

FAULTLINES

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

Volume 30

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Volume 30

edited by
AJAI SAHNI



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THE INSTITUTE FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT



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

Edited by Ajai Sahni

FAULTLINES - THE SERIES

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

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Foreword

The emerging new world disorder demands urgent attention. The global environment has become extraordinarily volatile, unleashing epochal uncertainties. In the sharp contestation that has been impelled by the rapid shifts in the equations of power across the world and within its regions, clear winners and losers will emerge over no more than the coming decade. Critically, unprecedented complexity – produced by dramatic technological transformations, by the shrinking of the world into an increasingly interlinked ‘village’, and by new and convoluted patterns of conflict that go far beyond the increasingly obsolete concept of hybrid warfare – adds limitless layers to the tasks of domestic and global management. Against this backdrop, leaderships and bureaucracies trapped in old ways of thinking and operating are doomed to lead their nations into the abyss.

Responding effectively to this strange new world will demand enormous capacity building, a leadership that has the will and the vision to chart out each nation’s future, and the urgent framing and implementation of the plans and programs to realize this vision. The nations that fail to achieve each of the three elements of this trifecta in adequate measure will inevitably face progressive marginalization, indeed, subordination to one or the other external power.

With the exception of China – and there would be many qualifiers here – no country in the world appears to be coping with the demands of the sheer pace of adaptation that these circumstances require. Indeed, before the unending COVID-19

pandemic commenced, the old, entrenched ways of thinking – a rampaging West imposing its decisions across much of the world, even as it relinquished the real substance of power, outsourcing virtually all industrial processes as well as their underlying technologies, overwhelmingly to China, under a faith-driven policy of ‘globalization’ – appeared to define the broad trajectory of future developments. The Donald Trump administration had, of course, begun to question the wisdom of the ‘imbalance’ with China even before COVID was unleashed on the world – including on a visibly unprepared US. A more fundamental geopolitical transformation, however, had to wait on COVID – China’s opacity and duplicity on causation and source, the supply-chain disruptions that followed, and the global dangers of inordinate dependence on a duplicitous, authoritarian, expansionist power, that rejected or subverted the authority of international institutions and law, eventually drove home the point in most Western capitals, and a rather messy and often contradictory process of ‘disentanglement’ commenced in earnest.

The war in Ukraine has substantially accelerated these processes, as well as the crystallization of a new pole – the China-Russia axis (with Russia relegated to a progressively subordinate role) – that seeks to impose Xi Jinping’s vision of a new authoritarian world order by corralling an array of rogue, weak, and failing regimes, and of floundering economies, across the world.

Confronting this rising challenge demands an intense and focused strategic response, one that appears increasingly difficult to achieve in the face of the receding current of strategic wisdom among political leaderships across the democratic world. Indeed, as crisis compounds crisis, most leaderships continue to fall back on broken systems and failed ideologies, largely ignoring the imperatives that new equations of power and new technologies have created.

India is no exception to these complex patterns of strategic incoherence, as the gap between ambitions and postures, on the one hand, and institutions and capacities, on the other, continues to widen, even as policies and practice undermine existing institutional strengths and systems. A sustained, reality-based, effort of analysis is necessary, if effective policies are to be devised to address the augmenting vulnerabilities of the system, both to global and domestic disruptions. *Faultlines* continues with such an effort of analysis in the hope that, at some stage, some elements of a rational strategic discourse may begin to find resonances in national policy.

Ajai Sahni
New Delhi,
April 15, 2023

The India-China Conundrum: The Maritime Dimension

Admiral Arun Prakash (Retd.)*

Crystal-gazing in international relations is a hazardous occupation, and history is replete with instances where statesmen have blundered in statecraft, leading their countries to grief. In September 1938, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain loftily predicted, on return from Munich after his talks with Hitler; “I believe it is peace for our time.” Less than a year later, he was proved, not only a false-prophet, but utterly naïve, when Hitler remarked at the outbreak of war: “Our enemies are little worms. I saw them at Munich.”¹

Closer home, India’s post-independence leaders, nowhere as well-versed as Chamberlain in international relations, certainly misread the intentions of China’s Communist regime in 1949. Prime Minister Nehru also compounded his error of judgement by ignoring the few pragmatic voices that tried to raise an alarm. Home Minister Sardar Patel had written to Nehru, in November 1950, warning him that notwithstanding Indian Ambassador Panikkar’s “false sense of confidence”,

* Admiral Arun Prakash is a former Chief of the Naval Staff, who retired in October 2006.

1 “Conquest at Munich”, *The History Place*, 2001, <https://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/triumph/tr-munich.htm>.

China was indulging in duplicitous conduct vis-à-vis Tibet.² But Nehru chose to ignore this warning.

Those of us who grew up in the 1950s would recall frequent references to *Panchsheel* and the non-aligned movement which regularly peppered headlines and radio news. We often saw photographs of smiling Premiers Jawaharlal Nehru and Chou En Lai in newsreels and papers; and the famous slogan: “*Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai*” was enthusiastically adopted by the Indian public in good faith. In 1950 China invaded the independent state of Tibet and incorporated it as an autonomous republic. When India tamely accepted Chinese suzerainty over Tibet in 1951, few realized the implications of the elimination of a huge buffer state, bringing China right to our northern doorstep.

India’s humiliating military defeat at China’s hands in 1962, proved a historical watershed in many ways. For one, it shook the political leadership out of its complacent thought-process, which had assumed that the profession of non-violence and adoption of *Panchsheel* would render us immune to aggression. Responding to former President Radhakrishnan’s admonition about his “credulity” and “negligence”, vis-à-vis China, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had, ruefully, acknowledged, “We were getting out of touch with reality in the modern world and living in an artificial atmosphere of our own making.”³

This essay attempts to examine the rationale and motivation behind China’s long-term strategic objectives, with a focus on its grandiose maritime ambitions, and the threat they pose, in the hope that it will cast some light on the way ahead, for India to deal with this conundrum.

2 “Sardar Patel’s Letter to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru”, *Friends of Tibet*, November 7, 1950, <https://www.friendsoftibet.org/sardarpatel.html>.

3 G Parthasarathy, “Lessons from the 1962 debacle”, *The Hindu Businessline*, October 24, 2012, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/columns/g-parthasarathy/lessons-from-the-1962-debacle/article64598653.ece>.

THE INDIA-CHINA RELATIONSHIP

India's Ambivalence

As news of the clash that took place on the Aksai Chin plateau in the night of June 15, 2020, between Chinese and Indian troops, reached a dismayed Indian public, many wondered whether history was repeating itself. Whether or not, one accepts the value of history as an aid to prediction, it is undeniable that even after being embroiled in a territorial dispute with China for 70 years, there is little clarity in New Delhi about the long-term strategic aims and objectives underpinning China's belligerence.

One can only conclude that the roots of our diffidence towards China, lie in our profound ignorance about this huge neighbour. Till a decade ago, we had neither created a substantive pool of Mandarin speakers, nor fostered many institutions dedicated to researching China's history, culture, economy, industry, and strategic thought. In the absence of a national security strategy or a Parliamentary 'white paper' on Sino-Indian relations, it is not surprising that our response to recent Chinese actions has been lacking, both in clarity and resolve.

It would seem that, from Jawaharlal Nehru's naïve hopes, encapsulated in the *Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai* mantra, to Prime Minister Modi's prolonged courtship of Xi Jinping, India has been groping in the dark, while misreading China's real intent. As we watch Beijing's sinister border strategy unfold, the absence of a matching counter on India's part becomes painfully obvious.

Other concerned nations have not been remiss on this account. The US Congress, for example, has mandated not only the Department of Defence to render an annual report on China, but also tasks its own Congressional Research Service

(CRS) to provide regular inputs on China's economic and military developments. A November 2022 CRS report, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy*, opens with the statement:

China's military modernization... is the top focus of U.S. defense planning and budgeting... China's naval modernization has been underway for more than 25 years, since the early to mid-1990s, and has transformed China's navy into a much more modern and capable force.

On current trends, China's rapidly growing economy promises to endow it with all the attributes of a great power by (or before) 2049, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic. This is the date by which President Xi Jinping has declared China's intent to become a "fully developed nation" and thus to attain strategic equivalence with the US.⁴ It has become increasingly obvious, from Beijing's utterances and actions, that domination of its neighbourhood is seen by China as a prerequisite for the attainment of this state of eminence.

No meaningful study of the rationale and the motivations underpinning China's actions is possible, nor should policy formulation be attempted, without a glimpse into its historical past.

CHINA'S PAST

When viewed against the backdrop of China's actions as well as oft-heard utterances of its leaders, three predominant influencing factors can be discerned in its past. First, China has an imperial tradition going back many centuries, in which

4 Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower*, Henry Holt & Co., Kindle edition, 2015, pp. 335-390.

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a well-defined heartland, overwhelmingly populated by ethnic Hans, exercised military dominance over the surrounding peripheral states. Thus, China has historically had a ‘great-power’ self-image, underpinned by the abundance of resources, economic self-sufficiency and vastness of the imperial state and its population.

Second, in tandem with the cultivation of a ‘great power’ persona, the Chinese people have also nurtured a deep seated ‘victim mentality’, as a result of China’s defeat, subjugation, and humiliation by foreign powers.⁵ During the 19th century, China’s inability to resist Western military pressures led to the Opium Wars and signing of what they called the ‘Unequal Treaties’ with USA, Russia, UK, and other European powers. These treaties violated China’s sovereignty by granting trading, judicial and other extra-territorial rights on Chinese soil to foreigners.

In 1900 China suffered the humiliation of an invasion by a coalition of Western powers to put down the ‘Boxer Rebellion’. In 1937 Japan invaded China, and in the intense eight-year conflict that followed, China suffered at least 20 million casualties and many atrocities at the hands of the ruthless Imperial Japanese troops.⁶

Third, this ‘victim syndrome’ has served to intensify a strong urge to emphasize foreign threats and justify the creation of a powerful Chinese nation which not only commands international deference, but can also redress perceived past wrongs.

Maintenance of internal order and domestic well-being is considered the foundation of China’s national security.

5 Michael D. Swaine and Ashley Tellis, “China’s Grand Strategy. Past Present and Future”, RAND Corporation, 2000, https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1121.html.

6 Henry Kissinger, *On China*, Penguin Books, London, 2012, p. 109.

Admiral Arun Prakash

The current Communist system, still repressive and corrupt, exists alongside a market economy; and the Chinese people often question the compatibility of the two. There is enormous pressure on the present regime to sustain high levels of economic growth in order to cope with a rising population, and sharp emerging economic disparities between the industrialized coastal provinces and the agrarian hinterland.⁷

Ethnic tensions simmer just below the surface in non-Han majority areas like Tibet, Sinkiang, Mongolia, and Manchuria, incorporated into China in the last century. The brutal suppression and arbitrary detention of the Uyghurs in internment camps, has led to outbreaks of ethnic violence, which represent an additional source of insecurity for the state.

Against this backdrop, the parallel evolution of China and India as 20th century nation states is significant.

A PARALLEL EVOLUTION

The first half of the twentieth century saw both China and India undergo immense change, accompanied by prolonged turbulence, while proceeding on the path to nationhood. In 1947 India emerged from two centuries of British rule using Mahatma Gandhi's unique philosophy of non-violence as a tool. Independence, accompanied by partition of the sub-continent into India and Pakistan, however, witnessed widespread violence.

Having overthrown imperial Manchu rule in 1911, China saw a prolonged internecine conflict between the Communists and the Nationalists (known as Kuomintang or KMT) from 1927 to 1949. This was overlaid by a Japanese invasion and brutal occupation from 1931 to 1937, followed by WW II in

7 Rollie Lal, *Understanding China and India: Security Implications for the United States and the World*, Praeger Security International, Westport, Connecticut, 2006, pp 14-25.

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1941. The Communists, having emerged victorious from the civil war, established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, while the KMT retreated from mainland China to set up the Republic of China on Taiwan island.

While the early policies of both the PRC and the Republic of India were shaped by strong leaders like Mao and Nehru, whose stature gave them much authority, the security perceptions of each of these countries were influenced by its unique historical experience. In China, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), having participated in the civil war and nation-building endeavours, remained closely identified with the ideology of the Communist Party and the decision-making processes of the state. In India's case, the strategy of non-violence, adopted during the freedom struggle, as well as the nature of its parliamentary democracy, tended to marginalize the role of the Indian armed forces. India's military has traditionally remained aloof from politics and accepted subordination to the elected political authority.

The Western powers having refused to recognize the Communist regime, KMT-ruled Taiwan was given a seat in the UN as well as in the Security Council. At this juncture, Prime Minister Nehru actively espoused the cause of the PRC in the hope that the two nations could form an Asian grand-alliance to fight colonialism. India was, thus, one of the few nations which advocated China's admission into the UN and UN Security Council, which eventually happened in 1971.

In the years following civil war/independence, both China and India suffered from widespread poverty, as well as threats to territorial integrity. While leaders of both countries focused on economic growth and used force to quell insurgencies and separatism, the ideologies they adopted were different. China, under Chairman Mao Ze Dong, relied heavily on revolution and

economic policies dictated by Communist dogma. India, under Nehru, remained ideologically ‘non-aligned’ and adopted a ‘Socialistic pattern of society’ for economic development. The 1990s saw both countries undergo ideological shifts in their policies, veering away from Communism in China’s case and from Socialism in India’s, to embrace economic liberalization.

According to American analyst, Michael Pillsbury, a few years after the end of the Civil War, the Chinese leadership under Mao had decided that a long-term aim for the country would be to surpass the Soviet Union and, following its own playbook, to eventually overtake America and become the dominant actor on the world stage.⁸ Along the way, China would acquire nuclear weapons and eliminate potential rivals, starting with its Asian neighbourhood. As far as India was concerned, attainment of the latter aim manifested in two ways.

Firstly, the Chinese attack of October 1962 dealt, not just a physical blow to India’s security, but also to its national psyche, by the humiliation of a military defeat: exactly the result desired by China. Secondly, by making an ally of Pakistan, China created a South Asian proxy to checkmate and neutralize India. The unprecedented manner in which China has indulged in proliferation – nuclear as well as conventional – to arm Pakistan, has enhanced Pakistani belligerence. The China-Pak axis has kept India off-balance, sustaining the ever-present threat of cross-border terrorism and a potential ‘second front’.

Against this historical backdrop, it is useful to examine the geo-political rationale that has, possibly, underpinned Beijing’s conception of a grand strategy, which seeks an expanded economic, political, and military presence spanning the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. The ‘Chinese characteristics’ of

8 Michael Pillsbury, *op. cit.*

this strategy are symbolized by Xi Jinping's prized Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), in which the 'Belt' refers to Chinese ambitions on land and the 'Road', to its seaward component, the 'Maritime Silk Road'.

Geo-political Underpinning of China's Maritime Growth

In 1904, English geographer Halford Mackinder had put forth a proposition that the 400-year era of sea power, was over, and the future of global power lay, not in Mahanian grand-fleets dominating the global sea lanes, but in control of the vast land mass of Eurasia, which he called the 'World Island'. Mackinder, known as, the father of geopolitics, had pronounced, "he who rules the World-Island commands the world."⁹

In Mackinder's day, Eurasia was dominated by Imperial Russia, which was succeeded by the Soviet Union. But today, it is China, which is integrating Asia with Europe, through its internal network of high-speed railways, energy pipelines and fibre-optic cables. Having followed Mackinder's prescription on land, China has also learnt from Admiral Mahan's wisdom. Its leadership has acknowledged the role of maritime power, not only, as a shield against foreign hegemony, but also as a potent instrument for attainment of political goals. Safeguarding of the BRI has been designated a strategic objective, and one of the missions of China's armed forces is to "effectively protect the security and interests of overseas Chinese people, organizations and institutions."¹⁰

In the maritime context, apart from the contentious disputes thrown up by China's arbitrary and irridentist

9 Halford J Mackinder, "The Geographic Pivot of History", *The Geographical Journal*, Volume 23, Number 4, April 1904, pp 421-437.

10 "China's Defense White Papers- 1995-2019", July 23, 2019, <https://www.andrewerickson.com/2019/07/china-defense-white-papers-1995-2019-download-complete-set-read-highlights-here/>.

claims based on the ‘9-dash line’, the most serious issue with security implications is the ‘reunification’ of the Republic of China (ROC) or Taiwan, with mainland China. Chauvinistic considerations, apart, Taiwan’s importance for Beijing lies in its location, which dominates China’s eastern littoral, its seaborne trade and, hence, its economic development.

CHINA’S MARITIME LEGACY & DOCTRINAL OUTLOOK

The Chinese stake claim to an ancient maritime tradition, going back to the first millennium BCE, which gave rise to important navigational and shipbuilding innovations, and saw the opening of many trading routes to Asia and Africa. Early 15th century narratives, of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) describe Admiral Cheng Ho’s remarkable fleet of huge junks, carrying troops, treasure, merchandise, and victuals, which made seven epic voyages to India, the Middle East and Africa. This era of impressive Chinese naval power lasted a mere 30 years, as a combination of fiscal and political compulsions led the Ming Emperor to impose a ban on further voyages, and order destruction of Cheng’s ‘treasure fleet’. Over the next few centuries, protracted threats from the north and west, ensured that China’s naval power remained at low ebb and, therefore, incapable of repelling European imperialists who came by sea in the 18th and 19th centuries. China’s inability to resist Western commercial and military pressures led to the Opium Wars and signing of the ‘Unequal Treaties’ with USA, Russia, UK, and other European powers.

The PLA Navy (PLAN), on its official founding in May 1950, was equipped with warships and submarines supplied by the Soviets, who also helped establish training and maintenance infrastructure. China’s early maritime outlook was shaped by the naval advisers positioned by USSR at staff, command, and unit levels to disseminate Communist dogma along with Soviet

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naval doctrine. This doctrine emphasized coastal defence against amphibious assault by capitalist navies, using small craft and submarines to wage ‘guerrilla war’ at sea. Even as the Soviet Navy underwent a dramatic change after the 1961 Cuban missile crisis, the PLAN clung to its coastal defence and peoples’ war doctrines through the Cultural Revolution.

The Sino-Soviet split of 1960, followed by the decade long Cultural Revolution were both major setbacks for the PLAN, and hindered its technological development. It is noteworthy that, well before the Sino-Soviet doctrinal falling-out, the Chinese leadership had ordered the systematic purloining of Soviet weapons technology on a massive scale. Once the break occurred, in mid-1960, the Chinese leadership proclaimed the general policy of self-reliance based on reproducing the Soviet technology. This was to be a reverse engineering project, termed *Guochanhua* in Mandarin, mounted at the national level.¹¹ Within two decades of the Sino-Soviet split in 1960, China had accomplished the reverse engineering and serial production of major weapons and heavy machinery required by its armed forces. It was a combination of Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms and the appointment of General Liu Huaqing as PLA Navy commander, in 1982, that triggered the process of its transformation from a relatively inconsequential coastal force, to a substantive blue-water navy. Liu, a graduate of the Soviet Voroshilov Naval Academy, outlined a strategy for the PLAN which would give it all-round combat capabilities, by mid-21st century. As an influential member of the Central Military Commission, Liu had the influence to push through his vision in which the PLAN moved away from the “coastal defence” paradigm to “offshore defence” and then split the

11 Arun Prakash, “Not made in India”, *The Indian Express*, 31 January, 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/not-made-in-india-fdi-in-defence-foreign-investment-military-budget-5045360/>.

term “offshore” into different maritime zones to be brought under China’s influence in phases.

In the first phase, the PLAN was to establish itself in the area delineated by the ‘first island chain’, which is defined by a line running through the Kurile Islands, Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, Borneo and the northern tip of Indonesia. In the next phase, Liu’s strategy envisaged control of the ‘second island chain’, marked by a line running through Japan, 2000 miles south to the Mariannas and Carolines islands in the Central Pacific. The third and final phase envisaged the PLAN becoming a global force by 2050.

PLA NAVY’S RISE TO EMINENCE

Political backing for Liu Huaqing’s vision followed in 2003, when Chinese Premier Hu Jintao sounded a warning about the ‘Malacca Dilemma’ that China could face. This reference to the vulnerability of Chinese shipping, during its long passage across the Indian Ocean via the Malacca Strait into the Pacific, led the PLAN to seek enhanced reach and endurance. Early signs of China’s ‘maritime awakening’ started emerging when its 2004 Defence White Paper spelt out the PLA Navy’s responsibilities as “safeguarding China’s maritime security and maintaining the sovereignty of its seas, along with maritime rights and interests”, but observers remained sceptical about such lofty ambitions. A decade later, scepticism started giving way to apprehension, as it became clear that the white paper’s intent was being translated into reality.

At a 2013 Politburo meeting, Xi Jinping had pointed out that China’s broad maritime interests were dictated by four strategic objectives: (a) defending China against a seaward attack by the US; (b) ensuring security of China’s seaborne trade; (c) safeguarding China’s global economic interests; and (d) recovering sovereignty over claimed maritime territory

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– especially Taiwan.¹² China’s leadership has been shrewd enough to realize that becoming a ‘maritime power’ requires the acquisition of a full range of capabilities, and China’s economic boom has enabled it to do so.

Less than a decade later, it became clear that Hu’s announcement had been based on a well-considered, long-term strategy. The September 2020 edition of the US Department of Defence report on China declared that the PLAN had become the “largest navy in the world”, with an overall battle-force of approximately 350 ships and submarines, including over 130 major surface combatants, relegating the US Navy (USN), numerically, to second place.¹³ The report also pointed out that China was the world’s top ship-producing nation. Chinese-flagged merchant ships outnumber all others on the high seas and China boasts of the largest Coast Guard as well as fishing fleet in the world.

The PLAN’s rise to eminence has been clearly propelled by considerations related to the four strategic objectives outlined by the Politburo in 2013. In order to deter the US Navy from mounting offensive operations from the western Pacific Ocean, China has developed what is dubbed by western analysts as the “anti-access, area-denial” or A2AD capability. It aims to pose a layered threat to approaching forces which may come in support of Taiwan or threaten the mainland; the prime targets of A2AD being US aircraft-carriers.¹⁴

12 Michael A McDevitt, *China as a Twenty First Century Naval Power*. Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 2020, pp. 43-45.

13 “Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2020”, US Department of Defence, Report to US Congress, pp. 44-46, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

14 Arun Prakash, “India’s Maritime Air Power - Outlook for the 21st Century”, *Naval War College Journal*, Volume 32.

China's 2019 Defence White Paper (DWP) described how, "the PLAN is speeding up the transition of its tasks from defence of the near seas to protection missions on the far seas..."¹⁵ Apart from its BRI commitments, China, in its quest for securing strategic resources, has cast its net world-wide; from Australia to the Russian Far East and from West Africa to the heart of South America. These far-flung economic interests make China dependent on extended sea lines of communication (SLOC) which criss-cross the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and expose China's "Achilles heel." It is to protect this significant vulnerability that China seeks to stage a revival of the Imperial 'great game' in the Indian Ocean.

At USD 225 billion, China's 2023 defence budget was nearly four times that of India's (USD 72 billion) and next only to that of the US.¹⁶ China possibly spends an equal amount, secretly, on strategic forces and special projects. China's military expansion and modernization has been marked by total opacity of purpose, and it has never attempted to rationalize this expenditure, or to reassure its neighbours. India must, therefore, assume the worst and expect hegemonic dominance.

China's leadership has, astutely, grasped the reality that maritime power is much more than just a 'fighting-navy'. The results are truly striking; China is, today, the world leader in ship-building and its 5000-ship strong merchant marine ranks No.1 in the world. It also owns the largest number of coast guard vessels that protect the world's biggest fishing fleet. (It is noteworthy that China's sea-going fishing fleet is viewed

15 "China's National Defense in the New Era", Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, July 24, 2019, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/TopStories/4846443.html.

16 Liu Xuanzun, "China's 2023 defense budget to rise by 7.2%, a 'reasonable, restrained' increase amid global security tensions", *Global Times*, March 5, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202303/1286643.shtml>.

in strategic terms as a guarantor of national food-security and marine economy). Chinese shipyards are rapidly adding to its fleet of modern warships as well as merchantmen. Its force of homebuilt nuclear submarines is operationally deployed and its first two aircraft-carriers are at sea, with more to follow.

INDIA'S MARITIME AWAKENING

Overcoming Sea-Blindness

Had New Delhi paid adequate attention to India's 'oracle of maritime wisdom', Sardar K.M. Panikkar, it may have brought earlier focus on the maritime domain, and been better prepared for coming events. As far back as 1945, Panikkar, speaking of India's dependence on the Indian Ocean, had written: "Her national interests have been mainly on the Indian Ocean, over which her vast trade has found its way to the marts of the world, throughout history." Panikkar had also forewarned: "That China intends to embark on a policy of large-scale naval expansion is clear enough... with her bases extending as far south as Hainan, China will be in an advantageous position..."¹⁷ Panikkar's prophesy came true, half a century later, in 2000, when China started construction of its southern-most naval base at Yulin, on Hainan Island.

India's ancient seafaring skills and maritime tradition had remained dormant for almost a thousand years, till they were revived by a visionary post-independence naval leadership, which laid the foundations of a navy and triggered India's maritime revival. Our political and bureaucratic decision-makers, however, continued to suffer from a continental mindset and the malady termed (by sailors) as 'sea-blindness'.

17 K.M. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1945, p. 82 and 85.

Their ‘maritime-awakening’ was triggered, not by a sudden epiphany, but a series of disruptive developments, which included the globalization of India’s economy in the 1990s, the drama of rampant piracy, the trauma of a sea-borne terror strike on Mumbai, and the spectre of a fast-growing and belligerent PLA Navy.

One of the most significant decisions taken by the Navy’s leadership as far back as in 1960, was to initiate indigenous warship design and construction. Today, the Navy’s stature as well as operational capability owe much to the fact that its ships are largely designed and built at home. Six state-owned shipyards have, over the past five decades, built over 100 modern warships, ranging from patrol boats and diesel submarines to aircraft carriers, and from tankers to nuclear submarines.

However, it must be noted that, unlike China, India has failed to take a holistic view, and while focusing on the navy, it has neglected many other components of maritime power, such as ports, shipbuilding, shipping, fisheries, and seabed exploration.¹⁸ Moreover, despite advances in nuclear and space technologies, India has been a laggard, as far as military technology is concerned, and remains amongst the world’s leading importers of arms, with a significant proportion coming from Russia and other states of the former USSR. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, has already imposed delays on the delivery of systems and spares for the Indian Navy, and will certainly have an adverse, long-term impact on India’s military preparedness.

18 Prakash, Arun, “India’s Neglected Maritime Domain; a Missed Opportunity”, in Manoj Joshi et. al. (ed), *In Hard Times*, Bloomsbury, New Delhi, 2022.

INDIA'S MARITIME STAKES

India's central position in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), astride major shipping lanes, accords it both advantages and responsibilities. Jutting a thousand kilometres into the ocean named after it, the Indian peninsula has a 7,500-kilometre-long coastline, containing 200 major and minor ports, with an exclusive economic zone of over two million square kilometres, rich in food and mineral resources. India has 1,200 islands along both seaboard, which are located astride vital shipping lanes that run from the Persian Gulf to the Malacca Strait. With the Laccadive group lying across the Arabian Sea shipping lanes, and the Andaman and the Nicobar group guarding the mouth of the Malacca Straits, they constitute strategic maritime outposts.¹⁹

The waters of the Indian Ocean see over 120,000 merchantmen in transit annually, carrying cargo worth a trillion dollars. Amongst these are ships that carry 95 per cent of India's foreign trade. In 2022, India's merchandise trade stood at close to USD 90 billion,²⁰ with the "trade to GDP ratio" having risen from 10 per cent in 1960 to 45 per cent in 2021.²¹ This intense international exposure of the Indian economy is changing the nature of India's national interests. India's investments, energy partnerships and economic interests are dispersed all across the globe today, and the maritime domain has acquired an unprecedented importance for India. In addition, there are

19 "Ensuring Secure Seas, Indian Maritime Security Strategy", Indian Navy, Integrated HQ, Ministry of Defence, 2015, https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdf.

20 "India's Foreign Trade: November 2022", Ministry of Commerce & Industry: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1883953>.

21 "Trade (% of GDP) – India", The World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.TRD.GNFS.ZS?end=2021&locations=IN&start=1960>.

Admiral Arun Prakash

1,400 vessels of about 20 million tons that fly the Indian flag and almost two hundred-thousand Indian sailors serving on board foreign ships that are also plying these waters.

A defining moment, which not only established India's credentials as a regional power, but also demonstrated its maritime prowess, was the December 2004 Great Asian Tsunami. Within hours of the calamity, Indian Navy ships and aircraft had reached out, with alacrity, not just to India's own stricken citizens but also to its Sri Lankan, Maldivian and Indonesian neighbours in dire need. This humanitarian undertaking left a deep impression on international observers, and India's image has been steadily reinforced by subsequent operations by the Indian Navy, to evacuate South Asian refugees from conflict or disaster-stricken zones in the middle-east and Africa.

THE INDO-PACIFIC SCENARIO

The 2015 Indian Maritime Security Strategy identifies India's "primary areas of maritime interest" as, essentially, the North and South-west Indian Ocean and all its entry, exit and choke-points. It then defines the "secondary areas of maritime interest" that encompass the South East Indian Ocean, Western Pacific Ocean, South and East China Seas, the Red Sea, the west coast of Africa and other areas based on Indian Diaspora, overseas investment, or other interests. What this means is that India's vital maritime interests go well beyond the Indian Ocean and are, in fact, better defined by the more inclusive notion of an 'Indo-Pacific' geo-strategic vision.

The roots of the Indo-Pacific concept, which replaced the post-WW II 'Asia-Pacific' construct, lay in the need felt by the US, for creating a new and more inclusive paradigm to embrace

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a broader geographic scope.²² Amongst the factors that, possibly, influenced its evolution was the near simultaneous rise of China and India, on either side of the Malacca Strait, and the interests of US allies like Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan and Australia, who are dependent on trade and energy sea-lanes, running across the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and who are vulnerable to a hegemonic China.

Today, the US unhesitatingly acknowledges that the Indo-Pacific is the “single most consequential region for its future,” and its maritime strategy is marked by a commitment, in partnership with other nations, to contain China’s rise as a regional hegemon. The military underpinning of this commitment was conveyed by renaming of the US Pacific Command as the ‘Indo-Pacific Command’ in 2018. India, apprehensive about the adverse reaction that recognition might evoke from China and Russia, remained ambivalent about the Indo-Pacific concept, for a few years. Eventually, the reality of Chinese pressure on India’s northern borders, and the imperatives of ensuring maritime security across the vast region convinced the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) of the Indo-Pacific logic. In 2019, separate divisions for the Indo-Pacific as well as Oceania regions were created in the MEA, which formally defined the Indo-Pacific as the “maritime space stretching from the western coast of North America to the eastern shores of Africa.”²³

India’s main source of concern is the increasing presence of the PLA Navy in its primary area of interest. Starting, in 2008,

22 ‘Asia-Pacific’ is associated with the part of Asia that lies in the Pacific Ocean, while ‘Indo-Pacific’ is the integrated region that combines the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, and the landmasses that surround them.

