

FAULTLINES

The K.P.S. Gill Journal of Conflict & Resolution

Volume 27

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edited by
AJAI SAHNI



Kautilya Books

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THE INSTITUTE FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT



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FAULTLINES: THE K.P.S. GILL JOURNAL OF CONFLICT & RESOLUTION

Edited by Ajai Sahni

FAULTLINES - THE SERIES

FAULTLINES focuses on various sources and aspects of existing and emerging conflict in the Indian subcontinent. Terrorism and low-intensity wars, communal, caste and other sectarian strife, political violence, organised crime, policing, the criminal justice system and human rights constitute the central focus of the Journal.

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Foreword

At a time of unprecedented and enveloping crisis, and with millions dying of the Chinese virus, across the world, conventional and enduring security threats appear to have receded somewhat from public attention. The abrupt outburst of the Israel-Palestine conflict in May 2021, however, made it abundantly clear that, despite the devastation wrought by the global pandemic, enduring conflicts are far from resolution, or even deferral. China's sustained and sinister consolidation of territorial dominance along its land and sea borders, indeed, takes advantage of the distraction that currently afflicts the international community, to push a creeping occupation into neighbouring countries. The violence in Afghanistan, in the wake of America's progressive drawdown and imminent withdrawal, reminds us – as do periodic reports of terrorist attacks in other parts of the world – that terrorism is far from a thing of the past, and may well see a significant resurgence in the wake of another dramatic 'victory of Islam' against a global superpower – echoes of what occurred in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989.

Indeed, on many other parameters as well, the pandemic has significantly increased existing risks to security. As the *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime* notes,

The pandemic has created fertile ground for crime to flourish. The economic downturn and associated lockdowns are also exacerbating the vulnerabilities of the most disadvantaged groups. Organized crime groups are stepping in where States are unable to provide support to

those most at risk of being left behind and using this to expand their reach.

In Myanmar, the military coup and the quick dismissal of the elected government, demonstrated that the authoritarian agenda continues to flourish, and that an arduous peace process that appeared to be approaching fruition, has easily been sacrificed by the military *junta* there, provoking a return to violence by many groups that were party to a ceasefire agreement. But Myanmar is far from alone in its trajectory towards authoritarianism – extremist ideologies and governmental abuse and suppression of freedoms is no longer restricted to rogue and openly totalitarian regimes. Increasingly unsubtle tyrannies are emerging in purportedly democratic states across the world.

Escalating domestic violence, in particular violence against women, has been another widely noticed feature of the pandemic, even as the lockdowns, the unemployment, the collapse of businesses, the dislocation, and the distress and mental illness that have resulted, create an environment fraught with tension, frustration and rage.

There is also a significant loss of confidence in governments across the world, as administrations failed to cope with the magnitude of the challenges created by the pandemic, even as partisan political rivalries – rather than national or human interest – tended to dominate responses in many countries. Equally, faith in international institutions, has been sharply eroded, particularly in view of the dubious statements and questionable conduct of the World Health Organisation leadership in the initial stages and in the inquiries into the origins of the Chinese virus.

The progressive collapse of the Western hegemony – led by the USA, for a brief moment in history, the ‘sole superpower’ – has opened up the world to vicious and potentially catastrophic new ‘great games.’ While China and Russia appear to have joined together as partners of opportunity, to exploit the growing vacuums in global power, many lesser players are also jockeying

for a place at the high table – and are each of these is willing to use all means available to fulfil their reckless ambitions.

All present indices suggest that the world is moving into a time of greater troubles, and these will naturally and enormously be augmented by the inexorable devastation human demography and consumption is inflicting on the planet.

A tremendous effort of will and intellect will be needed to contain and reverse these toxic trends. Absent a global and coordinated effort and the evolution of a paradigm that goes beyond traditional competition, violent contestation and obsessive hyper-consumption, the human species is now confronted with a foreseeable threat of catastrophe, if not extinction. Understanding, managing and resolving present conflicts is an integral element of this struggle for human survival.

Ajai Sahni

New Delhi July 2, 2021

**Galwan Valley, Covid &
Great Power Politics
in the Indo-Pacific**

Ashok Sharma*

Over the past two decades, the two Asian giants – China and India – have emerged as major players on the international stage. Their concomitant rise as an economic powerhouse has enabled them to wield influence on the global platform. China and India share several common traits. The two are the world's most populous nations, the catalysts of economic growth, the fastest-growing major economies, and both face the daunting task of lifting the standards of living of large proportions of their vast populations. In the past too, India and China, as two ancient sister civilisations, have had shared religious, cultural, and trade links. Both have been victims of colonial powers. Together, India and China shared 50 per cent of the world GDP till the second half of the 18th century.

However, since the 1962 Sino-Indian War, their relationship has been mired in suspicion and mistrust. Peaceful negotiations,

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summit-level talks, huge India-China bilateral trade, and many attempts to restore normalcy since the 1990s, from both sides, have not yielded significant results. Instead, the India-China relationship is stuck in a classic security dilemma and remains rough and volatile.

Over the past decade, their growing economic capabilities have enabled them to spend more on defence and to expand their influence in their immediate neighbourhood and beyond. Both are also pitched as rising great powers competing for the market, resources, energy, and global influence. Their competitive relationship has further intensified and is evident in the standoffs between Indian and the Chinese troops in the Himalayan border, their growing naval build-up in the Indo-Pacific, and their diplomatic tussle at international forums, including the United Nations and the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Since April 2020, the India-China relationship has worsened and the two world powers have been at a standoff against each other along their ill-defined border on the Line of Actual Conflict (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh. At the outset, the standoff was the culmination of long-standing border disputes and a continuing conflicting relationship, which has aggravated in recent years. The standoff on the Indo-Tibet border finally turned into a deadly conflict on the night of June 15, 2020, in the Galwan Valley, the first fatal confrontation between the two sides since 1975. China claimed the Indian territory of Galwan Valley as its own, a claim India rejected as a unilateral attempt to alter the *status quo*, and as unfounded, unacceptable, and unreasonable. Again, in August 2020, India blamed China for provoking military tensions on the LAC twice within a week.¹ China denied both charges and

1 “India accuses China of ‘provocative military movements’ at border”, *BBC News*, August 31, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-53971397>.

blamed India for the stand-off. In September, China accused India of firing shots at its troops, which India denied, and accused Chinese troops of firing into the air.² Then again, on January 20, 2021, in a clash along the border in India's Sikkim state, soldiers on both sides were injured. Efforts along both diplomatic and military channels to defuse the standoff finally resulted in disengagement along the border from both sides. The military disengagement began with China pulling back its troops two kilometres from the Galwan Valley on July 6, 2020. On February 10, 2021, both sides began to de-escalate on the north and south banks of the Pangong Lake.³

The deadly Galwan Valley standoff is primarily attributed to the long-standing India-China strategic rivalry, differing perceptions about the LAC, recent infrastructure development in the border areas, and the military build-up at the LAC. But, the deadly India-China clash, not seen since 1975, has a larger canvass that needs to be assessed in the context of China's desperate attempt to use the humanitarian crises of the COVID-19 outbreak to push its geopolitical goals, as well as the emerging patterns of great power politics, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

This paper examines the latest India-China conflict in the context of their complex border dispute, the recent standoff culminating in the Galwan Valley standoff, the negotiations, disengagement process, and the triggering of the great power strategic rivalry amidst COVID-19 geopolitics, evident in the

2 "China says Indian troops fired 'provocative' shots in border dispute", *BBC News*, September 8, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-54067400>.

3 "India, China agree to pull back troops from disputed Himalayan lake after months-long standoff", *ABC News*, February 11, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-11/india-china-agree-to-pull-back-troops-from-himalayan-lake/13146658>.

Ashok Sharma

Indo-Pacific region. In the end, the analysis concludes that, despite the de-escalation and withdrawal of troops at the LAC, the relationship between India and China will remain tense and suspicious, and the likelihood of such standoffs in the future cannot be denied. The India-China strategic rivalry, moreover, is going to be further aggravated by the revival of the US-China strategic rivalry.

AN ENDURING BORDER DISPUTE AND THE INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT ALONG THE LAC

At the outset, the violent conflict on the night of June 15, 2020, in Galwan Valley was a culmination of more than a month of tension that was building up on the LAC. The standoff is attributed to divergent perceptions about the LAC – a 3,488-kilometre-long undefined border between India and China – their enduring strategic rivalry since 1962, and increased patrolling and infrastructure build-up along the India-China border in recent years. The Galwan Valley clash goes back to the nearly six decades of enduring conflict between India and China over the border issue, which dates back to the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The India-China border dispute, moreover, is rooted in the 1914 McMahon Line Agreement between British India, Tibet, and China, over the status of Tibet, which sought to acknowledge Tibet as an autonomous region. However, China accepted neither Tibet's autonomy nor the McMahon Line. In the post-World War II period, after gaining independence, India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru pitched for Indian-Chinese brotherhood (Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai) and advocated warm ties between the two Asian giants, emphasizing Asian solidarity in the emerging world order. Nehru also backed China's candidature for the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). However, China responded to India's friendly initiatives with belligerence. As a result,

the two Asian powers could not forge cordial ties and their relationship began to worsen. Finally, the growing tension over Tibet culminated in a full-fledged war between India and China in 1962.⁴

China dominated the war in which 1,000 Indian soldiers were killed and around 3,000 were captured, while an estimated 800 Chinese soldiers were killed.⁵ China also occupied about 45,000 square kilometres of Indian territory in the Himalayas. Five years later, in September and October 1967, a full-fledged Sino-Indian war broke out again, in which India prevailed, destroying Chinese fortifications and pushing back Chinese troops. An estimated 340 Chinese and 150 Indians soldiers were killed.

Serious standoffs also took place in 1987 and 2013, but full-fledged wars were averted. Nevertheless, the two sides were again on the verge of conflict during the 2017 India-China standoff on the Doklam issue. India responded swiftly to foil the Chinese intrusion attempt by marshalling around 40,000 troops along the border.⁶

In recent years, standoffs have also been frequent because both countries have increased their road connectivity for the

4 For detail see, Ashok Sharma, *India's Pursuit of Energy Security: Domestic Measures, Foreign Policy and Geopolitics*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2019; Bruce Riedel, *JFK's Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, the CIA, and Sino-Indian War*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC., 2015.

5 Russell Goldman, "India-China Border Dispute: A Conflict Explained", *The New York Times*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/17/world/asia/india-china-border-clashes.html>.

6 A. Sharma, "The recent deadly India-China border clash", *New Zealand International Review*, Volume 45, Issue 5, 2020, pp. 4-7; Russell Goldman, op.cit.; A Sharma, "India-China Standoff Ends India's Hopes for Asian Unity", *Australian Outlook*, July 2, 2020, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/india-china-standoff-ends-indias-hopes-for-asian-unity/>.

smooth movement of troops along the LAC. The growing economies of both countries have enabled them to focus on spending heavily on enhancing their defence capabilities and modernising military assets, and border security related infrastructure: building roads, rail links, and airfields along the LAC. This has also aggravated suspicion leading to accidental and sometimes deliberate incursions.

China has been building roads and railways links on the Sino-Indian border since the 1950s, in line with Mao's famous line dictum, when he ordered the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to "advance while building roads". As a result, a vast road and railway network to link Tibet to provinces of Xinjiang, Yunnan, Sichuan and Qinghai has been constructed.⁷ In recent years, China's infrastructure-building activities have intensified to enable the smooth movement of its troops and weapons on the LAC. Some of the notable Chinese projects in the pipeline are: linking of the old Xinjiang-Tibet Road to National Highway G219 running along nearly the entire China-India border; a concrete road between Medog and Zayu near India's Arunachal Pradesh State; a new rail line to connect Shigatse – the second largest city in Tibet – to Chengdu via Nyingchi, close to the Indian border; and a rail link between Shigatse and Yadong, a trading centre next to the Himalayan Indian State of Sikkim. China has also focused on its air power capabilities and has built about a dozen airfields.

After years of negligence, over the past decade and a half, India has also stepped up its defence on the LAC, not only increasing the number of troops and improving weaponry, but

7 Indrani Bagchi, "LAC face-off: Our border infra not your business, India tells China", *The Times of India*, October 16, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/our-border-infra-not-your-business-china-told/articleshow/78691265.cms>.

extensively focusing on building posts, roads, and railways to counter the Chinese forces and their logistical vantage. India's road and railway construction programme in the Himalayan region along the LAC is massive. India has approved 73 strategic roads and 125 bridges, and nine railway projects along the LAC for the strategic positioning of heavy weapons. India has also focused on enhancing its air-power capabilities along the LAC, increasing and modernising its network of helipads and Advanced Landing Grounds, in addition to its 25 airfields along the LAC, and installation of the surveillance equipment along the entire LAC in Ladakh at Qizil Zilga, 70 kilometres east of Daulat Beg Oldi.⁸

But it is the new road to a high-altitude Indian forward airbase that reportedly triggered the deadly clash in the Galwan Valley. The 255-kilometre (140 mile) Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi (DSDBO) road – which winds through mountain passes up to the world's highest airstrip more than 5,000 metres above sea level in the Ladakh region – was completed in 2019, after almost two decades of work. Its completion could enhance India's ability to move troops and materiel rapidly in a conflict.

India's recent building work, including the DSDBO road, has irked China. This was clearly stated in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's statement

8 Pratik Jakhar, "India and China race to build along a disputed frontier", *BBC News*, July 30, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53171124>; Snehes Alex Philip, "China continues infrastructure build-up along LAC, amid disengagement talks with India", *The Print*, November 20, 2020, <https://theprint.in/defence/china-continues-infrastructure-build-up-along-lac-amid-disengagement-talks-with-india/548504/>; Snehes Alex Philip, "After missile sites, China now builds heliports along LAC in Ladakh and near Doklam," *The Print*, August 31, 2020, <https://theprint.in/defence/after-missile-sites-china-now-builds-heliports-along-lac-in-ladakh-and-near-doklam/492534/>.

that urged India to refrain from stepping up of infrastructure building and military deployment along the border on the Indian side which is the main cause of tensions.⁹

The stand-off at Doklam in 2017, on the other hand, was sparked because of the construction activities by China to expand the border road near the tri-junction between India, China and Bhutan, threatening India's Siliguri Corridor. This infrastructure development became one of the main contributors to the face-off between Indian and Chinese troops.

In recent years, especially after the Doklam standoff, there have been increased and rigorous patrols along the border, rapid increases in the frequency of ingressions, encounters, and fistfights. The increased mobility has resulted in larger numbers of troops, heavier equipment, and temporary infrastructure moving forward quickly. This results in ever more intense shows of military strength. Indian and Chinese forces are often taken by surprise as there is no agreed and established mechanism to inform each other about their patrolling plans in advance, frequently resulting in a sudden confrontation.¹⁰

Past de-escalation processes at the LAC at the higher official and top political levels have failed to prevent such standoffs. There is a disconnect between the higher military and political levels, on the one hand, and the troops who operate on the ground. These ground-level troops and officers are often driven by emotions, and the lack of a mutually accepted set of rules of engagement, unavailability of proper communication

9 "Urge India to refrain from complicating situation along border, says China", *The Economic Times*, January 25, 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/urge-india-to-refrain-from-complicating-situation-along-border-says-china/articleshow/80450447.cms>.

10 Swaran Singh, "Recognizing the changed reality of India-China relations", *Global Times*, July 8, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1193925.shtml>.

channels, and the disagreement over the official maps claiming the land, complicate the situation.¹¹ The PLA has often violated the LAC and crossed into the Indian side while patrolling, and this, in recent years, has met with strong resistance from the Indian forces. After a protracted and restrained standoff, the Galwan Valley conflict sharply worsened the situation.

The infrastructure and road building activities of both sides have only heightened suspicion, as each tends to see the construction activities of the other as a deliberate attempt to augment their respective strategic edge. Tension builds up whenever a new project is announced or initiated on either side, only adding to the prevailing mistrust and the security dilemma.

The way China continues to work rapidly to enhance infrastructure build-up, including roads and bridges along the LAC, even in the midst of disengagement talks with India, gives rise to speculation that China will attack India with greater force in the near future. India, too, has ramped up its infrastructure building along the LAC. Experts believe that it is likely that China has agreed to disengage because of the freezing weather, and that PLA forces might come later in greater strength and at a faster speed. With large numbers of upcoming roads, railway network, and bridges emerging on the Indian and Chinese sides of the LAC, there is enough ground to believe in a rising risk of further confrontations in the Himalayan region between Indian and Chinese soldiers.

11 Huma Siddiqui, "India China Galwan Valley standoff: Why have the India-China tensions escalated? Experts explain", *The Indian Express*, June 16, 2020, <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/india-china-galwan-valley-standoff-why-have-the-india-china-tensions-escalated-experts-explain/1993321/>.

DIVERTING INDIA'S STRATEGIC FOCUS FROM THE INDO-PACIFIC

In recent years, India's defence preparedness has intensified. According to experts and a recent study by the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School, India is ahead of China in air power with more advanced aircraft and airbases along the LAC. China's J-10 fighter is technically comparable to India's Mirage-2000, and the Indian Su-30MKI is superior to all theatre Chinese fighters, including the additional J-11 and Su-27 models. China possesses around 101 4th-generation fighters and India 122 in the theatre. India's fighter aircrafts are all directed exclusively against China, whereas China must preserve a quotient for a potential Russian offence.

Further, India has fought more wars than China over the past 45 years. China fought her last war against Vietnam in 1979, while India has fought several wars against Pakistan over the years and won all of them, and has also faced a relentless proxy war mounted by Pakistan. India's forces are, consequently, much more battle hardened and have a better familiarity with the terrain because of their protracted conflict with terrorists and insurgents in multiple theatres.¹²

India's defence preparedness and force structure have also more recently been developed to tackle the dual-threat from China and Pakistan. To deter a potential Chinese attack, Indian force preparedness has concentrated on infrastructure

12 Frank O'Donnell and Alexander K. Bollfrass, "The Strategic Postures of China and India: A Visual Guide", Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, March 2020, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/strategic-postures-china-and-india-visual-guide>; "How India military stacks up vis-a-vis Chinese defence forces," *Hindustan Times*, June 19, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/how-india-military-stacks-up-vis-a-vis-chinese-defence-forces/story-OHXDNM1X3al4DBSohTgZRI.html>.

hardening; base resilience; improved air and maritime defence; and redundant command, control, and communications systems.¹³ China, on the other hand, has been almost exclusively engaged with perceived security threats from the US in the South China Sea.

China's aggression against India in the Himalayan border region is also seen as Beijing's strategy to divert New Delhi's attention and resources from the Indian Ocean. Over the past two decades, India has significantly focused on building its capabilities in the Indian Ocean and has emerged as a major Indo-Pacific power. Under "Look East" and "Act East", India has augmented its defence and naval capability in the Indian Ocean and engaged China-wary countries under strategic partnerships with strong military overtones, making it difficult for China to unilaterally map the future of the Indo-Pacific.¹⁴

India's navy is strategically well located on a number of choke points from where a large number of commercial ships traverse. The Indian Navy has acquired a sufficient capacity to efficiently track and prevent the movement of PLA Navy ships and submarines across these choke points into the Indian Ocean. In recent years, India has concentrated on developing its Maritime Domain Knowledge and enhancing its Anti-Submarine Warfare capabilities in all three dimensions (air, land and underwater), to deter China's naval attempt to enter the Indian Ocean.

13 Daniel Kliman, et. al., "Imbalance of Power: India's Military Choices in an Era of Strategic Competition with China", Center for a New American Security, October 23, 2019, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/imbalance-of-power>.

14 For details, see Rory Medcalf, *Contest for the Indo-Pacific: Why China Won't Map the Future*, Monash University Press, Melbourne, 2020; David Brewster, *India as an Asia-Pacific Power*, Routledge, London, 2011.

India's ambitious project to build six nuclear-powered attack submarines, currently under construction, is expected to be a force multiplier for the Indian naval capability to tackle China's naval build-up and increasing military assertion in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which is strategically significant to throttle Chinese ships at the strategically important Strait of Malacca.¹⁵ A large number of Chinese ships carrying goods and oil from Latin America, Africa, and the Persian Gulf traverse through the Indian Ocean. In case of a full-fledged war, the Indian navy is well-placed to cut this supply chain at various choke points in the Indian Ocean, on the shipping lanes running between the straits of Hormuz and Straits of Malacca. This scenario has been a major concern for China, not only due to commercial reasons but also as a major hurdle to Beijing's intent of dominating the Indo-Pacific region.

China, under its 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI), has been taking steps to blunt India's strategic advantage in the Indian Ocean. To this end, China has built and is further developing the Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan province, from where goods and oil will be transported to China through a 1,872 kilometre-long rail line as a part of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by linking Kashgar in China with the Gwadar Port.¹⁶ China is also opening the Northern Sea Route in the Arctic, which could create a 'Polar Silk Road' to blunt India's Indian Ocean advantage. Pakistan's Gwadar Port

15 "India begins project to build 6 nuclear-power submarines", *The Hindu*, January 9, 2018, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/policy/india-begins-project-to-build-6-nuclearpowered-submarines/article9979397.ece>.

16 "Pakistan approves \$7.2bn rail project", *Railway Technology*, June 8, 2020, <https://www.railway-technology.com/news/pakistan-approves-7-2bn-rail-project>.

remains vulnerable to Indian airstrikes, in the case of a full-scale India-China war, which would involve Pakistan as well on the Chinese side.¹⁷ Though these are still under construction and the pipeline is not at full operating capacity, China's policy is clear – that it, too, has a strong foothold in the region, and will blunt and encircle India.

China's naval presence, moreover, has been growing rapidly, which would enable it to project power into the Indian Ocean. According to some experts the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) will have 110 submarines by 2030 and world dominance by mid-century.¹⁸ China views the choke points in the Indian Ocean as strategically and commercially important and has been investing and engaging countries, particularly island nations in the Indian Ocean, under its 'Belt and Road Initiative.' This includes the development of commercial ports, airports, and bases, which India views as China's attempt to encircle India.

But the Strait of Malacca will remain a bottleneck between China's home waters and the Indian Ocean. India through a series of initiatives has not only engaged these island nations on a commercial, diplomatic and strategic front, but has focused strongly on building naval defence in the Indian Ocean. China values the Indian Ocean and any move by India could disrupt its massive trade route. Though China's naval presence in the South China Sea is strong, it is the Indian Navy, which is

17 H.I. Sutton, "Could The Indian Navy Strangle China's Lifeline In The Malacca Strait?", *Forbes*, July 8, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2020/07/08/could-the-indian-navy-strangle-chinas-lifeline-in-the-malacca-strait/?sh=62cac21078e8>.

18 James E. Fanell, "China's global Navy eyeing sea control by 2030, superiority by 2049", *Sunday Guardian*, June 14, 2020, <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/news/chinas-global-navy-eyeing-sea-control-2030-superiority-2049>.

powerful in the Indian Ocean and has a strategic advantage. The latest Chinese attack on Indian soldiers in the Galwan Valley is an attempt to divert India's attention from the Indian Ocean.

Nevertheless, this is not new and China has been pursuing this strategy for a long time. China's backing of Pakistan on all fronts and the China-Pakistan All-Weather Friendship, which goes back to the 1960s, has been aimed to engage India on the north-western front and constrain India in South Asia.¹⁹ The Chinese design to use Pakistan as a front for waging asymmetric war against India goes back to the 1950s, when Zhou Enlai advised Ayub Khan that Pakistan should organise itself for a prolonged battle by raising a military to act behind enemy lines. Much later, Pakistan raised and nurtured *jihadis*, indoctrinated youths in the region with *jihadi* ideology, and started planting armed modules in India in 1992-93. Since then, Pakistan has been using these tactics by masterminding and carrying out terrorist attacks along India's north-western bordering region and in the main cities of India. China is Pakistan's main arms supplier, selling advanced fighter aircraft, supplying missile development capability, upgrading Pakistani submarines, and jointly producing the Joint Strike Fighter-17 aircraft. The Trans-Karakoram Highway, vital for commercial and strategic purposes, connects the northern areas of Pakistan to the Xinjiang Province in China.²⁰ Chinese support to Pakistan is a key aspect of China's strategy of preventing or delaying India's ability to challenge Beijing's growing presence in the

19 J.N. Dixit, *India-Pakistan in War and Peace*, Routledge, New York, 2006; "China, Pakistan reaffirm all-weather friendship," *China Daily*, May 18, 2011, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-05/18/content_12535978.htm.

20 This is revealed in a book authored by a Pakistani national and published in Karachi in 2000; P.C. Katoch, "China: A Threat or Challenge", *CLAWS Journal*, Summer, 2010, pp.79-91.

Indian Ocean and beyond.²¹ While supporting Pakistan, China has put aside the international laws and norms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, as evident in the export of nuclear reactors and technologies to Pakistan. China justifies its action on the ground of strategic reason, including the US-India nuclear deal that made a nuclear exception for India.²² China's military and economic support to Pakistan are part of the its India encirclement strategy.

Terror networks in Pakistan have been one of the strategic balancing moves to keep engage India on the north-western frontier. China has protected the Pakistani terrorist network by using its veto power at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The resolution to designate some of the terrorists in Pakistan at the United Nations have been blocked by China at the UNSC. This has increased dramatically over the past couple of years.

REVIVAL OF THE US-CHINA STRATEGIC RIVALRY AND GREAT GAME

In the Galwan Valley clash, 20 Indian soldiers died as they were taken off guard and outnumbered by the Chinese *actus reus*. In the clash, a primitive brawl, Chinese troops outnumbered Indian troops and used nail-studded metal rods and stones. While India's casualties were known, China hid its casualties, but these were estimated at 43 fatalities by

21 Mohan Guruswamy, "Pakistan-China Relations: Higher than the Mountains, Deeper than the Oceans", *CLAWS Journal*, Summer, 2010, pp. 92-107.

22 Ashok Sharma, *India's Pursuit of Energy Security: Domestic Measures, Foreign Policy and Geopolitics*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2019; Mark Hibbs, "Pakistan Deal Signals China's Growing Nuclear Assertiveness," Carnegie Endowment, April 27, 2010, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=40685>.

media outlets, and 35 confirmed by US intelligence. Chinese state media claimed that hiding the number of deaths would help prevent further escalation of tension.²³ The Chinese army confirmed only one casualty of their Commander, but there were reports of protests in China by the families of deceased Chinese soldiers, and demands to recognise their martyrdom. Finally, nine months later, China officially confirmed the death of four soldiers in February 2021. This is not surprising, as China is known for hiding such deaths, be the casualties during the 1962 India-China War, the drought in 1959-61, or the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁴

According to some reports, the hiding of the casualties during the Galwan Valley clash has been attributed to the internal challenges that the Chinese President Xi Jinping was facing at home. The attack on India and hiding of casualties was to divert the attention of the Chinese citizen to cover his leadership's problems during the COVID-19 pandemic, handling of the outbreak and the trajectory of the worst decline

23 James Oaten, "China, India blame each other for border clash as death toll remains unknown", *ABC News*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-18/china-india-blame-clash-casualties-pledge-to-end-border-standoff/12367952>; "35 Chinese soldiers dead in Galwan Valley clash: US intelligence sources", *WION*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.wionews.com/india-news/35-chinese-soldiers-dead-in-galwan-valley-clash-us-intelligence-sources-306447>; Aadil Brar, "What Are Chinese Saying About the Deadly Sino-Indian Border clash?", *The Diplomat*, June 19, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/what-are-chinese-saying-about-the-deadly-sino-indian-border-clash/>.

24 Mayank Singh, "India lost 20 jawans but killed more than 40 Chinese soldiers: Union Minister VK Singh", *The New Indian Express*, June 21, 2020, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2020/jun/21/more-than-40-chinese-pla-soldiers-were-killed-in-galwan-valley-clash-says-union-minister-vk-singh-2159457.html>; Vaclav Smil, "China's great famine: 40 years later," *BMJ*, Volume 319, Number 7225, 1999, pp.1619–1621.

of the Chinese economy.²⁵ The death reports would have only worsened his problems. However, there has been no solid report of any leadership challenge to Jinping.

