highly resolved enemy can still inflict untold physical harm, let alone massive national dislocation. Relying on a cult of operational superiority, while ignoring the problem's political roots, invites the adversary to hold fast to its unshakeable beliefs, cling to violence as the only mode of politics, and to keep trying until it finally lands a meaningful blow.

This should sound familiar to Indian ears.

For almost a decade, aside from some initial feelers, the Narendra Modi government has treated Pakistan as little more than an irritant to an unstoppably rising India. In defence matters, this has included some commendable efforts. Facing a more urgent threat on the China border, in 2021 India resuscitated the Line of Control ceasefire, and it re-tasked a dedicated Pakistan-facing Strike Corps to the China border. More could be done to right-size the military's focus on Pakistan, which, for decades, has been a sink of resources and military attention.

But India was also seduced by the cult of operational superiority. Just as in Israel's case, the core of this concept suggests that a more powerful actor can apply periodic attrition to manage its threats. India has procured new technologies such as the SPICE (Smart, Precise Impact, Cost-Effective) missiles, adopted new punitive attack options such as in Balakot, and may even be involved in the mysterious assassinations of several anti-India terrorist leaders in Pakistan. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, some or all of these impressive capabilities are products of India's closer relationship with Israel. They make India stronger; but by themselves they only enable successful tactics, not effective strategy.

Meanwhile, India has rejected the notion of addressing the threat politically. New Delhi abrogated Jammu and Kashmir's autonomous status in 2019, signalling that the Kashmir dispute is now irrevocably non-negotiable, and maintains that it will not reopen talks with Pakistan as long as cross-border terrorism exists. This seems like a reasonable position. India has a thriving economy, is diplomatically courted by the world, and brims with the promise of technology-fuelled dynamism. Why should it get bogged down in a torturous process, full of spoilers, where any deal may not be enforceable?

The answer lies in Israel. Ignoring the political interests at the heart of a rivalry only invites the adversary to dig in and try harder.

Dialogue will not extinguish the Pakistan Army's entrenched anti-India ideology, and even less, the fervour of its terrorist allies. But détente has broken out among inveterate rivals before — including between Israel and its older Arab enemies, most recently Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Pakistan's Army and political elite could conceivably gain a stake in at least calming tensions with India and distancing themselves from extremist groups. They have incentives in buttressing economic stability, building capacity to counter anti-state terrorism, and reducing their dependence on China.

A grand bargain may be elusive, but starting a political process could address a range of pressing issues, from nuclear and missile confidence-building measures, to coordination on Afghanistan, and opening the spigot on trade and investment.

We have seen, in the past month, the costs of ignoring politics. A weaker and highly-resolved adversary can still cause untold harm. The cult of operational superiority has produced only more intractable insecurity for Israel, more devastating loss for Gazans, and possibly ripples of war across the region. Next to India, Pakistan is in the midst of seemingly endless internal tumult, and hosts a roiling soup of violent extremism. And it has nuclear weapons. By all means,

New Delhi must maintain and reinforce deterrence through the full spectrum of conflict. But managing a strategic threat through purely military means works only until the adversary finds a way in.

Arzan Tarapore is Research Scholar, Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University, U.S.

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G20 WORKSHOP SERIES BY NITI AAYOG

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: International Treaties & Agreements, and other important organizations

NITI Aayog organised a hybrid webinar on "Accelerating Progress on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)" at Dr. Ambedkar International Centre today in collaboration with knowledge partners, Institute for Human Development (IHD), Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP), and UNDP India. The webinar was structured around the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration (NDLD), which includes a specific focus on accelerating progress on the SDGs. The NDLD provides pathways for nations in their journey towards achieving the SDGs.

The webinar was organised to advance the implementation of SDGs in India, aligning with the G20 NDLD and encouraging domestic ownership of India's commitment to the global advancement of these critical development objectives. The event saw participation from various stakeholders from across the country, including think tanks, academia, practitioners, and thematic experts.

Shri Suman Bery, Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog, stressed the pivotal role of NITI Aayog in adapting the SDGs to the local context by establishing a presence at the state level through SDG India Index. Furthermore, NITI Aayog is working on the national front through programs like the Aspirational Districts Program and Aspiration Blocks program, effectively mobilizing a 'Jan Aandolan'. He also noted that India is likely to achieve a significant target on halving multidimensional poverty well before 2030, providing a model for the global community, particularly for developing countries, to pursue their respective goals. Thus, India's achievements are contributing to global success.

Dr. V. K. Paul, Member (Health), directed his attention to the progress of India concerning SDG Goals of 'Zero Hunger', 'Good Health & Wellbeing', and 'Quality Education'. He underscored India's focus on 'Zero Hunger' with a specific focus on nutrition, NCDs and preventable deaths. In light of this, he called upon all stakeholders to share their recommendations and innovative ideas for enhancing outcomes on these goals.

Dr. Ramesh Chand, Member (Agriculture) emphasized the current agricultural challenges. He highlighted the challenges pertaining to rising real food prices and increased food production costs. Despite technological advancements, production costs haven't significantly decreased, and supply chains remain fragmented. To tackle these issues, we must boost people's income, he added.

Session on eliminating hunger and malnutrition focused on access to food, awareness on and increasing nutritional variety. Shri Indevar Pandey, Secretary, Ministry of Women & Child Development, spoke about the critical role of technology, particularly data in addressing malnutrition in the country.

The second session on 'Ensuring Good Health for All' session centered on achieving universal health coverage and addressing health challenges. It emphasized the One Health approach, recognizing the interconnectedness of human, animal, and health ecosystem. Discussions covered strengthening primary healthcare and the health workforce, eradicating ongoing epidemics like AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, hepatitis, and water-borne diseases. Prioritizing the One Health approach for combating Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) and promoting evidence-based Traditional and Complementary Medicine in health were also highlighted.

The third session on “Delivering Quality Education” focused on dimensions of National Education Policy and highlighted dropouts in education due to health or economic reasons and the role of community engagement. It also included discussions on improving foundational learning, harnessing digital technologies and overcoming digital divides to ensure access to quality education, equipping educational institutions and teachers to keep pace with emerging trends and technological advances, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and enabling lifelong learning, particularly focused on skilling, reskilling, and upskilling, especially for vulnerable groups.

The closing segment, chaired by Dr. Arvind Virmani, Member, NITI Aayog, included the need for concerted action, effective local implementation, and continued collaboration across sectors and regions. The speakers underscored the importance of aligning with the spirit of the SDGs and fostering cooperative federalism and partnerships for sustainable development.

Participants and speakers at this action-oriented webinar expressed their optimism about the progress and achievements to come as India and the global community forge ahead on their journey in the run-up to 2030.

NITI Aayog is the nodal agency of Government of India for coordinating the adoption and monitoring of SDGs at the national and sub-national levels. With just seven years left to the 2030 Agenda, the G20 New Delhi Leader’s Declaration has provided the impetus at the international, national and sub-national levels to chart a pathway for accelerating achievements and outcomes on the 17 SDGs.

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IN TROUBLED WATERS IN QATAR

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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November 08, 2023 02:09 am | Updated 02:09 am IST

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On October 26, the news from Doha that its Court of First Instance had [awarded the death sentence to eight Indian Navy veterans](#) working there sent shock waves across India. The Ministry of External Affairs extended “absolute support” to the veterans and promised to make every effort to bring them home. A former Indian Ambassador to Qatar has been tasked with monitoring the case from New Delhi.

Editorial | [Mystery trial: On the case of the former Indian Navy personnel in Qatar](#)

This is perhaps the first instance in five decades of Indian migration to the Gulf that any Indian nationals have been accused of involvement in a breach of local security, and their culpability deemed serious enough to warrant the death penalty. The facts relating to the case are meagre: the eight veterans — three captains, four commanders, and a sailor — were employed with a local company, Dahra Global Technologies and Consultancy Services. The company, now closed down, provided training and other support services to the Qatari Navy. The eight naval officials, in detention since August 2022, are accused of espionage. Some sections of the media reported that the officials disclosed to Israel the specifications of an Italian submarine that Qatar contracted to obtain from an Italian company, Fincantieri. But this has been disputed: it has been asserted authoritatively that there is no ongoing submarine contract and no Israeli connection.

The absence of hard information has encouraged some of the most outlandish speculations in sections of the Indian media, generally reflecting the political biases or prejudices of the authors. One writer on a right-wing platform has described Qatar as acting “like a wannabe caliphate and an Islamist sanctuary”, hosting an “entire menagerie of terrorists”.

The Pakistani role in the imbroglio is another favourite with some Indian commentators. Pakistani social media posts have been quoted to suggest that the Indians were arrested following a tip-off from Pakistan, while some posts on Indian social media have asserted that the naval officials have been “framed” by Pakistani agencies. No evidence is proffered in either case. An Indian writer has speculated that the sentence is aimed at derailing India’s closeness to the Israel-UAE-Saudi axis, though such an “axis” has yet to emerge. He also believes that Qatar could be sending a cautionary American message to curtail India’s growing assertiveness in world affairs. Since the death sentence was announced three weeks into the Gaza conflict, a retired Indian Army officer has speculated that the Indian government’s public hostility towards Hamas could have led to the sentence. In their anxiety to explain the harsh sentence, even some serious commentators have been led astray: one of them views the sentence as a

“challenge [to] the foundations of an essentially strong relationship” that should “provoke a rethink in India about the future sustainability of this relationship”.

While the sense of shock is understandable, the outburst of rage and prejudice serves no useful purpose. We would do well to note that Qatar, though a small Gulf state, has close ties with the U.S., other western powers, and Iran and Turkey. It has been in the vanguard of regional diplomacy for over two decades. This role has been sustained by its serious and well-informed royal leadership, backed by outstanding diplomats.

Unlike some of its neighbours, Qatar’s political initiatives tend to be low-key and behind-the-scenes, such as its recent role in brokering U.S.-Taliban interactions in Doha, but this should not detract from the measured manner with which it approaches bilateral and regional challenges.