23 “PM Modi’s Keynote address at Shangri-la Dialogue”, June 1, 2018, https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-keynote-address-at-shangri-la-dialogue/.

with anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden, the PLA Navy has steadily gained experience and confidence, and deploys for extended periods in waters distant from home. 2014 saw the first PLAN submarine dock in a Sri Lankan port, to be followed by the visit of a nuclear attack submarine (SSN). Since then, there have been frequent reports of Chinese warships, as well as intelligence gathering ships (designated 'research vessels'), visiting and transiting through Indian Ocean waters.

Apart from its permanent military facility in Djibouti and the upcoming naval-base in Gwadar, China has created a series of ports in Indian Ocean Region (IOR) littoral states, including Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, which could offer logistic support to its forward deployed forces. Thus, as the PLAN's fleet strength grows, it would seek to create a permanent forward presence west of the Malacca Strait, and once it can spare an aircraft carrier task force, we may well see a Chinese naval squadron in these waters, as a hedge against any attempt to interfere with its maritime interests.

While, the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean is self-evident, less well-known are India's rapidly growing interests in the Pacific. Almost, 55 per cent of India's trade with the greater Asia Pacific area transits through the South China Sea. ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) ships crude oil extracted from its the Russian Far East concessions, to the refineries back home. OVL had also been awarded offshore drilling rights in Vietnam's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea, but work was suspended due to a maritime dispute with China. Any attempts to dominate waters of the Indian or Pacific Oceans would, thus, represent a grave threat to India's vital interests. In this scenario, what options does the maritime domain have to offer?

INDIA'S MARITIME OPTIONS

Power Balancing via Naval Diplomacy

Statesmanship and diplomacy having failed to persuade the Chinese to resume *status quo ante* on India's northern land boundary, New Delhi, seems to be looking for options, other than 'boots on the ground', which could bolster India's negotiating position. Given the difficult situation facing them, it is logical for India's decision-makers to explore possibilities in the maritime domain.

In this context, it is necessary to acknowledge two facts at the outset. Firstly that, given China's dramatic progress in the economic, technological, and military domains, India can no longer count itself in the 'same league'. Secondly, that given China's powerful industrial base and the PLA Navy's growing strength, the Indian Navy cannot contemplate matching it 'force-on-force'. However, options do exist, both for power-balancing, via naval diplomacy and partnerships, as well as for direct action via naval deployments.

That navies, unlike armies and air forces, have many roles to play, even in peacetime. was driven home by Soviet Admiral Sergei Gorshkov, when he observed, in 1979: "Demonstrative actions by the fleet, in many cases, have made it possible to achieve political ends without resorting to armed action, by merely putting on pressure... Thus, the navy has always been an instrument of policy and an important aid to diplomacy in peacetime."²⁴ This unique attribute of navies enables their use in support of foreign policy objectives, to deliver messages of reassurance to friends and of deterrence or coercion to adversaries. In this context, two inter-related maritime

24 Admiral Sergei Gorshkov, *The Sea Power of the State*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1979, p. 247.

concepts. ‘Exercise Malabar’ and the Quadrilateral Dialogue or Quad have come into the limelight, and bear discussion.

Malabar is the name of a bilateral naval exercise, which dates back to 1992. It originally involved just the Indian and US navies, but was later expanded to embrace Japan, and has now become a four-cornered naval drill that also includes, Australia. Serving to enhance interoperability and cooperation between the participants, Exercise Malabar has provided a professionally beneficial meeting ground for the four navies. The Quad, on the other hand, was originally formed for coordination of relief efforts, between the US, Australia, Japan, and India, during the 2004 Tsunami, and lapsed into inactivity, thereafter. It was revived in 2007 as a four-cornered security dialogue, which has become linked to Exercise Malabar, since the two now have a common membership.

Although, Exercise Malabar and the Quad remain, currently, in the domain of military-diplomacy, both have the potential to project themselves as security partnerships, for conveying messages of reassurance to members, and deterrence to adversaries. China, on its part, has made no secret of its neurosis about the Quad grouping, as well as Exercise Malabar. Beijing’s displeasure arises from the suspicion that these combinations are aimed at the ‘containment’ of China. While heaping scorn on their attempts at synergy and coordination, China loses no opportunity to send threatening messages to Quad nations.

Regrettably, the Quad members have shown palpable trepidation *vis-à-vis* China, and have gone to great lengths to emphasise that the grouping has no security implications and is not an ‘Asian NATO’. The February 2022 Quad Ministers’ Joint Statement, for example, spoke only of issues like COVID

vaccine, disaster relief, terrorism, cyber-security, the Myanmar crisis, and North Korea's missile tests. The word 'China' did not find a single mention in the statement. Fearful of China, the Quad members have neither created a charter for the group, nor invested it with any substance. No wonder, China, dismisses it as a "headline grabbing idea which will dissipate like sea-foam."²⁵

There is, however, an internal contradiction within Quad. While Japan, India, and Australia display great wariness in their pronouncements, Washington does not miss any opportunity to display bellicosity *vis-à-vis* China. The US Indo-Pacific Strategy of February 2022 pulls no punches, as it bluntly declares: "From the economic coercion of Australia to the conflict along the LAC (Line of Actual Control) with India to the growing pressure on Taiwan and bullying in the East and South China Seas, our allies and partners bear much of the cost of China's harmful behaviour."²⁶ Two recent US initiatives, in this context, deserve brief mention, because of their implications for Indo-Pacific security.

AUKUS and iCET

In a surprise statement, in September 2021, the heads of government of Australia, the UK and USA, announced the formation of a trilateral security pact, to be known by the acronym, AUKUS. Without naming China, US President Biden announced, that "in order to deal with rapidly evolving threats," the US and Britain would share, with Australia, intelligence and advanced technologies in areas like artificial

25 "Quad Move Will Dissipate Like Sea Foam: Wang Yi", *Press Trust of India*, March 8, 2018.

26 "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States", The White House, February, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

intelligence, cyber-warfare, quantum-computing and nuclear submarine construction.²⁷

Given the circumstances, it is obvious that creation of the AUKUS is an attempt to send a stronger message to China, than that conveyed by the Malabar Exercise/Quad. However, Beijing's description of this alliance as an 'exclusionary bloc', should be food for thought for two members of these forums – India and Japan – who have been excluded from the new grouping. It remains an open question whether AUKUS will overshadow the Quad and diminish its importance, or the two will reinforce each other.

An issue that should give cause for reflection in New Delhi, arises from Biden's promise to transfer advanced technology, including, submarine nuclear-propulsion to Australia, under the AUKUS. It brings into stark relief, India's failure to acquire any significant high technology from the US, despite bilateral ties that have grown in warmth and closeness over the past decade and a half.²⁸

Perhaps it was to address this state of stasis in Indo-US relations that, in May 2022, a communique after the Biden-Modi meeting in Tokyo announced the launch of a US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) spearheaded by the National Security Councils of the two countries. Pitched at such a high level, the iCET could become a 'game-changer' in catalysing Indo-US technology cooperation, persuading the US to lift existing export control restrictions, and encouraging

27 "The aftermath of the AUKUS deal at the Shangri-la dialogue," *Hindustan Times*, July 4, 2022, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/ht-insight/international-affairs/the-aftermath-of-the-aucus-deal-at-the-shangri-la-dialogue-101656939934489.html>.

28 Arun Prakash, "The new AUKUS alliance holds some lessons for India", *The Indian Express*, September 21, 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/aucus-alliance-new-partnerships-realpolitik-7523384/>.

the private sector of both countries to cooperate in sensitive sectors.²⁹

Apart from these various multi-lateral endeavours, India has, for many decades, been reaching out to its Indian Ocean neighbourhood to engage its maritime neighbours, and create a favourable environment through naval diplomacy.

INDIA'S MARITIME OUTREACH

A decade ago, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had declared that India was well positioned to play the role of “a net provider of security in our immediate region and beyond.”³⁰ Even as the Indian Navy was trying to shoulder this onerous role, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had, in 2015, coined the slogan, “SAGAR”, the acronym for “Security and growth for all” in the Indian Ocean. Although there is no document outlining the SAGAR vision or doctrine, it has become a foreign policy catchphrase, representing a broad concept of maritime cooperation to which many naval diplomacy initiatives are credited.

An important component of India's evolving naval diplomacy has been the creation of a strong maritime domain awareness (MDA) capability. MDA encompasses sensors, located along the coast, at sea and in the air/space, which continuously monitor shipping and compile a realtime maritime traffic picture, via a network. This picture, which India shares with neighbouring Seychelles, Mauritius, Maldives, and Sri

29 Arun Prakash, “The fine print in the Indo-US pact, iCET”, *The Indian Express*, February 9, 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-fine-print-in-the-indo-us-pact-icet-8432798/>.

30 Vinay Kumar, “India well positioned to become a net provider of security: Manmohan Singh”, *The Hindu*, May 23, 2013, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-well-positioned-to-become-a-net-provider-of-security-manmohan-singh/article4742337.ece>.

Lanka, enables the early detection of seaborne threats and illegal or unauthorised activity at sea. Another significant development has been the setting up, in 2018, of the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), in Gurugram. Intended to extend the scope of maritime collaboration, the IFC-IOR regularly exchanges MDA and other information with similar centres in France, Singapore, and Malaysia.

Having discussed the role that maritime-diplomacy or soft-power can play in power-balancing, a final look at the role of hard-power in the India-China context is also necessary.

Naval Deterrence

The fact that it has taken a border confrontation in the Himalayas to bring focus on India's maritime domain clearly indicates that the salience of maritime power is not yet fully understood by our decision-makers. Nor have the two major advantages bestowed on India by its fortuitous geographic location been fully appreciated in New Delhi: firstly, that the Indian Navy has the ability to exercise maritime dominance over Indian Ocean SLOCs; and secondly, that in any conflict situation, India's maritime forces will be operating on short 'interior lines' of communication, whereas the navies of all Pacific powers will be operating on 'exterior lines' stretching 10,000 to 15,000 kilometres from home.

The overwhelming dependence of China's economy and industry on uninterrupted passage of seaborne trade and energy, renders its Indian Ocean sea-lanes akin to an 'Achilles heel' or 'jugular vein', which India could threaten via trade-warfare. To illustrate this vulnerability, it may be noted that, as the world's top consumer of crude oil in 2022, China imported 11 million barrels per day (BPD),³¹ over half of which came

31 Chen Aizu, "China 2022 crude oil imports fall for second year despite Q4 pickup", *Reuters*, January 9, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/>

from the Persian Gulf. This is the equivalent of 5-6 tankers of the VLCC (very large crude carriers) class unloading oil in Chinese ports every single day. This means that, on any given day, apart from hundreds of cargo ships, there are 70-80 VLCCs bound for China on the high seas. Although China is known to maintain a significant buffer stock of crude oil, any disruption or delay of tanker traffic could upset China's economy, with consequent effects on industry and population.

Trade warfare is a feasible strategy during wartime, and once hostilities commence, belligerents may declare a 'naval blockade', against the enemy; denying entry and exit to all merchant shipping from the latter's ports and even sinking enemy merchant ships at sea. Laws of naval warfare also allow both belligerents to 'visit and search' an enemy or neutral vessel to determine the character of the ship or its cargo, and to intern it if necessary. In peacetime, however, a different set of rules apply, and legally speaking, navies cannot interfere with international shipping on the high seas.³²

'Naval compellence operations', according to British naval historian Geoffrey Till, are intended to force an adversary to do something he does not want to do, or to stop him from doing something that he intends to do, by use of coercive sea-based forces, which may or may not involve actual violence.

'Maritime interception operations' (MIOPS) which involve the stopping, boarding, searching, and diverting a foreign-flagged merchant ship on the high-seas, constitute a non-lethal form of compellence which can help persuade a state to change its policy, by posing a threat to its economy. While stopping

commodities/china-dec-crude-oil-imports-3rd-highest-yr-2022-imports-down-09-2023-01-13/.

32 Arun Prakash, "The India-China Confrontation: A View from Seawards", *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, Volume 8, Issue 1, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/2347797021992528>.

and boarding requires permission of the flag-state or ship's Master, a 'non-compliant' boarding is feasible, and if all else fails, the 'doctrine of necessity' can be invoked by a warship (or submarine) to board, search, divert or capture a merchant ship.³³

The success of these actions depends, to a great extent, on political will, and chances of success increase if there is international collaboration. Whether 'trade warfare' or MIOPS are ever employed or not, they constitute a potent 'threat in being' that must be used like a Damocles sword, to hang over a trade and energy dependent China.

Breaking old shibboleths

The Sino-Indian military equation along the Himalayan borders is heavily tilted in China's favour. Moreover, in case of a Sino-Indian conflict, Pakistan is likely to render support by opening a second front. Under these circumstances, the best that India's ground forces and air power can hope to achieve is a precarious stalemate. It is against this background that we need to look seawards and examine what the maritime domain has to offer.

The Indian Navy, despite fiscal constraints, has emerged as a compact but professional and competent force, and India's fortuitous maritime geography will enable it to dominate both the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. We must, however, bear in mind that the PLA Navy is underpinned by China's powerful economy and supported by a vast and efficient shipbuilding industry, both of which the Indian Navy lacks.

Notwithstanding its handicaps, India, as a democracy, a nuclear weapon state and a significant economic and military power, must stand firm, as a bulwark against regional

33 Geoffrey Till, *Seapower*, Routledge, Oxon, 2013, pp. 236-37.

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hegemony. History shows that neither appeasement, nor empty bluster works with hegemonic powers. If India is not to cede ground to China, physically or diplomatically, it must marshal all elements of its 'comprehensive national power' focusing especially on the maritime dimension.

The existential dilemma posed by an increasingly powerful and hegemonic China can only be countered by a stronger India. As a nation, we need to accelerate economic growth, enhance technological and industrial capability, and boost military muscle to stand up on our own. To attain its full potential, India will need a breathing spell, and insurance against hegemony. Consequently, while preparing to fight its own battles, India will need to seek external-balancing. If *realpolitik* so demands, it must break old shibboleths and strike new partnerships, or even alliances, wherever there is a convergence of interests.

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Future Battlespace

Embracing Change in the Future of Warfighting

Lt. Gen. A.B. Shivane (Retd.)*

CHANGING CHARACTER OF WARS AND THE TECHNOLOGY CONSTRUCT

War has an enduring nature and an evolving character.¹ The nature of war is the unchanging essence of its moral and physical characteristics, regardless of shifting motives, dimensions of war or technological advances. The character of the war, on the other hand, changes with evolving actors, approaches, technological progression and ideologies. This applies, equally, to military leadership: it too has an enduring nature of core values-cum-ethics, and an adaptive, dynamic character, driven by a multitude of challenges, including

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1 Lt. Gen. AB Shivane, “Eleven Big Lessons for the Employment of Tanks in Future Battlespace: The Russia – Ukraine Conflict”, *CLAWS* April 29, 2022, <https://www.claws.in/eleven-big-lessons-for-the-employment-of-tan-ks-in-future-battlespace-the-russia-ukraine-conflict>.

Lt. Gen. A.B. Shivane

technology, battlespace dynamics, complex command functions and evolving doctrines.

Based on the same analogy, war has an art and a science component. The art of war – its human dimension – is all-enduring, like the nature of war; and the science of war – its technology dimension – constantly evolving, like the character of war. Art is to visualise, describe, direct, and lead; and science is to understand, adapt, exploit, and optimise.

The art of war thus centres around leadership and strategy, to intertwine material and physical forces with moral forces. It is a ‘clash of wills, not machines’,² in which means must be subordinate to ends if the results are to justify the costs. The science of war changes the character of warfare, yet technology never rules warfare, but presides over warfare. Technology defines and governs warfare, yet this connection is not deterministic. It sets the stage for warfare and is its instrumentality.³ Technological superiority manifests in superior outcomes when military leaders are trained and educated to employ it effectively, with individual proficiency, collective mastery, and adaptive skills. Thus, gaining a technological advantage over an adversary will be a function of an adaptive and thought leadership, attuned warfighting doctrines, matching and prioritised capability-building and transformed Professional Military Education.

2 Williamson Murray, “Technology And The Future Of War”, *Hoover Institution*, November 14, 2017, <https://www.hoover.org/research/technology-and-future-war>.

3 Lt. Gen. A B Shivane, “Technology and Leadership Challenges in the Digital Battlespace”, *Ministry of Defence*, Sri Lanka, May 2, 2022, https://www.defence.lk/Article/view_article/4512.

TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED FUTURE BATTLESPACE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Without going into a detailed analysis of the geostrategic global environment, it is sufficient to say that the established equation of global and regional power has been subverted and a new ‘global disorder’ is emerging. Power transition theory says that the fall of a dominant great power and the rise of an ascendant challenger often result in instability. New geopolitics and strategic competition, rapid changes in technology, demographic shifts, urbanisation and climate change are all causing disruptions. The important issue to understand is that the enveloping chaos will inevitably seep across borders, creating greater instability, social turmoil and conflict of different dimensions and in multiple domains. It may be romantic to argue that ‘this is not the era of war’, but the reality is ‘peace is a temporary equilibrium and war a constant’. War and competition will remain part of human endeavour and states will continue to seek strategic advantage. Thus, it cannot be business as usual in the 21st century.

21st-century wars have witnessed a tectonic shift in the goals of war, the rules of war, the players and the instruments of war, reshaping its character and multiplying its domains. Possibly the most disruptive changes in warfare have been driven by technology, signaling the rise of a techno-military culture. With globalisation and the technology boom, a new term ‘Geo-technologies’ has emerged, which has become a tool of strategic competition and power play. At the centre of this contest is technology, a driver for economic, political, diplomatic and military power. The world is going through a technological and scientific revolution that, in every respect,

rivals the great “military-social revolutions” of the past.⁴ But unlike the period from 1914 through 1990, when military organizations were the primary drivers behind revolutionary changes in technology, the current period looks quite similar to the period before 1914, when factors outside the military were largely responsible for the technological revolution. The key issue, however, remains that technological changes are occurring at a pace faster than war fighters, legacy structures and conformist war doctrines can absorb, making military adaptation to future complexities of combat a challenge.

Yet military technology remains an outcome of civil-military fusion and the Defence Industrial Base, which remain nascent and displaced in the Indian context. Budgetary allocations add to the woes. We need manufacturing prowess and homegrown technologies, not acquisitions that are decided on domestic politics, rather than strategic considerations. The need is to understand the specific challenges at the national and military level that we face in case of a war or the even more dangerous blend of the present conflict below the escalation level. The nation needs greater accountability and responsibility rather than passing the buck amongst all stakeholders.

Crucially, what has been, and could be the role of the Private Sector in supporting national defence priorities? What has been the limited experience of success and failure, and of accountability, in the limited experience with the Private Sector in the past? The key challenges for India remain fiscal funding on technology research and development (R&D) and complementary human resource development, which remain subpar.

4 Murray Williamson, “The Future of War: Of course we need high-tech weapons. But with great capabilities come great vulnerabilities”, *Hoover Digest*, Issue 3, 2018, Gale Academic OneFile, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A547757985/AONE?u=anon~aec87598&sid=googleScholar&xid=ba2d0cb3.

India's principal security challenge comes from China, and Beijing not only allocates very large resources to R&D, but has also made scientific and technological leadership the focus area in its drive to become the world's economic dynamo, the power centre of a new geopolitical order, and a global military power. We cannot have dependencies on China by way of an imbalanced trade both qualitative (infrastructure and ICT) and quantitative, if we are to enhance our national deterrence against future threats.

The development of disruptive technologies over the past decade has taken warfare to a different plane and entered an era of Disruption in Military Affairs. This current technology tsunami will impose the greatest challenges on the military leaders and warfighters, to comprehend, adapt to, and optimise their force multiplication effect. The future technology-shaped battlespace will be characterised by:⁵

- **Digit, digitisation, digitalisation and disruption revolutionising the battlespace.** This has resulted in the overwhelming execution tempo of operations, enabled by rapid decision-making and the concurrency of action made possible by leveraging artificial intelligence and machine cognition. The overwhelming technological imperative driving military engagements will continue to be the competition between, on the one hand, detecting and precision-targeting the enemy at an increasingly longer range and, on the other, avoiding detection by enemy sensors and surviving engagements.

5 Lt. Gen. A.B. Shivane, "Military Leadership Challenges in the Future Technology Embedded Battlespace", June 12, 2022, *Raksha Anirveda*, <https://raksha-anirveda.com/military-leadership-challenges-in-the-future-technology-embedded-battlespace/>.

- **Enhanced visibility**, not only to warfighters but also characterised by higher political, media and public visibility, resulting in greater scrutiny, interference and counter-narratives by adversaries. Military leaders will not remain isolated from its fallout and thus must be trained to function and work through chaos. Technology has transcended the traditional battlespace impacting society and *weaponising all instruments of national power*. At the military level, the competition between hiding and finding requires, first and foremost, highly competent, proficient, and disciplined personnel. *High-technology weapons demand high-quality personnel*. As Russia's war in Ukraine has shown, the lethality of modern precision weapons has dramatically shrunk the margin for error; a single cell phone on a public network, for example, can quickly doom a unit.
- **Ascent in the levels of volatility and uncertainty with lower predictability and enhanced diversity**. Clarity of thought and focus along with the ability to make technology-aided decisions in such situations will be a critical ability. This will also require a shared view of the goals and a more collaborative joint service technology interface. It is therefore essential for the military leader to know how to use these new technologies and how to keep control of the use of new systems integrating a certain form of autonomy. Yet the military leader will need to preserve the very essence of his identity, to give meaning to military action and command to achieve his goals. The essence will be to train for certainty and educate for uncertainty. We would need to have a different perception of Time, Space, Force and Information as operational tools of warfare. We also need to empower and stand by

our brave frontline warfighters. So far, the tactical leadership has done us proud, carrying the operational and strategic commanders on the shoulders. We need to invest much more in Operational and Strategic level leadership.

- **Diffusion of technology** will make it more accessible and difficult to distinguish foe from friend. Technology in the hands of non-state actors is no more an aberration. The convergence of new technologies will provide such actors access to relatively cheap, standoff, autonomous weapons.⁶ Therefore techno-military leaders will need to adapt at the tactical and technical levels to deal with these challenges created by emerging technologies.
- **Knowledge and Adaption** will be the most valuable qualities for decision dominance. Military warriors will need to be trained to integrate, adapt and exploit technology for military advantage. Knowledge leads to adaption and adaption leads to outcomes. Technology friendliness will make them accept technological transformations with great ease, which would impact positively on the superior execution of their operational tasks and command functions.
- Finally, **in the age of long-range engagements, communications are going to play an even more critical role in military operations**; the role of sensors and real-time targeting will make reliability and redundancy in communication networks even more important in future conflicts, **which in turn requires dominating the electromagnetic spectrum.**

6 T.X. Hammes, “Technology Converges: Non-State Actors Benefit”, *Hoover Institution*, February 25, 2019, <https://www.hoover.org/research/technology-converges-non-state-actors-benefit>.

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Cyber warfare at the strategic, operational and tactical levels will have its fallouts.

In these conflicts, the contact and non-contact warfare dimensions have reached new milestones, and this has greatly influenced the leadership construct. Autonomous fighting platforms, cyber warfare and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles / Drones have already begun to impact warfighting strategies. Directed Energy Weapons, Nano Technology, Quantum Computing, Big Data Analysis, the Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence will have a transformational impact on the planning and conduct of warfare and will revolutionise traditional notions of force planning and force application. The massing of effects and influence, rather than the massing of forces and weapons, will gain criticality, with swarming manoeuvres threatening survivability.

For the military to generate an integrated advantage in such a complex and ambiguous environment, it will have to shed its erstwhile cloak and build on new ideas, evolve structures, and redefine the link between technology and war fighters. War fighters will need to have a scientific temper, defined as “a modest open-minded temper – a temper ever ready to welcome new light, new knowledge, new experiments, new technologies, even when their results are unfavourable to preconceived opinions and long-cherished legacy theories.” We cannot remain trapped in past paradigms nor rest in self-generated idealisms of the future.

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN THE FUTURE TECHNOLOGICAL BATTLESPACE

In today’s high-tech multidomain battlespace, decision superiority is arguably what would make the difference to prevailing in war. While enabled by technology, the commander’s education, experience, and judgment become

critical factors in making sound decisions.⁷ The military is often awed by technology transforming the character of war but frequently neglects this human dimension and capability of the warrior. Technology is critical but must be built into doctrines, structures and Professional Military Education, to develop tech-savvy leaders who can not only think strategically, critically, and creatively, but also adapt and exploit their capabilities, interdependencies, and vulnerabilities. The need is for enhanced man-machine synergy to identify, navigate and prevail in a multidomain environment. Steve Jobs reminds us,

Technology is nothing. What's important is that you have a faith in people, that they're basically good and smart, and if you give them tools, they'll do wonderful things with them. It's not the tools that you have faith in – tools are just tools.⁸

Thus, technology without human expertise is no more than an unexploited tool.

No technology can serve as a substitute for sound policy and flexible strategy. However, the critical challenge defence forces face is not how emergent technology will deliver outcomes, but rather it is the *reshaping of military bureaucracies, higher leadership mindsets and war doctrines* that will define the way we understand, integrate and use technology. The fact is, Defence Forces and their strategic leadership are conservative by nature, *status quoist* by culture, and thus guilty of preparing for not only the last war but the wrong war. The result is that

7 Vice Admiral Ann Rondeau, U.S. Navy (Retired), “Rebalancing The Science And Art Of War For Decision Advantage”, *Proceedings*, US Naval Institute, Volume 148/8/1,434, August, 2022, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2022/august/rebalancing-science-and-art-war-decision-advantage>.

8 Jeff Goodell, “Steve Jobs in 1994: The Rolling Stone Interview”, *Rolling Stone*, January 17, 2011, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/steve-jobs-in-1994-the-rolling-stone-interview-231132/>.

technology and warfare continue to evolve faster than military leaders and soldiers can adapt to.⁹

The challenge is to build adaptive and versatile leadership attuned to emerging threats. Adaptability is a cognitive quality and cannot be guaranteed by technology. This would require management of Human Resources (HR) policy changes in how we induct, retain, train and fight, to win the technology war. Versatile leaders come from a sound understanding of concepts. If the military continues down the path that ‘technology is not our business’, they will never know how that technology can be used to their advantage. That doesn’t mean we need warriors who can write code, but rather military leaders that understand how the technology is developing and can be applied. *Management of change requires cultural change, which remains the greatest challenge and a possible retarder.*

REALITY CHECK: TECHNOLOGY AND LEADERSHIP

Technology has its underpinnings and leadership dynamics, which need to be understood and addressed to optimize capabilities in future wars.

- When a new technology first appears, the leadership has no idea what to do with it, which leads to confusion and a failure to respond. This is because the **technology cycle manifests faster than the leadership adaption cycle**, and the doctrinal change cycle is even slower than the leadership adaption cycle. Thus, culturally, there is resistance to change and technology remains more spoken of than exploited.
- **Technology without integration, or a doctrinal underpinning, is the hype before the let-down.**

⁹ A.B. Shivane, Lt. Gen., op. cit., 2022.

Sun Tzu warned, “tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.” Artificial intelligence and autonomous machines are likely to be among the greatest military integration challenges due to the additional complexities they create for network architectures. Further, operational doctrines must ideally drive technology induction strategy, for a nation with a strong technological military-industrial base. In the interim, technology availability must result in adaptive operational application.

- **Technology compels integration and jointmanship.** Joint training and equipping of forces must become key aspects when we integrate technology for optimising joint force capabilities. The status quo culture and individual service mindset retards its exploitation.
- **Technology requires matching investment in both R&D and human resources.** Technologies improve operational effectiveness and are often assumed to lower manpower costs in the burgeoning revenue budget. The statistics are more complex and contrary. At the macro level, the manpower shifts from foreground to background technical support staff. It puts greater demands on increased training for operators and specialist support, thus increasing costs in time, training, and experience. The reality is that building a future force that incorporates technological empowerment won't necessarily lower the revenue budget, but it will certainly lead to increased readiness and a more effective force.
- **The quantity has its quality and thus boots and tracks on the ground count.** This is true particularly when nations have disputed and turbulent frontiers.

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Also, high technology has not replaced but supplanted low technology in land warfare. Every technology is a transition and has limits.

DETERRENCE, MILITARY STRATEGY AND REVITALISING DOCTRINAL CONSTRUCTS FOR THE FUTURE

The pendulum of impending threat on our turbulent disputed borders will continue to sway in terms of the competing challenges of gaining ascendancy in the strategic and operational space, time, force and information domain. To achieve their political aims, our adversaries are more likely to exploit a combination of the plethora of options available at the lower end of the spectrum of conflict. This translates into the imperative of honing our conventional deterrence, empowered by doctrinal reviews and complementary technology induction, against the revisionist strategic culture of our adversaries, ranging from brewing proxy wars to incremental territorial transgressions.

Deterrence in the Indian strategic security construct is aimed at punitive deterrence (assured retribution) on the western front, and dissuasive to credible deterrence (defensive) on the northern front. Our deterrence has been repeatedly put to test in the recent past, and ironically led to the exposure of strategic and operational doctrinal voids and vulnerabilities. These are being addressed expeditiously but need greater time-critical resources, founded on a doctrinal reconstruct. At the tactical level, the courage and valour of our brave hearts have given the aggressor more than a nightmare, but at an avoidable cost to precious lives. At the operational and strategic level, we need a doctrinal reconstruct to keep pace with the realism of evolving geopolitics, the character of war and emerging threats to national security.

India's military strategy entails managing threats on its disputed border by a 'defensive holding' psyche, with an attrition-based 'force-on-force' application, rather than an 'offensive domination and manoeuvre warfare' orientation. While the erstwhile orthodox Defensive Strategy has been doctrinally replaced by a Proactive Operations Strategy after Operation Parakram, its defensive character and reactive mindsets remain deeply embedded as a legacy of the past. *The focus must be on 'dominating spaces' instead of universally 'holding ground' with manpower.* The concept of 'Pre-emption, Dislocation and Disruption' as the three empirical means of defeat, as stated in the Indian Army Doctrine, requires greater technological teeth, offensive reorientation and integrated force restructuring.