The latest Chinese aggression against India needs, in fact, to be seen against the backdrop of the simmering great power rivalry and the emerging geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region, which escalated during the COVID-19 outbreak. The disease has already infected more than 194,962,145²⁶ people, killed nearly 4,178,291²⁷ and pushed the world into the worst financial crisis since the Great Economic Depression of the inter-war period. The disease originated in the Chinese province of Wuhan, but China suppressed evidence of the severity of the outbreak and its human-to-human transmission, manipulated the World Health Organisation (WHO), and engaged in spreading disinformation. The world began to take note of China's actions and the US and its allies demanded an impartial inquiry into the origin of the disease. But China stonewalled the demand, instead, resorting to medical aid diplomacy to project itself as a saviour. At the same time, Beijing began to exploit the humanitarian crisis for its geopolitical ends, evident in the stripping of Hong Kong's autonomous status through a draconian security law, flaunting its military powers against Vietnam, Japan, and the Philippines in the South China Sea, the imposition of tariffs against Australia for Canberra's demand for an impartial inquiry into the origins of the pandemic, the standoff on the Indo-Tibet border, and finally the attack against India.

25 Tom Mitchell, "What Xi knew: pressure builds on China's leader", *Financial Times*, May 21, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/3a294233-6983-428c-b74b-3cc58c713eb8>.

26 "COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic", *Worldmeter*, July 26, 2021, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries>.

27 Ibid.

In recent years, China's ambition for world dominance has accelerated under Xi Jinping's leadership and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has sought to spread its model of authoritarianism. Through its 'One Belt One Road' initiatives, China's sights are set on the entire world, with a strong emphasis on the Indo-Pacific. During COVID-19, China sensed an opportunity to dislodge US primacy in the Indo-Pacific, and the US considered this a serious threat to its strategic interests, and its proclaimed values of a free and democratic world. The US ramped up its assault on CCP tyranny and became more engaging amidst the COVID-19 geopolitics to balance China. The then US President Donald Trump and then Secretary of State Mike Pompeo criticised China's authoritarianism and military aggression. In the G7 meeting, the member nations – the US, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan – lamented China's misinformation on the severity of the outbreak. Trump and Pompeo used the "China Virus" phrase for the disease and criticised Chinese authority for disinformation, propagating conspiracy theories, and medical aid diplomacy to project itself as a white hat.²⁸

During the outbreak, the imperative to balance China's assertiveness and to fix the global supply chain which the world had, by default, allowed China to control, became more obvious than ever.²⁹ India's growing military and economic capabilities

28 Ashok Sharma, "Great Power Politics in the Post-COVID-19 World", *Australian Outlook*, April 1, 2020, <http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/great-power-politics-in-the-post-covid-19-world/>; "Pompeo says G7 agrees China spreading virus 'disinformation'", *France 24*, March 25, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200325-pompeo-says-g7-agrees-china-spreading-virus-disinformation>.

29 Raghendra Jha and Ashok Sharma, "India's Pharmaceutical Industry: Global Supply Chain and Governance in the Post- COVID-19 World", ASARC Working Paper, May 2020, pp.1-29, <https://acde.crawford.anu.edu.au/publication/asarc-working-papers/16743/indias-pharmaceutical-industry-global-supply-chain-and>.

have been seen as a credible strategic counterbalance to China in the Indo-Pacific, and India is, potentially, the only country that could match China's manufacturing scale. China's assault on Indian troops in the Galwan Valley and military assertion along the LAC are Beijing's direct message to the world and to its adversaries that India is not a match for China, and that Beijing would not tolerate any resistance to its geopolitical ambitions.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the US and China have been locked in great power rivalry. China's growing economic power has enabled it to assert itself militarily. The US sees the Chinese threat looming large and over the past two decades, successive US administrations have focused on building strong ties with India as a part of a China containment strategy. The US balancing act began to take shape under President George W. Bush's Grand Strategy and President Barack Obama's Re-Balancing Act in the Asia-Pacific. The Trump administration, in continuity with this strategy, changed the name of the US oldest and largest Pacific Command to the Indo-Pacific Command, emphasizing and continuing India's strategic significance in US foreign policy.³⁰ The United States' strategic moves to balance China included a strong strategic partnership with India, which began to take shape under the George W. Bush administration. The US-India Ten Year Defence Agreement and the US-India Nuclear Deal were the two landmark developments in the deepening US-India strategic partnership, which China viewed as a hurdle to its agenda of expansionism, and as a US-backed strategy of containment, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. China

30 Idrees Ali, "In symbolic nod to India, U.S. Pacific Command changes name", *Reuters*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-defense-india/in-symbolic-nod-to-india-us-pacific-command-changes-name-idUSKCN11V2Q2>.

tried to disrupt the passing of the US-India nuclear deal by aligning with nuclear *ayatollahs* and with Pakistani lobbying in the US Congress, to block the nuclear agreement under the international nuclear regime.³¹

Amidst the revival of the simmering US-China strategic rivalry, the US-India strategic partnership acquired immense tactical significance and witnessed the strongest bonding. Just before the COVID-19 outbreak, President Trump's India visit in February 2020 elevated the US-India strategic partnership to the US-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership. India's comprehensive strategic partnership with the US has very strong defence and military overtones – with no vagueness on balancing China – reflected in the US occupying the top slot as the defence supplier to India with a range of high-tech weapons, joint military drills, and intelligence sharing. India conducted the maximum number of military exercises with the US as compared to any other country in the world.³² The US-India partnership is a comprehensive force-multiplier and its strategic significance increased when the rules-based order and stability of the Indo-Pacific were seriously being challenged by China, particularly as this became evident amidst the COVID-19 geopolitics. In the fight between US democratic values and Chinese authoritarianism, the US-India strategic partnership has acquired further significance, as both continue to emphasise their shared democratic commitment.

31 Ashok Sharma, *Indian Lobbying and its Influence in the US Decision Making: Post-Cold War*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2017.

32 For detail on India-US strategic partnership, see Ashok Sharma, *Indian lobbying and its Influence in US Decision Making: Post-Cold War*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2017; Ashok Sharma, "US-India Defence Industry Collaborations: Trends, Challenges and Prospects," *Maritime Affairs*, Volume 9, Issue 1, 2013, pp. 129-147; Ashok Sharma, "Counter-terrorism Cooperation in the Indo-US Strategic Framework," *India Quarterly*, Volume 68, Number 4, 2013, pp. 315-30.

Besides, China's geopolitical ambitions have been obstructed by the converging strategic interests of the maritime democracies of which India is a major player, strongly supported by the US. The Quad, of which India is a member, has emerged as another powerful US-backed containment strategy. The Quad emerged in the wake of the Tsunami disaster, with the navies of four countries – the US, Japan, Australia, and India – conducting the Malabar exercise in 2007. India, for the first time, joined the multi-nation US security alliance. The Quad went backstage after China protested that it was a US-backed China containment arrangement.³³ Nevertheless, in the wake of the Chinese military expansion in the Indo-Pacific, the Quad re-emerged in November 2017. Recently, in the wake of Chinese aggression, the Quad has been extended to include South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand, under the nomenclature of Quad-Plus.³⁴ Further, the Quad is now no longer confined to ministerial and official level meetings, but Australia also joined the Quad drills in November 2020 and, for the first time, a Quad summit-level meeting took place in March 2021.

Moreover, India's closer strategic engagement with China-wary democratic nations in the region, especially Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore, and the evolution of strategic ties with US allies, mainly Australia, Japan, and South Korea, in the region, are significant elements of an Indo-Pacific strategy. During the COVID-19 crisis, India's ties with Australia moved towards a formidable defence partnership, and this accelerated during the skirmishes with the Chinese

33 Ashok Sharma, "Quadrilateral Initiatives: An Evaluation", *South Asian Survey*, Volume 17, Issue 2, 2012, pp. 237-253.

34 Derek Grossman, "Don't Get Too Excited, 'Quad Plus' Meetings Won't Cover China", *The Diplomat*, April 9, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/dont-get-too-excited-quad-plus-meetings-wont-cover-china/>.

along the LAC. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Prime Minister of Australia, Scott Morrison, during their virtual meeting concluded defence agreements on Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement and the Defence Science and Technology Implementing Arrangement.³⁵ These strategic alignments have received significant backing from the US, which aggravated already tense China-India relations.

Some strategic moves during the India-China LAC standoff are noticeable. In the wake of the Chinese aggression against India and the US allies in South East Asia, a clear message was sent out on China's belligerence against India and there was no ambiguity on US support to India. New Delhi was also invited to the G7 meeting; the US moved a significant number of troops from the European theatre to the Indo-Pacific; the US-India 2+2 dialogue was initiated; and the US open and unambiguous support for India was explicitly articulated, further strengthening the mutual trust and confidence between the two nations. The current US administration under President Joe Biden has, moreover, unambiguously declared that the US values its strategic allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region, and would protect the free and rules-based order among them. Beijing is set to face a more challenging future under President Joe Biden, a foreign affairs veteran who promises to restore US global leadership.

These strategic issues will further crystallize with the emerging need of shifting the global supply chain. COVID-19

35 R. Thakur and A. Sharma, "India in Australia's Strategic Framing in the Indo-Pacific," *Strategic Analysis*, Volume 42, Issue 2, 2018, pp. 69-83; "Australian Government, Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Republic of India and Australia", Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/Pages/joint-statement-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-between-republic-india-and-australia>.

will prompt the US and the Western world, especially the industrialised nations of G7, to manage their supply chains to mitigate over-reliance on China, shifting instead to the developing countries with manufacturing capabilities in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In this context, India, considered to be the only country with the potential to match China's manufacturing scale, is going to be important. The Modi government has focused on the manufacturing sector through the "Make in India" initiatives.³⁶ A noticeable development amidst the outbreak, India, the world's largest producer and exporter of generic medicine, has emerged as the largest producer and supplier of the COVID-19 vaccine and has outstripped China on vaccine diplomacy. These are trends that will exacerbate India-China competition and strategic tension, as any effort to diversify supply chains from China will be aggressively countered by Beijing.

CONCLUSION

China's actions during COVID-19 have exposed China's peaceful rise and benign power argument. In addition, China's military aggression and intimidating trade policy have exposed its geopolitical intent and predatory trade policy. The Galwan Valley conflict has jolted India's delusion with China of imagined togetherness in the so-called Asian Century, a Nehruvian legacy that continues to haunt till date. India has no option but to respond to China's aggression and China's "Free India Economic Ride". India will look to provide an open, trusted and transparent alternative to the global supply chain and cooperate with like-minded nations to deter China's aggression.

36 R. Jha, "Modinomics: Design, Implementation, Outcomes, and Prospects", *Asian Economic Policy Review*, Volume 14, Issue 1, 2019, pp. 24-41.

In India, there was a strong protest against China and the demand for curbs on Chinese investment. China's predatory trade policy and the balance of trade, with a trade deficit of around USD 55 billion heavily tilted in favour of China, are also under scrutiny.³⁷ The Indian Government has banned some Chinese products and taken steps to restrict Chinese investments in India, putting on hold large Chinese projects and blocking new contracts with the Chinese firms. In June 2020, after the Galwan Valley incident, India banned 59 Chinese apps and Chinese investment in highway projects.³⁸ India-China trade as usual is not going to continue and this will hit China the most. This has been made obvious from China's state media editorials which argue that India must not let the border scuffle fray economic relations with China.³⁹

China's repeated violation of the LAC requires a revision of all possible options and mechanisms to reduce the tension and further standoffs. The frequency of military and diplomatic level talks, consultations, negotiations to reduce any prevailing confusion and to fix the ill-defined border, need to be constantly pursued. The dis-engagement and pulling back of troops from

37 "China may have found a way to keep India in the dark over trade deficit", *The Economic Times*, April 15, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/china-may-have-found-a-way-to-keep-india-in-the-dark-over-trade-deficit/articleshow/68884958.cms>.

38 Samrat Sharma, "Maharashtra puts Chinese deals on hold, Yogi Adityanath's UP takes tough stand on imports from China", *Financial Express*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/maharashtra-puts-chinese-deals-on-hold-yogi-adityanaths-up-takes-tough-stand-on-imports-from-china/1999333/>; "India bars Chinese companies from highway projects", *Asia Times Financial*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.asiatimesfinancial.com/india-bars-chinese-companies-from-highway-projects>.

39 Li Hong, "India must not let border scuffle fray economic relations with China", *Global Times*, June 21, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1192317.shtml>.

both sides will temporarily ease border tensions. However, in the past, too, standoffs and disengagements between both nations have taken place and it is unlikely that China abide by the disengagement agreement.

The deadly clash in the Galwan Valley has intensified the already tense, competitive and conflicting Sino-Indian relations, and the possibility of more standoffs cannot be escaped. Both China and India are aware of the danger of full-fledged war and its disastrous consequences. Unlike 1962, both are nuclear-weapon states. Notwithstanding nuclear deterrence, the two Asian giants remain vulnerable to border skirmishes, standoffs and, in the worst case, war. In the Post-COVID-19 world, India-China relations will be intense and competitive, further fed by US-China great power geopolitics, competition for the same resources and markets, and the struggle for international clout and the pursuit of great power status.

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India

An Indigenous Strategy on Terrorism

Jitendra Kumar Ojha*

The counter-terrorism strategy of the West, and especially the United States, has largely been driven by the spectacular ‘global war on terror’ since the catastrophic 9/11 terrorist attacks. These initially involved strikes on terrorist hideouts, sanctuaries, key global networks and kingpins in Afghanistan and other parts of the world, alongside a rigorous domestic surveillance programme on actual and potential networks. Stronger legislative and institutional frameworks to deal with terror, stricter counter-measures to secure airports and national borders, and enhanced levels of cooperation in intelligence sharing on terrorism were natural extensions of this strategy.

Most major and stable nations have built stronger counter-terrorism and anti-terrorism capacities. These, together with progress on global protocols to curb terror financing and subversive propaganda, have indeed denied significant actual and potential space to known and organised terrorist groups. Though India has avoided participation in the US-led military

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campaigns against terrorism, it has been on the forefront in combating terrorism, both domestically as well as in this region. India has used a variety of less belligerent means, while observing broader parameters of the rule of law domestically.

India's record on containing terrorism has, so far, been fairly mixed. The current government has given a strong push to whole range of anti-terrorism and counter-terrorism priorities, but these still appear inadequate, given India's vulnerability to Islamist terrorism emanating mostly from Pakistan. Radicalisation of smaller sections of the domestic population and the growing clout of trans-national organised crime networks continue to exacerbate India's vulnerabilities in this context.

The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2020 has ranked India as the 8th most impacted (or vulnerable) state to terrorism, following Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Syria, Somalia, Yemen and Pakistan.¹ In fact, since 2002, India had been in the top five states most impacted by terrorism and, for four of these years, was at the second spot, right after Iraq, even when the war in Afghanistan had commenced.² In the larger geopolitical context, such a scenario is dangerous for security of both the Indian state and the Indian people. India, consequently, needs to explore strategies and capacities to deal with terrorism that are genuinely effective within the country's unique context, and that are sustainable in terms of human and material costs. This is crucial not only for India's aspirations for accelerated development and 'global power' status, but also for the larger stability of the global order, which is under stress from the rising clout of an authoritarian and belligerent China.

1 "Global Terrorism Index 2020", *The Institute for Economics & Peace*, November, 2020, <https://visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf>.

2 Ibid.

TIME TO REVIEW EXISTING STRATEGIES

This is the time for the world, especially democracies and particularly India, to review the efficacy of their existing strategies to deal with terrorism. While the interests of all democracies may overlap on this issue, these have never converged entirely. The West's apathy in the face of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism and organised crime through the 1980s and 1990s has been well documented. It took the unfortunate 9/11 attacks for them to realise the enormity of identity driven terrorist threats bred by Pakistan. Over the last 20 years, the world has come a long way in dealing with the radical terror and there is far more global understanding and awareness on this subject today than the past. But, a common and cohesive global approach to combat terrorism appears an improbable proposition in foreseeable future.

Despite military campaigns and sustained strikes on terrorist hide outs in Afghanistan, Pakistan has long been suspected of clandestinely supporting a host of *jihadi* groups, including Taliban, which were its own creation. Since *jihadis*, in any case, were aspiring for paradise, they often forgave the Pakistan Military's complicity in strikes that killed many in their ranks as the latter's compulsion. There are endless reports in the international media, with in *The New York Times*, stating that Pakistan's Army remained allied both to the United States and the Taliban.³ The report goes on to quote an observation made by the former Director General (DG), of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Hamid Gul, often referred to as the father of the Taliban, way back in 2014: "When history is written.... it will be stated that the ISI defeated the Soviet Union in

3 Mujib Mashal, et. al., "Biden's Afghan Pull Out is A Victory for Pakistan. But at What Cost?", *The New York Times*, April 15, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/15/world/asia/pakistan-afghanistan-withdrawal.html>.

Afghanistan with the help of America... Then there will be another sentence... the ISI, with the help of America, defeated America.”⁴

This only suggests that there was not even an iota of confusion in the minds of the top incumbents of the Pakistani deep state, whom Gul continued to represent despite his ignominious exit from ISI, that all that they needed to do was to wear the Americans down in Afghanistan. They were confident of their strengths on the ground, including their strategy of guerrilla war, as well as their global networks to sustain this war. It would be naïve to assume that such a double game by Pakistan would be unknown to the security establishment of the most powerful nation in the world.

Even at the time of 9/11 attack, it was internationally well known that Pakistan’s ISI was breeding the terrorist sanctuary in Afghanistan through its proxy Taliban and its associates. Pakistan had not parted ways with the Taliban, the Haqqani Network and a host of other smaller *jihadi* networks in that country. This was further exposed when Pakistan happily obliged the United States by bringing the Taliban to the table to negotiate a quick US withdrawal from Afghanistan. A large number of media reports suggest that Taliban leaders were visiting Doha from Pakistan only, probably after receiving instructions from ISI on their likely position on issues. Even the choice of Ankara as the venue for the next round of talks with the Taliban is yet another manifestation of Pakistani control over the so-called peace process, given the new nexus that it has built with Turkey under overall patronage of China.

Today, the United States appears fractured internally, even on issues that concern its grand strategy or larger national security objectives. It would be difficult to evaluate the real

4 Ibid.

factors that would have sabotaged the US-led global war on terror from striking at its real epicentre – Pakistan. Pakistan has been able to sustain a world-wide terrorist network through its deeper nexus with organised crime in the region and beyond. Under these circumstances, the inability of the United States to build an internal consensus on fighting the war on terror decisively and conclusively raises many questions.

Nevertheless, over the last two decades, several organised terrorist networks have been targeted and disintegrated and consistent efforts are on to destroy many of the causes and structures that promote and facilitate terror. Security agencies all over the world, especially in stable states, are better equipped to detect and neutralise more forms of organised terrorist attacks and modules. Global counter-terrorism strategy, despite its lack of cohesion and convergence of national agendas, has continued to advance. And yet there is a perception that the world could have done much better and needs to do so even now, to combat and even eliminate terrorism. We are still nowhere close to entirely securing civilian populations from terrorism. Industry, enterprise and normal social life continue to be impacted by terrorist attacks or the apprehension of terror.

Under these circumstances, a review of the efficacy the existing global strategy on terrorism, including the US led ‘war on terror’, becomes important. Many Americans have themselves argued that the war has failed to achieve its objectives and the costs have been far too high. Many attributes the economic hardship of the people at the lower echelons of society in the most powerful democracy, and the widening spaces for right-wing sentiments, to expensive military campaign against terrorism. The *Costs of War* project at Brown University estimates that, as on November 2019, the US led war on terror had cost approximately USD

6.4 trillion and nearly 801,000 human lives.⁵ The collateral civilian casualties in theatres of conflict, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, have been estimated to be around 335,000. Whereas the United States has lost nearly 15,000 soldiers and defence contractors, and allied forces have chalked up 12,000 military casualties, security and police personnel of the host countries have borne the brunt of fatalities. Moreover, the estimated number of internally displaced refugees in this ‘war’ has crossed 37 million.⁶

These costs do not include the additional infrastructure raised for combating terrorism, or other parameters of the indirect impact the world has borne to defend itself from radical *jihadi* terror. The overall impact of this war, is believed to have been so astounding for the United States that it has drastically altered the global geopolitical equilibrium. China now threatens to not only supplant the US as the dominant power in Asia and Africa, but has also overtaken the latter on the sheer pace of technological innovation in several key sectors, with 5G internet just one of these. This can potentially threaten the United States’ position as a global leader in many critical areas. Recent assessments by certain expert entities, in the contexts of China’s deft handling of the economic fallout of COVID-19, suggests that China is already on its way to overtake the US to become the world’s largest economy by 2028, five years before what was assessed earlier.⁷

5 “The cost of the global war on terror: \$6.4 trillion and 801,000 lives”, *Brown University*, November 13, 2019, <https://www.brown.edu/news/2019-11-13/costsofwar>.

6 Ibid.

7 “World Economic League Table 2020”, *Centre for Economics and Business Research*, December 26, 2020, <https://cebr.com/reports/world-economic-league-table-2020/>; “Chinese economy to overtake US ‘by 2028’ due to Covid”, *BBC News*, December 26, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55454146>.

According to the GTI Report 2020, the total economic losses on account of terrorism declined in the year 2019 to USD 26.4 billion from the preceding years' figure of USD 35.1 billion. The total figure of such accumulated economic losses for the years between 2014 to 2019 stood at USD 430 billion.⁸ A calculation of annual economic losses from terrorism from GTI reports, from the beginning of this century, works out at approximately USD 700 billion. At current prices, this figure would go into trillions of dollars. Nevertheless, such figures can only be rough approximation as the total economic and social impact of terrorism is indeed difficult to quantify.

Terrorism must have impeded the quality of human initiatives towards economic, social and technological advancements both directly and indirectly. A huge quantum of collective energies of nations have been frittered away on often excessive security counter-measures, to avoid potential terror attacks. The impact of terrorism on overall security and well-being of people, especially in the impacted countries, has been quite formidable over the last three to four decades.

A section of American strategic thinkers maintains that the US war on terror could have been less spectacular and yet far more effective. The initial strategy of the 'war on terror' involving identification, killing, arrest, deportation, and freezing of assets of suspected terrorists by destroying capacity of actual and potential terrorists all over the world, has depleted their energies beyond sustainable levels. This situation is believed to have been quietly exploited by the communist regime of China to steadily advance its influence all over the world. Hence, the clamour for review of the existing US strategy on terror has been generating a wide range of ideas.

8 "Global Terrorism Index 2020", op. cit. p.19.

Former US President Trump's call for withdrawal from avoidable overseas conflicts, or his demand that even NATO members must pay for the US backed security cover, generated considerable anxiety. President Biden too does not seem to be very different in his strategic objectives, even though he has appeared far more tactful and courteous to allies. The cost of the 'war on terror' seems to have genuinely depleted many of the strategic options that the United States had once enjoyed. Some members of the US strategic community have gone to the extent of advocating closure of all American overseas military bases and withdrawal of all troops from abroad for the sake of national security.⁹

While President Joe Biden's initial moves did not suggest that the United States would withdraw from its global engagement beyond a certain level, the world's most powerful democracy may expect its allies and partners to shoulder greater responsibilities towards global security. This may involve increased participation, albeit in a modified war on terror, alongside other engagements. Trump-era policies of scaling down direct US military confrontations and engagements overseas appear likely to continue, with a degree of consultation with allies, partners and associates. Though US President Biden had initially hinted at the possibility of reviewing withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan as scheduled on May 1, 2021, inviting some murmurs of resentment from the Taliban, he eventually confirmed on April 13, complete withdrawal of US combat troops from Afghanistan by September 2021. It remains to be seen whether this decision is written in stone.

9 Andrew J. Bacevich and David Vine, "Nine ways that drawing down overseas bases will improve US security", *Responsible Statecraft*, March 9, 2021, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2021/03/09/nine-ways-that-drawing-down-overseas-bases-will-improve-u-s-security/>.

A US withdrawal from Afghanistan may be particularly worrying for India, given the Taliban's ideological inclinations and its *de-facto* control in the hands of Pakistan's ISI. It is widely believed that if such withdrawal is based only on the commitment of not undertaking any attack on the West or on Western establishments, the security situation across South Asia may deteriorate. At the moment, the so-called back-channel talks between India and Pakistan, close on the heels of a military ceasefire agreement in February 2021, may be seeking to address the possible fall out of US withdrawal from Afghanistan. But it will remain doubtful if the Pakistani deep state, with its terrorist infrastructure intact and part of its own proxies having gone out of its control, shall be able or even willing to address India's concerns on terror.

Though terrorist attacks have dwindled in India since the 1990s, the country is nowhere safe from organised terrorism. The US-led global war on terror and the exposure of Pakistani complicity in world-wide terrorist networks, as well as the resultant pressure on Pakistan's deep state, have certainly improved the ecosystem for the fight against terror. But the process has not been easy. Besides Mumbai (2008) and Pulwama (2019), several smaller Pakistan sponsored terrorist attacks have taken place on Indian soil. This is despite heightened alertness on part of Indian security agencies and ongoing cooperation on terrorism with the United States and its allies. Radical elements and organised crime networks continue to wield fairly strong clout in several pockets of the country. Newer and stricter counter-terrorism measures have denied considerable space to them, have not been able to eliminate the threat.

The Indian strategy on terror, so far, has been driven by denial of space and opportunities to terrorist groups to carry

out attacks on its soil. The primary focus has remained on checking cross border infiltration and carrying intelligence-driven operations internally, to pre-empt and thwart potential attacks. Of late, community involvement in anti-terrorism campaigns is visible, with a large number of Muslim community leaders and clerics expressing themselves vocally against terrorism. But the arrangement appears more driven by few individual initiatives rather being institutionalised. The much-publicised “surgical strikes” into Pakistani territory, too, have been used to neutralise and deter potential terrorists, but only with limited success. The overall success rate of security forces has certainly improved over the years, but these have failed to contain radicalisation and organised crime, which can still provide a strong impetus to terrorism.

Terrorist threats in the West have been evolving on a somewhat different trajectory and in a different direction than in India. Despite certain similarities, India’s challenges are unique on many parameters. In the context of the spurt in lone wolf attacks in Europe or right-wing White supremacist assaults across the West, it is worth reiterating the concerns of several Western experts, over the last decade or so, on what they have described as the boomerang impact of excessive counter-terrorism measures. A much talked about research paper of the EU Institute for Security Studies, France, maintained, way back in 2010:

Pre-emption does not help...reduce the terrorism risk, but on the very contrary leads to its increase. The argument will be taken a step further by claiming that, in fact, the war on terror increases the likelihood of catastrophic terrorism, because the risk of terrorism increases as such that terrorists might seek indiscriminate violence not shying away to use weapons of mass destruction.

An Indigenous Strategy on Terrorism

The war on terror therewith turns into a risk paradox – carrying consequences which, arguably, are even more risky than the original risk itself.¹⁰

Over the last few years, almost all of Europe has witnessed an unprecedented rise in right wing sentiments, threatening internal cohesion of its societies. These in turn have been creating space for home grown smaller terrorist modules or lone wolf attacks. Clandestine radicalising networks have been exploiting the so-called discrimination against immigrants and they have succeeded in using the web and darknet for radicalisation and recruitment. These have put additional pressure on law enforcement and security agencies, who have been compelled to overlook many other issues, which has had an adverse impact on the health of these societies.

Terrorist threats to India stem substantially from its sheer geography, historical legacies of the communal Partition of the subcontinent, and the fragility of some of its institutions. India's vulnerability to terrorist attacks remains high due to emotive campaigns of viscera hatred against non-Muslims, and especially Hindus, that the Pakistani ruling syndicate has entrenched over the years. Widespread radicalisation of Pakistan's domestic population in the context of an extensive terrorist infrastructure and strategic assets like the Taliban, the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) and a host of others, as well as its world-wide linkages with organised crime and other terrorist networks, enhance the threat to India.

India also needs to be careful about sustained radicalisation of sections of its own population. A democratic India cannot

10 Carolin Goerzig, "The Boomerang Effect of the War on Terror", *EU Institute for Security Studies*, January, 2010, pp-163-171, <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:qQ1Y8FWPjpIJ:https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/3671366.pdf+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=in>.

afford blanket oppression of its minorities, either morally or even strategically. These minorities, in any cases, are far more integrated into the national mainstream than most such minorities anywhere else. An oppressive state like China can brutalise its entire Muslim population, which is largely confined to just one region, Xinjiang, in order to destroy any alleged or possible breeding ground for terrorism, and yet buy the silence of all Muslim nations on the issue. This would, quite simply, be an impossible proposition for India. India must, consequently, devise a far more innovative and effective strategy to deal with radicalisation at home and the externally sponsored proxy war through terrorism.

