

# AIR POWER

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CENTRE FOR AIR POWER STUDIES, NEW DELHI



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## **CENTRE FOR AIR POWER STUDIES**

### **VISION**

To be an independent **centre of excellence on national security** contributing informed and considered research and analyses on relevant issues.

### **MISSION**

To encourage independent and informed research and analyses on issues of relevance to national security and to create a pool of domain experts to provide considered inputs to decision-makers. Also, to foster informed public debate and opinion on relevant issues and to engage with other think-tanks and stakeholders within India and abroad to provide an Indian perspective.

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## ➤ EDITOR'S NOTE

Who would have imagined that the report to the WHO Country Office in China on December 31, 2019 of a pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan, would emerge as a pandemic in less than three months, engulfing 114 countries with more than 1,18,000 people infected worldwide, and 4,291 people succumbing to the corona virus disease (COVID-19). This was the status on March 11, 2020 when the Director General of WHO officially announced that COVID-19 was being designated as a pandemic. Of course, these numbers have only gone on increasing every day since then.

India reported its first death due to COVID-19 on March 12. With nations worldwide now gearing up to tackle the spread of the disease, let us hope that with the onset of summer, COVID-19 comes under control. But, before that happens, the pandemic has shown us its scary self and is being referred to as the 'Corona War'—a follow up to the Trade War between the US and China. Both countries appear to be blaming the other for the spread of the disease, with conspiracy theories being thrown around by the Chinese media about the outbreak of the deadly disease actually taking place in the US, and not China.

There was barely any time to recap the events of the year that had literally slipped by when news came in on January 3 about the US drone strike that killed General Qassem Soleimani, Iran's most powerful military general, who was the head of IRGC's elite Quds Force. The justification for the late-night strike given by the US President was that "*General Soleimani was actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region.*"

While the main task for the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps is to defend the regime against internal and external threats, the Quds Force allegedly also specialises in foreign missions, providing training, funding and weapons to extremist groups, including Iraqi insurgents, Hezbollah, and Hamas.

The Iranian Foreign Minister condemned the killing of the leader of the Quds Force which he claimed was the only force effectively neutralising the *Daesh* (the ISIS), while also holding the US responsible for further escalation, if any. The US President immediately responded to this threat by warning Iran that the US would “*quickly & fully strike back, & perhaps in a disproportionate manner*” if US persons or troops were targeted.

The Iranians, nevertheless, retaliated with pin-point attacks at 01:20 a.m. local time on January 8, 2020 against two Iraqi military bases where the US and coalition forces were stationed. However, there were no reported American casualties, possibly on account of early warning about the missile launches; this led to a de-escalation of an otherwise potentially volatile situation.

At around 0600 hours on the same day (January 8), a Ukrainian airliner, Flight 752, was shot down by an Iranian Air Defence unit soon after the aircraft took off from Tehran airport. All 176 passengers and crew were killed. While staying silent on the accident for a few days, the Iranian military leadership subsequently accepted that the aircraft had been mistaken for an American cruise missile and accidentally shot down and apologies were offered. Talk of collateral damage, albeit in a period of heightened tensions!

As far as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is concerned, the Iranian leadership had warned in January 2020 that the country would no longer abide by the terms and conditions of the nuclear deal. While this step was announced soon after the US attack that killed General Soleimani, it was anyway to come since Tehran had announced the conscious decision of *phased* withdrawal from the JCPOA and the next step was due in January 2020. With this fifth step now having been taken, henceforth, there would

be no limits to the amount of enrichment that Iran would carry out. Since January, Iran is already believed to have tripled its stockpile of enriched uranium, which now stands at more than a thousand kilograms—enough to make a few nuclear weapons. This certainly poses a great risk of nuclear proliferation in West Asia as other nations in the region, e.g. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, etc., have not hidden their compulsion to undertake a nuclear weapons program if Iran does so.

Iran has also vowed that it would carry out further attacks against the US, not necessarily against its military. Some reports suggest that Iran would use its robust cyber capabilities to carry out attacks against US facilities, a small example of which was given on January 4 itself when the website of the Federal Depository Library Program was taken down for 24 hours by Iranian hackers. Cyber-attacks by Iran against critical infrastructures (including energy infrastructure, financial institutions, and transportation systems) in the United States are continuing. Escalation of tensions between the US and Iran is a global concern; and Iran does not presently appear to be in the mood to simmer down, as the death of their most liked General, in their assessment, is yet to be avenged.

Amidst all the tensions in the West Asian region, an event of great significance for the Indian Armed Forces took place in the closing days of 2019—the announcement of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). With the announcement of creation of a Department of Military Affairs (DMA) in the Ministry of Defence, to be headed by the CDS, the stage was set for a reassessment of the Second Schedule of the Transaction of Business Rules, 1961 for clear division of roles between the newly created CDS—who will be of Cabinet Secretary rank—and the Defence Secretary, avoiding any overlapping of roles.

In order to understand the responsibilities of his new avatar as Secretary, DMA in the MoD, the CDS has got his work cut out in the coming months to fulfil his charter and make a difference that would see, inter alia, greater jointness amongst the three Services. The first task is the creation of the Air Defence Command, to be headed by an IAF officer. The second is the

creation of the Peninsula Command by merging the Eastern and Western Naval Commands. Logistics and Maintenance Command, a Doctrinal and Training Command are other priorities, besides the setting up of the first integrated theatre command within three years; a tall order by any standards, considering the allocations to the armed forces for its modernisation in Union Budget 2020. Although presently a work in progress, at the time of going to press, the CDS appears upbeat about delivering on his charter within his tenure, particularly in view of the ready support assured by the Service Chiefs.

The 11th edition of the Defence Expo was held in Lucknow from February 5-7, 2020, attracting Defence Ministers from 40 countries, 172 defense equipment manufacturers—with over 3,000 delegates—from 70 countries and 857 companies from India. With *'India: The Emerging Defence Manufacturing Hub'* as the underlying theme for the DefExpo 2020, the exposition was aimed at projecting 'Make in India' to the world. It was also an opportunity for the Indian defence industry to showcase its capabilities and promote its export potential. At the DefExpo, proposals worth ₹5 lakh crore were received for investment; work is believed to have already started on projects worth ₹2.5 lakh crore. Employment opportunities for over 3 lakh youth are expected to be generated, with India likely to become a prominent centre of global defence manufacturing in the coming years. With more than 12 lakh visitors, DefExpo laid a strong foundation for the development of the UP Defence Corridor. "The Lucknow Declaration" was signed by the defence ministers and representatives of 50 African countries with the Raksha Mantri, Rajnath Singh. Common security challenges such as terrorism, extremism, piracy and trafficking are underscored in the Declaration. Besides that, the agreement addresses increased cooperation in securing sea lines of communication, preventing maritime crimes, disaster, piracy, and illegal fishing through the sharing of information and other measures. The African nations have mostly been the recipients of India's defence assistance in the past in the form of Training Teams from India that have assisted in the setting up of defence academies in some African countries.

Under this agreement, India will provide Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs), Fast Interceptor Boats, body and vehicle armour, Night Vision Goggles (NVGs), Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), Dornier aircraft, and arms and ammunition to some of the African nations. This would be a significant breakthrough in the export of defence equipment, albeit on a modest scale. The real challenge for the Indian defence industry still remains breaking into the high-end technology areas. With the infusion of greater enthusiasm in the foreign OEMs—who always look at India's potential as a large market—it is felt that such breakthroughs in niche areas would happen, sooner than later, particularly if the Strategic Partnership model takes off in earnest under the aegis of Make in India.

It has been one year since Suicide Terrorism had reared its ugly head in the Kashmir Valley on February 14, leaving 40 CRPF personnel dead; the response by India with the IAF's 'non-military pre-emptive' strike against the Jaish-e-Mohammed training camp at Balakot on February 26 had clearly demonstrated India's resolve to punish Pakistan, undeterred by its projection of nuclear threats. The PAF attempted a response on February 27 in the Nowshera sector where a historic first was achieved when Wg Cdr Abhinandan, flying the MiG-21 Bison, shot down a PAF F-16, although his aircraft was also shot down in the ensuing melee. He ejected, was captured, but returned by Pakistan two days later as a 'goodwill gesture' (as per Pakistan PM, Imran Khan) towards de-escalating tensions between the two neighbours. The response by the PAF underscored the technological edge that the PAF enjoyed vis-à-vis the IAF on that day by virtue of having BVR missiles with ranges greater than those of the BVR missiles with the IAF. The tenacity and exceptional presence of mind of the pilot-fighter controller duo of the IAF ensured there were no losses on the Indian side—except Wg Cdr Abhinandan—despite five AMRAAMs having been fired by the PAF F-16s. Of course, such a situation (of technical asymmetry) should not be permitted to continue for long as it is not known when the IAF might be called in again to deliver a punishing blow.



EDITOR'S NOTE

Best wishes to all readers to stay healthy and alert in the times ahead. The watchword today seems to be PQSD—Personal Quarantine and Social Distancing!

Happy Reading

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'James', with a small flourish at the end.

# CLIMATE CHANGE AND AVIATION

**AJEY LELE AND KRITIKA ROY**

Aviation has been at the heart of global activity for long. Continents and people can come together, travelling over distances of thousands of kilometres only because of aircraft. Today, enhanced connectivity, cheaper tickets and more flying options have made the aviation sector an increasingly important means of transport for citizens, businesses and governments. Air travel is considered fundamental to the development of new markets, business relations, cargo and humanitarian aid. The importance of informal and spontaneous meetings can hardly be overestimated, especially for the growing markets. Some air travel, within the maritime and petroleum sectors, is also associated with inspections of physical installations or vessels, or for the transportation of crew to platforms and other technical installations. Additionally, air cargo is assuming an increasingly important role within various industries, especially among humanitarian organisations for relief work. Similarly, the aviation sector is intricately linked to so many sectors such that the smooth functioning of this sector facilitates a ceaseless functioning of all the dependent sectors. The International Air Transport Association has predicted that the number of passengers transported by airlines will reach 8.2 billion in 2037, up from 7.8 billion in 2036. The figures speak volumes for the growing popularity of air travel.<sup>1</sup> There is

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1. M. Garcia, "Air Travel Projected To Double in 20 Years, But Protectionism Poses Threat", *Forbes*, October 24, 2018; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/marisagarcia/2018/10/24/iata-raises->

**Climate change is a stark reality and growth in the aviation sector means an increase in emission rates. This growth rate of the aviation sector may even overshadow the Paris Agreement's quest to keep the increase in global average temperature below two degrees.**

absolutely no doubt that economic growth, world trade, international investment and tourism are being facilitated by the airline industry. However, there is a sizeable downside of this growth, and that is the impact on climate change. Climate change is a stark reality and growth in the aviation sector means an increase in emission rates. This growth rate of the aviation sector may even overshadow the Paris Agreement's quest to keep the increase in global average temperature below two degrees.<sup>2</sup>

This paper establishes the context for the need to focus on climate change and its impact on the aviation sector. The paper also analyses various features linking aviation and climate change through case studies. Finally, the paper offers a few policy recommendations.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND AVIATION**

Global climate change is an issue discussed not only with a lot of concern but also with a lot of passion. As an intellectual exercise, few recognise that "climate change represents the tragedy commencing on a global scale" and also gets described as the most important environmental problem of the 21st century.<sup>3</sup> Today, climate change is known as a 'mother of all problems' and it is believed that cataclysmic events will unfold as humanity blindly demands more and more luxuries like autos, jet travel, air-conditioned homes, etc.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in the coming years, the change of the climate system

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20-year-projections-to-8-2-billion-passengers-warns-against-protectionism/#4171b04e150f. Accessed on July 12, 2019.

2. Yun Gao, Xiang Gao and Xiaohua Zhang, "The 2°C Global Temperature Target and the Evolution of the Long-Term Goal of Addressing Climate Change", *Elsevier*, vol. 3, issue 3, April 2017, pp. 272-273.
3. Kathryn Harrison and Lisa McIntosh Sandstorm, eds., *Global Commons, Domestic Decisions* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press).
4. J. Griffin, ed., *Global Climatic Change* (Camberley: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited), p. 1.

would become so intense that it would have a wide range of consequences for biological and socio-economic systems, which, in turn, would have a cascading impact on other linked man-made systems.

The 19th century saw remarkable development of our knowledge about climatic variations. Around the period of the 1850s, the idea of climate change on the earth was determined by the heat balance between incoming solar radiations.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, this idea got developed further with more research taking place and with increased understanding about the science of climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which was established in 1988 to develop climate policies, in its 2007 synthesis report, stated that the warming of the climate system is now “unequivocal.” The earth’s climate is getting warmer, and its temperature has gone up about one degree Fahrenheit in the last 100 years. Much of the warming is attributed to the increase in the levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide. The major contributor to this rise is the use of fossil fuels. The consumption of fossil energy is increasing globally. At the same time, efforts are being made to reduce the carbon dioxide emissions in order to reduce further greenhouse gas emission loads on the environment. It is a reality that the production and utilisation, mainly in the case of fossil fuels, is becoming a major cause of environmental degradation.<sup>6</sup> Another accepted reality is the link between the progress of a nation and the availability of energy resources, and owing to the push for development—especially in the developing countries—energy demand is growing rapidly. Fossil fuels are the most commonly used form of energy that have also been accused

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5. B. Bolin, *A History of the Science and Politics of Climate Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 3.

6. A.N. Sarkar, *Global Climate Change Beyond Copenhagen* (New Delhi: Pentagon Earth, 2010), p. 95.

of causing significant environmental damage like emission of various greenhouse gases. Besides burning of fossil fuel and deforestation, the transportation sector is also responsible for the global emission of greenhouse gases.

The aviation industry is one of the most important sectors for international business, tourism, transportation of goods, and military and humanitarian aid. This industry is also seen as one of the most energy and carbon intensive forms of transport, whether measured per passenger km or per hour travel. However, the aviation sector, in particular, accounts for a very small percentage of greenhouse emissions, that is, around 2 per cent of all human produced carbon dioxide emissions.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, this small percentage of emission cannot be overlooked, as it should be seen with reference to the growth rates of the aviation sector and the reduction in emission rate demanded by the IPCC.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, aviation is different from other energy using activities, as the majority of emissions occur at an altitude that tends to instigate different atmospheric chemical processes, thereby adding to the global warming scenarios.

### **AVIATION SECTOR'S IMPACT ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

As air traffic increases year on year, so does the impact on the environment. The major impact of the sector on the environment occurs through the combustion of fuels leading to the emission of heat, gases, noise and particulate matter. These emitted particles and gases such as carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), black carbon, and hydrocarbons, oxides of nitrogen (NO<sub>2</sub>) and sulfur (SO<sub>x</sub>), and carbon monoxide (CO) interact among themselves and the atmosphere and have an impact on atmospheric composition that contributes to global warming and ocean acidification. Additionally, the disturbance in the atmospheric composition leads to the formation of condensation trails

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7. Airport Council International, "10 Questions about Aviation and Climate Change", [https://aci.aero/Media/aci/file/Position%20Briefs/information%20brief\\_10%20QUESTIONS%20CLIMATE%20CHANGE.pdf](https://aci.aero/Media/aci/file/Position%20Briefs/information%20brief_10%20QUESTIONS%20CLIMATE%20CHANGE.pdf). Accessed on July 12, 2019.

8. Stefan Gössling and Paul Upham, *Climate Change and Aviation: Issues, Challenges and Solution*, (US: Routledge, 2009).

(contrails). Many times, these disturbances also increase the formation of cirrus cloudiness that adds to the phenomena of climate change.<sup>9</sup> There are several reports that highlight that the rate of emission of CO and SO<sub>x</sub> from aviation has also gone up since 1990, while the rates of emissions from most other transport modes have fallen (European Environment Agency, 2017).<sup>10</sup> Additionally, NO<sub>x</sub> emitted from aircraft (especially the emission from subsonic and supersonic aircraft) fumbles with the ozone layer, and indirectly contributes to radiative forcing (a measure of the change in the climate). Since the emissions from these aircraft are released at a higher altitude, they have a stronger affinity to react with ozone formation. Concerns over aviation's global impact are not new; rather, these concerns gained prominence in the 1970s because of the proposed fleet of civil supersonic aircraft, namely, the Concorde and Tupolev-144. This concern was related to potential stratospheric ozone depletion because of the emissions from the supersonic aircraft. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, research was initiated to look into the effects of nitrogen oxide on the ozone layer and also the effect of contrails from these supersonic aircraft. The sonic boom (this happens whenever an aircraft flies faster than the speed of sound, i.e. over Mach 1.0), that the Concorde produced was also a source of nuisance to people on the ground. In the 1990s, various research projects identified a number of emissions and effects from aviation. It was also noted that aviation presented unique challenges for the environment since the major fraction of its emissions is injected at aircraft cruise altitude, i.e. 8-12 km. At these altitudes, the emissions have increased affinity to cause chemical and aerosol effects relevant to climate forcing. It is also important to note that an operating aircraft's emission remains in the atmosphere for periods ranging from days to centuries, with some climatic effect felt on even longer time scales. In the year 1999, IPCC published a comprehensive report titled

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9. Michael Le Page, "It Turns Out Planes are even Worse for the Climate Than we Thought," *New Scientist*, June 27, 2019, <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2207886-it-turns-out-planes-are-even-worse-for-the-climate-than-we-thought/>. Accessed on July 14, 2019.