Following from this, we should accept that that the espionage case and the role of India’s naval veterans would have been thoroughly investigated and sentences pronounced only on the basis of hard evidence, however painful this might be for us. There have also been suggestions that, given the close ties between India and Qatar, the results of the investigations could have been shared with the appropriate Indian officials. Again, given the harsh sentences meted out, an Israeli role in the sordid imbroglio cannot be ruled out.

We would do well to remember that all countries, including India, take national security matters very seriously and adopt a tough posture where espionage is involved. And, hardly ever are the full details of the investigation and the judicial process brought into the public domain.

My understanding of this unfortunate matter is as follows. First, this is a stand-alone security issue and the sentences have no link with bilateral ties with India or developments in regional politics. I believe this has been fully explained to the Indian officials concerned. Second, during this period of detention, patience and restraint are called for from our media. Communal abuse, name-calling, and fevered speculations serve no purpose; in fact, as we saw in the Nupur Sharma matter, they only vitiate the atmosphere. This would be a good time to silence the hate factories in India and abroad that are feverishly contributing to expanding the communal divide at home and in our neighbourhood. Third, our focus should be on intense behind-the-scenes diplomatic engagement with Qatar on freeing the veterans, while publicly affirming the importance of our long-standing, substantial and mutually beneficial ties.

As Rudyard Kipling warned us, “If you can keep your head when all about you/Are losing theirs and blaming it on you...”

Talmiz Ahmad is former ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE

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CLOSER TOGETHER: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE INDIA-BHUTAN TALKS AND THE PLANS AHEAD

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Bhutan

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November 08, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 12:40 am IST

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The decision by India and Bhutan to focus on infrastructure and connectivity during [talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bhutan's fifth King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck](#) is an important marker towards more bilaterally driven regional initiatives. A joint statement speaks of completing surveys for the Kokrajhar-Gelephu rail link that connects Bhutan to Assam, and beginning discussions on another Bhutan to West Bengal rail link, while also facilitating Bhutan-Bangladesh trade, with yet another rail link, and upgrading checkpoints along the India-Bhutan border. These plans foretell a future that could well change the development story of the region, including West Bengal and the northeast, Bhutan's south and east dzongkhags (districts), as well as Northern Bangladesh. Bhutan's economy has been dependent on hydropower and tourism revenues, and has been particularly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as worries over global warming. A lack of opportunities has also led to emigration by educated youth and professionals. The new project proposed by the king, to build a Special Economic Zone at Bhutan's southern border with Assam, and an airport at Gelephu, are expected to drive growth and investment to the kingdom. In addition, Bangladesh's signing of a Preferential Trade Agreement with Bhutan in 2020 could increase Bhutanese export of local produce and build more markets for Indian and Bangladeshi producers in the sub-region. India's "energy exchange", which is bringing more Bhutanese and Nepali hydropower suppliers online, while planning to distribute energy to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, will drive intra-regional growth and revenues. This would also power New Delhi's attempt at bridging the economic gap with the northeast, while drawing development partners like the World Bank and donor countries like Japan into the creation of a "sub-regional hub".

Efficient and time-bound execution is, therefore, key to such ambitious plans. Given India's problems with Pakistan and sanctions on Myanmar for the 2021 coup blocking the path for trade and land connectivity to the East, working with other countries on India's periphery to build connectivity, markets and energy links is the most sustainable way forward. In the longer term, geopolitical conflicts and anti-globalisation trends are forcing regional groupings to be more cohesive, something South Asia has not been able to achieve as yet. As India worries about China's push into South Asian trade, infrastructure projects and strategic ties, including concerns over a Bhutan-China boundary agreement's overhang over Doklam and India's "Chicken Neck" (Siliguri Corridor) route, these are ideas which will offer more security and prosperity for the countries involved, with particular benefits for Bhutan, India's traditionally trusted partner in the region.

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CEASE FIRE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE DANGER OF ISRAEL TURNING GAZA INTO AN OPEN PRISON ON FIRE

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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November 08, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 02:01 am IST

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Israel's bombing of Gaza is [entering its second month](#), and the tiny Mediterranean strip of 2.3 million people has been turned into what the UN has called [a "graveyard for thousands of children"](#) and "a living hell for everyone else". According to the Gaza Health Ministry, at least 10,000 people, many of them women and children, have been killed in Israel's onslaught, which began after [Hamas's October 7 cross-border raid](#), killing at least 1,400 Israelis. Israel's attack has also displaced some 1.5 million people. Israel ordered more than a million Gazans to move south and then continued to bomb the enclave. High-rises have been levelled and northern Gaza's neighbourhoods turned into rubble. Refugee camps, schools, hospitals and ambulances are not being spared, which led to frantic calls from the UN Secretary-General António Guterres for a ceasefire and respect for international humanitarian laws. According to the UN, 89 UN aid workers were among those killed in Gaza in four weeks, the highest "in any comparable period in the history of our organisation". The war has also triggered massive protests across the world, especially in the Arab street. But Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has rejected calls for even a humanitarian pause, let alone a ceasefire.

Israeli troops have now encircled Gaza city, a densely populated Hamas stronghold, and are involved in street battles with militants. The objective appears to be to topple the Hamas government, kill its commanders, destroy its military infrastructure and rescue the hostages seized by Hamas on October 7. In the past, Israel had taken quick victories against conventional armies in the region, but its track record in asymmetric wars is mixed. It has lost at least 30 soldiers, and once the fighting enters Gaza city, it is expected to be bloodier. If Israel presses on, turning the rest of Gaza into an open prison on fire, it can have disastrous consequences for West Asia. Yemen's Houthis have already launched attacks against Israel. The Israeli-Lebanese border remains tense with Hezbollah saying all "options are open". The only country that can rein Israel in is its patron, the U.S. But unfortunately, the Biden administration, despite all its rhetoric about rights and a rules-based order, is yet to act. This is an opportunity for the U.S. to show the moral leadership which it always preaches about. It should tell Israel, and use pressure if needed, that it cannot continue to kill Palestinian civilians in the name of its right to defend itself. Israel must be made to cease fire immediately.

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RAKSHA MANTRI & US SECRETARY OF DEFENCE TO CO-CHAIR INDIA-US 2+2 MINISTERIAL DIALOGUE & HOLD BILATERAL TALKS ON NOVEMBER 10, 2023

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

US Secretary of Defence Mr Lloyd Austin is visiting India on November 09 & 10, 2023 to co-chair the India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue and conduct a bilateral meeting with Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh. Secretary Austin, who will arrive in New Delhi on November 09, would be welcomed with a Tri-service Guard of Honour at the Palam Technical Area.

Secretary Austin and US Secretary of State Mr Antony Blinken will co-chair the Ministerial 2+2 Dialogue with Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh and Minister of External Affairs Dr S Jaishankar on November 10. It will be followed by a bilateral meeting between Secretary Austin and Raksha Mantri. A number of strategic, defence and technology issues are expected to be discussed during the 2+2 dialogue and the bilateral meeting. Secretary Austin last visited India in June 2023 and had met with Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh.

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TAIWAN, A MALACCA BLOCKADE AND INDIA'S OPTIONS

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November 09, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 01:46 am IST

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'India's primary role maybe limited to a proactive defence of its territorial interests and the security of supply chains' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

With China frequently intimidating Taiwan over the past year through deployment of its air force and navy in the surrounding areas, there is the oft-posed question whether India would take action in the Strait of Malacca or the Andaman Sea in the event of a conflict between the United States and China over Taiwan. Any speculative action in the Strait of Malacca or the Andaman Sea would involve either a naval blockade against commercial shipping or China's key trade and energy sea lines of communication or military action against Chinese naval vessels. The fact is that commercial shipping as well as naval vessels of any country have a right to freedom of navigation on the high seas. A naval blockade against commercial shipping is not feasible.

There are multiple constraints in regard to India's options in the Strait of Malacca. First, "distant blockades" away from a belligerent nation's geography can be challenged under international law. Second, the trade that passes through the Strait of Malacca is not just China's economic and energy lifeline. An overwhelming volume of the trade of Japan, South Korea and even India itself passes through the same Strait. Third, the channel of the Strait of Malacca is long, nearly 500 miles, and involves the sovereignty of other states such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore who would all be affected adversely by a naval blockade. The affected countries are unlikely to support a naval blockade. Fourth, commercial shipping is extremely complex to identify in terms of the sovereignty of the vessel, flag, registration, insurance and ownership of cargo. And these are often multinational in nature and can also be changed as convenient through transshipment at any port in Southeast Asia. Fifth, apart from the fact that it is difficult to interdict China's trade and energy supplies, the additional reality is that even if the Strait of Malacca were "choked", shipping can take a detour either through the Sunda or the Lombok Straits to reach China. In any case, very large crude carriers carrying crude or natural gas to China do not use the Strait of Malacca which is shallower. They use the Sunda Strait. Sixth, China also has a huge onshore and floating Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) which can help it tide over disruptions, especially with growing overland energy supplies from Russia and Central Asia.

A naval blockade or unilateral action against an adversary's naval vessels would tantamount to a declaration of war; at the very minimum, it could lead to a conflict, not necessarily limited to the

maritime sphere. Regional countries which are adversely affected by disruption in the Strait of Malacca, including friendly countries, are unlikely to endorse any unilateral action. China would use its permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council and regional influence to good effect to thwart any such effort.

It is also relevant to note that in both the First and the Second World wars, a naval blockade and sanctions led to conflagrations. During the First World War, the British blockade of Germany which lasted from 1914-19 saw Germany retaliating against British shipping on the high seas with its submarines (U-boats) with deadly effect. Subsequent developments, including the Battle of Jutland in 1916 and the sinking of U.S. merchant vessels by German U-boats eventually drew the U.S. into the First World War. During the Second World War, the U.S. had embargoed Japan's energy supplies which ran through the maritime commons, which probably played a key role in Japan's decision to launch the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941.

[Also read | Taipei looking forward to join hands with India, other nations to safeguard peace in Taiwan Strait: Taiwanese Envoy](#)

The ongoing tensions between Iran and the U.S. in the Strait of Hormuz are emblematic of the proposition that interdiction of even commercial shipping can easily lead to a military flare-up. Whenever Iran has attempted to disrupt the passage of internationally flagged oil tankers, it has immediately escalated the situation with the U.S. responding by sending its naval and air assets in the region to confront the Iranian vessels.