At the strategic political-military level, we need to review our approach to state versus state, and state versus non-state, threats. As a nation with disputed borders and inimical neighbours, our military must orient essentially for the state versus state conflict and adapt to the state versus non-state threats. The severity and consequences of the former are greater, and require greater capability building. India, for the foreseeable future, will thus need to balance its force structure to counter existent threats to its continental, aerospace and maritime domains, while simultaneously building military capabilities in equally critical future domains like AI, IW, Space, Cyber, etc. *The counter-insurgency or state versus non-state domain must be progressively handed over to the duly empowered PMF, CAPF and state security machinery.* The Armed Forces can ill afford to dilute their focus at the cost of their primary threat.

At the operational level, the need is to pre-empt, dislocate and disrupt enemy forces. Pre-emption implies initiating decisive

operations before the enemy does, thereby dictating terms on the battlefield. The tools for these will be both kinetic and non-kinetic with information warfare and technology opening new vistas. We thus need an agile, versatile technology-enabled and aggressive integrated force structure led by receptive, adaptive and versatile leadership. Our Operational Commanders need to review their force deployment, force orchestration and application matrix, with greater offensive intent and teeth.

At the tactical level, a defensive and reactive disposition culture, with the predictability of response, remain shortcomings. Thus, the initial initiative remains with the adversary, as seen in Kargil and Ladakh, leading to repeated operational and tactical surprise. One critical void has been the inability to discern enemy intentions through an integrated C5ISR (Command, Control, Computers, Communications, Cyber, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) architecture. The prevailing fragile situation on our disputed borders mandates an integrated C5ISR networked decision support system, integrated with state-of-the-art precision targeting, as part of our joint force's future capability. It must lead to the evolution of a fused integrated layered mix of sensor grid architecture that is pervasive, persistent, survivable, and enduring. Joint C5ISR operations must thus be integrated into the overall operational philosophy and warfighting doctrine and not managed or be a standalone capability. This must, alongside, embolden tactical leaders to be proactive and decisive even under conditions of ambiguity, to dominate the decision cycle and initiative.

The future operational philosophy will need to focus on a 'capability-based approach with deterrence based on denial'. Capabilities must optimise future technology exploitation in all domains and agile force structures must deny future

threats by superior operational orientation. Capabilities must be a logical proactive fallout of the Operational Doctrine and Philosophy and not just a resource-centric reactive approach based solely on a response to the threat. It must, thereafter, address the resource requirement and HR requirement with balanced weightage.

Further at the strategic and operational level, there is a need to comprehend the two basic concepts of ‘denial versus defence’ and ‘holding versus domination’. Denial seeks to make conflict/coercion look bad to the enemy, while defence seeks to make conflict/ coercion better for oneself by stalling the aggressor. Denial is proactive and defence is reactive. Similarly, the ground holding mindset brings in a reactive ethos and predictability, whereas domination brings in aggressiveness and unpredictability. This is the essence, and something the Indian military would do well to differentiate and arm its deterrence capabilities with a denial and domination strategy.

DESIRED FORCE GENERATION CAPABILITY

The desired force generation capability matrix¹⁰ entails:

- **Surface to Space Continuum.** To achieve knowledge dominance, precision effects and operational speed, the land forces must graduate from their traditional two-dimensional spatial orientation to a vertical and cognitive integrated third-dimensional manoeuvre. The vertical component must include HALE UAVs, UCAVs,¹¹ drones and airborne cum space satellite

10 Lt. Gen. A B Shivane, “Restructuring for India’s Disputed Borders: An Appraisal”, *CLAWS Journal*, Volume 14, Number 2, 2021, pp. 46-61, <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-77310-2>.

11 High altitude long endurance unmanned aerial vehicles, unmanned aerial vehicles, and unmanned combat aerial vehicles.

systems (including decentralised launch on-demand capability) for ISR, SATCOM and PNT¹². These must result in technology-empowered, integrated, lethal, lean, modular, survivable and manoeuvrable forces, with superior joint force synchronisation, operational orientation and intrinsic operational endurance.

- **Graduating from Jointness to Interdependence.** The level of interoperability and complementarity between land, sea and aerospace must achieve the desired speed, economy and operational acceleration. This will result in precision fire and dominant manoeuvre in near-simultaneous applications across the entire battlespace and beyond. The challenge lies more in the cultural silos mentality, lack of trust and service-centric mindsets.
- **Modular and Scalable Force.** Time is the enemy of a force that depends on knowledge and tempo for effectiveness. Force application must be on an escalatory matrix, by modular and scalable forces, while *in situ* forces with inherent reserves provide immediate pre-emption capability. These forces need to be technology-enabled and tailor-made, based on a mission-oriented grouping.
- **Superior Decision Dominance and Kill Capability.** Network-enabled C5ISR systems for dominant battlespace awareness and decision superiority will turn the tide. The field army must see deeper, see with greater accuracy and more persistently than our adversary, with shared situational awareness. Network-enabled command and control must generate

12 Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; satellite communications; and positioning, navigation and timing.

the ability to coordinate dispersed forces, to generate combat overmatch at points of decision with faster speed and overwhelming executing tempo as compared to the enemy. Stand-off precision, kinetic and non-kinetic strike capabilities, and manned unmanned systems fusion will win the firefight. These must be complemented by cyber and information warfare capabilities.

- **Combined Arms Integrated Force Structure.** What makes combined arms manoeuvre more potent than the sum of physical employment of multiple arms on the battlefield is its cumulative and complementary impact. This targets the enemy's will and ability to resist or respond effectively. The key to force constitution would essentially be based on intrinsic combat, combat support and logistics elements including Attack Helicopters, UAVs, Air Defence, Artillery and C5ISR capability. However, their combat effectiveness would be a factor of rapid deployment ability, integrated training, interoperability, complementary capabilities, and the competence of commanders to synchronise their effect.
- **Technology Empowerment.** The *mantra* is quality over quantity and capability over capacity. The requirement is for knowledge-based, decision-oriented and technology-empowered lean and agile forces, to execute missions faster and with greater effect. Technology must empower smaller brigade-sized forces to execute missions faster and with greater effect, previously thought suitable only for divisions.
- **Empowered Leadership and Directive Style of Command.** Knowledge of joint force application and

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technology exploitation of battlespace will result in decisive outcomes. Risk-taking, audacity and offensive orientation are essential for success. Thus, along with technology induction and restructuring, we must focus on moulding a competent techno-savvy leadership with a directive style of command, emphasizing traits such as creativity, aggressive and proactive disposition, and nonlinear thinking.

FRAMEWORK FOR MILITARY LEADERS IN THE FUTURE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The Indian military dons the mantle of being one of the most operationally committed forces, with diverse sectors and threat manifestations mandating sector specialist technologies. It has active frontiers, rather than just turbulent borders. In such a multi-domain and multi-terrain environment, high-tech operations will require techno-savvy thought leadership at the theatre operational level, as well as multi-skilling and multiple competencies in tactical leaders, with both cognitive and technical competence to prevail in a future conflict. The challenge remains technology specialisation and operational continuity, within the gambit of the present HR policy of rounded sector profile and a chronic budgetary crunch.

At the theatre strategic and operational level, the requirement is for leaders with a 'scientific temper'. They also need to optimize the technology thresholds of their command and contribute to combat overmatch, both in war and active or passive peace. Active peace employs proactive, offensive and coercive military and non-military means to achieve national security goals, such as China's Ladakh transgressions and coercive policies. Conversely, passive peace has a defensive connotation of ensuring peace by inbuilt resilience and a reactive disposition, to deter threats and ensure the furtherance

of national security goals, as in the Indian context. The strategic military leadership must be educated in both.

At the operational level, we need ‘Thought Leaders’ adept in the theatre operational art. A thought leader is a combination of an outstanding thinker (strategic, insightful, and creative) and an outstanding leader (daring, inspiring and empowering).

At the tactical level, we must invest more in the creative and bold employment of theatre-specific technology for combat effectiveness. Technologies such as C5ISR, Electronic Warfare (EW), AI, voice recognition, UAVs/ UCAVs, and Unmanned Ground Vehicles (UGVs) must lead to a more preemptive and aggressive disposition and to decentralised decision-making, for superior situational awareness and decision dominance, duly supported by kinetic and non-kinetic all-weather precision strike capabilities.

Further, mastering language skills and local dialects of adversaries must go beyond just translation and lead to a larger cognitive understanding of the psyche and mind of the adversary, to preempt and dislocate him. This would require institutional specialisation and continuity which may mandate integrating non-uniformed specialists through gateways like the Territorial Army (TA).

Military leaders must also imbibe operational and strategic thinking, intellectualism and communication competence, commensurate to rank and appointment. The need is to develop ‘Strategic Awareness Competence’ for junior officers to deal with unconventional warfare, including perils of real-time media coverage, and information warfare; and ‘Strategic Thinking Competence’ for senior officers, to understand the politico-military dimension of contemporary war and peace.

In terms of technology, the military needs to identify each sub-sector’s dynamics and priorities to empower sensors,

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decision makers and shooters (kinetic-non kinetic as well as manned-unmanned). The *mantra* must be, '*See Deep persistently, Decide First even under ambiguity, Coordinate with speed, and Win the firefight, at least cost and in minimum time*'. The priorities to address the voids both in technology and HR, and the roadmap for empowerment will be the command function of the uniformed fraternity of the day.

TRAINING OF TECHNO-MILITARY LEADERS

The military leader must be firmly grounded in the fundamentals of tactics, technology, and leadership. This will require a greater fusion between education and training. Leadership must have an optimal blend of the art and science of leadership skills. We are presently getting a sub-optimal blend of the science of warfare. The lack of this facet leads to technophobia, and resistance to technology adaption, which is critical for future wars. Conceptual and technical skills will provide the capacity to perform effectively in these conditions. Thus, as the defence forces transform to meet emerging security challenges, and review modernisation, restructuring, and doctrine, it is imperative we also examine our complementary approach to military education. Future leadership will have to be collaborative, based on a shared vision, joint ownership, mutual values and technology-interfaced decision-making, while shunning bureaucratic cultural retardation. Leaders will have to deal with an entirely new set of intellectual, cultural and equipment challenges that did not exist even a decade ago. Skilling and specialisation at tactical levels along with continuity of 'on-the-job' experience will be required. This will impact not only recruiting patterns and training methodology, but may also mandate a review of outsourcing of specialists. Similarly, technology training and capsules, aided by digitised systems, will be required for higher military leadership training to bridge the gap.

The following merit attention:

- The present training curriculum and infrastructure are not empowered to adapt/acquire/exploit niche technologies like AI, robotics, quantum computing, swarming, etc., in training and exercises/wargames. This has resulted in inadequate integration of non-contact vectors of emerging technology in the current methodology, which continues to deal with it in silos. These shortcomings must be addressed. The time is ripe to wean away from the traditional outlook towards professional military education (PME) and inculcate more dynamism and enhanced technical thresholds in all ranks. Disruptive technologies must be embraced through institutionalised intervention and the development of core competencies. Future PME must integrate Cyber Warfare to overcome disruptions, AI and Big Data analysis to shorten the observe–orient–decide–act (OODA) loop and overcome information overload, nanotechnology to reduce size and signatures, space-based applications, quantum computing and hypersonic technologies. The focus must be on absorption, adaptation, integration and exploitation, rather than the technicalities or codes.
- Training empowerment for future technologies would require dynamism and a review of soldiers' technology threshold, training curricula, training methodology, and tools to deliver, assess and unlearn to relearn future warfighting methodologies. The modern tools for digitised training like immersive technologies, e-learning, distance learning, intranet, and CD-ROM, must blend with existing training methods. The key is a shift from 'Training Delivery to Learning

Acceleration’, in keeping with the dynamic operational and technological environment.

- Training curricula must also be empowered to include a functional understanding of technologies. This would require a *technology soldier fusion*, beginning from induction, and pre-commissioning training to graduated training in its optimisation, commensurate with service profile and assigned roles. Further, it would mandate the inclusion of specialists as trainers (amendment of professional education) and, most importantly, integrate the role these technologies play in operational discussions and wargames.
- The training infrastructure and tools need to be enabled by technologies for virtual training besides enhancing classroom training. Instructional computer-based training packages, simulators – both technical and tactical – and military apps for mobiles, can supplement current classroom instruction and be used as study aids or refreshers for soldiers in operational units.
- Last but not least, the senior leadership must be brought abreast with technology infusion and payoffs, to derive confidence and bridge the technology-aversion gap. Technology capsules by specialists aimed at functionalities and application in combat must find focus both in the Field Army and training institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Indian Army needs ‘techno warriors’ who have a blend of a sharp mind, are empowered with modern-day technology, and are fully-trained in multi-domain military skills. **The need is thus for a leadership adaptive to emergent technology, which is knowledge-based, decision-oriented and optimises**

joint force capability. The summary of recommendations at the Strategic cum operational level and tactical level for integrated technology and techno military leadership development is as under.

Strategic and Operational level

- **Carry out a doctrinal review of deterrence and operational philosophy based on deterrence by denial and a capability-building approach for technology induction and leadership development.** We need to relook at our strategy. Do we require a strategy of defence or denial or domination? Each requires a different capability-building approach, supporting technologies, and a politico-military escalation control matrix. Deterrents particularly need to be evolved for Beijing's lesser forays – the incremental nibbling that remains below the threshold of violent retaliation – that can prove even more devastating, and far more difficult to counter. We need to target PLA's vulnerability rather than just countering its strength. The world continues to target China's strengths, whereas China continues to target their vulnerabilities. For too long have we seen Chinese intent from a myopic Indian lens. We need to understand the Chinese intent from the Chinaman's mindset and long-term vision. The doctrinal void of a National Security Strategy and National Defence University remains glaring.
- **Adopt a systems approach to technology induction** through identification based on theatre-specific desired capability as an outcome of defined operational philosophy; match the availability to identify the voids and then invest in a scaled manner to prioritise, based on value, vulnerability, and risks in temporal terms.

- **Upgrade Technology Infusion at Training Institutions and technology capsules at the Field Army level to empower Techno Military leaders.** Distributed Learning and non-resident courses with short contact programs need to be institutionalised and given due credit. The technology generation gap between strategic and operational military leaders must be bridged for the rise of a techno-military culture in all operational discussions and exercises with troops.
- **Review recruitment, retention and employment of specialists,** both non-uniformed (eg. induction in TA) and uniformed, for optimal exploitation and upkeep of technology. A few areas such as Information Warfare require civilianisation and a civil-military fusion.
- At the theatre and operational level, the requirement is for leaders to **imbibe a scientific temper and thought leadership** for the furtherance of war plans and contribute to active or passive peace. We cannot remain trapped in past paradigms nor rest in the self-generated idealisms of the future. Tactical leaders must invest more in the creative and bold employment of theatre-specific technology for combat effectiveness.
- **Adopt a tri-service approach to both technology induction and HR empowerment,** eg., UAVs, C5ISR systems, etc., and integrate training needs for better inter workability.
- **At the strategic politico-military level, invest much more in R&D and HR funding,** with a focused operational approach and a long-term perspective. The gap is wide and getting wider. This is a challenge, given the sparse availability of resources, but outcomes will be directly proportional to this strategic investment.

Future Battlespace: Embracing Change in the Future of Warfighting

- **Review force structuring and application**, matched with complementary sector-specific technology for optimal effects and smart warfighting in the battle space. For example, Integrated Battle Group (IBG) equipping, training and technology empowerment, must be viewed as one entity, not an arm or service-specific requirement.

At the Tactical Warfighting level

- **Increase the tempo, agility and velocity of combined arms forces.** Structure, organise, equip, train and manoeuvre as a combined arms force at the lowest practical level – IBG is the way forward. A one-size-fits-all solution IBG equipping, training and technology empowerment does not work.
- **Manoeuvre by land, air and sea at the operational and tactical levels** – 2D to 3D force application in a surface-to-space continuum, both in the kinetic and non-kinetic domain. Target both the capability and will of the adversary, which are, anyway, complementary.
- **Establish an “unblinking eye” over the battlefield, supported by real-time communication with redundancy** – C5ISR (command, control, computers, communications, combat systems, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) is the starting point.
- **Proliferate precision and distribute it downward** – the lowest tactical level should be given the same relative advantage in precision firepower.
- **Supplement manned with unmanned reconnaissance and kinetic with non-kinetic** – proliferate from the operational level to the tactical level.

- **Encourage a culture of joint force application and discourage silos or parochial mindsets** – Integrated Command and Control, and shared technologies.
- **Theatre-integrated and responsive logistics backed by adequate war stamina** and technology-aided means will need to be planned. Intended ‘short wars’ are no longer so short.

CONCLUSIONS

The imperative is to dispassionately acknowledge “where we are and where we want to be”, to prevail against future security challenges. The present system remains deeply embedded, and has not adapted and evolved with transformations over time. The challenges of the military technology revolution are multi-fold and dynamic. The extensive use of AI, robotics, advanced sensors, mixed reality, wearable technology, the Internet of Things (IoT), and Quantum Computing, have created an Internet of Battlefield Things, and the ongoing information revolution is bringing major disruptions in military affairs. *Technology manifestation requires demonstrative commitment in terms of funding, joint structures, doctrinal review, HR management, revitalised PME and, above all, a change in legacy mindsets and culture.*

Yet, technology is never going to replace humans in warfare. The human that recognises the technological potential and exercises an optimal blend of the art and science of warfare will emerge victorious, beyond just hardware. Technology also requires a “whole of nation approach” with a strategic vision, understanding of the future challenges, and time-critical outcomes with accountability, beyond myopic domestic politics or bold statements, which leave capabilities at a sub-par level.

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Understanding the Pashtuns[♦]

Tilak Devasher*

Afghanistan, and especially the Pashtuns,¹ have been in the news internationally, at least since December 1979, when the Soviets invaded the country. From then on, the region has seen incessant warfare and violence: the Soviet invasion led to

* Parts of the article have been extracted from the author's book *The Pashtuns: A Contested History*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2022.

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1 There has been a fair amount of confusion about the terms Pashtun, Pakhtun, Pathan and Afghan. The ambiguity stems from the fact that the Pashtuns have been commonly referred to interchangeably with Afghan due to the Persian usage of Abagon, Afghan or Affaghanah for the Pashtuns. During the British rule, a distinction was sought to be made between Afghan and Pathan: the Afghans were considered under Persian influence being part of the Safvid Empire of Persia and spoke Darri while the Pashtuns or Pathans had greater interaction with India and spoke Pashto. Further, tribes in the north of the region use the term Pakhtun while the southern tribes use the term Pashtun. Similarly, Pakhto is used to describe the language in the north and Pashto in the south. In this article, Pashtun and Pashto have been used throughout.

the *mujahideen* resistance and a nine-year-long war that ended with the exit of the Soviets in February 1989; a devastating civil war between the *mujahideen* who could not unite to govern the country and the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s. While the Taliban did establish the ‘peace of the graveyard’, 9/11 was to change all that. It led to the US invasion in 2001, the ouster of the Taliban, and the Taliban’s resurgence and eventual return to power in August 2021.

Over four decades of war have seriously impacted all ethnic groups in Afghanistan, none more so than the Pashtuns. This prolonged war has caused one of the largest displacements of people in recent times, with the main victims being the Pashtuns, whether they were refugees who sought shelter in Pakistan and Iran, or the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Pakistan as a result of various army operations.² The Pashtuns have also suffered the most in the globalization of *jihad* because of the structural changes that Pashtun society underwent on both sides of the Durand Line. The traditional Pashtun leadership was brushed aside, at times violently, and replaced with Afghan and Pakistani radical Islamists. Worse, those being killed were Pashtuns and those who were killing were also Pashtuns. Most of the *mujahideen* were Pashtuns; the Taliban are Pashtuns; the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is Pashtun; those whom they have killed in Afghanistan and in the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA, now part of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province) are Pashtuns; even Pashtun children have not been spared.³ And the story is not yet over. The killings, the war, go on.

2 Abubakar Siddique, *The Pashtuns: The Unresolved Key to the Future of Pakistan and Afghanistan*, Hurst and Co., London, 2014.

3 Aurangzaib Khan, “Manzoor Pashteen: Leading the Fringe to the Centre”, *Herald*, February 19, 2019, <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1398800>.

All this makes it imperative to study the Pashtuns in some detail. An understanding of the key trends amongst the Pashtuns and their history, especially of *Pashtunwali* – the way of the Pashtun; and of two important forces – Pashtun nationalism and Pashtun extremism – and their potential combination, are critical for peace and stability in the region. Superficial understanding and prescription have had, and could continue to have, devastating consequences for the region. Violence, insecurity and instability in this ‘crossroads’ has radiated, and would continue to radiate, violence and insecurity in the whole region, leading to a renewed surge of refugees, an increase in drug trafficking, and the creation of ungoverned spaces in which global terrorists incubate.⁴

The land of the Pashtuns – Pashtunistan – spanning an area of more than 100,000 square miles, historically stretched from the Indus to the Hindu Kush. It had a common government from 1747 up to 1834, when the Sikh empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh annexed the part of it lying between the Indus and the Khyber. This part was inherited by the British and passed on to Pakistan. Today, the Pashtuns are divided by the British era 2,640-kilometre-long Durand Line, into Afghanistan, a country that started taking shape in 1747, and Pakistan, a country created two centuries later, in 1947. As a result, the Pashtuns, perhaps despite being the largest Muslim tribal population in the world, are without a state of their own.

Though divided between two countries and having developed differently, the Pashtuns share a common ideology of descent, a common religion, common ethnic, cultural, linguistic and familial bonds, common historical memories

4 Dr. Sima Samar in conversation with Sally Armstrong, ‘How to end the endless war in Afghanistan’, April 29, 2021, <https://www.macleans.ca/news/world/how-to-end-the-endless-war-in-afghanistan/>.

and a common code – *Pashtunwali* – the way of the Pashtun. These unifying bonds makes it possible to see them as a single entity, inhabiting a single piece of real estate, distinct from their neighbours. Moreover, the present division of the Pashtuns is just one of the several *avatars* that this land has been subjected to over the centuries. Pashtuns on both sides of the Durand Line being one nation is best expressed by the Pashto phrase: *Lar O Bar, Yaw Afghan*, i.e., the Afghans in the low (as in lowlands of Pakistan) and high (as in highlands of Afghanistan), are one. This is one of the key slogans of the Pashtun Tahaffuz (Defence) Movement.

There are about thirty-one million Pashtuns in Pakistan, making up about sixteen per cent of the population, the third-largest ethnic group after the Punjabis and Sindhis. There are another fifteen million in Afghanistan, where they are forty per cent of the population and the largest ethnic group, though not the majority. The city of Karachi is home to the largest Pashtun population in the world – superseding Pashtun cities such as Peshawar, Kabul, Jalalabad and Kandahar.⁵

WHO ARE THE PASHTUNS?

There is no unanimity amongst scholars about the origins of the Pashtuns or when they came to settle in Pashtunistan. The various hypotheses about their origins vary from Semitic origins – being one of the lost tribes of Israel – to an Indo-Aryan inception.⁶

While scholars continue to debate the issue of Pashtun origins, there have been many attempts to codify the Pashtun genealogies, the most famous being the *Makhzan-i-Afghani* (History of the Afghans) compiled in India by Ni'matullah

5 Iftikhar H. Malik, *Pashtun Identity and Geopolitics in Southwest Asia*, Anthem Press, London, 2016, p. 3.

6 Ibid, p. 25.

al-Harawi, after being commissioned by the Mughal Emperor Jehangir in 1613.⁷

According to the chronicles, the Pashtuns themselves claim descent from a common ancestor – Qays bin Rashid or Qays Abdul Rashid who went to Madina in 622 CE, met the Prophet and was converted to Islam by him. On his return to Ghor, Qays is supposed to have successfully propagated the new faith.⁸

Qays had four sons – three biological and one adopted – who are, today, accepted as the founders of the major tribes in the Pashtun lineage. From all these sons and grandsons of Qays Abdul Rashid sprang the hundreds of tribes, sub-tribes and local lineages of the Pashtuns.⁹

This narrative is an article of faith amongst the Pashtuns, who determine the start of their lineage with the conversion to Islam, ignoring their whole history before Qays. They believe in the purity of the descent of their religion, believing that they ‘have no infidel past, nor do they carry in their history the blemish of defeat and forcible conversion’ – almost like a ‘chosen people’.¹⁰ Thus, the Hindushahi kingdom of Kabul, the Buddhist Kingdom of Bamiyan and the Zorashtrian influence in Ghazni, are all buried and forgotten.

Despite this Pashtun belief, the reality is different. Historically, scholars agree that Islam initially came to Afghanistan through the conquests of Arab generals in the service of the Rashidun Caliphs (reigned 632–61 CE) and the

7 Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: A History of Religious Mobilisation in the Pakhtun Tribal Areas, c. 1890–1950*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2011, p. 29.

8 Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans. 550 BC – AD 1957*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1958, p. 9.

9 Frederik Barth, *Features of Person and Society in Swat: Collected Essays on Pathans*, Routledge & Kegan, London, 1981, p. 60.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

Umayyad dynasty (reigned 661–750 CE), based in Damascus. While Balkh gradually became an important Islamic centre, the nature of Afghanistan’s mountainous terrain was such that it took another two to three centuries for Islam to spread to other regions. Buddhist rulers in Bamiyan and Hindu Shahi rulers in Kabul remained holdouts against Islam for many centuries.¹¹

TRIBAL CHARACTERISTICS

*The Pathans are rain-sown wheat—they all came up
on the same day—they are all the same.*¹²

Two unique characteristics distinguish the Pashtuns. First, they are regarded as perhaps the most highly segmentary ethnic group in the world. Each of the approximately 350 tribes are composed of a large number of *khels* or clans who, in turn, are divided into extended family groups called *kahols*. These *kahols* are made up of a number of nuclear families, or *koranays*.¹³ The names of Pashtun tribes end with suffixes that link the tribe to its progenitor, such as ‘*i*’ (of), ‘*zai*’ (sons of) and ‘*khel*’ (clan of).¹⁴ A tribal unit is traditionally defined by territory and usually lives in an area named after the tribe itself.¹⁵ According to Afghan scholar M. Jamil Hanifi:

11 Nile Green, “Introduction, Afghanistan’s Islam: A History and Its Scholarship”, in Nile Green ed., *Afghanistan’s Islam: From Conversion to the Taliban*, University of California Press, California, 2017, p. 3.

12 Abdul Ghani Khan, *The Pathans*, University Book Agency, Peshawar, 1947, p. 57.

13 Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “No Sign until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier”, *International Security*, Volume 32, Number 4, Spring, 2008, The MIT Press, Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30129791>, p. 51.

14 Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failure of Great Powers*, Public Affairs Books, New York, 2011.

15 Akbar Ahmed, *The Thistle And The Drone, How America’s War On Terror Became A Global War On Tribal Islam*, Harper Collins Publishers, Noida, 2013, p. 20.

The Afghan individual is surrounded... by concentric rings consisting of family, extended family, clan, tribe, confederacy, and major cultural–linguistic group. The hierarchy of loyalties corresponds to these circles and becomes more intense as the circle gets smaller... seldom does an Afghan, regardless of cultural background, need the services and/or the facilities of the national government. Thus, in case of crisis, his recourse is to the kinship and, if necessary, the larger cultural group. National feelings and loyalties are altered through the successive layers.¹⁶

Not surprisingly, tribal allegiance exerts the greatest pull on the life of a Pashtun. According to Geoffry Moorhouse, “The bonding within the tribe is much stronger than any local western community has known for centuries, and there may never have been its equal in the West.” Equally, are the antipathies between one tribe and another, making the region a kind of permanent battleground not only because of regular invasions but also due to the tribes fighting each other.¹⁷

The second unique feature of the Pashtun tribes is that they are acephalous, i.e., without leaders, where each man guards his status and independence jealously. Every household head is thus a ‘petty chief’ and no collective tribal action is possible without his consent.¹⁸ This is best represented by the common saying, ‘Every man is a *malik* [elder].’ The same sentiment was reflected when a Mehsud elder from the Abdur Rehman Khel tribe suggested to the then British administrator in Waziristan,

16 Cited in Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “No Sign until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier, pp. 51-52.

17 Geoffry Moorhouse, *To The Frontier*, Holt, Rinehart And Winston, New York, 1985.

18 Akbar Ahmed, *Social and Economic Change in The Tribal Areas, 1972-76*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1977.

Sir Evelyn Howell, in the early twentieth century, either “blow us all up with cannon, or make all eighteen thousand of us *nawabs* [chiefs].”¹⁹ This was expressed by Ghani Khan, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan’s elder son, who declared that the Pashtun is a great democrat:

The Pathans are rain-sown wheat – they all came up on the same day – they are all the same. However dirty and coarse his hand, he will stretch it to a king for a handshake. However meager his meal, he will invite an emperor to share it. ‘Look at the warmth in my eyes,’ he tells his guest, ‘and not the hardness of the corn bread before you.’²⁰

This Pashtun ideal of equality has been reinforced with the belief that all Pashtuns are born equal as children of a common ancestor. Thus, social and economic inequality that exists is not given by nature or birth, but is individually achieved. The tribal order, in fact, discourages social hierarchy.²¹

The tribal system over the centuries has not been static but dynamic, subject to innovation and change in changing circumstances, like outward migration, development schemes and so on.²² The poet Mohammad Iqbal called Afghan conservatism a “miracle”, for it was “adamantine, yet fully sensitive to and assimilative of new cultural forces; this was the secret of the eternal organic growth of the Afghan type.”²³

19 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit., p. 15.

20 Abdul Ghani Khan, op. cit., p. 57.

21 Bernt Glatzer, “Is Afghanistan On The Brink Of Ethnic And Tribal Disintegration?” in William Maley ed., *Fundamentalism Reborn?: Afghanistan And The Taliban*, New York University Press, New York, 1998, p. 173.

22 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit.

23 Rajmohan Gandhi, *Ghaffar Khan: Nonviolent Badshah of the Pakhtuns*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2013, p.32.