THE TERRORIST CHALLENGES FOR INDIA

The world-wide decline in the incidence of organised terrorist attacks¹¹ since 2014-15 has not eliminated the terrorist threat to people anywhere in the world. Terrorist organisations and terrorism itself continue to mutate into newer forms. They are reaching out to newer areas and posing different forms of threats, which demand more innovative responses from both state and society.

The *South Asia Terrorism Portal* (SATP) observes that the year 2019 witnessed the lowest daily average of terrorism/insurgency linked fatalities - at 1.44 – in India since 1986.¹² The data provided by same portal indicates that the intensity of terrorist attacks in India was at its peak between the year 2000 to 2010. Throughout the first decade of 21st Century, India remained in the list of the five states most impacted by terrorism, even according to the GTI 2020, prepared by the Institute of Economics and Peace.

11 “Global Terrorism Index 2020”, op. cit.

12 “India: Assessment-2020”, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, <https://www.satp.org/terrorism-assessment/india>.

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COUNTRY	20 02	20 03	20 04	20 05	20 06	20 07	20 08	20 09	20 10	20 11	20 12	20 13	20 14	20 15	20 16	20 17	20 18	20 19
Afghanistan	16	13	11	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	2	2	2	1	1
Iraq	29	7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Nigeria	35	25	26	32	12	13	17	11	11	6	4	4	2	3	3	3	3	3
Syria	107	105	55	63	49	57	39	46	56	14	6	5	5	5	4	4	4	4
Somalia	43	38	42	36	30	9	6	6	6	5	7	7	6	7	7	6	6	5
Yemen	44	31	39	39	36	30	22	20	10	9	8	8	8	6	6	7	7	6
Pakistan	12	10	6	6	5	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	4	4	5	5	5	7
India	2	2	3	2	2	4	4	4	4	4	5	6	7	8	8	8	8	8
DRC	25	20	24	25	25	20	12	5	8	11	13	17	18	17	13	11	10	9
Philippines	13	8	10	12	14	12	8	9	9	10	11	9	10	11	12	10	9	10

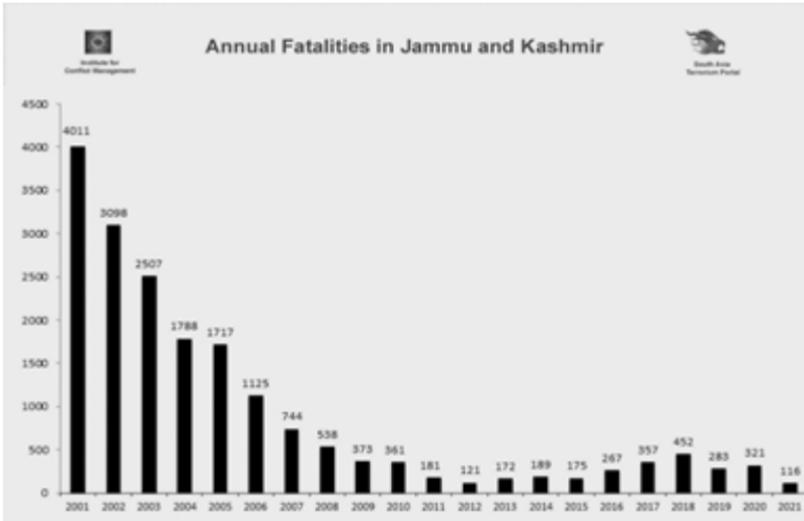
Ten countries most impacted by terrorism as per GTI¹³

According to SATP data too, from 2011 onwards, there has been a general decline in both total number of major lethal terror attacks and casualty of security personnel, with occasional incidents such as Pulwama being an exception. The general decline in such intensity of terrorism in India can be attributed to the success of Indian security forces in retrieving the situation from the precarious 1990s in Jammu and Kashmir, to fairly stable and improving levels by 2007-2008. It has been assessed by security experts that a soft target like Mumbai was chosen by LeT-ISI for the 2008 attacks only because it had become extremely difficult for them to operate in the Kashmir Valley. Again, from 2016, the Kashmir Valley has seen a moderate spike in terrorist violence, which can be attributed to propaganda and incitement against the Hindu nationalist identity of the current Government. The total casualty of security personnel in the Valley has been higher in the second half of the previous decade (2016-2020), as compared to the first (2011-15). These trends also reconfirm

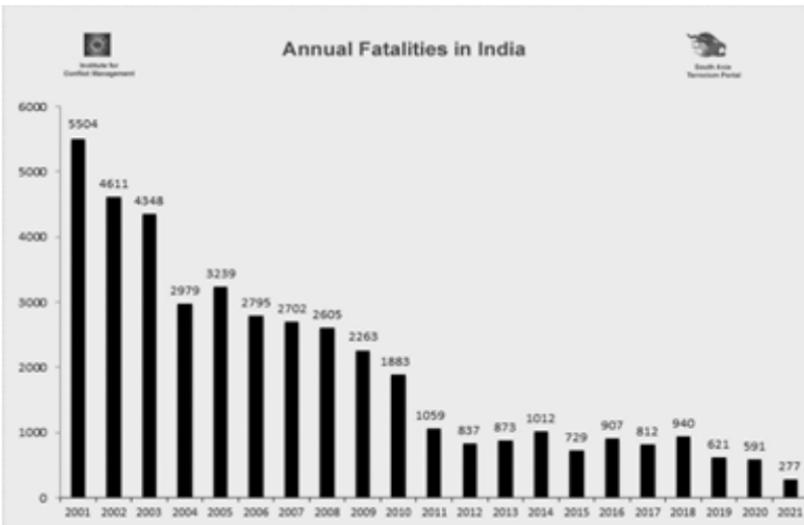
13 “Global Terrorism Index 2020”, op. cit.

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the assertion that the security forces in the Valley have avoided collateral damage for the civilian population even at the cost of their own lives.



Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), data till July 8, 2021



Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), data till July 8, 2021

India's North-East also appears quite stable for the first time after Independence. Along side intensified security initiatives, denial of support and sanctuary in neighbouring Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar have also helped in this direction. Greater political and social integration of the region with the mainstream is far more visible today than at any time in the past.

However, the Indian state continues to grapple with extremely complex security-governance challenges in the form of the Maoist insurgency in the Chhattisgarh-Andhra-Telangana-Maharashtra tribal belt. Insurgents have been significantly tamed over the past few years, but this terrorism/insurgency threat appears unlikely to fade out in the immediate future.

The Maoists continue to inflict significant casualties on security personnel at regular intervals through their unique ambush and hit-and-run attacks. The latest attack on April 4, 2021, which killed 22, and injured 30, personnel of a team combining the elite CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action), other Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel, and the state's armed Police and District Reserve Guards, was a stark reminder of the Maoists' formidable capacity for deceptive violence. The local terrain and some degree of local support, obtained through both coercion and persuasion, works to their advantage. The Indian state has to handle this problem with care, using a combination of security, governance and social initiatives. Even if a security-centric approach succeeds, which appears difficult given the sheer challenge of terrain, such groups can mutate into a different kind of terrorism or organised crime networks and build possible linkages with others in the region.

Interestingly, the major component of the terrorist threat to India stems from the cross-border proxy war waged by Pakistan through a combination of means. SATP has mentioned a list of 79 terrorist groups proscribed in India. Over 50 of these groups are driven by Islamic radicalism or separate Islamic identity.¹⁴ Moreover, nearly half-a-dozen proscribed Sikh extremist groups are also known for the support, succour and sanctuary they receive from Pakistan's ISI, both on Pakistani soil and through the latter's world-wide networks.

Barring Left Wing Extremism (LWE), nearly all major active terrorist groups in India have always shared clandestine linkages with Pakistan at one or the other point of time, whereas a few in the North East were known to have secured the backing of Chinese intelligence services. Hence, the cross-border dimension of terrorism and Islamic radicalism remains a significant component of the terrorist threat confronting India.

With the second largest overall Muslim population, and the largest living as a minority anywhere in the world, Indian Muslims have remained substantially immune to radical religious propaganda. Their representation in the top echelons of the corporate sector, defence forces, civil services, politics and the media, is probably higher than most other major ethno-religious minorities anywhere in the world. Nearly all members of the community in leadership roles identify with India's composite nationalism and virtually each one of them has been vocal against the identity driven extremism stoked by Pakistan.

Nevertheless, the entire community, especially those at the lower rungs of the population, cannot entirely escape the impact of sustained radical propaganda. A so-called

14 "India-Terrorist, insurgent and extremist groups", *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, <https://satp.org/terrorist-groups/india>.

majoritarian hard-line social media and political campaigns provide further fodder for radical propaganda in the name of Islam. These enhance vulnerability of the members of the community, especially at the lower rungs, to recruitment to crime, terrorism and other subversive activities. A report in *India Today* magazine, in early 2021 quoted National Crime Records Bureau to highlight the disproportionately higher number of Muslims, along with Tribals and Dalits, in Indian prisons.¹⁵ Right-wing groups have been propagating, over the past several decades, that the overall percentage of certain sections of Indian Muslims has been disproportionately high in various shades of crime and illicit activities. Sociologists and socio-psychologists have attributed the phenomenon to the relative backwardness of the community on parameters of education and employment.

India has made significant strides towards providing universal and equitable access to education and employment, ever since the famous Sachar Committee report of 2006 highlighted the relative backwardness of the Muslim community. In the absence of stronger and credible mechanisms of the rule of law, sufficiently strong state intervention to facilitate universal access to education and employment, as well as credible and effective deterrents against crime and terrorism, vulnerabilities of sections of India's poor Muslim to radical propaganda and recruitment to subversive networks, persist. Simultaneously, identity based political mobilisation and right-wing Hindu nationalist propaganda, especially in the context of the eroding credibility of the criminal-justice system, create wider spaces for both organised crime and radicalism.

15 Kai Friese, "Silenced Minority?", *India Today*, January 30, 2021, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/nation/story/20210208-silenced-minority-1763812-2021-01-30>.

ORGANISED CRIME AND TERROR

A fairly large number of reliable research studies and investigations have established the symbiotic nexus between organised crime and terrorism. Security and strategic observers have maintained for long that no insurgency or organised movement of terrorism can ever be sustained with ‘clean money’. Hence, organised terror groups or insurgents and organised crime networks have always shared the kind of bonhomie that policy-makers often ignore. A 2017 RAND Corporation paper provides graphic details about involvement of the Islamic State in the illicit drug trade.¹⁶ The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) at one point of time was believed to be generating a significant amount of funds through the illicit trade in Narcotics.¹⁷ The Taliban’s drug trade and the ISI’s involvement in all shades of organised crime have also been well documented. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) annual reports routinely highlight the nexus between organised crime and terrorism, as well as insurgency.

But the manner in which organised crime and terrorism have converged and coalesced in India would have few parallels anywhere else in the world. The phenomenon of the “D-Company” and its complicity in the Mumbai terrorist attacks of 1993, and its subsequent extension of logistical facilities to the LeT during the 26/11 (2008) Mumbai attacks, have been

16 Colin P. Clarke, “ISIS Is So Desperate It’s Turning to the Drug Trade”, *RAND Corporation*, July 25, 2017, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2017/07/isis-is-so-desperate-its-turning-to-the-drug-trade.html>.

17 Joe Miller, “Junk for Jihad: Prohibition Empowers Terrorists and Violent Insurgents”, *The Rutherford Institute*, July 29, 2004, https://www.rutherford.org/publications_resources/oldspeak/junk_for_jihad_prohibition_empowers_terrorists_and_violent_insurgents.

well established and well documented.¹⁸ But in reality, there would be several less talked about networks or aggregators of crime cartels, who are available to carry out subversive and/or terrorist operations at the best of external entities.

A research paper on “Organised Crime and Terrorism” by Sam Mullins and James K. Wither of the George C. Marshall European Centre for Security Studies, has particularly examined the transition of D-Company from a pure mercenary crime group to a reliable terrorist affiliate of Pakistan’s ISI.¹⁹ The paper quotes other researchers, including Clarke and Lee,²⁰ as well as others, to demonstrate that, from 1976 onwards, when this group was noticed for the first time, it had remained a powerful crime syndicate until the ISI exploited a host of factors to co-opt it into its radical terrorist agenda. However, “D-Company” and its associates have not given up their clandestine transnational crime operations. Its kingpins continue to evade global security agencies, in sanctuaries either in Pakistan or other safe havens, but the manner in which the group has enhanced the strategic strengths and capacities of ISI to wage clandestine war is evident in many assessments.

The larger dynamics of collaboration or interface between terrorism and organised crime, their mutual appropriation and assimilation, and transformation of the one into the other, multiply the challenges for counter-terrorism strategists. India needs to be particularly careful with regard to the expanding

18 Sam Mullins and James K Wither, “Terrorism and Organised Crime”, *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, Volume 15, Number 3, 2016, p. 75; Nafiu Ahmed, “Transnational Organised Crime in India: A Framework of Analysis”, *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, Volume 2, Issue 5, 2017, pp. 33-49.

19 Ibid.

20 Ryan Clarke and Stuart Lee, “The PIRA, D-Company, and the Crime-Terror Nexus”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 20, Issue 3, 2008, pp. 385 and 390.

influence of organised crime on its territory. This is especially in the context of its sluggish criminal justice system and absence of requisite levels of institutional professionalism among some of its law enforcement agencies. Subversion of some sections of these institutions has been a longstanding reality, notwithstanding some of the most brilliant professionals and security leaders that India has produced.

It is an open secret in India's strategic and security community that, despite an outward ban, "D-Company" is able to operate with impunity on Indian soil. It is believed to have built a series of smaller networks and close allies in both the political and police establishments. There is a strong possibility that externally sponsored organised crime networks may have subverted sections of state institutions, about whom very little information may otherwise be available in the open domain. A 2019 write up in the famous Lima Charlie Journal, that vouches for its credibility and integrity, has noted:

...there is a deep and strong interlink between the Pakistani Army, organised crime (especially D-Company) and Islamic terrorist groups operating out of Pakistan on behalf of the military's irregular war against its neighbours in India and Afghanistan. Dawood Ibrahim still controls one of the most comprehensive organized crime networks in Mumbai with deep collusive roots among elements of Maharashtra's political leadership. Meanwhile, D-Company has become a major Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) asset and a continuous collaborator with the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and other Pakistan-backed terrorist groups, facilitating the movement of arms and explosives, as well as of finances across international boundaries. It is useful in this context to briefly examine the sheer

multiplicity of sources of finance for Islamist terrorist groups operating in India, and the near impossibility of effectively targeting these networks.²¹

Pakistan has often ramped up propaganda to project itself as a victim of terrorism and sought to draw parity with India. Some Pakistani leaders and activists have gone to the extent of accusing India of inflicting terrorism on Pakistani soil. India needs to be wary of this and so do other democracies. In a bid to treat India and Pakistan on the same level, many Western statesmen in the past have been hoodwinked by Pakistani propaganda, to let Rawalpindi off the hook, allowing the ISI to expand its crime-terrorism domain. The kind of clandestine infrastructure for terrorism that the Pakistani deep state has assiduously built, is simply not viable in the Indian context. India has its own challenges, but its institutions have simply no wherewithal, capacity or freedom to pursue a radical terrorist agenda. The so-called terrorism in Pakistan is nothing more than the ‘blowback’ or ‘boomerang’ effect of patronising and nurturing terrorism and its infrastructure on its own territory.

The UN's World Drug Report 2020 maintained that, over the preceding five years, Afghanistan accounted for nearly 84 per cent of the world's total opium production, and the Taliban is believed to be generating nearly USD 1.5 billion in drug revenues annually.²² There is no way such a large volume of drug trade could be carried out without reliable world-wide networks that would require continuous efforts and state support to maintain. It is Pakistan's ISI alone that has enabled

21 Gary K. Busch, “Organised Crime in Asia – An [In]convenient Relationship: Part 2”, February 24, 2019, <https://www.newscabal.co.uk/organised-crime-in-asia-an-inconvenient-relationship-part-2/>.

22 “Afghanistan's drug disorder: UN World Drug Report”, *South Asia Monitor*, July 17, 2020, <https://southasiamonitor.org/un-watch/afghanistans-drug-disorder-un-world-drug-report>.

these networks and this trade. Further, such Pakistani or Pakistan linked networks, are not confined to the production and processing of drugs alone. A significant component of the proceeds of illicit drug and crime money would be finding its ways into the legal economy. This is something, which has been confirmed by a UNODC report in mid-2020, especially in the context of the outbreak of COVID-19.²³

There is a strong possibility that a large number of resource rich and influential entities in different parts of the world are connected through such networks. Once their financial stakes in the formal economy increase, they may become averse to random and reckless use of terrorism. But it is also possible that such entities may be supplanted by others in due course, or at least that some of them use terrorism in a selective way to advance their own agendas. With the onset of globalisation, a large variety of crime-cartels have emerged, aggregating and subsuming each other with an element of collaboration and competition. Though UNODC has routinely assessed the total volume of transnational crime, the figures on these parameters can only be a rough approximation.

The Pakistani deep state is also believed to have built a well-oiled clandestine global network of fairly influential entities, who have been receptive to its concerns. This is notwithstanding serious deprivations with which ordinary people in that country may be living. While such networks may not remain cohesive and united under all circumstances, as internal rivalries or conflicts are inevitable, these have been fairly effective in extricating Pakistan from difficult situations.

23 United Nations, “Organized crime groups are infiltrating the legal economy following COVID-19 crisis, says latest UNODC Research Brief”, July 13, 2020, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2020/July/organized-crime-groups-are-infiltrating-the-legal-economy-following-covid-19-crisis--says-latest-unodc-research-brief.html>.

Despite being discredited as a rogue state following exposure of its direct involvement in abetting, sponsoring and patronising terrorism, they seem to have sufficient capacity to get around influential entities across most divides. While all such support may not be the outcome of underhand deals, but the volume of easily deployable resources that Pakistan has at its disposal for focussed lobbying, cannot be matched by most states. This is what explains, among others, the failure of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to blacklist Pakistan despite its sustained transgressions. Even the United States failed to go beyond a point, despite discovering Osama Bin Laden within Pakistan's territory.

India's overall institutional capacity to deal with subversive networks – especially organised crime and radical propaganda – has appeared inadequate in face of the enormity of challenges in this direction. While there is no credible data on the exact volume of revenue generated through organised crime, such as money laundering, hawala, political kickbacks, bribery/corruption, extortion, betting networks, circulation of fake currency, human trafficking/illegal immigration, and street crimes, etc., in India, their widespread prevalence has been well established.²⁴ These would continue to augment India's vulnerabilities to terrorism, subversion and other forms of internal and external security threats.

GLOBAL TERROR

All known terrorism monitoring entities have observed a sustained decline in the incidence of organised terrorist attacks and resultant casualties since the peak of 2014, but have cautioned against newer forms of emerging terrorist threats. The Global Terrorism Index, 2020, thus maintains,

24 Nafiu Ahmed, *op. cit.*

Deaths from terrorism fell for the fifth consecutive year in 2019 to 13,826... representing a 15 per cent decrease from the prior year... Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Russia and Eurasia, South America and South Asia regions all recorded falls in deaths from terrorism of at least 20 per cent...²⁵ the decrease in the impact of terrorism was spread across many countries, with many more improving than deteriorating. In 2019, 103 countries improved their score, compared only 35 that deteriorated and 25 that recorded no change. The GTI assesses more than just the total number of deaths and incidents. It measures the full impact of terrorism, which takes into account a weighted average of all terrorist activity over a five-year period. Although the number of deaths from terrorism is now at its lowest level since 2012, terrorism is still a major global threat. Deaths remain substantially higher than a decade ago, and are still nearly twice as high as the number recorded in 2001.²⁶

The sustenance of the terrorist threats, despite the global decline in organised terrorist violence and spectacular terror attacks, stems from the emotive appeal of identity driven violence, the mutation of terrorist groups, and the transformation of their essential character. Many newer and smaller terrorist groups have emerged in different parts of the world, even as several offshoots of existing groups have been relocating to deficiently governed or fragile states. With their increasing linkages with crime groups, down to informal street gangs, and a stronger capacity to influence psychologically unstable youth, terrorist groups continue to threaten most open societies and states. The possibility of resurrection of organised

25 "Global Terror Index 2020", op. cit.

26 Ibid.

terrorism, at least in a limited or newer form, remains a reality. Clandestine support, patronisation and utilisation of such groups by certain known state actors and entities for limited tactical or strategic objectives, further enhance the challenges for counter-terrorism institutions in democracies.

The GTI Report 2020 goes on to identify the Afghan Taliban as the deadliest terrorist group, which has gained an element of legitimacy following a peace deal with the United States. There is serious apprehension that the scheduled US withdrawal from Afghanistan – now by September 2021 – can make the dreaded terrorist formation the de-facto ruler of Afghanistan. Given Pakistani influence – if not control – over this group and the financial muscle enjoyed by it through illicit commerce, the ISI can use it as the most powerful aggregator of all major terrorist outfits in the region. The Taliban has continued to target police and security personnel even after the deal with the US in Doha in February 2020, in violation of the peace agreement. Growing rapprochement between Iran and Pakistan, with Turkish support and ostensible covert backing by China, becomes particularly worrying for India in this context.

While the very nature of such organisations and their structures breed internal and external rivalries and conflict, the backing of a state like Pakistan and indirect support of China throws up newer possibilities. There is a strong potential that the Taliban, or some offshoot, can emerge as a unique and disciplined mercenary army that can be utilised for terrorism- and subversion-driven covert wars in targeted countries. It can do this either on its own or in collaboration with smaller affiliates or existing localised networks, or with the support of powerful states, who are not hesitant in using any amount of force to secure the suppression of any external rival or domestic dissidence. Even if such organisations and arrangements breed

their own contradictions in due course, the situation in South Asia is likely to deteriorate quite seriously.

GTI and other terrorism watchers have also recorded the growing stature of Boko Haram as an organised terrorist and insurgent group. Boko Haram controls large swathes of territory in Africa, especially in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. With easier access to disgruntled and even radicalised young recruits and funds generated from resource rich pockets in the region, this group has built its own sustainability and power. It is suspected that some state and non-state actors, having commercial stakes in the region, depend on this group for the security of their establishments and operations. At this pace, the influence and reach of this group can enhance globally and it can find newer allies.

Similarly, the Islamic State, despite the debacle in Iraq and Syria, has not entirely been wiped out. This group has split into multiple smaller modules, some of which may be merging with localised groups in South Asia and Africa. Its continued push in newer regions and ability to inspire lone wolf or even spectacular attacks, like the one on Sri Lankan churches and luxury hotels in 2019, or even in Indonesia in March 2021, has been a stark reminder of the group's residual capacity and prowess to cause serious damage. GTI-2020 has recorded the Islamic State's presence in 27 countries, other than Iraq and Syria, in 2019, and its involvement in 141 attacks involving 687 fatalities.²⁷ A section of Islamic State has continued to push towards sub-Saharan Africa in search of newer territory and sanctuary to flourish. A December 2020 report of the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies has highlighted growing influence of the Islamic State of Greater Sahara (ISG) in the region.²⁸

27 "Global Terrorism Index 2020", op. cit., p. 17.

28 Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, "Islamic State in the Greater Sahara Expanding Its Threat and Reach in the Sahel", December 18, 2020, <https://>

Most of the Al Qaeda remnants and variants have mutated into newer groups and joined various localised terrorist groups, but their ideology and some of their splintered modules continue to threaten security of several regions, including South Asia. The Bureau of Counter Terrorism of the US State Department, in its Country Report on Terrorism for the year 2019 (published 2020) claimed that in the year 2019, the US and its partners pursued Al Qaeda around the world, inflicting significant setbacks, yet the group and its associates remained resilient enough to pose a threat in Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere.²⁹

Simultaneously, the ideologies of both Al Qaeda and the Islamic State continue to inspire large sections of psychologically vulnerable Muslim youth, including neo-converts, across many national divides. A spurt in lone wolf attacks in different parts of the world – from the West to the far East – have been claimed by one or other such ‘inspired’ group. Shockingly, the December 2019 shooting attack at US Naval Air Station Pensacola in Florida, which killed three people and wounded eight, was carried out by a Royal Saudi Air Force officer, who had gone there for a training exchange programme. The State Department Country Report on Terrorism 2019 observes, “...before the shooting, the gunman had coordinated with al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which claimed credit for the attack.”³⁰ That such a level of radical motivation on the part of a serving defence officer, who had been cleared to undergo a defence exchange programme, could not be detected either by the Saudi or even the US military or civilian intelligence, is certainly disturbing.

africacenter.org/spotlight/islamic-state-in-the-greater-sahara-expanding-its-threat-and-reach-in-the-sahel/.

29 “Global Terrorism Index 2020”, op. cit. pp.17-18.

30 Ibid.

Lone wolf attacks, by their very nature, pose a serious challenge to intelligence agencies. Since attackers have no organisation and they don't need to coordinate with anyone, unless they are using high quality explosives. As a result, even the high-quality tech-int infrastructure of intelligence agencies cannot detect them. Prevention of such attacks calls for newer and yet cost-effective methods and strategies, going beyond the policing and security dimensions.

It is worrying that all major terrorist groups, including Al Qaeda and Islamic State, despite the disintegration of their networks in West Asia and the Middle East, are regrouping and seeking to operate from fragile states and poorly governed territories. The US State Department report suggests that Al Qaeda networks continue to survive and exploit under-governed spaces, conflict zones, and global security gaps to recruit, fundraise, and plot attacks. There is a strong possibility that a host of terrorist groups and organised crime networks may converge and coalesce in some of these territories and run clandestine global networks, threatening the security of people and states through more innovative and novel methods.

The State Departments report identifies, "Al Shabaab in the Horn of Africa, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin in the Sahel, and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham/Al-Nusrah Front in Syria," as some of the most active and dangerous terrorist groups.³¹ Al Shabaab, an erstwhile affiliate of Al Qaeda with a Sunni Salafist orientation, in pursuit of an Islamic state as its objective, has retained a strong influence in Somalia. It has carried out sustained attacks in Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda, demonstrating its capacities across the region.

The US based Foreign Policy Research Institute's assessment of prospects of terrorism in 2021 indicates that

31 Ibid.

the impending withdrawal of US forces from the Middle East, South Asia, and throughout Africa, could give a new push to increase in the incidence of terrorism in certain parts of the world. The Institute asserts, further,

Al Qaeda, the Islamic State (ISIS), and their respective affiliates could make a renewed push to capture new territory and destabilize countries and regions. Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Nigeria are home to jihadist groups linked to al Qaeda and ISIS.³²

The report assesses that these groups can even withstand losses of their top leaders, such as the ailing Ayman al-Zawahiri or even Al Qaeda veteran Muhammad al-Masri, who was killed in Iran in 2020. Their organisational dynamics are no longer dependent on charismatic leaders. The report goes on to warn of prospects of a spurt in the appearance of non-state actors, the increasing use of newer technologies, including unmanned aerial and drone attacks – as already manifesting in many parts of the world – and the impact of varying forms of newer ideologies, inspiring terrorism and identity driven conflicts.

OUTLINES OF AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY

India has to be prepared to face newer and more advanced forms of terrorist threats, without eroding its long-term developmental and social objectives. A detailed assessment and projections of these is not possible in this paper. What is important at this stage is to explore an effective and viable strategy to contain emerging threats at a level from where they do not impact on the normal life and liberties of people, or on their long-term capacities and aspirations.

32 Colin P Clarke, “Trends in Terrorism: What’s On the Horizon in 2021?”, *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, January 5, 2021, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/01/trends-in-terrorism-whats-on-the-horizon-in-2021/>.

Sustained, direct or indirect, state support to some of the terrorist groups in the region will further complicate India's challenges. Nevertheless, India has also built sufficiently credible anti-terrorism and counter-terrorism capacities since the early 1990s, and it must utilise the anti-terrorism sentiments mounting in many West Asian and even Asian States, to evolve a robust strategy of its own. India's advances in counter-terrorism and anti-terrorism capacities appear to have been driven largely by individual leadership initiatives in some of the agencies and institutions. It is certainly time for stronger specialised institutional capacity, involving the social and governance ecosystem as well.

The UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, created in 2017 with a separate Under Secretary General, has adopted UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/60/288 of 2006,³³ both as plan of action and a strategy, consisting of the following 'four pillars':

1. Addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.
2. Measures to prevent and combat terrorism.
3. Measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard.
4. Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism.³⁴

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN General Assembly had to postpone the seventh biennial review of the 'four pillars' strategy, which was scheduled for

33 Security Council Report, "A/RES/60/288", September 8, 2006, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/terr-ares60288.php>.

34 United Nations, "UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy", <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy>.