10. European Environment Agency, *TERM 2017: Mixed Progress for Europe's Transport Sector in Meeting Environment, Climate Goals*, 2017; <https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/term-2017-mixed-progress-for>. Accessed on July 15, 2019.

“Aviation and the Global Atmosphere” which for the first time presented an exhaustive assessment of aviation’s impact on climate using the climatic metric “Radiative Forcing (RF).”<sup>11</sup> Today, the aviation sector is a top-ten global emitter whose emissions are expected to rise dramatically by mid-century. Under current scenarios, the aviation sector could emit 56 GtCO<sub>2</sub> over the period 2016-50, or one-quarter of the remaining carbon budget.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the sector’s CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, aviation’s non-CO<sub>2</sub> effects are also significant in nature. Aviation emissions are 2.1 per cent of the global share, but when non-CO<sub>2</sub> effects are included, aviation contributes an estimated 4.9 per cent to the global warming problem.

Additionally, the rising competitiveness in the aviation industry and the competition to provide greater comfort and luxury by the airlines has added to the pressure of climate change, as the emissions also depend on where the passengers sit and whether they are taking long haul flights or shorter ones. For long haul flights, carbon emissions per passenger per kilometre travelled are about three times higher for business class and four times higher for first class. This is because there is more space per seat, so each person accounts for a larger amount of the whole aircraft pollution.<sup>13</sup> A World Bank study estimates that the carbon footprint of a person flying business class is three times more than one flying economy and nine times greater for a person flying first class.<sup>14</sup> With raised awareness and proactive measures towards environmental protection, it has been predicted that emissions from the aviation industry would continue to grow if an appropriate mitigation strategy is not formulated timely.

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11. *Aviation and the Global Atmosphere* IPCC (1999) described “Radiative Forcing (RF) as a measure of the perturbation of the Earth-atmosphere energy budget since 1750 (by convention in IPCC usage) resulting from changes in trace gases and particles in the atmosphere and other effects such as changed albedo, and is measured in units of watts per square metre (W m<sup>2</sup>) at the top of the atmosphere.”
  12. Pidcock and Yeo, “Analysis: Aviation Could Consume a Quarter of 1.5C Carbon Budget by 2050,” *Carbon Brief*, August 8, 2016; <https://www.carbonbrief.org/aviation-consume-quarter-carbon-budget>. Accessed on July 16, 2019.
  13. “Climate Change: Should you Fly, Drive or Take the Train?” BBC News, August 24, 2019. See <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-49349566>. Accessed on July 16, 2019.
  14. Irene Kwan, “Inflight Luxury: Who Really Pays?” <https://theicct.org/blogs/staff/inflight-luxury-who-really-pays>. Accessed on July 16, 2019.

## IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON AVIATION

The aviation industry contributes to climate change significantly. However, unfortunately, it is also a victim of climate change. This impact, on occasions, is severe, while at times, it is extremely localised. With the aviation industry deemed to grow at an average of 4-5 per cent per year, climate change is a growing risk to the aviation sector.<sup>15</sup> Hot, wet, or cold, in all seasons when some extremes occur, the aviation industry gets impacted. Be it higher temperatures or storms or excessive snowfall or high-altitude icing, all these normally lead to an increase in flight disruptions.<sup>16</sup> Taking into consideration the prominent and prevalent climatic effect, it is important to highlight the impact on aviation. The most evident outcome of global warming has been the melting of ice caps and glaciers, thermal expansion of oceans and rise in temperature. In 2017, during the summer, extremely high temperatures prevented hundreds of flights in Arizona, USA, as the aircraft were not able to generate enough lift to take off in thinner air.<sup>17</sup> Very high temperatures, combined with higher values of specific humidity in some regions have a negative repercussion on take-off performance at airports at high altitudes or with short runways, limiting payload or fuel uptake. This is because, as the air temperature increases, air density decreases (if pressure remains constant); lift is reduced, so more thrust and runway length are required for take-off. As the temperature rises, aircraft would need to toss out a few passengers, some cargo or fuel to get the same lift on a hot day, thereby raising the costs and requiring more flights.

The temperature change will further have an implication on aviation infrastructure such as heat damage to runways. In addition, the method of scheduling long-haul departures for the cooler evening and night hours in some regions (the Middle East, and Central and Southern American high altitude

15 J. Griffin, ed., *Global Climatic Change: The Science, Economics, and Politics (New Horizons in Environmental Economics)*, (Camberley: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2003), p. 8.

16. Fred Pearce, "Climate Change Spells Turbulent Times Ahead for Air Travel", *The Guardian*, February 19, 2018; <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/feb/19/climate-change-spells-turbulent-times-ahead-for-air-travel>. Accessed on July 31, 2019.

17. Zach Wichter, "Too Hot to Fly? Climate Change May Take a Toll on Air Travel," *The New York Times*, June 20, 2017; <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/20/business/flying-climate-change.html>. Accessed on July 30, 2019.



**The rise in temperature has led to the rise in sea level, increase in the monsoon, tropical storms, thunderstorms and cyclones that often threaten the viability of airports at coastal locations.**

airports) would be affected by reduced overnight cooling where high cloud cover, partially caused by long-lived contrails, is often present. In these cases, the warming effect of contrail-related cirrus clouds, which reduce radiative cooling at night, may have to be considered as an additional problem. Such phenomena would further shorten the already restricted operational hours in some regions. The rise in temperature has led to the rise in sea level, increase in the monsoon, tropical storms, thunderstorms and cyclones that often threaten the viability of airports at coastal locations. For instance, at Ilaquit airport in North Canada, the runway and taxiway had to be resurfaced as the permafrost on which it was built started melting.<sup>18</sup> Also, intense precipitation due to storms and cyclones leads to flooding which affects the ground operation of airports. For instance, heavy rains in Mumbai led to the temporary suspension of activity at the airport due to fluctuating visibility. Mumbai airport is the second busiest airport in India, handling up to 1,300 movements per day.<sup>19</sup> The July 26, 2005, Mumbai heavy rain event had recorded 944 mm rainfall in 24 hours with significant spatial variability. This event was poorly forecast by operational models and resulted in large human and economic losses.

## EVENT DESCRIPTION

Mumbai is a coastal city built on what was once an archipelago of seven islands. The weather situation of this region gets influenced by the Western Ghats mountains that run parallel to the Indian coast. The month of July is considered to be the peak period for the southwest monsoon,<sup>20</sup> giving

18. "Thawing Permafrost a Growing Problem for Iqaluit Airport," CBC News, 2013; <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/thawing-permafrost-a-growing-problem-for-iqaluit-airport-1.1371922>. Accessed on July 30, 2019.
19. "Mumbai Rain Updates: City Paralysed after Incessant Rain; Toll Rises to 35", *Livemint*, 2019; <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/mumbai-rains-updates-today-flights-airport-local-trains-traffic-bus-roads-waterlogging-1562034756785.html>. Accessed on July 12, 2019.
20. The word monsoon is derived from the Arabic word 'mausin' which means 'the season of winds.'

heavy and exceptionally high amounts of rainfall. However, the July 26, 2005 event was unique. First, the rainfall amount of 944 mm is, thus, far a record amount for a single day rain event for this mega city (population over 10 million). The previous highest rainfall (during the last 30 to 40 years period) never exceeded 400 mm in 24 hours. The previous highest rainfall was on June 10, 1991, amounting to 399 mm. The unprecedented rainfall in Mumbai on July 25, 2005, was a major catastrophe and resulted in more than 1,000 deaths and a near complete inundation of the city. The approximate damage was estimated to be US\$ 1 billion. Along with human lives, the business economy took the hardest hit in this financial capital of India. The airport was non-operational for two days, trading on the Stock Exchange was suspended for a day, and many areas of the city remained flooded and without power for more than a week.<sup>21</sup> The map below (Fig 1) indicates that the 'very heavy' part of the rain was a localised phenomenon. Vihar Lake and Santacruz were the most affected areas. Santacruz is the area in Mumbai where the airport is located and the amount of rain at Santacruz was recorded by the weather observatory located at the airport itself. Santacruz received a record high rainfall of 94.4 cm. The event was highly localised, which can be gauged from significant rainfall variations found within regions 5 to 20 km away from the airport (refer Fig 1). Most of

**Take-off and landing are the most crucial aspects of any flight and any disruption, damage or waterlogging on the runways affects smooth operations. Upgrades of airports during their operational life-time are planned for, but climate change induced incidents may require unplanned upgrades, which, however, may be limited by local planning parameters and the state of the prevailing technology.**

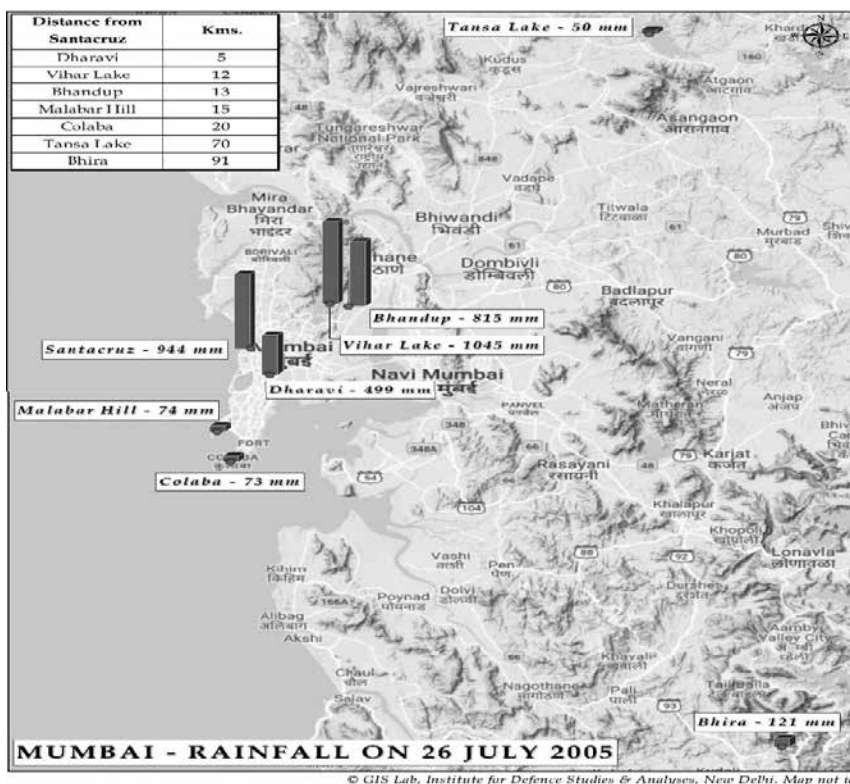
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21. Dudhia, Kumar, Niyogib, Rotunno and Mohanty. "Analysis of the July 26, 2005 Heavy Rain Event Over Mumbai, India Using the Weather Research and Forecasting (WRF) Model", *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society*, 2008, vol. 134, pp. 1897-1910, and Malini Dixon and Ayyalashomayajula, "Description and Impacts of the Mumbai Monsoon Flood of July 2005", *Papers of the Applied Geography Conferences*, 2008, vol. 31, pp. 162-165.

the operational numerical models had failed to predict this extreme event.<sup>22</sup>

It could be argued that the damage was not only due to the excess amount of rainfall but other factors like unplanned construction in low-lying areas, solid waste in urban drainage channels, and inadequacy of drainage capacity were also responsible. Such situations of urban flooding, mainly in the case of coastal cities, also include hydrological factors like the presence or absence of overbank flow channel networks and occurrence of high tides impeding the drainage in coastal cities.<sup>23</sup>

**Fig 1: Graphical Representation of Mumbai Rains in 2005**



22. Sahany Sandeep, V. Venugopal Ravi and S. Nanjundiah, "The 26 July 2005 Heavy Rainfall Event Over Mumbai: Numerical Modeling Aspects," *Meteorology and Atmospheric Physics*, vol. 10, pp. 115-128.
23. K. Gupta, "Interview: Dr. Kapil Gupta\* on Urban Floods", <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=153050>. Accessed on July 12, 2019.

The case discussed (Mumbai heavy rains) is a typical example of how heavy rains could affect locations which are close to the coast.

The air connectivity for Mumbai was totally affected for a few days and also some infrastructure got damaged. On July 26, 2005, owing to the heavy rains, the post afternoon operations were stopped. Initially, more than the rains, the problem was that of poor visibility, for both landing and take-off. However, within a few hours, the consistent rain led to waterlogging of the operations area and, subsequently, water started flowing through the international terminal building. This led to the cutting-off of the power supply and the standby generators could not be switched on because of safety concerns. The entire airport remained non-operative for a period of around 48 hours (2.15 pm on July 26 till 1 pm on July 28) and over 1,100 flights were cancelled.<sup>24</sup> It was found that the intersection area of the runways had as much as six feet of water at one point. Around 3,600 feet in length portion of the 8-foot-high wall around the operations area was breached, allowing water and debris to cover the runway. As a result of the submergence, the Instrument Landing System (ILS) stopped working. There was also a sad incident of the collapse of the extension wall of the airport, resulting in 25 deaths. For restarting the operations, the major task of debris removal from the runways was undertaken. Also, there was a need to restore the runway lights and ILS for smooth operations. There were issues with the approach roads to the areas housing the powerhouses and generators (all the areas were covered by water and slush).<sup>25</sup> Almost every agency involved in the operations had to bear some losses, with the major sufferers being both domestic and international airlines. Take-off and landing are the most crucial aspects of any flight and any disruption, damage or waterlogging on the runways affects smooth operations. Upgrades of airports during their operational life-time are planned for, but climate change induced incidents

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24. Mumbai airport is the world's busiest, with single runway operations, and holds the record for handling 1,004 flights (December 9, 2018). Even during 2006, it used to manage significant amounts of air traffic.

25. "Mumbai Marooned: An Enquiry into Mumbai Floods 2005", *India Environment Portal*, 2006; <http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/Mumbai-Marooned.pdf>. Accessed on July 30, 2019.

may require unplanned upgrades, which, however, may be limited by local planning parameters and the state of the prevailing technology. This is especially true in the case of airports whose overall runway alignment and airside configuration do not allow for them to remain unoperational or with restricted operations for a long time.

Another impact of climate change is the airframe icing or high altitude icing, caused by ingestion of a high density of icicles at very low temperatures [below  $-50^{\circ}\text{C}$ ] in the vicinity of convective cloud tops. Ice content in excess of  $5\text{ g/m}^3$  of air, is often seen as a hindrance for aviation. This phenomenon occurs due to the presence of large supercooled droplets at a temperature range between  $-4$  and  $-14^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The presence of these droplets depends on several conditions like the availability of a substantial measure of water vapour—typically mesoscale bands of intense updrafts and a limited concentration of suitable aerosols acting as condensation nuclei, favouring the formation of large supercooled droplets. Additionally, the growing phenomenon of global warming and increase of moisture in some latitude bands, with a more active dynamic of the flow, all point to an increased chance of occurrence of conditions favourable to icing. They also lead to an upward extension of the upper limit of the icing layers due to lower temperature, and make flying trickier at higher altitudes. This phenomenon has caused more than 100 engine failures in recent years. In 2009, an Air France flight from Rio de Janeiro to Paris crashed, killing all onboard, after ice crystals disabled its speed sensors.<sup>26</sup> Alarmingly, modern energy-efficient lean-burn engines may be more prone to high-altitude icing. Such a phenomenon is likely to increase with more intense cumulonimbus clouds and rise of the tropopause due to the higher temperature and moisture of tropical air masses.

Atmospheric turbulence is also known to cause most weather related aircraft incidents. Clear Air Turbulence (CAT) has been the most difficult to detect by satellites or onboard radar. CAT is linked to atmospheric jet streams, which are estimated to be fortified by anthropogenic climate

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26. Wichter, n. 17.

change. Flying would feel different in and around the jet stream. Flying east would become quicker in the stronger winds that result, but flying west would be slower. Thus, there would be more delays and cancellations of flights. In future, all airline schedules would need to accommodate these altered flight times and routes. There are reports that suggest that climate change would lead to bumpier transatlantic flights, in addition to an increase in travel time and fuel consumption.<sup>27</sup> Changes in wind patterns are also known to impact jet stream strength, position, curvature and prevailing wind direction. These impacts would, in turn, cause operational and network disruptions in many airports. Furthermore, as the storm, rain and cyclone patterns witness a change due to the change in climatic patterns, there would be an increase in delays and re-routing, thereby, leading to more fuel being used, further leading to greater loss of money. A superstorm named Sandy hammered three international airports in and around New York City, including the La Guardia airport in 2012. The storm subjugated La Guardia's protective "berm wall system" paving the way for nearly 380 million litres of water from Flushing Bay flooding the airfield and closing it for three days.<sup>28</sup> This incident highlights that climate change could considerably impact several airports which would not only affect civil aviation but also hamper businesses and military requirements. As the changes in climatic conditions continue to wreak havoc, many of the sectors in aviation would face difficulty, especially in areas where air travel is the only option. Some of these have been listed in Table 1.