The larger question in the context of the Strait of Malacca that remains to be answered is whether any of India's strategic partners, especially the U.S., would support any interdiction of Chinese vessels in a bilateral conflict between India and China, unless the U.S. itself were involved in a kinetic conflict with China. Even in such a scenario, there is perhaps no guarantee of support by other stakeholders in the region, especially the South-East Asian nations.

To the extent that a full-blown U.S.-China conflict over Taiwan sends ripples across the Indian Ocean, India's primary role may be limited to a proactive defence of its territorial interests and the security of its sea lines of communication and those of its strategic partners in the eastern and western Indian Ocean. In any such eventuality, India's primary focus would remain on its continental borders with China.

India has traditionally faced China's military threats on its borders essentially on its own. The new U.S.-India partnership in the economic, high-tech and military areas is expected to strengthen in the years ahead. The U.S. increasingly regards India as regional ballast for stability in the region. A robust India with a strong economy, nuclear deterrence capability and a credible military can contribute to multi-polarity in the Indo-Pacific.

Sujan Chinoy is the Director General of the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses and the Think20 Chair for India's G-20 Presidency. The views expressed are personal

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THE U.S.'S SIGNAL OF A HUGE DIGITAL SHIFT

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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November 11, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 08:51 am IST

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'But a major (perhaps the main, unstated) reason for the U.S. declaration is the China factor' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

When [Thomas L. Friedman triumphantly declared in 2005 that the world was flat](#), with the opportunities having been equalised globally, it was considerably premised on new digital developments. This new geopolitical and geo-economic ideology was led by the United States, home to most of the world's Big Tech. It first sought to redefine development through the field of ICT4D (Information and Communication Technologies for Development), and then herald a new dawn for democracy globally, most characterised by colour revolutions in East Europe and the so-called Arab Spring.

Behind it all of course was a new plan to employ the global reach of digital tentacles, and later data-enabled controls, for economic expansionism. Some called it digital colonisation, due to its extractive nature. The U.S. thereby sought to preempt alarmed national regimes from reconstructing boundaries to contain digital globalisation. It devised a set of digital trade proposals seeking binding commitments from countries to essentially prevent any effective future regulation of Big Tech. For some years now, such digital trade proposals have been the hottest agenda at various plurilateral trade negotiations and at the World Trade Organization (WTO). Countries such as India and South Africa, and some other developing ones, have stoutly resisted the U.S.-driven digital trade agreements juggernaut.

In the circumstances, the world was shocked to hear the U.S. withdraw, in late October, from its centerpiece digital trade positions at the WTO — those about data flows/localisation, access to source code, and location of computing facilities. The declaration represents a watershed moment about how the global digital economy and society will evolve going forward. The stated motive is the realisation that the U.S. needs domestic policy space to regulate Big Tech and AI, for which data and source code could be important leverage points. Having employed this as a major reason for opposing global digital trade agreements, developing countries can feel vindicated. However, they also had strong economic reasons; an uncontrolled remit of the Big Tech would not allow domestic digital industrialisation.

But a major (perhaps the main, unstated) reason for the U.S. declaration is the China factor. The flat world was a happy place for the U.S. when it meant its singular digital hegemony over it. But with China fast on the heels of the U.S. towards digital superpower-hood, the situation has become more complex. The digital trade negotiations at the WTO are open to all countries, and

China grasped the opportunity to participate in them. China had leveraged its accession to the WTO in 2001 to become the 'world's factory', thereby taking its economic development, and subsequently geopolitical status, to an entirely new level. A free digital trade agreement — with free data flows, without the need to share the source code of digital products, and allowing remote computing facilities — could similarly be employed globally by China to now outsmart the U.S. digitally. It could help bring China on an equal footing with the U.S. in accessing global digital markets, and in driving and controlling the world's digitalisation, in all sectors. Apart from the economic challenge, the U.S. also considers any pervasive Chinese digital presence globally as a major security threat.

Such Cold War-like economic and security-related exclusions, and blocs building, may at least be as important a reason behind the U.S. declaration as the stated one of preserving policy space. Even though having withdrawn from these all-important positions in the WTO digital trade negotiations, where China cannot be excluded, the U.S. may still push for data flow, source code, and facilities location, related provisions in regional digital trade deals, in some form or the other. Such deals will be led by the U.S., and, significantly, be limited to its allies. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) and the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP) are two such initiatives by the U.S. It is pursuing similar interests through bilateral trade and technology councils, for example with the European Union (EU) and India.

The historic declaration by the U.S. can, therefore, be seen in two different lights. At one level, it signals a full global acceptance that preserving national policy space around data flows, source code, and location of computing facilities is key to all-important digital regulation. This is a most welcome development. But at another level, what indeed is rather worrying is that it could firmly herald the splitting of the global digital space, structures and value-chains into two competing blocs — one led by the U.S. and other by China. This is already happening, but could now pick up a new momentum.

What does this mean for developing countries such as India? They should make the most of the new global consensus on the need for strong digital regulations to rein in Big Tech and manage AI, including through policies related to data, source code, and location of computing facilities. The U.S.'s statement is like abnegation by the king, with the EU already employing data and source code related laws in its domestic regulation which are beginning to look quite contrary to its positions at global digital trade forums. Developing countries should grasp this opportunity with both hands to urgently shape new paradigms for national digital regulation.

But, at the same time, developing countries must stoutly resist a new trap of a digital Cold War, whereby they get bound into digital dependencies either with the U.S. or China. A new digital regulation paradigm should combine with strong digital industrial policies to bolster domestic digital industry. Countries should aim at creating globally open standards, open protocols, and open digital public infrastructures. All these together could mean complete and genuine global-scale interoperability. This would enable open global digital value chains, allowing easy switching across global digital trade partners — suppliers or consumers — whether from the U.S., China, or elsewhere.

Parminder Jeet Singh is a New Delhi-based digital activist and researcher

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MINISTER FOR FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES HOLDS BILATERAL MEETING WITH GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF MATO GROSSO OF BRAZIL

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The Minister of Food Processing Industries, Shri Pashupati Kumar Paras held a bilateral meeting with the Governor of the state of Mato Grosso of Brazil, Mauro Mendes Ferreira here today. The meeting was attended by Additional Secretary, Shri Minhaj Alam and senior officials from the Ministry. From the Brazil side, Governor was accompanied by H.E. Kenneth Nóbrega, Ambassador of Brazil to India and other senior government officials of Brazil.



Both the sides discussed about the historic relationship both the countries enjoy which goes back to over 70 years. The recent high-level interactions and visits are testimony to both side's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations, and this momentum needs to be continued, sustained, and further strengthened. Shri Pashupati Kumar Paras highlighted that the Prime Ministers of our respective nations had very productive meetings on the sidelines of G7 Summit as well as G20 Summit.



Governor Mauro Mendes Ferreira emphasized that India is a key strategic partner for Brazil and Brazil commends as well as congratulates the visionary steps taken by the government to foster development in India. Governor Mauro Mendes Ferreira also applauded the recent success of Indian space missions and the strong performance of India's food processing, pharma, and energy sectors.

Shri Paras inquired about the status of agri food production in Brazil in accordance with the Agro-climatic in general and in specific to the state of Mato Grosso. Brazil officials expressed their interest in expanding their export of Soybean, Corn, Cotton, poultry meat etc. to India in the near future.

Both sides acknowledged the strategic importance of each other to foster food security. India as one of the largest producer of Agri Food and Brazil as one the largest exporter of food can work towards ensuring food security for the world. Brazilian side highlighted that the bi-lateral trade between the two countries has expanded by 32% to US\$15.2 billion in 2022.

The two sides discussed synergies and exploring possibilities in further collaboration and co-ordination in the food processing sector particularly in terms of exchange of goods and human resource. Both sides agreed to continue to work in partnership with each other to facilitate even greater exchange of goods and ideas.

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6TH HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF THE INDIA-OPEC ENERGY DIALOGUE

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: OPEC

The 6th High-Level Meeting of the India-OPEC Energy Dialogue took place on 9 November 2023, at the OPEC Secretariat in Vienna, Austria

The Meeting was co-chaired by HE Haitham Al Ghais, Secretary General of OPEC and HE Hardeep Singh Puri, Honourable Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas and Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs of the Republic of India.

The open and candid discussions at the Meeting focused on key issues related to oil and energy markets with a specific emphasis on ensuring availability, affordability and sustainability, which are necessary in ensuring the stability of energy markets. The two sides discussed the short, medium and long-term outlooks for the industry and recognized the important role of India in global economic growth and energy demand.

The sides noted the World Oil Outlook 2023, which forecasted that India would be the fastest-growing major developing economy, averaging long-term growth of 6.1% between 2022-2045 and to account for over 28% of incremental global energy demand during the same period. The sides also noted the need for continued cooperation and dialogue in the interest of both producers and consumers while also exploring further areas for future cooperation.

In his remarks, HE Haitham Al Ghais said: "The excellent state of the OPEC-India Dialogue also extends to the development of positive relationships between OPEC, its Member Countries and major Indian oil companies," noting that "OPEC's relationship with India has continued to go from strength to strength." He appreciated India's balanced, realistic and pragmatic approach towards energy issues.

"The relationship between India and OPEC will be pivotal in the years to come, as the world seeks to foster global energy security, deliver energy affordability and reduce emissions," the Secretary General added.

HE Haitham Al Ghais also praised India's G20 Presidency, the remarkable Chandrayan mission, and highlighted its leadership role in addressing global issues of great importance. "India's heading of the G20 was impressive, with India's able leadership steering this year's G20 discussions to a successful outcome, including on key energy issues," the Secretary General stated.

HE Hardeep S. Puri highlighted that, as the third-largest energy consumer, crude oil importer and the fourth-largest global refiner, close ties between India and OPEC are not only essential but also natural. He added that as India remains on a trajectory of stable and robust economic growth, fostering deeper collaboration for the mutual benefit of both parties has the potential to contribute significantly to the long-term prosperity and stability of the global oil markets. In this context, he called on OPEC to continue playing its key role in maintaining and ensuring market stability for the benefits of consumers, producers and global economy.