May 2020, to its seventy-fifth session slated in 2021. A final plenary meeting of the Assembly is scheduled on 28-29 June 2021, for the review of the strategy and consideration of the adoption of a resolution.

While the role of the UN has helped build better conditions for global cooperation, underlining the significance of the subject, real cooperation on terrorism has largely taken place at bilateral levels. Different states have devised their own respective strategies, developed capacities and worked out their collaboration with like-minded states. Interestingly, since the turn of this century, India's interest on this subject has increasingly converged with Western democratic nations. Hence, the 'four pillars' identified by the UN, probably after considerable deliberation, may provide at least a broad guideline for India to continuously refine and sharpen its strategic capacities. But details in this direction need to be geared to address specific challenges, priorities and requirements in India's own unique context.

In particular, at least the following must be included as major critical ingredients of India's strategy to deal with terror:

1. Appreciation of Complexity of Terrorism in Indian Context

Since the genesis and sustenance of Islamist terror in the Indian context can be traced back to the violent Partition of the subcontinent in the name of Islam, and the subsequent use of terrorism by the Pakistani deep state as an instrument of proxy war, India has to appreciate the issue and devise its response accordingly. The threat of terrorism faced by India, for all practical purposes, has been a form of highly complex war, where the adversary has been seeking to exploit both liberal, and at times even lax, institutions, alongside emotions attached to the identity of the Muslim population. It has built a large and covert infrastructure for such war, some of which may

no longer be under its control. Terrorist violence is the most direct aspect of such war, which must be thwarted, but this war has to be fought in totality, with optimal use of all round resources, to defend the long-term security of India. None of the existing institutions of the Indian state – whether police, military, intelligence or diplomacy – are trained to fight such a complex war on their own.

The adversary has, so far, enjoyed the advantage by retaining the initiative to strike and push this war largely into our territory. Pakistan and its people have been facing only the boomerang impact of a war they have initiated and substantially control. It is, however, possible that some of the real masterminds of this war may be hiding in secure locales of some of the most advanced nations. For them, this war may have a strong commercial and other dimension that could be giving them huge international clout. It is also important to appreciate that, given the nature of Pakistani state, the adversary may not be the entire population of Pakistan, most of whom have only been used as fodder for this war.

This war has built its own momentum and even killing terrorists and disintegrating terrorist networks may fail to bring terrorism to an end in the foreseeable future. India may have to simultaneously build stronger conditions, where such a war and its infrastructure become unsustainable. A system of political governance in this region that is institutionally and practically unconstrained in its capacity to demolish the terrorism-crime-radicalisation infrastructure should eventually be the goal of all counter-terrorism strategies in this region.

2. Clarity, Focus and Precision in Approach

India's focus must remain on winning this complex war in the shortest possible time, through optimal use of energies, and not merely fighting it efficiently. The indefinite prolongation

of this war has already had seriously negative consequences on the overall health of the Indian state and society, undermining their optimal evolution. There should be clear identification and precise targeting of multiple variables that have helped sustain terror on Indian territory.

A comprehensive approach must be guided by the objective of securing our social spaces not merely from specific acts of violence, but also from their associated consequences. The strategy must incorporate not merely thwarting each and every possible terrorist attack, or the disintegration of hostile terrorist networks, or paralysing their capacity, but also the destruction of conditions that can allow them to resurface.

Finally, a major and comprehensive overhaul of institutions must be the long run objective. However, a series of swift, viable and leadership-driven innovations must be encouraged, keeping the larger strategic objective in mind.

3. Evolving Suitable and Dynamic Defensive and Offensive Capacities & Strategies

While reactions and responses are critical for self-defence, no war can ever be won by a defensive strategy alone. Offensive strategies again need to focus more on outcome rather than garnering wider attention as a public spectacle. As part of a defensive strategy, the Indian state's response has to be measured and must not fracture its internal cohesion. Neither should radical forces be allowed to exploit democratic freedoms to carry out subversive propaganda, nor should an identity-driven counter response be encouraged. While external bases and support structures need to be destroyed, as part of an offensive strategy, internal cohesion must be protected through a credible and speedy mechanisms of rule of law with a special focus on terrorism.

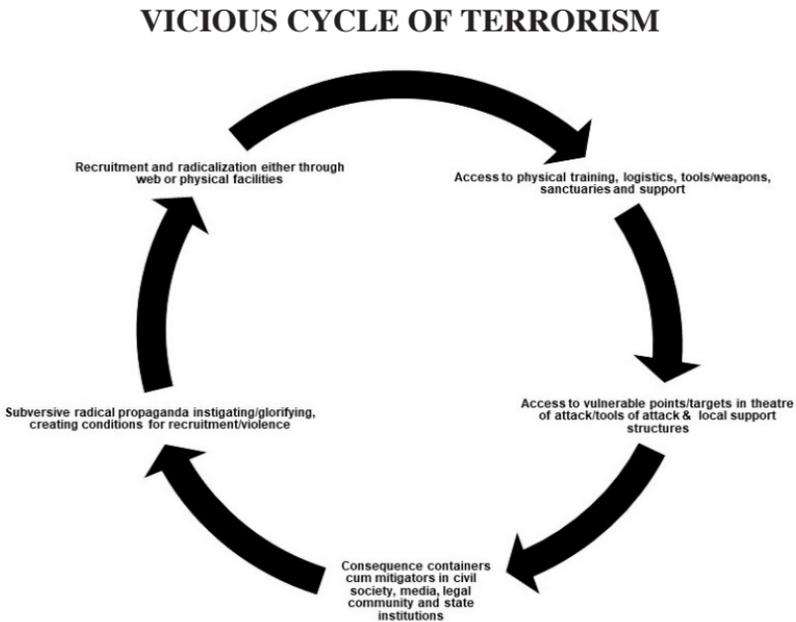
External offensive strategies must not be spectacular attacks on foreign soil alone, though these, in certain contexts, could be an inescapable necessity. Building bridges with friendly and even neutral entities should be extended beyond intelligence sharing mechanisms to help fragile or deficiently governed states build adequate capacity to deny space to terrorism and organised crime on their own territory.

Pakistani capacity to perpetrate terror, insurgency and propaganda emanates from a well-oiled cash-rich effective machinery to wage a covert war. Various entities, from United States to China to a host of others, including many in the Islamic world, have found utility in such capacity. Simultaneously, some have found such association with Pakistan as double-edged weapon that is potentially dangerous for their own security. India has to go beyond formal international regulatory and other institutions to build suitable security-military-intelligence capacities, and create a conducive domestic and international ambience to decimate such clandestine Pakistan linked terror-crime networks, with collaboration of all like-minded forces, globally. Clandestine association with Pakistani terrorist or crime syndicates must become increasingly unsustainable for all major state and non-State entities.

Concurrently, India must exploit all avenues and opportunities at its disposal to push for de-radicalisation, rule of law and defence of human rights within Pakistan, without any significant cost to itself. These have been crushed by the Pakistani deep state by citing the threat from India, or by raising the bogey of Kashmir, in a bid to retain its grip over the Pakistani state apparatus. India must think innovatively to contain the Pakistani deep state internally and paralyse its ability to operate globally.

4. An integrated and comprehensive approach, with optimal use of existing assets and instruments of governance

A successful and sustainable indigenous strategy must target every link in the chain of the vicious cycle of terrorism – which includes subversive and radical propaganda, funding, recruitment, radicalisation/training, access to logistics/bases/sanctuaries, weapons, tools of destruction, availability of support structures in the media, civil society or crime groups, etc. The following chart roughly depicts this vicious cycle.



A viable strategy must identify each of the above or similar ingredients of the terrorism cycle, and target them at each level, involving all institutions of both the state and society. Since it is far easier to breed and spread terrorism, and many more

times difficult to contain and eliminate it, the Indian strategy must involve simultaneous refinement of all institutions and synergise their role with each other. In their normal capacity, institutions of governance should aspire not only to disintegrate this vicious cycle and deny space to terrorism, but also to build such a political, administrative, economic and social order, which would offer no space to terrorist violence.

5. Sufficient Focus on the Psychological Dimension

Given the significance of the psychological dimension of identity-driven terrorism and its emotive appeal, the state must encourage and protect all such community leaders, clerics and Ulema who can build a larger genuine campaign against radicalism. All actual, potential and credible role models, who advocate harmony and coexistence with others, need to be encouraged. These must not be confined to mere speeches but should result in follow up action by the state, providing access to secular education, economic security and integration in the wider society.

6. A Proactive Strategy as Part of a Larger Vision of Governance

The overall Indian strategy on terrorism must not only be based on the strengths and requirements of counter-terrorism alone, but should also be part of the overall governance-security edifice. This need to continuously and seamlessly evolve with the passage of time, as terrorism and similar threats also keep mutating. The strength of the strategy would depend on its ability to retain the initiative through a proactive approach on larger issues of governance and security as well.

As the largest plural democracy, with strong civilisational linkages with nearly all of Asia, and the largest Muslim population as minority, India has to re-envision its role in the region. Containing and curbing terrorism, has to be part

of this larger role. The effective management of terrorism as well as emerging forms of covert and deceptive wars, will bolster India's great power aspirations and add to the larger stability and security of this region. A more proactive global role, based on its own unique strengths, rather than models provided by the United States or China, is critical for creating a more conducive internal and external ecosystem to contain and prevent terrorism.

India's experience over the past two decades has shown that neither persuasion or appeals, nor even military pressures, can effectively combat and contain terrorism. Pre-emption of terrorist attacks, through security and intelligence instruments, including selective decimation of known targets, is an indispensable tactical necessity. But its accumulated costs, which has already started hitting nearly all open societies, could soon become unsustainable for the larger pursuit of other national security objectives. Hence, the strategic focus, and simultaneous efforts, must remain on building appropriate and viable societal and governance instruments that complement each other to deny space for terror.

This would call for major innovations in our approach not merely to terrorism but larger issues of security and governance. India may have to go well beyond the limited Western ideas of 'counter & anti-terrorism' strategies, to evolve appropriate and sustainable capacities for its own unique context. Besides stronger domestic cohesion, India also needs a mutually empowering and healthy equilibrium with other democracies in the region. The overall advancement towards resilient and effective institutional capacities of governance and security, with a judicious mix of persuasion and coercion, are critical for this purpose.

Strategic Implications

BRI in Bangladesh

Dr. Sujit Kumar Datta*

China's rapid engagement in the 21st Century international political arena and its growing influence is progressing tremendously. Its Belt and Road Initiative [BRI, originally One Belt One Road (OBOR)] is a strategic vision that is meant to influence investment through connectivity. The BRI is a global development strategy proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in September-October 2013 that focuses on connectivity and cooperation between countries in Europe and Asia.¹ It is estimated that the OBOR initiative will cover two-thirds of the world's population and one-third of global GDP. The multi-trillion-dollar project has two components: the Silk Route Economic Belt (SREB) and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR). The SREB, comprising 136 countries, focuses on uniting Asia and Europe, connecting China with the Persian

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1 C. Nicola, "When all roads lead to Beijing. Assessing China's New Silk Road and its implications for Europe." *The International Spectator*, Volume 51, Number 4, 2016, p. 95-108.

Gulf and the Mediterranean through West Asia, and connecting Southeast Asia with South Asia and the Indian Ocean.²

The 20th Century MSR, on the other hand, is designed to take a loaf of bread from Europe to Africa via the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean and from the South China Sea to the South Pacific coast of China. BRI is significant in the present world of geo-economic, geo-strategic and geopolitical dimensions. BRI has six economic corridors. One of them is the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor. Bangladesh is connected with the BRI through this economic corridor which was formally endorsed during the first Bangladesh-China inter-governmental study group meeting in Kunming in December 2013. The corridor covers 1.65 million square kilometres, and includes about 440 million people. It is intended to connect China's Yunnan province, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Kolkata in India through road, rail, water, and air linkages.³

SINO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

The historical ties between China and Bengal predate the modern state-centric global order. Several historical accounts document close commercial, cultural and religious links between China and ancient Bengali Buddhist dynasties. Some Chinese chronicles have recorded the visits of Chinese travelers like Ma

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- 2 Larçon, Jean-Paul and Rold Jens Brunstad, "The Baltic Sea Region and China: Economic Environment and Strategy of the Firms" in Jean-Paul Larçon ed., *New Silk Road: China Meets Europe In The Baltic Sea Region The-A Business Perspective*. World Scientific, Singapore, 2017, pp. 47-63.
 - 3 Fahmida Khatun and Syed Yusuf Saadat, "How can Bangladesh benefit from the Belt and Road Initiative?", *Dhaka Tribune*, November 19, 2020, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/opinion/op-ed/2020/11/19/op-ed-how-can-bangladesh-benefit-from-the-belt-and-road-initiative>.

Huan, Fa Xian, and Zheng He to ancient Bengal.⁴ Presently, Bangladesh has no visible dispute with China. However, in a complex geopolitical competition in South Asia, China stood against Bangladesh during Bangladesh's Independence War in 1971.⁵ China, as a key ally of Pakistan, was hostile to the idea of an independent Bangladesh. It strongly backed Pakistan's military actions to crush the independence movement in present-day Bangladesh. Even after the military defeat of the Pakistani forces, China kept opposing the international recognition of Bangladesh by vetoing the latter's inclusion in the United Nations. Beijing was predominantly hostile to the government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, which, according to China, was an 'instrument of Indo-Soviet manipulation of subcontinental unrest as well as an impediment to the normalisation of relations between Dhaka and Islamabad'.⁶ Due to all these activities, the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and China did not go very well in the post-independence period.⁷ China used its veto between 1972-1974 to prevent Bangladesh's membership, but eventually, on September 17, 1974, Bangladesh became a full member of the United Nations. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, gave a speech in Bengali at the General Assembly on September 24, 1974.⁸

4 M. Jashim Uddin and Mahbubur Rashid Bhuiyan, "Sino-Bangladesh Relations: An Appraisal", *Strategic Analysis*, Volume 32, Number 5, 2008, p. 770.

5 T. Maniruzzaman, "Bangladesh in 1975: The Fall of the Mujib Regime and Its Aftermath", *Asian Survey*, Volume 16, Number 2, 1976, p.119-129.

6 R. Chakrabarti, "China and Bangladesh", *China Report* Volume 30, Number 2, 1994, pp.149-59.

7 Sally Morphet, "China as a Permanent Member of the Security Council", *Security Dialogue*, Volume 31, Number 2, 2000, pp.151-166.

8 Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "How China blocked Bangladesh's entry in early 1970s stymieing efforts by Soviets & India", *The Economic Times*, August 11, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/how-china-blocked-bangladeshs-entry-in-early-1970s-stymieing-efforts-by-soviets-india/articleshow/77480733.cms>.

In 1975, China established diplomatic relations with independent Bangladesh. The state visit of President Zia-Ur-Rahman in 1977 marked a new era of bilateral relations between the two countries. His successor, President Hussain Muhammad Ershad, continued the policy of goodwill towards China, visiting the country five times in his eight-year presidency. Even after the return of democracy in the 1990s, the two large parties of the country, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Awami League, maintained cordial relations with China.⁹

Mutual trust and economic interest can be considered the foundational basis of Bangladesh-China relations. China is now a crucial partner in Bangladesh's development, and there is much to suggest that Bangladesh-China relations are growing without any constraint.

Bangladesh is part of the same Ganga-Brahmaputra basin in the north-eastern part of India and China. Bangladesh needs Chinese friendship for its economic development and security-related issues. On the other hand, China needs an alternative access route to the Indian Ocean through the Bay of Bengal for trade and energy supplies from the Middle East and Africa. China also needs a good amount of labour support from Bangladesh, since Beijing seeks to shift labour intensive manufacturing of its private institutions to countries with cheaper labour. These factors make a case for a genuine alliance between Bangladesh and China.

At present, Bangladesh maintains a strategically important bilateral partnership with China. Beijing and Dhaka collaborate on several aspects, ranging from trade to defence. In 2005, China became the largest exporter of goods to Bangladesh.

9 Prashant Kumar Singh, "China-Bangladesh Relations: Acquiring a Life of Their Own", *China Report*, Volume 46, Number 3, 2010, pp. 267-83.

It is also the principal supplier of armaments to Bangladesh's military. Dhaka is the second-largest purchaser of Chinese defence equipment after Pakistan.¹⁰

China has an enduring vision for South Asia, and Bangladesh appears to be entirely committed to it. During the Chinese President's visit in 2016, Bangladesh signed 27 treaties. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stated, "I had very fruitful discussions with President Xi on bilateral, regional and international issues of our common interests."¹¹ A 1,320 MW Payra Thermal power plant, several lanes of the tunnel under the Karnaphuli river, Dasherbandi Drainage Plant, Padma Bridge, and the National Data Center are already in existence. Two submarines and six warships have been bought for the Bangladesh Air force.¹² The year 2017 was also declared the Bangladesh-China friendship year.

Since the present government of Bangladesh is in a close relationship with its geographically large neighbour – India – a close relationship with another traditional and large neighbour can cause discomfort. In 2016, a Defense Deal was signed with India to cope with India's response just after Dhaka purchased two submarines from China.¹³ Bangladesh is now an investment-

10 Sultana, Yesmin "The Changing Dynamics of China-Bangladesh Relations", *The Daily Star*, November 11, 2018, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/global-affairs/news/the-changing-dynamics-china-bangladesh-relations-1658695>.

11 Rezaul Karim and Shakhawat Liton, "Strategic Partners", *The Daily Star*, October 15, 2016, <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/strategic-partners-1298923>.

12 Tekendra Parmar, "China's President Xi Jinping Makes 'Historic Visit' to Bangladesh", *Time*, October 14, 2016, <http://time.com/4530974/bangladesh-xi-jinping-visit-china/>.

13 Joyeeta Bhattacharjee, "What Can Be Expected From The India-Bangladesh Defence Deal?", *Outlook*, March 24, 2017, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/what-can-be-expected-from-the-india-bangladesh-defence-deal/298328>.

hungry country and financing various projects is a big issue for the government. On the other hand, the transformation from a Least Developed Country (LDC) to a middle-income country will make it difficult for Bangladesh to secure debt relief. Increasing power outage; lack of gas and electricity in the industry, and limited employment opportunities for hundreds of thousands of educated youth are significant challenges for Bangladesh.

For China's Foreign Policy, multilateralism is one of the most important features. It is also vital to note that China always focuses on economic aspirations and the development process. It would not be wise for Dhaka to keep all its eggs in one basket. India's concerns are likely to be dealt with through balanced diplomacy, critical for Dhaka's economic and security perspectives. Bangladesh has decided to join the BRI, as this would provide a gateway to the wider Indian Ocean Region. However, involvement in China's initiative will also have to be seen in the light of other significant factors, as this process creates geopolitical risks.

On the other hand, Bangladesh's elevation to a middle-income country is very much related to China's policy.¹⁴ Bangladesh needs investment and international commercial communication infrastructure to transform its economy from the garment industry and foreign remittance-dependent economy, to an industrialised economy. Further, since China is moving to a higher level of industrialisation, it needs to relocate its industries and non-sophisticated technologies to developing countries. China has also pursued its industrialisation plans with Japan's second-tier technology and industry. The same

14 "Connecting to Compete 2016: Trade Logistics in the Global Economy-- The Logistics Performance Index and Its Indicators", *World Bank*, 2016, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/24598>.

model can also fit within the Bangladesh context. Bangladesh may consequently be the beneficiary of Chinese machine technology.

Due to the dispute with Japan and the United States in the South China Sea, China needs new waterways for maritime trade. The Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean is the most suitable for this. China has already built the Gwadar Port in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka and the Doraleh Port in Africa's Djibouti. The Indian Ocean is going to be at the center stage of international trade in the 21st Century and it has densely populated countries, including India and Bangladesh. The Indian Ocean is the main waterway of international trade, and the world's most rapidly growing economies are on its shores.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Neoliberalism presents convincing challenges to neorealism, as it offers alternative explanations for state behaviour and the peaceful transformation of regional orders. Several versions of neoliberalism exist. Scholars like David Baldwin, Arthur A. Stein and Andrew Maitland Moravcsik have offered different classifications of neoliberalism that influence the state's preferences and influence foreign policy behaviour.¹⁵ Baldwin identified four varieties of neoliberalism, referring to theories of effects of democracy, economic interdependence, international institutions, and community as "republican liberalism", "commercial liberalism", "institutional liberalism" and "sociological liberalism", respectively. Sociological liberalism, which describes a community of

15 Moravcsik, A, "The new liberalism", in Robert E. Goodin ed., *The Oxford handbook of International Relations*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, p. 234.

nations with shared values and international norms, reaches the same conclusions as constructivism.¹⁶ J.R. Oneal and B. Russett see the three core assumptions as a continuation of the classic liberal tradition, which are accepted and described as three legs of a Kantian tripod: democracy, international institutions and economic interdependence, each attributed to peace.¹⁷ International institutions and economic cooperation are the best fit for neoliberalism in complex interdependence on Chinese BRI for Bangladesh.

The first factor – *international institutions* – serves as a mediator and provides information that could reduce fears of double-dealing.¹⁸ Moreover, international regimes potentially improve each side's information base, which reduces transaction costs and misunderstanding, thereby promoting international cooperation.¹⁹ Neoliberal institutionalism focuses on mutual interests that extend beyond economics. In particular, states have been compelled to address security concerns, such as terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destructions, and global financial crises; hence, regional and multilateral forums have been created to combat such non-traditional security threats. This approach may well account for the convergence of interests between China and Bangladesh on BRI, including bilateral relations on multidimensional aspects. However, international institutions only play a limited and peripheral

16 J. Sterling-Folker, "Competing paradigms or birds of a feather? Constructivism and neoliberal institutionalism compared", *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 4, Number 97, 2000, p. 119.

17 John R. Oneal and Bruce Russett. "The Kantian peace: The pacific benefits of democracy, interdependence, and international organizations, 1885–1992." *World Politics*, Volume 52, Number 1, 1999, p.1-37.

18 R.O. Keohane, *After hegemony; Cooperation and discord in the world political economy*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1984, p. 27.

19 S.D. Krasner, "State power and the structure of international trade", *World Politics*, Volume 28, Issue 3, 1976, p. 28.

role, and they do not encroach on the security field, particularly when states are primarily concerned with relative gains.²⁰

Another factor – *economic interdependence* – makes states less likely to fight with each other, based on the principle that states cooperate to maximise their absolute gain.²¹ Some hold that economic linkages and interdependence between China and Bangladesh have increased exponentially, resulting in globalization and transformation.²² However, as Dale Copeland suggests, returning to a “realist” view, economic interdependence can also produce political friction.²³ Increasing economic cooperation and commercial openness have increased Sino-Bangladesh motivation for maintaining cordial relations, since these form a strong foundation for supporting their domestic legitimacy, but it was not an underlying cause of the transition to cold peace.²⁴

The relationship between Bangladesh and China is based on strong and deep economic ties. In addition, the links between Bangladesh and Chinese civil society have further accelerated Bangladesh-China relations. Bilateral relations between China and Bangladesh are based on interdependence.

20 J. Grieco, “Anarchy and the limits of cooperation: A realist critique of the newest liberal institution”, *International Organization*, Volume 42, 1988, pp. 485-507.

21 R.O. Keohane and J.S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, USA, Pearson, 2011. p. 67.

22 S. D. Sharma, *China and India in the Age of Globalization*, New York, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2009, p. 109.

23 D. Copeland, “Economic interdependence and war: A theory of trade expectations”, *International Security*, Volume 20, Number 4, 1996, pp. 5-41.

24 Fravel, M. T. “China views India’s rise: Deepening cooperation, managing differences”, in A.J. Tellis et. al. eds., *Asia Responds to Its Rising Powers-China and India*, The National Bureau of Asian Research, Seattle, 2011, pp. 127-131.

Due to this mutual economic interdependence, Bangladesh and China consider each other as friendly countries.

BRI AND BANGLADESH

The Belt and Road Initiative has pledged the development of the physical and soft infrastructure for communication and economic development across six corridors. The Belt and Road Initiative provides several benefits for Bangladesh that directly impact trade, investment, connectivity, education and tourism. Bangladesh joined the BRI as a signatory state in October 2016.²⁵ Two geo-economic incentives pushed Beijing to include Bangladesh in the BRI.²⁶ One of them was Bangladesh's strategic geographical location within the South Asian region and the possibility of accessing the largest markets in South Asia and the Bay of Bengal. Another was Bangladesh's growing economic and productive workforce. Bangladesh can export its industrial potential to help China develop much-needed infrastructure in Bangladesh, which will play an influential role in Bangladesh and China's economic development.²⁷

The successful implementation of the BRI in Bangladesh and its neighbouring states is expected to have some implications for Bangladesh's bilateral relations with its bordering states. For instance, China has offered almost USD 38 billion as investments and loans to Bangladesh.²⁸ Through these loans

25 K. C. Das, "The Making of One Belt, One Road and Dilemmas in South Asia", *China Report*, Volume 53, Number 2, 2017, pp. 125-142.

26 R. Saimum, "The Prospect of Belt and Road Initiative in the Context of Bangladesh", *China Report*, Volume 56, Number 4, 2020, pp. 1-20.

27 Ibid.

28 Anu Anwar, "How Bangladesh Is Benefiting From the China-India Rivalry", *The Diplomat*, July 12, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/how-bangladesh-is-benefiting-from-the-china-india-rivalry/>.

and investments, China is trying to bring Bangladesh within its sphere of influence. As a regional rival of China, India also has offered loans to Bangladesh in reaction to Chinese loans to counter China's effort to bring Bangladesh within its orbit.²⁹ Bangladesh now has chances to improve its bilateral relations with both India and China, as BRI has implications for Bangladesh's relations with its neighbouring countries.

Bangladesh and China are part of the greater Asian region. Both the countries have promoted and maintained their political, economic, diplomatic, and military relations since China recognized Bangladesh in 1975.³⁰ The relationship between the two countries has improved over the years irrespective of the change of regimes in Dhaka, and in 2005 China overtook India as the primary source of imports.³¹ Currently, Bangladesh is the second-largest importer, after Pakistan, of Chinese military hardware and China also provides training to Bangladesh's military.³² China is also currently Bangladesh's largest trading partner. In the fiscal year 2017-18, bilateral trade between Bangladesh and China stood at USD 12.40 billion. In line with this, some economists believe that, if current trade trends continue, the bilateral trade between Bangladesh and China will reach about USD 18 billion in 2021. Note that in 2021, Bangladesh celebrates the golden jubilee of its independence.³³

29 B. Chakma, "The BRI and Sino-Indian Geo-Economic Competition in Bangladesh: Coping Strategy of a Small State", *Strategic Analysis*, Volume 43, Number 3, 2019, pp. 227-239.

30 M. J. Uddin and M.R. Bhuiyan, "Sino-Bangladesh Relations: An Appraisal", *BISS JOURNAL*, Volume 32, Number 1, 2011, pp. 1-24.

31 B. Chakma, *op. cit.*, p. 227-239.

32 *Ibid.*

33 Sabbir Rahman Khan "Sino-Bangladesh Relations: Mapping Sectoral Opportunities", *The Financial Express*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/reviews/sino-bangladesh-relations-mapping-sectoral-opportunities-1565793456>.