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27. Paul D. Williams and Manoj M. Joshi, "Intensification of Winter Transatlantic Aviation Turbulence in Response to Climate Change", *Nature Climate Change*, 2013, vol. 3, pp. 644-648.

28. Sandeep Sahany, V. Venugopal Ravi and S. Nanjundiah, n. 22..

**Table 1: Likely Impact of Climate Change on Different Sectors of Aviation**

Civil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent delays and cancellation of flights</li> <li>• Route changes and long waiting hours</li> <li>• Increase in flight prices and travel time</li> <li>• Increase in no-go flight days</li> <li>• Increased threat to life and safety</li> <li>• Unplanned expenditure</li> <li>• Disruption of tourism/leisure trips</li> </ul>
Business/ Freight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent delays and cancellation of flights—loss of money</li> <li>• Delayed delivery of parcels and packages</li> <li>• Increase in no-go flight days</li> <li>• Impact on perishable goods and food products like fish</li> <li>• Unplanned expenditure</li> </ul>
Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flooding of airfields, access limitations and other logistic related impairments</li> <li>• Delay in rescue operations and humanitarian aid</li> <li>• Unplanned expenditure</li> <li>• Weather conditions impact Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) activities</li> <li>• Impact on personnel recovery/casualty evacuation</li> <li>• Delay/cancellation of logistics flights</li> </ul>

### CLIMATE CHANGE AND METEOROLOGY

The Mumbai rains case study highlighted two important issues: one, the need to majorly upgrade various ground systems and infrastructural facilities, and two, the need to evolve weather forecasting models which can catch the microclimate changes well in time. It appears that some changes need to be made in the practices of aviation meteorology too. As mentioned earlier, climatic disturbances have a negative impact on the safety of aircraft because of the different scales involved in weather phenomena. However, these disturbances may not have the same impact if the aircraft encounter them

en-route (regional and global scales) or in the airport terminal area (local scale). Furthermore, some phenomena are only present either at the local scale or at high altitude when the aircraft is en-route.<sup>29</sup> Normally, weather observations which are shared with the flying aircraft are either half an hour or one hour old, depending on the session. At present, automatic weather stations are available which provide continuous weather observations. Also, various radars (including doppler radars) are available. There is other modern equipment available to address different parameters of the weather. In addition to this, improved Numerical Weather Prediction (NWP) models are available that provide timely weather forecasts at different scales. Since weather forecasting and weather data collection cannot be restricted by geographical boundaries, internationally, there is greater understanding about the exchange of timely information and forecasts. More importantly, today, the quality of forecasting is improving. Quality is gaining roughly a day a decade so that a 5-day forecast is now about as good as a 4-day forecast was a decade ago, and a 2-day forecast 30 years ago.<sup>30</sup>

### **NEW TECHNOLOGIES: NEW CHALLENGES OR NEW OPPORTUNITIES?**

Advances in technology have facilitated the development of new innovative aircraft which may present new challenges but, at the same time, represent new opportunities to address the environmental challenges. The requirement is that the global aviation sector should contribute towards holding global warming to 1.5 degrees. Therefore, the aviation sector needs to evolve an effective mechanism that could rapidly reduce the emissions produced by it. Particularly for the purpose of decarbonisation, some of the possible solutions include: ensuring compatibility with the Paris Agreement, 2018, deploying near-term technology solutions, including

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29. P. Christian, "Understanding Aviation Meteorology and Weather Hazards with Ground-Based Observations", in Domenico Cimini, Guido Visconti and Frank S. Marzano, eds., *Integrated Ground-Based Observing Systems* (London: Springer), pp. 161-173.

30. Peter R. Orszag, "We Need to get Weather Forecasts Right, Global Cooperation & Data Sharing is how", *The Print*, August 1, 2019; <https://theprint.in/opinion/we-need-to-get-weather-forecasts-right-global-cooperation-data-sharing-is-how/270660/>. Accessed on August 1, 2019.



**Technological improvements usually involve changes in the design of the aircraft or aerodynamic modifications, fittings that weigh less, fuel efficient upgraded engines, and increased operational efficiencies. Artificial Intelligence (IA) and predictive analytics may be used for timely maintenance and upgradation.**

alternative (environment friendly) fuels and creating new green business models (including ground operations) for the aviation industry. The biggest improvement in the aviation sector would typically arise from replacing or upgrading the outdated fleets. For instance, some aircraft can be retrofitted with technical devices at the tip of the wings (“winglets”), new surface treatments that reduce drag (air resistance) and even new engines.

Improving the fuel efficiency of aircraft and the reduction of harmful emissions has been a major area of technological research and development since it directly improves airlines’ operation cost. Technological improvements usually involve changes in the design of the aircraft or aerodynamic modifications, fittings that weigh less, fuel efficient upgraded engines, and increased operational efficiencies. Artificial Intelligence (IA) and predictive analytics may be used for timely maintenance and upgradation.

There has been considerable development in electric and hybrid aircraft, including autonomous aircraft that provide point-to-point connectivity. European companies like Pipistrel are currently developing electric power plants for aircraft. The electricity is proposed to be generated by means like solar cells, batteries, fuel cells or ultra-capacitors. Research for clean propulsion technologies like cryogenic hydrogen fuel or electric powered aircraft is still underway. The Airbus, Rolls-Royce and Siemens aircraft “Electric Fan-X” is anticipated to test fly by 2020. One of the engines of the aircraft has been replaced by two megawatt electric motors. Additional changes include the development of Counter Rotating Open Rotor (CROR) that is expected to provide fuel burn improvements up to 30 per cent. Development of the Airbus A340 laminar flow aircraft is tasked to assess the feasibility of the

laminar flow wing technology that aims to reduce aircraft drag by 10 per cent and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 5 per cent.<sup>31</sup> Inspired by steam catapults used on aircraft carriers, research has been going on in the use of induction electric motors to accelerate planes to the desired speed in a more fuel efficient and quieter manner.<sup>32</sup>

Another interesting development has been of the fuel cell powered electric nose wheel that is being proposed to be inducted in order to save fuel while reducing airport noise. Aircraft fitted with this nose wheel will be able to approach their locations travelling in both forward and reverse directions, as well as move to their take-off positions without using towing vehicles or their main engines.<sup>33</sup> Use of Sustainable Alternative Fuels (SAFs) has been another avenue of research by the aviation industry. There has been major focus on the bio-based fuels that are obtained from woody biomass, hydrogenated fats or recycled wastes and have lower carbon intensity. Significant interest also exists for non-bio-based feedstocks, in particular for the drop-in power-to-liquids “electro-fuels”. Electro-fuels comprise synthetic alternative fuels to fossil kerosene through the use of renewable electricity to produce hydrogen from water by electrolysis and a combination with carbon dioxide captured from the air. The power-to-liquid process has been found to present a favorable greenhouse gas balance relative to conventional and bio-based aviation fuel streams, with close to zero emissions. These alternatives might be eco-friendly to some extent but present challenges of their own. For example, the use of electro-fuels may be a technically viable option to help decarbonise the aircraft, however, they

**Many industry experts are of the opinion that commercial deployment of advanced technologies or eco-fuels will take another two decades. Moreover, many of these adaptations do not guarantee zero per cent emission rates.**

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31. European Aviation Environmental Report, 2019; <https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/2019-aviation-environmental-report.pdf>. Accessed on August 1, 2019.

32. M. G. Richard, “Civilian Airplanes Could Someday Take-Off With Electric Catapults”; <https://www.treehugger.com/aviation/civilian-airplanes-could-one-day-take-off-electric-catapults.html>. Accessed on July 27, 2019.

33. See Orszag, n. 30.

are 3 to 6 times more expensive than kerosene. Even the use of bio-fuels in airlines would be an expensive affair

With countries indulging in a race to develop advanced supersonic aircraft with speeds over Mach 3 for both civilian and military purposes, with a reduced sonic boom, in 2016, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) announced a programme to develop quieter supersonic aircraft. However, these supersonic aircraft would be operating at a higher altitude in the sensitive troposphere and stratosphere which might enhance the issues of global warming. Research also indicates that non-CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from these flights would have a greater impact on climate change than the subsonic ones. Many of these technologies may appear promising. However, many industry experts are of the opinion that commercial deployment of advanced technologies or eco-fuels will take another two decades. Moreover, many of these adaptations do not guarantee zero per cent emission rates. Additionally, the cost factor would weigh heavy on the stakeholders and they would think twice before investing in new technologies if the profit made is nil. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to see how many of the new inventions are pushed into the realm of reality.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The effects of climate change imply that the local climate variability that people have previously experienced, and have adapted to, is changing. This change is happening at a relatively great speed and many of the climatic phenomena may soon become unpredictable and come as a relative surprise, although the impact of climate change on the aviation sector would vary according to geography, climate zone and local circumstances. However, surprise weather events like dust storms, cloudbursts and flash flooding could impact various aviation related activities and may have spillover effect in different sectors as well. Advances in technology are just one facet of curbing the impact of climate change from the aviation sector. Measures need to be taken by the policy-makers and other stakeholders, including aircraft operators, airports, air navigation service providers, aircraft

manufacturers and regulators for this to happen. France has announced that it would tax air travel from 2020 as a part of its climate strategy and it has been predicted that soon the European Union (EU) might follow suit.<sup>34</sup> The same could be followed by countries that witness a heavy dependency on air travel. Moreover, commuters should be encouraged to travel by rail or other eco-friendly means unless air travel becomes absolutely necessary.

Air traffic management is usually discussed in terms of emissions and contrails reduction and improved operational efficiency. Airlines can also optimise their timetables, and route network and flight frequencies to minimise the number of empty seats flown. Air shows can be cut down and private aircraft allowed only in case of emergencies. Leaders or celebrities of a country often taking a chartered aircraft can set an example by travelling on commercial aircraft. Moreover, airlines should do away with business class or luxury class to reduce the carbon footprint, thereby reducing the pressure to some extent.

Although the impact of climate change on the aviation sector is fraught with uncertainties, the industry needs to build a strategy to mitigate its impact on climate change at a global level. Currently, the approach to mitigating the impact of climate change on aviation is less coordinated. However, solutions will require the involvement and collaboration of all industry participants, and the setting up of intergovernmental panels. If the aviation industry starts addressing the issue of climate change proactively, it could prove to be a win-win situation for both the aviation sector as well as the climate in the long term.

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34. C. Farand, "France Announces Tax on Air Travel in Climate Push", Climate Home News, July 9, 2019; <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2019/07/09/france-announces-tax-air-travel-climate-push/>. Accessed on July 25, 2019.

# US-RUSSIA RELATIONS AND FAILURE OF THE RESET (2008-14)

CARL JAISON

## INTRODUCTION

At the end of the Cold War, US-Russia relations were expected to be on the upswing, given the end of their ideological and strategic rivalry. Getting over the uncertainties of the post-Soviet era, the two countries achieved remarkable cooperation in the areas of nuclear arms control, during the Gulf War against Saddam Hussein's Iraq and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)-led North Atlantic Cooperation Council, marking the first reset between the former Cold War adversaries. As the administration of George H. W. Bush did not promote democracy initiatives in the former Soviet Union, there was greater scope for a new form of partnership between the US and Russia.

However, this view rapidly changed once Bill Clinton was elected as US president. The view of his administration was fundamentally shaped by the US perception of the unprecedented unipolarity of the international system. Without any significant challenger, the US policies under the Clinton administration were based on a values-driven, market-reforms approach and this played out in its dealings with Boris Yeltsin's Russia. The critics of the Clinton-Yeltsin reset argue that the US played a major role in pushing democratic reforms within Russia, enlarging NATO eastward

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**Under the George W. Bush Jr. administration, the US-Russia relationship was briefly strengthened after the 9/11 attacks when President Vladimir Putin took the initiative to mark the third reset. But the issue of US missile defence, further NATO enlargement to include the Baltic states in 2004 and interference in the former Soviet sphere of influence with respect to Georgia and Ukraine had alerted Moscow to Washington's continued disregard for the former's core interests.**

to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, and ignored Russia's core interests in its neighbourhood, especially with the NATO military operation against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Subsequently, under the George W. Bush Jr. administration, the US-Russia relationship was briefly strengthened after the 9/11 attacks when President Vladimir Putin took the initiative to mark the third reset. But the issue of US missile defence, further NATO enlargement to include the Baltic states in 2004 and interference in the former Soviet sphere of influence with respect to Georgia and Ukraine had alerted Moscow to Washington's continued

disregard for the former's core interests. The Russo-Georgian War of 2008 had all but ended the Bush-Putin era of rapprochement.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE RESET POLICY**

By the end of George Bush Jr.'s presidency, US-Russia relations had turned frosty and this served as the immediate background to the widely publicised Obama-Medvedev 'reset'. Despite cooperation in the sphere of counter-terrorism and non-proliferation in the early years of the Bush-Putin era, the relations were beset by strategic constraints. Firstly, the unilateral US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002 prompted Russia to "reject the implementation of the START II Treaty."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Wade Boese, "Russia Declares Itself No Longer Bound by START II", *Arms Control Today*; <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002-07/news/russia-declares-itself-longer-bound-start-ii>. Accessed on October 10, 2019.

In order to move forward with its missile defence plan for Europe, the US mooted the idea of installing an anti-missile site close to Poland's northern Baltic Sea coast that would be a part of NATO's defensive umbrella. In the month of August 2008, when Russia sent troops into Georgia, the former threatened rocket attacks on Poland for "agreeing to host 10 US interceptor rockets there as part of the missile defence plan."<sup>2</sup> Despite US assurances that the missile shield was to provide protection for Europe against the Iranian short-to-intermediate-range ballistic missiles, Moscow believed it had strong reasons to suspect Washington's intentions. Therefore, the repercussions of Bush's decision to abandon the ABM Treaty in 2002 had strategic consequences for both NATO's security and Russia's belief of an encroaching threat near its borders.

Second, continued NATO expansion heightened Russia's fears of the organisation's military objectives in the former Soviet Union's sphere of influence. The fifth wave of NATO enlargement in 2004 absorbed countries like Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, among which the admission of the Baltic countries particularly angered Russia,<sup>3</sup> as these were former Soviet states. Prior to this, in 1999, NATO had admitted three former Warsaw Pact countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. While most Central and Eastern European states had been courting NATO membership since the fall of Communism, Russia was staunchly opposed to the idea of NATO encroachment into what it considered

**While NATO expansion into Central and Eastern Europe complicated Russia's relations with its neighbouring countries, it was the accession talks relating to Georgia and Ukraine that proved to be the thorniest subject in US-Russia relations in the following years.**

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2. Ian Traynor, Luke Harding and Helen Womack, "Moscow Warns it Could Strike Poland over US Missile Shield", *The Guardian*, August 16, 2008; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/aug/15/russia.poland.nuclear.missiles.threat>. Accessed on October 16, 2019.

3. Laurence Peter, "Why Nato-Russia Relations Soured Before Ukraine", BBC News, September 3, 2014; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-29030744>. Accessed on October 10, 2019.

as its “near abroad”.<sup>4</sup> This refers to post-Soviet countries where Moscow claims to have strategic stakes and acts as the self-proclaimed protector of the considerably large Russian ethnic minorities within the borders of these states.

While NATO expansion into Central and Eastern Europe complicated Russia’s relations with its neighbouring countries, it was the accession talks relating to Georgia and Ukraine that proved to be the thorniest subject in US-Russia relations in the following years. In the backdrop of the NATO Summit in Bucharest, Putin warned of consequences over the granting of the Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia and Ukraine. Although the action plan was not extended to these countries due to Germany’s intervention, the US supported Tbilisi’s and Kiev’s future inclusion. In the sixth wave of NATO expansion in 2009, Albania and Croatia were included which indicated the military organisation’s strategic interests in Eastern Europe. This was prompted by Russia’s backing of Serbia in its war over the breakaway territory of Kosovo, which proclaimed unilateral independence under the support of NATO forces in early 2008.

Thirdly, the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 represented in no uncertain terms the seriousness with which Moscow dealt with ethnic flare-ups involving Russian-speaking communities in the former Soviet states. The Georgian territories in question were South Ossetia and Abkhazia where Russia had maintained peace-keeping troops to prevent the discriminate killing of the ethnic Russian minority. Georgia claimed that the Russian forces targeted Georgian civilians and that it was an act of aggression in order to instigate war and invade the country under the pretext of ethnic tensions. The US backed Georgia in the conflict, which confirmed Russia’s deepest concerns about the military encirclement by Western forces around its border areas.