The Meeting noted the remarkable progress achieved to date in the framework of the dialogue, including at the technical and research levels. Last month, experts from both India and OPEC met under the umbrella of the 5th Technical Meeting of the India-OPEC Energy Dialogue on 27

October 2023 via videoconference.

The 6th High-Level Meeting of the India-OPEC Energy Dialogue concluded with both parties underscoring the importance of fostering enhanced cooperation between India and OPEC moving forward.

It was agreed to hold the next High-Level Meeting of the India-OPEC Energy Dialogue during the course of 2024 in India.

RKJ/M

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INDIA WILL HOST 33RD CONFERENCE OF WOAAH REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND PACIFIC AT NEW DELHI FROM 13TH TO 16TH NOVEMBER

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: International Treaties & Agreements, and other important organizations

India is set to host the 33rd Conference of the WOAAH Regional Commission for Asia and the Pacific, scheduled from November 13 to 16, 2023 at New Delhi. Union Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying Shri Parshottam Rupala will inaugurate and conclude the ceremonies. Union Ministers of State for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying Dr. Sanjeev Balyan and Dr. L Murugan will also be present in the event.

The decision to host this significant event was made during the 90th General Session of the World Assembly of Delegates of the WOAAH in Paris in May 2023. The Hotel Taj Mahal, New Delhi, will serve as the venue for the conference.

Hosted by the Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying, the conference will attract delegates from 36 member countries including India, senior officers from regional and international organizations and representatives from the private sector and private veterinary organizations in the region.

The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic emphasize the crucial role of scientific expertise in assessing risks at the human-animal-environment interface. It also underscores the necessity to enhance resilience and capacity in Veterinary Services for future challenges. Face-to-face Regional Conferences like this one facilitate closer contact, active dialogue, and meaningful debates among delegates, invited experts and key regional partners. It is anticipated to be a week of fostering valuable discussions and building essential networking relationships.

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THE QATAR DEATH ROW AND INDIA'S OPTIONS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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A glimpse of the exercise Zair-Al-Bahr conducted between the Indian Navy and the Qatar Emiri Navy in the Persian Gulf near Abu Dhabi. | Photo Credit: PTI

On October 26, Qatar's local court handed down the [death penalty to eight former Indian Navy officers](#). The case has garnered international attention.

In August 2022, the eight officers were detained in Doha by Qatari intelligence authorities. They worked for Dahra Global Technologies and Consultancy Services, which served Qatar's defence and security agencies. Legal proceedings encountered delays, including the rejection of the initial bail plea one month after the arrest. The first trial was held in March 2023. In October, consular access was granted, and the Indian Ambassador met the detainees. But the situation took a grim turn on October 26 with the local court's verdict.

The case shares similarities with other incidents involving the arrest of Indian nationals by foreign authorities. For instance, Kulbhushan Jadhav, an Indian national, was sentenced to death in 2017 in Pakistan on charges of espionage and sabotage. Pakistan accused him of acting at the behest of India's intelligence agency, which India denies. The case proceeded in a military court with no transparency. India moved the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which found that Pakistan had breached Article 36 of the Vienna Convention requiring immediate notification of an arrest to the national's consulate. It ordered Pakistan to review the process of Jadhav's trial and conviction, and provide India with consular access.

Editorial | [Mystery trial: On the case of the former Indian Navy personnel in Qatar](#)

In a separate incident, Indian Air Force pilot Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman's aircraft was shot down by Pakistani fighter jets after he took down a Pakistani F-16 fighter jet. He was captured on the Pakistani side of the Line of Control, but was released about 60 hours later following intense back-channel communications between India and Pakistan.

In both instances, the individuals involved were reluctant to disclose their identities, mirroring the present situation. India either mitigated their sentences or brought them back to their home country through diplomatic means.

India has the option to initiate legal appeals within the Qatari legal system. As per Article 110 of the Penal Code of Qatar, engaging in espionage is regarded as a serious criminal offence.

Espionage is legally defined as the act of collecting or transmitting confidential information or documents to a foreign state or its agents with the intent to harm Qatar's national security or interests. Penalties can result in imprisonment not exceeding 15 years, depending on the gravity of the offence. During times of war, the punishment may escalate to life imprisonment or the death penalty. It is noteworthy that Qatar has not disclosed information about the verdict. India can pursue a legal battle with the aim of reducing the sentence to imprisonment.

In 2015, India and Qatar signed an agreement pertaining to the transfer of sentenced prisoners. Under the agreement, Indian citizens who are sentenced in Qatar have the choice to serve their prison sentence in their home country. If the legal appeals in Qatar's judiciary do not yield the desired outcome, India could turn to the ICJ as a means of redress. Just as in the Jadhav case, there has been a delay in notifying the Indian embassy here too.

The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations provides the framework for consular relations between sovereign states. Article 36 of the Convention is central to this case, as it deals with communication and contact with nationals of the sending state. The Convention's Optional Protocol grants the ICJ compulsory jurisdiction over disputes arising from its interpretation or application. As mentioned earlier, Article 36 of the Vienna Convention requires immediate notification of an arrest and the right to consulate access.

India has the capacity to initiate diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving the case. The relationship between India and Qatar has yielded significant economic ties. Qatar is the largest provider of liquefied natural gas to India. While India's defence collaboration with Qatar has been somewhat limited, it still offers an avenue for diplomatic engagement. The Indian community represents the largest expatriate group in Qatar. The remittances sent to India by the community amount to an estimated \$750 million annually. Moreover, a steady stream of Indian artists performs in Qatar at events organised by community associations affiliated with the Indian Cultural Centre. By harnessing these robust ties with Qatar, New Delhi can exert pressure on the Qatari government to adopt a more lenient approach towards the detained individuals, potentially offering them some relief.

India's diplomatic challenge with eight Navy veterans on death row in Qatar | In Focus podcast

Numerous global human rights organisations have been actively combating unlawful imprisonment, capital punishment, and other violations of human rights. Amnesty International, for instance, has consistently championed human rights on a global scale. These organisations also have the potential to mobilise and advocate for the Indian Navy officers who are facing the death penalty.

This is a challenging diplomatic issue that requires careful consideration and strategic action. India's response should take into account the implications of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, international precedents, and the broader context of India-Qatar relations. Whether through diplomatic dialogues, political interventions, legal appeals, or a blend of these strategies, India has the potential to seek a resolution.

Hasan Mohammed Jinnah is Tamil Nadu State Public Prosecutor

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A NORWEGIAN PERSPECTIVE OF INDIA'S DIGITAL JOURNEY

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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November 15, 2023 12:08 am | Updated 02:01 am IST

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'These lessons can be used as a blueprint to maximise international development efforts' | Photo Credit: Getty Images

'Leaving no one behind'. This is the powerful but challenging promise that United Nations member-states have pledged to work towards in the pursuit of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). India has discovered some of the ways to move closer to this promise. With a vast and diverse population of 1.4 billion people, the progress made in the past decade to reach out and give social protection to every Indian has been impressive.

One of India's most powerful tools in this journey has been Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). As the Norwegian Minister of International Development, I am impressed by the development benefits of the use of digital public goods. Aspiring to leave no one behind, India has been able to issue digital identities to almost all its citizens. In turn, this has provided them access to social services, the digital economy, government support services and more. These lessons can be used as a blueprint to maximise international development efforts.

The first is India's role in accelerating the digital public goods agenda. During India's G-20 presidency this year, the world saw that digital public goods are part of the international development architecture of the future. India made digital public goods and DPI more tangible. One key step was in getting all G-20 countries to agree to the G-20 Framework for Systems of Digital Public Infrastructure. Arriving at this common framework is an impressive feat. The definition (which describes "a set of shared digital systems" used to "drive development, inclusion, innovation, trust, and competition and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms") captures the idea behind digital public infrastructure very well.

Work on digital public goods provides a great example of how the world is organically organising itself in new ways, and how countries in the global South are now leading this effort. Over 97 million people in countries as diverse as Morocco, Togo, Sri Lanka and the Philippines have received by now an ID through the Bengaluru-developed open source ID source system, or MOSIP (Modular Open Source Identity Platform), an effort I am proud that Norway supports. It is also illustrative that today, members of the Digital Public Goods Alliance (DPGA) are meeting in Ethiopia for their annual assembly, and that these strategic decisions are taken in the global South. The international development ecosystem should pay attention to these conversations as

they are shaping the world at an impressive speed — in a way which positively benefits the SDG agenda.

Norway has a long history of supporting digital public goods and is a proud co-founder and member of the DPGA, which provides a registry of certified digital public goods. Norway also recently pledged to become a frontrunner country in the 50-in-5 campaign, which was launched last week by the DPGA, the United Nations Development Programme and others. In this campaign, countries pledge to make at least one national digital goods available globally in the next five years. I can see only benefits in doing so. If taxpayers are paying for the development of national systems which can be shared without creating scarcity nor competition, then the default should be that it should be released globally as a digital public good. As the Minister of International Development, I am happy and proud to see that some of the digital public goods that Norway has already provided are being put to good use across the world.

One example is the weather services of the Norwegian metrological services Yr, which is used to forecast weather around the world. Another system is a warning system for plant health, VIPs, which has been used for over 20 years in Norway, and which is now being implemented in Malawi, Africa. Yet another example is the District Health Information Software 2 (DHIS2), managed by the University of Oslo. The system is the world's largest health management information system platform and is used by health authorities in 73 low- and middle-income countries, representing 30% of the world's population.

There is also the use of digital goods to put food on the table. One crucial and defining challenge of our time is food insecurity. In response to a deteriorating situation for food security globally, Norway is placing food security at the centre of Norwegian international development efforts; digital public goods such as VIPs and others are a part of this picture. I am happy to see that 24 of the registered digital public goods are already targeting SDG2 on ending food hunger — and the list is growing.

No service nor good is fully free, and the same is true in the digital domain. Someone must finance the development of protocols and their maintenance and security. Going forward, governments and businesses need to respond to increasingly challenging concerns of privacy and data leaks.