Bangladesh is connected with the BRI through the BCIM economic corridor, which was formally endorsed during the first inter-governmental study group meeting in Kunming held in December 2013. The corridor covers 1.65 million square kilometres, and about 440 million people. It connects China's Yunnan province, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Kolkata in India through road, rail, water and air linkages. At the domestic level, Bangladesh's first toll road project was signed on December 6, 2018. The government of Bangladesh had signed a contract with a China-Bangladesh consortium to upgrade the 48-kilometre-long Dhaka Bypass Road to a dual carriageway. The objective was to improve connectivity between the north and northwest parts of Bangladesh and the Chittagong Port.³⁴ Moreover, Bangladesh's growing economy is also an essential motivation for Chinese investments in the country. The demand for infrastructures in developing economies like Bangladesh is a significant chance for Chinese state-owned and private companies to enlarge into foreign markets. As China is transitioning from an investment-driven economy to a consumption-driven one, contribution in overseas projects could help Chinese enterprises to become internationally competitive and would accelerate the 'internationalization' of the economy.³⁵

THE INDIA FACTOR IN SINO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

India has cultural, social and economic ties with Bangladesh. Both countries have a shared heritage in terms of history, culture, language as well as traditional values and norms. In 1971, during the Liberation War of Bangladesh, both countries

34 Khatun and Saadat, op. cit.

35 Peter Ferdinand, "Westward ho—the China Dream and 'One Belt, One Road': Chinese Foreign Policy Under Xi Jinping", *International Affairs*, Volume 92, Number 4, 2016, pp. 941–57.

worked as close allies. Though India played a vital role in the Liberation War, Bangladesh has had disputes with India over land and maritime boundaries, river water sharing, the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), and border killings. All problems have been solved peacefully by Indian and Bangladeshi Government except for the water sharing, NRC, and CAA issues. India wants to maintain a close alliance with Bangladesh, especially for the following reasons:

- The geopolitical importance of Bangladesh
- Tackling China's dominance in Bangladesh
- Protecting the political and economic investments that India already has

Bangladesh and India are two neighbouring countries of the South Asian region and share more than a 4,000-kilometer-long international border – globally the fifth-longest land border. One fact that cannot be denied is India's significant contribution to the Bangladeshi independence movement. The role and assistance of India in then East Pakistan was very remarkable for the emergence of Bangladesh as a new nation, and it is also worth noting that India was the first country to recognise Bangladesh as a sovereign state.³⁶ Irrespective of the changing governments in both the countries, India and Bangladesh have always been trying to maintain good diplomatic and economic relations. These two neighbouring countries value their relationship very much, which is manifested in their cooperation in multiple sectors. Over the past few years, India and Bangladesh have made significant

36 M.A. Kashem and M.S. Islam, "Narendra Modi's Bangladesh policy and India-Bangladesh relations: Challenges and possible policy responses", *India Quarterly*, Volume 72, Number 3, 2016, pp. 250–267.

progress in maintaining and advancing bilateral trade. A multifaceted relationship is needed to enhance this trade and investment cooperation further. Connectivity, Border Management & Security, and People-to-People exchanges are vital in building this multifaceted relationship.³⁷

Nevertheless, in the economic arena, by inaugurating the BRI, China is getting closer to Bangladesh than India, through various pledges of loans and investments. However, as a very long-term trading partner of Bangladesh, India has a history of maintaining trade with Bangladesh to a greater extent than China until 2004. The declining tendency of Bangladesh's trade with India and increasing trade with China demonstrates the impact of Chinese influence in Bangladesh in the economic sector as more significant than India's. Also, as a member state of the BRI, Bangladesh is getting considerable amounts in loans and investments from China, which is unprecedented in Bangladesh's history.

The growing Chinese investments and influence in Bangladesh are a bit bothering for India given the fact that India once used to be the largest trading partner of Bangladesh. That kind of attitude shows how much China and its BRI will be a factor in the relationship between Bangladesh and India, especially in the economic sector.

Bangladesh is strategically crucial for India and China, and both the latter countries are trying to bring the former into their respective spheres of influence, principally through economic incentives. For example, Beijing offered USD 38 billion in aid to Bangladesh in 2016.³⁸ On the other hand, during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to New Delhi in 2017, India's

37 H.V. Shringla, "India-Bangladesh relations: An Indian perspective", *Strategic Analysis*, Volume 42, Number 5, 2018, pp. 524-528.

38 B. Chakma, *op. cit.*, pp. 227-239.

Government offered Bangladesh a USD 5 billion line of credit and other economic assistance.³⁹

The increased level of China-Bangladesh cooperation is manifested in the steady progress of projects like the Padma Bridge Rail Link project, the Karnaphuli River Tunnel project, the Dhaka-Chittagong High-speed Railway project, and the Payra Power Plant project. The proper implementation of these projects will massively upgrade and develop Bangladesh's infrastructure level. It will possibly solve traffic congestion, outdated facilities and power shortages in the country.⁴⁰

These Chinese projects in Bangladesh are very much of concern for India because of its fear of losing control and influence over Bangladesh and the greater South Asian region. Like China, India is also offering Bangladesh several infrastructural, power development, and connectivity projects. For example, India and Bangladesh will enjoy better connectivity through a separate Akhaura-Agartala rail link. Two other collaborative rail connectivity projects, Chilahati-Haldibari and Khulna-Mongla rail links, will also be ready very soon.⁴¹ It can be argued that India's connectivity projects in Bangladesh, to some extent, are coming against the backdrop of the Chinese offer of connectivity to Bangladesh under the BRI. Moreover, India has offered assistance to Bangladesh to build power plants, ports, and nuclear power plants, as well as grants and loans for various medium and small-sized projects. It can be argued as well that one of the main objectives of New Delhi

39 Ibid.

40 X. Sun, "Bangladesh's Win-Win Cooperation With China And India", *The Rising Nepal*, July 7, 2020, <https://risingnepaldaily.com/opinion/bangladeshs-win-win-cooperation-with-china-and-india>.

41 A. Maitra, "Reshaping Indo-Bangladesh Relations", *Belt and Road News*, August 30, 2020, <https://www.beltandroad.news/2020/08/30/reshaping-indo-bangladesh-relations/>.

behind all these projects and assistance is to counter Beijing's more significant interference and influence in Bangladesh.⁴²

As Bangladesh is a participating state in the Chinese BRI, it is supposed to get some development opportunities from China. With respect to India, Dhaka will get opportunities because of the rivalry between India and China. The rivalry between these two neighbouring giants is presenting Bangladesh with many opportunities and challenges.

STRATEGIC OPTIONS FOR BANGLADESH

Trade facilitation reform is required to implement Bangladeshi BRI projects. To address the challenges associated with the BRI project, the Government of Bangladesh needs to implement the projects openly and transparently. Environmental and social impact assessments are essential for the implementation of BRI projects. Besides, meaningful participation and involvement of local people with the projects will play a vital role in implementation. Bangladesh needs to consider BRI as an excellent opportunity to achieve its vision of becoming a developed country by 2041. There are certain areas where Bangladesh and China can cooperate for the benefit of both parties.

China can help Bangladesh build its much-needed infrastructure, which will help Bangladesh achieve connectivity with other countries in the region. The BCIM Economic Corridor can play a vital role in this regard. However, there are still some doubts regarding this initiative's successful implementation, because India has refused to participate in this project. Some in the academia have suggested an alternative Bangladesh-China-Myanmar Economic Corridor for achieving the desired connectivity. One possibility is that China may

42 B. Chakma, *op. cit.*, p. 227-239.

seek to include Bangladesh in the CMEC (China-Myanmar Economic Corridor) by stretching it to the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, given India's opposition to the BRI.⁴³

- Bangladesh has a tremendous and comparatively cheaper labour force, which is an opportunity for China. If China decides to move its labour-intensive manufacturing units, such as textiles and clothing production to Bangladesh, this will create many job opportunities and help the country enhance its industrialisation process.⁴⁴
- Duty-free access of Bangladeshi products to the Chinese market is another example of cooperation between these two countries. The Government of China has given duty-free access to 5,161 Bangladeshi products in the Chinese market, along with 3,095 products that already have duty free access to the Chinese market under the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA). In total, 8,256 Bangladeshi products thus have duty free access to the Chinese market. This initiative will increase exports from Bangladesh to China in the future, consequently and significantly increasing future trade the two countries.⁴⁵

In October 2020, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated, “China wants to align its strategies with Bangladesh and jointly

43 R. Saimum, op.cit., p. 1-20

44 M. Guanqun, “China-Bangladesh Relations have enhance Since Belt & Road”, *Belt and Road News*, June 13, 2020, <https://www.beltandroad.news/2020/06/13/china-bangladesh-relations-have-enhanced-since-belt-road/>.

45 Staff Online Report, “China gives duty-free access to 5,161 more Bangladeshi products”, *The Daily Star*, June 19, 2020, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/china-gives-97-percent-duty-free-access-bangladeshi-products-1917129>.

promote the ambitious BRI with Dhaka... China is keen to take the China-Bangladesh strategic partnership to new heights.”⁴⁶ One thing that is very clear from XI Jinping’s remarks is that China wants to work with Bangladesh to promote and implement the BRI. By working with China, Bangladesh will be able to achieve its desired economic development, which puts Bangladesh’s interests first. Though there will be specific challenges, Bangladesh needs to face and overcome those challenges to further its bilateral ties with China. Another positive outcome of better Sino-Bangladesh relations is that it will drastically reduce the historical tendency of Bangladesh’s dependence on India.

CHALLENGES FOR BANGLADESH

To enjoy the fruits of BRI, Bangladesh needs to face and overcome particular challenges in an efficient manner. In particular, massive loans have been pledged to Bangladesh by China as necessary for the economic and infrastructural development of Bangladesh are also a matter of concern. Bangladesh needs to handle these loans and investments very efficiently and adequately to avoid an unmanageable debt burden. Most of these Chinese loans are very commercial, with stiff interest rates, and for that, there cannot be any room for corrupt practices while implementing the BRI projects.⁴⁷

46 S. Patranobis, “China wants Bangladesh to align strategies, promote Belt and Road projects”, *Hindustan Times*, October 4, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/china-wants-bangladesh-to-align-strategies-promote-belt-and-road-projects/story-hPCBfNQ0hstvBcsSlxcluo.html>.

47 J.U. Ahmad, “China’s ‘One Belt One Road’ project - Risks and benefits for Bangladesh”, *The Asian Age*, March 9, 2020, <https://dailyasianage.com/news/221896/chinas-one-belt-one-road-project---risks-and-benefits-for-bangladesh>.

Another major challenge for Bangladesh is the Sino-Indian rivalry in the South Asian region. Both countries are crucial for Bangladesh. India is quite reluctant to get directly involved in the Chinese BRI projects due to various doubts, particularly on security dimensions. Many of the countries in South Asia, including Bangladesh, are more closely integrated with India than China, and that is why the absence of India's participation in the Chinese BRI makes the proper implementation of this initiative in the South Asian region quite problematic.⁴⁸

Bangladesh also needs to be very cautious while dealing with Chinese offers, because too much Chinese interference might bring Indian resentment, which might hamper the country's economic growth. Such a scenario could never be desirable for Bangladesh.⁴⁹

Another major challenge for Bangladesh will be to choose between the two neighbouring great powers, especially when both sides are offering development opportunities to Bangladesh. This will not be very easy.⁵⁰

It is essential to note that, sustainable finance is an essential part of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. It is visible that the Chinese government is creating a new debt trap by providing new loans to debt-ridden countries. Many countries cannot defend their sovereignty under such debt. The Paris Club is a group of officials from the borrowing countries, whose role is to find a comprehensive and sustainable solution for repayment problems. China is not a member of the Paris Club, but, only an observer. As an observer, China will not take practical steps to resolve the crisis in various debt-ridden countries. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), China provided

48 K.C. Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-142.

49 B. Chakma, *op. cit.*, pp. 227-239.

50 *Ibid.*

loans to 31 of the 36 Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). For instance, China signed an USD 8 billion loan for Sri Lanka in July 2017 and a loan for an equity agreement for a 99-year lease to operate the Hambantota Port.⁵¹

Although BRI has the potential for positive economic development, it can cause irreparable damage to the environment in Bangladesh. This infrastructure can threaten the livelihood of the people who depend on the ecosystem and the environmental resources around them. Around 56 per cent of China's total investment in Bangladesh is in the energy sector – more precisely in coal. Such large investments in coal-based energy sector projects are likely to have an adverse environmental impact. BRI is partly responsible for the soaring investment in renewable energy worldwide. China could have made more BRI investment in renewable energy in Bangladesh, but chose not to.⁵²

Further, the lack of an open, transparent, and competitive procurement process can lead to lost timeline costs and poor performance of BRI projects in terms of construction services. However, several initiatives were taken at the Second Band Forum in Beijing in April 2019, in the wake of allegations of corruption and some projects contributing to environmental pollution. One of these initiatives is “The Beijing Initiative for Clean Silk Road”.

BRI-linked projects in Bangladesh are designed to build world-class infrastructures for transportation of goods and people. But this infrastructure will only pay dividends if Bangladesh can get more overseas investment in the export-oriented manufacturing sector. BRI-related investments could potentially avoid bureaucratic and political hurdles, as

51 Khatun and Saadat, *op. cit.*

52 *Ibid.*

most of the Chinese loans are provided on a government-to-government basis. But Bangladesh still needs to attract private sector investment to build a strong manufacturing base. The country needs to expand its export products and destinations, to enhance international trade. To achieve these goals, there is no other way but to bring major reforms in the administration and regulatory system of the country, and to remove bureaucratic barriers.⁵³

CONCLUSION

China inaugurated the BRI in 2013, and many countries from the greater Eurasian region were intrigued by it and started joining in one by one. Bangladesh also joined the BRI in 2016. The BRI offers its member states better and excellent connectivity, increased trade and businesses, along with overall economic development. The BRI is expected to have several implications for Bangladesh's relations with its neighbouring countries. As an emerging economy, Bangladesh considers BRI as significant for its economic development, and needs support for several aspects of its economic expansion. This is precisely what BRI offers to Bangladesh. China has offered loans and investments to Bangladesh, mostly in its infrastructural and power development sector, which are essential for Bangladesh to achieve its desired development. Bangladesh has considerable stakes in the BRI projects. Due to the dearth of economic incentives, Bangladesh has never been a major destination for foreign investment, and the BRI could significantly increase the flow of foreign investments.

Nevertheless, what is troublesome in this context for Bangladesh is that Chinese plans and interference are bothering Bangladesh's other neighbour, India. India has also offered

53 R. Saimum, *op. cit.*, 1-20.

loans and investments to Bangladesh to counter Chinese intervention in Bangladesh and the greater South Asian region. As an emerging country, Bangladesh cannot specifically choose between either of them, neither can it refuse either of these two great powers. This is certainly problematic for Bangladesh.

In terms of 21st-century international politics, Bangladesh could benefit the most from the India-China competition. But the Bangladesh government needs to formulate a more balanced policy, taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the Chinese BRI, even as it remains sensitive to India's core concerns.

Again, the ongoing Rohingya crisis also has several implications for Bangladesh's relations with its other neighbour, Myanmar. Any progress regarding Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral ties is challenging, without solving the Rohingya crisis first. Bangladesh needs Myanmar's support, and Myanmar also needs Bangladesh's backing, for implementing several projects under the BRI in their respective countries. For that to happen, China needs to mediate between these two countries and play a more active role in solving the Rohingya crisis.

The BRI is a project that can change the fate of many countries, including Bangladesh. No matter what challenges it poses in Bangladesh's bilateral relations with its neighbours, Bangladesh needs to face and overcome these challenges, diplomatically and tactfully, to fully reap the benefits associated with the BRI.

Can We Tackle Violence Against Women?

Bilal Zahoor*

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a worldwide problem. On an average, one in three women has been battered, or undergone coercion or abuse in some or other way in her lifetime.¹ Tackling violence against women is a challenge faced by all countries of the world, and the efforts are driven as much by health-related and economic reasons as by humanitarian and egalitarian concerns. Women suffer death as a result of violence, either directly in the form of homicide or indirectly through suicide, with 38 per cent of their murders being committed by their intimate partners.² Thousands more die due to maternity related causes or lethal diseases like HIV. Women who experience intimate partner violence are twice as likely

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- 1 L. Heise, et. al., “Ending violence against women”, *Population Reports*, Volume 27, Number 4, 1999.
- 2 “Violence against women”, *World Health Organisation*, November 29, 2017, <http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

to have depression and 1.5 times more likely to acquire HIV as compared to women who do not undergo partner violence.³ Almost 750 million of the women alive today were married before they turned 18.⁴

The situation is equally dismal on the economic front. Development practitioners are increasingly concerned about the hindrances, violence against women cause to development.⁵ For instance, in India, an incidence of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) can cost a woman five paid work days, making her receive 25 per cent less salary.⁶ Research indicates that the economic cost of VAWG is ubiquitous in every country. Canada loses \$1.16 billion dollars and Australia faces a loss of \$11.38 billion every year as a result of IPV.⁷ Countries in Middle East, West Africa and South Asia are at equal or perhaps greater risk, though the lack of data makes it difficult for analysts to make country-wide extrapolations.

The global experience of tackling violence against women shows that it is an uphill but not an impossible task. Several non-governmental and governmental organisations have been successful in setting precedents, both in terms of prevention and response.

3 “Facts and figures: Ending violence against women”, *UN Women*, November, 2017, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.

4 Ibid.

5 P. Sen, “Development practice and violence against women”, *Gender & Development*, Volume 6, Number 3, 1998, pp. 7-16.

6 Lakshmi Puri, “The economic costs of violence against women”, *UN Women*, 2016, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/9/speech-by-lakshmi-puri-on-economic-costs-of-violence-against-women>.

7 Ibid.

PREVENTION PROGRAMS

For decades, the efforts of governmental and non-governmental women's organisations have been focused on meeting the needs of victims of violence. While helping survivors is an essential element of a holistic strategy designed to counter gender-based violence, the focus of a long-term approach has to be on reducing, if not preventing, violence.

Lori L. Heise's ecological model that takes gendered factors occurring across a social ecology as drivers of violence is widely considered as the starting point for any prevention programming and research. From social norms and behaviour that support VAWG to early childhood experiences of violence that increases the likelihood of life-long exposure to violence, the model indicates key drivers of violence against women and girls. The framework also establishes a proportional relation between partner violence and harmful alcohol use and an inversely proportional relation between violence and women's economic empowerment. The model recognises the effectiveness of legal interventions and strongly recommends improving the violence database by using modern data collection methods.⁸

Drawing on the factors highlighted by Heise and adapting the ecological model at various levels (societal, community, interpersonal and individual) can yield a sound framework to prevent violence against women.

SOCIETAL LEVEL: BUILDING INDIGENOUS AND INCLUSIVE FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

At the societal level, change needs to be brought to legal and policy norms. There has to be a widespread unacceptability

8 L. Heise, "Violence against women: an integrated, ecological framework", *Violence Against Women*, Volume 4, Number 3, 1998, pp. 262-290.

of violence; advocacy to change discriminatory laws; and a legal and policy infrastructure that ensures an adequate state response to VAWG.⁹ Weldon and Htun (2013) conducted an important study in 70 countries from 1975 to 2005 to find out why some governments have adopted robust measures to counter VAWG and why others lag miles behind. The answer lies in the existence of ‘feminist activism’.¹⁰ Feminist activism plays a decisive role in making governments enact effective policies and infrastructure-related measures to prevent and mitigate violence. The study also reveals that the success of strong indigenous feminist movements lies in using international and regional conventions and agreements as levers to influence policy-making and educating indigenous groups and communities about the value of global norms on women’s rights.¹¹

This, however, is extremely difficult in societies with a strong resistance, and in certain cases abhorrence, towards the feminist and human rights framework on the grounds of religion. Religious scholars influencing legal norms, particularly in the Islamic tradition, project feminism as an instrument for “women’s dominance over men” and human rights as something ‘alien to Islamic tradition’.¹² At the same time, human and women’s rights’ activists consider it futile

9 L. Michau, et. al., “Prevention of violence against women and girls: lessons from practice”, *The Lancet*, Volume 385, Number 9978, 2015, pp. 1672-1684.

10 S.L. Weldon and M. Htun, “Feminist mobilisation and progressive policy change: why governments take action to combat violence against women”, *Gender and Development*, Volume 21, Number, 2, 2013, pp. 231-247.

11 Ibid.

12 Mir-Hosseini, Z. “Criminalising sexuality: Zina laws as violence against women in Muslim contexts”, in Z. Mir-Hosseini and V. Hamzić eds., *Control and Sexuality: The revival of Zina Laws in Muslim contexts*, Women Living Under Muslim Laws, London, 2010, pp. 19-48.

and counter-productive to work within a religious framework.¹³ Mir-Hosseini (2010) asserts that these two blind spots must be removed and that both the Islamic framework and human rights perspectives can be mutually reinforcing, particularly in terms of resisting the ‘revised *Zina* laws’ which deal with ‘unlawful’ sexual relations.¹⁴ *Zina* laws, if viewed historically, had become obsolete in almost all Muslim countries in the early 20th century, only to be revived as a result of the resurgence of Islam as a political force in the late 20th century. This suggests that these laws are based on a patriarchal interpretation of the sacred texts of Islam, and must be critiqued from within the Islamic tradition. The classical jurists’ interpretation of the sacred texts was rooted in the social, economic and political realities of the world they lived in, a world where patriarchy and slavery were part of the fabric of society and were seen as the natural order of things.¹⁵ These laws, therefore, are merely juristic constructions that have their roots in the tribal structures and patriarchal ideology of pre-Islamic Arabia.¹⁶ The interpretation of these laws much evolve with the changes in socio-political reality. Besides, many of these laws, such as stoning to death or punishment for consensual sexual relations, have no roots in the Qur’an. As argued by Asifa Quraishi, “(w)hile the Qur’an condemns extramarital sex as an evil, it authorizes the Muslim legal system to prosecute someone for committing this crime only when the act is performed so openly that four people see them without invading their privacy.”¹⁷ Building a vibrant indigenous feminist movement in order to

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Asifa Quraishi, “Her honour: an Islamic critique of the rape provisions in Pakistan’s ordinance on zina”, *Islamic Studies*, Volume 38, Number 3, 1999, pp. 403-431.

influence governmental action thus seems unlikely without a consistent and effective engagement with clerics and religious bodies, particularly in Muslim countries. Amendment of *Zina* laws in Pakistan and the reformation of Family Law in Morocco are two examples of the success of such an inclusive approach.

National laws, however, must complement regional, provincial, sub-provincial and indigenous laws. This is where the active participation and leadership of local women's rights activists can create a difference. A classic example is that of Ecuador where efforts by women's organisations at the national level "to affect the 2008 national constitution" was supported by indigenous women activists from the Kichwa community. The latter succeeded in translating the national legislation into the indigenous justice system by formulating a set of principles called Regulations for Good Livings (*Reglamentos de Buena Convivencia*).¹⁸

COMMUNITY LEVEL: USING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE WAYS AND ENGAGING LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

While violence against women and girls at the societal level is shaped by law and policy, at the community level it is the social norms about gender and power that can either support or discourage violence.¹⁹ Social norms, created by the interplay of cultural and religious beliefs, are often presented as a justification for gender-based violence. For instance, in a male-dominated society like Pakistan, partner violence is accepted as a cultural norm in many urban and rural settings and viewed as normal behavior within a marriage.²⁰ In communities

18 L. Michau, et. al., op. cit.

19 Ibid.

20 T.S. Ali, et. al., "Intimate partner violence in urban Pakistan: prevalence, frequency, and risk factors", *International Journal of Women's Health*, Volume 3, 2011, pp. 105-115.

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where such attitudes are legitimised by informal social norms, individuals find no incentive to shun violence. In fact, the threat of social condemnation or punishment²¹ strongly *discourages* them from challenging pro-violence norms. Community-level prevention of violence, therefore, must aim to change such violence-inducing social norms by creating an environment that breeds gender-equality and non-violence.

This starts with introducing change in attitudes supporting gender-based violence. Whether it is a prevention programme or a service for assisting victims, the key lies in using culturally and socially relevant ways and matching program delivery to local needs, preferences, and cultural norms.²² The success of the ‘It’s not OK’ campaign in New Zealand, for example, is largely due to the use of culturally pertinent images, language, people, and situations to create a stronger enabling environment for changes in attitudes around intimate partner violence.²³ New Zealand, despite having ratified a number of international and regional treaties, continues to face VAWG, with one in three women having experienced domestic violence in their lifetime.²⁴ The ‘It’s not OK’ campaign, however, has proven to be a model for creating a difference. Aimed at challenging attitudes and behaviour that tolerate violence, this community-driven initiative used a

21 “Changing Cultural and Social Norms that Support Violence”, *World Health Organisation*, 2009, https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/norms.pdf.

22 J. A. Durlak and E.P. DuPre, “Implementation matters: A review of research on the influence of implementation on program outcomes and the factors affecting implementation”, *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Volume 41, Number 3-4, 2008, p. 327.

23 L. Michau, et. al., op. cit.

24 J. Contesse and J. Fenrich, “It’s Not OK: New Zealand’s Efforts to Eliminate Violence against Women”, *Fordham International Law*, Volume 32, Number 6, 2008, pp. 1770-1871.

mix of effective tools such as TV advertisements, engaging family-violence related soap operas, a toll free information helpline, vibrant social media presence, training of journalists and service providers, regular broadcast of personal stories of survivors, and innovative community-led activities backed by a research and evaluation programme.²⁵ A survey regarding the effectiveness of campaign's advertisements reveals that the ads helped 68 per cent of people understand behaviour that should not be tolerated and made 88 per cent of people believe that change was possible. Moreover, the ads helped generate discourse about domestic violence amongst 68 per cent of the viewers, and 22 per cent of the viewers took at least one action in response to the advertisements.²⁶

No attempt to change norms around Gender Based Violence (GBV) is likely to succeed without involving a wide array of local stakeholders. This not only adds a culturally relevant flavour to the project but also intertwines counter-violence efforts with the interests of the stakeholders. SASA! (a Uganda-based non-profit organisation working toward the prevention of violence against women and children), for instance, engages a broad range of stakeholders including “community activists, local governmental and cultural leaders, professionals such as police officers and health care providers, and institutional leaders”.²⁷ In 2014, SASA! undertook a study

25 L. Michau, et. al., op. cit.

26 “Campaign for Action on Family Violence: Reach and retention of the “It’s not OK” television advertisements”, *Centre for Social Research and Evaluation*, March, 2010, <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/campaign-action-violence-tv/index.html>.

27 T. Abramsky, et. al., “Findings from the SASA! Study: a cluster randomized controlled trial to assess the impact of a community mobilization intervention to prevent violence against women and reduce HIV risk in Kampala, Uganda”, *BMC Medicine*, Volume 12, Number 22, 2014.

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to evaluate the impact of its community mobilisation efforts on prevention of IPV and reduction in HIV risk in Kampala, Uganda. The intervention, they found, lowered the social acceptance of violence significantly, increased the acceptance that women can refuse sex to a great extent and decreased the occurrence of IPV by 52 per cent.²⁸

INTERPERSONAL LEVEL: GET MEN INVOLVED

Most instances of VAWG occur at inter-personal level, with partner violence being the most common form. Preventing violence at this level has, therefore, been the focus of most governmental and non-governmental organisations. Victims normally share the instances of violence with their immediate family members, peers and neighbours, and their response dictates their perceptions of violence and the course they are likely to take. This implies that prevention programs should not be solely directed toward women and girls but also work with their family members and peers, particularly men. Men can be and must be engaged as participants in education programs, as community leaders, as professionals and providers, and as advocates and activists working in alliance with women.²⁹

Entertainment-Education (EE) programs have been gaining quite a lot of significance lately, especially through the initiatives of Breakthrough, a human rights organisation with offices in India and the US. Lapsansky and Chatterjee (2013) undertook Breakthrough's case study in India and found there are five ways in which men can be represented in EE programs: "1) invisible men; 2) men as perpetrators; 3) men as allies; 4) men as agents in challenging hegemonic masculinity; and 5) men as agents in

28 Ibid.

29 M. Flood, "Involving men in efforts to end violence against women", *Men and Masculinities*, Volume 14, Number 3, 2011, pp. 358-377.

redefining manhood”.³⁰ EE programs seek to redefine manhood by challenging the notions of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and presenting alternative forms.

One of the most interesting and innovative campaigns involving men as agents of change is the Canadian White Ribbon Campaign (WRC) that started in 1991. Based on the premise that there are scores of men who detest violence against women, the campaign seeks to break the silence of all such men and make them part of the solution. Activists typically wear a white ribbon “from November 25 (the international day for the eradication of VAW) to December 6 (the anniversary of the Montreal massacre in which a man killed 14 women)”³¹ and, thus, pledge publicly that they will neither commit violence against women nor remain silent about it. Apart from working with a wide range of ordinary men across the social and political spectrum, the WRC also involves high-profile men who speak out publicly against violence to inspire change. WRC also attempts to change the traditional notions of fatherhood and encourages men to be more active, nurturing parents. The campaign gives overwhelming importance to education programs and distributes educational materials among boys studying in schools. From providing shelters to local women with the help of men to working with trade unions, and from running an inspiring media campaign to developing sound educational programs, WRC provides a model for giving boys and men the structure, encouragement and tools to work as allies with girls and young women.³²

30 C. Lapsansky and J.S. Chatterjee, “Masculinity matters: using entertainment education to engage men in ending violence against women in India”, *Critical Arts*, Volume 27, Number 1, 2013, pp. 36-55.

31 M. Kaufman, “Building a movement of men working to end violence against women”, *Development*, Volume 44, Number 3, 2001, pp. 9-14.