The issues of missile defence, NATO enlargement and ignorance of Russia’s sensitivities about its sphere of influence remained irritants

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4. Dominic Lieven, “Post-Soviet Russia”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*; <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia/Post-Soviet-Russia>. Accessed on October 10, 2019.



throughout Bush's two-term presidency. The Russian president during these years, Vladimir Putin, had shown signs of both cooperation and confrontation in his dealings with the US. However, there was a change of leadership on both sides, with Dmitry Medvedev elected president of Russia in March 2008, and Barack Obama winning the US presidential elections in November 2008. The two presidents had the opportunity to rewrite the course of US-Russia relations that had suffered from weariness and mistrust over the previous decade or so.

### **FACTORS ENABLING A 'RESET' POLICY**

The Obama-Medvedev 'reset' was set against the background of the shaky bilateral ties during the final years of the Bush and Putin presidencies, culminating in the Russo-Georgian War of August 2008. There were increasing efforts by Washington to call out the resort to authoritarianism within Moscow's domestic political space. The cloud over the Iraq War had also unsettled the geo-political calculus of the Middle East, and with both the US and Russia taking opposite positions, the likelihood of their convergence on international security issues appeared slim. Thus, both Obama and Medvedev had inherited a tough foreign policy field from their respective predecessors. Nevertheless, there was a palpable glimmer of hope as the two leaders were determined to work out a common ground and set US-Russia relations on a new footing.

The major areas of cooperation, as outlined by the US, were identified as: nuclear arms control, sanctions against Iran, access to Afghanistan's northern border, counter-terrorism operations against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, restoration of verification procedures in the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), and trade. However, there was a caveat: Vice President Joe Biden warned Russia that the US "will not recognize any nation having a sphere of influence".<sup>5</sup> In spite of the avowed promises to cooperate on the aforementioned issues, the crux of the US reset policy

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5. Col. Jeffrey S. Davis, "US-Russian Cooperation in the Post-Cold War Environment", United States Army Command and General Staff College, April 2017, p. 30.

was based on a pragmatic approach toward Russia that included three elements: “cooperating on specific areas where their interests aligned, remaining firm where these interests diverged, and engaging with the Russian people themselves.”<sup>6</sup> The last objective was controversial and would later generate reservations from Russia as a form of US interference in its domestic affairs.

Before analysing the various elements of the reset policy, it is pertinent to understand the conditions that allowed for a reassessment of positions at the level of foreign policy decision-making. Broadly speaking, these factors generated favourable grounds for the brief period of rapprochement in US-Russia relations from 2009 to 2011.

### ***2008 US Presidential Election and Obama’s Foreign Policy***

During the first televised presidential debate, Obama offered a more balanced take on the course of US policy towards Russia. He agreed that there were certain issues of common interest for both sides and that the next president should not deal with Russia “based on staring into his eyes and seeing his soul” but based on the national security interests of the United States.<sup>7</sup> This was part of Obama’s larger strategy of soliciting Russia’s support on global issues like nuclear non-proliferation and the war on terror.

On the face of it, there was no ambiguity with regard to his policy over Russia. He condemned the Russians for the takeover of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and, at the same time, pledged to engage with Moscow on nuclear issues. Obama singled out Bush for his failure to undertake a pragmatic approach towards Russia on nuclear weapons and missile defence. He believed that the US treatment of Russia had to de-couple the Georgian crisis from the nuclear arms race. Engaging Russia on nuclear issues was vital to limit the destabilising impact of Russia’s nuclear weapons. This was a priority for US national security.

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6. Hillary Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), p. 231.

7. “The First McCain-Obama Presidential Debate”, Commission on Presidential Debates, September 26, 2008; <https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/2008-debate-transcript/>. Accessed on October 4, 2019.

The views of Henry J Kissinger and George Schultz influenced Obama's approach towards NATO expansion and enlisting Russia's support on Iran's nuclear programme, energy, finding ways to defuse the impact of the anti-ballistic missile deployment in Eastern Europe and a "possible linking of some American and Russian anti-ballistic missile defense systems."<sup>8</sup> Although Obama renounced his prior support for NATO expansion,<sup>9</sup> he continued the long tradition of US-sponsored democracy-promotion and assistance programmes in the former Soviet states of Ukraine and Georgia. This would later impede closer US-Russia cooperation on other issues.

### *The Russian 'Tandem'*

The term 'tandem' in Russian politics represents a unique power-sharing arrangement as part of the joint leadership of Russia between 2008 and 2012. Vladimir Putin was constitutionally barred from serving a third consecutive term but was appointed as Russia's Prime Minister under President Medvedev. There were conflicting views on who out of the two exercised power at the Kremlin, despite the prime minister's role being of lesser significance in Russian politics. Those who felt the transfer of presidential powers was only an eyewash and that Putin continued to retain his position as the paramount leader in the hierarchy, saw Medvedev as a "notional president".<sup>10</sup>

It was generally believed in the US strategic community that Putin still called the shots in the Kremlin. Having steered Russia's foreign policy direction since 2000, it was hard to discount the fact that no major decision could be taken by the new dispensation without Putin's consent. Despite

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8. Henry A. Kissinger and George P. Shultz, "Finding Common Ground", *The New York Times*, September 30, 2008; <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/30/opinion/30iht-edkissinger.1.16585986.html>. Accessed on October 4, 2019.

9. Benjamin H. Friedman and Justin Logan, "Hitting the 'Stop' Button on NATO Expansion", *International Affairs Forum*, April 24, 2009; [https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/articles/friedman\\_logan\\_hittingstopbuttononnatoexpansion.pdf](https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/articles/friedman_logan_hittingstopbuttononnatoexpansion.pdf). Accessed on October 4, 2019.

10. Philip Stephens, "Putin Maps the Boundaries of Greater Russia", *Financial Times*, August 28, 2008; <https://www.ft.com/content/128428e4-7517-11dd-ab30-0000779fd18c>. Accessed on October 5, 2019.

**There was a general attempt during the 'reset' period to manage the expectations of the bilateral relationship. Both the Obama and Medvedev administrations understood that a realistic assessment of interests without a reaction to rhetorical provocations by either side was the way forward.**

America's misgivings about Putin, the new Obama administration was determined to work amicably with Medvedev and begin a new chapter in US-Russia ties.

It was also helped by Medvedev's attempt to establish his own distinct persona and his general commitment towards modernisation reforms in Russia. The new US administration was encouraged by his rhetoric on domestic problems, which were forward-looking and "in sync with Western recommendations" for Russia.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Medvedev appeared to handle the foreign policy portfolio,

while Putin focussed on economic issues. This allowed Washington to act with Medvedev on various foreign policy challenges for which Russian support was crucial.

It was also noted that Medvedev had been at the helm when Russia decided to invade Georgia in August 2008 and, therefore, had the requisite wherewithal to initiate policy reforms and decisions. While the over-estimation of Medvedev's autonomy would hurt America's ability to engage with Putin once the latter was reelected as president in 2012, there was a general attempt during the 'reset' period to manage the expectations of the bilateral relationship. Both the Obama and Medvedev administrations understood that a realistic assessment of interests without a reaction to rhetorical provocations by either side was the way forward.

### *Global Financial Crisis of 2008*

The economic downturn was attributed to a mix of factors: "falling energy prices, global market turmoil and political issues including worries over the

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11. Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 186.

war with Georgia.”<sup>12</sup> Further, Russian economic sectors were controlled by state-backed monopolies that hold a disproportionate share of the market, supported by a corrupt government apparatus.

But the consequence of the financial crisis vis-à-vis the Georgia War was most acute on the energy front. Western Europe depends on Russia for energy deliveries and Georgia “offers an alternative corridor for energy transit from the Caspian basin, bypassing Russia.”<sup>13</sup> In response to sanctions over its Georgia incursions, Russia disrupted gas supply to Western Europe as slumping energy prices threatened the “fiscal health and political stability” of its economy.<sup>14</sup>

However, Russia’s leaders were not aware of the extent to which the country had been integrated with the global economy and the financial crisis helped to change that view. While Medvedev expressed surprise that Russia’s economic collapse was more than he had anticipated, Putin gave an implicit acknowledgement of Russia being affected by the crisis

**Unlike the US, Russia’s terror threats have mostly come not from ‘Islamist’ groups but rather from areas in its North Caucasus, driven by grievances over Moscow’s centralisation attempts. However, Russia’s support for the US’ war on terror stems from the fear that the conflict in Afghanistan could spread to its Central Asian doorsteps, which would lead to the presence of other insurgent groups.**

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12. “Russian Stock Market Still Shut after Plunge: Market Official”, AFP, September 19, 2019; [https://web.archive.org/web/20080919230300/http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5j8R4\\_3j96oTVQzSlJlqtZsZD9OPA](https://web.archive.org/web/20080919230300/http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5j8R4_3j96oTVQzSlJlqtZsZD9OPA). Accessed on October 5, 2019.

13. Peter Havlik and Vasily Astrov, “Economic Consequences of the Georgian-Russian Conflict”, The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, September 2, 2008; <https://wiiw.ac.at/press-release-economic-consequences-of-the-georgian-russian-conflict-english-pnd-19.pdf>. Accessed on October 5, 2019.

14. Andrew E. Kramer, “Russia Cuts Gas, and Europe Shivers”, *The New York Times*, January 6, 2009; <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/07/world/europe/07gazprom.html?mtrref=www.google.com&assetType=REGIWALL&mtrref=www.nytimes.com&gwh=D9F07234837D57345344ABEFFAD52F92&gwt=pay&assetType=REGIWALL>. Accessed on October 5, 2019.

“because it had become globally integrated”.<sup>15</sup> Medvedev’s conciliatory tone prevailed and Putin’s economic team weathered the crisis better than many other countries.

Despite the improvement in its economic situation, Russia realised that there were two major obstacles in its way to become integrated into global markets: one was the World Trade Organisation (WTO) accession and the second was the US domestic legislation called the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. With regard to both issues, cooperation with the US was critical, which figured as an element in the US-Russia reset policy.

### *The Global War on Terror*

When President Obama took office, the United States was engaged in counter-terror operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although the 9/11 World Trade Centre terrorist attack had heightened national security concerns regarding the Al-Qaeda and Taliban, the US-led “War on Terror” had failed to stabilise the situation in both these countries. The Bush administration’s unilateral intervention in these regions had worsened security fears and fuelled the rise of a global *jihadist* resistance against the US. In Obama’s early phase as US president, there was a concerted effort to reject Bush’s foreign policy actions, end the war in Iraq and undertake a path of cooperative engagement with both allies and adversaries.

For Russia, the global war on terror meant something entirely different. Unlike the US, Russia’s terror threats have mostly come not from ‘Islamist’ groups but rather from areas in its North Caucasus, driven by grievances over Moscow’s centralisation attempts. However, Russia’s support for the US’ war on terror stems from the fear that the conflict in Afghanistan could spread to its Central Asian doorsteps, which would lead to the presence of other insurgent groups. This cooperation had begun since the 9/11 attacks but the disagreements over the Iraq invasion had clouded attempts towards increased coordination between the two countries.

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15. “Putin: The Crisis is the Result of Integration into the Global Economy. For Which they Fought”, Newsru.com, December 29, 2008; <https://www.newsru.com/finance/29dec2008/putincrisis.html>. Accessed on October 5, 2019.

Despite reservations about the Bush-era war on terror, Russia opened the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), a “commercially based logistical corridor connecting the Baltic and Black Sea ports with Afghanistan via Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.”<sup>16</sup> In this way, Russia sensed important gains accruing from the international coalition in Afghanistan, both “to contain the movement and activities of Islamic insurgents and terrorists and to curtail the drug flow infecting its own population courtesy the Afghan heroin.”<sup>17</sup>

### **ELEMENTS OF THE RESET POLICY**

A new US policy was announced by US Vice President Joseph Biden at the Munich Security Conference in February 2009 and was followed by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton presenting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov with a red button with the English word “reset” at Geneva in March 2009. The initial period of the reset was marked by US acquiescence over issues that had historically antagonised Russia: democracy promotion in post-Soviet states and US interference and criticism of Russian domestic politics. This posture was vital in soliciting Russian help in areas like nuclear non-proliferation, Afghanistan, Iran, etc.

The first official meeting between Obama and Medvedev took place on April 1, 2009, in London in the backdrop of the global financial crisis. Unlike the first Putin-Bush summit in Slovenia, which had suffered from over-promises and over-expectations, the Obama-Medvedev interaction was restrained and recognised the “real differences” between the two countries.<sup>18</sup> Obama’s meetings in the Kremlin a few months later with both Putin and Medvedev were starkly different. Putin saw Obama’s outreach as a signal of US course correction of its past mistakes. But Obama’s meeting with

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16. Andrew C. Kuchins and Thomas M. Sanderson, “The Northern Distribution Network and Afghanistan: Geopolitical Challenges and Opportunities”, Centre for Strategic & International Studies, January 2010; [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/091229\\_Kuchins\\_NDNandAfghan\\_Web.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/091229_Kuchins_NDNandAfghan_Web.pdf), p. 1.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

18. Stent, n. 11, p. 189.

Medvedev was more forward-looking as the two discussed wide-ranging issues like a new nuclear arms control treaty, opening of a joint early-warning centre to share data on missile launchings, Afghanistan, etc.

However, there was once again a mismatch between the US' stated policy and its on-ground behaviour. As US Ambassador to Russia and the president's chief Russia advisor Michael McFaul revealed, the Obama administration was careful to ensure that the reset in government-to-government relations was not a return to "pure realpolitik" and did not "oppose advocacy of democracy and human rights issues in Russia."<sup>19</sup> America's engagement with civil society members and Russian opposition figures would result in friction between the two governments in the later years of the reset period.

Nevertheless, Russia's rhetoric grew more positive towards the US due to two reasons: the new US government's change in policy and the 2008 global financial crisis.<sup>20</sup> The immediate realisation that Russia needed Western capital and technical knowhow to help deal with the crisis, necessitated Moscow's modified stance, and marked the beginning of the 'reset' years.

### *New START Treaty*

In what was to become the centrepiece of the Obama-Medvedev reset, the US and Russia began negotiations on a new nuclear arms control treaty, later termed as the New START Treaty. This was predicated on three factors. First, the existing treaty on the nuclear limit, START I, was set to expire in December 2009. Second, the Russians considered it a priority for them because it could free up resources to spend on other areas in the context of the financial crisis. Third, for the Americans, the treaty would help secure tangible reduction in the Russian nuclear capability, which would help to offset Moscow's relative weakness in conventional forces. However, the US was in it for the long haul.

Global de-nuclearisation was close to Obama's heart and he hoped to succeed in his long-term strategy to persuade Iran to discontinue its

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19. Michael McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin's Russia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), p. 66.

20. Stent, n. 11, p. 190.



nuclear programme. Further, the Obama administration was committed “to strengthen nuclear security by reducing and safeguarding nuclear materials and ensuring that they did not fall into the hands of rogue states or non-state actors.”<sup>21</sup> The Nuclear Security Summit of April 2010 in Washington was directed towards this purpose and the two countries agreed to “dispose of a combined sixty-eight metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium under an agreement that would eliminate enough material to produce seventeen thousand nuclear weapons.”<sup>22</sup> Since his pledge for de-nuclearisation would comprise a shift in US nuclear strategy, it was pertinent that Russia was equally convinced about the contents of the treaty.

According to Ambassador Michael McFaul, who was also a key member of the US negotiating team, there were essentially three focus areas during the treaty negotiations: limits on deployed nuclear warheads, limits on delivery vehicles [Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers] and missile defence. The Russians were most interested in securing limits on missile defence deployments, but the Americans would not budge on this even at the cost of exiting the treaty negotiations.<sup>23</sup>

The Russians feared that US missile defence deployment would improve in the coming years, while they themselves had not caught up with US systems. Putin threatened that “any plans for US missile defense systems would result in Russia not signing the New START agreement.”<sup>24</sup> However, Russia soon realised that the US’ missile defence capabilities were not going to expand enough over the duration of the New START Treaty to undermine

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21. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

22. Peter Stockton, “U.S. Nuclear Weapons Complex: How the Country Can Profit and Become More Secure by Getting Rid of Its Surplus Weapons-Grade Uranium”, Pogo, September 14, 2010; <https://www.pogo.org/report/2010/09/us-nuclear-weapons-complex-how-country-can-profit-and-become-more-secure-by-getting-rid-of-its-surplus-weapons-grade-uranium/>. Accessed on October 8, 2019.

23. McFaul, n. 19, p. 103.

24. Patrick Goodenough, “Putin Impedes Obama’s Plan for ‘World Without Nuclear Weapons’”, CNS News, December 30, 2009; <https://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/putin-impedes-obama-s-plan-world-without-nuclear-weapons>. Accessed on October 8, 2019.