Many individuals, families and even subtribes settled in the plains, where the original tribal identity gradually became diluted. They became part of settled administrations and subjected to laws that were based on different systems than their own. Not surprisingly, while the Pashtuns in the settled districts retained their identity, language and culture, their tribal ties were weakened by a century of close contact with the laws and administration, first of the British and then of the people of Pakistan (and Afghanistan).²⁴ Those who continued to live in the hills and mountains clung to tribal identity and prided themselves on their independence. As a result, over a period of time, “despite having the same origins, the two developed distinct, and even antithetical, social and political ways of organizing their lives.”²⁵ The former, settled populations, do retain their identity as Pashtuns or their memory of tribal descent, but they do not live amongst fellow tribesmen or participate in tribal political institutions. Such Pashtuns are often referred to as detribalized.²⁶

Akbar Ahmed, a noted scholar, described two kinds of tribes: *nang* and *qalang* Pashtuns. The *nang* (highland Pashtuns) primarily resided in the mountainous regions and lived by honour, while the *qalang* (lowland Pashtuns) lived in the fertile lowland areas and were subject to taxes. Thus, the main difference between the *qalang* and the *nang* tribes was whether they were taxed by the state or not. For the Pashtuns, taxation – even symbolic – meant submission to another authority and hence made them unfit to rule. Being

24 James Spain, *The Way of the Pathans*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1972, p. 25.

25 Akbar Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

26 Barnett Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002, p. 29.

taxed was humiliating because they felt that they were capable of governing their own internal affairs. Thus, tribes submitting to the state's authority and paying taxes were called *qalang*, which is taxation in Pashto, while those who did not let the state tax them were called the *nang*, meaning honour in Pashto. As the Pashto proverb goes, "Honour [*nang*] ate up the mountains, taxes and rents [*qalang*] ate up the plains."

More closely adhering to the segmentary lineage structure, *nang* populations were small and dispersed, whereas the *qalang* societies were typically large, concentrated, and hierarchical.²⁷

Most of the *nang* tribes were located in the tribal belt between today's Afghanistan and Pakistan, or earlier, British India. These tribes have had a reputation of resisting outside control, whether of the Mughals, the British, the Durrani or Pakistan.

Among the several characteristics of the Pashtuns, Louis Dupree's classic study, *Afghanistan* (1973), notes the 'insolence' of the Pashtuns. However, this was not the frustrated insolence of the urbanized, dehumanized man in Western society, but insolence without arrogance, the insolence of harsh freedoms set against a backdrop of rough mountains and deserts, the insolence of equality felt and practised (with an occasional touch of superiority), the insolence of bravery past and bravery anticipated.²⁸

Mention needs to be made of a peculiarly Pashtun institution, the *hujra* – or the village club and guest house combined. No account of Pashtun life would be complete without a description of this institution. Every village has

27 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit., p. 26.

28 Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1978), p. xvii.

one or more *hujras*, the number varying according to the size of the village. It usually consists of a room or two, with an adjoining courtyard. A number of bedsteads or *charpoys* are found in each *hujra*. Here the villagers gather when the day's toil is over, to meet one another and discuss the topics of the day. Matters like the weather, the crops, the marketing of farm produce, the high-handedness – supposed or real – of the police or the magistracy, and party politics are discussed, punctuated by great puffs at the *chilam* or *huqqa* passed around the gathering.²⁹

JIRGA

The *jirga*, the assembly of adult male Pashtuns, is an indigenous institution to discuss, deliberate and mediate on specific questions and provide a mechanism for speedy conflict resolution in Pashtun society. Its decisions are based on a combination of *Sharia* and *Pashtunwali*.³⁰ Key features of the *jirga* include people sitting in a large circle in the open to avoid even symbolic hierarchy, and within which there was no place for the *mullah*; he sat on the side and prayed for the success of the *jirga*; the *mashars* or *spin giris* (white-bearded elders), because of their knowledge and experience, played an important role in the deliberations; the *jirga* ruled by consensus. Theoretically, a *jirga* could be convened at any level of tribal organization, from the smallest lineage to an entire confederation. However, *jirgas* were most commonly held at the lineage level, though there were larger tribal or even inter-tribal *jirgas* as well, at least amongst eastern Pashtuns.

Discussions at a *jirga* were frank and democratic, though the village chief, who normally held a quantity of land and

29 Abdul Qaiyum, *Gold and Guns on the Pathan Frontier*, Hind Kitabs, Bombay, 1945, p. 25.

30 See below.

was called a *Khan*, was likely to be more equal than the others. Only a senseless man defied his tribal *jirga*, in which case he was ostracized or fined, or had his property burnt. There was no life for the Pashtun clansman in the tribal areas outside the clan system. Personal safety as well as access to roads, water, oil, food and help were provided through the tribal system and found with difficulty outside it.³¹

The *jirga* was not so much a justice delivery system as a resolution mechanism, where disputes were debated until a negotiated settlement acceptable to the offender and the victim was arrived at.³² Fairness and collective justice were the ultimate good, not punishment of the individual wrongdoer as in the Western sense, which, for the Pashtun, was essentially an alien concept.³³ Some of the punishments meted out to those responsible for crimes were extremely harsh: death by stoning, for instance, was carried out on those found guilty of ‘illicit relations’. In the 1980s, stoning was used as a punishment to counter the growing incidence of abductions.³⁴

Mediation apart, the *jirga* held the authority to declare war or work out a peace agreement between the conflicting parties. In most cases, estimated to be ninety-five per cent, the *jirga* succeeded in resolving the issue. The remaining five per cent issues were settled by force. A Pashto proverb reflected the reality regarding the unresolved five per cent cases: “What is not decided in the *jirga* will be decided by bloodshed.”

A *jirga* could often sanction the formation of *lashkars* (tribal militia) for maintenance of law and order, and self-

31 Sana Haroon, op. cit., p. 75.

32 Farhat Taj, *The Real Pashtun Question: How to Control Religious Extremism, Misogyny and Pedophilia?*, Kautilya Books, Delhi, 2017.

33 Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, op. cit., p. 61.

34 Giandomenico Picco and Antonio Luigi Palmisano, eds., *Afghanistan: How Much of the Past in the New Future*, Institute of International Sociology, Gorizia, 2007, p. 106.

defence, along with the enforcement of the *jirga's* decisions. The *lashkar* was thus the military arm of the *jirga* for the formation of which tribesmen were called to fight and each family contributed manpower and weapons.³⁵ *Lashkar*, as used in the tribal sense, could be employed for a *jihad* or a holy war.³⁶ Thus, since the purpose was temporary – to implement a *jirga* decision against an individual or a tribe – once it was fulfilled, the *lashkar* instantly disbanded. The tribal *lashkars* have played a major role in countering militants in Pakistan's Pashtun tribal areas, along with defending their territories, since 2002.³⁷

The concept of *jirga* has changed since the 1980s, when the emergence of the *mujahideen* created a new type of leadership in FATA, not based on lineage or official position. The officially sponsored *jirga* lost much of its credibility after becoming a tool in the hands of the political administration and became riddled with corruption. From being a tribal gathering to resolve issues, it has been converted into a state-manipulated gathering.³⁸

During the anti-Soviet war, under the influence of the Arabs, a new institution came into use in Afghanistan: *shura*, an Arabic term referring to the first meetings of the Muslim *ummah* (community), when the *shura* sat to appoint the first *khalifa* (caliph) after the death of the Prophet in 632.

35 Matt M. Matthews, "An Ever Present Danger: A Concise History of British Military Operations on the North-West Frontier" Occasional Paper 83, Combat Studies Institute Press, US Army Combined Arms Center, Kansas, June 2010, pp. 8-9.

36 Ibid.

37 Farooq Yousaf, 'Pakistan's "Tribal" Pashtuns, Their "Violent" Representation, and the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement', *SAGE Open*, Volume 9, Number 1, 2019.

38 Shuja Nawaz, "FATA—A Most Dangerous Place", Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, January 2009, p. 26.

There are several differences between *jirga* and *shura*. The *shura* is more representative in character than the *jirga* since it is not confined to members of a tribe or sub-tribe; it has a relatively permanent membership, and meets more regularly. *Jirgas*, on the other hand, meet *ad hoc* when a problem arises.³⁹ The *shura*, unlike the *jirga*, is often open to those who have some kind of religious qualification, and is not solely confined to tribe or locality. While the main function of a *jirga* is as a dispute resolution mechanism, the *shura*, on the other hand, makes recommendations of a policy nature that are accepted by the *Amir*.

There are several examples of the functioning of *shuras* in Afghanistan. One such was the *shura* used by President Burhanuddin Rabbani to prolong his rule. He held a *shura* consisting of 1,335 hand-picked members, mostly from his own *Jami'at* and Masoud's *Shura- i-Nazir* and some smaller groups, reviving an archaic Arab gathering the *Shura-i-Hal wa'Qud*, (the 'council of those who can solve and make decisions'), never convened in Afghanistan before. It approved Rabbani to continue as President for a further two years.

Mullah Omar, was declared the *Amir-ul Momineen*, or Commander of the Faithful, in April 1996, by a *shura* of 1,000 *ulema* in Kandahar. The *shura* also declared *jihad* against Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani's government in Kabul.

The Taliban in the 1990s ruled through two *shuras*, one in Kandahar headed by Mullah Omar and one in Kabul led by his number two, Mullah Muhammad Rabbani. The former consisted of Omar's core advisors, while the latter comprised of religious leaders, cabinet ministers and deputy ministers.

39 Bernt Glatzer, 'The Pashtun Tribal System', 2002, p. 161-168.

One shura that became famous over the past twenty-odd years was the Quetta *Shura*, which functioned as the leadership council of the Taliban after they were ousted from Afghanistan by US-led forces in late 2001. Mullah Mohammad Omar, the Taliban *Amir*, led the Quetta *Shura* and began planning counter-strikes against the US forces. The Haqqani Network's North Waziristan leadership was usually called the Miram Shah *Shura*.

TRIBAL RIVALRY

One of the constants in Pashtun history is the abiding and intense rivalry between the Durrani and the Ghilzais. This division between these two confederacies has been at the root of centuries of conflict and intrigue among the Pashtuns. The Ghilzai Hotakis under Mirwais Ghilzai had liberated Kandahar from Safavid control in 1709, and even invaded Persia and destroyed the Persian Empire.⁴⁰ The Durrani wrested power from them and held it almost continuously for over two hundred and fifty years. The Durrani provided *all* of Afghanistan's kings, a fact not lost on the Ghilzais. Despite this, the Ghilzais never accepted that the Durrani were superior to them, as an Afghan saying goes: "He who would rule at Kabul must make peace with the Ghilzai and make it to a great extent on their terms."⁴¹

Only twice in Afghan history have the Ghilzais seized national power from the Durrani – in 1978 when the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) staged a coup d'état against Mohammad Daoud, and again in 1996, when Mullah Omar came to power. Much of the original

40 Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, op. cit., p. 63.

41 Quoted in Z T Sungur, "Articulation of Tribalism into Modernity': The Case Of Pashtuns In Afghanistan", Thesis, The Graduate School Of Social Sciences Of Middle East Technical University, January 2013, p. 14.

Taliban leadership, including Mullah Omar, came from the Ghilzai Hotaki tribe.

An interesting point has been made that the politics of the Afghan *jihad* was virtually a Ghilzai affair. Khalq's Ghilzai leaders, Hafizullah Amin and Muhammad Taraki, began the process with the 1978 coup. The Afghan military forces were dominated by Khalqi officers, many of whom were Ghilzai. Najibullah, one of the few Parchamis with Ghilzai roots, replaced Babrak Karmal (who had Durrani connections). Except for Babrak Karmal, the great Durrani Pashtun confederation had little representation on either side of the conflict. Khalqi members of PDPA were committed to break the established tradition of Durrani rule. Some spoke of the Marxist usurpation and the war as Ghilzai revenge against Durrani dominance. On the resistance side, nearly all of the key *mujahideen* parties were led by or had strong ties to the Ghilzais. Ethnic rivalry, perhaps, more than Islamic ideology, was even responsible for the refusal of the Peshawar parties to accept the exiled King Zahir Shah, a Durrani, into *mujahideen* politics.⁴²

The Taliban movement was at some level also a recreation of the triumph of the Hotakis over the Durrani monarchs. Significantly, when the Taliban first became powerful, their instinct was not to march immediately on the capital Kabul, but to subdue, co-opt and subjugate the Durrani lands of Kandahar and Helmand Provinces. When the Taliban seized control of Kabul, exiled King Zahir Shah was not invited to return from Italy. According to Johnson and Mason, this dynamic is still at work today: the priority of the resurgent Taliban in 2006 was not driving northeast towards Kabul and bringing down the Karzai government, but rather focusing on first establishing political dominance over Durrani lands in Kandahar and

42 Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, op. cit., p. 64.

Helmand Provinces. Clearly, more was at work here than a simple, radical Islamist movement bent on seizing national power.⁴³

Another rivalry exists between the Mehsuds and the Wazirs in Waziristan in the erstwhile FATA. The Mehsuds consider Wazirs slow-witted, mercantile and untrustworthy—‘If your right hand is a Wazir, cut it off,’ advises a Mehsud. Wazirs, for their part, consider Mehsuds vagabonds and cattle-rustlers, often quoting as evidence for this a prayer that Mehsud women are said to chant to their infants: ‘Be a thief and may God go with you!’ Mehsuds also quote this, to illustrate their people’s cunning and derring-do.⁴⁴

Both the Mehsuds and the Wazirs have had their heroes. The Mehsud warrior mullahs included Mullah Powindah, who in 1894 led an attack on the British team demarcating the Durand Line. Taking the title Badshah-e-Taliban, King of the Taliban, he was a two-decade-long headache for the British, who decried him as an irredeemable fanatic, but were not above trying to buy him. Curzon wrote that Powindah was “a first-class scoundrel that we are taking under our wings”. A Wazir of North Waziristan, Mirza Ali Khan, known as the Faqir of Ipi, was a harder case. From 1936 to 1947, he led a freedom struggle that at one point sucked in 40,000 British Indian troops, and was quelled only by brutal aerial bombing. Khan was also backed by the other Pashtun tribes, and was allegedly in contact with Nazi Germany. But when he died, in 1960, the London *Times* mourned him as a ‘doughty and honourable opponent’.⁴⁵

43 Ibid, p. 78.

44 *The Economist*, “Waziristan: The Last Frontier”, December 30, 2009, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2009/12/30/the-last-frontier>.

45 Ibid.

PASHTUNWALI

*May God keep you away from the venom of the cobra, the teeth of the tiger and the vengeance of the Afghans.*⁴⁶

The Pashtuns have a unique and defining tribal code called *Pashtunwali* or the ‘way of the Pashtun’ that distinguishes them from other ethnic groups. It is an unwritten set of values, customs and cultural codes that governs routine life. *Pashtunwali*, in fact, is “the sum total of the tribes’ collective expectations of their members to conform to the norms and customs that ensure the group’s survival as a distinct sociocultural entity.”⁴⁷ “While for the most part it is the individual who acts on the code, the community at large judges with remarkable unanimity the righteousness of his action and supports it or opposes it.”⁴⁸ “The more one adheres to its maxims the more high esteem he enjoys in his brotherhood and community.” The code, compels Pashtuns “to defend their motherland, to grant asylum to fugitives irrespective of their creed or caste and to offer protection even to his deadly enemy and to wipe out insult with insult.”⁴⁹

The various elements of *Pashtunwali* taken together represent the Pashtuns’ notion of a *gairatmand* Pashtun, i.e., an ideal Pashtun who embodies *pashto*, or is leading a completely honourable life. The key qualities of a *gairatmand* Pashtun are that he is *tuhrawala* (courageous), *hayadar* (respectable), *sateetob* (humane), *rahamdel* (merciful), *bahadar* (brave), *mahman-nawaz* (hospitable), *khandani* (a descendent from honourable ancestors), *deendar* (religious) and a defender of

46 Ascribed to Alexander.

47 Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, op. cit., p. 244.

48 James Spain, “The Way of the Pathans”, cited by Johnson and Mason, op. cit., p. 68.

49 Cited in Matt Matthews, op. cit., p. 8.

the faith.⁵⁰ To obtain the status of a *gairatmand* Pashtun, he has to live an ideal lifestyle as prescribed by *Pashtunwali*. A person who does not follow the tenets of *Pashtunwali* is chided as *bagarat* (a man without honour).⁵¹

At its core, *Pashtunwali* is about *nang* (honour) rooted in the triangle of *zan* (woman), *zar* (gold/wealth) and *zameen* (land). “I despise the man who does not guide his life by honour,” wrote Khushal Khan Khattak, the seventeenth-century Pashto poet, ‘The very word honour drives me mad.’⁵² He wrote:

The very name Pashtun spells honour and glory
Lacking that honour what is the Afghan story?

Since the responsibility of upholding individual and tribal honour rests with the males, most carry weapons, which have become a tangible expression of the code of honour. The obligatory weapon symbolizes a man’s status in society, signalling his role as protector of his community. ‘A man’s gun is his jewellery’ is a popular proverb amongst Pashtuns. The fate of an individual who is not able to uphold honour is possibly worse than death. He would be called *dauz*, or ‘person with no honour’, quite possibly the worst slur or insult one Pashtun can bestow on another. Such a Pashtun family, especially in the rural areas, becomes a pariah, unable to compete for advantageous marriages or economic opportunities, and shunned by the other families as a disgrace to the clan.⁵³

This obligation to protect the honour of his person, his property and his women has at times led to a great deal of

50 Khan Idris, *The Pakistan–Afghan Borderland: Pashtun Tribes Descending into Extremism: A Case Study of a Pashtun Tribe*, Tribal Analysis Publishing, Texas, 2013.

51 Ibid.

52 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit., p. 53.

53 Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, op. cit., p. 59.

tension between Pashtuns and states attempting to establish their own rule of law. This is because, as Johnson and Mason note,

...for the Pashtun, the very concept of justice is wrapped up in the maintenance of his honour and his independence from external authority. Breaking the laws of the state to take action to preserve honour would seem perfectly acceptable to a Pashtun. In fact, his honour would demand it.⁵⁴

An extreme example of this involved a woman, the most sensitive subject where a man's honour is concerned. It tells of a man who gave shelter to a couple escaping from a tribal feud and asked his oldest son to take care of them. Before long, the son developed a relationship with the man's wife. The man complained to the host, who responded by arranging a feast. At the end of it, the host asked everyone to say a prayer, then pulled out his revolver and shot six bullets into his son. After the forty days of Islamic mourning, the host called on the man to shoot his wife with the same revolver and uphold his honour. Upon her death, the host adopted the man as his own son and arranged a marriage between him and his dead son's wife.⁵⁵

A core tenet of Pashtunwali is *melmastia* (hospitality) that pertains to the welcoming and protection of guests. As Elphinstone noted: "One of the most remarkable characteristics of the Afghans is their hospitality. The practice of this virtue is so much a national point of honour, that their reproach to an inhospitable man is that he has no *Pooshtoonwullee*."⁵⁶

54 Ibid, p. 62.

55 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit., p. 53.

56 Mountstuart Elphinstone, *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul, and Its Dependencies in Persia, Tartary, and India: Comprising A View of the Afghaun Nation and A History of the Dooraunee Monarchy*, R. Bentley, London, 1842, p. 295.

Interestingly, while hospitality to strangers is offered free, without expecting any reciprocity, hospitality to one's kinsmen or tribesmen puts the recipient under reciprocal obligation, accompanied by the "fear that he will not be in the position to return it adequately when the occasion demands."⁵⁷

All Pashtuns, rich and poor alike, pride themselves on their readiness to feed and care for their guests. Hospitality increases the power and prestige of a Pashtun amongst the tribesmen. The further a Pashtun spreads his *dastarkhan* (table cloth), the more respected he is. A common saying is 'There is no Khan without a *dastarkhan*.' For the Khan in particular, feeding many guests is one of the primary ways to convert wealth into power and respect.

Badraga, escort or safe passage through one's tribal land, is another aspect of Pashtun hospitality. Anyone in fear of being robbed or shot may ask his host for *badraga* and the host is then under obligation to freely escort the man out of his territory. Should anyone accost the guest, they will face not only the wrath of the escorted person but that of his host as well, a price few would want to pay.⁵⁸

The concept of hospitality, according to Akbar Ahmed, is held in such high esteem that it even trumps tribal requirements for revenge, as seen in the chivalrous offering of food and provisions even to enemies.⁵⁹

The obligation to take revenge, or *badal*, is another critical part of Pashtunwali, which, according to some, helps regulate behaviour in the absence of a legal system like police and courts of law. However, even when a modern court system is available,

57 Nabi Misdaq, *Afghanistan: Political Frailty and External Interference*, Routledge, London, 2006.

58 Ibid.

59 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit., p. 23.

the need to take revenge persists.⁶⁰ As a young Churchill put it: no injury was to be forgotten and no debt left unpaid.⁶¹ Every Pashtun knows that transgressions against another's honour will lead to revenge against the transgressor and it is in his interest not to provoke *badal*. As a Pashtun proverb states: 'He is not a Pushtoon who does not give a blow in return for a pinch.'⁶² When serious crimes occur—such as murder, theft or rape—revenge is taken to correct the wrong and restore honour and face. Such acts often precipitate a cycle of revenge and counter-revenge between families and clans, which can last for generations. Time is irrelevant in the Pashtun culture for taking revenge. A tribesman and his relations may take years before they attack their enemy or before they avenge the killing of a family member. There is a saying amongst the Pashtuns: 'The Pashtun who took revenge after a hundred years said, "I took it quickly."⁶³ This also underlines the persistent fear that would hang over the head of the wrongdoer and his family.⁶⁴ Even a jihad does not stop *badal* but, at times, *melmastia* or hospitality clashes with *badal*. In such cases, even if the person seeking hospitality is a bitter enemy, he cannot be refused shelter and hospitality.⁶⁵

The most important issue involving tribal honour concerns women—their behaviour and transgressions against them. This is so because it directly relates to the honour of men in the family and clan. Violation of their honour is perceived as one of the greatest threats to a tribe's honour and thus provokes

60 Ibid, p. 25.

61 Rajmohan Gandhi, op. cit.

62 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit., p. 53.

63 Ibid, p. 25; Idris, op. cit.

64 Nabi Misdaq, op. cit.

65 Mohammad Yousaf and Mark Adkin, *Afghanistan: The Bear Trap—The Defeat of a Superpower*, USA: Casemate, Philadelphia, 2001, p. 33.

the most intense blood feuds.⁶⁶ Cases concerning honour of women are called *tor* (black). In most cases, they can only be converted to *spin* (white) by death.⁶⁷

Ghaffar Khan's eldest son, the poet and artist Ghani Khan, described the working of *badal*:

[If dishonoured, the Pathan] must shoot, there is no alternative. If he does not, his brothers will look down upon him, his father will sneer at him, his sister will avoid his eyes, his wife will be insolent and his friends will cut him off... One day he goes out and never comes back. He has laughed his way into a bullet that was fired by another of his own blood and race. His wife inherits from him a moment of joy, two sons and a lifetime of sorrow. She hangs up his rifle and sitar for his sons. She learns to hide her tears when she hears a love song in the evening. She worships her elder son because he looks like his father, and the younger one because he smiles like him. When she sits by the fire in the evening and looks at the eyes of her children and then at the empty space beside them, she thinks of him who is not there.⁶⁸

Ghaffar Khan was one who knew the flaw of *badal* and tried to overcome it – unsuccessfully.⁶⁹ His non-violent movement did not succeed in many respects partly because the state (first the British and later Pakistan) harshly restricted the movement and partly because the Pashtun values, such as revenge, are too firmly rooted in the culture to be eliminated without committed state backing.⁷⁰

66 Akbar Ahmed, p. 25.

67 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit., 1977.

68 Khan Abdul Ghani Khan, op. cit., p. 8.

69 Rajmohan Gandhi, op. cit.

70 Farhat Taj, op. cit.

While *badal* generally signifies violence such as revenge killings, it also means ‘exchange’ and includes marriages, in which two men marry each other’s sisters.⁷¹ The Pashtun culture is designed not so much as to punish an aggressor as to address the grievances of the victims in order to prevent further conflict. The emphasis on revenge, to an extent, gets mitigated through mediation between rival parties to settle matters peacefully through blood compensation, arranged marriages between rivals, and so on.⁷²

Like *melmastia*, *nanawatai* (offering shelter and protection) is another fundamental element of *pashtunwali*. This requires an individual to safeguard those who seek refuge, even at the cost of his own life. For example, a tribesman fleeing from one set of enemies, who is forced to seek refuge from a third party who is also an enemy, can be sure to receive it despite the enmity. The person from whom refuge is sought would refuse to surrender the enemy now under his protection, even if it means having to fight the enemies of his sworn enemy. A man will not be considered *gairatmand* if he refuses to give refuge to those who (to use the Pashtun phrase) ‘seize his skirt’ (*laman niwul*).⁷³

When one party in a feud wants to sue for peace, a delegation of women carrying Korans and accompanied by a *mullah* are sent to the compound of their enemy. By putting themselves in harm’s way in order to secure a truce, the action of the women signals the readiness of their male kinsmen to negotiate with their enemies. When this is done, all fighting is supposed to stop and those who refuse to do so are seen as

71 David B. Edwards, *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier*, University of California Press, Berkley, 1996, p. 64.

72 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit., p. 24-25.

73 David B. Edwards, op. cit., p. 68.

violating *nanawatai*.⁷⁴ *Nanawatai* has also been described as “supplication by the defeated, invariably with the Koran in his hands, and in extreme indignity... the vanquished submitting to the victors with grass in their mouths and the exclamation ‘I am your ox.’ The victor, in his turn, is obliged to be magnanimous when faced with such humility.”⁷⁵

A recent example of this was Mullah Omar refusing to hand over Osama bin Laden, who was his guest, to the Americans or even to fellow Muslims, the Saudis and Pakistanis.⁷⁶ Interestingly, Mullah Omar prioritized *Pashtunwali* over *Sharia* in defending his decision when the *ulema* argued that under Islamic principles bin Laden should be handed over for trial.⁷⁷

Another element in *Pashtunwali* is cousin rivalry or *tarburwali*. The agnatic rivalry between cousins is best expressed in the Pashtun saying ‘God knows that the uncle is an infidel.’ Agnatic rivalry engenders long-standing feuds and vendettas that often end in the destruction of entire families.⁷⁸ This denotes that first cousins fight each other, then they join in fighting the distant relatives of the other family and then they join to fight that of the other clan, and so on. Such rivalries have been a factor for not only causing internal division but also inviting external manipulation.⁷⁹ For example, the Persians were able to exploit the rivalry between the Durranis and the Ghilzais and so control Kandahar in the eighteenth century.

Analysts believe that these interlocking elements of *Pashtunwali* have enabled the Pashtuns to defeat efforts to

74 Ibid.

75 Geoffrey Moorhouse, *To the Frontier*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1985.

76 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit., p. 22.

77 Ibid, p. 22.

78 Ibid, p. 20.

79 Ibid.

subject them to centralized rule of law. Despite this, as Johnson and Mason note, western policymakers have continued to downplay the importance of these basic cultural values in their efforts to shape strategies for the Pashtun areas. On the other hand, the Taliban and al Qaeda have used these values for recruitment, shelter and social mobilization.⁸⁰

The problem with *Pashtunwali* for the West is, as Charles Allen writes, “an uncompromising social code so profoundly at odds with Western mores that its application constantly brings one up with a jolt.”⁸¹ Talking about the Pashtun code of honour, Churchill noted that it was so strange and inconsistent as to be incomprehensible to a logical mind.

I have been told that if a white man could grasp it fully, and were to understand their mental impulses— if he knew, when it was their honour to stand by him, and when it was their honour to betray him; when they were bound to protect and when to kill him – he might, by judging his times and opportunities, pass safely from one end of the mountains to the other.⁸²

ISLAM AND PASHTUNWALI

There is a special relationship between the Pashtuns and Islam. For most Pashtuns, there is no difference between *Pashtunwali* and Islam on the grounds that, for a man to be a Pashtun, he must also be a Muslim. Thus, Pashtuns see Pashtunwali as entirely in sync with their Islamic identity. As mentioned in the section on Pashtun origins, the link to

80 Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, op. cit., p. 64.

81 Charles Allen, *God's Terrorists: The Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad*, Little, Brown, imprint of Time Warner Book Group, London, 2006, p. 29-30.

82 Winston Churchill, *The Story of The Malakand Field Force: An Episode Of Frontier War*, Longman, Green And Co, London, 1898), p. 27.

the Prophet is through their common ancestor Qays. This, according to Akbar Ahmed, in effect sanctified *Pashtunwali*. It meant that almost every local custom had some religious cover, however tenuous. This close relationship has been reinforced with the symbols and practice of Islam being visible and respected in society. For example, there is an almost absolute observance of fasting during the month of *Ramzan*; most males, especially the elders, make it a point to say prayers regularly in the village mosque; great pride is taken in the title conferred after the pilgrimage to Mecca: *hajji* for men or *hajjan* for women.⁸³

However, in reality, “the coexistence of Pashtunwali with Sharia was achieved only through the arbitration by *mullahs* and other *ulema*, whose community stature allowed them to bridge the chasm between the two sets of laws.”⁸⁴ When custom did not quite square with Islamic law, tribesmen may shrug it off, citing their relationship to the Prophet: ‘We are the most loyal of God’s believers. How can God be angry with us for a minor trespass?’

There are several friction points between the two aspects of Pashtun identity – Islam and *Pashtunwali*, and elements of *Pashtunwali* conflict with Islam. Some examples are : Tribal customs like the father of the bride demanding payment from the groom; a woman suspected of sexual indiscretion being put to death; a family’s women being excluded from inheritance, especially of land; bloody rivalry between male cousins lasting for years; interest being charged on loans; and *Pashtunwali* being glorified over all other forms of identity, including Islam itself.⁸⁵

83 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit. p. 54.

84 Ralph H. Magnus and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx and Mujahid*, HarperCollins Publishers, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 77-78.

85 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit., p. 54.