32 Ibid.

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There are, however, several challenges associated with working with men. Casey et. al. (2013) interviewed 29 representatives of organisations engaging men across continents to prevent violence against women and discovered five core challenges: “(1) negotiating issues of gender, (2) intersectionality, (3) sustainability, (4) legitimacy, and (5) ideological inclusivity”.³³ The authors describe these challenges as “tensions” as they exist within competing priorities and paradigms. These tensions are influenced by two larger themes: the theme of cultural, political, economic and social context and the manifestation of these tensions across ecological layers of analysis. The latter has implications pertaining to both the participation of individual men in programs and the impact of these tensions at organisational, societal and national levels.³⁴

Working with men has been a rewarding experience, demonstrating potential for bringing about change in attitudes associated with violence against women. But the experience has been local in scale and limited in scope.³⁵ Instead of small, scattered and short-lived interventions, efforts involving men ought to be systematic, large-scale, and coordinated.³⁶

Another approach that has drawn the attention of programmers lately is designing the prevention programs on the basis of strong theoretical notions. Increasingly, programmers are moving towards incorporating theories of change that explore how change happens in complex social systems, as opposed to sticking to a linear cause-and-effect knowledge,

33 E.A. Casey, et. al., “Context, challenges, and tensions in global efforts to engage men in the prevention of violence against women: an ecological analysis”, *Men and Masculinities*, Volume 16, Number 2, 2013, pp. 228-251.

34 Ibid.

35 M. Flood, op. cit.

36 Ibid.

attitudes, and practices (KAP) model.³⁷ The Nicaraguan feminist non-governmental organisation Puntos de Encuentro's multi-sectoral program is a classic example. Working in coordination with hundreds of organisations, institutions, media outlets and health and social service providers, Puntos draws on a vast range of social and psychological theories and creates intertwining television storylines that recognise that change is non-linear and often messy.³⁸ Two of their television series, *Sexto Sentido* (Sixth Sense) and *Contracorriente* (Turning the Tide), "have moved millions of viewers to challenge the *status quo* of entrenched machismo and violence".³⁹ Grounded in theories of social change, the series do not tell the audience what to do but present an interesting mix of thought-provoking drama and humour revolving around the power relations and struggles of women and men. Apart from the television series, Puntos broadcasts a radio programme, publishes a feminist magazine and regularly offers training courses to women and youth activists. Surveys evaluating Puntos' impact revealed that the television series brought about significant change, with the majority of viewers talking about issues of violence against women and opposing domestic violence.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL: ASPIRATIONAL PROGRAMS MATTER

The individual level reflects the experiences of violence faced by women and girls. This is the level where men hold notions of masculinity including social dominance, aggressive sexuality and feelings of bias and power. Women, on the other hand, adhere to the notions of femininity including "learned submissive roles which lead them to accept violent behaviour

37 L. Michau, et. al., op. cit.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

or feel that they are to blame for the violence that they have experienced".⁴⁰

One of the principles that Michau and colleagues (2015) recommend to prevent violence at this level is aspirational programming, which encourages activism by presenting ideas and concrete examples of the world that we foresee for ourselves.⁴¹ Because the programming aims to inspire activism, the messages conveyed have to be powerful, striking and relatable. Efforts may focus on the men of a particular community, as Breakthrough's *Bell Bajao* (Ring the Bell) campaign is doing in two Indian provinces. *Bell Bajao*, launched in India in 2008, calls on men and boys to ring the bell to stop domestic violence against women. Men or boys, usually neighbours, ring the doorbell after overhearing a man beating his wife, under the pretext of needing something. The campaign is unique in that it shifts the responsibility of activism away from non-governmental organisations, state or victims, onto men in the community.⁴² Impact evaluation surveys of the campaign showed promising results, indicating considerable change, at individual and community level, regarding interpersonal violence.⁴³

BEYOND LEVELS: EDUCATING CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS AND WORKING WITH PARENTS

The continued focus of governmental and non-governmental organisations on educating children and adults about violence against women and girls as part of prevention

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Jael Silliman, "Breakthrough's Bell Bajao!: A Campaign to Bring Domestic Violence to a Halt", 2011, http://breakthrough.tv/wp/wp-content/files_mf/1330816837_BellBajao_Insight.pdf.

programs reflect the effectiveness of such interventions. Education on GBV brings awareness among both children and adults about their gender-related rights and responsibilities, about what constitutes inappropriate behaviour, harassment, sexism, racism and coercion, about the repercussions such criminal acts bring, or must bring, and about what to do and how to respond when violence is perpetrated. Education, both formal and informal, is a “powerful tool for the prevention of violence, especially when combined with other strategies, such as community mobilisation and awareness-raising”.⁴⁴ Schools, in particular, can play a critical role in addressing different gender inequalities and stereotypes leading to violent behaviour.⁴⁵

Domestic violence is one such manifestation of violent behaviour that can be addressed through school-based prevention programs. Hounslow (one of the boroughs in London) reached this conclusion in 2004 and launched a programme ‘Learning to Respect’. The programme revolves around a curriculum focused on improving understanding of healthy and non-abusive relationships. Since 2004, it has engaged 73 schools in the borough, trained over 2000 teachers and equipped thousands of children with awareness regarding domestic violence, in collaboration with a number of agencies.⁴⁶ The success of the programme encourages replication, though the challenges and cultural sensitivities in different regions need to be taken into account.

44 “Through education, youth act to prevent violence against women”, *UN Women*, October 29, 2015, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/10/through-education-youth-act-to-prevent-violence-against-women>.

45 Patte Friend, “Learning to Respect: Domestic Violence Education Programme”, 2014, <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/download/file/fid/3446>.

46 Ibid.

LEAVE THE KIDS ALONE

Sexual violence, including child sexual abuse (CSA), is yet another kind of violence likely to be prevented through education at primary and secondary levels. With over 300,000 children being sexually abused every year,⁴⁷ this is a global problem that needs immediate attention. A research analysing 55 studies conducted between 2002 and 2009 on children aged less than 18 years estimates the prevalence of CSA ranging from 8 to 31 per cent for girls and 3 to 17 per cent for boys.⁴⁸ Dealing with the mental, physical, emotional and social impact of such abuse on a victim's life⁴⁹ requires programs backed by scientific research, applied in an integrated manner.

The lack of age-appropriate sexuality education initiatives at both primary and secondary levels is one of the leading factors increasing vulnerability of sexual abuse, particularly among girls.⁵⁰ Sexuality education can be particularly effective in lowering sexual activity and preventing unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).⁵¹ UNESCO's

47 "Prevent Child Sexual Abuse: Facts about Sexual Abuse and How to Prevent it," *Stop It Now*, 2008, https://www.stopitnow.org/sites/default/files/documents/files/prevent_child_sexual_abuse.pdf.

48 J. Barth, et. al., "The current prevalence of child sexual abuse worldwide: a systematic review and meta-analysis", *International Journal of Public Health*, Volume 58, Number 3, 2013, pp. 469-483.

49 D. Lisak, "The psychological impact of sexual abuse: Content analysis of interviews with male survivors", *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Volume 7, Number 4, 1994, pp. 525-548; P.K. Trickett, et. al., "The impact of sexual abuse on female development: Lessons from a multigenerational, longitudinal research study" *Development and Psychopathology*, Volume 23, Number 2, 2011, pp. 453-476.

50 D. Finkelhor, et. al., "Sexual abuse in a national survey of adult men and women: Prevalence, characteristics, and risk factors", *Child Abuse and Neglect*, Volume 14, Number 1, 1990, pp. 19-28.

51 M.L. Vincent, et. al., "Reducing adolescent pregnancy through school and community-based education", *Jama*, Volume 257, Number 24, 1987, pp. 3382-3386; D.B. Kirby, et. al., "Sex and HIV education programs:

2008 report incorporated a number of reviews on the impact of sex, relationships and HIV education. The takeaway is that such programs, if increased substantially in number, can “significantly decrease one or more types of sexual activity”.⁵² The report also debunks the myth that sexuality education increases sexual behaviour. Similar revelations about the absence of relation between sexuality education and increased sexual behaviour have been made by Kirby’s (2002) review of studies. Highlighting the scope and focus of different sexuality education programs, the UNESCO (2008) report unveils that, at present, a vast number of programs seek to either eliminate risk or delay sexual activity, with very few focusing on preventing sexual abuse and violence.⁵³

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), therefore, is the need of the hour. CSE “is a rights-based and gender-focused approach to sexuality education, whether in school or out of school. It is taught over several years, providing age-appropriate information consistent with the evolving capacities of young people”.⁵⁴ It covers “anatomy, hormones and physiological responses, STIs, birth control, gender identity and gender roles, sexual orientation, development, sexual behaviors and problems, and sexual abuse”.⁵⁵ In

their impact on sexual behaviors of young people throughout the world”, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Volume 40, Number 3, 2007, pp. 206-217; K.F. Stanger-Hall and D.W. Hall, “Abstinence-only education and teen pregnancy rates: why we need comprehensive sex education in the US”, *PloS One*, Volume 6, Number 10, 2011.

52 “Review of sex, relationships and HIV education in schools”, UNESCO, 2008, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000162989>.

53 Ibid.

54 “Comprehensive sexuality education”, UNFPA, 2016, <https://www.unfpa.org/comprehensive-sexuality-education>.

55 B.M. King, “The need for school-based comprehensive sexuality education: some reflections after 32 years teaching sexuality to college students”, *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, Volume 7, Number 3, 2012, pp. 181-186.

the industrialised world, particularly in the US, the issue of sexuality education has been politicised with the proponents of abstinence-only education pressuring governments not to embrace CSE. Numerous studies have proved abstinence-only education ineffective,⁵⁶ but a vast majority of American schools continue teaching it.⁵⁷ The result is that over 70 per cent teens have no knowledge about sexuality beyond birth-control, and the epidemic of STIs among the young is growing by the day. The US also has the highest teenage pregnancy and STI rate in the industrialised world.⁵⁸

While there is ample evidence highlighting CSE's effectiveness, very few studies have been conducted evaluating its impact specifically on preventing abuse. Whatley and Trudell (1989), however, have useful recommendations, making up for the lack of research. The authors argue that sexual abuse prevention education needs to "be integrated into a comprehensive, coordinated K-12 (from kindergarten to grade 12) sexuality curriculum".⁵⁹ Such a curriculum would expose students to non-exploitative values – ones that emphasise less on 'my body is my own' and more on 'everyone's bodies are their own'. These values, besides helping children avoid abuse, would be carried through to adulthood "preventing abusive sexual behaviour" among adults. The authors also admit that,

56 J. Santelli, et. al., "Abstinence and abstinence-only education: A review of U.S. policies and programs", *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Volume 38, Number 1, 2006, pp. 72–81.

57 B.M. King, op. cit.

58 M.S. Kearney and P.B. Levine, "Why is the teen birth rate in the United States so high and why does it matter?", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Volume 26, Number 2, 2012, pp. 141-63; K.F. Stanger-Hall and D.W. Hall, 2011, op. cit.

59 M. Whatley and B. Trudel, "Sexual abuse prevention and sexuality education: Interconnecting issues", *Theory into Practice*, Volume 28, Number 3, 1989, pp. 177-182.

without sustained and quality training of teachers and without bringing in specialists, the likelihood of delivering fruitful programs is low.⁶⁰

Like children and young adults, parents also need to be educated about CSA and sexuality education. Research divulges that programs that include family members of vulnerable youth are likely to be more successful in reducing risk of sexual abuse.⁶¹ Parents need to be trained and exposed to scientific facts about sexuality and the link between CSE and low vulnerability for sexual abuse. Some myths, like sexual abuse is mostly committed by strangers, need to be debunked. Babatsiko's review of studies conducted in North America and Asia, show how "parents throughout the studies thought that strangers posed the greatest threat to their children".⁶² In addition to 'stranger danger', there are several other myths diffusing "perpetrator responsibility" and the extent of harm CSA poses and its prevalence.⁶³

Moreover, teaching children correct names of genital organs is the first step toward sexuality education. A child not aware of the names of sexual organs is likely to find it hard explaining the experience of molestation if it occurred. This would also be a good way to remove shame and stigma associated with discussing sexuality. Research also supports

60 Ibid.

61 F.H. McClure, et. al., "Resilience in Sexually Abused Women: Risk and Protective Factors", *Journal of Family Violence*, Volume 23, Issue 2, 2008, pp. 81-88.

62 G. Babatsikos, "Parents' knowledge, attitudes and practices about preventing child sexual abuse: a literature review", *Child Abuse Review: Journal of the British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect*, Volume 19, Number 2, 2010, pp.107-129.

63 L. D. Cromer and R.E. Goldsmith, "Child Sexual Abuse Myths: Attitudes, Beliefs, and Individual Differences", *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, Volume 19, Number 6, 2010, pp. 618-647.

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the idea of educating parents and children in tandem with each other as that can encourage family communication about the matter, eventually triggering parent-to-parent discussion within communities.⁶⁴ Similarly, other individuals and personnel involved in the prevention of CSA, from medical providers to clergy and from forensic interviewers to law enforcement officials, can help children to disclose abuse and parents to report to the authorities.⁶⁵

RESPONSE PROGRAMS

USING HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK AND FIXING THE POWER EQUATION

Tackling violence against women, seemingly a complex job, must be viewed through the correct lens. Research shows that violence against women can be dealt effectively within the human rights framework.⁶⁶ Informed by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Istanbul Convention, and other international and regional treaties, the human rights framework seeks to address all the factors impacting women's lives and causing violence. The notion is reinforced by the lessons learnt from work of WOMANKIND, a UK-based women's rights organisation with a focus on Africa. Being principally

64 M.C. Kenny, "Child sexual abuse prevention: Psychoeducational groups for preschoolers and their parents", *Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, Volume 34, Number 1, 2009, pp. 24-42.

65 S.K. Wurtele, "Preventing sexual abuse of children in the twenty-first century: Preparing for challenges and opportunities" *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, Volume 18, Number 1, 2009, pp.1-18.

66 "The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence", *Victorian Health Promotion Foundation*, State Government Victoria, 2004, <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/IPV%20BOD%20web%20version.ashx>.

interested in the intersection between violence against women and other women's human rights, the organisation reveals that a rights-based analysis can help to provide an understanding of the often-intricate linkages between women's experience of violence and the denial of their social, political, economic and legal rights.⁶⁷ At the heart of violence, it implies, lies the unequal power relations between men and women in societal structures. Men being considered superior to women, particularly in patriarchal societies, get to have the freedom to involve in employment and education and contribute to the community. Women, in contrast, are expected to be agreeable and to follow the expectations of males in their family and/or community. The difference in both the sort and degree of freedom is the difference in power each bloc holds in the social, economic, political and legal spheres in a society. This is where the human rights framework can be instrumental. Once the unequal power relations are addressed, violence will decrease automatically. For instance, economic empowerment interventions such as the microfinance-based intervention in South Africa or the group-based credit programs in Bangladesh have led to significant decrease in domestic violence.⁶⁸ Conditional cash transfers to poor girls in high school in northeast South Africa resulted in a 34 per cent decrease in IPV, also reducing the risk of HIV.⁶⁹

67 Hayes, C., "Tackling violence against women: a worldwide approach", in Geraldine Terry and Joanna Hoare eds. *Gender-based violence*, Oxford, Oxfam, 2007, pp. 1-13.

68 J.C. Kim, "Understanding the impact of a microfinance-based intervention on women's empowerment and the reduction of intimate partner violence in South Africa", *American Journal of Public Health*, Volume 97, Number 10, 2007, pp. 1794-1802; S.R. Schuler, et. al., "Credit programs, patriarchy and men's violence against women in rural Bangladesh", *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 43, Number 12, 1996, pp. 1729-1742.

69 K.N. Kilburn, et. al, "Conditional cash transfers and the reduction in partner violence for young women: an investigation of causal pathways using evidence from a randomized experiment in South Africa (HPTN 068)", *Journal of the International AIDS Society*, Volume 21, 2018, e25043.

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The human rights framework is already successful as it has moved the violence against women from being invisible and a private matter to “being embraced in the human right programs by state parties, human rights organizations and individuals”.⁷⁰ The weakness, however, lies in the implementation, as the rights-based framework “depends on the functionality of the country’s legal system, the country’s judicial and political openness and country’s cultural context”.⁷¹

LEGISLATION: THE STARTING POINT

Legislation, in isolation, cannot prevent and tackle the deep-rooted social problem of violence against women, but the presence of legal instruments is a necessary condition. Besides legal sanctions, legislation can educate people and shape public opinion.

However, despite having enacted legal regulatory mechanisms in areas of domestic violence, sexual violence, human trafficking, cyber violence and forced marriages, Sweden continues to face growing violence against women, with the statistics revealing the prevalence being 13 per cent higher than the EU average.⁷² Interestingly, Sweden appears to be one of the top five countries in the World Economic Forum’s Gender Parity Index, 2018.⁷³ This paradox needs

70 Patience Gulu, “The Usefulness of Human Rights Framework in Addressing Gender Based Violence”, *Peace Woman*, October 1, 2010, <https://www.peacewomen.org/node/90004>.

71 Gaay, F., “Poverty as a failure of entitlement: do rights-based approaches make sense?”, in L. Williams ed., *International Poverty Law: An Emerging Discourse*, Zed Books, London, pp. 34-48.

72 “European Institute for Gender Equality (n.d.). *Combating Violence against Women: Sweden*”, EIGE, 2016, <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/combating-violence-against-women-sweden>.

73 “The Global Gender Gap Report”, World Economic Forum, 2018, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf.

to be explored with greater zeal as currently there exists a complete dearth of research in the arena. Surprised by the singular lack of research, Enrique Gracia and Juan Merlo (2016) set out to discover the baffling relation between high rates of gender equality and violence against women in Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), particularly partner violence. They concluded that anger over the equal or, in certain cases relatively high, status of women may be at play, along with factors unrelated to gender equality, such as alcohol abuse.⁷⁴

While these revelations are intriguing and demand further research, countries like Pakistan need not be misled. Legislation continues to be the starting point for any effective intervention programme. Without effective legislative support, victims of violence will not be able to hold perpetrators accountable. This is particularly valid for countries that ought to resist the clergy-dominated institutions and their influence over the formulation of law. Council of Islamic Ideology's (CII's) proposal to sanction 'light beating' of a wife by a husband in 2016;⁷⁵ and UAE's local court's ruling permitting husbands beating their wives if no marks are left,⁷⁶ are two of the manifestations of religion being used as a justification for violence. Pakistan, one of the countries struggling to legally challenge faith-based interpretations of clergy-led institutions, has a very long way to go. The country has enacted several relevant national laws

74 E. Gracia and J. Merlo, "Intimate partner violence against women and the Nordic paradox", *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 157, 2016, pp. 27-30.

75 Raza Khan, "'Lightly beating' wife permissible, says CII's proposed women protection bill", *Dawn*, May 26, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1260803>.

76 "Court in UAE says beating wife, child OK if no marks are left", *CNN*, October 19, 2010, <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/meast/10/19/uae.court.ruling/>.

in recent years, but the clergy continues to pose a threat to the safety of women. For instance, when the government of Punjab passed a landmark bill regarding domestic violence in February 2016, 30 religious groups opposed it and threatened to launch country-wide protests, calling the bill “un-Islamic”.⁷⁷ The state faces immense opposition from religious groups, including the CII and mainstream Islamist parties, whenever it takes up bills on violence against women.

EFFECTIVE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: A MEASURE OF ADEQUATE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Legislation needs to be backed by a holistic framework of implementation in order to truly tackle violence against women. Research suggests the following measures rendering criminal justice system (CJS) effective.

- Training and education for criminal justice professionals: Drafting detailed rules and regulations for the implementation of formulated laws is usually the first step towards implementation. This needs to be followed by rigorous “training and education for criminal justice professionals”⁷⁸ across the CJS and the associated sectors of health and education. From the officer having firsthand interaction with the victim to judges, every one engaged with CJS must be fully aware of the laws and their implications and must be equipped with the skills and attitudes necessary to make

77 Lizzie Dearden, “‘Rampant’ violence against women in Pakistan revealed as groups fight ‘un-Islamic’ law against domestic abuse”, *The Independent*, April 5, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/rampant-violence-against-women-in-pakistan-revealed-as-groups-fight-un-islamic-law-against-domestic-a6969311.html>.

78 Dora M. Y. Tam, et. al., “Comparing criminal justice responses to violence against women in Canada and China”, *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development*, Volume 23, Number 2, 2013, pp. 106-120.

responses effective. Making professionals well-versed with the underpinnings of law is relatively easier; the greater challenge lies in changing attitudes rooted in patriarchal cultures.

One of the programs that has been seeking to educate members of the judiciary in India is the Gender and Judges Project run by Sakshi, a grassroots NGO working in the fields of education, health and community development. At the start of the project in 1994, Sakshi surveyed the judicial attitudes to violence against women to find out the degree of judicial bias restricting women's access to justice. The resulting report "confirmed that there is a pervasive gender bias in the attitudes of judges to violence against women".⁷⁹ Besides India, the project has reverberated well in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan, catalysing "local groups to start independent work on these issues".⁸⁰

A study by Deborah Epstein (1999) also points to the existence of widely prevalent 'anti-victim bias' amongst judges in the US. Informed by a biased perception of domestic violence, most "judges and clerks tend to be easily frustrated with battered women" and perceive them as liars.⁸¹ The solution according to Epstein is judicial education. Care, however, must be taken while formulating any judicial training programme, in that it may lead to 'anti-perpetrator bias' if driven too far in one direction.

79 Aanchal Kapur, "I am witness to...": A profile of Sakshi Violence Intervention Centre in New Delhi, India", *Gender & Development*, Volume 6, Issue 3, 1998, pp. 42-47.

80 Ibid.

81 Deborah Epstein, "Effective Intervention in Domestic Violence Cases: Rethinking the Roles of Prosecutors, Judges, and the Court System", *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, Volume 11, Number 3, 1999, pp. 3-50.

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- Improving the responsiveness of the CJS to survivors: This should be an integral part of the state's policy of implementation of laws. This means increasing the representation of women at all levels of the CJS (female judges, prosecutors and police officers). Numbers alone, however, do not make the difference. Pakistan, for instance, holds over one third representation of female judges in the family courts, but there's no substantial evidence suggesting that the phenomenon has led to improved decision-making.⁸² Another study by Hunter (2015) suggests that increased number of female judges is not always likely to result in "substantively different decision-making".⁸³ Instead it will only occur under conditions of "a combination of opportunity (in terms of both subject matter and legal space), plus personal commitment and/or external encouragement".⁸⁴ As long as these conditions are met, women judges are highly likely to bring "gendered sensibility to the process of decision-making" and "engage in active mentoring", besides offering numerous symbolic effects and civilising their male colleagues behind the scenes.⁸⁵
- Specialised tribunals, specialised prosecutors, women police stations and state-owned and alternative all-women courts are some of the other measures likely to improve responsiveness of CJS.

82 L. Holden, "Women Judges and Women's Rights in Pakistan", *Oñati Socio-legal Series*, Volume 7, Number 4, 2017, pp. 752-769.

83 Rosemary Hunter, "More than Just a Different Face? Judicial Diversity and Decision-Making", *Current Legal Problems*, Volume 68, Number 1, 2015, pp. 119-141.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

- *Specialised courts and tribunals*: In response to the gravity and prevalence of gender-based violence, creating specialised tribunals and courts is an expression of the willingness to deal with the urgency of the situation. Apart from having enormous symbolic value, there are numerous concrete implications of such actions. For instance, in 2009, judicial officials from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in collaboration with the Open Society Justice Initiative and the Open Society Institute for Southern Africa (OSISA) launched the mobile gender courts initiative for the victims of sexual violence. The driving force behind the initiative was the prevalence of mass sexual abuse of women at the hands of Congolese Army, terrorists and rebels, lasting for over a decade in the eastern parts of DRC. Staffed with officials specially trained in the area of sexual violence, the courts found several army officers and other armed groups guilty of rape and sexual abuse against women. Between October 2009 and May 2011, the courts heard 250 cases during a series of multiple short sessions and handed out “195 convictions – 75 per cent for sexual crimes, and 25 per cent for other crimes”.⁸⁶ The mobile courts, in addition to speeding up the proceedings, turned out to be a model to replicate for delivering justice to the victims of sexual crimes.

Similar specialised courts, Sexual Offences Courts, were created in South Africa in 1993 to deliver justice to women and child survivors of sexual assault. The creation of these courts led to an increased conviction

86 “Fact Sheet: DRC Mobile Gender Courts”, *Open Society Justice Initiative*, 2018, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/mobile-court-20110725.pdf>.

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rate of 70 per cent, well above the national average. Another result was the reduction of duration of cases from 3-5 years to less than 6 months. Moreover, these courts are viewed positively by not just the legal personnel involved but also the survivors and their families.⁸⁷

- *All-women courts*: While the research thoroughly supports the idea of state-sanctioned specialised courts aimed at reducing violence against women, the findings about the impact of ‘non-state’ all-women courts are mixed. Such courts are particularly prevalent in India, where they primarily broker matters concerning marital disputes. *Mahila Panchayats* (all-women courts) are backed by NGOs, with the leading role of arbitration being played by specially trained women personnel as well as female members of the community versed with the woes faced by fellow women. Although widely popular, their decisions are not officially recognised by the Indian judicial system. Women who approach these courts normally enter into a voluntary agreement informally binding their spouses not to recommit violence. But in case the perpetrators break the agreement, these alternative arrangements cannot do anything beyond suggesting the parties to come again for discussion or recommending that the victim file a criminal charge against the perpetrator. Another question that scholars raise is regarding the precedent of compromise these courts end up setting. Because these courts aim to reconcile disputing couples, women are “often sent back into the marriages they were trying

87 Cheryl Thomas, et. al., “Working with the Justice Sector to End Violence Against Women and Girls”, 2011, <http://www.endvawnow.org/uploads/modules/pdf/1325624043.pdf>.

to escape from,”⁸⁸ eventually validating the same patriarchal values they are fighting against. However, in the context of India, and for that matter Pakistan too, amongst several other countries from the Global South, the implications of divorce are cataclysmic. Most of the women being uneducated, unskilled or semi-skilled find it hard to earn their living besides being vulnerable to sexual abuse after being divorced. This unfortunate reality of women not having any viable alternative makes the agenda of reconciliation seem more plausible.

At the same time, what women experience in professional courts as opposed to these informal arrangements needs to be considered: from standing before the courtroom dominated by men to undergoing male stares, which may turn into harassment at times, there is a lot that women face during a court hearing. Alternative fast-track courts, on the other hand, provide them with the environment where they not only feel comfortable but also believe that the women in charge of the matter would relate to their particularities and propose solutions specific to their circumstances.

In countries like India, where legal pluralism being practiced on a large scale seems unlikely, alternative all-women courts might seem like a reasonable option despite their limitations, if they develop a repute for fairness and even-handed conduct for both men and women, and trust on social pressure and persuasion, to ensure that their decisions are complied with, just like

88 S. Vatak, “The “women’s court” in India: an alternative dispute resolution body for women in distress”, *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, Volume 45, Number 1, 2013, pp. 76-103.

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the male-led clan, caste and village panchayats upon which they model themselves.⁸⁹

- *Women's police stations*: Like specialised courts, the 20th century also saw specialised police stations dealing with specific set of crimes. Women's police stations, generally considered as a manifestation of the success of the women's movement, are one such set of an unusual component of the criminal justice system. Brazil was the first country to create a women's police station in Sao Paulo in 1985.⁹⁰ This, in turn, led to dozens of similar police stations or units within regular police stations being created in Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru, Argentina, Bolivia, South Africa, Ghana, Uganda, Spain, Portugal and India amongst other countries.

Brazil offers an interesting case study of the effectiveness of such "machineries" and the complex interaction among policewomen, feminists and complainants. Commonly known as *delegacia da mulher* (women's police station, or DDMs), their creation was a direct answer to the feminist critique that policemen in regular police stations were sexist and did not take women's complaints of violence against them seriously.⁹¹ These sexist attitudes in Brazil have been historically shaped by patriarchal socio-legal structures developed as a result of tyrannical colonial and post-colonial experiences. The Portuguese

89 Ibid.

90 "Women's Police Stations in Latin America Case Study: An Entry Point for Stopping Violence and Gaining Access to Justice", *UN Women*, 2011, https://www.endvawnow.org/uploads/browser/files/security_wps_case_study.pdf.