**For the US, the biggest threat came from Iran's ballistic missile programme. Since the Russian radar systems were positioned in locations close to Iran, it would be in the US interest to obtain early warning information about an Iranian attack on Europe.**

mutual assured destruction.<sup>25</sup> Although the Russians warned that future US deployments could undermine the treaty, the US argued that there was no relationship between the two.

In the final treaty limits, the New START provides the parties with seven years to reduce their forces, and is to remain in force for a total of 10 years. It limits each side to no more than 800 deployed and non-deployed land-based ICBM and SLBM launchers and deployed and non-deployed heavy bombers equipped to carry nuclear armaments. Within that total, each side can retain no more than 700 deployed\* ICBMs, deployed SLBMs, and

deployed heavy bombers equipped to carry nuclear armaments. The treaty also limits each side to "no more than 1,550 deployed warheads; those are the actual number of warheads on deployed ICBMs and SLBMs, and one warhead for each deployed heavy bomber."<sup>26</sup>

In strategic terms, both the US and Russia generally agreed that the New START Treaty succeeded in limiting the build-up and deployment of nuclear capabilities. For the Russians, their failure to link the New START to missile defence was underplayed and, instead, the focus was on its economic advantages. Although it reduced its strategic nuclear arsenal, it still allowed Russia to maintain a "significant nuclear posture".<sup>27</sup> For the Americans, the treaty helped to reinforce the idea of its conventional military superiority, courtesy the Russian reluctance to negotiate further reduction in deployed strategic warhead and delivery vehicles. However,

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25. McFaul, n. 19, p. 103.

26. "The New START Treaty: Central Limits and Key Provisions", Congressional Research Service, May 30, 2019; <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R41219.pdf>. Accessed on October 8, 2019.

27. Stent, n. 11, p. 192.

\* A deployed ICBM or SLBM is one that is contained in a deployed launcher. Non-deployed launchers are, therefore, those that are used for testing or training, those that are located at space launch facilities, or those that are located at deployment areas or on submarines but do not contain a deployed ICBM or SLBM.

the US could not seek restrictions on tactical nuclear weapons, where the Russians have a numerical superiority but which, from their point of view, “can offset the strategic weapons deficit”.<sup>28</sup>

### *Missile Defence*

The subject of missile defence came to the fore again with the idea of a unified European security architecture, having both NATO and Russian cooperative mechanisms. The limited objective was to assure defence from a missile attack launched from outside the continent, presumably from Iran. Russia’s suggestion was to have a “sectoral” plan, whereby the US and NATO would protect a “Western” European sector and Russia would shield the “Eastern” European sector. The Americans shot down the idea.<sup>29</sup>

For the US, the biggest threat came from Iran’s ballistic missile programme. Since the Russian radar systems were positioned in locations close to Iran, it would be in the US interest to obtain early warning information about an Iranian attack on Europe.<sup>30</sup> In the NATO summit in Lisbon in 2010, the two countries agreed to “cooperate on missile defense against shared threats”. To this end, it was agreed that NATO and the Russia Council would resume theatre ballistic missile defence and “... to identify opportunities for Russia to cooperate with NATO’s new territorial missile defence capability by 2011.”<sup>31</sup>

**The key factor for the inconclusiveness regarding the NATO-Russia joint missile defence plan was Moscow’s insistence on legally-binding guarantees from Washington. Since the US could not obtain congressional approval for the same, Russia decided that the negotiations were heading towards an impasse.**

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28. Ibid., p. 193.

29. McFaul, n. 19, p. 127.

30. Dean A. Wilkening, “Cooperating With Russia on Missile Defense: A New Proposal”, *Arms Control Today*; <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2012-03/cooperating-russia-missile-defense-new-proposal>. Accessed on October 9, 2019.

31. “Fact Sheet: President Obama’s Participation in the Nato Summit Meetings in Lisbon”, Obama White House Archives, November 20, 2010; <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/20/fact-sheet-president-obamas-participation-nato-summit-meetings-lisbon>. Accessed on October 9, 2019.

However, the plan for missile defence cooperation with Russia would impact the US' ties with its Central European allies. When the Bush administration had mooted the idea of a missile defence shield in Eastern Europe, Russia regarded it as a threat to its own strategic deterrence and considered that Washington's primary motivation was "to neutralize Russia's nuclear deterrent".<sup>32</sup> During their Moscow meeting, Obama had promised Medvedev that he would review these plans. This had alarmed the Central European countries, which already felt that Washington did little to counter Russia on its Georgian incursion.

The Obama administration went ahead with a modified programme, termed as the "phased, adaptive approach", and it reinforced the idea amongst the Central European countries that the US-Russian reset had superseded regional security. Around the same time, the Czech Republic and Poland expressed disappointment with Washington's decision to abandon its plans to deploy radars in Prague and interceptors in Warsaw against Russian offensive capabilities. Despite Russia's overall support for this move, the Obama administration's phased adaptive approach allowed for "stationing more advanced interceptor missiles in Poland as early as 2018 should Iran's missile capabilities continue to improve."<sup>33</sup>

While Russia once again sensed a threat to its nuclear deterrent, the key factor for the inconclusiveness regarding the NATO-Russia joint missile defence plan was Moscow's insistence on legally-binding guarantees from Washington. Since the US could not obtain congressional approval for the same, Russia decided that the negotiations were heading towards an impasse. The failed outcome of the joint missile defence plan not only showed cracks in the 'reset' policy but also on the long-standing issue of US engagement with post-Soviet states regarding missile defence deployments.

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32. Stent, n.11, p. 193.

33. Richard Weitz, "Illusive Visions and Practical Realities: Russia, NATO and Missile Defence", *Survival: Global Politics & Strategy*, 52:4, pp. 99-120, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00396338.2010.506824>

### *Iran Sanctions*

With Iran, the US realised the vital role that Russia could play in either aiding or sabotaging Washington's plan to stall Tehran's nuclear programme. With the signing of the New START Treaty, both countries knew that nuclear non-proliferation was a central concern. However, unlike in the case of the treaty negotiations, it was always going to be a tough proposition to convince Russia to support sanctions against one of its closest allies in the Middle East. The US had to up the ante and devise pressure tactics to bring the Iranians to the negotiating table.

On the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting in September 2009, Obama informed Medvedev about Iran's construction of a second nuclear enrichment facility near Qom; this information had been kept secret from the Russians. Although Medvedev was not convinced that sanctions would achieve the desired purpose, he was nevertheless livid with the Iranians for deceiving the Kremlin, and voiced his support for the sanctions.<sup>34</sup> During the Prague meeting in April 2010 for the signing of the New START Treaty, Obama and Medvedev extensively discussed about the nature of the sanctions. But the Russian president distinguished between the treaty and sanctions negotiations, arguing that, for Russia, the latter would result in the loss of billions of dollars in trade with Iran, while the US had virtually nothing to lose.

In this context, the US promised to lift sanctions on Rosoboronexport and three other Russian entities, re-submit the 123 Agreement to the US Congress and push for Russia's accession into the World Trade Organisation (WTO). With Russia on board, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSC) 1929 was implemented which imposed military and cargo sanctions, and called on states to "suspend trade and financial activities with Iran, and placed forty companies and organizations under a travel ban and asset freeze."<sup>35</sup>

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34. "Medvedev Signals Openness to Iran Sanctions After Talks", CNN Politics; <https://edition.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/09/23/us.russia.iran/index.html?iref=nextin>. Accessed on October 10, 2019.

35. "Security Council Imposes Additional Sanctions on Iran, Voting 12 in Favour to 2 Against, with 1 Abstention", United Nations, June 9, 2010; <https://www.un.org/press/en/2010/sc9948.doc.htm>. Accessed on October 10, 2019.

To America's surprise, Medvedev added that Russia had decided unilaterally to cancel the S-300 missile defence contract with Iran over its nuclear programme, which also contradicted Putin's stance on the issue. As Medvedev projected a more independent hand in dealing with foreign policy matters, it bode well for the US-Russia reset. Post the Iran-sanctions, the US accelerated and completed negotiations on Russia's WTO accession and the other guarantees.

However, what turned out to be an issue of cooperation quickly turned into disagreement when Obama signed "legislation authorizing new unilateral sanctions by the US targeting Iranian individuals and companies."<sup>36</sup> The Russians expressed displeasure over the additional sanctions. When the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) released a report in 2011 claiming that Iran was working on a new facility in which it was designing an atomic bomb, Russia concluded that the sanctions would be "counter-productive and questioned the lack of evidence supporting that claim."<sup>37</sup> For Russia, the strategic partnership with Iran was too important to be dictated by the reset. Iran controlled key access points in the Strait of Hormuz, which were critical for Russian ships and waterways.

### *Afghanistan*

In the context of the US-Russia reset, the issue of Afghanistan was less complicated than Iran. The US wanted to identify an alternative route for military supplies to Afghanistan so as to reduce its reliance on Pakistan. Despite the threat to their "sphere of privileged interests", the Russians offered to open the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) to the US-led NATO troops.

At the 2009 Moscow Summit, Obama and Medvedev signed an agreement for the transportation of lethal and non-lethal goods. It was in Russia's

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36. "Obama Says New U.S. Sanctions Show International Resolve in Iran Issue", CNN Politics, July 1, 2010; <https://edition.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/07/01/obama.iran.sanctions/index.html>. Accessed on October 10, 2019.

37. Steve Gutterman, "Russia Opposes New Iran Sanctions Over IAEA Report", Reuters, November 9, 2011; <https://www.reuters.com/assets/print?aid=USTRE7A857620111109>. Accessed on October 10, 2019.

interests that the US and NATO troops helped to stabilise the situation in Afghanistan and towards that end, Moscow enthusiastically embraced and facilitated the establishment of the rail line that constitutes the NDN north from Latvia down to the Uzbek-Afghan border, and overflights of lethal materials.

By the end of 2012, more than “70,000 containers of supplies had crossed over Russian territory.”<sup>38</sup> Despite the goodwill of the Russians to offer their air space for the Afghanistan operation, there were delays in the implementation of the agreement, courtesy “foot-dragging by the Russian bureaucracy”.<sup>39</sup> Despite the early signs of cooperation, Russia was simultaneously “dissuading Kyrgyzstan to deny the US military further access to the air base in Manas”, which for more than seven years had been a key transit hub for US military personnel and equipment into Afghanistan.<sup>40</sup> Being members of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), Russia was sceptical of the US using the Kyrgyz base to exercise influence in what it considered its traditional sphere of influence. This once again highlighted the dilemma in Russia’s decision to allow the US presence in its Central Asian sphere of influence.

However, on countering the heroin trade and fighting terror, US-Russia cooperation was more forthcoming. The increase in drug use and illicit trafficking had affected Russia, and the two countries shared counter-terror intelligence information. In order to aid counter-terror efforts in Afghanistan, the US purchased 21 Mi-17 helicopters from Rosoboronexport.<sup>41</sup> In return for much needed investment in the Ulyanovsk region, Russia agreed to the establishment of a NATO military transit and logistics hub “to transport military cargo, non-military and non-lethal goods, transit flights for NATO

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38. Stent, n. 11, p. 197.

39. Samuel Charap, “Assessing the ‘Reset’ and the Next Steps for U.S. Russia Policy”, Centre for American Progress, April 2010; [https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2010/04/pdf/russia\\_report.pdf](https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2010/04/pdf/russia_report.pdf). Accessed on October 11, 2019.

40. Luke Harding, “Kyrgyzstan to Close Key US Military Airbase”, *The Guardian*, February 4, 2009; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/feb/04/kyrgyzstan-us-base-afghanistan>. Accessed on October 7, 2019.

41. “US Helicopter Contract ‘In Place’ Says Russian Arms Firm”, Sputnik News, March 12, 2012; <https://sputniknews.com/world/20121203177886242/>. Accessed on October 11, 2019.

**The reset period gave birth to promising initiatives. The signing of the New START Treaty, 123 Agreement on nuclear cooperation, cooperation on Iran, Afghanistan and Kyrgyz crisis, Russia's WTO accession, and the UNSC Resolution against Libya were mutually achieved due to the overriding sentiment in both administrations for deeper US-Russia cooperation.**

personnel, and other goods for onward rail shipment to Riga and Tallinn."<sup>42</sup>

Owing to the political standoff with Pakistan, US military logisticians had to shift up to 60 per cent of the supplies to northern routes via Russia, with the rest of the cargo having been delivered by air. Although it was more expensive than the Pakistani route and had the possibility of over-dependence on Moscow, the geography of the region necessitated US cooperation with Russia. Additionally, there were "no Taliban fighters registered north of the Afghan border", making it a far less risky route.<sup>43</sup> As a medium-term strategy, the US goal was also to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. Even here, the

Americans had to be dependent on Russia for the northern route.<sup>44</sup>

## CHALLENGES TO THE RESET

Despite the enduring disagreements on missile defence and US engagement with the former Soviet states, the reset period gave birth to promising initiatives. The signing of the New START Treaty, 123 Agreement on nuclear cooperation, cooperation on Iran, Afghanistan and Kyrgyz crisis, Russia's WTO accession, and the UNSC Resolution against Libya were mutually achieved due to the overriding sentiment in both administrations

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42. Heidi Reisinger, "A NATO Transit Hub in Ulyanovsk—What's Behind the Russian Debate", NDC Research Division; [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/141071/02Apr12\\_ReisingerRepNATOtransitUlyanovsk.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/141071/02Apr12_ReisingerRepNATOtransitUlyanovsk.pdf). Accessed on October 11, 2019.

43. "Logistical Nightmare: Russia Leads NATO Out of Afghan Trap", *Russia Today*, July 6, 2012; <https://www.rt.com/news/nato-transit-afghanistan-russia-565/>. Accessed on October 11, 2019.

44. Rathnam Indurthy, "The Obama Administration's Strategy in Afghanistan", *International Journal on World Peace*, 28:3, pp. 7-52; [https://www.jstor.org/stable/23266718?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23266718?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)



for deeper US-Russia cooperation. Both Obama and Medvedev succeeded in personalising ties, which proved to be an enabling factor during the reset years. However, the success of the reset ended there. Given the lack of a strong economic foundation and historical irritants in the relationship, the US-Russia reset was bound to confront challenges, leading to its eventual demise. These challenges offer a glimpse into why the inherent potential of the US-Russia relationship is still clouded by the Cold War narrative and mutual distrust of each other's motivations.

**For Russia, the Arab Spring spelled doom for its own domestic stability. The colour revolutions in the preceding decade in Ukraine and Georgia had alerted the Kremlin about the potential downside of popular uprisings.**

#### *Arrest of Russian Spies, June 2010*

The first instance of a potential rupture in US-Russia relations concerned the arrest of 11 Russian sleeper agents who had been living in America with fake identities and false passports.<sup>45</sup> Although they were not Russian intelligence officers nor working in the Russian Embassy, these individuals were attempting to infiltrate into US Silicon Valley companies and government think-tanks. Despite the low-key nature of the espionage network, the episode threatened to derail the reset as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officials pressed for the expulsion of Russian diplomats.

For the Obama administration, the spy scandal was an embarrassment at a time when the groundwork was being laid for Medvedev's visit in June 2010. Eventually, the arrests were held off until the Obama-Medvedev meeting concluded. It was decided that there would be a spy exchange, which happened to be the largest in the history of US-Russia relations. In that same year, another scandal broke out in the form of the leaked classified US

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45. Jerry Markon and Philip Rucker, "The Suspects in a Russian Spy Ring Lived All-American Lives", *The Washington Post*, June 30, 2010; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/29/AR2010062905401.html>. Accessed on October 12, 2019.

cables by Wikileaks.<sup>46</sup> The cables revealed damning allegations of corruption and Russia's embrace of autocracy, as interpreted by the US Embassy in Moscow and other US government agencies. However, in keeping with the spirit of the reset, both governments tended to play down the fallout from both incidents and focussed on the initiatives lined up for the upcoming years. It showed the limits of the US-Russia reset, which so far had reflected a selective partnership, based on mutual recognition of interests. In so far as mutual suspicion of each other was concerned, both the US and Russian governments behaved like Cold War adversaries.

### *Arab Spring, December 2010*

The Arab Spring had caught both the administrations by surprise in the context of their increased cooperation on security issues like Iran, Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan. Beginning in Tunisia, the Arab Spring represented a spontaneous uprising of pro-democracy supporters fighting for basic rights under authoritarian regimes in West Asia. Consequently, the Arab Spring had different connotations in the White House and the Kremlin. Despite US backing for dictators and regimes in the region, the Obama administration viewed it as an opportunity to engage with democracy-minded opposition groups in these countries and to ramp up collective security through the responsibility-to-protect doctrine with its allies. In this respect, the Arab Spring offered conditions for US primacy for humanitarian intervention.

