

# India's National Security: Imperatives of a Paradigm Shift

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It is ironical that it takes a protracted stand-off on the border with China, with the possibility of a military confrontation, for New Delhi to realise the gravity of the most complex and formidable national security threat that India has faced. This has been further compounded by internal governance deficiencies, many of which stem from colonial legacies.

What most security and strategic experts – both Indian and Western – often ignore is the fact that the combined threats from Pakistan and China are beyond usual neighbourly rivalry and irritations. They appear driven by a perceived sense of conflict of identity, albeit of different shades. Both of India's neighbours are driven by a superior sense of identity and view its traditionally liberal and pacifist values as an opportunity to impose their aggressive and extractive designs. The very nature of the threats driven by such ideas is so complex that

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they are nearly impossible to avoid, even if they do not always translate into military conflagration or war.

Further, India as well as democratic states in the developing and developed world must realise that serious deficiencies in democratic governance make a liberal and transparent society far more difficult to defend, especially in a globalised world.

Over the past few decades, Pakistan's deep state has evolved an unusually emotive campaign of propaganda against India, as well as an elaborate covert infrastructure of terror and crime to pursue its strategic objectives. It appears to have done so in a bid to entrench itself, using its professed quest for the supremacy of Islam on the subcontinent and beyond, as a convenient pretext. The entire dynamics has built its own momentum of radicalisation that is difficult to handle. Several radicalised elements and groups have gone beyond the control of Pakistani state, making the task of their containment far more difficult. Going by the current trend, at least the next few generations of Pakistanis will struggle to live in peace not only with a secular, plural India, but also non-Muslims anywhere. The resultant reactions will threaten social cohesion on a much larger scale, destroying the element of social trust which provides a key foundation for industry, enterprise and initiative.

Going by the cumulative exposures of Pakistan's nexus with world-wide terrorist attacks and terrorist groups, state institutions all over the world will struggle to contain the threat from India's western neighbour to non-Muslims and even liberal Muslims worldwide. These associations have already had a spiralling impact on large sections of people in Pakistan as well. This is despite the fact that the world is more aware today about Pakistan's extensive clandestine and covert capacities to support and fund Islamist terror and even use global crime

syndicates for this purpose. However, global forces, despite professing strong action against terrorism, appear helpless in the face of Islamabad's machinations and ability to exploit its purported strategic utility for external powers. There is no let-up in the Pakistani deep state's primary objective to bleed India through increasingly innovative forms of terror and crime.

Simultaneously, aggressive nationalism in Communist China – driven by a sense of Han superiority and backed by spectacular economic and technological transformation – not only legitimises an opaque and authoritarian regime but also appears to empower it to bulldoze every opponent at home and abroad.

A democratic India, with a long civilisational history, appears a natural anathema to the Chinese establishment, proud of the country's long journey as a prosperous, independent and continuously expanding state. China has repeatedly sought to project itself as a distinctly superior civilisation to the rest of mankind, while grudgingly acknowledging the currently superior strength of the United States. Beijing has not concealed its patronising and arrogant ways in dealing with India, virtually threatening it through its state sponsored media by citing its substantial dominance in economic and military terms.

Even otherwise, the rise of a democratic India could potentially threaten the authoritarian ruling cliques in both China and Pakistan, creating possibilities of igniting a domestic clamour for greater rights and liberties. Hence, while Pakistan may have its traditional animosity towards India, even China appears to be using several unscrupulous, deceptive and subversive strategies, either on its own or through others, to obstruct India's economic rise, which could also be a potential threat to Beijing's hegemony in the region.

India's defence forces and diplomatic establishment have, so far, handled the combined threat from China and Pakistan quite well, aided by the growing world-wide suspicion of China and the exposure of Pakistan's connection with terror. But the enormity of this threat has been increasing manifold in a globalised world, where trade and technology could be lethal tools of predation and many of India's democratic institutions are battling obsolescence and the entitlement of its political, corporate and bureaucratic classes.

The expanding asymmetry of economic and technological power with China, sustenance of covert war in Kashmir and the continued Pakistani clout in Afghanistan and beyond, are reflective of sustained under-performance of certain key institutions of India. This is notwithstanding certain enclaves of institutional excellence, a highly skilled middle class, fairly influential Diaspora and probably the most professional and disciplined defence forces.

One doesn't know the extent to which the higher echelons of India's political-governance establishment have been cognizant of the dynamics and complexity of the overall national security challenges. But over the last few decades, they have struggled to build commensurate strategic-institutional capacities to deal with the daunting scale of threats challenging India as a state and civilisation. The existing trend has the potential to gradually deplete the over-all economic, technological and professional capacities of the Indian state to address the whole gamut of national security challenges – driven by the combined resolve of two determined geopolitical adversaries – amidst the dysfunctionality of some of its own key institutions, and in a global order that is not entirely favourable.

Under these circumstances, it becomes imperative for India to explore a paradigm shift in its entire governance and

national security edifice and outlook to bolster its overall capacities and output.

### STRATEGIC PSYCHE AND OUTLOOK OF INDIA AND CHINA

In the context of a speech by Xi Jinping in 2017, where he had used the term civilisation repeatedly, an eminent Sinologist has emphasised that in recent years Chinese leaders and thinkers have been stressing China's global status and aspirations in the past, present and the future<sup>1</sup>. Many such discourses have involved not only evaluation of their own outlook and responses over a much longer period of time, but that of others as well. They have often tried to drive home the point that China is the only continuous civilisation-state in the entire world, which reflects its resilient and robust strategic culture. They do acknowledge a few reverses, but tend to blame the 'Hundred Years of Humiliation' by the West to explain their poverty and constraints in 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A large number of Chinese political academics and thinkers have often described India only as a civilisation and not a state. There has been emphasis on its political fragility and disunity over most of its history, except for a brief period in the medieval era when external occupiers brought a large swath of the subcontinent under a common rule. They have derived pride in the fact that China has maintained its cohesion as civilisation and state, despite all reverses and setbacks. While they seem determined to avenge wrongs done to them during the 'hundred years of humiliation', the perception of a larger culture of political disunity and fragility in India has indeed

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1 Alison Kaufman, "China's Discourse of Civilization: Visions of Past, Present, and Future", *The Asian Forum*, Volume 8, Number 6, 2020, <http://www.theasianforum.org/chinas-discourse-of-civilization-visions-of-past-present-and-future/>.

shaped their strategic outlook in the region, compounded by their own sense of civilisational and cultural superiority.

It is in this context that one should see the rush to revive the Confucian idea of harmony, Sun Tzu's principles of warfare, to Shang Yang and Han Fei's codes of governance, besides the articulation of the modern Chinese dream. Consistent stoking of nationalist passion has been backed by successes in poverty alleviation as well as creation of better access to opportunities at home. Externally, there is a clear move to influence and shape the world in accordance with the purportedly superior civilisational virtues of China, which translates into tangible moves towards strategic domination of Asia and beyond at one level, and opposition to Western values and outlook on the other.

Such an element of national or racial superiority has always been part of the political psyche of the Chinese state. This may have had a role in Chinese expansion, subsuming people and their territories who were described as Nomad in Sima Qian's *Shiji* – one of the earliest chronicles on Chinese history compiled close to the turn of First Millennium AD. A similar outlook has continued to manifest in the behaviour and outlook of China's leadership from the time of Mao, when it comes to dealing with the rest of the world. Of late, there has been repeated Chinese emphasis on how, from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD until the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, China had remained the richest country on the planet. China's poverty and misery of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has been blamed on “unequal and exploitative treaties” deceptively imposed by the West.

In this context, an appeal in the name of avenging wrongs to the nation not only inspires younger generation but also influences the global outlook of sections of China's communist leadership as well. Simultaneously, it enhances the

legitimacy of an unelected regime. Despite some dissidence, rising prosperity levels, national power and global prestige helps snuff out dissidence at home. This entire dynamic virtually exposes the hollowness of the Western prophecy that democracy automatically descends with a certain level of prosperity. Prosperity has, in fact, driven China to influence, shape and dominate the world in accordance with its own strategic psyche.

India, as a civilisation and state, has been universally perceived as perennially lacking in sound strategic culture over the last millennium or so, especially following the decline of Gupta empire. This is notwithstanding a few exceptions including Ranjit Singh and the Marathas and some other notable historical figures. This is, indeed, paradoxical for a state and civilisation with such rich and formidable history. China's own Buddhist monk Fa-Hien or Faxian of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE had described the unparalleled prosperity and social tranquillity of the Gupta Empire of India, which was far larger than its Chinese counterpart in that era. Even the Western records now confirm that India as a civilisation had remained way ahead of all other ancient civilisations including Rome, Greece, China, Babylon or Mesopotamia or others at one point of time. When master strategist and statesman Kautilya sought to resurrect India as a civilisation and state as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, it was still bigger than the subsequent Roman, Chinese and other empires, with far stronger economic, military and governance features. Hence, the decadence and degeneration in strategic culture would have been of a very high intensity, notwithstanding efforts to reverse these.

A larger culture of lack of outward strategic vision as well as lack of internal political cohesion have been a reality that has troubled India as a state and civilisation for centuries. This

is notwithstanding brilliant innovations and initiatives to the contrary from certain quarters. The cumulative impact of a deficient strategic culture continues to manifest in India's half-hearted efforts to conclude the covert of war from Pakistan as well as the proclivity to ignore the expanding asymmetry of power with China. These are further backed by failure to regulate domestic political competition and encourage integrity and excellence in institutions, which are critical for national power and a stronger national security architecture. As a result, some key institutions of governance, despite their resilience, have struggled to optimise the collective strength of its people and harness these towards comprehensive national power.

Stakeholders in independent India have failed to acknowledge the fact that internal political cohesion – based more on persuasion and less on oppression – and stronger external strategic outlook supplement each other. Civilisations or political entities lacking internal cohesion and stability have always struggled to build a strong strategic outlook and requisite infrastructure to pursue strategic goals. This is a vicious trap as internal decay and degeneration become inevitable if a state or ruling establishment fails to appreciate and prepare for the challenges posed by its geo-political environment. This is what explains India's vulnerability to even non-state entities in the past, resulting in its external occupation and colonisation, despite its exceptional material prosperity.

Post-independent India, despite being the world's biggest democracy, has continued to display serious lack of a comprehensive and pragmatic national security outlook. It has struggled to devise dynamic, consistent, suitable and sustainable strategies to pursue some of its core security interests. India apparently sacrificed its strategic interests in Tibet and Eastern Turkistan in deference to China's goodwill.



Whereas China promptly violated the trust and entered 110 kilometres inside the existing Sino-Indian border in the Aksai-Chin sector, which was the only point through which an all-weather road could be built to link China's recent acquisitions like Tibet and Xinjiang<sup>2</sup>. The association of both these regions with China has been nominal and fairly recent, with people of both the places being mentioned as Nomads and Tribes in Chinese history. In fact, as a civilisation, India had a much stronger footprint in both the regions, with the Tibetan script being similar to Devnagri, and Hindustani being a more familiar language than Mandarin in Kashgar.

It is intriguing that the British archives mention that once they had almost settled British India's boundary with China in 1897, with the Chinese accepting the Ardagh-Johnson Line, but they suddenly developed an interest in Aksai Chin at the instigation of Russians after two years and reneged in 1899.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, a Peking University map of 1928 had clearly acknowledged the whole of Aksai Chin as part of India as per the 1840 Treaty of Chushul and the Shimla Convention of 1913. Even with Tibet, their nominal association of 192 years had terminated in 1912, but Maoist China completely overwhelmed the region by 1959, after continuous coercion from 1950 and forcing a 17-point Agreement on the Dalai Lama in 1951.<sup>4</sup>

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2 Jitendra Kumar Ojha, "Border Stand-Off: Handle the Crises But Build a Strategic Capacity", *Democracy, Geopolitics And National Security*, May 23, 2020, <https://www.democracyandgovernance.com/2020/05/recurrent-sino-india-border-standoff.html>.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

geopolitics, and pursued colonial style decision making, distrusting military-security institutions. They preferred building a bridge of friendship with fellow Asian countries rather than to act with foresight. In 2019, the state-owned TV channel Doordarshan brought out a rare video footage of probably the last media interview that the first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, had given (May 18, 1964), barely a week before he passed away on May 27, 1964. Speaking with American TV host Arnold Michaelis, Pandit Nehru spelt out the both governance constraints of the nascent and yet the biggest democracy of the world as well as the serious security threats it was facing from both China and Pakistan.<sup>5</sup>

He appeared particularly disappointed at the manner in which China had betrayed his trust, responding with contempt to all gestures of goodwill like support on Tibet and Taiwan and a seat at UN Security Council, among others. He noted that China was driven by a sense of racial and civilisational arrogance, treating everyone else, including India, as “uncivilised”, or even barbaric, despite the fact that they were poorer than India.<sup>6</sup> China’s aspiration for regional, or even a wider, hegemony was amply evident even at that point of time. It has only become more amplified with the rising economic and military prowess of China following fruition of Deng Xiaoping’s modernisation programmes focusing on Agriculture, Industry, Defence and Science & Technology.