91 C. M. Santos, *Women's Police Stations: Gender, Violence, and Justice in São Paulo, Brazil*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

colonial law that prevailed until the independence of Brazil in 1822 “allowed a man to kill his adulterous wife and her lover but did not allow the wife to kill her adulterous husband”⁹². Even after the law was repealed in 1830, “the belief that a man could legitimately kill his adulterous wife remained accepted by the dominant culture”⁹³, the extent of which can be measured by the fact that the pop song “Dá Nela” (“let her have it” or “beat her up”) turned out to be one the most popular songs in the early 1930s, winning multiple awards. In this cultural backdrop coupled with the twenty years period (1964-1984) of military dictatorship, the birth of the world’s first police station on August 6, 1985, as an example of “state-institutionalised feminism”,⁹⁴ is “a significant advance in the field of women’s rights”.⁹⁵ The experiment was replicated in other states of Brazil and by 1990, the country had 74 DDMs.⁹⁶ Over the years, the number of complaints increased significantly because of the ease offered by DDMs, with 310,058 complaints being registered in Sao Paulo alone in 2010.⁹⁷

However, there are several challenges that the aspiration of creating a feminist organ within a

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

94 S. Hautzinger, “Criminalising Male Violence in Brazil’s Women’s Police Stations: From flawed essentialism to imagined communities”, *Journal of Gender Studies*, Volume 11, Issue 3, 2002, pp. 243-251.

95 C.M. Santos, op. cit.

96 Thomas, D.Q., “In Search of Solutions: Women’s Police Stations in Brazil” in M. Davies ed., *Women and Violence: Realities and Responses Worldwide*, Zed Books, London, 1994.

97 C.M. Santos, “En-Gendering the Police: Women’s Police Stations and Feminism in Sao Paulo”, *Latin American Research Review*, Volume 39, Number 3, 2004, pp. 29-55.

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patriarchal state is faced with. First, it's important to mention that some of the expectations regarding the potential of DDMs to bring substantial change in isolation were exaggerated. Most of the DDMs are staffed with policewomen not trained in domestic and other kinds of violence against women. Moreover, the DDMs are discriminated against by the state police department, not just in Brazil but in other countries as well. More importantly, many of the policewomen do not align themselves with the agenda of feminists and behave more like the police officers found in regular police stations, signifying the existence of lack of coordination between policewomen, feminists and complainants. Policewomen generally assume one of three positions regarding feminists: "explicit alliance, opposition, and ambiguous alliance".⁹⁸ According to Nelson (1996), they hold these divergent positions because DDMs lie within the coercive and masculinist arm of the state.⁹⁹ Their conflicting interests have also been shaped "by the legal principle of neutrality"¹⁰⁰. Couple it with a lack of "gender-based training" in the curriculum of police academies for both policemen and policewomen, and a high likelihood of the masculinist culture is created within the institutional spheres of police in general and DDMs in particular.

Nonetheless, despite their limitations, DDMs have been successful in bringing notable changes to the lives of women in Brazil. From opening up a job market

98 Ibid.

99 S. Nelson, "Constructing and Negotiating Gender in Women's Police Stations in Brazil", *Latin American Perspectives*, Volume 23, Number 1, 1996, pp. 131-148.

100 C.M. Santos, op. cit.

for women to helping increase reporting of violence, DDMs have been at the forefront of offering services to survivors. Surprisingly, even after three decades of their inception, there are very few studies conducted on their impact. One such study undertaken by Perova and Reynolds (2017) reveals that DDMs in metropolises are highly effective in decreasing the homicide rate, particularly among young women. Establishing DDMs in metropolises, the authors conclude, is likely to reduce occurrences of homicide by “5.57 deaths per 100,000 women” ages 15-24 years.¹⁰¹ Similar effects have been observed in Patiala, India, where a study conducted on an all-female police station tasked with the responsibility of attending to and rescuing the women tortured by their husbands/relatives showed that such a quasi-legal arrangement “can save much time, psychological trauma and litigation”.¹⁰²

Another criticism levelled against DDMs lies in the low punishment of violent crimes against women. For instance, only one-third of the cases of violence registered in the first half of year 1994 resulted in police investigation, with the number of cases resulting in conviction being even lower. Academics, however, warn against evaluating DDMs on the grounds of prosecution rates alone. DDMs are not given the same kind of importance given to specialised police units tackling homicide, theft, or drugs, yet they

101 E. Perova and S.A. Reynolds, “Women’s police stations and intimate partner violence: Evidence from Brazil”, *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 174, 2017, pp. 188-196.

102 A.R. Sarin, et.al., “Women’s police station—A women-in-distress cell”, *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics*, Volume 70, Issue S1, 2003.

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have been successful in bringing to light a problem that had hitherto been considered ‘private’, and their contribution toward sensitising the population to this issue cannot be denied. But there’s an enormous need for gender-training courses within the police academy for all personnel, irrespective of gender.¹⁰³

One of the recommendations likely to render all-female police stations more effective, as learned through Brazil’s experience, includes granting these police stations a greater mandate and authority, one that would not just increase the number of registered cases going to trial, but also enhance the confidence of both the complainants and policewomen. But this calls for rigorous training of women personnel, equipping them with the skills, knowledge and perspectives needed to deal with crimes of violence against women. This needs to be accompanied by the overhauling of the police as an institution that continues to discriminate against policewomen and squeeze their chances of career-related mobility, in turn lowering their morale and, subsequently, causing poor job performance.¹⁰⁴ In addition to these decisive factors, the story of “one of the best” police stations in Brazil – located in the capital Brasilia – unveils that collaborating with other services such as health and housing and liaising with local feminist organisations are some of the pre-requisites for women’s police stations to deliver successfully.¹⁰⁵ Concerns have also been raised about the low number of women’s police stations even in Brazil, which seems

103 S. Nelson, op.cit.

104 Ibid.

105 S. Jacobs, et. al., (eds.), *States of conflict: Gender, Violence and Resistance*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2000.

to host the greatest number of them, let alone countries like Pakistan that only have 14 of them, many of which are either dysfunctional or functioning marginally.

- *Collecting more and better data for policy-making:* Research, data collection and analysis are the starting points for any policy-making, implementation and monitoring initiative. The process of collecting quantitative and qualitative data systematically and its subsequent analysis helps evidence-based policy making.

Within the realm of the CJS, there are a number of elements on which data can be collected. This may include, but is not limited to, the prevalence of violence in a particular region; the economic repercussions of VAWG; the amount and quality of help needed by the survivors; the evaluation of the effectiveness of adopted policy; and the monitoring of progress, among many others. Despite astounding efforts made by states, international and regional organisations and civil society groups, availability of data regarding violence against women remains weak in many countries, particularly in the Global South.

Globally, comprehensive data on violence against women is available only in a few nations. Data on IPV, in particular, is missing in 90 per cent of Arab countries, 70 per cent of Latin American and Caribbean states and 56 per cent of countries from South Asia.¹⁰⁶ While some countries, mostly from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), have made

106 “Violence against women: Unacceptable and unmeasured”, *UNDP*, 2017, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/violence-against-women-unacceptable-and-unmeasured>.

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progress in addressing the problem and increased the availability of sex-disaggregated data, countries from Asia and Africa are still largely under-researched.

One of the factors behind lack of availability and accessibility of sex-disaggregated data is under-reporting. In India, for instance, only 45,536 rapes were formally reported in 2019.¹⁰⁷ Comparing this with the national rate of 5.7 per 100,000 implies that millions of rapes are unreported annually.¹⁰⁸ Dutton (2011) reveals that only one in six women worldwide report physical assault to police. With such degree of under-reporting, measuring the extent and depth of violence becomes unlikely.¹⁰⁹ Global reports, therefore, “still inevitably rely on well-informed estimates and extrapolations of partial data”¹¹⁰. Underreporting, besides causing serious challenges for researchers, analysts and policy-makers, also imposes a limit “on criminal justice effectiveness as a solution to wife assault”¹¹¹. The CJS cannot operate and function fully when the crimes are unreported.

Absence of standardised definitions is another major reason making availability of sex-disaggregated data difficult. Apart from a few forms of violence against

107 *Crime in India*, 2020, National Crime Records Bureau, Government of India, <https://ncrb.gov.in/sites/default/files/CII%202019%20Volume%201.pdf>.

108 “Unheard and Uncounted: Violence against Women in India”, *Small Arms Survey*, 2015, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/G-Issue-briefs/IAVA-IB5-unheard-and-uncounted.pdf>.

109 Donald G. Dutton, *The Domestic Assault of Women: Psychological and Criminal Justice Perspectives*, UBC Press, Vancouver, 2001.

110 “The Role of Data in Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls”, *UNFPA*, 2013, https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/finalUNFPA_CSW_Book_20130221_Data.pdf.

111 Donald G. Dutton, op. cit.

women, understanding of definitions vary within and among states worldwide.¹¹² Lack of common understanding of definitions ultimately poses serious limitations on comparability of data across states. The dearth of analogous data across Europe, for example, “is a major challenge in dealing with questions concerning the extent and nature of VAW”¹¹³. Comparability of data is also affected by the differences in sources and methods used to obtain data at national, regional and international levels.¹¹⁴

Limited availability of data also stems from poor reporting practices and insufficient resources for training and data collection. Field researchers need to undergo rigorous training in order to be able to carry out research effectively on sensitive topic areas. Researchers should also be trained to understand the ethical dynamics associated with research and must take into account the anonymity and protection of the interviewees. International organisations continue developing new statistical standards and methods for data collection, and there are ample guidelines available for researchers and analysts such as the Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence against Women created by UN in 2014. In terms of data collection, efforts should be in line with the standards set by the World Health Organisation. However, without

112 “Administrative data collection on violence against women: Good practices”, *EIGE*, 2016, <https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0416095enn.pdf>.

113 Ibid.

114 “The World’s Women, 2015: Trends and Statistics”, *United Nations*, 2015, https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/worldswomen2015_report.pdf.

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effective training programs and sufficient resources, the quality and volume of data collection is unlikely to improve.

While it is clear that concerted and systematic efforts need to be made to make the availability of sex-disaggregated data possible, highlighting some specific areas of study is important. A UN Expert Group Meeting in October, 2007 on *Indicators to Measure Violence Against Women* listed 12 forms of violence requiring more research. This includes homicide by intimate partners; female infanticide; threats of violence; economic and psychological violence as part of IPV; dowry deaths; honour killings; forced marriage; conflict-related violence against women; sexual exploitation; trafficking; femicide; and sexual harassment. International and regional organisations are working hard to gather more evidence and are publishing reports year after year, highlighting not just areas in need of more study, but also protection indicators and multiple dimensions of women's rights violations. However, "more systematic data collection, dissemination and analysis are needed"¹¹⁵ to create appropriate designs of programs aimed at responding to victims.

MEASURING THE IMPACT

While there are a number of intervention and response programs of varying degrees at work in all countries of the world, very few of them have monitored their progress closely and evaluated their impact neutrally. One major challenge in

115 "Violence against women: Unacceptable and unmeasured", *UNDP*, 2017, op. cit.

doing so is that counter-violence efforts are about bringing change to attitudes and cultural norms, which is something that cannot be measured in the short-run. Unfortunately, most programs operate for only a few years, implying that adequate evaluation of their impact is unlikely. This is also the reason why donors hesitate in funding such projects as they need to see concrete effects of their donations. Tackling violence is a long, complex and patience-demanding job, and it takes longer than a few years to quantify the impact on values, attitudes and norms. It is, therefore, essential for both governmental and nongovernmental organisations working in the arena to advocate “improved funding structure” and develop improved understanding of the complexity of evaluation among governmental and private donor agencies.¹¹⁶

Second, while organisations like Breakthrough and WOMANKIND have developed innovative methods of evaluation, most small and medium scale organisations have not. WOMANKIND’s partner organisations in Peru, for instance, “have developed a set of Minimum Standards on Violence Against Women”¹¹⁷ after redefining rights in the light of national, regional and international laws. Although the efforts are at a pilot stage at the moment, the organisation hopes to be able to adequately track progress against this baseline.

Traditionally, monitoring and evaluation have been based on linear cause-effect models, which seek to logically connect inputs and activities to outputs and outcomes and, thus, link the change to the intervention. While applicable to a vast range of interventions, these models might fail when it comes to violence against women. This is because they fail to reflect the complexities involved in the problem and fall short in

116 Hayes, C., in Geraldine Terry and Joanna Hoare eds., *op. cit.*

117 *Ibid.*

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gauging varying contributions made by different stakeholders. Alternative approaches that focus on the ‘influence’ one has exercised for a change might be worth-pursuing. Instead of attributing change to a contribution, they consider the possibility of the role played by other contributors while also remaining “flexible in measuring the impacts achieved”.¹¹⁸

As most organisations do not have the capacity and resources to build modern monitoring and evaluation methods, their problem of presenting a sound record of impact to donors persists. While NGOs like WOMANKIND, which have the capacity and willingness to innovate, plan to disseminate the takeaways of their learning among other organisations, it is not sufficient. Unless states, private donor agencies and NGOs work together to sustain small and medium scale projects, and unless chaotic and scattered mechanisms get replaced by cohesive and coordinated efforts, large scale change seems unlikely.

118 “Strengthening Health System Responses to Gender-based Violence in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: A Resource Package”, *UNFPA and Wave*, 2014, <http://www.health-genderviolence.org/sites/default/files/download/WAVE-UNFPA%20English.pdf>.

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Myanmar's Peace Process

Issues and Challenges

Dr. Biplab Debnath*

On February 1, 2021, in what was a massive blow to democracy in Myanmar, the elected government of the National League for Democracy (NLD) was ousted by a coup by Myanmar's military [the *Tatmadaw* (Burmese Army)], led by the Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services, General Ming Aung Hlaing, as he declared a state of emergency for one year. The putsch occurred a day before the swearing-in ceremony of the elected members of the 2020 general elections held in November 2020, in which the NLD comprehensively won, securing 396 out of 476 seats – six more than their tally in 2015.¹

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1 “Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling party claims resounding election win in Myanmar”, *CNN*, November 10, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/11/09/asia/myanmar-election-results-nld-intl-hnk/index.html>.

In an early morning raid, the military detained President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, along with other Parliament members, put them under house arrest and declared a fresh election after the emergency. While *Tatmadaw* justified its actions, asserting irregularities and fraud in the November general elections – they charged NLD leaders on multiple offences of corruption, breach of COVID-19 guidelines, violation of import and export laws, possession of unlawful communication devices, etc.,² the military’s desperation to preserve its central role in the political affairs of Myanmar was distinctly evident in the coup. Such desperation stemmed from *Tatmadaw*’s insecurities, despite the privileges granted to the military by the 2008 Constitution, arising out of an elected government in Myanmar backed by massive popular support, and the possibility of the elected representatives eventually usurping the military’s pivotal role in political affairs of the country. A day after the coup, Min Aung Hlaing established the State Administration Council (SAC), according to the 2008 Constitution, with legislative powers vested in himself or in a body appointed by him.³

The military coup and the ensuing violence have thrown the country into a state of instability and turmoil, besides crushing any semblance of democratic functioning that was painstakingly taking shape over the last decade. As of March 29, 2021, 510 people had been killed and more than 2,500 detained in an intense military campaign to stamp out the pro-

2 See “Myanmar’s military accuses Suu Kyi of taking \$600,000 and gold”, *BBC News*, March 11, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56327764>. Also see, “Myanmar coup: Detained Aung San Suu Kyi faces charges”, *BBC News*, February 3, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55915354>.

3 “Myanmar military announces New State Administrative Council”, *Myanmar Times*, February 2, 2021, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/myanmar-military-announces-new-state-administrative-council.html>.

democracy protesters that came out in the streets in defiance of military rule.⁴ The bloodiest day since the coup was the Annual Armed Forces Day on March 27, when the security forces gunned down 114 pro-democratic protestors, even as the military demonstrated a show of strength in the annual parade.⁵ The military action invoked widespread international condemnation as a number of countries threatened to curb diplomatic ties with Myanmar and impose economic sanctions.⁶ *Tatmadaw's* killing of unarmed civilians, including children, has been termed 'indefensible acts' amounting to 'mass murder'.⁷ On the domestic front, the SAC for Myanmar has categorised the Myanmar military as a 'terrorist group' that should be brought to the International Criminal Court, while the General Strike Committee of Nationalities, a body made from party members from 25 groups against dictatorship, called for a removal of the military-drafted 2008 Constitution and rooted for the formation of a Federal Union.⁸

4 Emily Fishbein and Kyaw Hsan Hlaing, "Protests Unite Myanmar's Ethnic Groups Against Common Foe", *Foreign Policy*, March 29, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/29/myanmar-protests-coup-ethnic-groups-military-federal-democracy/>.

5 "Myanmar: Over 100 killed in deadliest day since military coup", *Deutsche Welle*, March 27, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/myanmar-over-100-killed-in-deadliest-day-since-military-coup/a-57022363>.

6 "Countries curb diplomatic ties, weigh sanctions on Myanmar", *The Economic Times*, February 11, 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/countries-curb-diplomatic-ties-weigh-sanctions-on-myanmar/articleshow/80851578.cms?from=mdr>.

7 See, "Myanmar: Over 100 killed in deadliest day since military coup", op. cit., 2021. Also see, Sabastian Strangio, "At Least 120 Killed as Myanmar Endures Another Dark Weekend", *The Diplomat*, March 29, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/at-least-120-killed-as-myanmar-endures-another-dark-weekend/>.

8 See, Ben Dorethy, "Myanmar military a 'terrorist group' that should face international court, advisory council says", *The Guardian*, March 29, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/30/myanmar-military-a-terrorist-group-that-should-face-international-court-advisory-council-says>.

Another dimension of the post-coup violence and instability emerged as various Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs), engaged in ceasefire negotiations with the NLD government and the military, pledged support for the pro-democracy movement and allied with democratic forces in a renewed armed conflict against the *Tatmadaw*. Consequently, the military coup has left the peace process in Myanmar, painstakingly constructed by the NLD government through the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), in a state of uncertainty. On the one hand, post-coup armed conflict between the *Tatmadaw* and ethnic armed groups, which presented a common front in favour of the pro-democracy movement, has left the ceasefire agreements negotiated during the NLD regime hanging in the balance. On the other hand, with the military's intransigence against dissenters, as evident in past records, the situation in Myanmar could soon spiral into a full-fledged civil war that would ring the death knell of whatever progress had been achieved in the peace process.

Despite these challenges, it is useful to remind ourselves that the NLD under Aung San Suu Kyi made considerable progress in the peace process, as she gave momentum to the ceasefire developments undertaken by her immediate predecessor Thein Sein. Suu Kyi initiated the 21st Century Panglong Conference to continue efforts towards finding a lasting solution to the incessant armed conflicts that have plagued Myanmar for the last six decades, on the lines of the original Panglong Conference that her father Aung Sang started in 1947. In her opening remarks at the 4th session of the conference in August 2020, which was also the final session

Also see, "A General Strike Committee formed, made up of student leaders and political parties", *Eleven Media Group*, February 21, 2021, <https://elevenmyanmar.com/news/a-general-strike-committee-formed-made-up-of-student-leaders-and-political-parties>.

before the military's takeover, Aung San Suu Kyi emphasised the importance of the NCA- a landmark agreement concluded between the Government of Myanmar and some of the major EAOs in 2015. The NCA laid down the principles of a peace process between the armed forces of Myanmar and the EAOs, which included attempts to formulate a common ground between the signatories and create an inclusive peace process by bringing on board ethnic armed groups that are yet to accede to the agreement.⁹

The peace process in Myanmar started to take concrete shape in 2011 as Suu Kyi's immediate predecessor Thein Sein initiated a series of bilateral ceasefires with the EAOs that eventually lead to the signing of the NCA. The 4th session of the 21st Century Panglong Conference adopted 20 additional points as Part-III of the Union Accord to implement the NCA and establish a Union based on a democratic and federal system.¹⁰ While the NLD projected the adoption of the additional principles as a positive step in keeping the peace process on track, the challenges on the way to permanent peace could hardly be overlooked. The difficulties included, *inter alia*, armed clashes between the military and EAO's in Shan, Kachin, Karen and Rakhine provinces by both signatories and non-signatories of the NCA; conflict-induced displacement of population mostly to refugee camps; lack of consensus between *Tatmadaw* and NCA-signatories on the terms of the ceasefire; challenges in translating the principles of the Union Accord

9 "Speech of State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, in her capacity as the Chairperson of the Union-level Peace Dialogue Joint Committee at 19th meeting of UPDJC", *National Reconciliation and Peace Centre*, Government of Myanmar, August 18, 2020, <http://www.nrpc.gov.mm/en/node/443>.

10 "Union Accord Part III", *National Reconciliation and Peace Centre*, Government of Myanmar, August 21, 2020, <http://www.nrpc.gov.mm/en/node/470>.

into action; the problem of inclusiveness in the peace talks; the government's denunciation of groups such as the Arakan Army (AA) as 'terrorist organisations' further complicating the already strained relationship; and lack of continuity in negotiations exemplified by long periods of deadlock. The NLD, despite public pronouncements regarding the progress in peace talks, did not shy away from acknowledging the difficult path in achieving its long-term objective of reconciliation with the ethnic groups and establishing a truly Federal Union of Myanmar.

A HISTORY OF ARMED CONFLICT

The roots of armed conflict in Myanmar lie in the country's heterogeneous demography, which comprises the majority Burman population residing alongside many ethnic minority groups such as the Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan. A geographic demarcation exists between the Burman group that resides in the plains and the numerous ethnic minorities that occupy the country's peripheral hilly regions along the international borders with India, China, Bangladesh and Thailand. While the Burman controlled the political and administrative units of a nascent state-building exercise in Burma, the minority groups largely excluded themselves from such endeavours and instead engaged in agricultural activities and maintained a cultural identity and social practices distinct from the Burman community. Incidentally, neither the minority ethnic groups nor Burma's rulers, either pre-colonial or colonial, made any serious attempt to assimilate the peripheral groups into the mainstream.

The British rulers segregated Burma into Ministerial Burma and Frontier Areas – the former included the lowlands and

valleys and the latter the hilly areas in the periphery.¹¹ By the time the colonial rule came to an end, both the Burman majority and the ethnic minorities had their own sets of grievance against the Britishers. Despite being a majority community, the Burmans were overshadowed by the British and Indians in administrative structure and economic activities. Distressed by the Colonial rule, which led to their marginalisation and loss of identity, the Burmans sided with the Japanese during the Second World War. On the other hand, several minority ethnic groups, aspiring for an independent political identity separate from the Burman, supported Great Britain in the war on the assurance of independent statehood by their colonial master. Such opposing perceptions led to frequent clashes between the minority ethnic groups demanding separate states for themselves and the Burmese army trying to suppress those independence assertions.

The complexity of assimilating diverse ethnic groups into a single political unit came to the fore after Great Britain's exit, leaving the Burman in charge of Burma. The Panglong Conference in 1947 tried to establish a working agreement, where the minority ethnic groups were promised substantial autonomy in the future Union of Burma and even rights to secession after ten years.¹² However, the conference lacked both inclusiveness – as evident in the absence of many ethnic groups such as Mon and Arakanese – as well as uniformity in the promise of independence rights to different groups, which resulted in numerous inter-ethnic clashes. The hopes pinned on

11 Sarah L. Clarke, et. al., "Re-examining Ethnic Identity in Myanmar", *Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies*, May 31, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Ethnic-Identity-in-Myanmar.pdf>.

12 Lawrence E. Cline, "Insurgency in amber: ethnic opposition groups in Myanmar", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Volume 20, Numbers 3-4, 2009, p. 577.

the Panglong Conference soon lost sheen as the momentum of the reconciliation process flagged. The minority ethnic groups felt a sense of neglect and discrimination by the Burmese government ruled by the majority Burman and resorted to a violent armed assertion of their rights. It marked the beginning of an unending civil war, as numerous ethnic groups, along with their respective armed organisations, remain engaged in a continuous conflict not just with the Burmese army but also among themselves. The Coup of 1962, which brought General Ne Win to power, further intensified the ethnic divide and the consequent armed conflicts. Win's call for 'The Burmese Way to Socialism'¹³ included an intense nationalist campaign that involved further suppression of the minority ethnic groups who, in turn, took up arms to protect their territory, identity and culture.

ETHNIC ARMED ORGANISATIONS IN MYANMAR

It is estimated that, since 1947, around 40 ethnic groups have engaged in armed conflict in Myanmar.¹⁴ Referred to as Ethnic Armed Organisations- EAOs, they were among the primary actors in an incessant civil war in post-independent Myanmar, besides the *Tatmadaw*, as well as the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) till its disintegration in 1989. The relationship between these three significant stakeholders was often complicated. While the *Tatmadaw*-EAOs conflict usually occupies maximum space in an analysis of political instability

13 On April 30, 1962, the Revolutionary Council of the Army-led Burmese Government announced a new national ideology and plan of action named The Burmese Way to Socialism.

14 Thawngmung, A. M., and Furnari, A., "Anti-state Armed Groups in Myanmar: Origins, Evolution and Implications", in B. Schreer and A. T. H. Tan eds., *Terrorism and Insurgency in Asia A Contemporary Examination of Terrorist and Separatist Movements*, Routledge, New York, 2019, p. 134.

in Myanmar, a few EAO's have sided with the government forces in waging an armed conflict against other ethnic groups. Similarly, while many ethnic groups have opposed the CPB, others such as the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and United Wa State Army (UWSA) found a common agenda with the communist groups, with the latter recruiting well-trained insurgents into their camps to strengthen their struggle against the Burmese government.¹⁵

The conflict between the EAOs and the military has evolved through a varied dynamic, encapsulated in their different composition, objectives and strategies. The larger armed groups such as KIA, Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Shan State Army (SSA), Arakan Army and the UWSA have troops ranging from 5,000 to 20,000 recruits. The KNLA is the oldest armed group that has engaged in a conflict with the government troops since 1949. Others such as UWSA (1989), Shan State Army – South (SSA-S) (1996) and Arakan Army (2009) are the more recent ones, reflecting the persisting dissatisfaction among many minority ethnic communities against the government.

Most of the EAOs represent their ethnic communities' interest and have established a degree of control over the area where their community resides. Whether it is the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and Arakan Army representing the interest of the Rohingya community in Northern Rakhine Province, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and SSA for the Shan ethnic group in the Shan Province, KNLA in Karen Province, KIA in Kachin, UWSA for Wa people in Northern Myanmar – all such armed outfits are fighting for the cause of their ethnic communities, whether it is oppression by the *junta* or military

15 Lawrence E. Cline, op. cit., 2009.

action by the Burmese army. The political wing of many EAOs such as the Karen National Union (KNU), Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), UWSP, etc., have set up an elaborate system of administration in essential sectors, such as education, health, taxation and policing in the areas under their control. In the case of armed groups, UWSA's control over its administered territory is strong enough to interdict even government troops, who have to obtain permission to access Wa areas.

Over the years, the objectives of some of the EAOs have undergone a significant transformation. The KNLA, dejected by the Britishers' failed promise of an independent Karen state and subsequent atrocities from the government of Myanmar dominated by the Burman, had an initial aim of an independent Karen state. A similar set of grievances also factored in KIA and SSA-S demand for an independent Kachinland and Shan state. Nevertheless, these groups subsequently softened their stance as they gave up their demand for secession and settled for a certain degree of autonomy, which would protect their ethnic communities' interest within a federal political structure in Myanmar. Wariness among the insurgent groups due to prolonged struggle, loss of personnel and territory in the face of the Myanmar Army's fierce counter-insurgency campaigns and weakening due to break-away factions are some of the factors that forced many EAOs to participate in ceasefire negotiations, thereby diluting their demand for independence to autonomy.

On the other hand, groups such as the UWSA never sought complete independence and maintained a nexus of convenience with the Myanmar government. The UWSA even fought along with the *Tatmadaw* as their 'private army' against other EAOs such as SSA-S in return for benefits like a free

hand on the lucrative narcotics trade without much government interference.

The EAO's possess a considerable stockpile of weapons, most of them imported and a few from their production lines. Some groups such as UWSA have the most sophisticated weaponry line that included heavy machine guns, air defence systems, surface-to-surface missiles, surface-to-air missiles, anti-tank missiles, helicopters, etc., along with their line of arms production that serves as an alternate source of income to their lucrative narco trade.¹⁶ Many other groups possess small arms, AK 47 and assault rifles in their armoury. The two most common strategies that the EAOs allegedly employ are landmines and child soldiers, even though many organisations deny the use of the latter. KIA currently has an estimated 1,000 child soldiers, who they recruit by tweaking the system of national service to recruit children below the age of 18.¹⁷ UWSA is alleged to be one of the largest recruiters, at one time having around 2,000 and 800 child soldiers under 18 and 15 years of age respectively.¹⁸ SSA-S, often accused by the Myanmar government of recruiting child soldiers, runs a program called *Nang Harn* (brave girls) that provides weapons training to teenage girls.¹⁹ While the group denies using such

16 Anthony Davis, "It's party time for Myanmar's largest armed ethnic faction", *Asia Times*, April 9, 2019, <https://asiatimes.com/2019/04/anthony-davis-wa-story/>.