Such friction points are best exemplified by the Pashtun saying, 'Pashtuns accept half of the Koran,' reflecting the age-old struggle for influence between *Khan* and *mullah*, or the mosque and the *hujra* (the tribal chief's guesthouse). According to Peter Tomsen, one Pashtun told him that an Afghan Mujahedeen who was willing to become a martyr in the name of Islam would, at the same time, "not accept Islam when asked to give a share of his land to his daughter."⁸⁶

Other examples include: *Pashtunwali* demands *badal* for a wrong in order to regain honour. This has led to a cycle of revenge that can ruin families involved in an active feud. In contrast, Islam stresses forgiveness that prevents the cycle of killing. For the Pashtun restoration of honour, and in order to not give the impression of being weak, redress is preferable when it is in accordance with *Pashtunwali* rather than Islam. Asking for justice under Islamic injunctions would indicate a man's weakness and thus leave him wide open to further encroachments by his rivals.⁸⁷ Then again, *Pashtunwali* relies upon hereditary leadership, while Islam facilitates achieved leadership, which appeals to the young, educated tribesmen whose leadership is blocked in traditional Pashtun society. Under *Pashtunwali*, the age of a person defines influence and power, but in Islam, age does not play an important role in leadership: piety and religious education and practices are the source of a leadership position.⁸⁸ *Pashtunwali* lionizes personal, family and tribal achievement, generating jealousy amongst close relatives, especially in the male cousins from the paternal side of the family. In contrast, Islam demonizes personal, family and tribal pride, lauding an achievement as God-given, not individual. This minimizes jealousy and competition

86 Peter Tomsen, op. cit.

87 Nabi Misdaq, op. cit., p. 276.

88 Khan Idris, op. cit.

amongst the tribesmen. *Pashtunwali* glorifies personal and tribal identity that creates feuds and fragmentation within society while Islam highlights a common Islamic identity that facilitates more harmony, unity and a shared identity that crosses traditional tribal barriers. *Pashtunwali* turns a blind eye to some un-Islamic practices such as music, dance, smoking and the use of hashish and opium, while the Islam-based Tablighi Jamaat movement prohibits these practices and views them as un-Islamic.⁸⁹

Another issue where Islam and the *Pashtunwali* are in conflict is related to women. In *Pashtunwali*, a woman whose husband dies may be remarried to the man's brother or another close relative. This is considered justified by the practice of the groom paying bride price to the bride's family, giving the husband's family right of possession of the woman her entire life. But in Islam, a woman cannot be remarried without her consent and her husband's family has no right of possession over her.⁹⁰

Pashtunwali also keeps the priests outside the tribal system, either below it, or above it. Thus, *Sayyeds* and *pirs* are above the system, while the village *mullah* is below it, since he does not have much learning. At times, *mullahs* attend the *jirga* as counsellors but are not permitted to intervene too much. The *pir*, on the other hand, is a spiritual master of a Sufi order, whose tomb becomes a place of pilgrimage or *ziarat*. *Pirs* are believed to have *barakat* or a form of holy blessing, along with *Sayyeds*, who are believed to be the descendants of the Prophet. *Sayyeds* are also kept outside the tribal system even when they are of Pashtun origin. 'Even if his mother tongue is Pashto, he will not be thought of as a Pashtun: his *qawm* is *Sayyad*, that is to say, "Arab".' The external position given to

89 Ibid.

90 Nabi Misdaq, op. cit.

the men of religion makes them natural mediators in factional rivalries amongst tribal groups.

According to Khan Idris, in some places, Islam has now superseded *Pashtunwali* when it comes to the Pashtun way of life, or to the decision-making process amongst Pashtuns. He notes that *Pashtunwali* does not provide answers to some of the complex questions raised by modernization, something that Islam appears to do. Moreover, the traditional Pashtun tribal leadership structure has changed due to modern education, rural-urban migration, trading, an influx of money and remittances from the Middle East, proliferation of media outlets, mobility of the people and growth of transportation. The penetration of modern institutions, such as the administrative structure, the police force, the court system and the system of governance, has also ensured that modern law and justice take precedence over customary law or *Pashtunwali*.⁹¹

RELIGION

*Who could be a better Muslim than us?*⁹²

Islam has been, perhaps, one of the most critical cultural, social and political forces in Afghan history. "From their conversation," wrote Elphinstone of the Afghans in 1842, "one would think the whole people, from the King to the lowest peasant, was always occupied in holy reflections; scarce a sentence is uttered without some allusion to the Deity, and the slightest occurrence produces a pious ejaculation."⁹³ In the 1970s, Michael Barry, a scholar, still found much the same situation: "Every gesture of life was dictated by ritual and impregnated with the sacred."⁹⁴

91 Khan Idris, op. cit.

92 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit., p. 28.

93 Mountstuart Elphinstone, op. cit., p. 211.

94 Cited in Barnett Rubin, op. cit., p. 38.

For the Pashtun, his tribal identity and his Islamic identity are two sides of the same coin. Claims that the Prophet had converted their ancestors has engendered the belief that they are the 'purest' of Muslims. 'Who could be a better Muslim than us?' or 'We were converted to Islam by the Prophet himself,' they say with pride. They believe that on judgment day, 'the Prophet will vouch for them and overlook their shortcomings as they will receive the infinite blessings of the greatest of God's messengers.' These links to the Prophet provide 'a kind of cover for impurity' for groups 'largely ignorant of orthodox Islamic theology and practices.'⁹⁵

While the overwhelming majority of Pashtuns are Deobandi Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school, some tribes such as the Turi in the Kurram Valley of Pakistan, some amongst the neighbouring Bangash and Orakzai tribes, and small communities in Afghanistan, are Twelver Shi'a. The Deobandi sect has generally had an anti-Shia stance. Despite this, historically, relations amongst Pashtun Deobandis and Shias were cordial, though there were isolated cases of sectarian violence that were easily controlled by the British and subsequently by Pakistan. However, the advent of Gen. Zia ul Haq in 1977 changed the situation due to his policy of 'Sunnifying' Pakistan. This led to the rise of sectarian violence against Shias. These tendencies have been amplified greatly due to the anti-Shia aspects of the Taliban ideology.⁹⁶ The Sufi orders, too, have large followings amongst the Pashtuns, especially the Naqshbandi-Mujadiddi order.

Despite the perceived direct link to the Prophet, the Pashtuns followed tribal Islam, where *Sharia* was interspersed with tribal custom. The religiously conservative society was tolerant of other religions and sects. It has been pointed out,

95 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit., p. 28.

96 Farhat Taj, op. cit.

Traditional Islam meant low government interference in defining what was Islamic and the prevalence of Sufi practices and popular Islam – a folksy Islam that blended pre-Islamic rituals and a reverence for saints and shrines not explicitly identified with the teachings of the Koran and the Prophet Muhammed.⁹⁷

Thus, tribal Islam was quite different from the legalistic view of the *ulema* that, in turn, was different from the various schools of Islamists and their interpretation of Islam.⁹⁸ Many religious leaders would view some of the Islamic practices followed by the Pashtun tribesmen as un-Islamic or perhaps only borderline Islamic. Despite this, the Pashtuns continued to practise those rituals.⁹⁹

Though most Pashtuns are Deobandis, they have been influenced by Sufi practices that supplemented Pashtun culture and involved participation in *Urs* (celebration of birthdays of Sufi saints), wearing *ta'wiz* (charms) and belief in the healing powers of holy men. According to the former Afghan Taliban ambassador to Islamabad, Abdul Salam Zaeef, his father, a village *mullah*, wrote *ta'wiz* for the ill and 'demonically possessed' people. He held that there were times when faith worked where medicines did not.¹⁰⁰ The tribesmen have faith that their saint, often a Sufi, whether alive or dead, would intercede with God on their behalf.¹⁰¹ According to anthropologist Louis Dupree:

97 Husain Haqqani, "Afghanistan's Islamist Groups", *Hudson Institute*, May 23, 2007, <https://www.hudson.org/research/9772-afghanistan-s-islamist-groups>.

98 Nabi Misdaq, op. cit.

99 Khan Idris, op. cit.

100 Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, *My Life with the Taliban*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2010, p. 5.

101 Akbar Ahmed, op. cit., p. 29.

The Islam practiced in Afghan villages, nomad camps, and most urban areas would be almost unrecognizable to a sophisticated Muslim scholar. Aside from faith in Allah and in Mohammad as the messenger of Allah, most beliefs relate to localized, pre-Muslim customs.¹⁰²

According to him, almost any stone thrown in Afghanistan would hit the *ziarat* (shrine) of a *pir*, *khwajah* or other name-saint. Pilgrims flocked to *ziarats* to ask for the intercession of a particular saint with Allah for specific favours. In Afghanistan, for example, a saint's tomb near Jalalabad specialized in curing insanity; another near Charikar was believed to cure mad-dog bites; and in the Valley of Paiminar, just north of Kabul, were forty-odd shrines, all dedicated to fertility. Women desiring children visited Paiminar to buy *ta'wiz* (amulets) from the *ziarat* caretakers, each guaranteeing a son or daughter, as the case may be. At one tomb, women actually fondled the bones of shaheed (Muslim martyrs, particularly those killed in warfare against non-Muslims) and ate a pinch of earth, probably reflecting a very ancient belief in impregnation from mother earth.¹⁰³

For the Taliban, since they were swayed by the Wahhabi ideology, such practices were heretical 'innovations' in Islam.

As a result, while still believing in Allah and His messenger Muhammad, different groups of Pashtuns have been Hanafi Muslims, Sufis, Roshanis, Ismailis, Shi'a, and Salafist Wahhabis, often following different schools of thought within the same tribes.

Traditionally in Pashtun areas, tribal *mullahs* or clerics did not have a lot of political authority. The mosque was not used

102 Louis Dupree, op. cit., p. 104.

103 Ibid, p. 105.

for tribal political activity and the *mullah* was subordinated to the tribal elders, who had the monopoly on political activity conducted in the *hujra*, which acted as a counterweight to the mosque. If a tribal area was threatened by outside invasion, *mullahs* might be called on to rally the tribesmen and lead a *jihad* in response. But for the most part, the *mullahs* were impoverished and illiterate, and they depended on the *maliks* to provide them with both income and security (for example, by protecting their mosques from raiders). The *mullahs* did not have an independent political voice.¹⁰⁴ Their traditional role was to act as a buffer between tribes and subtribes and as intermediaries when tribes clashed amongst themselves. Their everyday role was rather humdrum and only concerned with rites of passage (birth, circumcision, marriage and death ceremonies). They did not feature in tribal genealogy. Their role in tribal society is perhaps best depicted in this classic story, although apocryphal, about the *mullah* who went into Afridi Tirah and berated the tribes for not having a single shrine or holy tomb. The Afridi answer was to kill the *mullah* and set up his shrine as the first religious one in the area.¹⁰⁵

Though Islam is at the core of the ordinary Pashtun's life, their practice of it has undergone major transformations. Prior to the Soviet invasion, the Pashtuns were tolerant of other religions and sects. This was evidenced by the significant number of Sikhs and Hindus who lived amongst the Pashtuns till the 1947 Partition of the subcontinent. The Pashtun Khudai Khidmatgars had joined the All India Congress, a secular nationalist party in India, and opposed the creation of Pakistan. However, the Soviet-era *jihad* (1979–89) and the civil war that followed (1992–96) severely damaged such open-mindedness.

104 Shuja Nawaz, *op. cit.*

105 Akbar Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

Over the past three decades, Salafi influence has been growing at the expense of traditional religious orders, with support and funding from outside.¹⁰⁶

Due to the Soviet invasion in 1979, there was huge influx of money from Saudi Arabia and the United States; eventually USD 6 to 8 billion was distributed to the clerics waging *jihād*. For the first time in history, the *mullahs* were not dependent on the maliks for their survival.¹⁰⁷ These new opportunities enabled the *mullah* to expand his traditional role and to move from the mosque to the *hujra*. According to Shuja Nawaz,

Mullahs now participate in the new *jirga* as Members of Parliament, and guarantees that were given by the tribe are now given by the *mullahs*. *Jirgas*, which were traditionally held in the open, have been held inside *madrassas* and addressed by *mullahs*. In the traditional system, *mullahs* could not sustain a network of political patronage, as they lacked financial means. But now they have access to money and have created a space for themselves in the society.¹⁰⁸

The *mullahs'* power climaxed under Taliban control of Afghanistan in the 1990s and thereafter. They totally sidelined the Sufi *pirs* and the tribal leaders. Between 2007 and 2010, for example, the Salafists either killed or expelled the *pirs* and the traditional Pashtun leaders in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan and the Swat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, fuelling an insurgency against Islamabad. This disrupted the delicate relationship between the *pirs*, the *mullahs* and the tribal leaders along the Pakistan–Afghanistan borderland. Khan Idris argues that “as

106 Abubakar Siddique, op. cit., p. 29.

107 Shuja Nawaz, op. cit.

108 Ibid.

long as this disequilibrium exists in Pashtun society, there will be instability and violence.”¹⁰⁹

SALAFI INFLUENCE

A significant development in the past few decades is that the Pashtuns along the border separating Pakistan and Afghanistan, especially in the former FATA, have begun to shift their religious orientation from the more tolerant Hanafi Sufi beliefs to the more restricted and militant Salafi (‘following the forefathers’) interpretation of Islam that is more commonly practised in the Middle East.

This trend of the Pashtun tribes on the borderland moving towards Salafism began in the 1980s with the impact of the Soviet *jihād*, when a large number of Arab fighters came to the area and Wahabi *madrassas* were opened. It was reinforced in the 1990s due to the inroads that the Tablighi Jamaat has made in the area. The Tablighi Jamaat is one of the proselytizing Salafist organizations in the region while the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, Taliban and al-Qaeda support the ideology.¹¹⁰ Apart from FATA, the Salafi ideology is also making inroads into the settled areas of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

The older Sufi Islam was accommodative, even to the extent that the *pirs* would ignore some of the popular tribal practices that were clearly un-Islamic in the eyes of the more rigid purists. In contrast, the new Salafists do not tolerate any popular tribal practices, which are deemed un-Islamic. This has caused resentment amongst Pashtuns and, in some places, led to violence and intolerance.¹¹¹

The transformation from Sufism to Salafism deeply impacted the local Pashtun tribes. Over the medium and long

109 Khan Idris, op. cit.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

term, this will have consequences for the tribes, for the stability and security of the Pashtun-inhabited areas in Pakistan and Afghanistan, for regional stability, and terrorism. According to Idris,

...the changed internal dynamics to a large extent explain why some Pashtuns participate in terrorist activities and why some Pashtuns harbour non-Pashtun religious extremists. This would also help understand why some tribes gravitate towards extremism while others do not.

The Salafist ideology has been responsible for the Pashtun Salafists inviting and hosting al-Qaeda and other militant Islamic groups that have endangered the security and stability of the region. From their secure bases, al-Qaeda and others have planned and implemented terrorist operations in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other parts of the world.

The change to a more restrictive Salafism, seemingly at least for the long term, if not permanently, will alter and weaken the traditional Pashtun tribal structure that has been a major source of stability and peace in the area. It will undermine the role of the tribal leaders, leading to potential chaos and disorder. For example, the family structure of the Pashtuns is being impacted since, while the older generation tends to follow the Sufi traditions, the younger members are more receptive to the changes.¹¹²

A moot point is whether the growth of Salafism can be rolled back? Perhaps not. It has established deep roots within the tribal structure and local tribesmen have been empowered into becoming leaders who are thus able to rally support from substantial parts of the tribe. Traditional tribal elders will therefore, have a hard time trying to reclaim their original

112 Khan Idris, *op. cit.*

position from the new leaders since it would be very difficult now, to drive a wedge between the local tribesmen and the Salafists leaders. Additionally, the Taliban, both Afghan and Pakistan, have developed deep social and religious contacts in Pakistani society due to the large infrastructure of Salafi madrassas in Pakistan. The Taliban of both varieties use these madrassas and the mosques associated with them as recruiting and indoctrination places and for fund-raising, thereby institutionalizing their position.¹¹³

At the same time, while the Pashtun tribal structures of Pakistan and Afghanistan have been wounded, such an ancient culture cannot be eradicated in a few decades. However badly the building blocks of that culture are damaged, there remains a foundation on which Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other interested parties can begin to restore traditional Pashtun power structures and mores.¹¹⁴

The one way this can be done is by the restoration of the traditional balance in society by empowering the tribal elders again. The ‘collective control’ of the tribal elders and maliks ‘is the only stabilizing force the region has ever known’.¹¹⁵ Undoubtedly, the restoration of the Pashtun tribal structures will be a time-consuming and painstaking process. A prerequisite for this would be the commitment of governments on both sides of the Durand Line to demonstrate political will, provide reliable security and develop the requisite cultural understanding to underwrite such a task.¹¹⁶ With the Taliban in power in Kabul, the Salafists having made deep inroads into society and successive governments in Pakistan seeking ‘strategic depth’, this would indeed be a challenging task.

113 Ibid.

114 Thomas Johnson and Chris Mason, p. 77.

115 Ibid, p. 73.

116 Thomas H. Johnson and Chris Mason, op. cit., p. 67.

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The Russian oil price cap and its implications for India

Manish Vaid*

Russian aggression in Ukraine has unsettled the global energy system in a measure that countries that had set their respective net-zero targets in Glasgow to embrace cleaner fuels, have suddenly found themselves scrambling for both oil and gas supplies. Nations in Asia and Europe have accelerated their fossil fuel imports from Russia since the commencement of the conflict in Ukraine, with different long-term goals altogether. India and China have aimed to strengthen their partnership with Russia, while countries, particularly in the Group of Seven (G-7), seek to punish Russia for its war against Ukraine, either through an oil embargo or capping Russian crude oil prices.

Oil imports by India from Russia increased from almost nil in January and February 2022, to around 950 million barrels per day (mb/d) by June 2022¹. Post oil price cap, which came

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1 Nidhi Verma, "Russia's share of India's June oil imports surges to record", *Reuters*, July 11, 2022, [https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russias-share-indias-june-oil-imports-surges-record-2022-07-11/#:~:text=NEW%20DELHI%2C%20July%2011%20\(Reuters,provided%20by%20trade%20sources%20showed.](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russias-share-indias-june-oil-imports-surges-record-2022-07-11/#:~:text=NEW%20DELHI%2C%20July%2011%20(Reuters,provided%20by%20trade%20sources%20showed.)

into effect from December 5, 2022, India's imports from Russia continued to rise, registering 1.19 mb/d² and 1.27 mb/d³ in December 2022 and January 2023, respectively. China, too, remained the top importer of Russian crude, surpassing its imports from Saudi Arabia, both in consecutive months of May and June 2022⁴. Its imports rose to 11.42 mb/d in November 2022, and fell slightly to 11.37 mb/d in December 2022.⁵ Similarly, Europe, which aimed to import the maximum quantity of Russian oil before the European Union-wide embargo on Russian crude, which also came into effect on December 5, 2022, was importing over 1 mb/d of Russian oil.⁶

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- 2 "India's Russian oil imports top 1 million barrels a day in December," *Livemint*, January 15 2023, <https://www.livemint.com/industry/energy/indias-russian-oil-imports-top-1-million-barrels-a-day-in-december-11673762196458.html>.
 - 3 "India's import of Russian crude oil at record high in January", *Zee Business*, February 6, 2023, <https://www.zeebiz.com/markets/commodities/news-in-dias-import-of-russian-crude-oil-at-record-high-in-january-220750>.
 - 4 Chen Aizhu and Muyu Xu, "China extends record imports of Russian oil into June, cuts Saudi supply – trade", *Reuters*, July 6, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/china-extends-record-imports-russian-oil-into-june-cuts-saudi-supply-trade-2022-07-06/>.
 - 5 Russell, Clyde. "Column: Asia's crude oil imports hit record high, but it's not China", *Reuters*, February 2, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/asias-crude-oil-imports-hit-record-high-its-not-china-russell-2023-02-02/>.
 - 6 Irina Slav, "Europe Is Buying All The Russian Oil It Can Before Banning It", *Oil Price*, September 7, 2022, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/Europe-Is-Buying-All-The-Russian-Oil-It-Can-Before-Banning-It.html>.

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Figure 1: Russian oil Bought by India (mb/d)



Source: Vortexa Ltd.

On the other hand, the US, a net oil exporter, announced a ban not only on imports of crude oil and petroleum, but also coal and natural gas, from Russia, signaling a lesser dependency on imports of these fuels. Total US crude and petroleum product imports from Russia in 2000-2021 stood at 3 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively.⁷ However, the post-pandemic growth and subsequently Russia's Ukraine invasion of February 24, 2020, did not spare the US and, indeed, put it in a rather tight spot. US recorded a sharp increase in its pump prices, which rose to an all-time high of USD5 a gallon⁸ during the summer of 2022. The invasion also resulted in a sharp rise in Brent Crude, which soared to a 14-year high of USD139.13/

7 "The United States imports more petroleum products than crude oil from Russia", *U.S. Energy Information Administration*, March 22, 2022, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=51738>.

8 Vandana Hari, "China and India should reject West's Russia oil-price cap plan", *Nikkei Asian Review*, August 1, 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/China-and-India-should-reject-West-s-Russia-oil-price-cap-plan>.

barrel (bbl), and the West Texas Intermediate (WTI), which hit USD130.50/bbl in March 2022, before falling to USD85/bbl and USD80/bbl, respectively, on December 30, 2022.⁹ Thanks to a surge in COVID cases and resultant recessionary fear, due to easing of China's zero-covid policy.¹⁰

Earlier, while the US, UK, and Canada announced a ban on Russian oil and the EU on sea-borne Russian crude by December 5, 2022, and petroleum products by February 5, 2023, the Biden Administration proposed a price cap on Russian crude imports. This, according to Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen¹¹, "would enhance and strengthen recent and proposed energy restrictions imposed by the US, UK, Canada, and Europe, to limit Russian oil revenue, thereby weakening its economy and war efforts in Ukraine". This would also help control oil prices in a certain price range, benefitting all the oil-importing countries, while allowing Russia to still make some profits, and prompting it to produce oil without shutting its aging oil fields.

On September 2, 2022, G-7 countries vowed to urgently move towards a price cap on Russian crude imports, to which Russia retaliated by halting its gas supplies to Europe. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov announced, "Russian natural gas supply via the Nord Stream pipeline to Germany will remain

9 "Crude oil prices increased in first-half 2022 and declined in second-half 2022", *U.S. Energy Information Administration*, January 4, 2023, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=55079#>

10 "Payback time for zero-Covid: Why China's problems with the virus could be due to its hard approach to the pandemic", *The Indian Express*, December 25, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/zero-covid-china-pandemic-rising-cases-8334223/>.

11 Christopher Condon and Danielle Bochove, "Yellen Says 'Stay Tuned' for Word on Russian Oil Price-Cap Plan", *Bloomberg*, June 21, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-06-20/yellen-says-stay-tuned-for-word-on-russian-oil-price-cap-plan>.

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shut until the Western sanctions that impede gas turbine repairs are lifted.”¹²

At this stage, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) took a call on their oil production cuts every month, depending on the evolving market conditions. The main objective behind these exercises was, largely, to stabilize oil prices and prevent inflation from shooting up. However, due to the prevailing oil price levels, which went below USD80/bbl,¹³ primarily due to recessionary fears, OPEC was not encouraged to increase oil production.¹⁴ Recessionary fears, largely emanating from China’s zero-COVID policy and later, the easing of the COVID related restrictions, coupled with an economic slowdown in Europe and interest rates hikes to fight inflation in the U.S., created contradictory uncertainties in the oil market.

On December 3, 2022, the G-7 nations reached a consensus to limit Russia’s imports of oil priced over USD 60/bbl¹⁵, with the objective of reducing Russia’s oil earnings, while also being mindful of the possibility of increasing inflation. This, they believed, would force Moscow to reach a ‘culminating point’, where Russian troops run high and dry. Later, in order

12 Max Seddon, David Sheppard and Henry Foy, “Russia switches off Europe’s main gas pipeline until sanctions are lifted”, *Financial Times*, September 5, 2022.

13 Charles Kennedy, “Oil Falls Below \$80 As Powell Warns A Recession May Be Looming”, *Oil Price*, September 23, 2022, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Crude-Oil/Oil-Falls-Below-80-As-Powell-Warns-A-Recession-May-Be-Looming.html>.

14 Tsvetana Paraskova, “Further OPEC+ Production Cuts Could Be Looming”, *Oil Price*, September 6, 2022, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Crude-Oil/Further-OPEC-Production-Cuts-Could-Be-Looming.html>.

15 Olof Konig, et, al., “G7 Sets Price Cap for Russian Oil at USD 60 Per Barrel”, *Baker McKenzie*, December 9, 2022, <https://sanctionsnews.bakermckenzie.com/g7-sets-price-cap-for-russian-oil-at-usd-60-per-barrel/>.

to assess the oil market conditions better, the group also agreed to review the oil price cap in March 2023.¹⁶

Given these developments around the Russia-Ukraine war, this paper investigates the G-7 proposal on Russian oil price cap restrictions more deeply, to assess its impact on the global oil market. It also examines the implications for India's future energy relationship with Russia.

THE WAR AND THE PROPOSAL

The Russia-Ukraine war approaches a full year at the time of writing, and there seems no honest effort from either side, including Kiev's NATO supporters, to end the war. According to a joint assessment by the Government of Ukraine, the European Commission, and the World Bank, Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction need as of June 1, are estimated at USD349 billion¹⁷ (Figure 2). On October 24, the World Bank declared an additional USD500 million to aid Ukraine in fulfilling its urgent expenditure necessities, which have arisen due to the Russian invasion.¹⁸ So far, the World Bank has provided Ukraine with emergency funds totaling USD13 billion, including commitments, of which USD11.4 billion has already been disbursed.¹⁹ According to this assessment, the Russian invasion has caused civilian casualties and infrastructural damage, displacing over 5.35 million Ukrainians by January 2023.²⁰

16 Timothy Gardner and Kanishka Singh. "G7 agrees to review level of price cap on Russian oil in March -US Treasury", *Reuters*, January 21, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/g7-agrees-review-level-price-cap-russian-oil-march-us-treasury-2023-01-20/>.

17 World Bank, Government of Ukraine and European Commission, "Ukraine: Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment", August 2022, p. 12.

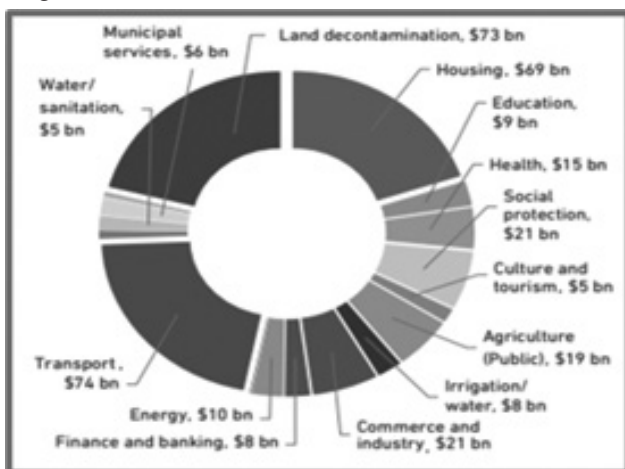
18 The World Bank, "World Bank Disburses Additional \$500 Million, the Latest Tranche of \$11.4 Billion Provided to Ukraine", October 25, 2022.

19 Ibid.

20 "Ukraine — Internal Displacement Report — General Population Survey Round 12, January 16-23, 2023," *Displacement Tracking Matrix, Global*

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Figure 2: Total needs as of June 1, 2022 USD349 billion



Source: The World Bank, Government of Ukraine, and EU

With the series of offensives²¹ and counter-offensive²² from both sides and neither side willing to blink first, the resultant impact has been felt across the energy markets and the global economy. President Biden's unexpected trip to Kyiv²³ to announce a fresh package of additional US weapons supplies worth USD500 million to counter Russian aggression has the potential to provoke Russia further. His visit could have the unintended consequence of a prolonged conflict as well,

Data Institute, <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/ukraine-internal-displacement-report-general-population-survey-round-12-16-23-january-2023>.

21 "Russia Says Delivering 'Massive' Strikes On Ukraine Frontlines", *Livemint*, September 13, 2022, <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/russia-says-delivering-massive-strikes-on-ukraine-front-lines-11663064049124.html>.

22 "Ukraine retook 6,000 sq km from Russia in September: Zelensky", *India Today*, September 13, 2022, <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/russia-ukraine-war/story/ukraine-reclaims-territory-capturing-many-russian-pow-1999552-2022-09-13>.

23 Peter Beaumont Isobel Koshiv and Luke Harding. "Joe Biden visits Kyiv in major show of support for Ukraine", *The Guardian*, February 20, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/20/joe-biden-visits-ukraine-kyiv>.

causing more deaths, displacement, and economic and political instability in the region, with possible wider global security implications. These developments eliminate the possibility of Putin considering a ceasefire with Kyiv and, instead, escalate tensions to the point where the world is pushed towards the brink of a global conflict.

The G-7 proposals for an oil price cap were more flexible than Europe's Russian oil embargo that also came into force on December 5, 2022, as part of the EU's sixth sanctions package.²⁴ Under this proposal, insurance of Russian oil shipments would be permitted if the oil price does not exceed the cap.²⁵ In other words, the price cap calls for participating countries to deny insurance, finance, brokering, and other services to oil cargoes priced above the USD60 bbl price cap on crude, set by the EU Council on December 3, 2022.²⁶

At the Group of 20 finance ministers and central bank governors meeting, which assembled in Bali, Indonesia, in July 2022, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen had declared, "Inflation is 'unacceptably high' – and a price cap on Russian oil is one of our most powerful tools to address the pain that Americans and families across the world are feeling at the gas pump and the grocery store right now."²⁷ She added, further,

24 Sergey Vaculenko, "The Flaw in the Plan to Cap Russian Oil Prices", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 8, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/87873>.

25 Ibid.

26 "EU agrees on level of price caps for Russian petroleum products", Council of the EU, 4 February 4, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/02/04/eu-agrees-on-level-of-price-caps-for-russian-petroleum-products/#:~:text=On%20December%202022%2C%20the,oil%20at%20%2460%20per%20barrel>.

27 Rob Garver, "Yellen Pushes Plan to Cap Price of Russian Oil on Global Markets", *VOA*, July 15, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/yellen-pushes-plan-to-cap-price-of-russian-oil-on-global-markets-/6659366.html>.

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that limiting the profits of Russian crude sales, “would deny [Russian President Vladimir] Putin the revenue his war machine needs... It will also aid in maintaining the global supply of oil, helping put downward pressure on prices for consumers in America and globally at a time when energy prices are spiking.”²⁸

According to Charles Michel, President of the European Council, “We want to make sure the goal is to target Russia and not to make our life more difficult and more complex.”²⁹ His statement makes sense because strong economic recovery post covid and low investment in oil production have pushed oil prices up. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has only exacerbated the global oil market condition further. All these have sent the oil price to stratospheric levels, and which is now being passed over to consumers at the pump, across several countries, including the US. Despite the shale boom, the U.S. cannot be said to be as energy independent as it also gets impacted by the global energy market as any other country.³⁰ The US too repeatedly requests OPEC to adjust its oil production to keep the global oil prices stable, while also seeking G-7 support for the Russian oil price cap.

The oil price cap on Russian crude is believed to be effective only if China and India are taken on board. Instead, India and China have increased their Russian crude imports at

28 Tsvetana Paraskova, “Is This The Only Way To Curb Russian Oil Revenues?”, *Oil Price*, July 16, 2022, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Crude-Oil/Is-This-The-Only-Way-To-Curb-Russian-Oil-Revenues.html>.

29 Guy Chazan, Sam Fleming and David Sheppard. “G7 aims to hurt Russia with price cap on oil exports”, *Financial Times*, June 26, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/ee090a48-5407-496f-b0e4-1fe78f37495d>.