Countries also need to ensure the safeguarding of digital sovereignty without tampering with an open, free and secure Internet for all or leading to Internet fragmentation by states and non-state actors. At the end of the day, sovereignty is every country's first concern, and open solutions such as digital public goods are a good way to ensure not to end up in a venter-lock in or paid subscription mode. In the face of these complex challenges, the good thing is that we have a compass for the journey ahead, based on certifying and pooling our digital public goods under the global lead of the DPGA.

I warmly welcome close collaboration with India within the frameworks of the DPGA and the 50-in-5 campaign. I am excited to be visiting India and to experience first hand how digital public goods have transformed Indian society. Together, we can draw on crucial lessons from India's digital journey to ensure that even more countries leapfrog the digital divide just like India has.

Anne Beathe Tvinnereim is the Norwegian Minister of International Development

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BRIDGE TO NOWHERE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA'S VOICE, ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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November 15, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 08:30 am IST

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Two weeks after [abstaining from a UN General Assembly \(UNGA\) resolution](#) that called for a ceasefire in the Israeli strikes on Gaza, [India voted in favour of five of six annual draft resolutions](#) at the UNGA's Fourth Committee that criticised Israel for increasing settlements in the Occupied Territories, was in favour of Palestinians' right to homes and property, and supported the UN Refugee and Works Agency (UNRWA) operating in Gaza. The [official explanation of the votes as "routine" affirmation of India's traditional policy](#) has only added to the confusion over the government's stand on the crisis. Its Explanation of Vote in the original UNGA resolution in October said that India could not vote for a resolution that did not include an "explicit condemnation" of the [October 7 attacks by Hamas](#). However, none of the six resolutions, including one in which India abstained, that discusses investigating Israel for rights violations, actually referred to the October 7 attacks. These were instead identical to resolutions that India had voted for before, and neither India nor any other country at the Fourth Committee deliberations proposed amendments. The Israeli envoy, in fact, demanded a rejection of the "anti-Israel" resolutions as they did not contain references to the current situation. Cuba argued that the resolutions were important to vote for, but that they also did not contain references to the more than 11,000 Palestinians killed, including 4,000 children, and the displaced (nearly a million). India did not propose amendments, nor did any Indian diplomat speak, although a lengthier explanation may be expected when the resolutions are put to a vote by the UNGA next month — by which time more of Gaza would have been flattened.

At a time when every day counts, New Delhi appears unwilling to exert itself to making a difference. True, the government continues to hold its traditional stand on support for the Palestinian cause and a two-state solution (which it reaffirmed during the recent India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial meeting), and that it "stands by" Israel, with "zero tolerance" for terror attacks. However, it has not joined the call for a ceasefire or explicitly asked for an end to the strikes on civilian targets, where Israel claims it is hunting for Hamas fighters and searching for hostages. Nor has it named Hamas for the terror attacks or changed Indian law, as the Israeli Ambassador to India called for, to designate Hamas as a terror group. More than a month after Israel's reprisals began, the government must explain its position on the conflict, including where, if anywhere, India could play a role in alleviating the situation. The upcoming Voice of Global South and G-20 virtual summits may present the opportunity to articulate options for ending the violence, recovering Israeli hostages, as well as post-conflict scenarios for Gaza and

Palestinians. India's voice, once known for being forceful and balanced on such issues, must not be replaced by an expedient silence.

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AS GAZA WAR RAGES, WAITING FOR THE OTHER SHOE TO DROP

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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November 16, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 08:02 am IST

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Palestinians wounded in Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip are brought to a hospital in Khan Younis on November 15, 2023. | Photo Credit: AP

The [Israel-Hamas war](#) is now in its sixth week. Like the proverbial landlord, West Asians and much of the world, are currently in suspended animation wondering when and where the “second shoe” will drop and how big a crater it would cause on regional and global geopolitics and the economy.

Editorial | [Bridge to nowhere: On India's voice, Israel and the Palestinian cause](#)

While West Asia is no stranger to such shoe falls, several aspects of the current scrimmage are familiar, although some are new. We need to dwell on them briefly before making any prognosis of the crisis. It has been just over 50 years since the 19-day Yom Kippur War of 1973, 41 years since Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 and 17 years since a 33-day inconclusive war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006.

Israel was forced to leave Gaza in 2005, largely due to Palestinian resistance after a 38-year-long occupation. Since then, it has launched several military campaigns against Gaza: 2008 (lasting 22 days); 2012 (eight days); 2014 (50 days); and 2021 (11 days). Almost all Gaza conflicts involved Hamas firing rockets and the Israel Defense Forces making extensive air raids and missile attacks with occasional forays by armour-tipped infantry. Their ceasefires were always mediated by Egypt, the only Arab country that has a border with Gaza. Of late, Qatar has developed some proximity with Hamas and the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), a sister militancy in Gaza, through financial support and sheltering their leaders.

Counting the differences, this ongoing conflict has proven to be far bloodier and more destructive than all its predecessors. It has already lasted longer than any — except the conflict in 2014. It has been the first time that Israel has suffered a major intelligence and security failure since 1973, denting its fabled impenetrable security and omniscient intelligence set-up. It has resulted in Israel suffering the largest number of war deaths and hostage-taking in a single day. Unlike previous instances of Israel fighting a non-state actor, this time it has had to contemplate the real possibility of a combination of Hamas, the PIJ, Hezbollah and the Houthis with Iran-allied Shia groups harassing the American military presence in Iraq and Syria in tandem.

Further, following the “Abraham Accords” and recent progress towards normalisation with Saudi Arabia, the regional geopolitics has shifted from an Arab-Israeli binary set-up to a more complex arrangement now. A prolonged and wider conflagration could risk a reversal of these hard-won diplomatic gains. In addition, it could draw in Iran which has become a more potent existential threat. At the same time, Israel’s abject failures on October 7 have dimmed its role as the possible anchor of a regional anti-Iran security alliance. While the Israel-Hamas conflict has hogged attention, other distractions such as the Ukraine-Russia war, China-United States frictions and global economic fragility are lurching around.

All these weighty new factors notwithstanding, the Israel-Hamas conflict has re-enforced some long-forgotten regional tenets. First, it has dramatically re-established the centrality of the “Palestine Cause”, demonstrating that 35 years of U.S.-sponsored peace-making has failed to bury it. An Israeli military solution at huge humanitarian costs could delay and complicate the situation, but may not take it to status quo ante October 6 2023. Second, the conflict has demonstrated that despite all talk of West Asia’s growing multipolarity, the U.S. remains the ultimate arbiter of the region’s security and stability. Third, thanks to its hydrocarbon assets, trade choke points and the existence of potent non-state terror actors, West Asia’s geo-economic importance remains undiminished. Even as West Asian events are often counter-intuitive, the Israel-Hamas war seems to be moving towards a denouement. Israel has gone for broke by besieging the major Gazan hospitals by alleging that Hamas uses them as human shields. It is a high-risk gambit: if the information is correct and the siege succeeds, Israel would achieve its twin objectives of breaking the back of Hamas and releasing the hostages. Otherwise, it would have to eat a humble pie at home and face a public relations disaster abroad.

For several reasons, Israel does not have time on its side after six weeks of tumult. According to an Israeli newspaper, even if war remains confined to Gaza, it could be financially ruinous, with cost estimates running to \$51 billion, or a tenth of the national annual GDP. A rough Indian equivalence could be a war costing \$350 billion. Israeli rulers are already on notice domestically, in abeyance due to the national crisis, for their various lapses. If the Gaza conflict goes awry or expands into a “forever” regional war, public support for the “national” government could easily evaporate. Israel’s iron fist pursuit of its war aims may be popular at home, but the serious collateral damage is a hard sell abroad, particularly to Arabs and Muslims. In recent days, the tide of global sympathy has perceptibly shifted away from the Israelis’ anguish after the October 7 outrage towards the suffering of the Gazan civilians. Most Arab regimes have no love lost for Hamas — long shunned by them as part of “political Islam” that could stir up the masses. However, by waging a protracted, no-holds-barred asymmetric conflict, Israel is pushing the Arab regimes towards Hamas, much to their chagrin. Arab regimes’ evident failure to prevent mass death and destruction in Gaza discredits them in the eyes of the putative Arab street. Thus, Israel’s single-minded pursuit of a military solution has a huge accompanying cost for the moderate Arab regimes — and they do not like it. Even the U.S., Tel Aviv’s ultimate protector, has gone beyond the usual “bad cop, good cop” routine and publicly distanced itself from Israel by calling for a “two-state” solution and “humanitarian pauses” in Gaza.

It is still too early to predict the eventual outcome of the conflict. In the worst-case scenario, it could be a Greek tragedy involving the killing of the hostages, conflict expanding to envelop first the non-state actors and, eventually, Iran. The World Bank predicted on October 31 that in the war’s worst-case scenario, oil prices could rise to \$157 a barrel. Many Wall Street honchos foresee such eventuality upending the fragile post-COVID-19 pandemic economic recovery into a global recession. Further, Israel still seems to be thinking aloud about its exit strategy, abjuring the adage, “The longer you stay, the more chaotic the exit”. It appears to have no good options to extricate itself from the messy aftermath of October 7.

India needs to be on its toes watching the Israel-Hamas conflict, which could do considerable harm given our huge exposure to West Asia. Resultant high oil prices would be bad for our economy. The current account deficit and inflation would surge. If global growth is impacted, our exports and investment inflows may suffer. The geopolitical instability may pose a threat to the security of our nine million-strong diaspora in West Asia, and raise questions about the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor launched with great fanfare in September. With both Russia and Israel, India's two most important defence suppliers, being currently mired in wars, our defence procurement may face uncertainty. A protracted conflict may also fan international terrorism. On the positive side, high oil income may raise prospects for higher investment and remittances from the Gulf countries. India would need to be careful to leverage putative job openings in Israel, lest it put its citizens in harm's way. Besides, replacing Palestinian workers with Indians may further stereotype India. The conflict has already subjected Indian diplomacy to some inelegant shifts, although we quickly regained our traditional balance. All in all, New Delhi should keep its ear close to the ground and wait for the second shoe of the Gaza conflict to drop, hopefully, without any further seismic convulsions.