Pandit Nehru also mentioned what the world had known all along, how the Jinnah-led Muslim League, acting at the behest of colonial Britain, had opposed India’s independence, and orchestrated the partition of the country, involving the

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5 Prasar Bharati Archives, “Jawaharlal Nehru’s last TV Interview – May 1964”, May 14, 2019, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zITfXWFQYGQ>.

6 Ibid.

worst genocide and carnage in human history. The West was extremely ambivalent on the issue and supported Pakistan, disregarding reality, only to pursue its own strategic interest of containing Soviet Russia during the Cold War. In many Western academic and social quarters there has often been an attempt to equate India and Pakistan by describing India as a Hindu-dominated state and Pakistan as a Muslim majority state, ignoring differences in the basic character and outlook of the two states. Even now there is very little mention of the fact that non-Muslims, who constituted more than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total population of territories that are part of Pakistan, were almost completely wiped out from both parts of Pakistan, even as the Muslim population of independent India continues to grow.

India had conceded the most fertile land to Pakistan and accepted far larger number of refugees, nearly 15 million compared to the 0.35 million who left India.<sup>7</sup> With an oversized army, access to far more resources per capita and almost no national vision or character of its own, the newly created state of Pakistan soon saw a new ruling establishment that started re-shaping its identity in terms of hatred towards India and made Kashmir a permanent bone of contention. India was reluctant to interfere in Kashmir until the Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession to protect his people from a Pakistani military-sponsored 'tribal invasion'. In fact, ever since the call for 'Direct Action' by Muhammad Ali Jinnah in 1946, a section of Muslims of the subcontinent, most of whom are now in Pakistan, have rationalised assaults on Hindus and India. Of course, there has been reaction on the other side as well, but there is no comparison with structural domestic atrocities against minorities in, and the global support structure of Islamist terrorism that has flowed out of, Pakistan.

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7 William Henderson, "The Refugees in India and Pakistan", *Journal of International Affairs*, Volume 7, Number 1, 1953, pp. 57-65.

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Interestingly, Prime Minister Nehru had recommended that the solution to these twin challenges was to make India internally stronger to face these effectively. There is no doubt that there has been substantial progress in this direction since then. But given the enormity of internal challenges as well as the magnitude of the twin threats, the progress towards building a reliable national security architecture has not been optimal. The primary impediment has been the lack of a wider culture of strategic and leadership-driven initiatives at political-bureaucratic levels in pursuit of a stronger and sustainable national security architecture. Such an architecture would need to be able to handle and even eliminate all shades of combined and diffuse threats from both Pakistan and China, without dislocating its strategic development and national consolidation goals. The professional skills and motivational levels of India's defence forces have been universally acknowledged. The real challenge lies in building a strong ecosystem of economic prosperity, technological innovation, high quality human resources, dynamic and effective institutions, and a wider culture of leadership and excellence. Breaking the existing inertia will not be easy, but this is the challenge history presents to any visionary and determined leadership.

#### **ANATOMY OF THE CHINESE THREAT**

The Chinese threat to India's national security has always been fairly comprehensive, strategic and nearly inevitable unless India becomes militarily and economically stronger. If

China peacefully co-existed with India as a civilisation in the ancient era, it was largely due to India's stronger economic and military capacity and its reluctance to militarily expand towards China. China as a state and civilisation has many strengths, but it has demonstrated a penchant to dominate all powers and civilisations that appear vulnerable and weaker. There has been an element of remarkable consistency in this notwithstanding its paternalistic political structure and political psyche, often inviting its own downfall and disaster at regular intervals.

Today, China has acquired the capacity to dislocate both long-term and short-term economic and security interests of India and it has not concealed its intent to do so under favourable circumstances. Such indicators are not confined to the border dispute, military support to Pakistan, opposition to Indian moves to curb Pakistani terrorist groups, blocking India's entry into institutions like Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), creation of strategic bases in the Indian Ocean, or aggressive wooing of smaller neighbours of India in South Asia. China has struggled even to conceal its contempt even for the West, given their relatively shorter history, but it has been particularly aggressive towards India both during its early years after the Communist Revolution, as well as in the aftermath of its spectacular economic transformation. There has been repeated emphasis at every level on the distinctly superior economic and military capacity of China compared to India. Its global power ambitions are not merely manifest in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or securing its strategic influence and domination in the Far-East, Asia-Pacific, Indian Ocean, nearly the whole of Africa, barring a few states, Central Asia, and parts of West Asia. Notwithstanding recent statement of Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi that his country had "no intention of challenging the United States or replacing it

or entering into total confrontation with it,”<sup>11</sup> this is inevitable given the internal political dynamics of China. Of course, it will be careful under normal circumstances to avoid total confrontation that could be detrimental to the Chinese regime as well as the Chinese state or its domain of influence.

But the very Confucian ideal driving the Chinese leadership, has a strange notion of enduring harmony, envisaging domination of the powerful and submission of the rest as its foundation. China has made its intent to dominate the entire world absolutely clear, despite the acceptance that it is no position to achieve this goal at this juncture. The United States remains formidable as of now and hence a direct confrontation would be avoided. However, it has been clear that China has become extremely powerful in whole of Afro-Asian region, where it has even tested the resolve of the United States with its stance on the South China Sea. It can accept some degree of US presence but it perceives its right to dominate and control the region as unquestionable. It would not like anyone to upset or disturb such calculation and India appears a potential threat in this direction. Simultaneously, it is also clear that India is in no position to challenge the Chinese domination of the region on its own. It has to do so with the backing of the western powers, especially the United States, which has been promoting a greater role for India in the whole of Indo-Pacific region.

China has the baggage of its dispute with India, which ranges from grudges like India’s hospitality to the Dalai Lama to so called territorial claims. Support to terror breeder Pakistan, despite the vulnerability of its own soft underbelly of Uyghuristan (Xinjiang) to Islamic radicalism, has to be seen in

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11 Christian Shepherd, “China says ties with US at lowest point since 1979”, *Financial Times*, July 9, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/cb2aab03-8a77-49fd-a928-b470948bebd>.



this context. Going by the psyche of the Chinese leadership, China could deploy every possible means to wage modern hybrid and multi-faceted irregular war, while avoiding large-scale damage to its own strengths, to ensure that India did not threaten Beijing's larger objectives. Given their larger ways of working, India has to remain extremely careful about subversion of its own institutions as well as indirect threats from Pakistan among others.

For India, a strained relationship with China has been a longstanding reality following the 1962 War, and China's proximity with Pakistan. Following the much-talked-about meeting between Deng Xiaoping and Rajiv Gandhi in 1988, there had been considerable advancement in confidence building measures and the two sides have managed to improve economic relations, though these have remained unfavourable to India. A suitable response would lie, not merely in blaming China, though this may be part of building psychological pressure to exact some concessions. But strategic policy makers and stakeholders in India have ignored the widening economic, industrial and technological gap between the two countries, especially since the turn of this century.

If some retired senior Indian diplomats are highlighting that China no longer talks of Sino-India partnership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the same way it did earlier, it is because they see a larger tectonic shift in geopolitical realities. China has become far stronger in Asia and Africa, creating an exceptional model of strategic, economic and military domination. Its economic power is supplementing its military capacities and vice-versa. It has captured the space of a superpower ceded by Soviet Russia in a somewhat different and more sustainable way. At the same time, India has been reduced to an economic and technological minnow. Hence, over the last 8 to 10 years,

China has been consistently violating all confidence building measures, even on the border, which had been decided on earlier. This is part of a larger strategy to subdue India, to snuff out any possibility of direct or indirect challenge to China's domination of the region. Its aggression in the South and East China Seas, stronger economic and strategic presence in the Far East, Indian Ocean, Africa, Central Asia and even South America, has been part of its own larger strategy, where India has no role to play.

### **RECENT BORDER STANDOFF**

By mid-July 2020, India and China were still negotiating the de-escalation of the worst border skirmishes since the 1967 border clashes near Nathu La. Though China has concealed the actual number of its casualties, all reliable indicators have confirmed that these are substantially higher than those on the Indian side. Nevertheless, Beijing appears reluctant to withdraw entirely and restore the status-quo ante, and has, indeed, extended its intrusions to several other areas. Indian experts assess that the mutual withdrawal from the point of scuffle near Galwan River or fingers area of Pangong Tso Lake or Hot Springs amounts to Line of Actual Control being pushed in by a few kilometres on the Indian side. The Indian government has given the assurance that this arrangement is only temporary and would not have a permanent impact on the actual border between the two countries.

However, what is worrying is the clear spurt in total number of Chinese incursions into the Indian side of the border since 2012-13, as projected by the following table:

<b>Chinese transgressions</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>Total</b>
2020	130	30	10	<b>170</b>
2019	110	70	7	<b>187</b>
Figures Jan to April				
<b>Aerial transgressions</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>Total</b>
2019	32	64	12	<b>108</b>
2018	31	42	5	<b>78</b>
2017	27	4	2	<b>23</b>
2016	17	4	2	<b>23</b>
2015	19	0	1	<b>20</b>

India-China border: Chinese transgressions, aerial transgressions<sup>12</sup>

Another study had compiled data from 2003 onwards, which showed a somewhat sudden increase in such border transgressions by the Chinese from 2012 onwards.<sup>13</sup> There were 16 transgressions between 2012 and 2014, compared to 14 over the preceding 10 years. The table above only indicates that such a trend has not merely sustained since 2012, but has built a momentum of its own. This is not possible without a well-planned strategic calculus on the part of the Chinese establishment.

It is also difficult to believe that the July 2020 border stand-off was unplanned. Such massive mobilisation at a time when the entire world had been battling the Wuhan virus (COVID-19)

12 Sushant Singh, "What does the increase in Chinese transgressions mean?", *The Indian Express*, June 16, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/chinese-transgressions-ladakh-line-of-actual-control-6421855/>.

13 Mihir Bhonsale, "Understanding Sino-Indian border issues: An analysis of incidents reported in the Indian media", *ORF Occasional Paper*, February 2018, [https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ORF\\_Occasional\\_Paper\\_143\\_India-China.pdf](https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ORF_Occasional_Paper_143_India-China.pdf).

for which most countries have held China responsible – is not possible without adequate preparation. Perhaps the mounting global pressure on the Communist regime for concealing vital information about the disease was a trigger point, forcing moves aimed at deflecting criticism. But the Chinese resolve to browbeat India appears to be part of a wider and consistent strategy. This was amply manifested even during the Doklam crisis, which was completely unprovoked, and in the opinion of many security analysts, aimed at conveying a message to Bhutan that India was in no position to guarantee the security of its borders. However, a tough stance by the Indian Army eventually repelled the Chinese.

Nepali Prime Minister K.P. Oli’s recent utterances and his efforts to create an artificial boundary dispute with India<sup>14</sup> has to be seen in the context of rising covert capacity of the Chinese state to influence and manipulate fragile and smaller states. The very possibility and space for exercise of such covert influence by China in India’s own backyard is extremely worrying for the latter’s national security interests.

Following the abolition of the special status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the *Global Times*, a mouthpiece of the Chinese Government, had threatened in an August 12, 2019, editorial, that India would incur risks over such a move. It had termed the Indian government’s decision to partition the state into two union territories as “reckless, provocative... and unilateral,” and one that had “broken the status quo on the border, challenging the interests of India’s neighbours.” Cautioning that the decision could impact the regional situation, it had warned that “opposition of Pakistan and Muslims in

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14 Nayanima Basu, “Oli now says India has ‘encroached’ Nepal’s territory since 1962, should return it”, *The Print*, June 10, 2020, <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/oli-now-says-india-has-encroached-nepals-territory-since-1962-should-return-it/439344/>.