For Russia, the Arab Spring spelled doom for its own domestic stability. The colour revolutions in the preceding decade in Ukraine and Georgia had alerted the Kremlin about the potential downside of popular uprisings. Moreover, Russia sought to emphasize the "primacy of absolute sovereignty and noninterference in the affairs of other states."<sup>47</sup> Additionally, the presence of Islamist parties among the dissident Arab Spring outfits posed "a threat to

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46. Simon Shuster, "WikiLeaks' Russian Cables: Bad for the Reset, Good for Putin?", *Time*, December 2, 2010, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2034670,00.html>. Accessed on October 12, 2019.

47. Stent, n. 11, p. 209.

the Russian state's fight against insurgent ideologies taking root among its youth."<sup>48</sup> The Kremlin's fear of protests breaking out in Red Square was real.

In the case of Egypt, the initial US response was to wait for the demonstrations to mellow down. Within the Obama administration, there was divided opinion on how to react to the developments in Egypt; while most senior military officials insisted that Obama back Mubarak, the US president was leaning towards support for the civilian movement. When it seemed imminent that Hosni Mubarak's reign was threatened, it directed the Egyptian military to pressure the dictator to step down and institute an interim government. In his second Cairo speech, Obama expressed a desire to "promote democracies in the Middle East as a foreign policy objective."<sup>49</sup> However, the victory of the Islamist party leader Mohammad Morsi and the subsequent takeover by the military in 2013 unsettled US strategy. Putin criticised the US withdrawal of support for Mubarak, which paved the way for "the rise of Islamist parties like the Muslim Brotherhood."<sup>50</sup>

The US response in Libya would involve "humanitarian intervention, but without sending US troops, absence of regime change and nation building, etc."<sup>51</sup> Specifically, the US operation comprised air strikes, along with allies, to stop the killing of innocents by the Libyan Army. Further, the Obama administration sought to obtain the UN Security Council's approval for which Russia's vote or even abstention was crucial. This was a daunting task since Russia had consistently blocked UN approval of American-led interventions in the past.<sup>52</sup> In addition, Russia was always reluctant to back punitive action

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48. "Russia's Young Muslims Especially Devout", *The Moscow Times*, August 9, 2012; <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/08/09/russias-young-muslims-especially-devout-a16905>. Accessed on October 12, 2019.

49. "Remarks of President Barack Obama—As Prepared for Delivery—A Moment of Opportunity", Obama White House Archives, May 9, 2011; <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-barack-obama-prepared-delivery-moment-opportunity>. Accessed on October 12, 2019.

50. McFaul, n. 19, p. 149.

51. "Remarks by the President on Libya", Obama White House Archives, March 19, 2011; <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/19/remarks-president-libya>. Accessed on October 12, 2019.

52. McFaul, n. 19, p. 147.

in a region where it continues to sustain, albeit limited, post-Soviet political and economic influence. However, similar to his sudden decision to support sanctions against Iran, Medvedev agreed to support the first resolution on Libya, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1970, that called for an arms embargo but did not authorise force. But the larger US strategy was to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya with an objective to push back the Libyan Army through military force. Despite reports of disagreements with Putin over Russia's role in Libya, Medvedev decided to not veto UNSCR 1973, thereby paving the way for UN-sanctioned military intervention. This marked the first instance when the United Nations Security Council authorised the "use of force within a sovereign country for the purpose of preventing genocide."<sup>53</sup>

However, the subsequent US-led air campaign in Libya failed to remove any doubts over the differences emerging between Putin and Medvedev. For Medvedev, the Libya resolution was a means of advancing the US-Russia reset and finding ways to cooperate on issues of peripheral importance. For Putin, Medvedev's decision to abstain on the UNSC vote was a sign of American influence over the Russian president. In short, Putin's criticism of Medvedev's foreign policy decision effectively undermined the authority of the tandem and, as a result, dealt the first blow to the US-Russia reset.

If the cases of Egypt and Libya underscored the tensions between the two former Cold War rivals, the outbreak of a civil war in Syria in March 2011 effectively ruptured the basis of the reset, given the opposing stands of both countries. A staunch supporter of Bashar al-Assad's Syria, Russia has important strategic and economic stakes going back over decades. To help Assad stay in power for what remains Russia's only formal ally in West Asia, Moscow stepped up "arms sales and missile defense systems worth nearly \$1 bn through Rosoboronexport."<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the Russians would

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53. "Security Council Approves 'No-Fly Zone' over Libya, Authorizing 'All Necessary Measures' to Protect Civilians, by Vote of 10 in Favour with 5 Abstentions", United Nations, March 17, 2011; <https://www.un.org/press/en/2011/sc10200.doc.htm>. Accessed on October 12, 2019.

54. Thomas Grove and Erika Solomon, "Russia Boosts Arms Sales to Syria Despite World Pressure", Reuters, February 21, 2012; <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-russia-arms/russia-boosts-arms-sales-to-syria-despite-world-pressure-idUSTRE81K13420120221>. Accessed on October 12, 2019.

never support measures against Assad whom they favour to a much greater degree than they did Qaddafi. The fallout from the Libyan intervention had convinced Putin that the UN Resolution was only a pretext for resumption of Western military influence in the region.

The West, led by the United States, sought to oust Assad and remove the stockpile of chemical weapons from Syria. However, Russia vetoed a UNSC Resolution that called for Assad to step down and even “helped Syria evade financial sanctions through its banks.”<sup>55</sup> The United States and other Western countries, along with their Arab allies, continued to pressure Russia to agree to a UN sanctioned intervention against Assad’s use of chemical weapons against his own citizens. John Kerry, during his 2013 visit to Moscow, showed evidence that “chemical weapons had been used in Syria and warned that Assad could avoid a US military strike by surrendering the entire stockpile.”<sup>56</sup> Eventually, the US and Russia agreed to forge a deal to eliminate more than “1300 metric tons of Syrian chemical weapons in 2013.”<sup>57</sup> However, both sides continue to disagree on the nature of investigations with Russia blocking efforts by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to this day.

### ***Russian Presidential Elections and the Return of Putin, Fall 2011–March 2012***

The power shift in the Kremlin would prove another challenge to the continuity of the reset. Despite claims that Putin closely monitored every decision taken by Medvedev and voiced either his assent or dissent, it was clear that the two had strong differences of opinion since the Western

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55. Margaret Coker and Jennifer Valentino-DeVries, “Syria’s Russian Connection”, *The Wall Street Journal*, August 14, 2012; <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10000872396390444130304577560810962055348>. Accessed on October 12, 2019.

56. Arshad Mohammed and Andrew Osborn, “Kerry: Syrian Surrender of Chemical Arms Could Stop U.S. Attack”, Reuters, September 9, 2013; <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-kerry/kerry-syrian-surrender-of-chemical-arms-could-stop-u-s-attack-idUSBRE9880BV20130909>. Accessed on October 12, 2019.

57. Alicia Sanders-Zakre, “Russia Blocks Consensus at CWC Conference”, *Arms Control Today*, January/February 2019; <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2019-01/news/russia-blocks-consensus-cwc-conference>, Accessed on October 12, 2019.

**Putin sought to wrest control of the situation by appealing to his most important constituency—the provincial working class—who harboured a dislike for America’s policies. He alleged that foreign influences were orchestrating the mobilisation of the urban elites and opposition groups in Russia.**

intervention in Libya. For Putin, the reset failed to resolve the major points of contention between the US and Russia. But Medvedev, despite his displeasure at the US’ overreach on the Iran sanctions and Libya, emphasized that the reset enabled a mechanism where compromises could be made. However, the internal rebalancing of politics in Russia prompted Medvedev to step down at the end of his tenure in 2012.

Putin, running for his third presidential term, revealed his plans for Russia’s foreign policy in an article wherein he yearned to regain influence in the former Soviet republics

and establish “a powerful supra-national union capable of becoming a pole in the modern world” which would “change the geographical and geo-economic configuration of the entire continent.”<sup>58</sup> He believed that Russia’s core interests would never be taken seriously by the United States.

While Putin adopted a plan of action on the foreign policy front, he was faced with mounting criticism within the domestic arena. After the December 4 elections to the Duma, a protest movement gathered pace—numbering between 30,000 to 100,000—demanding “investigations into fraudulent election practices.”<sup>59</sup> Putin’s response was to allege “US interference in Russia’s domestic affairs and blame Hillary Clinton for organising the protests.”<sup>60</sup> Further, Putin sought to wrest control of the situation by appealing to his most important constituency—the provincial working class—who harboured a dislike for America’s policies. He alleged that foreign influences were orchestrating the mobilisation of the urban elites and opposition groups in Russia.

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58. Davis, n. 5, p. 39.

59. Stent, n. 11, p. 208.

60. “It’s Not in the USA, but in the Russian People”, *Kommersant*, December 12, 2011; <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1838682>. Accessed on October 13, 2019.

Putin's emphasis on Russia's role in a complex external environment, so as to alleviate his domestic problems, resonated with an audience that believed Washington used nefarious means to influence politics. He pointedly criticised the US for its "unilateralism in the Middle East through military intervention, blamed NATO expansionism as a cause of instability and chastised the United Nations for its ineptitude."<sup>61</sup> In clear signs of strain between the two countries, Putin snubbed his first meeting with Obama, before the G-8 Summit, since their respective reelections and sent Medvedev instead. Eventually, they met on the sidelines of the G-20 Summit in Mexico a few weeks later, which did not make for pleasant viewing. The reset policy was found crumbling.

**Putin ordered the annexation of Crimea in eastern Ukraine on March 14, 2014. Russian-speaking armed soldiers, who lacked any official insignia on their uniforms, seized the local Parliament and other strategic facilities. In a Russian-backed referendum, an overwhelming majority of the registered Crimean voters voted to join with Russia.**

### *Domestic Acts and Exiting Pacts, December 2012*

US-Russia relations further deteriorated in late 2012 when both Houses of Congress adopted legislation designed to punish Russian officials and businesses involved in human rights abuses. Named after Sergei Magnitsky, a lawyer who died while in Russian custody under mysterious circumstances, the Act penalised those Russian individuals who were connected to the killing by placing them on a visa ban list and freezing their bank assets. To Putin, a US domestic legislation highlighting "alleged human rights violation in Russia vindicated his claim about Washington's interference."<sup>62</sup>

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61. Vladimir Putin, "Russia and the Changing World", Foreign Policy Association, February 28, 2011; <https://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2012/02/28/russia-changing-world/>. Accessed on October 13, 2019.

62. Peter Baker, "U.S.-Russian Ties Still Fall Short of 'Reset' Goal", *The New York Times*, September 2, 2013; <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/03/world/europe/us-russian-ties-still-fall-short-of-reset-goal.html>. Accessed on October 13, 2019.

In response, the Duma passed the Dima Yakovlev Law, named after a Russian child who had died in the custody of his adoptive American parents. This legislation banned all future adoptions by Americans of Russian children. Americans had adopted “60,000 Russian children” prior to this ban.<sup>63</sup> US Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) engaged in democracy promotion withdrew their operations in Russia after the latter imposed “strong restrictions” on their funding.<sup>64</sup> After the US backed out from a joint panel on civil society, Russia retaliated by “cancelling an agreement that provided help from the United States in fighting narcotics and human trafficking and enhancing the rule of law.”<sup>65</sup> Russia also refused to cooperate on the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction legislation, which had provided a “basis for joint US-Russian efforts to destroy the former Soviet Union’s weapons of mass destruction, related material and delivery vehicles.”<sup>66</sup> The United States’ increased criticism of the Russian government’s authoritarian turn and its clampdown on civil rights had affected US-Russia ties. However, the bigger diplomatic and strategic fallouts that would plague bilateral relations between the two countries were about to be witnessed.

### *Snowden Granted Asylum in Russia, June 2013*

Edward Snowden, a National Security Agency (NSA) contractor, had fled to Moscow to unravel the US domestic surveillance programme, with evidence of classified documents to back his claims. The Wikileaks affair had earlier embarrassed the administration but Snowden’s threats to release vital national security files to the press provoked the US officials. Upon

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63. “Dima Yakovlev Law”, *Russia Today*, December 28, 2012; <https://www.rt.com/russia/official-word/dima-yakovlev-law-full-995/>. Accessed on October 14, 2019.

64. Josh Rogin, “U.S.-Funded Democracy NGO Pulls Out of Russia”, *Foreign Policy*, December 12, 2012; <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/12/12/u-s-funded-democracy-ngo-pulls-out-of-russia/>. Accessed on October 14, 2019.

65. Kathy Lally, “Russia Cancels Accord with U.S. on Fighting Drugs, Human Trafficking”, *The Washington Post*, January 30, 2013; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russia-drops-us-help-in-fighting-drugs-human-trafficking/2013/01/30/f1b67228-6ae6-11e2-af53-7b2b2a7510a8\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russia-drops-us-help-in-fighting-drugs-human-trafficking/2013/01/30/f1b67228-6ae6-11e2-af53-7b2b2a7510a8_story.html). Accessed on October 14, 2019.

66. Daniel Horner and Tom Z. Collina, “Nunn-Lugar Program Scaled Back”, *Arms Control Today*, July 2013; <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2013-07/news/nunn-lugar-program-scaled-back>. Accessed on October 14, 2019.



revoking his passport, the US demanded that Snowden be extradited to face criminal charges. Putin, however, refused to do so citing the “lack of sufficient legal ground.”<sup>67</sup> Despite the outrage in the US over Russia’s decision, Putin hoped that “this wouldn’t affect the businesslike nature of our relations with the United States.”<sup>68</sup>

Putin’s stance on the Snowden affair was tempered by the need to find common ground on Syria for which US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov were meeting for a conference. Moreover, Putin saw it as an unwanted diplomatic affair that could drive a wedge in bilateral relations. But he knew that political asylum for Snowden was a vital bargaining chip he could employ to influence those in his country who looked to the US as a harbinger of civil rights and liberties, and to divert attention away from his policies. During the early part of his term, Putin astutely framed his international posture in order to “impact those Russian voters who were skeptical of his ascent to power.”<sup>69</sup> He partially succeeded as the protests against him waned by the end of 2013.

### *Ukraine Crisis, Sanctions and End of Reset, February 2014–end of 2014*

The situation in Ukraine became tense after President Viktor Yanukovich postponed the signing of the EU association agreement in early 2014. Putin, who nurtured a long-held desire to integrate Ukraine into the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), had played a pivotal role in Yanukovich’s electoral victory in 2010. He expected that the Ukrainian president would join Russia’s club rather than the EU. In order to sway his decision, Putin offered to “buy \$15 bn of Ukrainian government bonds and expressed his desire to cut

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67. Kathy Lally and Will Englund, “Putin: No Grounds to Extradite Snowden”, *The Washington Post*, June 25, 2013; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russia-denies-that-it-could-have-handed-snowden-to-us-authorities/2013/06/25/3767d7b8-dd7d-11e2-948c-d644453cf169\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russia-denies-that-it-could-have-handed-snowden-to-us-authorities/2013/06/25/3767d7b8-dd7d-11e2-948c-d644453cf169_story.html). Accessed on October 14, 2019.

68. Ibid.

69. James Lamond, “The Origins of Russia’s Broad Political Assault on the United States”, Centre for American Progress, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2018/10/03/458841/origins-russias-broad-political-assault-united-states/>. Accessed on October 15, 2019.

the gas price.”<sup>70</sup> This helped to revive the economy that was heading into bankruptcy.

However, this prompted widespread protests in Kiev led by the pro-democracy activists and opposition figures who blamed Yanukovych for selling out the country to Moscow. In the ensuing protests, violence broke out between the police and the pro-EU demonstrators, leading to several deaths on both sides. The US immediately condemned the “use of police force to clamp down on the protests and called for a negotiated settlement.”<sup>71</sup> Due to mounting Western pressure, Yanukovych was left with no choice but to sign an agreement stating that the political crisis would be resolved via dialogue with all the stakeholders.

In another dramatic development, hours after signing the agreement, Yanukovych fled from Kiev citing fear for his life and sought refuge in the Russian city of Rostov. The Ukrainian Parliament immediately voted unanimously to impeach Yanukovych and an interim government was set up until the country went to polls in May 2014. The Kremlin denounced the new government, stating that it was illegitimate and stood by Yanukovych.

Then the moment that would sever diplomatic ties between the US and Russia came to pass: Putin ordered the annexation of Crimea in eastern Ukraine on March 14, 2014. Russian-speaking armed soldiers, who lacked any official insignia on their uniforms, seized the local Parliament and other strategic facilities.<sup>72</sup> In a Russian-backed referendum, an overwhelming majority of the registered Crimean voters voted to join with Russia. Putin acknowledged the results and announced that “Crimea and Sevastopol were now part of the Russian Federation.”<sup>73</sup> Russia’s next move was to seize a territory called

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70. Shaun Walker, “Vladimir Putin Offers Ukraine Financial Incentives to Stick with Russia”, *The Guardian*, December 18, 2013; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/17/ukraine-russia-leaders-talks-kremlin-loan-deal>. Accessed on October 15, 2019.