Mahesh Sachdev is a former Indian ambassador and an Arabist

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WAR IN MYANMAR: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE JUNTA AND RESTORING DEMOCRACY

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Myanmar

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November 17, 2023 12:10 am | Updated 12:12 am IST

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A coordinated offensive by Myanmar's ethnic rebels against the junta in several parts of the country late last month is the clearest sign yet that the coup regime's hands are overstretched. The Three Brotherhood Alliance, a coalition of ethnic minority armed groups, has claimed to have made territorial gains on Myanmar's border with China and [dozens of junta forces surrendering](#). Clashes have erupted in the restive Rakhine State, and Chin State that borders India. Faced with battlefield setbacks, the junta's response has been to carry out air strikes, causing heavy civilian casualties. In a rare acknowledgement of the challenges, Myint Swe, the military-appointed President, said recently that "It is necessary to carefully control this issue (rebel offensive)". When the military toppled the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021, its first step was to use force to establish order. It jailed most of the pro-democracy politicians, including Ms. Suu Kyi, and unleashed a violent crackdown on protests. Since then, over 4,000 civilians and pro-democracy activists have been killed by the military and some 20,000 people jailed, according to advocacy groups. The UN estimates that 1.7 million people have been forced out of their homes. But the junta's violence has done little in stabilising the country.

Myanmar has faced violence by ethnic minorities for decades. But in the past, the main political contradiction in Burmese society was the peaceful struggle by the pro-democracy movement, led by Ms. Suu Kyi. This time, the pro-democracy movement gave up the Suu Kyian model of peaceful resistance, formed an underground government, established a militia wing and joined hands with the ethnic rebels — an outcome the coup regime did not anticipate. Over two years, new political realities have emerged. The rebels have made substantial territorial gains and kept multiple fronts open, maintaining operational pressure points on the junta. The generals are also facing regional isolation, especially in ASEAN. The new rebel offensive and territorial losses point to the mounting woes of Gen. Min Aung Hlaing's regime. The junta does not have any easy options. A military solution looks improbable. The junta has not come forward for talks; but the rebels, led by a diverse new generation of leaders, have asked the generals to retreat from politics and then hold talks to find peace. They demand a federal democratic system with greater autonomy for ethnic minority regions. If the violence continues, especially in areas bordering India and China, it will have regional repercussions. Major regional players, along with ASEAN, should play a more proactive role to achieve a ceasefire in Myanmar, setting the stage for meaningful dialogue that is aimed at restoring democracy and freedoms.

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DAY 2

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue 2023 (IPRD-2023), the annual apex-level regional strategic dialogue of the Indian Navy, continued today in New Delhi. The three-day conference is being conducted from 15 November 2023 to 17 November 2023.

The theme of the two professional sessions on the second day was “Maritime Connectivity through Shipping and Trade”. The day’s proceedings commenced with a special address by Admiral Karambir Singh (Retd), Chairman of the National Maritime Foundation, and former Chief of the Naval Staff. In his address, Admiral Singh offered a nuanced perspective of maritime connectivity and elaborated upon its six inter-related aspects. He also prognosticated about the potential advancements in shipping and port-connectivity in his talk. The special address was followed by the release of a report “*India-Vietnam Dyadic Approached to Holistic Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific*” by Admiral R Hari Kumar, Chief of Naval Staff.

In the course of discussions that ensued in the first session, eminent panellists from Bangladesh, Canada, India, the UK and the USA, lent their expertise in deliberations on specific issues which included the contemporary and future influence of China on maritime ports, shipping, and trade, specifically in respect of island states of the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific; the opportunities, challenges, and prognosis of the Chennai-Vladivostok corridor; a comparative analysis of ‘Flags of Convenience’ versus national ownership and flagging; and the challenges of ship-recycling in the Indian Ocean Region and solutions thereof. The session was enriched by the sagacity of the moderator, Professor Geoffrey Till.

Special Address by the Hon’ble Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways

The Hon’ble Minister Shri Sarbananda Sonowal, acknowledged the sterling role of the Indian Navy and the National Maritime Foundation in furthering maritime thought in India, especially among the population, through initiatives such as the IPRD. He stated the India’s vision to grow to an eight trillion US dollar economy by 2030, and to 30 trillion USD economy by 2047 would be facilitated in large measure through the growth in her maritime sector. He brought out that the acronym SAGAR (Security and Growth for all in the Region) clearly encapsulated India’s maritime policy and elaborated upon various initiatives of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways in its support. He stressed the need to build resilience of port infrastructure and the maritime sector not only against sea level rise, but also against climate change as a whole. He specifically alluded to the *Harit Sagar* (Green Ocean) initiative of the Government which envisages several new projects related to green hydrogen, green port guidelines, renewable energy and biodiversity protection. The Hon’ble Minister also brought out the connectivity initiatives such as SAGARMALA, inland waterways, the recently announced India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Eastern maritime (Chennai-Vladivostok) corridor. The minister also spoke about the government’s vision to make India a premier ship cruise hub in the region. In conclusion, the minister commended the efforts of the Indian Navy and the NMF in promoting and preserving India’s maritime interests. On completion of his address, the Hon’ble Minister released a book entitled “*Shipbuilding Trends and the Rise of Indo-Pacific*”, published by the NMF.

India's Amrit Kaal maritime vision in the Indo-Pacific is propelled by Hon'ble PM Shri [@narendramodi](https://twitter.com/narendramodi) Ji's mantra of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).

Spoke on our role in the region and growth prospects, at the Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue in New Delhi... pic.twitter.com/BN2xr0zcmH

Live: Speaking at the Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue in New Delhi. <https://t.co/IH1Jp5pAGD>

Professional Sessions

The second session of the day built upon the previous one, and explored in greater detail the trade and shipping facets of maritime connectivity in the Indian Ocean; the lessons emerging for maritime shipping and trade from the Russia-Ukraine conflict; India's engagement with the Djibouti Code of Conduct – Jeddah Amendment (DCoC-JA) and the Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Affairs (CGIMA) for promotion of security of shipping and maritime trade in the IOR; the supply chain challenges in respect of Rare Earth Elements (REE), Rare Metals (RMs), and Energy Critical Elements (ECE) in the Indo-Pacific, and the potential of the SAGARMALA project from a Sri Lankan perspective. This session, which was moderated by VAdm G Ashok Kumar (Retd), National Maritime Security Coordinator (NMSC), Government of India, and included participants from Australia, Germany, India and Sri Lanka. VAdm G Ashok Kumar (Retd) also released a book titled 'Gwadar - A Chinese Gibraltar', authored by Captain Alok Bansal (Retd), Indian Navy at the end of the second session.

The second day of the IPRD 2023 concluded with an enthralling cultural display of Indian dance forms by the School of Creative Hands (SOCH), at the resplendent Manekshaw Centre in New Delhi.





VM/JSN

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Spoke on our role in the region and growth prospects, at the Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue in New Delhi... pic.twitter.com/BN2xr0zcmH

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BUILDING THE FLOOR: ON THE U.S.-CHINA SUMMIT MEETING, LESSONS FOR INDIA

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November 18, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 09:10 am IST

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This week's summit meeting between [U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping](#) in San Francisco is unlikely to resolve any of the major differences that plague [relations between the world's two biggest powers](#). It has, however, offered the promise of much needed respite for the world by stabilising a relationship that has recently been in free fall and brought growing concern. The summit, on the sidelines of APEC, yielded two significant takeaways. The first involved several concrete agreements, including to restart military-to-military direct dialogue and to discuss risk and safety issues involved with artificial intelligence. The second is what both sides have described as establishing a floor to the relationship. That was the goal when the two leaders last met in Bali in 2022. The Bali consensus was, however, blown away by the "spy balloon" incident. This time there is cautious optimism that this attempt at stabilisation has been built on more solid ground. But how long it will last remains an open question, especially with two potentially disruptive political events looming on the horizon. In January next year, Taiwan goes to the polls, and the outcomes could see a further ratcheting up of tensions across the strait. On Taiwan, both sides reiterated their stands, with China cautioning against interference, and the U.S. saying it opposed any change in the status quo. Meanwhile, the U.S. will, next year, go into election mode ahead of polls in November 2024, and campaign season inevitably brings heated rhetoric on China.

A longer term concern — and one that underlines the limits of this modest stabilisation — is a basic point of difference in how they see the future of their relations. As Mr. Xi put it, "the number one question" was whether they were "adversaries or partners". He criticised U.S. framing of the relationship as being fundamentally competitive, saying it would lead to "misinformed policy making, misguided actions, and unwanted results", and asked it to "refrain from flip-flopping, ... and crossing the lines" on issues including Taiwan and export controls. Mr. Biden, however, "emphasised that the U.S. and China are in competition" and described the immediate challenge as how to "manage it responsibly". These differences aside, one crucial point of agreement is the apparent realisation that high-level engagement and open channels are key in preventing competition from sliding into conflict. This offers clear lessons to the India-China relationship, as the crisis along the Line of Actual Control enters its fourth winter. Dialogue in and of itself is not a concession, and as the U.S. and China have realised, building a floor, when ties between major powers are at the risk of free fall, is the first step.

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THE GEOPOLITICAL FALLOUT OF THE ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

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November 18, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 12:16 am IST

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'The situation in Gaza is effectively back to the pre-2005 days' | Photo Credit: AP

One strategic shift and two tactical realignments. These were the driving forces of geopolitics in West Asia in recent years, until October 7. All were interrelated. The United States, the reigning superpower of the region since the end of the Second World War, had begun shifting its strategic focus to more conventional rivals such as Russia and China. But, to maintain its hold over and interests in the region, what the U.S. sought to do was to bring two of the pillars of its regional policy, Israel and the Gulf Arabs, closer. The Abraham Accords were a result of this policy, which was rolled out by the Donald Trump administration and embraced by the U.S. President, Joe Biden. A common Jewish-Arab front in a relatively peaceful West Asia would allow the U.S. to free up resources from the region which it could use elsewhere.