India-controlled Kashmir may have actual consequences. If the Muslims collectively oppose India's move, it is hard for India's system to control the situation. We do not see that India has the political and other resources to fully take over the area."<sup>15</sup>

Given the Chinese support to Pakistan's efforts to internationalise the situation, many Indian observers believe that China had probably started planning aggression in the Ladakh sector since Delhi's moves on Jammu & Kashmir on August 5, 2019. What is interesting is that the report also accused the West of "conniving with India, when China was busy at the trade war and the Belt and Road Initiative." The editorial went on to caution India, warning that New Delhi "needed a friendly neighbourhood in its own interest."<sup>16</sup>

Some experts on China have dismissed such rants in *Global Times* as pieces of propaganda warfare. But others believe, and quite logically, that even such propaganda offers a valuable insight into the thinking of the Chinese leadership, who rarely speak their mind publicly and often use party-controlled media to vent. All reports and writings on such important issues are cleared at an appropriate level by the Chinese Communist Party, whose functionaries ensure consistency, if not identity, with the party line.

At the height of 2020 border stand-off, *Global Times* used somewhat intimidatory language to assert Chinese supremacy in the region, even as it appeared wary of the growing US support for a greater Indian role in the Indo-Pacific region:

...in recent years, favourable opinion toward China has rarely been heard from India, but voices that cater to the values-

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15 "Unilateral move will incur risks for India", *Global Times*, August 12, 2019, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1161227.shtml>.

16 Ibid.

based alliance and the Indo-Pacific Strategy are becoming louder. Can these provide strong strategic support to India's desire to rise? These concepts dominated by the US implicitly target China, and Washington needs a country like India to spearhead attacks on China...<sup>17</sup>

If New Delhi is obsessed with playing such a role, it is giving up on itself rather would do everything possible to dominate the world, than being strategically active. It will turn itself into a tool of the so-called value alliance, abandoning its ambition of being an independent big country.<sup>18</sup>

Another such editorial openly sneered at any suggestion of possible economic and political competition or rivalry with India. Emphasising its comprehensive superiority, it asserted:

...some Indian people mistakenly believe their country's military is more powerful than China's. These misperceptions affect the rationality of Indian opinion and add pressure to India's China policy...the gap between China's and India's strength is clear. China does not want to turn border issues with India into a confrontation. This is goodwill and restraint from China. But China is confident in the situation at the border. It does not and will not create conflicts, but it fears no conflicts either. This policy is supported by both morality and strength.<sup>19</sup>

While the eventual outcome of the border dis-engagement talks, as well as the sustainability of the understanding reached, remain uncertain, a careful analysis of such media reports and other gestures of the Chinese leadership reflect their significant trust in: a) the capacity of the Pakistani state machinery, or

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17 "Border peace basis for healthy China-India ties", *Global Times*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1191967.shtml>.

18 Ibid.

19 "India needs to rid two misjudgements on border situation", *Global Times*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1191846.shtml>.

Pakistani deep state, to engage and at least harass India through non-conventional and asymmetrical strategies; b) possibility of Indian Muslims in Kashmir aligning with the agenda of the Pakistani state in the region; c) possibility of large scale disaffection of Indian Muslims against the Indian state, possibly through the covert strategic designs of the Pakistani deep state, translating into serious pressure on the Indian state; d) deficiencies of India's political and administrative institutions in handling such internal and external pressure; e) combined strength of China and Pakistan, supplemented by other smaller states in the region, to impede and obstruct the optimal rise of India as a major power; and f) China's own ability to manoeuvre the entire geopolitical context in its own favour, given its superior technological, economic and institutional prowess.

There may be some element of substance in China's self-belief, but the prevailing geopolitical equations are not as simple as they appear. China has spread itself far too much, both economically and politically, and the consequences of any increased confrontation may be far too high for both sides, as the differences in economic capacities do not necessarily translate into proportionate differences in military capacities and strategies. Beyond a certain point, outcomes may depend upon the ability of the two sides to absorb and recover from shocks. In the prevailing geopolitical and strategic calculus, India has its own strengths, despite the vulnerabilities ascribed by the Chinese strategists.

However, this does not eliminate the importance of a stronger geostrategic approach and building suitable capacities through internal reforms. Simultaneously, India needs to factor in the possibility that dictators and irresponsible power-driven oligarchs never act with rationality. The Chinese system lacks

adequate checks and balances, with few people in a position to question Xi-Jinping. He is vulnerable to more political miscalculations and security risks, which can eventually prove self-destructive for China as well. The apparent softening of the Chinese position on the Indian border and Foreign Minister Wang Yi's conciliatory tone towards the United States, especially after the latter's tough stance on the South China Sea amidst a chorus of protest from regional powers, reflects an element of caution, though it could simply be a tactical retreat.

### **DECODING CHINA'S STRATEGIC- MILITARY CALCULUS**

A careful analysis of the thrust of China's modernisation programmes, its BRI, its footprints in resource rich pockets of Africa, Central Asia, West Asia, the Far East and even South America, or its domination of critical sea routes, capture of the South China Sea or domination of the East China Sea, or securing somewhat monopolistic access to large resources all over the world, among others, indicate a stronger capacity and intent to: a) strongly defend itself from any possible aggression; b) dominate large part of the region and possibly keep even the United States at bay, or at least substantially enhance the cost of their intervention in the region; c) secure access to resources, markets, bases for strategic and economic domination; d) lock up global resources for itself and deny similar access and opportunities to others; e) maintain a close nexus between its economic agenda and military capacity, backing these through technological innovation.

Since the time when communism was collapsing in the Soviet Union and other East European countries, China has been further strengthening its internal security regime. This could possibly have been aimed at denying any space for covert CIA operations to destabilise communist nations. The ruthless



suppression at Tiananmen Square was followed by moves to placate people at one end and strengthen military and other security capacities on the other. A careful look suggests that the Communist regime may have become more entrenched internally and is fairly strong in its own backyard. However, it is amply clear that it is in no position to threaten the United States, militarily or in terms of stronger infrastructure for technological innovation, at least in the foreseeable future.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) had reported a small rise in China's nuclear warheads to 320 in 2020,<sup>20</sup> which is well beyond the threshold of minimum credible deterrence. What is significant is the large number of reports in the open domain indicating consistent improvement in its credible deterrent capacity and simultaneous advancement in its missile technology, capable of carrying nuclear payloads. From the mid-1990s China's military modernisation programme gained a strong momentum. A RAND corporation paper,<sup>21</sup> that assessed China's military modernisation over 1996-2017, has certain significant observations suggesting rapid strides by the Chinese People's Liberation Army. An analysis of these inputs together with other available information in the open domain suggests following:

China has managed to bridge significant gaps to enhance the cost and risk of any American military attack on China, the East Asia region, including Japan, Philippines, Taiwan or South China or Chinese territory, either from its ground

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20 "Nuclear weapon modernization continues but the outlook for arms control is bleak", *SIPRI*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/nuclear-weapon-modernization-continues-outlook-arms-control-bleak-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now>.

21 "An Interactive Look at the U.S.-China Military Scorecard", *RAND Corporation*, September 14, 2015, <https://www.rand.org/paf/projects/us-china-scorecard.html>.

bases in the Far East or even US aircraft Carrier Strike Groups (CSGs).<sup>22</sup>

PLA has built a large inventory of (over 1400) advanced short (less than 1000 km) to intermediate (1000 to 3000 km) range ballistic and cruise missiles, with much greater accuracy that threaten forward US air bases in Japan and potential naval deployments in the region. For example, the Hypersonic DF-17 missile with a range of 1800 to 2500 kilometres is assessed to have high-precision strike capability that can counter adversary missile defences by its higher manoeuvrability and lower-altitude flight, which are difficult to detect and counter. US officials assess that, during 2008-2018, China conducted 20 times more hypersonic weapons' tests compared to the United States.<sup>23</sup>

During its National Day parade in 2019 (October 1) China exhibited an exceptional number of new high-tech weapons of diverse range, which accounted for 40 per cent of the total weapons showcased. These sought to demonstrate China's technological superiority in information, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and conventional precision strike capabilities. Some of these weapon systems appeared capable of disrupting US communication and information networks, disrupting US situational awareness and precision targeting, and exposing US and allied forces in the Asia-Pacific to threat from manoeuvring munitions that challenged the existing US air and missile defences. A stronger underwater surveillance capacity appeared capable of threatening the dominance of US submarines in the region.<sup>24</sup>

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22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ian Williams, "More Than Missiles: China Previews its New Way of War", *CSIS Brief*, October 16, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/more-missiles-china-previews-its-new-way-war>.

Some experts assess that China's newer conventional capabilities, along with several new or upgraded nuclear delivery systems, mobile Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) and Submarine-launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs) appeared aimed at enhancing the survivability and penetration capacity of China's nuclear forces. Moreover, the technical sophistication and modernity of China's strategic missile force, a central consideration in Chinese nuclear decision-making, reflected Chinese aspiration to supplant the United States as the leading military and technological power in the Asia-Pacific region. Concerns persist over the dual-capability of China's medium-range systems. China's DF-26, for example, has both conventional and nuclear variants, and similar uncertainties persist over the nuclear capability of China's hypersonic glide vehicle (HGV) programs.<sup>25</sup>

Despite induction of newer SEAD (suppression of enemy air defences) stealth aircraft, the ability of the US Air Force to penetrate and strike targets opposite Taiwan with minimal risk had significantly declined. This is largely due to substantial improvement in China's integrated air defence system (IADS), with the induction of newer missiles with more sophisticated seekers and ranges of up to 200 kilometres, combined with more sophisticated fighter aircraft and the addition of new airborne warning and control system-equipped aircraft. However, the US capacity remained robust in the case of the Spratly Islands due to the much smaller target area and its proximity to the coast.

With the development of new generations and larger and more varied inventory of all-weather precision weapons with longer ranges deployable from a growing variety of platforms, and hitting targets from hundreds of kilometres, the US Air

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25 Ibid.

Force can attack more targets and even virtually shut most Chinese airbases around Spratly Island and South China Sea, if it deploys one or more of its aircraft carriers in the area. However, such weapon systems are finite and in case a conflict prolongs, this advantage would be mitigated.

With its increasingly credible and robust over-the-horizon (OTH) intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capability to detect precise input about any movement in waters beyond 2000 kilometres from the Chinese coastline, China has achieved approximate capacity to deter anti-surface attacks by the United States. China has developed the first ever anti-ship ballistic missiles – the first ever weapon system of their kind – posing an unexpected threat for US naval deployments in waters close to Chinese territory. Details of this missile system are not known nor is there any input available in the open media about any weapon system developed to counter these by Americans. There has been massive expansion of the Chinese Navy and, as on March 9, 2020, they have deployed a 76-submarine fleet, many of which are believed to be armed with cruise missiles as well as torpedoes. A RAND assessment suggested that their effectiveness (as measured by the number of attack opportunities it might achieve against carriers) has risen significantly.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, many independent observers have maintained that the capacity of most Chinese submarines to sustain longer voyages on their own is suspect. They are in no position to threaten US amphibious superiority in general but their existing capacity is strong enough to threaten US Naval deployment close to their own shores.

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26 Jon Harper, “Eagle vs Dragon: How the U.S. and Chinese Navies Stack Up”, *National Defence*, March 9, 2020, <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2020/3/9/eagle-vs-dragon-how-the-us-and-chinese-navies-stack-up>.

Despite the decline in US capability against Chinese amphibious forces, with a combination of submarine, air, and surface attacks, the US still enjoys clear superiority over Chinese amphibious forces and their ability to conduct or sustain an amphibious invasion, especially beyond Chinese waters.

In the eventuality of a counter-space conflict, China has fairly strong defensive capabilities. It may not be in a position to dazzle or obstruct American satellites away from its own territories, but it can certainly protect its own territory from observation by other satellites.<sup>27</sup>

These observations suggest that China has succeeded in building what appears to be a near impregnable shield of protection for itself through defensive and localised offensive capacities. It is clear, however, that at this stage, instead of threatening America, China is keener to protect its own territory, deter any US attack on China, and to dominate the East China Sea and South China Sea by making any American military adventure extremely risky and expensive. However, the net consequences of a full-blown US-China conflict would be extremely dangerous and the real efficacy of Chinese weapons would be known only then. What is apparent at this stage is that China's military capacity has become strong enough to dominate Asia, but it is still in no position to threaten or compete with United States globally.