71. “Remarks by President Obama before Restricted Bilateral Meeting”, Obama White House Archives, February 19, 2014; <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/02/19/remarks-president-obama-restricted-bilateral-meeting>. Accessed on October 15, 2019.

72. McFaul, n. 19, p. 275.

73. “Meeting in Support of Crimea’s Accession to the Russian Federation “We are together!”, President of Russia Website, March 18, 2014; <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20607>. Accessed on October 15, 2019.

Novorossiia or New Russia, which had been incorporated into Ukraine after the Bolshevik Revolution. The pro-Russian separatists captured the administrative buildings in the towns of Luhansk and Donetsk, leading to unprecedented clashes between ethnic Russian militias and the Ukrainian authorities.

The West, taken aback by the turn of events, instituted a comprehensive sanctions regime against Russian individuals and companies involved in the military campaign. Further, sponsored by the US, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring “the Crimea referendum invalid, in a vote of 100 in favor to 11 against with almost 58 abstentions.”<sup>74</sup> Russia was expelled from the G-8 as the West sought to put up a united front against Russia’s adventurism. However, barring rhetorical statements from the White House, the overall Western response to Russia’s military action was weak, with the Americans and Europeans divided over what should entail an ideal reaction. The Russians issued “retaliatory travel bans on nine US lawmakers and officials”, thereby pulling the plug on the reset between the two countries.<sup>75</sup>

However, international attention for the Ukrainian conflict reached its crescendo after pro-Russian separatists shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in eastern Ukraine, killing all 298 people on board. In a Dutch investigation of the incident, it was revealed that the missile launched to down the passenger plane was of Russian origin, although Putin pinned the blame on the Ukrainian government for failing “to end hostilities in southeast Ukraine.”<sup>76</sup> In a fresh round of sanctions, while not immediately implemented, the EU called out Russia for its involvement in the crisis. Putin, buoyed by his rising domestic support post the Crimea episode, lashed out at the West for its “unjustified sanctions move, arguing that the humanitarian

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74. Louis Charbonneau and Mirjam Donath, “U.N. General Assembly Declares Crimea Secession Vote Invalid”, Reuters, March 27, 2014; <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-un-idUSBREA2Q1GA20140327>. Accessed on October 15, 2019.

75. “Russia Sanctions 9 US Officials in Response to US Sanctions on Russian Officials”, CNBC, March 20, 2014; <https://www.cnbc.com/2014/03/20/obama-authorizes-new-sanctions-on-russia-over-crimea.html>. Accessed on October 15, 2019.

76. “Meeting on Economy Began with a Moment of Silence in Honour of Victims of Plane Crash over Ukrainian Territory”, President of Russia Website, July 18, 2014; <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46243>. Accessed on October 14, 2019.

**The new Russian state, barring its nuclear and missile capabilities, is vastly inferior in military terms to the US and is a shadow of the former Soviet Union. Russia has now become a second-order priority for the US that only seeks limited engagement on issues of mutual interest like nuclear arms control.**

nature in eastern Ukraine had necessitated Russian military intervention.”<sup>77</sup> In short, this was Russia’s Libya moment, albeit without any UN oversight. The reset had well and truly ended.

#### **FAILURE OF RESET AND FUTURE PATH**

The Russian annexation of Crimea became the low point in US-Russia relations since the Russo-Georgian War of 2008. While the reset had effectively ended by the end of Medvedev’s term as president and Putin’s reelection in 2012, the two countries had not resolved the structural issues that had affected bilateral ties since the end of the Cold War. Despite the pragmatic nature of the reset policy, there were certain issues that remained contentious which were beyond the objectives of the Obama-Medvedev rapprochement. As much as the reset was possible due to conditions that allowed for cooperative engagement, long-standing issue-based factors fuelled the end of the reset. The crisis in Crimea was only the by-product of larger structural issues in the bilateral relationship.

First, the explanation for the Crimean crisis is that it was shaped by events that happened since the fall of the Soviet Union. While the Americans viewed the fall of the Soviet Union as a triumphalist moment in their foreign policy, the Russians perceived it as humiliation. Further, the Russians often complained of the US’ treatment of their concerns like being that “of a defeated rival rather than of an equal partner.”<sup>78</sup> The Russians contend that the Cold War was mutually ended rather than through a unilateral surrender by Gorbachev and that every Russian attempt at cooperation during the 1990s was seen

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77. Julian Borger, Alec Luhn and Richard Norton-Taylor, “EU Announces Further Sanctions on Russia after Downing of MH17”, *The Guardian*, July 22, 2014; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/22/eu-plans-further-sanctions-russia-putin-mh17>. Accessed on October 15, 2019.

78. Stent, n. 11, p. 217.

as a sign of weakness. Compared to the US backing for the likes of Germany, UK and France, the Russians always felt that they were not offered a meaningful role in the new Euro-Atlantic security arrangement. Instead, they had to set their own interests and objectives. For the US, the “de-nuclearization of Russia’s neighbours, the beginnings of market economy, Western-style elections, increased attention to freedom of expression and securing Russia’s cooperation in the Balkans were touted as an achievement, embodied in its value-driven foreign policy, especially under the Clinton administration.”<sup>79</sup>

**Putin believed that by reaching out to Bush and facilitating the establishment of US bases in Central Asia, the United States would view Russia as “a partner, recognize its sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space, treat it as an equal, and give it the respect that had been lacking during the Yeltsin era.”**

Since Putin’s rise to the top in 2000, Russia’s foreign policy priorities have centred on the following themes: to carve out a ‘privileged’ sphere of influence in Eurasia and move towards an economic integration of the former Soviet states (excluding the Balkans) through the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU); to ensure that no major international decision is taken without Russia’s assent (this was seriously felt after Russia was snubbed regarding NATO’s Kosovo intervention in 1999, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and over the Western overreach in Libya in 2011); to prevent NATO’s eastern enlargement and EU accession for former Soviet states (the membership plans for Georgia and Ukraine irked Russia the most); to undermine US-backed democracy promotion and minimise the possibility of regime change in its neighbourhood; to seek minimum cooperation with the US for its technology and investment to aid domestic modernisation programmes. In all of the above cases, barring the last one, the Obama-Medvedev reset sought to overlook these themes and chart out a new path to US-Russia relations. However, all these themes featured prominently in one way or another, highlighting the limits of the partnership.

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79. Ibid., p. 218.

Second, the vast disparity in military power and economic influence between the two countries remains the proverbial elephant in the room. The new Russian state, barring its nuclear and missile capabilities, is vastly inferior in military terms to the US and is a shadow of the former Soviet Union. Russia has now become a second-order priority for the US that only seeks limited engagement on issues of mutual interest like nuclear arms control. For what Russia lacks vis-à-vis America, it makes up for by either oscillating between engagement and antagonism towards the US, depending on the domestic pressures for the same. Unlike in the Soviet-era foreign policy, Russia's external posturing is now heavily hinged on domestic considerations. Moreover, the two countries lack the necessary economic complementarity to foster a robust economic relationship as long as Russia remains primarily a raw materials and arms exporter. The bilateral trade stands at a paltry \$41 billion.<sup>80</sup> The absence of the rule of law, and the high-level corruption in Russia have also prevented a smooth commercial relationship.

Third, the US has tended to exaggerate its influence over Russia's domestic politics and economic trajectory. Consequently, the US has relied on democracy promotion and human rights activism, either at a governmental/congressional level or even through NGOs specialising in this field. According to those who insist on the US giving more attention to pragmatic foreign policy cooperation, the act of attempting to "influence the policies and politics of Russia is a counter-productive exercise."<sup>81</sup> Therefore, the US could limit its criticism of Russia's internal affairs and focus on issues that can result in mutual benefits. However, despite the best efforts of various US administrations, including Obama's, the US Congress has sometimes impeded such an approach by linking foreign policy issues to Russia's domestic climate. This was evident during the signing of the Magnitsky Act, which Obama was reluctant to do. There has also been the problem of a lack of a strong pro-Russian lobby in the US Congress that could help shape the narrative during such situations.

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80. Ibid.

81. Johan Kharabi, "An Interview with Prof. Stephen F Cohen: US-Russia Relations in an Age of American Triumphalism", *Journal of International Affairs*, Spring/Summer 2010, 63:2, pp. 191-205.

Finally, there is always a palpable sense of mutual distrust for each other stemming from the Cold War mindset. Even at the beginning of every reset, suspicion prevailed regarding the true intentions of each other's efforts. Most Russians recognise the unequal treatment meted out to them during the 1990s by both the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations, including the US breaking a promise about "NATO's eastward enlargement."<sup>82</sup> Moscow also complains that the US doesn't appreciate the post 9/11 reset attempt to create a strategic partnership. Putin believed that by reaching out to Bush and facilitating the establishment of US bases in Central Asia, the United States would view Russia as "a partner, recognize its sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space, treat it as an equal, and give it the respect that had been lacking during the Yeltsin era."<sup>83</sup> On the 2009 Obama-Medvedev reset, Kremlin's take was that it was more of a "course-correction" and admission of past mistakes on the part of the US. Despite disagreements over US missile defence and regime change policies, the two leaders partially succeeded in setting aside these concerns because the US diluted its attention on the post-Soviet space, especially with respect to Georgia and Ukraine. However, Russia blamed the US for reverting to its "unilateral foreign policy actions" courtesy the Libya intervention and alleged interference in the Maidan protests in Ukraine that deposed Ukrainian President Yanukovich.

The failed reset shed light on the limits of the strategic partnership between the two Cold War adversaries. However, cooperation on nuclear arms control, Iran, Afghanistan, the Kyrgyz crisis, etc. pointed to the scope for selective engagement. With regard to the future potential of US-Russia relations, it is important to delve into the major challenges that came to the fore in the years after the Cold War, and how the reset years offered a lesson for future American strategy towards Russia.

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82. Mary Elise Sarotte, "A Broken Promise? What the West Really Told Moscow About NATO Expansion", *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2014, 93:5, pp. 90-97.

83. Stent, n. 11, p. 220.

# RUSSIA'S EVOLVING EURASIAN STRATEGY

POONAM MANN

While speaking at the second Belt and Road Forum meeting held in Beijing (China) on April 26, 2019, Russia's President Vladimir Putin, emphasized on the "harmonious and sustainable economic development and economic growth of the Eurasian space" and noted how "the Belt and Road Initiative rhymes with Russia's idea to establish a Greater Eurasian Partnership, a project designed to 'integrate integration frameworks' and, therefore, to promote a closer alignment of various bilateral and multilateral integration processes that are currently underway in Eurasia."<sup>1</sup> Similar views were expressed by him in his opening speech, in June 2016, at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum, where he proposed his vision of establishing a "Great Eurasian Partnership, involving the EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union), China, India, Pakistan, Iran, CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) members, and other interested countries and associations".<sup>2</sup> He has envisioned the establishment of a network of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements among the members, which would, initially, involve harmonising and easing regulations for scientific and technological cooperation, cooperation for mutual investments, phytosanitary control, customs administration,

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1. "Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation", April 26, 2019; <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60378>. Accessed on May 15, 2019.
2. "Plenary Session of St Petersburg International Economic Forum", June 17, 2016; <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52178>. Accessed on May 15, 2019.



**Continuous focus on multilateral cooperation within the Greater Eurasian Partnership and Eurasian Integration has become an important vector for the advancement of Russian foreign policy thinking in recent times.**

and protection of intellectual property, etc. Later, they could gradually move towards the lowering of tariffs and ultimately establishing a 'Free Trade Zone' with more than 40 countries.<sup>3</sup> The president further proposed that the Greater Eurasian initiative was also open for Europe, and anticipated that it would eventually join.<sup>4</sup> This continuous focus on multilateral cooperation within the Greater Eurasian Partnership and Eurasian Integration has become an important vector

for the advancement of Russian foreign policy thinking in recent times.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, Greater Eurasia demonstrates Moscow's geo-economic strategy, i.e. through economic connectivity (i) it can, reposition itself at the heart of integrated Eurasia; (ii) as an energy and transportation hub, it can elevate its bargaining power; and (iii) connectivity with rising markets in Asia can provide it opportunities for diversification.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, it is also perceived as a new geo-political phenomenon, i.e. Eurasia symbolises a common space among Europe, Russia and Asia, therefore, Russia can become a centre of integration between Asia and Europe. Moreover, this could provide Russia with an opportunity to gain a new status of not just being on the European periphery, with possessions in Asia, but an Atlantic-Pacific power committed to the future.<sup>7</sup> Third, Greater Eurasia is also seen as Russia's move to restore its place at the international level, politically, and

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3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Zachary Paikin, "Orders within Orders: A New Paradigm for Greater Eurasia", April 27, 2019; <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2019/04/27/orders-within-orders-a-new-paradigm-for-greater-eurasia/>. Accessed on May 3, 2019.

6. Glenn Diesen, *Russia's Geoeconomic Strategy for a Greater Eurasia* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 1.

7. Sergei Karaganov, "From East to West, or Greater Eurasia", *Russia in Global Affairs*, October 25, 2016; <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/From-east-to-west-or-Greater-Eurasia-18440>. Accessed on April 30, 2019.

reestablish influence in its “near abroad”<sup>8</sup> so as to fill the ideological emptiness generated by the demise of the Soviet Union.<sup>9</sup>

Against this background, the present paper will try to examine ‘Eurasia’ in Russia’s foreign policy calculus. It will focus on various possibilities and challenges for Russia to achieve its objectives, specially amidst the profound global changes.

### **BRIEF BACKGROUND**

The evolution of the concept of Eurasia in the Russian discourse should be understood in the context of the disintegration of the USSR in 1991. Since then, Russia has undergone significant changes in its foreign policy. In fact, the demise of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War and the virtual disappearance of the Communist international sub-system left a conceptual void in the foreign policy of the newly independent Russian Federation.<sup>10</sup> Given the fact that it inherited the features of the changed international system, radically different territorial boundaries, deep economic crisis and increased social discontent, a number of questions surfaced regarding the direction its foreign policy should take. Also, with the loss of its ideology’s official standing, the issue of Russia’s national identity came to the forefront. In fact, the question of national identity became more central than national interests,<sup>11</sup> as it was

**The demise of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War and the virtual disappearance of the Communist international sub-system left a conceptual void in the foreign policy of the newly independent Russian Federation.**

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8. Lt Col Craig S. Baumgartner, “Russia’s Strategic Window of Opportunity in Eurasia”, Retrieved from [http://inset.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/AWCReport\\_2013\\_Baumgartner\\_Final.pdf](http://inset.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/AWCReport_2013_Baumgartner_Final.pdf). Accessed on June 13, 2019.
  9. Diana Shendrikova, “Going Regional the Russia Way: The Eurasian Economic Union between Instrumentalism and Global Social Appropriateness”, July 3, 2015, [http://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/green\\_shendrikova.pdf](http://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/green_shendrikova.pdf). Accessed on July 3, 2019.
  10. Robert H. Donaldson and Joseph L. Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia-Changing Systems Enduring Interests* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), pp. 107-111.
  11. Andrei P. Tsygankov, “From International Institutionalism to Revolutionary Expansionism: The Foreign Policy Discourse of Contemporary Russia”, *Mershon International Studies Review*, vol. 41, 1997, p. 248.

noted by analysts that until and unless the question of “what Russia is without the Soviet Union and without the Russian Empire” is dealt with, no military doctrine or national security will endure.<sup>12</sup> However, amidst the chaos and confusion, the leaders of the Russian Federation accepted the premises of the “new thinking” as put forward by Mikhail Gorbachev, and the “liberal ideas based on liberal democracy, the market economy and Western-centred system”, dominated Russian leadership’s foreign policy thinking from 1991-93.<sup>13</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, the then foreign minister, justified this policy by stating that “there were neither potential adversaries nor military threats to Russian interests”, and that “the world was going through a transition from the former global division and confrontation to a system of relations of global cooperation”.<sup>14</sup> Thus, during that time, Russia sought partnerships with the West on the basis of shared values of democracy, free market and human rights. It was claimed that the Western powers were the natural allies of Russia,<sup>15</sup> as the then President Boris Yeltsin clearly articulated in his speech to the UN Security Council in January 1992, “Russia regards the United States and the West not as mere partners but rather as allies ... we reject any subordination of foreign policy to pure ideology or ideological doctrines. Our principles are clear and simple: primacy of democracy, human rights and freedoms, legal and moral standards ...”<sup>16</sup> Clearly, under President Yeltsin’s leadership, joining the West as a major partner of the US and an integral player in Greater Europe, was the chief foreign policy objective. It included radical economic reforms and integration into transatlantic economic and security institutions like the European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO),

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12. Ibid. Also see, Eugene B. Rumer, *The Building Blocks of Russia's Future Military Doctrine* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 1994), p. viii; [https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR359.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR359.html). Accessed on June 13, 2019.