17 "A Dangerous Refuge: Ongoing Child Recruitment by the Kachin Independence Army", *Child Soldiers International*, July 28, 2015, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/9339/pdf/childsoldiersinternational/alkiareportfinaltouploadonline9367343.pdf>.

18 "My Gun Was As Tall As Me: Child Soldiers in Burma", *Human Rights Watch*, October, 2002, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2002/burma/Burma0902.pdf>.

19 Jeffrey Hays, "Shan State Army, Shan Political Groups and the Shan Insurgency", *Facts and Details*, May 2014, http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Myanmar/sub5_5k/entry-3063.html.

trainees for combat roles, Human Rights Watch does not entirely rule out the possibility and prescribes close monitoring of the group's activity.²⁰

A factor that considerably strengthens the cause of EAOs' struggle is the support they receive from other nations and the international community. KNLA, for instance, receives widespread sympathy and support from the western world against military assault by the *junta*. They also receive financial donations from Christian communities across the globe, an effect of the preponderance of Christians in KNU and the Karen diaspora community.²¹ In the past, KNLA received considerable support from Thailand, especially from the cross-border arms trade, though, in recent times, such assistance has waned a great deal due to Thailand's attempts to develop its relations with Myanmar on a range of issues. Similarly, in a pragmatic effort, the KIA altered its pre-1970's anti-communist stance to develop an alliance with the CPB, which helped the armed group receive weapons from China through CPB's trading networks.²² Even for the UWSA, despite its alliance with the Myanmar government, China comes across as a crucial strategic ally. China is the primary source of weapons, capacity building in the form of providing training to the UWSA troops for combat and arms production, and economic benefits arising from business opportunities via cross-border trade.

The EAOs claims to protect their land and people through secession from Burma has led to a reflexive campaign by the

20 Ibid.

21 Lawrence E. Cline, op. cit., 2009.

22 Christopher O'Hara and Niels Selling, "Myanmar's Ethnic Insurgents: UWSA, KNU and KIO", *Institute for Security and Development Policy*, 2012, https://isdpeu/content/uploads/images/stories/isdpeu-main-pdf/2012_ohara_myanmar-ethnic-insurgents.pdf.

Burmese army. A common strategy that the military used is the 'four cuts' policy – cutting-off EAOs links with four crucial elements of food, funding, intelligence and recruits.²³ As a part of the four cuts policy, the military used villages as the line of defence, established 'people's militias' who were forced to work for the government, used villagers as minesweepers to walk ahead of the military in suspected landmine areas, and did not shy away from deploying land mines and recruiting child soldiers on their part.²⁴ The conflict between the Burmese army and the EAOs since 1949 has led to thousands of deaths, internal displacement, poverty and underdevelopment in Karen, Kachin and Shan state. From 1988-1992, counter-insurgency operations have led to the forcible reallocation of up to 10,000 Kachin.²⁵ Similarly, thousands of villages in the central Shan province were evacuated and converted to free-fire zones by the army, forcing out around 300,000 displaced people from their homes.²⁶ Such harsh military operations were among the primary causes of the weakening of the EAOs, which compelled them to come to the negotiating table.

CEASEFIRE ATTEMPTS AND THE PROBLEM OF PEACE

Over the years, the Burmese government made several attempts to initiate a peace process with the armed insurgent groups without much success – a reflection of the ethnic and political complexity in Myanmar. Beginning with the 1950's peace movement initiated by Thaksin Kodaw Hmaing, the celebrated Myanmar poet; to the federal movement in 1962;

23 Andray Abrahamian, "The Tatmadaw returns to the 'four cuts' doctrine", *The Lowy Institute*, September 4, 2017, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/tatmadaw-ominous-return-four-cuts-doctrine>.

24 Lawrence E. Cline, op. cit., 2009.

25 Christopher O'Hara and Niels Selling, op. cit., 2012.

26 Jeffrey Hays, op. cit., 2014.

amnesty in 1963; peace talks in the 1970s; and amnesty in 1980; the bilateral ceasefire agreements initiated from the late 1980s to mid-1990s constitute the six attempts at peacebuilding, one which culminated in the 2015 National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).²⁷ General Thein Sein announced the NCA after his Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) came to power in 2011, starting the most comprehensive peace process to date. In October 2015, eight groups out of 15 invitees signed the NCA – the KNU, Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), All Burma Students Democratic Front, KNU Peace Council, Chin National Front, Arakan Liberation Party and Pa-O National Liberation Organisation – later joined by another two groups, the Lahu Democratic Union and the New Mon State Party in 2018.

The peace process set up by Thien Sein was carried forward by the NLD leader and State Counsellor Aung San Sui Kyi, who came to power in March 2016. She revived the Panglong Conference, initiated by her father Aung Sang in 1947, with the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference as a platform for negotiation between the government representatives and the EAOs. Following the first session of the 21st Century Panglong Conference in August 2016, three more sessions were held on May 2017, July 2018 and August 2020. A significant outcome of the conference was the adoption of the Pyidaungsu (Accord) in the second session in 2017, with the stated aim of a ‘non-disintegrated’ Myanmar based on democracy and federalism, and one that guaranteed national equality and

27 Bertil Lintner, “Why Burma’s Peace Efforts Have Failed to End Its Internal Wars”, *United States Institute of Peace*, October 2020, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/20201002-pw_169-why_burmas_peace_efforts_have_failed_to_end_its_internal_wars-pw.pdf.

self-determination.²⁸ In the 4th session of the conference in August 2020, Part-III of the Union Accord was signed, which added 20 points to the agreement, highlighting a framework for implementing the NCA and establishing a union based on democracy and a federal system.²⁹

Though most comprehensive to date, the peace process failed to provide a sustained hope of bringing the conflict to an end. The peace negotiations lack inclusiveness - as evident by a considerable number of non-signatory ethnic armed groups - which acted as a roadblock towards a holistic negotiation and failed to establish an all-encompassing framework that would be acceptable to all the parties. The fourth session of the 21st Century Panglong Conference was conspicuously marked by the Arakan Army's absence. The armed group was designated a terrorist organisation by the NLD government on March 2020, under the 2014 Counter-Terrorism Law. Other groups such as the KIA, UWSA, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) and Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) also declined to participate, citing the exclusion of the Arakan Army, even as the government invited them to the Panglong platform as a precursor to bringing them into the NCA fold.³⁰

In 2018, KNU and RCSS, the two largest armed groups and signatories to the NCA, pulled out of the peace process over the failure to agree on the terms of the ceasefire. Together with other non-signatories of the NCA, these two groups joined

28 "37 Points Signed as Part of Pyidaungsu Accord", *State Counsellor Office*, The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2017, <https://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/en/node/904>.

29 "Union Accord Part III", *op. cit.*, 2020.

30 Tabea Campbell Pauli, "Myanmar Peace at a Crossroads in 2020", *The Asia Foundation*, September 30, 2020, <https://asiafoundation.org/2020/09/30/myanmar-peace-at-a-crossroads-in-2020/>.

forces under the leadership of the UWSA, outrightly rejecting the ceasefire and calling for fresh negotiations.³¹ While KNU and RCSS eventually returned to the peace process, after clarification of some of the key terms of the NCA, in a semi-informal dialogue arranged by the government with the NCA signatories,³² the overall fragility of the exercise was clearly evident.

Many ethnic organisations discarded the NLD's demand to the EAOs to surrender their arms as a pre-condition for negotiation. Even more worrying is the prevalence of armed conflict between the *Tatmadaw* and the NCA signatories, exemplifying the mistrust accumulated in all these years of conflict. Such mistrust is evident in the relationship between the Myanmar government and the KNLA, one of the country's oldest insurgent groups. Multiple negotiations between the government and the KNLA from the 1990s for a bilateral ceasefire could not bear any fruit over the pre-condition of arms surrender. Each breakdown of talks led to a renewed violence between the KNLA and *Tatmadaw*.³³ Despite being a signatory to the NCA in 2015, the accumulated distrust from decades of conflict has prevented a lasting solution. Even post-2015, military clashes between *Tatmadaw* and KNLA continues, with each side blaming the other for violating the ceasefire. The government's construction activities in Karen controlled areas, such as in the Hpapun District, have led to violent clashes and displacement of more than two thousand

31 "Rebooting Myanmar's Stalled Peace Process", *International Crisis Group: Asia Report*, June 19, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/308-rebooting-myanmars-stalled-peace-process>.

32 Ibid.

33 Nehginpao Kipgen, "Ethnicity in Myanmar and its Importance to the Success of Democracy", *Ethnopolitics*, Volume 14, Number 1, 2015, pp. 25-26.

villagers, with as many as fifty clashes just in the first few months of 2020.³⁴

Ceasefire negotiations could not produce a lasting solution, even in the case of KIA. The latter accused Government forces of using the ceasefire, negotiated in 1994, to confiscate Kachin administered territories and inflict human rights abuses, resulting in renewed conflict between the two.³⁵ Since 2011, the proposed Myitsone Dam project has been a bone of contention between the government and KIA. The latter opposed the project, asserting that the dam's construction could lead to the destruction of dozens of Karen villages and displace thousands of villagers.³⁶ A full-scale attack at KIA positions by the Myanmar Army in 2012, which led to heavy casualties and more than 90,000 displaced, was followed by two rounds of peace talks hosted by China.³⁷ The talks failed to have the desired effect, as a series of hostilities continued, such as the shelling of a KIA training school by the Myanmar Army in 2014,³⁸ attacks by KIA on Muse township in 2016,³⁹

34 See, Nyein Nyein, "Tatmadaw Agrees to Halt Contentious Road Project in Karen State", *The Irrawaddy*, May 17, 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/tatmadaw-agrees-halt-contentious-road-project-karen-state.html>. Also See, "First Months of 2020 See Dozens of Clashes Between Burma Army, KNU", *Network Media Group*, April 2, 2020, https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/first-months-2020-see-dozens-clashes-between-burma-army-knu?fbclid=IwAR3J-oOR3pOTDvtFzwmxhcZGV1NxxsYv0UV1id8GuTHmuv_Zc4vc0B9qoRs.

35 Nehginpao Kipgen, op. cit., 2015.

36 Christopher O'Hara and Niels Selling, op. cit., 2012.

37 N. Ganesan, "Ethnic Insurgency and Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in Myanmar", *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, Volume 3, Number 2, 2015, p. 278.

38 Jared Ferrie, "Myanmar Kachin rebels say 23 cadets killed by army shell", *Reuters*, November 20, 2014, <https://in.reuters.com/article/myanmar-kachin-casualties-idINKCNOJ40IY20141120>.

39 Iftikhar Gilani, "Myanmar 2 faces: Embrace insurgents, ostracise Rohingya", *Anadolu Agency*, August 25, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/>

multiple armed conflicts between KIA and *Tatmadaw* in the townships of Sumprabum, Waingmav and Tanai throughout 2018,⁴⁰ the attack by the KIA at a military college in Nawngkio in 2019,⁴¹ etc. In November 2019, *Tatmadaw* and KIA clashed in Waingmaw township in Kachin, followed by another China-initiated meeting between the two parties in Kunming in December.⁴²

Like KNLA, SAA-S became a signatory to the NCA in 2015, but the negotiations did not lead to peace. Despite the ceasefire negotiations, SSA-S has been engaged in armed conflict, not just with the *Tatmadaw* but also with other armed groups such as the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Shan State Army-North (SSA-N). Around 100 clashes have occurred between the *Tatmadaw* and SSA-S since the 2011 ceasefire negotiations, primarily due to the occupation of mineral-rich Shan bases by Government forces. Similar resource wars have occurred between SSA-S and TNLA over territorial claims, such as the one in 2018 in the resource-rich Namtu Township.⁴³

en/analysis/analysis-myanmar-2-faces-embrace-insurgents-ostracize-rohingya/1952789.

40 Michael Hart, "Myanmar's Ethnic Conflicts Have Multiple Fronts, and High Barriers to Peace", *World Politics Review*, May 24, 2018, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/24782/myanmar-s-ethnic-conflicts-have-multiple-fronts-and-high-barriers-to-peace>.

41 Thu Thu Aung, "Myanmar insurgents attack elite military college, other targets, 15 Killed", *Reuters*, August 15, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-insurgency-idUSKCN1V50EH>.

42 Swe Lei Mon, "Not a Good Year for Peace Process", *Myanmar Times*, December 31, 2019, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/not-good-year-peace-process.html>.

43 Elliott Bynum, "Understanding Inter-Ethnic Conflict in Myanmar", The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, September 28, 2018, <https://acleddata.com/2018/09/28/understanding-inter-ethnic-conflict-in-myanmar/>.

Clashes between *Tatmadaw* and many NCA-Signatories have also continued unabated. For instance, RCSS and *Tatmadaw* clashed 42 times just in November 2019, while the fierce conflict between Government forces and the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) took place on November 5, 2019.⁴⁴ Since 2019, clashes between the Arakan Army and *Tatmadaw* in the Rakhine province have intensified to become one of Myanmar's bloodiest in recent times. Throughout 2019, armed conflict between the two has led to the forced displacement of over 41,000 people, pushed into 131 refugee camps in Rakhine and Chin states.⁴⁵ The refugee camps in these two states are home to around 130,000 displaced people, comprising approximately 40 per cent (350,000) of the conflict-induced globally displaced population, who are, in the words of Human Rights Watch, "sitting in the path of a public health catastrophe."⁴⁶ amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The Myanmar Government's decision to declare the Arakan Army a 'terrorist organisation' in March 2020 – in response to the Arakan Army's attack on public servants and police, and kidnapping of lawmakers, government officials and even civilians supportive of the NLD government⁴⁷ – has greatly distanced the ethnic armed group from the peace negotiations.

While the government has taken a tough position concerning the Arakan Army, the latter enjoys the Rakhine community's

44 Swe Lei Mon, op. cit., 2019.

45 Ibid.

46 Michael Hart, "COVID-19 Is Just the Latest Setback in Myanmar's Troubled Peace Process", *World Politics Review*, June 8, 2020, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28822/covid-19-is-just-the-latest-setback-in-the-troubled-myanmar-peace-process>.

47 Sithu Aung Myint, "To revive the peace process, all sides need to compromise", *Frontier Myanmar*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/to-revive-the-peace-process-all-sides-need-to-compromise/>.

support, as the people are disgruntled at the country's political process. Several Government actions - such as NLD's refusal to allow the Arakan National Party to form a government in the Rakhine State, despite the latter winning a majority of seats in the 2015 elections; opening fire at a crowd, which had gathered to mark the anniversary of the Rakhine kingdom's fall to the Burmans, at Mrauk-U in January 2018; the arrest and imprisonment of Dr. Aye Maung, a leading political figure etc. - have dented the Rakhine community's faith in electoral democracy in Myanmar. Such loss of faith has led the Rakhine community to offer support to the activities of the Arakan Army.⁴⁸

The Arakan Army refused to negotiate with the Myanmar Government at a bilateral level and rejected the government's condition for the ethnic army to withdraw from the Rakhine state before negotiations. Such a stance have made bilateral ceasefire negotiations difficult for the government, not just with the Arakan Army but also with other groups such as KIO, TNLA and MNDAA, as a precursor to bringing them into the NCA fold.⁴⁹ The latter three groups have formed the Three Brotherhood Alliance and launched deadly attacks in Pyin Oo Lwin in the Mandalay region and Nawngchio in Shan on August 15, 2019, which led to a fierce two-week battle between the alliance and Government forces in Nawngcho, Thibaw, Kyaukme, Lashio, Kutkai and Muse townships of Shan. At least ten civilians were killed, and over 8,800 people were forced to flee their homes.⁵⁰ Displaying solidarity with their ally, in a statement on March 26, 2020, the Three Brotherhood Alliance criticised the Myanmar Government's stand against the Arakan Army as unwarranted, one that has destroyed the

48 "Rebooting Myanmar's Stalled Peace Process", op. cit., 2020.

49 Ibid.

50 Swe Lei Mon, op. cit., 2019.

hope for political negotiation and lead to a serious political crisis.⁵¹ As a reflection of the dire state of the negotiations, the Myanmar Government rejected a call by the Brotherhood Alliance for ceasefire talks and, instead, vowed to intensify its counter-insurgency operations against the three groups.⁵²

THE 2021 COUP AND ITS AFTERMATH

The February 2021 coup by the military has not just left the peace process in Myanmar in a state of turmoil, but has also added a new dimension to the seven-decade-old conflict between the EAOs and the Burmese Armed Forces. The coup and subsequent military action against the pro-democracy supporters in different regions of the country have united the ethnic outfits in a common agenda of armed response against the military. A rare societal shift towards ethnic unity is also evident between the majority Burman and minority ethnic groups, in collective protests against military action against unarmed civilians and children. Such an attitude was in stark contrast to indifference of the Burman ethnic majority to *Tatmadaw's* abuses against the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities in Kachin, Shan, Rakhine and Shan states.⁵³ However, the shared post-coup suffering of all communities has brought them together in a sense of solidarity, as they uniformly raising their voice for democracy. Such societal unity was also reflected in the EAO's outlook in response to the military coup.

51 "Brotherhood Alliance", *Global Security*, Accessed November 20, 2020, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/brotherhood-alliance.htm>.

52 Mizzima, "Brotherhood Alliance Ceasefire Proposal Rejected", *The Eastern Link*, June 3, 2020, <https://theeasternlink.com/brotherhood-alliance-ceasefire-proposal-rejected/>.

53 Emily Fishbein and Kyaw Hsan Hlaing, op. cit., 2021.

Ethnic unity, though, may not correspond to any progress in the peace process as the two main stakeholders in the process – the *Tatmadaw* and the EAOs – remain at loggerheads with renewed armed conflict following the coup. In a decision which reflected the military’s antipathy towards the ongoing peace process mechanism, the *Tatmadaw* dissolved the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC) – a technical support body of the peace-making process – and declared that further peace talks with the EAOs would be under the aegis of a peace committee formed by the military.⁵⁴

Fresh fighting has erupted between the military and many ethnic armed groups as they refused to recognise *Tatmadaw* as a legitimate actor, or to be cowed down by the military. Many ethnic armed groups, including NCA signatories, have refused to negotiate with the military-formed SAC and threatened to break the ceasefire deal.⁵⁵ The KNU announced its support for the pro-democracy protest movement just days after the military coup and reignited its armed struggle against the military.⁵⁶ On March 27, 2021, the armed wing of the KNU overran an army command post, killing ten soldiers, and *Tatmadaw* retaliated with military airstrikes in Karen territory for the first time in 20

54 “Myanmar coup: Military abolishes NLD govt’s peace process mechanism”, *Business Standard*, February 9, 2021, https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/myanmar-coup-military-abolishes-nld-govt-s-peace-process-mechanism-121020900071_1.html.

55 See, Nu Nu Lusan and Emily Fishbein, “Amid Myanmar’s post-coup crisis, armed rebellion brews”, *Aljazeera*, March 19, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/19/amid-myanmars-post-coup-crisis-an-armed-rebellion-brews>. Also see, Marwaan Macan-Markar, “Myanmar’s ethnic rebels isolate junta ahead of Armed Forces Day”, *Nikkei Asia*, March 24, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Myanmar-Coup/Myanmar-s-ethnic-rebels-isolate-junta-ahead-of-Armed-Forces-Day>.

56 Martin Petty, “Explainer: Truce over as Myanmar’s Karen insurgents brace for battle with junta”, *Reuters*, April 1, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-politics-ethnic-explainer-idUSKBN2BO4G6>.

years, killing three people and inducing massive displacement, as more than 10,000 residents fled to Thailand.⁵⁷ In response to military encroachment of Karen territory, the armed wing of KNU continues to attack Myanmar army positions and cut off their supply routes.⁵⁸

The Kachin state is also emerging as a new font of the armed conflict, as incessant clashes between the KIA and the military have occurred since mid-February in the Shan state, with fresh fighting in four townships of Kachin since March 11.⁵⁹ The conflict resumed as the military stepped up the use of force to crush pro-democracy protests in the state, such as the one on March 12 in three townships in Kachin, attended by people from diverse ethnic groups.⁶⁰ On March 21, a battalion of the KIA mounted dawn attacks on three *Tatmadaw*-held bases.⁶¹

The Three Brotherhood Alliance – a coalition of the Arakan Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army – decided to review the ceasefire agreement after the coup and pledged their support for the anti-coup protesters of, what the alliance termed as, the 'spring revolution'.⁶² On April 10, the alliance

57 "Myanmar civil war fears grow after airstrikes on ethnic army", *Bangkok Post*, March 30, 2021, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/world/2092011/myanmar-civil-war-fears-grow-after-airstrikes-on-ethnic-army>.

58 Poppy McPherson and Panu Wongcha-um, "As ethnic armies unite against coup, war returns to Myanmar's borderlands", *Reuters*, March 30, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-politics-ethnic-idUSKBN2B M2KF>.

59 Nu Nu Lusan and Emily Fishbein, op. cit., 2021.

60 Ibid.

61 Marwaan Macan-Markar, op. cit., 2021.

62 Sebastian Strangio, "Alliance of Ethnic Armed Groups Pledge Support for Myanmar's 'Spring Revolution'", *The Diplomat*, March 30, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/alliance-of-ethnic-armed-groups-pledge-support-for-myanmars-spring-revolution/>.

attacked a police station in the Northern Shan state and killed eight police officers.⁶³ General Yawd Serk, the Chair of the RCSS, has conveyed his decision to suspend political talks with the military and warned of armed retaliation if the military continues to kill peaceful protesters.⁶⁴

The EAO's are also collaborating with the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttah (CRPH) – a Burmese government in exile set up by the ousted NLD members – in formulating a joint action against the military. Many of the decisions of the CRPH – such as establishing a National Unity Government, writing a new constitution, creating a federal union army, etc. – are backed by the ethnic groups. For instance, the CRPH expressed its intent to work with the Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team towards establishing a federal democratic union. Similarly, groups such as the KIO and the KNU have backed the idea of a federal army in which the ethnic minorities would retain their own armed forces.⁶⁵

The *Tatmadaw*, on their part, remains critical of the ethnic armed groups but does not want to be in a position of simultaneously fighting a group of unified ethnic armies, even as the military is stretched by efforts to control the pro-democracy protest in the heartland. The ethnic minorities constitute one-third of Myanmar's population, and with a troop strength of 75,000, the EAOs could pose a considerable challenge to the military government, especially if the latter is forced to fight

63 “Brotherhood Alliance launches lethal attack on northern Shan State police station”, *Myanmar Now*, April 10, 2021, <https://www.myanmar-now.org/en/news/brotherhood-alliance-launches-lethal-attack-on-northern-shan-state-police-station>.

64 See, Sebastian Strangio, op. cit., 2021. Also see, Poppy McPherson and Panu Wongcha-um, op. cit., 2021.

65 See, Sebastian Strangio, op. cit., 2021. Also see, Emily Fishbein and Kyaw Hsan Hlaing, op. cit., 2021.

on multiple fronts.⁶⁶ General Min Aung Hlaing blamed the ethnic groups protesting against the coup as dancing to the tune of the ousted NLD government.⁶⁷ Simultaneously, the coup leader sought to reach out to the ethnic armies to prevent them from joining together. The *Tatmadaw* is also open to offer concessions to the ethnic armies to keep them on the military's side. On March 11, the military government removed the 'terrorist' tag from the Arakan Army, which has been fighting for greater autonomy in the western Rakhine state.⁶⁸ However, the utility of the concession, at least in the short term, remains in doubt considering the armed retaliation of the Brotherhood Alliance against the military. Nevertheless, *Tatmadaw* will hope that the inter-ethnic difference in Myanmar will be strong enough to prevent a durable alliance of the ethnic armies in Myanmar.

THE WAY FORWARD

In the 2020 general elections, the ruling NLD achieved a landslide victory, bringing its leader Aung San Suu Kyi to the helm of affairs for the second time to sort out one of the most pressing problems that have plagued Myanmar for decades. While the elections' results were on expected lines, Suu Kyi and her party had their tasks cut out in moving the peace process forward. When the NLD came to power for the first time in 2016, it replaced a government that had already set the ball rolling to negotiate a peace process with the EAOs. The USDP led by Thein Sein succeeded in bringing some of the leading EAO's, which had over the years engaged in a bloody military conflict with *Tatmadaw* since the late 1940s, to negotiate bilateral ceasefires, paving the way for then to be

66 Poppy McPherson and Panu Wongcha-um, op. cit., 2021.

67 Ibid.

68 Nu Nu Lusan and Emily Fishbein, op. cit., 2021

signatories to the NCA in 2015. NLD was expected to better its predecessors' progress vis-a-vis the peace process – both in terms of increasing the number of NCA-signatories and developing a common framework acceptable to all parties for a future federal Union of Myanmar. Suu Kyi's reprise of the 21st Century Panglong Conference was a commendable step in developing a platform for dialogue between the stakeholders, on the lines of what her father did in 1947, despite the hindrances in the overall progress of the peace process.

The military coup in February, 2021, however, threatens whatever progress the civilian government had achieved in moving the peace process forward. The ceasefire agreements between the ethnic armed groups and the military dangle in balance, as many of the EAOs resorted to fresh armed attacks against the *Tatmadaw*. While solidarity among the ethnic organisations against military rule is a welcome development – one that has not been evident in the past, considering the frequent inter-ethnic clashes – it would be erroneous to think that ethnic solidarity would necessarily lead to restoration of the stability necessary for the peace process. On the contrary, the EAOs support for the pro-democracy movement and *Tatmadaw*'s military stubbornness against resistance could spiral towards a full-fledged civil war.

Deterioration of law and order in Myanmar will be detrimental to *Tatmadaw* as the latter might lose its grip as a major actor in the politics of Myanmar. The scale of anti-coup protests has already reflected people's faith in Aung San Sui Kyi as the only leader who could bring any semblance of democracy in the country. The military, which over the years has been used to fighting the ethnic armed rebellion in the periphery, is now resisting a strong pro-democracy protest by the Burman majority in the urban centres. The latter

group, from being historically indifferent to the plight of the minorities, is now more apologetic and stands in support of the resistance movement against the coup in the peripheral regions. The alliance of EAOs with a common agenda against military rule has already raised a challenging prospect for *Tatmadaw* on multiple fronts. Add to this, China's pressure on the military *junta* to stabilise the situation, given Beijing's interest to protect its assets in Myanmar, does not paint a picture of the military's invincibility.

For any semblance of the peace process to move forward, there has to be a transfer of authority to the civilian government in the near future. It is unlikely that the ethnic groups will negotiate any peace agreement with the *Tatmadaw*, as this would amount to providing legitimacy to military rule. *Tatmadaw's* concessions to ethnic groups are also unlikely to cut much ice, as evident by the renewal of conflict by the Brotherhood Alliance, despite the removal of the 'terrorist' tag from the Arakan Army. The present cooperation of ethnic groups, however, may be difficult to sustain in the long run, considering inter-ethnic differences, but it is not certain that ethnic differences will necessarily lead to EAOs negotiating with the military *junta*.

Considering the current circumstances, the most effective way for *Tatmadaw* to present itself as a powerful legitimate actor in Myanmar is within a civilian democratic framework acceptable to the people which, at the same time, keeps considerable powers in the hands of the military. In the interim period, it is crucial that the ceasefire agreements between the military and the armed ethnic groups remain intact, even if not more inclusive, to prevent a complete breakdown of the peace process.

Despite the current anti-coup protests, *Tatmadaw* will continue to be a major factor in any future political developments in Myanmar. It needs to be seen whether *Tatmadaw* agrees to exercise this authority within a democratic framework in the near future. The international community also can play a major role in the process. Given the complexity of the political and ethnic situation in Myanmar, the international community will do well to persuade the military to transfer power to the civilian government, rather than impose strict sanctions that might worsen the situation. As a major stakeholder, the future roadmap of the military *junta* – whether it agrees to trade-off a degree of authority in a democratic structure while retaining its primary position in the country’s political decision-making, or resists any civilian induced pro-democratic change by sheer force – will determine the shape of the future peace process in Myanmar.

SOUTH ASIA INTELLIGENCE REVIEW

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