The following table compares relative numbers of different military variables of India, China, Pakistan and the United States:

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27 Missile Defense Project, "DF-17", *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, February 19, 2020, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/df-17/>.

MILITARY VARIABLE	INDIA CHINA	CHINA	PAKISTAN	UNITED STATES
ACTIVE TROOPS	2140000	2300000	653000	1281900
RESERVE TROOPS	11550000	8000000	513000	8111000
TANKS	4427	7760	2735	6393
ARMOURED VEHICLES	5681	6000	3066	41760
ARTILLERY	5067	9726	3745	3269
SELF PROPELLED ARTILLERY	290	1710	325	950
ROCKET ARTILLERY	292	1770	134	1197
TOTAL AIRCRAFTS	2216	4182	1143	12304
FIGHTER AIRCRAFTS	323	1150	186	457
MULTI-ROLE AIRCRAFTS	329	629	225	2192
ATTACK AIRCRAFTS	220	270	90	587
HELICOPTERS	750	1170	323	4889
TOTAL NAVAL VESSELS	214	780	Not Known	437
AIRCRAFT CARRIERS	02	02	0	20
DESTROYERS	11	36	0	20
FRIDGETS	15	54	9	0
CORVETTES	24	42	0	0
SUBMARINES	15	76	15	71

Source: Compare Armed Forces<sup>28</sup>

The relative numbers do not necessarily translate into real time war-winning capacities. While all out military conflict at any level would have serious consequences for all concerned, Indian defence forces have advantages beyond what these

28 “Compare armed forces”, accessed on July 16, 2020, <https://armedforces.eu/compare/country>.

numbers may suggest. They have far more improvised and reliable weapon systems compared to both the Chinese and Pakistanis. They are the only major defence force with combinations of the best improvised weapon systems from American, Russian, Israeli and indigenous inventories. The Indian Navy has superior experience and is fairly strong within the Indian Ocean where they would be operating closer to the shore. Many experienced observers have conveyed that, notwithstanding its strengths on paper, China's military technology has several snags. Even their fast-expanding Naval system is believed to be facing severe constraints. Naval experts describe their two naval carriers as nothing more than show pieces and their submarines as incapable of sustaining themselves for long durations in the ocean. They may be strong in the South and East China Seas, but they are certainly vulnerable in the Indian Ocean and beyond.

### **STRATEGY OF GLOBAL DOMINATION**

A closer look at China's moves, especially over the past two decades, suggests that they are going by the traditional military strategies of domination of critical locations at land, sea, air and now space, with the backing of significant technological innovations. Incorporation of cyber and biotechnological elements in the overall military arsenal remains a possibility given their secretive approach. They are also building stronger and sustainable economic capacities to back their strategic and military designs, which in many cases involve grave human costs for people outside China, by unethical exaction or even plunder of their resources. This suggests that China is not content with building a stronger defensive security cover itself, but is in the process of building strong pockets of economic, military and strategic domination around the world,

which would constrict choices of other states and people and eventually threaten global stability.

A recent *Foreign Policy* commentary observed, “The conventional wisdom was that China would seek an expanded regional role – and a reduced U.S. role – but would defer to the distant future any global ambitions. Now, however, the signs that China is gearing up to contest America’s global leadership are unmistakable, and they are ubiquitous.”<sup>29</sup>

While China is in no position to challenge America militarily or economically on a global scale, its increasing capacities, approach and strategic psyche force an inference of strong intent. Its efforts to build logistical bases, dominate and control crucial waterways way beyond its shores or build pockets of influence by supporting tyrants and autocrats, use coercive strategies against every possible adversary and opponent, especially in the context of individual ambitions of President Xi Jinping, reflect this penchant for domination of other races and people.

Further, the *Foreign Policy* commentary notes, China has “put more vessels to sea between 2014 and 2018 than the total number of ships in the German, Indian, Spanish, and British navies combined.”<sup>30</sup> Its technological and military modernisation programmes or even economic domination should not have threatened or alarmed other countries. But it has been coercing virtually all its neighbours to capture pieces of land and water. The virtual occupation of South China Sea and confrontation with Japan in the East China Sea over the Spratly Island has been followed up with attempts to further

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29 Hal Brands and Jake Sullivan, “China has two Paths to Global Domination”, *Foreign Policy*, May 22, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/22/china-superpower-two-paths-global-domination-cold-war/>.

30 Ibid.



push borders with India beyond its own stated position of 1960s and later. Borders with Nepal and Bhutan have also been breached. Under these circumstances, Chinese actions arouse nervousness all over the world, especially given its internal political dynamics and a strategic psyche of territorial and national expansion. China has clearly demonstrated a tendency to use its economic and military capacity for outright coercion of smaller nations and powers.

Under these circumstances, it is clear that China seeks domination over others and not “peaceful co-existence.” The model of funding such military modernisation and sustaining economic development by securing access to uninterrupted supplies of natural resources and creating captive markets, as well as using diplomatic as well as covert influence to preserve these, are quite worrying. Chinese support to autocratic and even rogue regimes is well known.

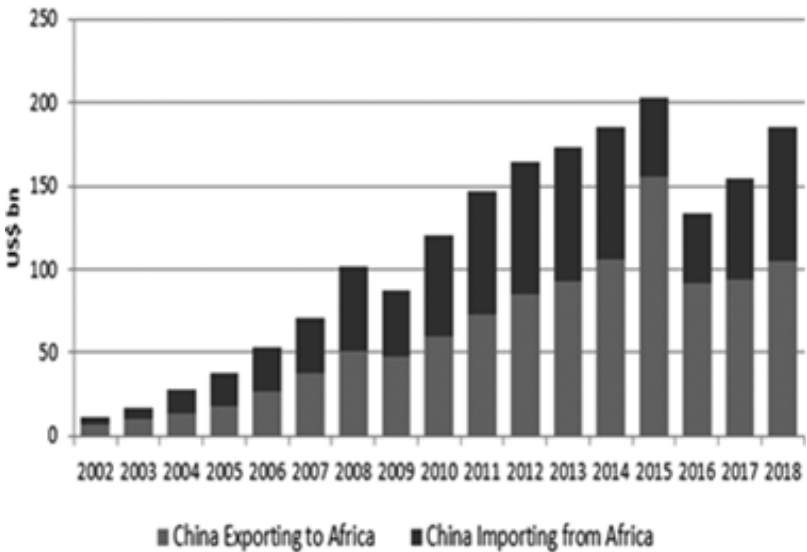
Beijing has simultaneously been increasing its domination and influence in resource rich Central Asia and the Eurasian region as well, in an attempt to consolidate its questionable control and oppression of people in Tibet and Xinjiang. Resource rich but impoverished countries of Africa are threatened by the burgeoning Chinese might. China's major trading partners, or suppliers of natural resources are some of the most impoverished countries with somewhat non-transparent political system. At the top of the list are “South Sudan, Angola, Eritrea, The Gambia, DR Congo, Guinea, Zimbabwe, Gabon, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Equatorial Guinea, Chad and Mauritania.”<sup>31</sup> A media report recently suggested that “China also gets 95% of South Sudan's

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31 Abdi Latif Dahir, “Africa's resource-rich nations are getting even more reliant on China for their exports” *Quartz Africa*, April 26, 2019, <https://qz.com/africa/1605497/belt-and-road-africa-mineral-rich-nations-export-mostly-to-china/>.

crude petroleum exports as of 2017. These included funnelling a sixth of its total daily output – 30,000 out of 170,000 barrels – to the Export-Import Bank of China to fund the young nation’s infrastructure needs.”<sup>32</sup> Simultaneously, resentment has been growing against China, and this, in a few cases, has resulted in the killing of Chinese employees of various Chinese corporations and projects in Africa.

### China-Africa Trade



Source: John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies as borrowed from UN Comtrade<sup>33</sup>

The extent of Chinese influence in Africa is difficult to evaluate simply on the basis of available data of trade and

32 Ibid.

33 “China-Africa Trade”, *John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies*, accessed on July 16, 2020, <http://www.sais-cari.org/data-china-africa-trade>.

investment. Former *Financial Times* correspondent in Africa, Tom Burgis had highlighted China's role in what he described as "loot of the resources of the continent", along with few other shadowy forces.<sup>34</sup> He has specifically documented China's murky dealings through a controversial conduit, Sam Pa, to exact huge amounts of resources by bribing autocrats and dictators and securing access to infrastructure projects.

The US magazine *National Interest* claimed:

China lent nearly USD125 billion to Africa between 2000 and 2006 and recently pledged USD 60 billion at the 2018 *Forum on China-Africa Co-operation*. The Chinese superficially appear to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with Africa by providing financial and technical assistance to Africa's pressing developmental needs. Trade between China and Africa has grown from USD10 billion in 2000 to USD190 billion by 2017. It is estimated that 12 per cent of Africa's industrial production, or USD500 billion annually – nearly half of Africa's internationally contracted construction market – is carried out by Chinese firms.<sup>35</sup>

It is clear that China's expanding military and economic capacities seem to supplement each other. Logistical bases acquired under BRI or expansion in Central Asia or South China Sea and even Africa are likely to bolster Chinese capacities for both economic and military domination, not only within

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34 Tom Burgis, *The Looting Machine: Warlords, Oligarchs, Corporations, Smugglers and The Theft of Africa's Wealth*, Public Affairs, New York, 2015.

35 Akol Nyok Akol Dok and Bradley Thayer, "Takeover Trap: Why Imperialist China Is Invading Africa", *The National Interest*, July 10, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/takeover-trap-why-imperialist-china-invading-africa-66421>.

those regions but at a global scale. China appears to be locking up resources in these regions for its exclusive use, exploiting the vulnerabilities of people there. People in these regions are becoming so dependent upon China that their own ability to decide their destiny is being seriously undermined. On the other hand, secure and captive access to resources and markets will keep fuelling China's own economy, notwithstanding some benefits reaching others, giving Beijing enough surpluses to invest in military and technological modernisation, which help build its capacity to dominate others even further.

All this underlines the need for a concerted effort to address a larger challenge to meet the developmental aspirations of the people of poor but resource-rich nations. China's quest for military and economic domination through the existing model of development threatens to throw these regions into perpetual instability and poverty and to undermine the security of world at large. Countermeasures by impacted states are likely to enormously enhance the role of the military-industrial complex, dislocating the broader agenda of global governance.

It is extremely difficult to second-guess China's intentions within the region or beyond, to assess their larger impact on India's national security. Nevertheless, a careful appreciation of the larger regional and global context, as well as overall capacities – economic, strategic, military, technological and diplomatic – in the context of China's recent moves, presents a highly disturbing trend. China has openly flaunted its superior strength and has not hesitated to browbeat independent nations. For example, Australia, which has been a longstanding supplier of commodities and natural resources to China, has been complaining for quite some time about clandestine Chinese interference within their country, including in critical political processes. Many Australians perceive this phenomenon as

detrimental to their own people and violative of transparency in governance. The Chinese have simply been dismissive of such reports.

Recently, when Prime Minister Scott Morrison called for independent review to probe the role of China into the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese Ambassador, in somewhat undiplomatic language, threatened Australia with sanctions. Quintessentially vituperative editor of *Global Times* went a few steps ahead to insult Australians when he wrote: "Australia is always there, making trouble. It is a bit like chewing gum stuck on the sole of China's shoes. Sometimes you have to find a stone to rub it off."<sup>36</sup> It is such disdainful dismissal of criticism that causes concern over both the rising economic influence of China and many of the unethical ways it employs to support and sustain its economic and military empowerment.

China has repeatedly shown its aggressive intent towards India, and such instances have increased in recent years. This could be driven by its own understanding of its relative economic-military and even purported cultural superiority, compared to India. The larger international as well as domestic context of China, along with some of India's vulnerabilities, may have given an additional push to such an approach. As a major power, India cannot risk its national security interests and objectives by relying on the good intentions of others. While New Delhi's immediate options may be limited as far as addressing the standoff on the border is concerned, a long-term restructuring of all its institutions to bolster their capacity is indispensable for the defence of India as a civilisation and a state.

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36 Felix K. Chang, "Social Distancing: Australia's Relations with China", *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, May 22, 2020, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/05/social-distancing-australias-relations-with-china/>.