30 Colin Jerolmack and Amy Westervelt. “The Enduring Myth of America’s “Molecules of Freedom”, *Slate*, April 11, 2022, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2022/04/ukraine-war-american-fracking-natural-gas-exports-russia.html>.

steep discounts, signaling no support for this move of the G-7 grouping. Moreover, China's aggressive response to Pelosi's visit to Taiwan³¹ with its unprecedented range of actions has closed all the doors for any negotiation with the US on the oil price cap.

RUSSIA'S OIL MATTERS

Russia being the major player in the global energy market is the world's third-largest producer of petroleum and other liquids (after the United States and Saudi Arabia). Russia is the world's largest exporter of oil to global markets and the second-largest crude oil exporter behind Saudi Arabia. India imports a mix of crude grades from Russia, like the Urals, Siberian Light, CPC Blend, and East Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO). However, India is buying more Urals crude as it suits most of its refineries. Urals Oil is a reference oil brand used as a basis for the pricing of the Russian export oil mixture. It is a mix of heavy sour oil from the Urals and the Volga region, with light oil from Western Siberia.³² Urals considers the blend prices in the Baltic and Black Sea, including the cost of insurance and freight.

Russia's total crude oil reserves stood at 107.8 thousand million barrels (Figure 3). Russia had an annual average of 10.5 million barrels per day (mb/d) in total liquid fuel production in 2020. However, in January 2022, Russia's total oil production was 11.3 mb/d, of which 10 mb/d was crude oil, 960 thousand barrels per day (kb/d) of condensates, and 340 kb/d of Natural

31 Jenni Marsh and Cindy Wang. "Here Are All the Ways China's Hitting Back Against Pelosi's Trip", *Bloomberg*, August 3, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-03/here-are-all-the-ways-china-s-hitting-back-against-pelosi-s-trip#xj4y7vzkg>.

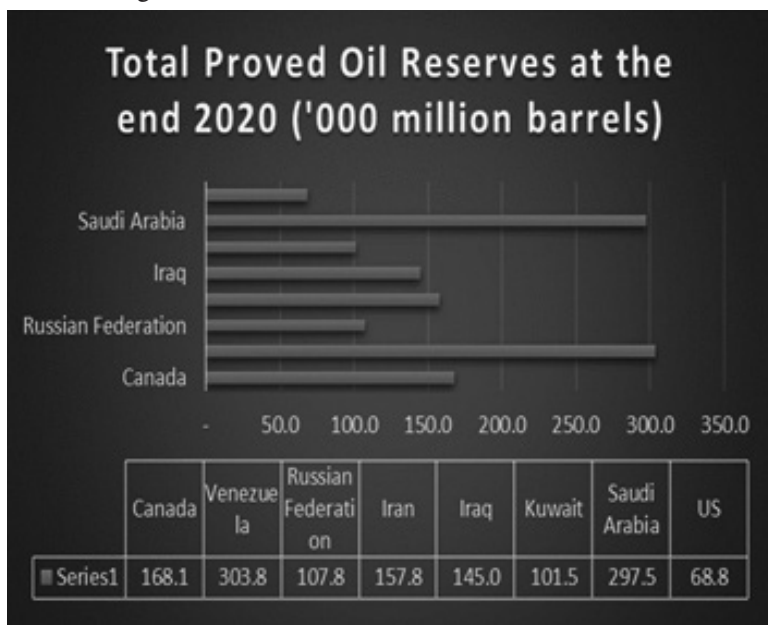
32 Trading economics. "Urals Oil". <https://tradingeconomics.com/commodity/urals-oil>.

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Gas Liquids (NGLs). Compared to this, US total oil production was 17.6 mb/d while Saudi Arabia produced 12 mb/d.

Russia relies heavily on revenues from oil and natural gas, which in 2021 made up 45 per cent of Russia's federal budget. In 2021, Russia exported an estimated 4.7 mb/d of crude, to countries around the world.³³ The crude imported to China, being the largest importer of Russian crude, accounted for 1.6 mb/d, while in Europe it was 2.4 mb/d.³⁴

Figure 3: Total Proved oil Reserves at the end 2020



Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy, June 2022

Russia's extensive crude export pipeline capacity allows the shipping of large volumes of crude directly to Europe

33 "Energy Fact Sheet: Why does Russian oil and gas matter?", *International Energy Agency*, March 21, 2022, <https://www.iea.org/articles/energy-fact-sheet-why-does-russian-oil-and-gas-matter>.

34 Ibid.

as well as Asia. According to US Energy Information Administration's (EIA) 2021 data, Russia exports around 5 mb/d of crude oil and 2.85 mb/d of other oil products, of which 671,000 barrels per day (bpd) or 13 per cent are received by the US and the remainder by Europe and Asia.³⁵ The roughly 5,500 km Druzhba pipeline system is the largest crude oil pipeline in the world which transports 750,000 bpd of crude directly to refiners in east and central Europe. Oil shipments via this pipeline are expected to be spared from the ban as Hungary along with other landlocked countries are not prepared for an oil embargo for the next couple of years.

Since 2014, sanctions³⁶ have been imposed by both the US and EU on Russia for its actions and policies in Ukraine, (On February 24, 2022, Russia launched an undeclared war against Ukraine, a country Russia first invaded and partially occupied in 2014) which has mainly affected Russian energy companies access to US capital markets and goods, services, and technology in support of deepwater exploration and field development.

However, since 2020, Russia has been actively coordinating with the OPEC+ countries and has signed an agreement to curb crude oil production in response to rapidly declining demand resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁷ On July 18, 2021,

35 Mathew Smith, "Why Easing Sanctions Against Venezuela Would Be A Bad Move For The U.S.," *Oil Price*, March 8, 2022, <https://oilprice.com/Geopolitics/South-America/Why-Easing-Sanctions-Against-Venezuela-Would-Be-A-Bad-Move-For-The-US.html>.

36 CRS, "Russia's 2022 Invasion of Ukraine: Overview of U.S. Sanctions and Other Responses", *Congressional Research Service – Insights*, July 6, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11869>.

37 Eric Han and Candace Dunn, "OPEC+ agreement to reduce production contributes to global oil market rebalancing," *U.S. Energy Information Administration*, September 23, 2020, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=45236>.

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OPEC+ agreed to begin increasing production quotas for the participating countries and to extend the duration of the OPEC+ agreement through the end of 2022. This resulted in an increase in Russia's production baseline from 11.0 mb/d to 11.5 mb/d starting in May 2022. This also allowed Russia's production quota to increase by 100,000 b/d per month beginning in August 2021.³⁸

RUSSIAN REVENUES UP DESPITE SANCTIONS

Russian budget is generally based on low oil prices as has been the case in 2021, with the Russian Finance Ministry projecting an oil price of USD45/bbl, compared to the average price of USD69/bbl.³⁹ Consequently, oil and gas revenues exceeded the initial expectations by over 51 per cent registering USD119 billion. Even for the 2022 budget, oil prices projected were USD44.20/bbl, with Russia's Ural recorded at USD72.78/bbl, indicating a high potential for increased production.⁴⁰

However, after Moscow started, what it calls 'special military operations' in Ukraine on February 24, it planned to reinstate its budget rule to divert excess oil revenues into its rainy-day fund. Under this new rule, the Russian Finance Ministry proposed a crude oil price of USD60 per barrel

38 Jon Gambrell, "OPEC, allies raise limits for 5 countries to end oil dispute", *Associated Press News*, July 18, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-business-health-coronavirus-pandemic-opecf3bed082ce6cb9353701bab9dc01429f>.

39 "Factbox: Russia's oil and gas revenue windfall", *Reuters*, January 21, 2021, [https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/russias-oil-gas-revenue-windfall-2022-01-21/#:~:text=MOSCOW%2C%20Jan%2021%20\(Reuters\),of%20the%20country's%20total%20budget](https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/russias-oil-gas-revenue-windfall-2022-01-21/#:~:text=MOSCOW%2C%20Jan%2021%20(Reuters),of%20the%20country's%20total%20budget).

40 Rosemary Griffin, "Commodities 2022: Russian crude oil output expected to rise despite demand concerns", *S&P Global*, December 22, 2021, <https://www.spglobal.com/commodityinsights/en/market-insights/latest-news/oil/122221-commodities-2022-russian-crude-oil-output-expected-to-rise-despite-demand-concerns>.

and a daily oil output of 9.5 million barrels.⁴¹ According to International Energy Agency (IEA), Russian oil revenues increased by USD700 million in June 2022 to USD20.4 billion on a month-on-month basis, which was 40 per cent above the last year's average.⁴²

Notably, in the first 100 days of the Russia-Ukraine war, Moscow collected around USD100 billion from its energy export proceeds on global markets, 60 per cent of which came from the sale of crude oil and petroleum products. Also, in the first six months since the war started, Russian oil and gas revenues amounted to USD106 billion, compared to its planned budget of USD157 billion.⁴³ With a daily oil revenue of USD600 million, Russia was expected to make another USD140 billion by the end of 2022, as estimated by TS Lombard. However, in 2022, Russian oil revenues grew by 20 per cent to USD218 billion, as per the estimates from the Russian government and IEA.⁴⁴

This has gone a long way in stabilizing Russia's economy despite a series of sanctions. While across the world nations were struggling to cope with high inflations, oil prices averaging over USD100/bbl (Figure 4) has helped Russia to sit on its sizeable cash reserves. This has helped the Russian government

41 "Russia considers new budget rule, investment options, sources say", *Reuters*, July 19, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russia-introduce-new-budget-rule-60-per-barrel-oil-vedomosti-2022-07-19/>.

42 "Oil Market Report – July 2022", International Energy Agency, July 2022, <https://www.iea.org/reports/oil-market-report-july-2022>.

43 Ekaterina Mereminskaya, "The bid to cap Russian oil prices The U.S. and its allies want to limit the price of Russian oil to hinder Moscow's ability to fund the war. Would that work?", *Meduza*, August 10, 2022, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/08/10/the-bid-to-cap-russian-oil-prices>.

44 "How Russia is surviving the tightening grip on its oil revenue", *The Indian Express*, February 8, 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/russia-survive-tightening-grip-oil-revenue-8430866/>.

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to add USD9.5 billion to its emergency reserve fund to be used as a stimulus package to protect its economy from the impacts of Western sanctions and its military operations in Ukraine.⁴⁵ Thus, Russia has generated more money from oil than it did before the invasion of Ukraine mainly due to higher oil prices.

Figure 4: Road to USD100 per barrel



Source: The Times of India

Knowing that ports and shipping lanes would go off-limits and its exports to face logistical delays, to lock its future revenues, Russia is luring non-participating countries with long-term and fixed price contracts at deep discounts. For instance, Russia has offered India a Ural grade crude oil at a discount of USD35/bbl, given the lower appetite for oil elsewhere.⁴⁶ In this

45 “Russia adds \$9.5 bln to emergency reserve fund”, *Reuters*, June 9, 2022, [https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/russia-adds-95-bln-emergency-reserve-fund-2022-06-09/#:~:text=June%20%20\(Reuters\)%20%2D%20The,and%20its%20actions%20in%20Ukraine](https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/russia-adds-95-bln-emergency-reserve-fund-2022-06-09/#:~:text=June%20%20(Reuters)%20%2D%20The,and%20its%20actions%20in%20Ukraine).

46 “Russia offers oil to India at \$35/bbl discount from pre-war price”, *Live Mint*, April 2, 2022, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/russia-offers-oil-to-india-at-35-bbl-discount-from-pre-war-price-11648704105136.html>.

regard Russia wanted India to take contracted volumes of 15 mb/d for 2022 itself.

However, to ramp up its oil war with Russia, the EU has imposed ban on Russian oil product exports with effect from February 5, 2023, just a couple of months after an oil price cap. The oil price caps set for discounted petroleum products is USD45/bbl and premium petroleum products is USD100/bbl.⁴⁷ So far, these cumulative sanctions by the EU have done little to significantly curb Russia's oil and gas production, as any loss of exports to the EU has almost been compensated by a ramping up of Russian oil exports to India, China and Turkey.⁴⁸

As a result, according to the IEA, Russia's net oil production in January 2023 decreased by a mere 160,000 bbl/day compared to pre-war levels, and Russia managed to ship 8.2 million barrels of oil to markets across the globe.⁴⁹

However, India would go back to its old sources of oil imports in the Middle East and Africa once shipping rates from Russia go up, shrinking discounts Russian crude further.

HOW WILL G7 PRE-MECHANISM WORK

In a joint statement in early September 2022, finance ministers from the Group of 7 said the "initial" price cap would be based on a range of 'technical inputs and factors', agreed upon by countries that join the agreement by consensus. The coalition would be headed by a rotating coordinator from among

47 Sam Meredith, "Europe is set to ramp up its oil war against Russia — and markets are bracing for more disruption", *CNBC*, February 3, 2023, <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/02/03/europe-is-set-to-ramp-up-its-oil-war-against-russia-with-products-ban.html>.

48 Elliot Smith, "Sanctions on Russian oil are having the 'intended effect' IEA says", *CNBC*, February 16, 2023, <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/02/16/sanctions-on-russian-oil-are-having-the-intended-effect-ia-says.html>.

49 Ibid.

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the countries.⁵⁰ According to The Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control, as and when more countries would join the coalition, the price cap would be reset, constituting the next phase of the agreement.⁵¹ According to this department, the cap would be a fixed price to facilitate frequent reviews, depending on the market volatility.⁵² This would continue till the time Russia stops its aggression in Ukraine. The G7 price cap mechanism, which is set at USD60/bbl currently, is on these lines, which allowed a transition period of 45 days for vessels carrying Russian crude loaded before December 5 and unloaded at the final port of destination by January 19, 2023.⁵³ It has been agreed to review the price cap in March 2023 and thereafter, periodically, to adapt to market conditions, with a transition period of 90 days after each of those reviews.⁵⁴

The stated goal of the price-mechanism continues to be to compel Russia to cease its aggression against Ukraine by targeting its oil industry in a manner that does not affect global oil supplies, while also maintaining Russia’s oil revenues at a moderate level to incentivize continued oil production.

The price-cap would limit the availability of shipping and insurance services that facilitates the worldwide transport of Russian oil and the same would be mandated to only those importing countries that observe the above price ceiling of USD60/bbl.

50 Alan Rappeport, “What Price Is Right? Why Capping Russian Oil Is Complicated”, *The New York Times*, September 16, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/16/business/russian-oil-price-cap.html>.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Olof Konig, et, al., op. cit.

54 CSIS. “Progress Report on EU Embargo and Russian Oil Price Cap”, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, January 10, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/progress-report-eu-embargo-and-russian-oil-price-cap>.

Urals is priced at a discount to the international Brent benchmark and the G7 wants to keep that spread wide, to keep down Russian oil revenue. The price of Russia's Urals oil blends fell to an average of \$57.49/bbl⁵⁵ between November 15 and December 14, which is below G7's oil price cap of \$60/bbl. In mid-December, Urals crude hit a new low for the year 2022, trading at around \$53/barrel and at a discount of over \$25/barrel to Brent, mainly due to rising freight costs for tankers carrying Russian oil, as several shipowners refused to handle Russian oil due to the price cap implemented on December 5, 2022.

Russia would be pushed out of more than 90 per cent of the global oil shipment insurance market as most of the ports do not allow tankers to dock unless they have full insurance coverage. This includes insurance from the UK-based International Group of P&I Clubs, which handles 95 per cent of the global tanker insurance market consisting mostly of UK, US, and European insurers.⁵⁶

Holding oil prices at a level closer to the cost of production and much below the current high market price would certainly impact Russia's finances while relieving inflationary pressure on several countries. However, the risk is that oil prices could shoot up very sharply as no other oil exporting countries would be able to fill this void as both Iran and Venezuela are yet to come out of their sanctions, particularly after China's coming out of tough COVID conditions.

55 "Russia's Urals oil averaged \$57.49/bbl in past month, below price cap", *Reuters*, December 16, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russias-urals-oil-averaged-5749bbl-past-month-below-price-cap-2022-12-16/>.

56 Tsvetana Paraskova, "Why The U.S. Is Desperate For A Russian Oil Price Cap", *Oil Price*, July 28, 2022, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/Why-The-US-Is-Desperate-For-A-Russian-Oil-Price-Cap.html>.

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In this regard, the IEA cautioned that the market would have to prepare itself for a loss of 2.4 mb/d. This would include 1.4 mb/d of oil and 1 mb/d of petroleum products off the market.⁵⁷ Moreover, the implementation of the price cap would need both India and China's consent to it, otherwise, the very purpose of containing Russia's aggression in Ukraine would be defeated.

CHALLENGES IN OIL PRICE CAP

India's acceptance of the oil price cap

One of the biggest challenges that G-7 countries would face is to convince both India and China and make them to accept the Russian oil price cap. This is particularly the case with India as has been noticed in the Security Council voting, wherein most of the time India has abstained from voting and only once it voted against Russia that too on procedural issue, without compromising its neutral stand at the council.⁵⁸ All the G-7 countries appreciate the historic and time-tested relationship between India and Russia, which goes beyond just defence ties, to include, political, security, energy, trade and economy, science and technology, and culture.⁵⁹

Given India's oil demand to increase in the future as well, it wants to have long-term arrangements and agreements with Russia to enhance its energy cooperation, including in the oil

57 Charles Kennedy, "IEA: Russian Crude Ban Will Take 2.4 Million Bpd Off The Market", *Oil Price*, September 14, 2022, <https://oilprice.com/Energy-General/IEA-Russian-Crude-Ban-Will-Take-24-Million-Bpd-Off-The-Market.html>.

58 Palki Sharma, "India votes against Russia at UN Security Council", *Gravitas, Wion*, August 26, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-xpvq0_SQs.

59 "India-Russia Relations", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, January 2022, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-Russia-Relation-2022.pdf>.

sector. India's oil imports from Russia increased by ten times as later met India's around 10 per cent of total imported oil consumption. Both countries are set to strengthen their energy ties further with Russian companies planning to invest in India's renewables⁶⁰ and coal sector⁶¹.

Further, despite the Western sanctions on Russia, both countries are also gearing up to enhance trade by reinforcing of International North-South Transport Corridor⁶² (INSTC) and paying Russian goods in Indian rupees⁶³, given the extremely volatile Rouble.

Therefore, it is highly unlikely that India would concede to the demands of G-7 countries to put an oil price cap on Russian crude additionally, as India is already contributing to this cap, priced at a discount to the international Brent benchmark, though not in the range planned by the group. The G7 wants only wants to keep this cap spread wide, to keep down Russian oil revenue.

India is rather concerned about oil supplies in the market, largely due to supply constraints emanating from OPEC's frequent oil production cuts, non-supply of Iranian and Venezuelan crude and overall upstream under-investments in

60 Sanjeev Choudhary, "Russia's rosatom to bet on Indian renewables markets", *The Economic Times*, September 14, 2022, https://m.economictimes.com/industry/energy/russias-rosatom-to-bet-on-indian-renewables-markets/amp_articleshow/94185138.cms.

61 Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "Russia's largest coal company in talks to set up India office", *The Economic Times*, September 11, 2022, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/indl-goods/svs/metals-mining/russias-largest-coal-company-in-talks-to-set-up-india-office/articleshow/94125409.cms>.

62 Angelo Mathai, "India ramps up Russian trade volumes via north-south corridor", *The Loadstar*, August 23, 2022, <https://theloadstar.com/india-ramps-up-russian-trade-volumes-via-north-south-corridor/>.

63 Manoj Kumar and Nidhi Verma. "India's trade with Russia in rupees to start soon - trade body", *Reuters*, September 14, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/us/indias-trade-with-russia-rupees-start-soon-trade-body-2022-09-14/>.

the oil and gas sector. Moreover, the U.S. has warned Europe that its shale producers cannot bail out them by ramping up production of oil and gas during winters. These factors have further pushed India towards heavily discounted Russian crude to secure its growing oil needs.

Can Iran and Venezuela fill the void?

Notably, when the Trump administration had asked India to cut down its heavily discounted crude imports to zero, India agreed to in return for costlier US crude oil to respect its relationship with the US. This time around with no surety of sanctions to be removed from Iran and Venezuela so soon, India has now looked around its old friend Russia to capitalise on the cheap crude on the offer.

In March, 2022, Iranian Ambassador to India Ali Chegeni offered to relaunch the rupee-rial trade mechanism to export oil and gas to India. The bilateral trade under this mechanism may help cross USD30 billion. However, the US sanctions resulted in a fall in India-Iran trade from USD17 billion in FY19 to less than USD2 billion in April-January in FY22.⁶⁴

However, the new nuclear deal with Iran seems to be stuck for several reasons: Washington has kept the deal on the backburner, particularly after mass protest in Iran after the death of a 22-year-old woman, followed by renewed sanctions by the US.⁶⁵ Iran on the other hand, blamed the US for this unrest. Moreover, multiple rounds of new sanctions were also

64 “After Russia, Iran offers oil to India, proposes revival of rupee-rial barter”, *ET Now*, March 19, 2022, <https://www.timesnownews.com/business-economy/economy/after-russia-iran-offers-oil-to-india-proposes-revival-of-rupee-rial-barter-article-90324533#:~:text=Iranian%20ambassador%20to%20India%20Ali,revive%20the%20rupee%2Drial%20trade>.

65 Maziar Motamedi, “Where does the Iran nuclear deal stand right now?”, *Al Jazeera*, February 20, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/20/what-exactly-happened-to-the-iran-nuclear-deal>.

imposed on Iran by the West for supplying drones to Russia for the war in Ukraine.⁶⁶ Besides, International Atomic Energy Agency said that they are “not in a position to assure that Iran’s nuclear program is exclusively peaceful”, as they didn’t find credible answers from Iran about the presence of nuclear material at three undeclared sites.⁶⁷

On the other hand, the case for removing sanctions from Venezuela is even more complicated. Vladimir Putin received strong support from Venezuela’s President Nicolas Maduro⁶⁸, who, while condemning destabilising actions of the US and NATO on the Ukraine issue, spoke out openly against a Western campaign of “lies and disinformation”.

During the period when Caracas was grappling with civil unrest and widespread corruption coupled with its economic collapse⁶⁹ resulting from a prolonged oil price slump, it was Russia⁷⁰ that came to the rescue of Venezuela, once the richest and most stable democracy⁷¹ in Latin America. Venezuela

66 Ibid.

67 “IAEA ‘cannot assure’ peaceful nature of Iran nuclear programme”, *Al Jazeera*, September 7, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/7/iaea-cannot-assure-peaceful-nature-of-iran-nuclear-programme>.

68 “Russia receives Venezuela’s ‘strong support’”, *France 24*, March 1, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220301-russia-receives-venezuela-s-strong-support>.

69 Dany Bahar and Meagan Dooley. “Venezuela refugee crisis to become the largest and most underfunded in modern history”, *Brookings*, December 9, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2019/12/09/venezuela-refugee-crisis-to-become-the-largest-and-most-underfunded-in-modern-history/>.

70 Mathew Smith, “Venezuela’s Oil Riches Are Quietly Falling Under Russian Control”, *Oil Price*, July 7, 2022, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Crude-Oil/Venezuelas-Oil-Riches-Are-Quietly-Falling-Under-Russian-Control.html>.

71 Jason Margolis, “Venezuela was once the richest, most stable, democracy in Latin America. What happened?”, *The World*, February 7, 2019, <https://theworld.org/stories/2019-02-07/venezuela-was-once-richest-most-stable-democracy-latin-america-what-happened>.

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has the largest oil reserves with 304 billion barrels of crude oil. It has the potential to significantly lift ailing petroleum production, provided an estimated investment of USD175 billion⁷² is made, to help Venezuela to restore its production to pre-crisis level.

Thus, these apprehensions surrounding Venezuela and the chances of removal of sanctions becoming remote, Venezuela would not contribute in any way towards recovery of the market any time soon.

Structural Flaw in oil price cap proposal

The most important question that needed to be asked before the implementation of the Russian oil price cap rule is whether it would be practically possible to implement it effectively and if all the importers of Russian crude will be made to unite and agree on the stated price level. Some of the structural flaws in the oil price cap are as under.

1. Russia may counter cap price with floor price: At the time when G-7 agreed to put an oil price cap on Russian crude, they assumed that Russia will not retaliate, because the price that would be set will be as close to Russia's marginal cost of production of USD44/bbl, just to ensure that it is not profiteering. Russia in that way would be incentivised to keep producing oil, which otherwise would be a costly affair if it shut-in of production at home, while also losing other strategic markets elsewhere.

However, for the year 2022, Russian Finance Ministry had proposed a crude oil price of USD60/bbl.⁷³ Keeping the

72 Mathew Smith, op. cit.

73 "Russia considers new budget rule, investment options, sources say", *Reuters*, July 19, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russia-introduce-new-budget-rule-60-per-barrel-oil-vedomosti-2022-07-19/>.

price cap at or around the same price levels as estimated by G-7 countries is not acceptable to Russia, prompting them to halt their oil supplies. Russia has already announced that they would not resume gas supplies from Nord Stream pipeline until sanctions are removed completely, forging troubled winters for EU consumers.⁷⁴

Russia has already banned oil supplies to countries and companies which have complied with the oil price cap.⁷⁵ In its response to the cap, Kremlin could set a floor price for its oil exports, triggering the oil price to move up sharply. Consequently, the buyer's cartel⁷⁶ would be prompted to knock on doors for Russian oil supplies. According to J.P. Morgan, if Russia slashes oil production by 5 mb/d to retaliate against the oil price cap, Brent prices could soar to a stratospheric \$380/bbl in the most extreme scenario.⁷⁷ Russia has already announced a cut of 500,000 barrels per day from March 2023 onwards, prompting Brent oil to shoot up immediately by 2.5 per cent at USD86.6 bbl/d.⁷⁸

74 Tsvetana Paraskova, "Russia Won't Restart Nord Stream Pipeline Until Sanctions Are Lifted", *Oil Price*, September 5, 2022, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/Russia-Wont-Restart-Nord-Stream-Pipeline-Until-Sanctions-Are-Lifted.html>.

75 Alexander Marrow and Vladimir Soldatkin. "Putin bans Russian oil exports to countries that implement price cap", *Reuters*, December 28, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/putin-bans-russian-oil-exports-countries-that-imposed-price-cap-decree-2022-12-27/>.

76 Sergey Vakulenko, "How Russia Could Thwart an Oil Price Cap", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 5, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/87437>.

77 Joe Carroll, "J P Morgan Sees 'Stratospheric' \$380 Oil on Worst-Case Russian Cut", *Bloomberg*, July 2, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-07-01/jpmorgan-sees-stratospheric-380-oil-on-worst-case-russian-cut#xj4y7vzkg?leadSource=verify%20wall>.

78 Vladimir Soldatkin and Olesya Astakhova. "Russia to cut oil output by 500,000 bpd in March", *Reuters*, February 10, 2023, <https://www.>

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2. Insurance: The G-7 has planned to waive the Russian oil import ban on insurance and all services if the transported Russian oil is bought at or below a cap price. Shipowners will be reluctant to lift Russian uninsured cargoes, which could even be barred from some ports.⁷⁹ However, the insurance scenario might end up punishing insurers instead of Russia. In case of shipping limitations, Russia, China and India will have to use domestically owned or controlled tonnage to move the crude.⁸⁰ In this regard, it may be noted that India has succeeded in creating a INR500 crores insurance pool, national reinsurer GIC Re, to underwrite imports to India, insuring over 25 voyages,⁸¹ which though may not be sufficient, would prompt India to explore new measures to deal with rising cost of insurance.
3. Monitoring and compliance of price cap: Even if the G-7 succeed in going ahead with their plan of capping Russian crude oil prices by the end of this year, whether they would equally be successful in

reuters.com/business/energy/russia-cut-oil-output-by-500000-bpd-march-2023-02-10/.

79 Ben Cahill, “European Union Imposes Partial Ban on Russian Oil”, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, June 8, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/european-union-imposes-partial-ban-russian-oil#:~:text=A1%3A%20On%20June%203%2C%20the,as%20of%20February%205%2C%202023>.

80 Sam Chambers, “The tanker fallout from impending Russian insurance ban”, *Splash247*, June 3, 2022, https://splash247.com/the-tanker-fallout-from-impending-russian-insurance-ban/?utm_source=d1vr.it&utm_medium=twitter.

81 Subhomoy Bhattacharjee, “Rs 500 cr insurance pool helps India withstand G7 cap on Russian oil”, *Business Standard*, September 11, 2022, https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/rs-500-cr-insurance-pool-helps-india-withstand-g7-cap-on-russian-oil-122091100400_1.html.

monitoring compliance of this proposal seems doubtful. Monitoring and compliance mechanisms thus would be taken care of by the private sector, which may force them to run through yet another gauntlet of price inspectors checking every transaction for compliance, which would create a riot of illegal activity and lawsuits while deterring legitimate investment.⁸²

Moreover, given the cap rate to change hourly, setting the cap at a discounted rate would introduce additional complexity and compliance burdens.⁸³ Besides, there would be a rise in illicit tanker trades, ship-to-ship transfer, and crude blending, just like it happened after sanctions on Iranian and Venezuelan oil to evade sanctions.⁸⁴ Dark fleets to supply Russian crude oil are also on the rise.⁸⁵

4. Tanker disruptions: Crude tankers are specially designed to transport large amounts of crude oil from extraction facilities to refineries. The company that owns the crude tanker leases the ship to oil marketers, refiners, and others on a term that varies depending on the length of the lease, the amount of oil to be

82 Daniel P. Ahn, “Price Cap on Russian Oil Exports Would be Futile; West Should Opt for Tariff Instead”, *Russia Matters*, July 14, 2022, <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/price-cap-russian-oil-exports-would-be-futile-west-should-opt-tariff-instead>.

83 Allen Rappoport, “What Price Is Right? Why Capping Russian Oil Is Complicated”, *The New York Times*, September 16, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/16/business/russian-oil-price-cap.html>.

84 Ben Cahill, “Big Challenges for Russian Oil Price Cap”, *CSIS*, September 9, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/big-challenges-russian-oil-price-cap>.

85 Jon Letzing, “What are ‘shadow fleets’ and how do they hinder efforts to help Ukraine?”, *World Economic Forum*, February 15, 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/02/shadow-fleet-hurting-efforts-to-defund-the-invasion-of-ukraine/>.

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transported, and the route of transport.⁸⁶ This contract also specifies who will bear operational expenses such as fuel costs, crew payments, and insurance.

Over-supply of crude oil production leads to a decline in oil supplies and an increase in demand of oil-consuming nations. This also allows them to stockpile millions of barrels of oil at low prices. However, demand for tankers has been on the rise, particularly that of ice-class tankers, ever since Europe slapped an oil embargo on Russian crude effective from December 5, 2022. Supplies through these tankers would remain tight due to the limited number of tankers that have been built over the last few years. This is going to push the cost of transporting crude and the resultant fuel price further up, eventually making the cap on Russian oil imports unsustainable.