On the other side, the U.S.'s deprioritisation of West Asia led Gulf Arabs to make their own tactical changes in foreign policy for a more predictable and stable relationship in the region. This opened an opportunity for China, which has good ties with countries across the Gulf, to play the role of a peacemaker. The result was the Iran-Saudi reconciliation agreement. The U.S.'s response to the Saudi-Iran détente was to double down on the Abraham Accords. The Biden administration invested itself in talks between the Saudis and the Israelis. It was so confident about prospects of a deal that it unveiled the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) proposal earlier this year, which hinged on Arab-Israeli peace, and sold it as an alternative to China's outreach into the region. Then came the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel.

Hamas, which has been controlling Gaza since 2007, looked at these two realignments differently. For Hamas, a Sunni Islamist militant group, the coming together of Iran, a Shia theocratic republic which also has been its patron for years, and Saudi Arabia, a Sunni monarchy that has been wary of the Hamas brand of political Islam, is a welcome development. But it saw Saudi Arabia normalising ties with Israel, which has been occupying Palestinian territories at least since 1967, as a setback.

In 1978, when the Camp David Agreement was reached, Egypt got the Israelis to sign the Framework For Peace Agreement, which became the blueprint for the Oslo process in the 1990s. Jordan signed its peace treaty with Israel only after the first Oslo Accord was signed in

1993. But when the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Morocco signed the Abraham Accords in 2020, Israel did not make any concessions for the Palestinians. This was the clearest sign yet that Arabs, especially Gulf Arabs, were ready to delink the Palestine question from their engagement with Israel, which boosted Tel Aviv's efforts to localise the Palestine issue — to treat it as a mere security nuisance while continuing the occupation without consequences. When Saudi Arabia and Israel were in talks, nobody expected the Benjamin Netanyahu government, the most far-right government in Israel's history comprising settler extremists and ultra-Orthodox Zionists, to offer concessions to the Palestinians.

So, understandably, one of the goals of the October 7 Hamas attack was to break the walls of localisation, re-regionalise the Palestine issue, and thereby scuttle the Saudi-Israel peace bid. Israel's vengeful onslaught on the Gaza Strip, which followed the Hamas attack, killing at least 11,500 Palestinians, a vast majority of them women and children, made sure that Hamas met its goal, at least for now.

Both the Arabs and Israel were ready to sidestep the Palestine question and chart a new course of partnership. But new regional realities emerged after October 7. The Palestine issue has now come back to the fore of the West Asian geopolitical cauldron.

Second, Israel's disproportionate and indiscriminate attack on Gaza has triggered massive protests across the Arab Street, mounting enormous pressure on monarchs and dictators. Arab countries, which witnessed violent destabilising street protests and civil strife just 10 years ago, cannot completely turn away from the growing pan-Arab sympathy with the Palestinians and the antipathy towards Israel.

Third, there is always the Iran factor. Ever since the Palestine issue got re-regionalised, Iran has stepped up its pro-Palestine rhetoric and called for collective action against Israel, while its proxies, the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon, have launched limited attacks on Israel. Iran is trying to claim the leadership of the Islamic world, bridging the Shia-Sunni divide. This has left Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries with difficult choices. They can either ignore the anger in the Arab Street, letting Iran take up the cause and go ahead with the planned peace agreement with Israel or halt the talks and return to the original King Abdullah Initiative, which called for the formation of an independent Palestine state based on the 1967 border in return for Arab recognition of Israel. The Saudis convened an Islamic summit on Gaza, which saw the landmark visit by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to the Kingdom, and reiterated its call for the creation of a Palestine state based on the 1967 borders for peace and security in the region. In effect, Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi Crown Prince, has relinked the Palestine issue with peace talks with Israel. This is a setback for both America and Israel.

The U.S. might still hope that the situation would be conducive to reboot the Abraham Accords once the dust settles. This is entirely possible. But a key challenge is that it is still not clear what Mr. Netanyahu's endgame is in Gaza. He has already signalled that Israeli troops would continue to play an overall security role in the enclave — which means, Israel would reoccupy the territory from where it withdrew in 2005. The U.S. had proposed that post the war, the Palestinian Authority, which runs parts of the West Bank with limited powers, should take over Gaza as well. But Mr. Netanyahu has shot down that proposal. So, if Israel reoccupies the territory, home to 2.2 million people living in distress and misery, the current wave of violence would only be the beginning of a long spell.

The Iran-Saudi reconciliation, under Chinese mediation, itself was a setback for the U.S. In recent years, Arab countries have also shown an increasing hunger for autonomy. The UAE and Saudi Arabia refused to join American sanctions against Russia after the Ukraine war. Saudi Arabia continued its Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Plus

cooperation with Moscow, defying Washington's requests and diktats. China is playing an increasingly greater role in the Gulf, which includes secret plans to build a military facility in the UAE. The current crisis is expediting these changes in the regional dynamics. With the Saudi-Israel peace plan derailed and the Iranian President having visited the Kingdom to discuss Israel's war on Gaza, what Washington is witnessing is the limits of the U.S.-brokered Abraham Accords and the widening scope of the China-brokered Iran-Saudi détente.

The situation in Gaza is effectively back to the pre-2005 days, but the geopolitical reality is entirely different from the early 2000s when the U.S. was the sole superpower in the region. Russia and China may not replace America in West Asia in the near future given the U.S.'s huge military presence, but the growing footprint of other great powers is offering space for better manoeuvrability for regional players. By tying itself deeply with Mr. Netanyahu's brutal, endless war on Gaza, the Biden administration has put the U.S. in a difficult position in a region that is already in a flux.

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INDIA AND JAPAN CONVERGE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (left) and Philippine Transportation Secretary Jaime Bautista in Manila on November 4, 2023. Mr. Bautista has noted that the Philippine government is willing to tap both India and Japan for development assistance. | Photo Credit: AFP

Upon [dropping](#) a series of Chinese-led infrastructure projects due to sustainability and geopolitical concerns, the Philippines is now redirecting its attention to Japan and India as alternative sources of development and security. Transportation Secretary Jaime Bautista reaffirmed this earlier this month when he [noted](#) that the Philippine government is willing to tap both countries for development assistance. This statement intersects with Manila's desire to deepen and broaden its security and economic partnerships with like-minded partners amidst Beijing's growing unwillingness to act and behave like a responsible neighbour.

Under the leadership of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the Philippines has been steadfast in securing its sovereignty and sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea against China's revisionist interests in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, at the heart of Marcos Jr.'s foreign policy lies the intent to work closely with like-minded traditional and non-traditional partners with similar goals, interests, and concerns in the region. Accordingly, Manila's attribution of both Tokyo and New Delhi as important traditional and non-traditional partners allows all three democracies to explore new opportunities for multi-faceted strategic cooperation. The past few months have also witnessed significant developments in this regard.

The Philippines and Japan share a close strategic partnership, with the former being Manila's major investor and its largest source of overseas development assistance (ODA). While the partnership traditionally functioned in the context of the United States hub-and-spokes system, bilateral ties are now displaying significant momentum as an independent force, with Tokyo seeking to play a more prominent security role amidst Manila's desire to bolster its defence network and maritime security capabilities in the region. The historic visit of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to the Philippines marked a turning point in the trajectory of bilateral ties. From being [the first recipient](#) of Japan's overseas security assistance (OSA) to formalising [negotiations](#) for a reciprocal access agreement (RAA), the meeting between Marcos Jr. and Kishida paved the way for a "[golden age](#)" in the Philippines-Japan strategic partnership, which has the makings of more regularised military-to-military engagements.

Similarly, the bilateral partnership between the Philippines and India has witnessed noteworthy advancements as Manila is now more willingly incorporating New Delhi in its strategic

calculations. The past few months witnessed essential milestones in the burgeoning bilateral relationship, encompassing the [visit](#) of Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Enrique Manalo to New Delhi and the [signing](#) of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Philippine and Indian Coast Guards, which will allow both sides to improve their interoperability, intelligence sharing, and maritime domain awareness. More recently, India has also [offered](#) to supply the Philippine Coast Guard with seven indigenously manufactured helicopters based on a soft loan agreement with extended payment terms. This potential agreement also comes at the heels of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile delivery to the Southeast Asian country later this year.

Thus, Japan and India's bolstered engagements in Southeast Asia complement the interest of resident countries like the Philippines to lessen their susceptibility to China's expanding economic clout and deepening power projection capabilities. Forging robust ties with friendly regional powers is crucial to Southeast Asian countries' hedging strategies, especially as the U.S.-China competition continues to intensify. In fact, based on the authoritative [State of Southeast Asian Survey of 2023](#), Japan and India are the top two choices of Southeast Asian countries for alternative Indo-Pacific strategic partners. Therefore, the contemporary structural conditions serve as an opportunity for Japan and India to operationalise their shared vision for the Indo-Pacific, in general, and Southeast Asia, in particular.

The India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership is best defined through the robust ties both major Indo-Pacific democracies share. In terms of security, New Delhi and Tokyo constantly engage in varied platforms ranging from regular bilateral military exercises and two-plus-two meetings to multilateral frameworks such as the Quad and the G20. Moreover, both countries also share similar threat perceptions vis-à-vis an increasingly assertive and disruptive China. In fact, in its 2022 National Security Strategy, Tokyo [declared](#) China as an "unprecedented and greatest strategic challenge", while Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also recently [highlighted](#) the need to counter Chinese aggression.

Beyond defence cooperation, New Delhi and Tokyo have also embarked on a third-country cooperation model in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. In 2017, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his former counterpart Shinzo Abe welcomed collaborative efforts in establishing industrial growth and development networks across Asia and Africa, creating the Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). While the project eventually slowed down due to geopolitical turbulence and the economic constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, both countries have recently explored new third-country cooperation models throughout the region. Among them are the emerging trilateral partnerships between India, Japan, and [Bangladesh](#) and a similar framework between India, Japan, and [Sri Lanka](#).

Accordingly, as India is significantly deepening and broadening its ties with Southeast Asian countries, such as the Philippines, New Delhi should consider taking its third-country developmental model with Tokyo into the sub-region of the greater Indo-Pacific at a time when resident countries are looking for alternative sources of development and security amidst the polarising dynamics of the U.S.-China power competition.