## **THREATS FROM PAKISTAN**

Pakistan has remained a perennial threat and it is likely to remain so for a long time. The primary national security threat from Pakistan can be summarised as under:

Military-Strategic Threat as a neighbour;

Low-cost diffuse covert war in Kashmir;

Its covert capacity to use global terror and crime to pursue the strategic and mercenary objectives of the Pakistani deep state;

There has been complete unanimity among security experts that Pakistan on its own is incapable of posing any serious conventional threat to India. Its nuclear deterrence is a credible shield against a conventional military confrontation against a much stronger India. Nevertheless, Pakistan remains an important factor in a hypothetical situation of two-front conflict, in which its territories can be used by China and Pakistani armed forces can operate alongside the Chinese. Hence, its oversised conventional capabilities compared to size of its territory and population cannot entirely be ignored. Its higher number of nuclear warheads and stockpile is again a matter of concern, given its congenital hatred towards India and the pervasive fragility of its formal state structure.

## **PAKISTAN'S USE OF TERROR IN KASHMIR'S PROXY WAR**

What has troubled and irritated India most is the sustained covert war in Kashmir, with its combination of terrorism, propaganda, subversion and radicalisation. Such wars in general are difficult to handle but the one that the Indian security forces have been fighting in Kashmir is, indeed, the most complex of its kind. Even the most formidable conventional armed forces, with access to the most sophisticated firepower and absence of

the kind of restraint that the Indian Army exercises in Kashmir, have failed to conclude such wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. What has complicated this conflict is the infusion of the element of the Islamic identity, for which the Pakistani military establishment had been investing intensive clandestine efforts soon after Zia ul Haq took over the reins of power in Pakistan.

The Pakistani deep state exploited the porous border to create pockets of support through Islamic radicalisation and propaganda to avenge Pakistan's comprehensive debacle in Bangladesh, and wrest Kashmir through a new strategy. Such efforts took nearly a decade for fruition, when concerted militancy erupted in the state in the late 1980s. The Indian state was not fully prepared and it had ignored clandestine activities and subversion that had been going on for some time, and that probably continues even now in other parts of the country as well. Manipulation and rigging of local elections may have acted as a trigger, but such well-organised armed attacks on security forces and civilians was impossible without sustained secret planning, organisation, coordination and financial-military backing by Pakistan's state machinery.<sup>37</sup>

It is pertinent to recall that, following Soviet Russia's intervention in Afghanistan and the strategies used by Pakistan with the backing of allied forces to destabilise Afghanistan, there was a steep rise in Rawalpindi's overall technical, financial and social capacities to fight proxy war. The Pakistani state recruited young people both domestically as well as from the wider region and beyond, who were radicalised, trained and launched into Kashmir. Hence, the initial armed militants

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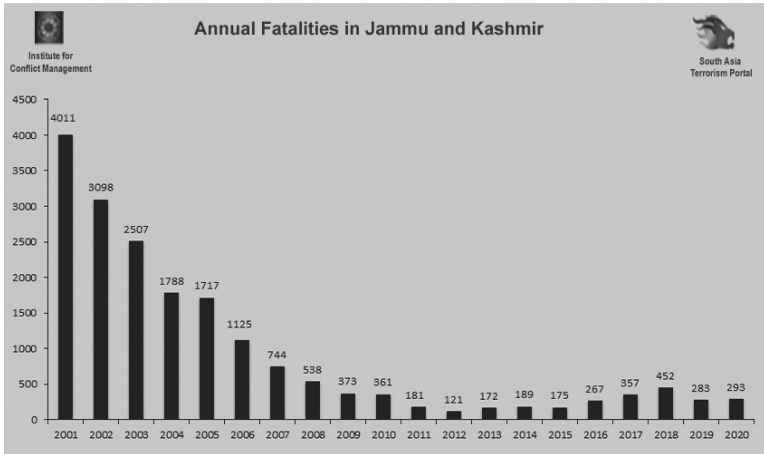
37 Priyanka Bakaya and Sumeet Bhatti, "Kashmir Conflict: A Study of What Led to the Insurgency in Kashmir Valley & Proposed Future Solutions", 2005, <https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297a/Kashmir%20Conflict%20-%20A%20Study%20of%20What%20Led%20to%20the%20Insurgency%20in%20Kashmir%20Valley.pdf>.

in the Kashmir Valley in the 1990s were mostly outsiders. The Pakistani state relied on the spiral impact of such war to provoke excesses by the Indian security forces, which like all other conventional militaries initially struggled to handle such guerrilla attacks where civilians were used as shield.

As the conflict prolonged, some degree of alienation of the local population was inevitable. The Pakistani deep state exploited this with their infrastructure across the border, to provide sanctuary, succour and support to sections of the youth who had been radicalised by Pakistani infiltrators and local sympathisers. With their newfound resources, they could fund and arm an Islamic insurgency and use their diplomatic infrastructure to lavishly spread propaganda to build further pressure on the Indian state. Exploiting the constraints of security forces to protect civilian population over such a large area, small but well-armed Pakistani sponsored groups held civilian populations to ransom, forcing complete exodus of the minority Hindu population from the Kashmir valley.

Nevertheless, there has been remarkable fightback from the Indian state, which has been spearheaded domestically by the Indian Army and backed by Central Para-military Forces and the State Police. Sections of the civilian Muslim population also started speaking out against Pakistan-backed forces once the security situation improved. But the very dynamics of such diffuse but identity-driven irregular war generated large-scale radicalisation and some degree of avoidable alienation of the local population. It was both the democratic credentials of Indian state as well as subsequent improvement in capacities of Indian security forces to fight such a war that led to a steep decline in armed militancy from around 2005-06. Following table, drawn from the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) reflects the broad trend:





Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP)

While there has not been a comprehensive study to calculate total costs of Pakistani sponsored covert war in Kashmir, its negative impact on India's larger economic development must be significant. Security forces have built capacities to handle the element of violence, especially acts perpetrated on Indian territory, but appreciation of the complexity of the entire range instruments deployed in this form of conflict, as well as their effective neutralisation, remains a challenge. All traditional counter-insurgency experts have unanimously observed that it is easy to ignite an insurgency, but eliminating one is extremely difficult.

Even among these, the one driven by Islamic identity has been the most emotive in the overall context of South and West Asia, especially after 1980s. There appears to be no solution to such identity driven hatred, which initially led to creation of Pakistan, and which continues to drive the persecution of non-Muslims in that country even now. It manifested itself in expulsion of Hindus from the Kashmir Valley. Hence, despite exposure of the Pakistani role in fomenting radicalised Islamic

terror in the Valley and its world-wide infrastructure for terror and propaganda, years of radicalisation and unavoidable civilian losses have given a push to the very momentum of such insurgency. Amidst these, the Pakistani cross-border infrastructure of support, sanctuary and radicalisation has never allowed the situation to normalise.

Most Western experts have displayed limited understanding of the complexity of the Islamic identity-driven war engineered by Pakistan through every possible means. Many of them came to realise the potent appeal of a certain version of Islam in inciting hatred and terror against non-Muslims, and deeper involvement of Pakistan in this game, only after the 9/11 terror attacks. This changed perceptions about Pakistan forever. However, the Pakistani security establishment managed to pretend to be with the West at one end and continue with their clandestine terrorism-backed war against India.

Most western security experts still struggle to appreciate that Pakistan carries the legacy of the biggest man-made carnage and genocide in the name of Islam in recent human history, the partition of the subcontinent, and such sentiments continue to drive sections of the Pakistani security establishment and society. With its own strategic objectives of containing Soviet Russia, the West had turned a blind eye to Pakistani transgressions during the Cold War era. The idea of Islamic radicalisation reached its pinnacle during the conflict with the Soviets in Afghanistan. There was little foresight within the West's own security establishment about the larger strategic consequences of this development. There was no empathy about the possible impact of radicalisation on secular India and the plight of people in the entire subcontinent.

It has taken several decades and huge human costs to force a realisation about the enormity of identity-driven conflicts.

Even now, sections of the Pakistani state establishment and civil society continue to emphasise the superior identity of Muslims in a language that makes any reconciliation and peaceful coexistence with India nearly impossible in foreseeable future. No amount of concession and goodwill is going to help, as the Pakistani state is simply incapable of reining in such forces.

There has been a large number of studies in recent years emphasising the challenges of the emotive dimensions of identity-driven irregular wars that India has been facing from Pakistan. In one well-researched paper, Louis Kriesberg argues that collective identities create “difficulty in reaching an accommodation between conflicting groups.”<sup>38</sup> Kriesberg maintains, “members of groups with identities that place a high priority on being honoured and being treated with deference may have difficulty making compromises for or respecting other groups. Furthermore, some self-conceptions relating to ideas of sovereignty, authority, and legitimacy constitute barriers to successful settlement of a conflict.”<sup>39</sup> It is precisely such a psyche that has shaped the Pakistani outlook towards India. Many among its security and political establishment continue to emphasise the superior identity of Muslims. Voices of sanity, who talk of accommodation and coexistence are simply snuffed out. This is what explains the demolition of a Hindu temple in Islamabad,<sup>40</sup> and the continuous succession of atrocities and state protected discrimination against all minorities in Pakistan.<sup>41</sup>

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38 Louis Kriesberg, “Identity Issues”, *Beyond Intractability*, July 2003, [https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/identity\\_issues](https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/identity_issues).

39 Ibid.

40 “Temple Built With Govt Permission Demolished In Islamabad In Pak, No Action From Minority Ministry”, CNN-News18, July 7, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4\\_79GHL9Ako](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_79GHL9Ako).

41 Rajat Sharma, “Double Faced Pakistan: Attacks on Hindus and Temples”, *India TV*, November 03, 2020, <https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/>

It is, again, these sentiments that drive the Pakistani covert war in Kashmir through use of terror, subversion and crime – to defy its original instrument of accession with India or wider aspiration of Kashmiris to stay with India as demonstrated in peace and tranquillity in the Valley decades after independence. It was a failure of the strategic psyche and somewhat fragile governance that allowed the Pakistani deep state to initiate this identity driven diffuse war in the region.

In its United Nations System Staff College paper, Britta Gade observes, “Armed violence has progressively become more complex over the past three decades. Not only has the number of wars that are exclusively inter-state decreased – it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between armed conflict and contexts that are shaped by regular instances of violence and crime without being considered in official statistics. The proliferation of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and the rise of identity-driven insurgency has led to the assumption that we are dealing with an entirely new type of warfare, the so-called ‘new wars’.”<sup>42</sup>

A careful examination would suggest that an appreciation among academics about such wars may be new, but not the nature of these wars, particularly given the predominance of clandestine and covert elements in conflict. Gade goes on to add “even though the idea that these wars are entirely new is debated, both within academic as well as in practitioners’ circles, the complexity of armed violence today does pose important challenges to the UN and its partners. This starts

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double-faced-pakistan-attacks-on-hindus-and-temples-rajat-sharma-opinion-aaj-ki-baat-662066.

42 Britta Gade, “Understanding the Complexity of Armed Violence in the 21st Century”, *United Nations System Staff College*, November 15, 2018, <https://www.unssc.org/news-and-insights/blog/understanding-complexity-armed-violence-21st-century/>.

with the question of what non-state armed groups really are. Many of them are in fact not entirely 'non-state' but cultivate good relations to official authorities... Many have links to organized crime networks and engage in the trafficking of drugs, weapons or natural resources... non-state armed groups need to be understood in their local context."<sup>43</sup>

In recent years, every independent research study has concluded that Pakistan has traditionally used Islamic extremism and terrorism to further its strategic interests in the region. It is now universally acknowledged that it is the Pakistani deep state that has created, nurtured and supported terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Harakat-ul Mujahideen (HuM), Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), the Mullah Nazir Group, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), and the Afghan Taliban and its affiliated Haqqani Network, among others. In recent years, it has been found propagating the idea of Ghazwa-e-Hind, which has energised and motivated a large number of Pakistani and even non-Pakistani youth. This concept has been advocating the conquest of the entire Indian subcontinent by Muslims.<sup>44</sup> As part of this larger agenda, several religious preachers have also been making inciting sermons to help recruit cadres. Several preachers and mosques within India have been feeding such propaganda through their interpretation of certain tenets of Islam that are hateful towards non-Muslims, creating a larger support structure for the Pakistani deep state.