5. Inflation factor: One of the basic premises on which Russian crude oil prices are set to be capped was that it would ease inflation. According to U.S. Treasury Secretary, Janet Yellen, given US consumer inflation soared to a 40-year high of 9.1 per cent, a cap on Russian oil prices will go a long way in bringing this inflation down.⁸⁷ While it is true that oil is a feedstock and a source of energy that is used in the transportation of many things, the impact of oil price rise would be felt virtually on all the goods and services we use. Nevertheless, with the higher oil prices at present, the resultant inflation is set to intensify post implementation

86 Ibid.

87 Su-Lin Tan, “Yellen says price cap on Russian oil is ‘one of our most powerful tools’ to address inflation”, *CNBC*, July 14, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/07/14/yellen-says-price-cap-on-russian-oil-can-help-address-inflation.html>.

of the oil price cap by the G-7, along with an oil embargo by the EU. It is most certain that with enough cash reserves in hand, Russia could put a floor price for its crude exports to retaliate, skyrocketing the oil prices. The warning which is already been given by various agencies is as follows.

According to the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security, the Russian oil price cap could push the oil prices to USD140/bbl.⁸⁸ The Chief Analyst, Commodities, SEB, Bjarne Schieldrop⁸⁹ was of the view that “while “neat on paper”, the proposition “sounds like a recipe for disaster right now”. Goldman Sachs stated that, given Moscow’s potential to slash exports, can push oil prices to soar at USD125/bbl in 2023. All these estimates suggest that inflations are set to further increase next year. Bank of America has projected the price to go past USD130/bbl⁹⁰, despite OPEC’s increase in its oil production and recessionary fears. These estimates are other than the extreme one where J.P. Morgan forecasts oil prices to reach up to \$380/bbl.

88 Abigail Ng, “Price cap on Russian oil is a ‘ridiculous idea’ and could push oil to \$140, says energy research group”, *CNBC*, July 18, 2022, <https://www.cNBC.com/2022/07/19/price-cap-on-russian-oil-could-push-oil-to-140-think-tank-iags.html>.

89 Bjarne Schieldrop, “A price cap on Russian oil sounds like a recipe for disaster”, *SEB Group*, June 29, 2022, <https://research.sebgroup.com/macro-ficc/reports/28798>.

90 Leonhard Foeger, “A price cap on Russian oil could push crude past \$130 even if OPEC+ increases production, Bank of America says”, *Business Insider*, August 4, 2022, <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/commodities/russian-oil-price-cap-europe-energy-crisis-ukraine-west-opec-2022-8>.

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Thus, the recent increase in Russian crude oil import by India is a part of India's inflation management, as noted by Indian Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman.⁹¹

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA AND ITS ENERGY TIES WITH RUSSIA

India being the world's third-largest energy consumer and emitter of carbon dioxide (CO₂) irrespective of low per capita energy consumption and CO₂ emissions, has become a major force in global energy arena. India, which is heavily reliant on fossil fuels to meet its every growing energy need, the extraction and burning of the same have significantly contributed to CO₂ and other GHG emissions, thereby has also become a driving force for climate change. To address these challenges India has pledged to Net Zero Emissions by 2070.

Still, given India's development priorities resulting from strong economic growth and rising population and urbanisation, its thirst for oil is not going to reduce soon. This is despite of the efforts being made for shifting towards cleaner fuels like green hydrogen, methanol blending, electric vehicle pushed through its new battery technologies and its shift toward natural gas. Earlier, India had set a target of curbing oil imports by 10 per cent by 2022, but this has already been missed. Rather, India's crude oil dependency has risen further from over 85 per cent in FY22.⁹² Consequently, India continues to struggle to cope with rising crude oil prices and the necessary adjustments that

91 "Importing Russian oil part of inflation management: Nirmala Sitharaman", *Live Mint*, September 8, 2022, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/importing-russian-oil-part-of-inflation-management-nirmala-sitharaman-11662620998518.html>.

92 "PPAC's Snapshot of India's Oil & Gas data", Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India, August 2022, p. 6. https://ppac.gov.in/uploads/rep_studies/1670479880_202209160807210018941SnapshotofIndiasOilandGasdataAug2022upload.pdf.

its refiners must make to minimize the impact of volatile oil prices on its economy.

However, the ongoing tussle between Russia and Ukraine has given an opportunity to India to accept the offer of discounted crude oil, which coupled with a windfall tax on domestic crude has helped India save INR35,000 crores so far.⁹³

The recent announcement by OPEC⁹⁴ to cut production by 100,000 bpd in October was felt immediately on crude oil prices, wherein Brent crude went up by three dollars, which crossed the USD96/bbl mark from around USD93/bbl earlier. This production cut is not even equal to one per cent of the global oil demand but even a minor rise in the oil price can shake up the balance sheets of oil importing countries. For instance, an increase in oil prices by USD1/bbl results in India paying about USD1 billion more at the current price levels. This impact is mostly felt by Indian citizens despite efforts put on by India's oil marketing companies (OMCs), namely, Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited, and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited, which most of the time had held the retail fuel prices of both petrol and diesel without revising its rates to help the government manage inflation.

These OPEC meetings are held every month and there would likely be more supply cuts in the future as well in case crude oil prices fall further, as has been the case when oil prices fell below USD80/bbl. It would hence be difficult for

93 Sanjay Dutta, "Discounted Russia crude gives India Rs 35,000 crore gain", *The Times of India*, September 19, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/discounted-russia-crude-gives-india-rs-35000-crore-gain/articleshow/94288223.cms>.

94 "32nd OPEC and non-OPEC Ministerial Meeting", Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, September 5, 2022, https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/press_room/7002.htm.

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the government to keep the oil prices always frozen. The recent freezes by the three OMCs have resulted in their combined net loss of INR18,480 crores in the June quarter.⁹⁵

Thus, India's growing oil import dependency, falling Indian currency, and lack of enough supplies into the oil market, mainly due to the non-removal of sanctions from Iran and Venezuela coupled with the oil embargo and likely secondary sanctions on Russia to stop the war, has prompted India to accelerate its Russian oil imports to an unprecedented level. In this regard, Russia rose to become India's second-biggest oil supplier (Figure 5) and India too became the second major oil buyer after China.

Figure 5: Top 5 oil suppliers to India



Source: The Times of India

95 "Oil prices at 7-month low, but no change in petrol, diesel prices in India", *The Hindu*, September 11, 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/oil-prices-at-seven-month-low-but-no-change-in-petrol-diesel-prices-in-india/article65878645.ece>.

Moreover, the Russia-Ukraine war has changed the hydrocarbon geopolitics, which has a direct bearing on energy transition progress going across the world at different levels. For instance, to prepare for an oil embargo and shortage of natural gas in winters, European nations are reactivating coal-fired power plants, keeping their climate actions on the back burner, and planning to backtrack on crucial climate pledges and that too at the cost of energy crisis.⁹⁶

This suggests that advanced economies in the EU are still highly dependent on dirty fossil fuels, such as coal, and hence their energy system is so non-resilient that they find it extremely difficult to survive their embargo on Russian oil and gas. Now the questions are being raised as to how countries like Germany, which was seen as the global pioneer in renewable energy and environmental technologies are hugely dependent on Russian gas.

Also, India, which imported a meager percentage of oil from Russia before the war has been criticized for not cutting down its oil imports from this country and not accepting to join the club of oil price cap of Russian crude. Rather, India has raised its oil imports by double figure to over 10 per cent. On India's rising oil imports, Foreign Minister S Jaishankar⁹⁷ has stated that,

“It is a situation today where every country will try to get the best deal possible for its citizens, to try to

96 “The war in Ukraine hasn’t left Europe freezing in the dark, but it has caused energy crisis in unexpected places.” *ET Energyworld*, February 20, 2023, <https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/oil-and-gas/the-war-in-ukraine-hasnt-left-europe-freezing-in-the-dark-but-it-has-caused-energy-crises-in-unexpected-places/98081305>.

97 Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, “Govt has moral duty to give best deals to citizens: Jaishankar on Russian oil”, *The Economic Times*, August 18, 2022, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/govt-has-moral-duty-to-give-best-deal-to-citizens-jaishankar-on-russian-oil/articleshow/93625925.cms>.

The Russian oil price cap and its implications for India

cushion the impact of high energy prices. And that is exactly what we are doing... I have a country that has a per capita income of \$2,000. These are not people who can afford higher energy prices..... it was the government's "obligation" and "moral duty" to ensure that the people in India get the "best deal"

Till the time of the war, India-Russia oil and gas trade had remained significantly lower mainly due to rising costs resulting from long transportation distances and cargo delivery times. However, with the development of the INSTC, the Chennai-Vladivostok Maritime Corridor, and the Northern Sea Route, connectivity is set to play an important role in taking energy ties to a next level. India-Russia initiatives in the oil and gas sectors include at least \$32 billion in joint investments⁹⁸, which extends further to other energy areas such as coal, nuclear power, and natural gas investments.

ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL), the overseas subsidiary of India's state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation has three ongoing projects in Russia, namely, Sakhalin-I oil and gas fields off Russia's eastern coast, as well as full ownership of an oil exploration firm in the Tomsk region. India is also eyeing a major investment in one of Russia's largest oil projects, Vostok in Siberia, as well as the Arctic Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)-2 project.

In the recently concluded Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, Russian energy minister Nikolay Shulginov said that "looking at prospects for energy cooperation in a wider energy value chain, almost all the major Russian energy companies like Rosneft, Gazprom Neft, and Novatek were

98 "India-Russia Relations and Implications for U.S. Interests", Congressional Research Service, August 24, 2022, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R47221.pdf>.

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keen on developing new projects with Indian oil and gas companies.” This cooperation also includes Russia growing interest in the renewable and coal sector in India, as above-mentioned.

RIISING TENSIONS

Knowing that India and China are still not committed to the Russian oil price cap proposal and to make this proposal uniform and hence more effective, Democratic and Republican senators proposed the Biden administration to use secondary sanctions on international banks and financial institutions involved in trade finance, insurance, reinsurance and brokerage of Russia oil and petroleum products sold at prices exceeding the cap.⁹⁹ So far Biden administration is reluctant to go ahead with the secondary sanctions to avoid complications in the relationship with India, which is an important partner in the Indo-Pacific. Besides, this proposition could easily backfire in an existing environment of high inflation, as oil prices could shoot up to an unprecedented level.

However, couple of interesting development regarding a referendum by Russia held between September 23-27, 2022, in four Ukrainian regions and partial mobilization of troops by the introduction of additional 300,000 reservists to the Russian forces has added woes to the geopolitical crisis in hand. For instance, partial mobilization¹⁰⁰, which is the first since the Second World War, has raised the temperate in the region. Kremlin has blamed NATO’s incessant support to Ukraine in its war against Russia for troop mobilization.

99 Patricia Zengerle, “U.S. senators want secondary sanctions on Russian oil”, *Reuters*, September 20, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-senators-want-secondary-sanctions-russian-oil-2022-09-20/>.

100 Clara Weiss, “Russian offensive underway in Ukraine as war destabilizes the entire region”, *WSWS*, February 17, 2023, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2023/02/17/uyws-f17.html>.

CONCLUSION

To control Russia's aggression and to prompt it to stop the war with the West is working in tandem to find out the most effective way to hit Russia's oil revenue hard. But in doing so they are also stuck between a rock and a hard place as they now must confront the hard landing conditions, emanating largely from a slowdown in Europe and China due to their long-term covid restrictions in addition to the inflationary risks, that is set to grow further from here on. Both increases in fuel and food prices had hit vulnerable populations in low-income countries the hardest than advanced economies. According to the World Economic Outlook April 2022, the inflation projection rates for 2022 were 5.7 per cent in advanced economies compared to 8.7 per cent in emerging markets and developing economies.¹⁰¹

With the oil price cap on Russian crude and its oil embargo have a negative reaction from Russia by blocking their oil supplies to those who are a part of the buyers' cartel formed by G-7 countries, it has contributed towards inflation. Now with Russian oil exports have started to come down because of the rising cost of shipping and insurance in the absence of better alternatives in place, supply constraints would be felt sooner than later.

As far as India's position towards G-7's oil price cap cartel, India would do well to ignore the proposal mainly to sustain its time-tested partnership with Russia rather than looking for a short-term monetary benefit attributed largely to importing heavily discounted crudes from Russia. This becomes even

101 "World Economic Outlook Update, July 2022: Gloomy and More Uncertain", *World Economic Outlook 2022*", July 26, 2022, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO#:~:text=War%2Dinduced%20commodity%20price%20increases,higher%20than%20projected%20last%20January>.

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more important at a time when both Iran and Venezuela are under sanctions, and India has the option to go back to its old suppliers from the Middle East and even Canada to resume importing oil which seemingly has become more lucrative to Russian oil. India is heavily dependent on imported oil and needs to be mindful of tremendous pressure on its retail fuel prices at home in the event of a spurt in global crude oil prices. At best India would still be better off compensating its shortfall of discounted Russian crude oil imports with its traditional buyers to an extent, rather than being a part of a Western strategy of cornering Russia and part away with its long-standing relationship with Russia.

Communist Insurgencies and the 'Cult of the Leader'

Uddipan Mukherjee*

In the pages of history, the city of Melbourne could hardly be associated with any major revolution. Not, at least, till the first week of January 2023. Nevertheless, when I discovered that our cab driver Allen (name changed for privacy) was from Vietnam, I could not help myself asking him his views about Communism and the 'revolution' that shook his country for almost two decades. Allen was not at all coy about discussing the issues. His family had left Vietnam just after the 'Fall of Saigon' in April 1975, when the Communist troops of then North Vietnam overran the capital of then South Vietnam. Thereafter, his family settled in Australia and Allen was brought up in a land separated from his roots. He was non-committal on Communism as an ideology, but was very vocal

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about the intent of the Communist leaders who ruled Vietnam after the ‘revolution’.

‘After all, human nature prevails’, sighed Allen, ‘It is perhaps normal for human beings to exert, dominate, and of course go corrupt with the assumption of power’ With a lot of enthusiasm, I referred to Ho Chi Minh and General Vo Nguyen Giap and the historic battle of Dien Bien Phu in which the Vietnamese had defeated the French in 1954, but Allen seemed to be less interested. His basic complaint was against the ways and means adopted by the Communist leadership after the merger of North and South Vietnam. The conversation had to end rather abruptly, as we reached our destination. Nonetheless, my initial surprise over this interaction with a Vietnamese ended on a rather contemplative note.

FROM A COMMUNIST PENTAGON: VIETNAM-CAMBODIA-PERU-NEPAL-PHILIPPINES

It was 1924. Ho Chi Minh, after graduating from Moscow, moved to Canton (Guangzhou) in south China – the place being a major centre of Chinese Communist revolution, writes Julia Lovell.¹ China later pumped in about USD 20 billion in aid to North Vietnam and, among other things, provided training to the Vietnamese communist cadres.² In fact, whenever Ho visited China after 1949, he regularly received red-carpet treatment, while Zhu De of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army [PLA] even accompanied Ho to watch films together.³

Vo Nguyen Giap, the master craftsman of military strategy for the Vietnamese Communist insurgency, perused the

1 Julia Lovell, *Maoism : A Global History*, Bodley Head, London, 2019, p. 228.

2 Ibid, p. 227.

3 Ibid, p. 229.

writings and speeches of Mao Zedong in the late 1930s.⁴ It is quite logical to infer that Giap's command over the ground military tactics was influenced by his studies of the Chinese protracted war commanded by Mao Zedong, Zhu De, Chou En Lai and others. As Lovell puts it, further, "most of the leadership of the Vietnamese Communist insurgency, were plagiaristic disciples of Mao."⁵ Interestingly, Giap asserted, to the contrary: "We fought our wars in a Vietnamese way. My only influences were the great strategists of Vietnamese history."⁶

As if to bolster what Allen told me in Melbourne, Bui Tin – a Vietnamese Army veteran, defected to France in 1990, being disillusioned by the corruption and authoritarianism of the Vietnamese Communist government.⁷ Tin later wrote: "Maoism after 1951 began to stultify our consciences and has caused lasting harm right up till now... Repression was mistaken for enlightenment and progress."⁸ He even took a dig at Giap: "...the reputations of generals are built on the bodies of 10,000 men."⁹

This was quite interesting indeed. A pantheon of leaders supremely attracted to Mao Zedong, emulating him in every possible way, finally giving rise to a government that underscored corruption. A people's war culminating in an anti-people's government. Was this outcome desired even in the wildest possible dreams of the 'revolutionaries'?

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Robert Templer, "General Vo Nguyen Giap obituary", *The Guardian*, October 4, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/04/general-vo-nguyen-giap>.

7 Julia Lovell, op. cit., p. 230.

8 Ibid.

9 Robert Templer, op. cit.

Nonetheless, as the so-called Vietnamese ‘revolution’ saw light of the day with the Fall of Saigon, the ‘Father’ of the ‘revolution’, Mao Zedong gradually fell into the abyss of ill health. By April 1976, notes Lovell, “Mao was little more than a vegetable”¹⁰ during his meeting with then Prime Minister of New Zealand, Robert Muldoon. Mao was lifted from his armchair to shake hands with him, but he ‘slumped back in’ the chair in a state of apparent collapse, Muldoon recalled.¹¹

This was perhaps a full circle – a revolution – for Mao Zedong. Though revolution per se implies a full circle, from the perspective of social sciences, it has a different connotation. It simply cannot be a term used in natural sciences, indicating a complete 360-degree movement, coming back to the point of origin. Enzo Traverso, Professor at Cornell University, writes that “revolution is a rush towards progress.”¹² He further affirms that, since the French Revolution, the term ‘revolution’ had become “a projection of society into the future, an extraordinary acceleration of history.”¹³ However, a former Nazi, Reinhart Koselleck defines revolution as a socialist utopia, which was temporalised and projected into the future, and hence asserts that revolution is an “unconscious secularization of eschatological expectations.”¹⁴

All said, before Mao Zedong was overpowered by the vagaries of health, his last-ditch effort bore some venomous fruits, and this was in Cambodia, spearheaded by two despots: Pol Pot and Ieng Sary – the latter being the chief of foreign affairs whereas the former was the secretary-general of the

10 Julia Lovell, op. cit., p. 239.

11 Ibid.

12 Enzo Traverso, *Revolution: An Intellectual History*, Verso, London, 2021, p. 46.

13 Ibid, p 47.

14 Ibid.

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Communist Party of Kampuchea [CPK] or, more infamously, the Khmer Rouge. The one-hour rendezvous of these two individuals with Mao Zedong on June 21, 1975, provided them with the required fillip to launch the gory plunge into a 'dark Communism' – thoughtless and grotesquely interpreted – a Communist end game in which people were shifted *en masse* from cities and urban areas to farmlands or, more aptly, concentration camps. Doctors, engineers, professors – all were forced to till the land, the much sought-after 'practice' of Communism in the template of Marxian praxis. An estimated 20,000 people died of snap executions, hunger and disease in the evacuation of Phnom Penh alone.¹⁵

One photograph shows Mao, Pol Pot and Ieng Sary dressed in Mao-esque suits. Sary is seen holding Mao's right wrist with both hands, while Pol Pot appears out of focus, standing a few steps back. An extract of the conversation runs thus:¹⁶

Pol Pot: "We are extremely happy to be able to meet the great leader Chairman Mao today!"

Mao Zedong: "We approve of you! Many of your experiences are better than ours. China does not have the right to criticize you...You are fundamentally correct..."

As if to vehemently negate this specific conversation between Mao and Pol Pot, another communist 'revolutionary' who radiated his own cult, however spatially positioned about 13,000 km away from Beijing, Fidel Castro (duly imagined with his trademark cigar) declares:¹⁷

15 Julia Lovell, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 240-241.

17 Fidel Castro, *On Imperialist Globalization: Two Speeches*, Left Word Books, New Delhi, 1999, p. 5.

‘So, then I asked him (a common citizen of Cuba):
Would you agree with socialism?’

Answer: ‘Socialism? No, no, no, not with socialism.’
Let alone communism....

Castro however presents his case:¹⁸ “There was so much prejudice that this (communism) was an even more scaring word.” Then he goes on to say that revolutionary legislation was what contributed the most to making a socialist consciousness in our people. Notwithstanding his staunch belief in communism and his unabashed reveling in the cult of the leader, Castro at least agrees that a revolution can only be born from culture and ideas. No people become revolutionary by force. And, as if to explicitly counter the popular communist notion of relegating human beings to the backburner in the motion of history, Castro asserts: “we, the revolutionaries, have discovered an even more powerful weapon: man thinks and feels.”¹⁹

Manoj Thapa opines²⁰ that Sendero Luminoso (SL) or the Shining Path in 1980s’ Peru and the Maoist insurgency in Nepal launched by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) [CPN(M)] from 1996 to 2006, did impact their respective states and societies. Nonetheless, Thapa continues to assert that “despite similarities in the social, economic, and political grievances, the two insurgencies had dramatically different trajectories and outcomes.”²¹ One reason, according to Thapa, was that, perhaps, the SL leadership could not exploit the political opportunities in Peru. As a natural fallout, the moment

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid, p. 9.

20 Manoj Thapa, “A rationale for the outcomes of insurgencies: A comparison case study between insurgencies in Peru and Nepal”, *Naval Postgraduate School*, California, December, 2014, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA620771.pdf>.

21 Ibid.

when SL's charismatic professorial leader Dr. Abimael Guzman was incarcerated by the security forces, the insurgency disintegrated.

However, in Nepal, the CPN(M) leadership under Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka *Prachanda* (the fierce), adopted pragmatic approaches and exploited political opportunities.²² However, Thapa incorrectly discounts the fact that in Nepal, Prachanda *et al* by eventually treading the path of electoral politics, shelled out an open compromise *vis-à-vis* armed insurgency. Thapa's thesis argues that the Peruvian insurgency developed around a cult of personality, and was dogmatic, whereas the Nepalese communists were far more pragmatic than their Peruvian counterparts, though the former were, at one point of time, inspired by the latter, to take up arms.

This is, of course, one way of looking at things. However, Ina Zharkevich, with her fieldwork in Nepal, presents an ethnographic description of the 'revolution'. She mentions²³ that several whole-timers of the Nepalese communist party later regretted joining the insurgency. They were much aggrieved by the treatment meted out to them by the party leadership. They openly held Prachanda culpable for their non-inclusion in the Nepalese Army after they had laid down their arms.²⁴ Besides, they complained about the lack of financial support, which was, on the contrary, being granted to the Maoist fighters stationed in the cantonments. It was Prachanda, according to them, who had asked them not to join the cantonments and be in the 'open'. During the 'revolution', Prachanda proposed a tactical approach – a fusion of Mao's rural insurrection and a simultaneous urban insurgency – a course popularised as

22 Ibid.

23 Ina Zharkevich, *Maoist People's War and the Revolution of Everyday Life in Nepal*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2019, p. 2.

24 Ibid, pp. 2-5.

the ‘Prachanda Path’.²⁵ The ‘path’ included joining electoral politics or compromise as one of the options. Baburam Bhattarai correctly described the ‘Prachanda Path’ as a school of thought that was more than a set of tactics, but less than an ideology,²⁶ with the ‘cult of the leader’ being evident in the programmes, tactics and policies that the Nepalese insurgents followed!

There is always a high likelihood of people getting attracted, or more correctly accreted, towards an imagined character and movement. However, Joel S. Migdal²⁷ has pointed out that communists gained followers among peasantries not because of the inherent attractiveness of communist thought, but because communist parties were the most effective groups in undertaking the task of organising peasants for land reforms and protecting traditional village communities from depredations of the state or landlords. Susan Eckstein,²⁸ on the other hand, has argued that in Latin America, when states with similar levels of economic development and forms of economic organization are compared, states that experienced revolutions have generally given rise to a more equitable allocation of land. Cuba in particular has made greater strides in health care and education, than the states that did not undergo communist revolutions. At least insofar as health care is concerned, Fidel Castro endorses²⁹ Eckstein’s argument,

25 K. Hachhethu, “The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist): Transformation from an Insurgency Group to a Competitive Political Party”, *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*, 2008-2009, 33-34, pp. 39-71.

26 International Crisis Group, “Nepal’s Maoists: their Aims, Structure and Strategy”, 2005, <https://icg-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/104-nepal-s-maoists-their-aims-structure-and-strategy.pdf>.

27 Cited in Jack A. Goldstone, “The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Volume 8, 1982, pp. 187-207.

28 Ibid.

29 Fidel Castro, op. cit., p. 11.

declaring: "26,000 Cuban doctors have taken part in them (international missions)." However, Lewis Beck³⁰ blunts the hunky-dory Cuban post-revolution growth story, arguing that the Cuban Revolution of 1959 gave rise to slower long-term economic growth than was evident under the previous regime.

In several Latin American countries such as Peru, Brazil, Colombia, Bolivia and Paraguay, there was a strong attraction to the Chinese Revolution of 1949.³¹ One Mexican labour activist, Julia Lovell asserts, was swept away by Chinese hospitality, when hundreds of Chinese (including schoolchildren), "greeted him at a railway station in a snowstorm."³² On the other hand, some Latin American visitors fell for Mao himself, writes Lovell. They were enthralled by his high and shining forehead, by a man so great and at the same time so modest, so sure of the victory of the people over their oppressors.³³ Himself hypnotized by Mao and his thoughts and actions, Dr. Abimael Guzman of the Shining Path would justify his personality cult by likening himself to the bass solo in the final movement of Beethoven's choral symphony.³⁴ And if this was not enough, then the following piece of information surely validates the cult of the leader thesis: "Intolerant of dissent, Guzman was a fanatic, who had the power to fanaticize others".³⁵ It is quite interesting to note that though Marxism (Communism) focuses, in theory, far less on leadership, in practice however, insurgencies based on Marxist thought have relied much more on the leader.

The Nepalese Maoist insurgency is to date the best example of the transformation reflected in two of Mao's statements,

30 Cited in Jack A. Goldstone, *op. cit.*

31 Julia Lovell, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

32 *Ibid.*

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*, p. 314.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 317.

separated by a decade. In his 1927 world famous slogan, Mao proclaimed “political power comes out of the barrel of a gun”. In 1938, however, he declared: “The party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the party.” Similarly, the Nepali Maoists began with a bang of the gun and transformed into a democratic political party at the end of the ten-year long insurgency – jumping into electoral politics – a complete full circle, a ‘revolution’ indeed. Here too, the imagined attraction towards the leader is evident in what Khagendra Sangroula (who never met Mao nor visited China) pronounces³⁶: “I had a hundred Red Books in my bag... I like Mao, China and the Chinese revolution...”

On the eve of China’s Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution [GPCR], alongside China’s foreign aid, Chinese films promoting socialism influenced the future Nepali Maoists.³⁷ Interestingly, the first documented armed communist rebellion in Nepal (influenced, aided and abetted by India’s ‘Naxalites’ or Maoists) took place in May 1971 at Jhapa, a place located in Nepal just across Naxalbari on the Indian side (where India’s armed rebellion on Maoist lines originated).³⁸ The radical communists of Nepal were inspired by the Naxalite movement in India and further influenced by the Chinese GPCR. It is needless to drive home the point that the Indian Naxalites, too, had accepted ‘Mao as their chairman’. However, gradually, the Nepalese Maoists were greatly energized by Guzman’s Shining Path.³⁹ By October, 1989, Prachanda was at the forefront of

36 Julia Lovell, op. cit., pp 390-392.

37 Aditya Adhikari, *The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Story of Nepal’s Maoist Revolution*, New Delhi, Aleph Book Company, 2014, p. 1.

38 Lawoti, Mahendra, “Evolution and growth of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal”, in Mahendra Lawoti and Anup K. Pahari, ed., *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal*, Routledge, Special Indian Edition, 2015, pp. 5-7.

39 Aditya Adhikari, op. cit., p. 7.

leadership.⁴⁰ Finally in 1995, Prachanda came up with the CPN(M) and decided to begin an armed insurgency.⁴¹

A revolutionary is not a terrorist⁴² is what Ninotchka Rosca asserts in connection with the octogenarian Jose Maria Sison, who continued to hold the mantle of leadership of the Filipino communist insurgency⁴³ till his death in December 2022. Rosca believes that Sison “taught his people to ask questions and gave them explanations as to why we are the way we are, who’s responsible for our state of affairs.”⁴⁴ Born on February 8, 1939, ironically in a clan of landlords, Sison believed in the praxis:⁴⁵ “as you say life should be lived, so should your own life be lived.” Sison lived in exile in the Netherlands, where he applied for political asylum in 1988, and till his death. Like other cult leaders of contemporary Communist insurgencies across the globe, Sison was glad to meet “Comrade Mao and have a photograph taken with him.”⁴⁶ Sison admitted⁴⁷ that he and his followers were “inspired by the revolutionary teachings of Mao Zedong... From among the teachings of Mao, we have learned the principle of self-reliance in carrying the Philippine revolution forward.” However, even Sison’s cult was challenged from within the party and its military wing, which culminated in plans to assassinate him.⁴⁸

40 Ibid, pp. 7-8.

41 Lawoti, op. cit., p. 7.

42 Ninotchka Rosca, *Jose Maria Sison: At Home in the World - Portrait of a Revolutionary*, Open Hand Publishing, North Carolina, 2004, p. 1.

43 International Crisis Group, “The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines: Tactics and Talks”, February 14, 2011, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4d5a310e2.pdf>.

44 Ninotchka Rosca, op. cit., p. 4.

45 Ibid, p. 19.

46 Ninotchka Rosca, op. cit., p. 45.

47 Ibid, p. 46.

48 Ibid, p. 57.

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Before delving into further intricacies of the subject, it is certainly pertinent to point out the questions that emerge. How could leaders of Maoist/Communist insurgencies establish a cult? To what extent did the leadership cult influence the insurgency? Why could the critique from within the organization not dismantle the cult?

THE MAO-MAZUMDAR-SANYAL TRICHOTOMY

Purshottam (name changed), a young civil services aspirant, was sweating it out in Delhi, India's capital city. Hopping from one coaching institute to another, searching for answers to his probing questions. On one such day in February 2008, just after a session on current events, he bumped into me at the exit gate of a reputed civil services training centre in Delhi's Rajinder Nagar.

“Sir, I think there is a huge difference between the Naxalites and the Maoists. But I guess most do not know that,” Purshottam asserted.

I understood he was not to be assuaged so easily because he was carrying pre-conceived notions, which were tough to disentangle. Therefore, I asked him to meet me at leisure so that we could discuss the subject at length.