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GLIMMER OF HOPE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE ISRAEL-HAMAS DEAL

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November 23, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 07:38 am IST

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The [Israel-Hamas deal](#) to release hostages and Palestinian prisoners in return for a pause in fighting offers a much-needed humanitarian relief to the 2.3 million people of the Gaza Strip who have been living in unspeakable misery since October 7. According to the deal, clinched in talks mediated by Qatar, Hamas will release 50 civilian hostages while Israel will release 150 Palestinian prisoners. Both sides will also halt fighting for four days. The Israeli government has stated that if Hamas releases more hostages, the pause in fighting could be extended, offering a glimmer of hope for securing a more sustained ceasefire. Hamas captured about 240 hostages during its [October 7 cross-border attack in Israel](#), in which at least 1,200 people were killed. When Israel launched its counterattack the same day, it promised to “crush Hamas”, eliminate security threats from Gaza for good, and free the hostages. In the past six weeks, Israeli attacks have turned Gaza into a graveyard, [killing at least 13,000 Palestinians, a vast majority of them women and children](#). But Israel simultaneously began indirect talks with Hamas seeking to free hostages, which resulted in the current deal.

But this is not enough. What the people of Gaza, who have been bombed, shelled, displaced, and denied essential supplies such as food, fuel and medicines, immediately want is a lasting ceasefire. Israel initially refused to have any talks with “Hamas terrorists” and promised to dismantle the Islamist militant group. Israel’s anger was understandable given the horrors unleashed by Hamas. But in its response, a vengeful Israel is collectively punishing the people of Gaza. Several Israeli Ministers have issued dangerous and repugnant statements, from nuclear threats to welcoming epidemics in southern Gaza. But after six weeks of fighting, Israel is far from achieving its own declared objectives, which raises questions about the effectiveness of its military strategy. It stormed Al-Shifa Hospital, Gaza’s largest medical facility, alleging that a Hamas command centre was located beneath it. More than a week since, Israel is yet to produce any credible evidence to back this claim. But the fact that Israel and Hamas have reached a deal suggests that both sides are ready to engage with each other even amidst high decibel propaganda and bloody fighting. They should build on the momentum generated by the deal and extend the pause into a full-fledged ceasefire. That is the only way to release all the hostages, provide lasting relief to the Palestinians, and calm spiralling tensions in West Asia.

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END THE SECRECY: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE ACTIONS OF INDIAN AGENCIES ABROAD

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India's decision [to resume e-visas for Canadian citizens](#) worldwide is a significant step towards restoring travel ties with Canada, [which were snapped in September](#) during the diplomatic stand-off following [Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations](#) that Indian government agents had masterminded the [assassination of a Khalistani leader](#). While India had restored certain categories of the visa last month, e-visa and tourist visas remained under suspension due to the threat to Indian diplomats from Khalistani groups. According to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, the restoration of visas for Canadians was due to the "situation becoming more secure". However, the step does not necessarily mean a restoration of normal ties. After India cancelled visas for Canadians and demanded that Canada cut down its diplomatic strength by two-thirds for "parity purposes", Canada had flown out [more than 40 of its diplomats](#) and their family members and reduced its visa issuance capacity as well. With travel visas curtailed on both sides, business and investment ties too suffered, especially as Canada had already suspended talks for a Free Trade Agreement after the killing of the Khalistani leader, Hardeep Singh Nijjar. While Mr. Jaishankar and the Canadian Foreign Minister met each other in the U.S. in September, political ties have virtually shut down.

In addition, a new controversy, sparked by Washington, has emerged over [a report](#) that [Indian government agencies were plotting to target another Khalistani leader](#), Sikhs for Justice leader Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, in the U.S. Like Nijjar, Pannun, a U.S.-Canadian dual national, is wanted in India for inciting violence against Indians and Indian diplomats, and for recently issuing a "warning" to travellers [not to take "Air India" flights](#) after November 19. This menacing statement harks back to the bombing of Air India Flight 182 out of Montreal, which killed all 329 on board, in 1985. A White House statement confirmed news reports that U.S. officials had raised the issue during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Washington in June. This indicates that the issue over Khalistani separatists is far from dying down, despite New Delhi's conversations with western partners at the 2+2 dialogues with the U.S. and Australia, respectively, and Mr. Jaishankar's recent visit to the U.K. In sharp contrast to the recent past, the government, which had rejected the Canadian allegations as "absurd and motivated", has been surprisingly accommodating of the U.S.'s allegations. The External Affairs Ministry issued a statement that said India is examining the "U.S. inputs" and would take "necessary follow-up action". While these are no doubt matters of national security, it is time the government shed some of the secrecy surrounding its dual responses and crafted its future course of action more coherently.

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IT IS AN INHUMANE DECISION TO EXPEL AFGHAN REFUGEES

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Afghan refugees with their belongings sit atop a truck as they head from a makeshift camp near the Afghanistan-Pakistan Torkham border to Jalalabad, after their deportation from Pakistan, in the Ghani Khel district of Nangarhar Province on November 12, 2023. | Photo Credit: AFP

While international attention is focused on Israel's merciless bombing of Gaza and its ground attacks, [Pakistan's decision to expel 1.5 million undocumented Afghan refugees](#) in the beginning of winter is escaping sufficient global scrutiny. The Israeli action, since October 7, has resulted in thousands of deaths, including of infants, and widespread destruction of territory. Even hospitals have not been spared. It may therefore be considered inapt to mention the Pakistani decision along with the Israeli action. The intention is not to compare them but to emphasise that the expulsion of Afghan refugees to an uncertain future is unjustified and will result in deprivation, if not starvation, for many of them. Apart from being inhumane, this expulsion is also contrary to the ties of brotherhood that Pakistan claims binds the Afghans with its own people.

Editorial | [Scapegoating: On Afghan refugees in Pakistan](#)

Significantly, some of the refugees who have been pushed out have lived all their lives in Pakistan. Many built businesses, obviously with Pakistani official complicity, which they are being compelled to sell at dirt cheap prices. This is because Pakistan is permitting departing refugees to take only 50,000 with them. The decision is also particularly harsh for girls who have been studying in Pakistani schools and colleges and will now have to abandon their studies in Afghanistan. More than two-thirds of the Afghanistan population is facing a humanitarian crisis. Hence, for the Taliban authorities, making arrangements for their incoming compatriots from Pakistan is, as Caroline Gluck of the United Nation Refugee Agency reported on November 17, "a daunting task".

While Pakistan is supporting its move as being diplomatically, politically and morally correct, the fact is that this decision has been taken on account of the country's frustration with the Afghan Taliban administration's refusal to rein in the Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP). Caretaker Pakistani Prime Minister Anwaar ul Haq Kakar told the media on November 8 in Islamabad, "After the establishment of the Interim Afghan government in Afghanistan in August 2021, we had a strong hope...[that] strict action would be taken against Pakistan-opposing groups, especially the TTP, and they would not be allowed to use Afghan soil against Pakistan". That

hope was unrealistic even though the Pakistani establishment nurtured the Afghan Taliban for over two decades after they were ousted from Kabul in November 2001. Apart from ideological and ethnic affinities between the Afghan Taliban and the TTP, the former wish to retain the latter as a card against Pakistan. All through history, the Afghans have been shrewd practitioners of realpolitik. The Afghan Taliban are no different.

The Afghan Taliban's approach towards the TTP has enabled the Pakistani group to increase its attacks on the Pakistani security forces in recent months. Pakistan claims that terrorist acts in the country have increased by 60% since the Afghan Taliban came to power and that 2,267 Pakistanis have lost their lives in TTP attacks. This is enraging the army. The Pakistani generals feel that the Afghan Taliban would not been able to carry out their successful struggle against the U.S. and its NATO allies in Afghanistan but for the safe havens that Pakistan gave them, and so they should be thankful to Pakistan. What the generals should know is that there is no gratitude in global affairs. Indeed, far from appreciation for Pakistan, Afghans feel that the country has used them for its own interests. Pakistan's decision on the refugees will only consolidate that sentiment. The Afghan Taliban would not be immune from this widespread emotion against Pakistan.

Speaking at the Margalla Dialogue in Islamabad on November 15, Mr. Kakar hoped that Afghanistan's governance challenges and the recent transformations would get settled because that would be "pivotal" for Pakistan's connectivity with Central Asia. Defending Pakistan's decision on refugees at the Dialogue, *Dawn* newspaper reported Mr. Kakar as saying "issues would settle the day Kabul would have a legitimate government". The interim Afghan government spokesman rejected this contention. He stressed that the "incumbent" system is legitimate and enjoyed popular support.

This is not the first time that Mr. Kakar has said that the Taliban government is not "legitimate". He said so during a TV interview two months ago. Indeed, he went further to state that the idea of a Westphalian state could not be applied to Afghanistan because its governance structure had "multiple layers". He also expressed doubts about the efficacy of a "central authority". These comments were made in the context of Pakistani allegations of "terrorist incursions" into Pakistani territory from Afghanistan. He refused to directly respond to a question on whether Pakistan was willing to enter Afghan territory to combat terrorism. However, he said that Pakistan will fulfil its responsibility to defend its borders "at any cost". Unfortunately, it is the hapless Afghan refugees who are paying the "cost".

Pakistan and Afghanistan's mutual negativity greatly accelerated once the Soviet-supported communist government came to power in 1978. Pakistan became the base camp for the Afghan jihad, which was supported by the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and China. The withdrawal of the Soviets in 1989 and the fall of Mohammad Najibullah in 1992 saw Pakistan intervening in Afghan affairs to form a pro-Pakistan Mujahideen government. Its efforts were repudiated by the Mujahideen groups, and the Pakistani favourite, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, failed to deliver. Pakistan then turned to the Taliban which had emerged in 1994. It helped the Taliban gain control of almost all of the country. After the Taliban were ousted from the country in the wake of 9/11, Pakistan ensured that the Taliban insurgency was successful.

What Pakistan does not understand is that the Afghan Taliban in power in Kabul, even if they do not have international recognition, will not do its bidding. This includes approaches towards India. Clearly, the refugee expulsion is to create fissures among the Taliban, who are Pashtun. That would not be easy, for there is deep resentment among Afghan Pashtuns against Pakistan.

Vivek Katju is a retired diplomat

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