#### **PAKISTAN'S INFRASTRUCTURE FOR DIFFUSE COVERT WAR**

Over the years, the deep state of Pakistan appears to have built formidable world-wide capacities – in the form of spirited

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43 Ibid

44 "Ghazwa-e-Hind" *Islam & Islamic Laws*, July 11, 2019, <http://www.islamlaws.com/ghazwa-e-hind/>.

crime syndicates, radicalised clerics as well as organised terrorist groups in the region and beyond – that are financially self-sustaining and appear particularly rewarding to their incumbents. Hence, Pakistan’s comprehensive infrastructure for all-out diffuse covert war through every possible means – including propaganda, deception, terrorism and clandestine subversion – cannot easily be dismantled. Even though some of the terrorist groups have drifted apart and splintered, Pakistan’s larger clout among a significant number of these remains intact. This has been demonstrated by facilitation of the recent US-Taliban Agreement by Pakistan.

Recently the European Foundation for South Asian Studies (EFSAS) as well as the US-based Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) accused Pakistan of “stoking the present escalation of Taliban violence” in Afghanistan.<sup>45</sup> These reports go on to argue that “if Pakistan possessed enough leverage over the Taliban to get it to the negotiating table with the US, it certainly should have the clout to get the Taliban to eschew violence at a time when such violence is threatening to tear apart the US-Taliban agreement.”<sup>46</sup> Such developments only reflect that the Pakistani deep state is unlikely to give up the covert capacity which it has built over the years. It is keen to control both Afghanistan and its drug trade, and yet manage a strong bargain with the United States.

Given the obvious threats that they face from these groups, the West has been more concerned with the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network. India thus, has to devise its own ways and

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45 ANI, “Pakistan’s behind-the-scenes role in thwarting intra-Afghan talks comes to fore with intensified Taliban violence”, *Business World*, July 18, 2020, <http://www.businessworld.in/article/Pakistan-s-behind-the-scenes-role-in-thwarting-intra-Afghan-talks-comes-to-fore-with-intensified-Taliban-violence/18-07-2020-298850/>.

46 Ibid.

means, along with suitable low-cost and sustainable capacities, of addressing Pakistan's covert war.

Crucially, Pakistan's entire claims about its so-called War on Terror are misleading. *Counterextremism.com*, an American watchdog on extremism and counter terrorism observed in a July 2020 report that:

Pakistan has instead focused most of its counterterrorism operations against groups that seek to challenge and overthrow the Pakistani state. These groups, which pose a more direct threat to the state, include the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP)—a subset of the Pakistani Taliban and the deadliest of indigenous Pakistani extremist groups, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ).<sup>47</sup>

The report goes on to note that Pakistani Prime Minister “Imran Khan accepted Pakistan's responsibility in creating multiple militant groups but said that they no longer served Pakistan's interests and fighting violent extremism was necessary for Pakistan's stability.”<sup>48</sup>

But a July 2020 European Foundation for South Asian Studies report clearly suggests that either Imran Khan has been misguiding the international community or he is in no position to push the Pakistani deep state to give up its clout through terrorist proxies even in Afghanistan, where the Americans are at receiving end. Arguing that Pakistan's past counter-extremism efforts have generally been insufficient, the American watchdog quotes a 2016 report of the US Department

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47 “Pakistan: Extremism & Counter-Extremism”, *Counter Extremism Project*, July 20, 2020, <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/pakistan>.

48 Ibid.

of State which claimed, “Pakistan was not doing enough to disrupt the activities of LeT and JeM – both of which continue to operate, train, organize and fundraise within Pakistan.”<sup>49</sup> It is well known that LeT and JeM are operating in Kashmir. Subsequently, Indian authorities have cited a huge amount of data that confirms Pakistani involvement in large number of terrorist attacks, including the Pulwama incident of 2019.<sup>50</sup>

Pakistan’s world-wide influence and role in global terrorism is not new. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there had been increasing disclosures by Western intelligence agencies about the level of radicalisation in Pakistan, radicalisation that has impacted Pakistanis almost all over the world. Even second-generation British Pakistanis were on the forefront in the Islamic State-backed *jihad* in Syria. Disclosures in 2013, quoting MI5, claimed that hundreds of British Muslims were fighting in Syria.<sup>51</sup> Subsequent media reports revealed that a majority of them were first- and second-generation British Pakistanis. British academic Lewis Herrington released graphic details quoting intelligence sources about British Pakistani nationals, radicalised in Pakistan or within the Pakistani community in the United Kingdom, conspiring to perpetrate terror attacks in Britain and beyond.<sup>52</sup>

Herrington had quoted the then MI5 Chief stating that, in November 2006, the agency knew of up to 30 terrorist-

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49 Ibid.

50 Muhammad Feyyaz, “Contextualizing the Pulwama Attack in Kashmir – A Perspective from Pakistan”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 13, Number 2, 2019, pp. 69-74.

51 “Hundreds of Britons fighting in Syria - MI5 chief”, *BB News*, November 7, 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-24856553>.

52 Lewis Herrington, “British Islamic extremist terrorism: the declining significance of Al-Qaeda and Pakistan”, *International Affairs*, Volume 91, Issue 1, 2015, pp.17–35.



related plots designed to kill UK citizens and damage the economy. He had also quoted political sociologist and former US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer Marc Sageman who had argued that the greatest threat of terrorism came from westernised Muslims undergoing the process of radicalisation in inner-city areas of Birmingham, Luton, Leeds and London, describing these places as the 'hotbeds of radicalisation'. Most of these areas are dominated by Pakistanis.<sup>53</sup>

The writer, who was posted as a diplomat in Indian mission in London during 2009-12, during a visit to Sheffield in November 2009 came across shocking levels of hatred among sections of British Pakistanis against Indians. In his role as Consular Officer, he had taken up the issue of British Pakistanis consistently harassing Indian female students. During the visit, the concerned police authorities of West Yorkshire Police District, initiated action. Eventually, they landed up conducting 35 to 36 raids throughout their jurisdiction as they discovered that the concerned British Pakistanis were radicalised and involved in drug trafficking, which suggested a strong possibility of their involvement in Pakistan-linked terrorist plots in the UK. Further details were not available, but the incident highlighted the reality of deep-rooted radicalisation among Pakistani youth in the UK.

In his 2015 study, Herrington claimed:

...without exception, Pakistan served as the main training ground for those who engaged in Islamic extremist terrorism in Britain between 2003 and 2006. In four of the five plots examined, two individuals external to the cell organized and partly financed the training. The first and perhaps the most high-profile individual alleged to have performed the tasks of

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53 Ibid.

fundraising and facilitating is Luton-based Mohammed Quyyam Khan, also known as Q. Both the Crevice conspirators and the now deceased Theseus suicide bombers received direct assistance from Q in obtaining training in Pakistan. A second man, Mohammed al-Ghabra, organized trips to Pakistan for the cell members of both Vivace and Overt. In all four plots, evidence suggests the conspirators received explosives training from Al-Qaeda specialists, namely Abdul Hadi al-Iraqi and Abu Ubaida al-Masri. Operation Crevice – the notorious ‘fertilizer plot’ exposed in 2003 – clearly illustrates Pakistan’s role in training and finance before 2006. British-born and raised Omar Khyam is widely believed to have led the conspirators, whose targets included nightclubs, shopping centers and domestic utility installations. Aged 18, Khyam travelled to Kashmir and fought with Pakistani-backed Islamist groups against Indian forces. Before returning to London in 2001 he spent time in Afghanistan, obtaining an audience with Taliban commander Abdul Hadi al-Iraqi. Following this meeting, Khyam agreed to undertake fundraising in order to supply finance and equipment to Hadi. By 2003, Khyam and his friends were sending up to £4,000 a month to Afghanistan. Khyam and at least four other associates were already attending events facilitated by the now banned Islamic fundamentalist group Al-Muhajiroun (ALM).<sup>54</sup>

Such details are the tip of a much bigger iceberg,<sup>55</sup> but these highlight the extent of radicalisation in Pakistan and its

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54 Ibid.

55 “Pakistan: The Footprints of Terror”, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, <https://www.satp.org/islamist-extremism/data/Pakistan-The-Footprints-of-Terror>.

wider global impact. Though several reports claim that such threats from Pakistan have declined in recent years, the regular trickle of terrorists in Kashmir or Pakistani clout with Afghan Taliban or its nexus with larger terror-crime syndicates, appear intact. Given the clandestine nature of the entire edifice and infrastructure of terror, security agencies – despite massive access to resources and professional specialisation – have struggled to tame these forces. The challenge becomes formidable when a large number of state agencies encourage, abet and clandestinely or even openly support such forces of terror, as has been the case with Pakistan.

A few spirited investigative journalists and researchers may have exposed this nexus, but the real contours of the dynamically evolving world of terror is difficult to fathom in its entirety. Pakistan's deep state or, for that matter, any other force, may not be able to control and regulate all the terrorist proxies it once created. But its covert capacity to regulate and manage a large number of these remains formidable. Further, the kind of radicalisation that it has helped ignite on the subcontinent and beyond has gathered its own momentum, feeding not merely terrorism but also more complex shades of global crime that are not easy to detect. The dynamics of secrecy and deception enhance the magnitude of the threat and overall pressure on security agencies.

Despite the containment of the terrorist infrastructure in many parts of the world, Pakistan's capacity to peddle terror as well as global crime through clandestine global syndicates appears substantially intact. Such capacity for terror can transition into different forms of subversion with a reduced level or newer form of violence. Pakistan's nuclear power status allows it to pursue these strategies with confidence. An open state with somewhat deficient institutions of governance

like India, which has been facing the brunt of Pakistani covert and clandestine subversion, is far more vulnerable. The poor regulatory capacity of the Indian state in the context of a deficient criminal-justice system, enhances such vulnerability.

Simultaneously, though the large Muslim population of India has so far escaped the deep spiral of radicalisation, the Indian state has traditionally neglected subversive propaganda by organised seminaries in the name of religious freedom. The possibility of some degree of clandestine involvement of the Pakistani deep state cannot be ruled out. But the expanding social fissures and continued propagation of somewhat conflicting versions of Islam by even the most established seminaries, such as Deoband, have the potential to undermine social cohesion of India, which can have seriously negative consequences for its overall national strength. While rationalisation of all shades of crime in the name of religion must be strictly curbed through an efficient criminal justice system, any attempt to undermine India's social cohesion enhances its vulnerability to subversive propaganda by Pakistan-linked groups.

#### **LIMITED IMPACT OF FATF ACTION**

Indian authorities appeared pleased at the decision of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to place Pakistan on the grey list in June 2018. Given the level of the Pakistani deep state's direct and indirect involvement in all shades of terrorism and global crime, the move was fairly mild. Interestingly, the Asia Pacific Group (APG), an intergovernmental technical body of 41 states on anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing, in its October 2019 report, pointed out serious deficiencies in Pakistani compliance on checking money laundering and terror-financing. The report rated Pakistan as non-compliant or partially compliant on most of

the 40 parameters identified for evaluation of its progress on countering terror finance and money laundering. It also highlights serious institutional deficiencies and lack of autonomy as well as integrity where institutions just cannot act independently. The report pointed out:

Pakistan completed its first Money Laundering (ML) and Terror Finance (TF) National Risk Assessment (NRA) in 2017. However, the NRA lacks a comprehensive analysis. Competent authorities have varying levels of understanding of the country's ML and TF risks, and the private sector has a mixed understanding of risks.

While Pakistan has established a multi-agency approach on the subject, it is not implementing a comprehensive and coordinated risk-based approach to combating ML and TF.

Pakistan is using financial intelligence to combat ML, TF, predicate crimes and trace property for confiscation but only to a minimal extent. Critically, the FMU (Financial Monitoring Unit) cannot spontaneously or upon request disseminate information and the results of its analysis to provincial CTDs (Counter-Terrorism Departments), which are designated as TF investigation authorities.

Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA) have undertaken 2,420 ML investigations, resulting in 354 prosecutions (primarily self-laundering cases) and the conviction of one natural person for self-laundering related to corruption.

Pakistan's law enforcement efforts to address ML are not consistent with its risks.

LEAs have measures to freeze, seize, and prevent dealing with property subject to confiscation. LEAs are seizing some assets in predicate offences cases, but not in terror related ML cases.

Overall, the value of confiscated funds is not commensurate with Pakistan's ML/TF risk profile. In addition, the cross-border cash declaration system is not effectively utilised to seize cash/Bearer Negotiable Instruments at the border.