Way later, in June 2021, barely a month after the demise of my mother due to the Covid pandemic, I was having a chat with a senior activist of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation [CPI(M-L)] in Kolkata. While reminiscing the events of the 1980s and 90s, he rebuffed me for raising the topic of India's Maoists post-2004.

“They are wholly unconnected with the Naxalites of 1970s – as led by *Charubabu* (Charu Mazumdar)”.

Interestingly, every year Indian Maoists observe July 28 to August 3 as Martyrs' week, to commemorate the demise

of Charu Mazumdar on the July 28, 1972. And to what extent was Mazumdar responsible for the Naxalite uprising of the late 1960s in India or whether he was indeed the focal point of the movement has been debated and discussed at length, in various fora, by various intellectuals, as well as plebeians in tea-stalls so carelessly yet craftily set up on pavements all across Kolkata. Just after being initiated into academic research in my early twenties, I still remember the man (probably in his mid-fifties) with rugged looks, shouting "Tro-tosky, Tro-tosky", while we both were travelling in a dilapidated bus on one fine afternoon in Kolkata. He evidently meant the enigmatic Leon Trotsky of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. I was rather amazed at the depth of his knowledge on Marxism and 'revolutions'. I was not sure why he was craving for Trotsky, whether it was his crude form of eulogy towards Trotsky for espousal of internationalism by the Russian revolutionaries, or to denounce Joseph Stalin's culpability in eliminating Trotsky in a hotel room in Mexico.

Monalisa Basu however, has cogently summed up the set of debates on Mazumdar. In the third chapter of her thesis:⁴⁹

The movement was the brainchild of Charu Majumdar, once a member of the CPI [Communist Party of India, which was founded by M.N. Roy at Tashkent in 1920] and thereafter of the C.P.I. (M) [Communist Party of India (Marxist) – formed in 1964], who had remained a strong critic of all kinds of revisionism and had been nurturing a dream of revolution.

Basu writes, further:⁵⁰

49 Monalisa Basu, *The Role of Individual in the History, Charu Majumdar in the Naxal Movement: A Case Study*, PhD Dissertation, University of Calcutta, 2017, p. 67.

50 Ibid.

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He (read Majumdar) was highly influenced by Mao's thought and the success of the New Democratic Revolution (NDR) in China.

Charu Mazumdar, was born in Varanasi, sometime during May-June 1919.⁵¹ In 1937, he joined Edward College at Pabna (in today's Bangladesh). He dropped out of college and the very next year joined the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), which was founded by a group of Socialist-minded individuals within the perimeters of the working of the Indian National Congress (INC), spearheaded by Jaiprakash Narayan, Minoo Masani, Ram Manohar Lohia, et al. Nevertheless, a radical from within, Mazumdar switched over to the CPI in 1939. in the Jalpaiguri district in today's West Bengal. During the severe Bengal famine of 1943, amidst the Second World War, Mazumdar encouraged the rural folk to seize paddy from the granaries of the landlords and, thereafter, sold them at a fair price through a duly constituted committee.⁵²

Mazumdar was very much involved in the historic Tebhaga Movement, reports the CPI M-L publication on him.⁵³ Having been arrested in 1948, he was eventually released in 1951.⁵⁴ In January 1963, when a bye-election was held for the Siliguri Assembly seat, he filed his nomination papers from a prison cell, where he was once again incarcerated. However, he had to forfeit his statutory deposit since he could not even garner 3,000 votes.⁵⁵ His political posture was clearly seditious: he condemned the Indian government as an aggressor against

51 A CPI (ML) publication, *Charu Mazumdar: The Man and His Legacy*, New Delhi, July 2012, p.9.

52 Ibid, p. 14.

53 A CPI (ML) publication, op. cit., p. 18.

54 Ibid.

55 A CPI (ML) publication, op. cit., p. 21.

China.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Mazumdar propagated the politics of armed struggle against the democratic Indian state.

Already by April 1967, Mazumdar had penned down his radical viewpoints in the *Eight Documents*,⁵⁷ the first of which he wrote in January 1965. In these documents, writes Basu,⁵⁸ "Mazumdar talked about agrarian revolution, formation of secret political and military units, and area-wise capture of political power." Mazumdar declared, resoundingly, that "China's Chairman is our Chairman."⁵⁹

Mao Zedong, the man whom Mazumdar revered to this extent, was born on December 26, 1893, in a rural family in Shaoshan village, in China's southern province of Hunan.⁶⁰ While Mazumdar's father Bireswar was the Darjeeling District President of INC,⁶¹ Mao's father was a soldier-peasant, who later turned to moneylending and trading in grain.⁶² Nevertheless, Mao felt his father was 'mean, harsh and demanding'. Both Mazumdar and Mao were close to their mothers, with Uma Shankari Devi playing an important role in shaping Charu Mazumdar's life, while author Delia Davin emphasizes that "Mao's love of his mother was in sharp contrast to his hostility towards his father."⁶³

Mao had once cursed his father (during an altercation) in front of many guests, and then his left residence. After

56 Ibid, p. 21.

57 Charu Mazumdar, *Eight Documents (1965-1967)*, <http://cpiml.org/category/library/charu-mazumdar-collected-writings/eight-documents-1965-1967/>.

58 Monalisa Basu, op. cit., p. 67.

59 Ibid.

60 Delia Davin, *Mao: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, p. 3.

61 A CPI (ML) publication, op. cit., p. 11.

62 Delia Davin, op. cit., p. 3.

63 Ibid, p. 4.

being persuaded by his mother to return, he demanded that his father stop physically abusing him. Thereafter Mao would seek forgiveness. His father relented. With this incident, Mao arrived at the conclusion that resistance could be effective.⁶⁴ Mao had also once grabbed the collar of a teacher with whom he was arguing.⁶⁵

In addition, Mao did not like the natural sciences, but scored heavily in the social sciences. At the other end, Mazumdar was a loving father who would guide his two daughters in their studies. He asked them to read English novels without the help of grammar and dictionary. He also encouraged his daughters to read the literary works of Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, and Bengali stalwarts Sarat Chandra Chatterjee as well as Bankim Chandra. Mazumdar was a connoisseur of classical music too.⁶⁶

Interestingly, as Mazumdar was enamoured by Mao's teachings, Mao in turn was attracted by *The Communist Manifesto*, translated into Chinese, a path-breaking document written way back in 1848 by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, in an altogether different geographical and cultural setting.

Many thinkers however have termed Mazumdar as a left adventurist and anarchist. Interestingly, as we learn from Basu's thesis,⁶⁷ specifically after his death, Mazumdar was targeted by his erstwhile followers. Kanu Sanyal, one of his closest comrades, who went to China to learn the art and craft of waging an insurrection, wrote in his 1973 treatise *More about Naxalbari*, about the mistakes committed by Mazumdar. Another of Mazumdar's erstwhile comrades, Asim

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid, p. 9.

66 A CPI (ML) publication, op. cit., pp. 23-24.

67 Monalisa Basu, op. cit., p. 71.

Chatterjee (then a student of Presidency College in Kolkata) later overlooked any exclusive role of Charu Majumdar in the Naxalite movement, but at the same time blamed him for the movement's collapse.⁶⁸

Pramod Sen Gupta, a Marxist intellectual, believed that work for mass organisations, on the one hand, and building up secret squads, on the other, exposed the contradictory postures adopted by Mazumdar. Sen Gupta criticised Mazumdar, arguing, "what Charu made in the name of CPI (ML) was not at all a Marxist-Leninist party but a new version of Bengal's old petty bourgeois terrorist party."⁶⁹ Sen Gupta squarely blamed "the blind faith of his followers on him (Mazumdar)"⁷⁰ for the ignominious failure of the Naxalbari insurgency.

Kanu Sanyal went to the extent of challenging the relevance of Majumdar's Eight Documents, considered to be the ideological kernel of the Naxalite movement.⁷¹ Sanyal in fact wrote that⁷² Charu Mazumdar wanted to establish "anarchism in a new form." Asim Chatterjee, once Mazumdar's blind follower, later termed⁷³ the "socialism of Charu Mazumdar as social terrorism."⁷⁴ While Mazumdar was reprimanded by his colleagues and contemporary thinkers and authors after his demise, the man (Mao) he idolized insofar as the notion of revolution was concerned, had this to write⁷⁵ about the concept of 'revolution':

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid, p. 73.

70 Ibid, p. 74.

71 Monalisa Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid, p. 76.

74 Ibid.

75 Delia Davin, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery, it cannot be so refined, so leisurely, so gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows the power of another.⁷⁶

And if we arrive at the conclusion that Mao learnt the nuances of revolution only from Marx, then we might be taken by surprise. Mao read a Chinese translation of *A System of Ethics* by the neo-Kantian philosopher Friedrich Paulsen.⁷⁷ He was attracted by Paulsen's ideas of self-cultivation through self-discipline. He applied these ideas in his life – by studying hard, with regular exercises and by dressing simply. He stressed that intellectuals ought to engage in physical labour too. Though Mao focused on learning modern thought and Marxism, in no way did he relegate traditional Chinese history and culture to the background.

Author Dilip Simeon described Mazumdar as “a man whose sole contribution to socialism consisted in elevating homicidal mania to a political principle.”⁷⁸ Mazumdar did talk about the annihilation of class enemies by carrying out squad-based armed actions at the village level. In this context however, way after Mazumdar's demise, Vinod Mishra applauds Mazumdar, arguing that “even his (Mazumdar's) mistakes showed us the deeper meaning of being a true Communist.”⁷⁹ Interestingly,

76 Mao Zedong, “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan, March 1927,” *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_2.htm.

77 Ibid, p. 10.

78 Dilip Simeon “Permanent spring”, *Seminar 607*, March 2010, https://www.india-seminar.com/2010/607/607_dilip_simeon.htm.

79 A CPI (ML) publication, op. cit., p. 36.

Mishra alerts us, "Charu Mazumdar formulated (the theory of) annihilation (of class enemies) on the basis of confidence in the masses."⁸⁰

On the contrary, scholar Pradip Basu, in his doctoral work,⁸¹ elaborates on the evolution of the Naxalbari insurgency and brings out that Mazumdar's leadership in the Naxal movement was action-based and not because of any better theoretical understanding on Mazumdar's part. Rather, Pradip Basu asserts that Mazumdar's analysis of the contemporary political and strategic questions was simplistic and superficial. Perhaps this was a fundamental reason for the lack of proper organisation of the Naxalites in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which ultimately failed to credibly challenge state authority, though the state was taken aback by the suddenness and bravado of the insurgent activities. Celebrated subaltern historian Ranajit Guha, in an interview to Milinda Banerjee, showered praise on Charu Mazumdar, although lamenting the organisational [in]capabilities of the erstwhile Naxals which, according to Guha, proved to be the nemesis of the otherwise revolutionary outbreak.⁸²

A physically frail and chronic cardiac patient Mazumdar somehow does not synchronise with the striking, commanding figure of Mao, though Mazumdar's eyes had a hypnotizing effect, as admitted by many of his contemporaries and followers, even police officers. Both Mazumdar and Mao smoked heavily. Mao had gifted cigars⁸³ to the four-man Naxalite contingent

80 Ibid, p. 42.

81 Pradip Basu, *Towards Naxalbari: An Account of Inner-Party Ideological Struggle*, Progressive Publishers, Calcutta, 2000.

82 Uddipan Mukherjee, "Marx, Mao and Rajanna: Aim and Shoot", *Uday India*, April 27, 2013, <https://udayindia.in/marx-mao-and-rajanna-aim-shoot/>.

83 Julia Lovell, op. cit., p. 362.

from India that visited China, led by Kanu Sanyal. Mao was, nonetheless not at all happy⁸⁴ with Mazumdar's slogan of "China's Chairman is our Chairman."

Ironically, Mao never met his disciple Mazumdar. Mazumdar too, never attempted to meet his idol Mao – possibly due to his ill health and also, perhaps, because he wished to remain in imaginary touch with his guru, interacting only in the ideological space. That unfortunately didn't work out for Mazumdar. Though Radio Peking applauded the 'Naxal revolution', Mao was not appreciative of the working of the Naxalites, and especially that of his name being tagged to the movement. Mazumdar nonetheless, went ahead, with his idiosyncratic interpretation and understanding of how to usher in the insurrection.

Expectedly, after Mazumdar's death, the Naxal movement splintered into several groups, several of which, however, again coalesced under the Maoist banner in 2004, in a much more aggressive and organised armed *avatar*. Mao on the other hand remained more or less unscathed during his lifetime, even as he conducted the social experiments under the terminology of the GPCR. After his death however, criticisms began to pour out into the open.

Though Mao had asserted that the Chinese communist party ought not to follow the Soviet practice of preserving the body of its leaders, yet the Politburo decided to embalm Mao and placed his dead body in an imposing mausoleum in Beijing's Tiananmen Square.⁸⁵ And, as if to perpetuate the hero-worship, his immediate successor Hua Guofeng imitated Mao's hairstyle.⁸⁶ Hua even went to the extent of proclaiming

84 Ibid.

85 Delia Davin, op. cit., p. 112.

86 Ibid.

a policy called 'two whatevers', in which he declared that whatever policy Mao had decided upon, it shall be resolutely defended, and whatever instructions Mao had given in his lifetime, they would be obeyed.⁸⁷

Deng Xiaoping however criticized Mao Zedong and his thoughts. Nevertheless, he was cautious and was not ready for a complete rejection of Mao's legacy. He declared, "We will not do to Chairman Mao what Khrushchev did to Stalin."⁸⁸ The "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China" was approved by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in June 1981. The key passage was as follows:

Comrade Mao Zedong was a great Marxist and a great proletarian revolutionary, strategist and theorist. It is true that he made gross mistakes during the cultural revolution, but, if we judge his activities as a whole, his contributions to the Chinese revolution far outweigh his mistakes. His merits are primary and his errors secondary. He rendered indelible meritorious service in founding and building up our Party and the Chinese People's Liberation Army, in winning victory for the cause of liberation of the Chinese people, in founding the People's Republic of China and in advancing our socialist cause.⁸⁹

However, on the 'two whatevers', the resolution stated that it would be wrong to regard whatever Mao said as the sacrosanct truth.⁹⁰ At the same time, the Resolution acknowledged that 'Mao Zedong Thought' would be the Party's guide to action

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid, p. 114.

89 Ibid, p. 115.

90 Ibid.

for a long time to come.⁹¹ Chen Yun on the other hand was harsh:

Had Mao died in 1956, there would be no doubt that he was a great leader of the Chinese people... Had he died in 1966, his meritorious achievements would have been somewhat tarnished, but his overall record still very good. Since he actually died in 1976, there is nothing we can do.⁹²

Earlier, in a 1957 address to Chinese students in Moscow, Mao had said:

The world is yours, as well as ours, but in the last analysis, it is yours... Our hope is placed on you. The world belongs to you. China's future belongs to you.⁹³

In 1976, Mao's last recorded remarks to the Politburo were:

What will happen to the next generation if the revolution fails? There may be a foul wind and a rain of blood. How will you cope? Heaven only knows.⁹⁴

In this context, it is interesting to note what Mao told Edgar Snow in 1970, in a prophetic manner:

Future events would be decided by future generations and in accordance with conditions we could not foresee... The youth of today would assess the work of the revolution in accordance with values of their own. A thousand years from now, all of us, even Marx, Engels and Lenin would probably appear rather ridiculous.⁹⁵

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid, p. 116.

93 Ibid, p.118.

94 Ibid, p. 119.

95 Ibid.

In India, within the organisation, criticism snowballed. For instance, Pramod Sen Gupta, who was close to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in his German sojourn, did not approve of Mazumdar and his coterie's decision to boycott the parliamentary election – a decision that was arrived upon on May 14, 1968, without much discussion.⁹⁶ As already mentioned, Kanu Sanyal too contested this decision. Sengupta charged Mazumdar with arrogance:

The arrogance of Charubabu... comes partly from (the) assumption that the revolution is (his) monopoly, no one else is a revolutionary except (him).⁹⁷

Sushital Ray Choudhury strongly criticized the attacks on educational institutions, breaking of furniture, damage to laboratories and disruption of examinations, among other unwarranted acts of violence. He also criticized the destruction of portraits and statues of some famous personalities of 19th century India, including Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Rabindranath Tagore, Vivekananda, etc.⁹⁸

Criticism also sprang up from outside the party confines. Kang Sheng held that it was wrong to call China's Chairman Mao the leader of CPI (ML) in India.⁹⁹ In this context however, Sumanta Banerjee's critical comments are noteworthy:

...none of these leaders who later so vehemently criticized Charu Mazumdar, were honest enough to admit their own faults. They refused to acknowledge their own responsibilities in transforming Charu Mazumdar into a demi-god... Had they realized their

96 Ashoke Mukhopadhyay, *Charu Majumdar: The Dreamer Rebel*, Niyogi Books, New Delhi, 2022, p. 85.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid, p. 89.

99 Ashoke Mukhopadhyay, op. cit., p. 91.

mistakes earlier and cooperated with the dissenters (like Kanu Sanyal and Sushital Ray Choudhury), the cult of personality that was growing round Charu Mazumdar would have been curbed...¹⁰⁰

In June 1966, after he returned to Siliguri from Kolkata's Dum Dum Jail, Kanu Sanyal went to meet Mazumdar.¹⁰¹ He wanted to share his views on the revolutionary strategies suggested by Mazumdar. As Sanyal narrates:

In the Eight Documents, Charu Da had prescribed an immediate armed insurrection. To realise this, he suggested the formation of small combat groups of dedicated Communist revolutionaries who were to operate secretly. Charu Da identified the landlords, high officials from the police and the civil administration as the immediate target. Those opposed to the revolutionary activities were also in the list. Significantly, Charu Da denounced the need for nurturing mass organisations.¹⁰²

Sanyal points out, "He labelled mass organisations as revisionist tools and held (them) responsible for weakening the revolutionary zeal of the comrades."¹⁰³ Though Sanyal, Keshav Sarkar, Jangal Santhal and Sourin Bose were in disagreement with Charu Mazumdar on the need for an armed insurrection, Sanyal further differed on the timing and strategy to implement the proposed uprising.¹⁰⁴

However, after Sanyal and the other three Naxalites met a delegation of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, an

100 Ibid, p. 93.

101 Bappaditya Paul, *The First Naxal: An Authorised Biography of Kanu Sanyal*, Sage, New Delhi, 2014, p. 85.

102 Ibid, p. 86.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

argument erupted between Sanyal and his three comrades, especially with Deepak Biswas. Biswas could not appreciate the fact that, while presenting a narrative about the Naxal uprising, Sanyal did not mention Charu Mazumdar. Sanyal, though, had his own defence, arguing that, since Mazumdar was not physically involved in the Naxalbari uprising, he did not find any logic to mention Mazumdar's name. However, Biswas was not satisfied with this logic and became annoyed with Sanyal.¹⁰⁵

While critical of Mazumdar, Sanyal was enthralled when he had a glimpse of Mao Zedong. "On taking a few steps, to our sheer delight, we saw Mao Tse-tung (Zedong) and Chou En-lai standing at the tail end of the long corridor. One cannot simply gauge the level of our excitement; holding high the Red Book in hand, we took to sloganeering in spontaneity: Mao Tse-tung Zindabad, Chou En-lai Zindabad (Long Live Mao Zedong, Long Live Chou En-Lai)...", was Sanyal's explicit admission. Sanyal was overwhelmed when Mao Zedong embraced him. He says that he was "robbed of words for the next few moments", and [though] "there were so many issues I wanted to ask Mao about, but nothing was coming to my mind!" Sanyal was completely blown away by the cult of the 'Father' of the Communist revolutions.¹⁰⁶

Interestingly, Charu Mazumdar had also, on previous occasions, had a similar hypnotic effect on young Kanu Sanyal.

Many legends, some fictitious and some true, were being circulated about Charu Da's extraordinary genius. These included his reported ability to make an exact prediction about his exam score in college days; being able to read through voluminous books

105 Ibid, p. 124.

106 Ibid, p. 129.

overnight; leaving his opponents awestruck with logical arguments on any topic under the sun; a daredevil attitude and so on and so forth. He was also well revered in the Communist circle for his role in the Tebhaga Movement of 1946.¹⁰⁷

It was at Jalpaiguri Central Jail that Sanyal finally did meet his imagined hero Mazumdar. Sanyal was exposed to the political thoughts of Mazumdar through brief discussions in jail itself. When Mazumdar was the District Secretary of the CPI Jalpaiguri unit, on one occasion, as he spoke on the sufferings of the poor and the peasantry, by the time he summed up, Sanyal “found himself enthralled and motivated.”¹⁰⁸ Thereafter, Sanyal came out of his dilemma and finalized his decision to become a whole-timer for the communist party. Mazumdar’s so-called magnetism had worked wonders on young Sanyal’s mind. Incidentally, the same Sanyal would vehemently criticize his hero Mazumdar later – perhaps after critical thinking overpowered the youthful romantic in him.

A FAILED INTERNAL CRITIQUE

In 2015, then general secretary of the Indian Maoists, Ganapathy, admitted that they (Indian Maoists) were keen to preserve the party’s top leaders (from being targeted by the security forces).¹⁰⁹ Recent reports indicate that Ganapathy was in a sorry state of health.¹¹⁰ In this context, it is significant to

107 Ibid, p. 34.

108 Ibid, p. 35.

109 Mohua Chatterjee, “Interview with CPI (Maoist) General Secretary Comrade Ganapathy”, *The Times of India*, August 9, 2015, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/interview-with-cpimaoist-general-secretary-comrade-ganapathy/articleshow/48415945.cms>.

110 NewsTap Bureau, “Top Maoist Leader Ganapathi in crippled condition, says surrendered senior Naxalite”, October 8, 2022, <https://www.newstap.in/national/top-maoist-leader-ganapathi-in-crippled-condition-says-surrenderedsenior-naxalite-1442510>.

note that the policy of targeted incarceration and elimination of Maoist leaders has been an effective instrument in curbing the Maoist insurgency in India.¹¹¹ A senior Indian Police Service officer has upheld the efficacy of the targeted approach against the Maoists.¹¹² Furthermore, intelligence officials have confirmed that loss of leadership has dealt a heavy blow to the Maoists.¹¹³

Interestingly, after Mazumdar's demise, though leaders cropped up at local levels, the metanarrative of the cult was missing in the palimpsest of the Naxalite/Maoist insurgency in India. That could be one major reason for the movement to have splintered from mid-1970 onwards, until its regeneration through a merger of two major groups in 2004. The lack of a cult leadership implied a lack of binding energy for the movement. Ganapathy became the general secretary of the merged Maoist neo-avatar after 2004 and re-established the cult image of the leader to some extent. Nonetheless, his failing health overcame his energy and zeal and, of course, his cult was affected. Once Ganapathy superannuated in November 2018, his successor Basavaraju took over. Basavaraju is, however, yet to establish a cult status, despite the fact that, being an explosive expert himself, Basavaraju has influenced the operations and tactics

111 Mukherjee, Uddipan, "Targeted Killings of Insurgents, Terrorists and Armed Combatants: Exploring the Legal Dimension", in Sarfaraz Ahmed Khan and Hifajatali Sayyed ed. *Crime Prevention and Crime Control: An Indian Perspective*, Thomson Reuters, Gurgaon, 2022, pp. 283-293.

112 ANI, "Loss of senior CPI (Maoist) leaders would deplete Naxal movement strength, says Bastar IGP", October 16, 2021, <https://www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/loss-of-senior-cpi-maoist-leaders-would-deplete-naxal-movement-strength-says-bastar-igp20211016042541/>.

113 Namrata Biji Ahuja, "One third of CPI (Maoist) central committee leaders neutralized in last 9 months : MHA", *The Week*, May 9, 2022, <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2022/05/09/one-third-of-cpi-maoist-central-committee-leaders-neutralised-in-last-9-months-mha.html>.

of the insurgency accordingly.¹¹⁴ After all, Ganapathy and Basavaraju are no Mao Zedongs – Mao could have camouflaged his ill health with the aid of an entire army of followers and the state apparatus. Mao’s cult grew along with his success in armed insurgency, and finally solidified into a demi-god status once the Chinese insurgency became a successful Revolution in 1949 from a working ‘revolution’. Some of Mao’s followers achieved that success too and attempted to perpetuate their cult. Interestingly, even though some of the followers could not achieve comparable success, yet they could gain cult status within their parties, viz., Mazumdar and Sison.

Through the facts, anecdotes and discussion presented in this paper, it may be derived that the leaders of Maoist/ Communist insurgencies could establish a cult status due to a combination of factors:

- Imposing physical attributes (hypnotic eye in case of Mazumdar, Mao’s shining forehead).
- Propaganda of mythical stories portraying a larger-than-life picture of the leader (that Mazumdar could predict his college examination scores, and Guzman’s reading of loads of books).
- Lack of constructive opposition within the organisation (in the cases of Mao, Prachanda).
- Oratory skills (of Mao, Mazumdar, Guzman, Prachanda, Sison).
- Success in the armed insurrection and/or coup (especially for Mao Zedong, later for Ho Chi Minh and Giap, and then Pol Pot).

114 Uddipan Mukherjee, “IEDs and the Maoist insurgency”, MPIDSA, May 7, 2019, <https://idsa.in/idsacomments/ieds-and-maoist-insurgency-umukherjee-070519>.

Communist Insurgencies and the 'Cult of the Leader'

In fact, 'lack of dissidence', has been pointed out to be one of the structural factors for the cult of personality to develop.¹¹⁵ Additionally, causes enumerated in terms of creating cult figures find analytical support in Wright and Lauer¹¹⁶:

The cult of personality phenomenon refers to the idealized, even god-like, public image of an individual consciously shaped and moulded through constant propaganda and media exposure. As a result, one is able to manipulate others based entirely on the influence of public personality.

On the other hand, success in the armed insurgency is a very realistic reason for glorification and solidification of the cult. However, even this success should not in any way shield the leaders from criticism within the organization – for instance, the free hand Mao was given in the GPCR is a valid case in point in this regard. Pol Pot's construction of inhuman concentration camps is another example.

Interestingly, physical appearance is more of an image worship, which is completely antithetical to Marxist/Communist thought.

The second aspect worth illuminating is the influence that these leaders wielded or still wield in the trajectory of the Maoist/Communist insurgencies. It is difficult not to accept that these leaders fundamentally 'drive' the insurgencies,

115 Adrian Teodor Popan, *The ABC of Sycophancy: Structural Conditions for the Emergence of Dictators' Cults of Personality*, Dissertation presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Austin, August 2015, <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/46763/POPAN-DISSERTATION-2015.pdf>.

116 Wright, Thomas A. and Lauer, Tyler L., "What is character and why it really does matter", Business Faculty Publications. 2., 2013, https://research.library.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=gsb_facultypubs.

by swaying their followers, unless and until some of the followers understand the follies in the purportedly infallible approaches and policies of their leaders. Whether it was Mao Zedong's guerilla warfare techniques or Prachanda's middle path, the followers or cadres (foot soldiers) toe the line of the leadership. This is somewhat inherent in Communist paradigm, since decision-making in Communist structures is based on the principle of democratic centralism – in which a decision is arrived at after discussions at all levels, from local to district to state to politburo – yet once a finality is reached, every cadre must implement the decision without questioning; treating the politburo and its helmsman – the leader (from Mao to Mazumdar) as the infallible, his wisdom as sacrosanct. On most occasions however, discussion based on dialogue and logic is hardly adhered to while arriving at decisions to fundamental questions.

Finally, it is interesting to ponder why an internal critique is unable to dismantle the cult? The answer to this query lies in the cult of the leader itself. The cult becomes so strong, that it is tantamount to blasphemy if anyone challenges it during the life of the leader. Even if, in a few cases, this is done, for instance, in Mazumdar's case, the renegades are in a minority and are unable to displace the leader.

Moreover, the strength of the cult is formidable only when the leader has done something at a pioneering level – Mao, Mazumdar, Guzman, Prachanda, Sison, Pol Pot and the Ho/Giap duo – were the first in their respective countries to prop up a communist insurgency and hence received a large fan following, with a sort of blind faith shared by supporters. And naturally, it becomes difficult for the minority dissenters to topple the pioneers even if their ideas appear irrational. It is seen that even the dissenters (viz. Deng Xiaoping) from a long-

term perspective in mind, adopt a middle path while positing a critique of the leader. Though the leader's faults are indicated, the legacy of the leader is carried forward. In fact, in the case of Mazumdar, Indian Maoists after 2004 and to date, consider him as the torchbearer of the 'revolution'. Again, this middle path approach is adopted because the original cult status of the leader could not be shattered.

Accounts of such cult leaders of Maoist/Communist insurgencies need to be explored and written on in much greater depth, no doubt. Detailed qualitative research in this aspect would help to unravel entwined issues, a few of which I have tried to discuss in this chapter. And when philosopher Michel Foucault.¹¹⁷ in his seminal work 'Power' stresses that even 'infamous' lives of 'those men of terror or scandal' could be narrated for posterity, then why not the cult leaders of Communist insurgencies that have perturbed and are still disturbing sovereign democracies, especially India and Philippines, be written about and analyzed in detail?

Nonetheless, such accounts ought not to leave out the subaltern cadre of the insurgency as a mere listener and follower. These accounts have a responsibility to uplift the cadre from the abyss of a mere worshipper to a rational human being: not at least like the silent man (while being tried) in the Paris criminal court.

The presiding judge asked the accused: 'Have you tried to reflect upon your case?' Silence.

The judge continued, 'Why, at twenty-two years of age, do such violent urges overtake you? Explain yourself.' Silence.

117 Michel Foucault, *Power: Essential Works 1954-84: Volume Three*, Penguin Random House, UK, 1994, pp. 162-164.

‘Why would you do it again?’ Silence.

Then a juror cried out, ‘For heaven’s sake, defend yourself’.¹¹⁸

The subaltern cadre, the foot soldier, needs to defend him(her)self and not just remain a mute follower of the leader, overawed by the cult.

In sum, the Indian Maoist insurgents and their global counterparts, in 2023, barely survive and ideate, in an ever-shrinking geographical domain, militarily cornered by the security forces. Nevertheless, they still worship their leaders and revere the cult, without acknowledging that the ideological space of their cult leaders is under serious existential threat from several quarters; the most vulnerable being their leadership itself.

The entire structure of Communist insurgencies is based on the cult of the leader and when the leader is targeted, the structure collapses. This is surely a welcome thought for security forces of the sovereign states affected by the Maoist/ Communist insurgencies in the 21st century, as targeted incarceration and elimination of the top leadership emerge as a cardinal principle of counterinsurgency.

118 Ibid, p. 176.