Screening by Financial Institutions (FIs) and Designated Non-Financial Businesses & Professions (DNFBP) is similar to that of TFS for terrorism and TF. No funds or assets owned have been frozen.

All other FIs have limited understanding of their ML/TF risks.

NBFIs are not filing Suspicious Transaction Reports (STR) commensurate with ML/TF risks in these sectors. There are no enforceable AML/CFT (Anti-Money Laundering/Countering Financing of Terrorism) requirements for Pakistan Post, CDNS (Central Directorates of National Savings) and DNFBPs.

The State Bank of Pakistan does not have a clear understanding of the ML and TF risks unique to the sectors it supervises.

The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has a limited understanding of ML/TF risks and has not implemented a risk-based supervisory approach.

There is little evidence that SECP's supervisory activity is improving.

Major ML predicate crimes include corruption, drug trafficking, fraud, tax evasion, smuggling, human trafficking and organized crime. Corruption is endemic across Pakistan's economy. As with TF noted above, Pakistan's geography and porous borders increase its vulnerability to smuggling and narcotics trafficking.<sup>56</sup>

Not much has changed over successive evaluations, beyond some formal compliance, as in the passage of legislation. In its latest Plenary on October 21-23, 2020, FATF once again retained Pakistan on its grey list, with the organisation's President, Marcus Pleyer pointing to very serious deficiencies that still have to be repaired and observing that Pakistan, consequently, still faced the risk of being moved to the 'black-list'. In its release on October 23, 2020, FATF, stated, that "as all action plan deadlines have expired, the FATF strongly urges Pakistan to swiftly complete its full action plan by February 2021".<sup>57</sup> In the release it asked Pakistan to

...continue to work on implementing its action plan to address its strategic deficiencies, including by: (1) demonstrating that law enforcement agencies are identifying and investigating the widest range of TF [terrorist financing] activity and that TF investigations and prosecutions target designated persons and entities, and those acting on behalf or at the direction of the designated persons or entities; (2) demonstrating

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56 "Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing measures-Pakistan" Mutual Evaluation Report, *APG*, October 2019, <http://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/mer-fsrb/APG-Mutual-Evaluation-Report-Pakistan-October%202019.pdf>.

57 Fayyaz Hussain, "'To remain on grey list': FATF urges Pakistan to complete action plan by Feb 2021", *Dawn*, October 24, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1586624/to-remain-on-grey-list-fatf-urges-pakistan-to-complete-action-plan-by-feb-2021>.

that TF prosecutions result in effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions; (3) demonstrating effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions against all 1267 and 1373 designated terrorists and those acting for or on their behalf, preventing the raising and moving of funds including in relation to NPOs [Non-Profit Organisations], identifying and freezing assets (movable and immovable), and prohibiting access to funds and financial services; and (4) demonstrating enforcement against TFS [Targeted Financial Sanctions] violations, including in relation to NPOs, of administrative and criminal penalties and provincial and federal authorities cooperating on enforcement cases.<sup>58</sup>

Despite such observations Pakistan has demonstrated the determination as well as the clout of the deep state to evade the noose of international watchdogs. None of the major member countries, including US, UK, China and France made any adverse remarks against Pakistan, or called for the country's blacklisting for such defiance. The West may have done so because of its dependence on the Pakistani security establishment in Afghanistan or in deference to Pakistani support for their counter-terror operations within their own countries or regions. China's support to Pakistan is well known, and Beijing is in a position to exploit Pakistani clout with terrorist groups to its own advantage, at least for the time being, both internally and externally. However, the net outcome of such a scenario does not augur well for India.

Following observation by the non-governmental American watchdog mentioned above becomes significant:

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58 Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring, *FATF*, October 23, 2020, <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/high-risk-and-other-monitored-jurisdictions/documents/increased-monitoring-october-2020.html#pakistan>.



“On April 20, 2020, it was reported that Pakistan removed thousands of names from its terrorist watch list over the past 18 months. Among the names removed were senior members of al-Qaeda, the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba. The proscribed persons list, maintained by Pakistan’s National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), provides a guideline for financial institutions to avoid doing business with or processing transactions of suspected terrorists.”<sup>59</sup>

It is abundantly clear that FATF and international (Western) pressure has proved demonstrably inadequate in dismantling Pakistan’s terrorist infrastructure.

#### NEXUS WITH CRIME

Organised crime has always been used to fund insurgencies and terrorism. Various studies have consistently highlighted this dimension. The Terrorism Prevention Branch (TPB) of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) observes:

...terrorists require financing to recruit and support members, maintain logistics hubs, and conduct operations. Thus, preventing terrorists from accessing financial resources is crucial to successfully counter the threat of terrorism. However, many States lack the legal and operational frameworks and technical expertise needed to detect, investigate and prosecute terrorist financing cases.<sup>60</sup>

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59 “Pakistan: Extremism & Counter-Extremism”, *Counter Extremism Project*, op. cit.

60 “Countering Terrorist Financing”, *UNODC*, accessed on July 17, 2020, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism/news-and-events/terrorist-financing.html>.

In fact, UNODC reports have successively highlighted the terror–crime nexus, along with the capacities of state institutions.

The UN Security Council has always been cognizant of this connection and a month after the 9/11 attacks, it adopted resolution 1373/2001, which recognised a “close connection between international terrorism and transnational organized crime, illicit drugs, money-laundering, illegal arms-trafficking, and illegal movement of nuclear, chemical, biological and other potentially deadly materials.”<sup>61</sup> The resolution called for “national, regional and international cooperation to combat terrorism financing and money laundering.”<sup>62</sup>

In March 2019, the UN Security Council adopted yet another resolution (2462), which addressed terrorism financing, and in July 2019 an open debate took place at the UNSC on organised crime–terrorism linkages. Yet, real progress in implementation has been extremely difficult.<sup>63</sup>

Both Indian and other agencies have regularly highlighted the Pakistani nexus with global crimes such as money laundering, drug-trafficking, circulation of fake currencies, extortion and piracy. Over the years, formidable Pakistani state-backed crime networks have expanded their clout and reach. It is well known that the most sophisticated crime cartel run by Dawood Ibrahim on Indian soil had the active support of the Pakistani state till he fled to Pakistan in the wake of the 1993 serial bombings in Mumbai. Pakistan is now sheltering

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61 Summer Walker and Tuesday Reitano, “New Security Council Resolution recognizes broader links between terrorism and organized crime”, *Global Initiative*, July 26, 2019, <https://globalinitiative.net/new-security-council-resolution-recognizes-broader-links-between-terrorism-and-organized-crime/>.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

Dawood Ibrahim in Karachi and assisting in the clandestine operations of his group, which operates across South and South East Asia, Africa, and Europe.

Social capital with terror groups is a low-risk and high gain commercial proposition for both the Pakistani deep state and for organised crime groups. Terrorism is a smaller but significant component of the entire edifice and infrastructure that generates huge all-round dividends. The link with terror and radicalisation converts illicit and criminal operations into a religious obligation. There are multiple reports indicating how the Pakistani deep state and Taliban have been controlling the lucrative drug trade in Afghanistan.

In this connection, a few recent incidents have caught the attention of security specialists. One pertains to gold smuggling through alleged misuse of the diplomatic bag by the UAE Consulate in Indian state of Kerala. India's top counter terror investigation agency has initiated probe in to the matter.<sup>64</sup> Whether the terror link is established or not, what is worrisome is that such smuggling has been going on for quite some time and it was only due to the spirited efforts of officials that the crime was detected and action was initiated on this occasion. Given the general laxity and perceived corruption in many government departments, the scale of such or similar crime may be quite high. Even if the terrorism link is not established, the very sustenance of such a large-scale criminal link constitutes a potential support structure for hostile state and non-state actors.

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64 "Kerala gold smuggling case: NIA registers FIR to probe if it's linked to terror activities", *The New Indian Express*, July 10, 2020, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2020/jul/10/kerala-gold-smuggling-case-nia-registers-fir-to-probe-if-its-linked-to-terror-activities-2167972.html>.

Similarly, on April 1, 2020, the Sri Lankan Navy seized a vessel with nine Pakistani nationals that was smuggling 605 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine and 579 kilograms of ketamine.<sup>65</sup> Media reports noted, “the seizure had reinforced contention of the Indian agencies that Pak based cartels had been indulging large scale drug trafficking via sea route in the region.” The reports cited the similar seizure of 500 kilograms of contraband heroin and 100 kilograms of methamphetamines on March 5, 2020, by the Sri Lanka Navy. in which eight of the 16 arrested crew members were Pakistani nationals and the origin of the contraband was traced to Pakistan’s Makran Coast. Reports had quoted officials and cited data that such seizures were the tip of a much larger iceberg of drug trade carried out with the collusion of the Pakistani deep state. The African bases of such cartels and the arrest of Pakistan-sheltered Dawood Ibrahim’s son in Barcelona in 2015 on charges of drug trafficking give an idea of the larger footprint and reach of such cartels.<sup>66</sup>

A retired official of the Sri Lankan Navy disclosed, on condition of anonymity, that these were not the first incidents of their kind. In one such incident, which had not surfaced in the media, the Sri Lankan Navy was probing the role of its own retired personnel who were caught off the Sri Lankan coast along with Pakistani nationals in 2016, while carrying an illicit cargo of arms.<sup>67</sup>

Hence, the Pakistani deep state’s ability and incentive to sustain its proxy war also provides enormous individual

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65 Devesh K. Pandey, “Haul points to Pak-based cartels’ role in drug trafficking via sea routes”, *The Hindu*, April 2, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/haul-points-to-pak-based-cartels-role-in-drug-trafficking-via-sea-routes/article31237497.ece>.

66 Ibid.

67 Telephonic interaction April 05, 2020.

gains and clout for its incumbents. The absence of a strong and effective criminal justice system in India, as well as in other states affected by the Pakistan-backed criminal-terrorist proxies, works to the advantage of the Pakistani deep state. Their protection and sheltering of Dawood Ibrahim – whose networks are believed to be active in money laundering, smuggling, drug and human trafficking, extortion and several other crimes – is a clear indicator of the strong covert support structure that the group is running on Indian soil. The problem is compounded by India's weak and deficient criminal justice system, which impedes ability of the state to guard itself and its people from serious subversion in such hostile regional geopolitics.

In this connection, it is worth citing a 2014 study by the US Army that pointed out that “insurgents commonly use criminal organisations to accomplish objectives.”<sup>68</sup> It had identified “theft, drug, human trafficking, smuggling of illicit materials, extortion, prostitution, kidnapping, blackmail, counterfeiting, taxing of civilians, bank robbery and bribery” among the activities employed. Criminal organisations may also assist insurgents in actions such as intimidating government officials, conducting assassinations, kidnapping key personnel, initiating sectarian violence, strikes, demonstrations, riots, and smuggling high value leaders, advisors or weapons.” Given the identity driven war by the Pakistani deep state, the very operation and existence of any organised crime of this nature, or even large-scale bureaucratic corruption or opaque political funding, enhances the overall vulnerability of India's national security.

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68 “Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies”; *Department of the Army*, Washington: DC, June 2, 2014, <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf>.

India's domestic security agencies have contained the threat to a significant extent but the response has largely been tactical. Further, the fragility of political and governance institutions, and a poor criminal justice system have conceded space for larger subversive networks to flourish and thrive. It is debatable whether India was ever in a position to destroy the capacity of the Pakistani deep state to raise such an army of radical terror groups – in the process radicalising their own society. What is worrying is that, in the absence of such capacities and progress in the direction of building such capacities, the cost of managing the Pakistani sponsored covert war is going to increase, taking it to a level where it can hurt India economically, socially and even politically.

#### **NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT**

The above analysis clearly underlines the need for a strategic paradigm shift on India's national security strategy and outlook. Hostility from two major nuclear armed states – including a new global super power – who happen to be its immediate neighbours, multiply national security challenges, especially given the pressures of addressing rising needs and expectations of a burgeoning population. China's intent and capacity for strategic domination of the region and beyond is fairly obvious. It has not only enhanced the cost and risk of US intervention in most parts of Asia, including the Far East, Asia-Pacific and Central Asia, but its rising influence in Africa, South America and parts of Europe and even West Asia, have aided its capacity to challenge the US global domination. Its cohesive political-governance apparatus appears better capable of responding to any crises, or extraordinary situations, more decisively, swiftly and flexibly than democracies. Crucially, China's decisions appear largely unfettered even by human costs.

In the prevailing dynamics, as well as given its strategic psyche, China is likely to do everything possible to eliminate space for any challenge to its regional supremacy that India may pose, either on its own or in collaboration with others. The sudden spurt in the Chinese belligerence on Indian borders since 2013, in the context of the Xi Jinping regime's aggressive posture towards all its neighbours, except known client states like Pakistan, appears part of a clear design. On the other hand, the very nature of evolution of the Pakistani state and society – with the rising influence of radical forces and unrelenting grip of the deep state over political power – makes the possibility of peaceful co-existence, or a genuine and sustainable rapprochement with India, improbable in the foreseeable future. What is more worrying is that, besides Chinese support to Pakistan, even major Western powers appear reluctant to antagonise India's western neighbour beyond a certain point, despite a near-global outcry against its collusion, support, patronage and sponsorship of terrorism and organised crime. This has been amply manifest in the fairly soft approach of the APG towards Islamabad's brazen defiance of the FATF guidelines on countering terror finance.

The Pakistani deep state appears to be deriving a form of tacit acknowledgment of its strength and utility, by virtue of its clout with regional and global crime-terror networks. Pakistan's Military-ISI complex demonstrated its utility for the West by facilitating the US-Taliban agreement in Afghanistan and remains a possible conduit for any potential tactical deal between the West and China in future. India has to be alive to the possibility that, in a tighter situation with limited choices, the West may even be content with simply confining Pakistani influence and activities within this region, rather than attempting a complete dismantling of its terrorist and crime infrastructure, the latter task appearing increasingly onerous.

Under these circumstances, India needs to find innovative strategies to address the expanding asymmetry of power vis-à-vis China and quickly build capacities to crush the sustained low-cost covert war from Pakistan that has been haemorrhaging it for decades. The nature of war in Kashmir or the unique dynamics of terrorism and radicalisation has created such levels of complexity that these are unlikely to be addressed through conventional strategies.

India, as a major international power, cannot risk its core national security interests by relying primarily or exclusively on diplomatic support and international goodwill, even though these are critical and must be pursued in all sincerity. Diplomatic support and goodwill do not always translate into tangible and sustainable strength, given the fluid dynamics of global and regional geopolitics. Unconditional military-security support also becomes difficult if other parties do not have an equally abiding stake in issues or if their gains are not commensurate with the risks involved in such support. Hence, a stronger and sustainable national security capacity, involving a proactive strategy to deter hostile intent and actions of actual and potential adversaries, needs to be backed by stronger economic, technological and governance capacities. At one level, India will have to shun its inward-looking approach, to engage, influence and shape issues and events beyond its frontiers, without eroding its military-economic strengths or diplomatic goodwill. On the other, it has to address its internal governance challenges and build suitable defensive and offensive capacities to address its security needs in the evolving situation.

India's defence forces have been exemplary in protecting the legitimate military interests of the country, but its political-bureaucratic and corporate institutions, notwithstanding a few



notable exceptions, have struggled to optimise the country's collective potential and strengths and to harness these towards comprehensive national power. This has manifested in avoidable asymmetry of power *vis-à-vis* China. The inability of many governance institutions to perform optimally or respond decisively and swiftly to emergent challenges, has been worrying. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has already tested our institutional capacities to handle an epidemic or natural calamity of a large scale. This only reinforces our belief in the need for a major transformational restructuring in this direction. This would also be critical for securing, among others, food-water-energy-communication needs of a massively expanding population amidst depleting resources like land and water.

The relatively sluggish pace of economic-technological advancement, in the context of the prevailing security and geopolitical dynamics, could become increasingly serious national security challenges. Similarly, a deficient criminal justice system generates avoidable stress on internal social and political cohesion and compounds sloth and inefficiency in large sections of the bureaucracy. In a competitive world, where trade and technology have emerged as lethal tools of predation, something for which mankind earlier resorted to wars, the country can no longer continue with unsatisfactory state of R&D institutions or larger components of an uncompetitive private sector. Similarly, the exodus of super-skilled human capital or flight of natural resources, the poor state of average health of the population and deficiently skilled work force, negatively impact the ability to sustain a stronger national security cover.

While no country can attain or pursue absolute national security, the vulnerabilities and challenges for India, compared

to its institutional capacities, have continued to expand. These appear unlikely to be bridged by any tactical initiatives to improve the professional-technical capacity of existing institutions. One can measure the quality of national security capacity of a state by evaluating the sum total of its institutional capacities to: a) prevent, pre-empt, and deter real and potential threats – external or internal – without eroding its long-term strengths; and b) the ability of these institutions – including their structures and processes as well as larger underlying values – to optimise the comprehensive national output of its people. On these criteria, the world’s biggest democracy and the oldest civilisation has its task well cut out.

#### **NATURE OF THE PARADIGM SHIFT**

A higher quality of human resources, in terms of stronger physical-cognitive-technical capacities, as well as larger values such as the integrity of industry and enterprise, have traditionally constituted the base of the pyramid of national security. Instead of sheer numbers, such attributes reflect the real strength of the population. India’s record is quite alarming on these parameters, with relatively low life expectancy, high incidence of malnutrition and morbid diseases, impaired cognitive skills and stunted growth of a large percentage of children, among others, resulting in physically weaker and deficiently skilled work force. With poor access to high quality technical, professional and life skills, the overall productivity of the country’s collective human resources is way below its potential, diluting the advantage of sheer numbers. Such challenges appear unlikely to be resolved by the existing free-flowing, and somewhat chaotic dynamics of markets or the state of existing governance and healthcare institutions.

Simultaneously, disproportionately larger sections of our productive human resource appear to have been sucked into

non-productive professions like political activism, cinema, infotainment, marketing, advertising, public relations, domestic chores and even various others pursuits whose real contribution to tangible economic power may be suspect. These could be symptoms of a deeper underlying challenges like extreme inequality, deficient regulation, and structural imbalances of the market economy. It will stretch the genius of even the best among Indian economists to find innovative solutions, going beyond the prevailing theories and concepts of the market economy, to facilitate optimally productive deployment of this large population.

Simultaneously, the nature of reforms that we need in the regulatory and enabling capacity of the state may not have any ready-made parallels. India needs stronger and sharper capacities to segregate *bona fide* corporate entrepreneurship, to nurture, protect, encourage and support these in a larger quest for the economic and technological empowerment of the country. It will have to adopt more innovative approaches and strategies to build its private sector as a genuine partner in wealth creation, gainful employment of people as well as major driver of technological innovation and excellence. This would be difficult in the absence of larger trust-based social systems that encourage and sustain a wider culture of excellence and integrity-driven leadership. It will test the leadership abilities of all major stakeholders of the country to unleash an agenda for transformation of institutions of state and society for this purpose.

Internal cohesion has always remained the most critical ingredient of national security. This enables states to handle external threats better. Despite sustained assaults on social harmony, and downsides like caste-based divisions, India's cohesive heterogeneity has remained fairly robust and resilient.

However, the situation could have been better with a robust and efficient criminal justice systems as well as stronger curbs on abuse of freedom in this direction. India needs to devise innovative and low-cost strategies to curb internal fissures, as these erode the capacity of the state to deal with external subversion and aggression. Despite consistent clandestine efforts of Pakistani deep state-sponsored networks, the overwhelming majority of Indian Muslims have remained immune to subversive propaganda and derive pride from their Indian identity. However, all identity-driven fissures, including radicalism in the name of Islam, can be addressed only through combined efforts of the criminal justice system and societal initiatives like persuasion, communication and social reform. Subversive radicalism peddled by hostile forces through clandestine global networks needs to be dealt with through exemplary and deterrent coercion. However, political exploitation of identity divides has an equally serious negative impact on internal cohesion. Coercive actions can deter assaults on internal cohesion only if these are channelled through a process of a credible and impartial criminal justice system.

There are large number of studies suggesting that organised subversion – including radicalisation and terrorism – and organised crime thrive and feed on each other. These eventually build a spiral of their own, making it difficult to differentiate normal corruption and sponsored subversion. India has to find a more effective solution to deny space to organised subversive and crime networks which have been flourishing, with the clandestine support of hostile forces. With strong pockets of global influence, these clandestine networks, aided by access to advanced technologies and ability to operate swiftly and flexibly, can wield far more influence than is ordinarily visualised. These can potentially subvert key institutions of state, and interfere with our democratic governance processes

and institutions to the detriment of our comprehensive national security. In certain situations, these can virtually paralyse the capacity of key institutions to defend and protect even the legitimate national interests of a democratic country.

The seriousness of the threat of subversion to open and democratic states is manifest in the US allegations of external interference in its electoral process, as well as other institutions. Sections of the US media have highlighted this issue, along with the malicious abuse of the mechanisms of lobbying, by exploiting the open nature of their society. It is difficult to fathom the entire reality in this context, but the vulnerability of even the most powerful democracy of the world, which boasts of a comprehensive network of efficient and autonomous institutions with access to most sophisticated technologies, is evident.

Given the greater fragility of institutions and intensity of hostility of some of its adversaries, India would be far more vulnerable. Tactical efficiency like improvements in transparency in all financial transactions, including electoral funding, or curbs on bureaucratic corruption or effective deterrents to money laundering, may be necessary but are probably insufficient to address the scale of threat. A comprehensive restructuring of institutions, to infuse a larger culture of efficiency and integrity, howsoever difficult and utopian it may sound, will have to be attempted, given the scale of threats.

### CONCLUSION

India, at this juncture of history, faces a predicament that probably very few major powers or civilisations have faced. Its potentials and opportunities to rise as a major global power are entwined with formidable challenges. There is massive

domestic aspiration as well as wider international support for the rise of a democratic and heterogenous India, which can be the biggest antidote to both Islamic radicalism as well as opaque authoritarianism. But there are serious internal and external impediments in this direction. Besides, global cliques and cartels, as well as the rough and tumble of a globalised world, create uncertainties and threats within which large sections of India's own political, corporate, bureaucratic as well as other elite, may be uncomfortable with the idea of transformational changes. Many of them have thrived and flourished in an ecosystem of fragile institutions and a shift towards competition, transparency and meritocracy may result in loss of privileges and advantages to entrenched sections of the elites.

China's spectacular governance accomplishments have raised serious doubts about the efficacy of the existing democratic governance institutions to transform the plight of people in post-colonial states. This is especially given the relative decline in governance capacities of even the advanced democracies of the West. Chinese scholars often claim that the West was able to establish its comprehensive material, intellectual and technological superiority largely due to the colonial moorings of its early prosperity, which provided the foundation for subsequent innovations, industry and enterprise. China claims to have built its prosperity and technological modernisation through sheer strength of its civilisational values and governance model, which it describes as more meritocratic, encouraging greater industry and enterprise.

India's societal ethos has retained its essentially humanist, plural and transparent nature, despite all pressures and distortions or degenerations, reversed by phases of resurrection. This is what explains the sustenance of democracy in India even under

adverse circumstances. Any drift towards authoritarianism is likely to seriously erode its capacity and output as a nation, and hence will be counter-productive for its national security objectives. At this stage, the country has to explore refinements of some of its key institutions, ranging from political parties to civil services, criminal justice system, corporate sector, media, civil society entities, institutions of higher research, health-care, the elementary education regime, among others, to bolster collective national output. This will be crucial for building and sustaining a stronger national security architecture, capable of pursuing robust and innovative strategies. To improve the quality of output of each of these institutions, as well as their contribution to national power, they need to be equipped with credible norms, values and procedures to promote skill and merit-driven performance as well as a culture of genuine leadership, which can continuously optimise the quality of their output. Political, bureaucratic or even corporate rent, or entitlement driven privileges or hereditary leadership, is a luxury that no dynamic democracy can afford within any of its institutions, including political parties or larger corporate organisations. India will have to spearhead democratic innovations in this direction to protect its core national security interests.

Democracies can potentially create far superior governance institutions than authoritarian states, provided they can marshal their basic principles to build a stronger synergy between individual and institutional excellence, where both drive each other. India has to explore an integrated and yet dynamic framework of high-quality governance and social institutions, where each enjoys autonomy and independence at one level, to optimally grow and evolve, and yet be able to collaborate with the others. This is possible with suitable safeguards as

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well as larger instruments of functional complementarity and a culture of integrity that enables swift and decisive responses. The challenges towards such a transition would be huge. But it is time to embark on a journey in this direction.