13. Christian Thorun, *Explaining Change in Russian Foreign Policy—The Role of Ideas in Post-Soviet Russia's Conduct towards the West* (St Antony's Series, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 28-29.

14. Ibid., p. 29.

15. Graham Smith, “The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the new Eurasianism”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 24, no. 4, 1999, p. 482.

16. “Boris Yeltsin’s Speech to the UN, January 31, 1992”; <http://undocs.org/en/S/PV.3046>. Accessed on June 21, 2019.

World Trade Organisation (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), G-7, etc. This new Westernised orientation shaped the foreign policy concept of 1992-93.<sup>17</sup> Many young liberal economists like Yegor Gaidar promoted radical liberalisation programmes or so-called “shock therapy” in the early 1990s and tried to replace the old system with the new one.<sup>18</sup> They expressed their belief in the private sector’s potential for the restructuring of the country’s ailing economy. However, this could not last long as it faced formidable opposition on the domestic front as was visible in the 1993 and 1995 parliamentary (Duma) elections, in which nationalists and Communists did well, compelling Yeltsin to modify his liberal agenda.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Russia and the Western world (US and Europe) could not achieve that level of mutual trust which is the basis of any partnership. Russia felt a sense of humiliation when the US and its allies set out to expand NATO forces by adding twelve new members, including former parts of the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup> It became one of the most contentious issues between Russia and the US. Consequently, there was a shift in Russia’s approach towards the West and with the appointment of Evgenii Primakov as the new foreign minister in 1996, the focus shifted more towards a new national identity and civilisational strategy for Russia. Primakov emphasized on the fact that since Russia is both Europe and Asia, therefore, the key priorities of Russian foreign policy should include improving relations with the non-Western countries and integration with the republics of the former Soviet region.<sup>21</sup> Though he never publicly called himself a Eurasianist, Primakov was the one who laid the basis for ‘multipolarism’, and emphasized that Russia

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17. Andrei P. Tsygankov, “Finding a Civilisational Idea: ‘West’, ‘Eurasia’, and ‘Euro-East’ in Russia’s Foreign Policy”, *Geopolitics*, vol. 12, no. 3, July 2007, p. 383.

18. Kairat Moldashev and Mohamed Aslam, “Russia in the Pursuit of Eurasian Integration: Developmental Regionalism or Identity Project”; [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273756228\\_Russia\\_in\\_the\\_Pursuit\\_of\\_Eurasian\\_Integration\\_Developmental\\_Regionalism\\_or\\_an\\_Identity\\_Project](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273756228_Russia_in_the_Pursuit_of_Eurasian_Integration_Developmental_Regionalism_or_an_Identity_Project). Accessed on June 25, 2019.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Alexander Lukin, “What the Kremlin is Thinking”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 93, no. 4, July-August, 2014, pp. 85-86.

21. Tsygankov, n. 17, p. 384.

should follow it in the post-Cold War period.<sup>22</sup> Primakov's multipolarism had five key aspects:<sup>23</sup>

- Russia should continue to pursue an active foreign policy and defend its position as a great power in international politics, despite its weaknesses.
- Russia should follow a multifaceted policy and enhance its relations not only with great powers like the US, European Union (EU), Japan, India and China, but also with regional countries like Iran, Turkey, Syria, Indonesia, etc. This diversification of foreign connections is important for Russia to overcome its difficulties.
- Russia, with its unique geo-political position, permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council, membership in the world's nuclear club, and its military-technological advancement, can play its cards smartly in the future and can advance/safeguard its interests.
- Russia should establish closer ties with countries which are equally uneasy about a US dominated world.
- Primakov believed that there are no constant enemies, but there are constant national interests, therefore, Russia should "pursue a 'rational pragmatism' devoid of romanticism and unaffordable sentimentality" and it should "look much farther afield for 'constructive partnerships', especially to China, India, and Japan, as well as Iran, Libya, Iraq, and others."<sup>24</sup>

Through this 'multivector' policy, Primakov aimed at preserving the civilisational uniqueness of Russia and the adoption of a more balanced approach towards the West. Consequently, the National Security Concept of 1997 reflected the formation of some basis for political and societal consensus

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22. Emre Ersen, "Neo-Eurasianism and Putin's Multipolarism in Russian Foreign Policy", *Turkish Review of Eurasian Studies*, Annual no. 4, 2004, p. 144.

23. Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "Russia Adrift: Strategic Anchors for Russia's Foreign Policy", *Harvard International Review*, Winter/Spring 2000, p. 19, as cited from Emre Ersen, "Neo-Eurasianism and Putin's Multipolarism in Russian Foreign Policy", *Turkish Review of Eurasian Studies*, Annual no. 4, 2004.

24. Ibid.

on the Russian self-image and a proper role in the world.<sup>25</sup> It identified Russia as an influential European and Asian power and recommended that it should maintain a balance in its relations with the global European and Asian political and economic actors.<sup>26</sup> However, considering the huge gap between this thinking and the actual capability of Russia at that point of time, this new surge of Eurasianism was not taken seriously by the West.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, the concept of multipolarism, certainly, gave a direction to the Russian foreign policy under Putin.<sup>28</sup>

The arrival of Putin as the president of Russia in 2000 brought a new dynamism in the Russian foreign policy. Although his foreign policy legacy has changed and evolved on multiple occasions since 2000 and the changes can arguably be termed as contradictory, they display Putin's prowess as a realist, a pragmatist, and a geo-political thinker. The period between December 31, 1999 (first, as an acting president and after March 26, 2000, as the elected president) and September 11, 2001, revealed a mix of Western and Eurasian perspectives in Putin's foreign policy postures. It was speculated that either he was tilting towards a post-Yeltsin direction or was testing the waters with different options. His policies were neither purely pro-West nor anti-West.<sup>29</sup> While he embraced the previously articulated vision of Russia to develop closer cooperation with the Western world, at the same time, he also emphasized on continuing the civilisational role of the Russian nation in Eurasia.<sup>30</sup> Although he challenged the US on various key issues like his opposition to national missile defence and the first phase of NATO's

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25. Alla Kassianova, "Russia: Still Open to the West? Evolution of the State Identity in the Foreign Policy and Security Discourse", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 53, no. 6, 2001, p. 827.

26. *Ibid.* Also see, Tsygankov, n. 17, p. 384.

27. Aryanta Nugraha, "Neo-Eurasianism in Russian Foreign Policy: Echoes From the Past or Compromise with the Future"; [http://www.researchgate.net/publication/324449324\\_Neo-Eurasianism\\_in\\_Russian\\_Foreign\\_Policy\\_Echoes\\_from\\_the\\_Past\\_or\\_Compromise\\_with\\_the\\_future](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/324449324_Neo-Eurasianism_in_Russian_Foreign_Policy_Echoes_from_the_Past_or_Compromise_with_the_future). Accessed on March 17, 2019.

28. Vladimir Putin is the president of the Russian Federation since 2012. Previously, he held the same position from 2000-08 and in between his presidential terms (2008-12), he was the prime minister of the country under President Dmitry Medvedev.

29. Donaldson and Noguee, n. 10, p. 340.

30. Tsygankov, n. 17, p. 385.

**The arrival of Putin as the president of Russia in 2000 brought a new dynamism in the Russian foreign policy. Although his foreign policy legacy has changed and evolved on multiple occasions since 2000 and the changes can arguably be termed as contradictory, they display Putin's prowess as a realist, a pragmatist, and a geopolitical thinker.**

expansion<sup>31</sup>, at the same time, he tried to maintain greater integration with the West, with a special focus on its European dimension. He underlined the fact that Russia always had a European identity. In his words, "We are a part of the Western European culture. No matter where our people live, in the Far East or in the South, we are Europeans."<sup>32</sup> During his visit to Bundestag, Germany, in 2001, not only did he give a speech in German but also proclaimed Russia's European choice.<sup>33</sup> Further, in the early 2000s, Moscow also made active attempts to shape a new vision of Euro-Atlantic Region (EAR) by calling for a new definition of 'Atlanticism' that

was inclusive of Russia. In fact, Russia's construction of EAR is largely based on geo-strategic pragmatism, as they share a continent and long historical relationship. Therefore, Russia's Euro-Atlantic policy was an extension of its European identity.<sup>34</sup> Putin, in his annual address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in 2005, had very categorically said that Russia is moving towards the values of freedom, human rights, justice and democracy like the other European nations and emphasized that "Russia was, is, and will, of course, be a major European power".<sup>35</sup> He further envisioned the creation of a common economic space stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok,

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31. Donaldson and Noguee, n. 10.

32. V. Putin, *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President* (New Delhi: Public Affairs, 2000), p. 169, as quoted from Tsygankov, n. 17, p. 398.

33. "Speech in the Bundestag of the Federal Republic of Germany", September 25, 2001; <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21340>. Accessed on November 3, 2019.

34. David Svarin, "The Construction of 'Geopolitical Spaces' in Russian Foreign Policy Discourse Before and After Ukraine Crisis", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, no. 7, 2016, pp. 132-133.

35. "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation", April 25, 2005; <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>. Accessed on November 13, 2019.

with a possibility of establishing a free trade zone for greater economic integration and, thus, building a Greater Europe.<sup>36</sup> However, at the same time, he was very clear that Russia would move in the direction of democracy and freedom with the Europeans but at its own pace and with its own conditions. During his annual address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Putin emphasized on his country's right to decide for itself the pace, terms and conditions of moving towards democracy.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, Putin also tried to establish warm and closer ties with the United States of America. The September 11, 2001, attacks on the US provided that opportunity to him.

**The US-Russian partnership remained steadfast for about a year after the September 11 attacks. However, soon, Russia started realising that many of the expected benefits of the partnership were elusive.**

## **RUSSIA AND THE WEST**

President Putin was one of the first leaders to offer his sympathy and support to the US ahead of the prepared invasion of Afghanistan at the beginning of the "war on terror".<sup>38</sup> His cooperation with the US was considerable, like an unprecedented sharing of intelligence information, permission to US aircraft to fly over Russian territory, support to the establishment of military bases in some of the Central Asian countries and coordination between the US military and the Northern Alliance that Russia was able to facilitate because of its long time support to the anti-Taliban struggle in Afghanistan.<sup>39</sup> Of course, Russia's support to the US had some deeper motivations, i.e. Russia had been engaged in its own war against religious extremism for years, and it found the US

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36. "Putin Envisions a Russia-EU Free Trade Zone", November 25, 2010; <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/from-lisbon-to-vladivostok-putin-envisios-a-russia-eu-free-trade-zone-a-731109.html>. Accessed on November 13, 2019.

37. n. 35

38. Sumantra Maitra, "Understanding Putin's Foreign and Economic Policy Correlation", *The Nottingham Economic Review*, February 20, 2014, p. 28.

39. Donaldson and Noguee, n. 10, pp. 346-348.



a natural and powerful ally against a common enemy. Chechnya was, indeed, its most immediate concern. Besides, during that time, Russia was also grappling with the poor state of the economy. Therefore, American investments and its help for Russia's admission to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) were crucial.<sup>40</sup>

The US-Russian partnership remained steadfast for about a year after the September 11 attacks. However, soon, Russia started realising that many of the expected benefits of the partnership were elusive. For example:

- The US' criticism over Russia's Chechnya policy was slow to materialise. In fact, the statements from the US Department of State spokesperson accusing Russian troops in Chechnya of the "disproportionate use of force against civilian installations" and "ongoing human rights violations" were quite disturbing for Moscow.
- Russia also accused the Western countries of holding double standards over the meetings with official representatives of these countries and representatives of the Chechen President Aslam Maskhadov in early 2000.
- The then US President George Bush's speech, wherein he identified Iran, Iraq and North Korea as an 'axis of evil' and the source of world terrorism was not well received in Russia. Moscow argued that US allies like Pakistan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia were also culpable. Also, Putin's concept of an 'arc of instability', a seedbed of ethnic strife along Russia's southern borders, was his bid to legitimise Russia's war in Chechnya.
- The US withdrawal from its steel agreement with Russia and increase in tariffs in early 2002 invited harsh words from Putin against the US and, consequently, Russia retaliated with a ban on chicken legs imported from the US.
- The Bush government's decision to unilaterally withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty emerged as another crucial irritant between the two. Moscow also objected to the US' plans to build a strategic missile defence; the Pentagon's unwillingness to destroy deactivated nuclear

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40. Ibid.

warheads; and America's long-term military plans in the Central Asian region and Georgia.<sup>41</sup>

- Some of the other issues viewed as provocative by the Russian administration included encouraging oil pipelines in the Caucasus region that bypass Russian territory and supporting democratic forces in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that were hostile to Russia.

Moscow was also not in complete harmony with Europe. Despite the fact that Russia and Europe shared a common position against the US-led war in Iraq, the European Union and the Council of Europe were critical of Russian human rights violations in Chechnya and its military bases in Moldova and Georgia. Moreover, the second round of NATO's eastward expansion near the Russian borders, wherein Slovakia, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Romania and Slovenia joined the alliance, further deteriorated the relationship.<sup>42</sup>

Putin's pro-Western line broke down completely in 2007 with his speech in Munich wherein he challenged the US for trying to establish a unipolar model and not being ready to respect the boundaries of any sovereign state in the world. He stated, "Today we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts.... We are seeing ever increasing disregard for the fundamental principles of international law. Besides, certain norms are coming increasingly closer to one state's legal system and that is, of course, the United States ... have crossed over their national borders in every way ... and this is extremely dangerous"<sup>43</sup> This speech was a watershed moment in the articulation of Putin's world view. He also suggested that because the US was such

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41. For details, see Donaldson and Noguee, n. 10, pp. 339-376. Also see, Angela Stent and Lilia Shevtsova, "America, Russia and Europe: A Realignment?", *Survival*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2002, pp. 121-134.

42. *Ibid.*

43. "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy", February 10, 2007; <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>. Accessed on June 24, 2019

a poor steward of the global order, it was time to consider a wholesale overhaul of the global security structure.<sup>44</sup>

This assertiveness was a reflection of both Russia's dissatisfaction with the West and Russia's new domestic confidence. The period of the 2000s saw a remarkable growth in the oil prices that helped Russia to free itself from external financial dependence. The nationalisation of a considerable part of the Russian oil industry in the mid-2000s, created a basis for a coordinated energy policy. The reforms carried out for the armed forces in the first half of the 2010s, provided the country an effective mechanism for its defence and promotion of its interests. Furthermore, the people's wholehearted support for Putin ensured the system's stability and the 'power vertical' provided a mechanism for Putin to exert his political will.<sup>45</sup> By 2008, Russia was back, pursuing an assertive agenda that was visible in Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine. The proposed expansion of NATO to include Georgia and Ukraine, the independence of Kosovo, and missile defence in Europe were the three events in particular that intensified the already existing tensions in Russia's relations with the Western world.

- When Kosovo declared its independence in 2008 in defiance of Serbia and Russia, within days, the US and most of the European countries recognised it as a new state. This was considered as a big blow to Russia's prestige. At the same time, the Russian foreign minister warned that "the declaration and recognition of Kosovar independence will make Russia adjust its line toward Abkhazia and South Ossetia".<sup>46</sup>
- The planned deployment of US missile defences in Eastern Europe was a major security concern for Russia. Although the US assured that the missile defence system stationed in Poland and the Czech Republic was not targeted against Russia but against Iran, Russia was convinced that

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44. Ibid.

45. Dmitry Trenin, "20 Years of Vladimir Putin: How Russian Foreign Policy Has Changed", August 27, 2019; <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/08/27/20-years-of-vladimir-putin-how-russian-foreign-policy-has-changed-a67043>. Accessed on November 12, 2019.

46. C. J. Chivers, "Russia Warns It May Back Breakaway Republics in Georgia", February 16, 2008; <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/16/world/europe/16breakaway.html>. Accessed on November 14, 2019.

this could be expanded to negate Russia's nuclear deterrent. Russia opposed the deal, saying that the United States was violating post-Cold-War agreements not to base its troops in the former Soviet bloc states and devising a Trojan Horse system designed to counter Russia's nuclear arsenal, not an attack by Iran or any other adversary. "It is this kind of agreement, not the split between Russia and United States over the problem of South Ossetia, that may have a greater impact on the growth in tensions in Russian-American relations," noted Konstantin Kosachyov, chairman of the foreign affairs committee in the Russian Parliament.<sup>47</sup>

- The inclusion of Georgia and Ukraine in the proposed expansion of NATO was another challenging issue for Russia as it would have brought the US in the heart of the Caucasus, with direct access to the oil and pipelines of the Caspian Sea basin. Also, Russia shares a close historical relationship with Ukraine: there is a large Russian population in eastern Ukraine, and the location of Russia's Black Sea fleet is Sevastopol in Crimea.<sup>48</sup> Thus, NATO's expansion sent strong signals to Russia and it reacted, and the five-day short war that Russia fought with Georgia can be seen in this light. The then Russian President Medvedev struck a firm tone acknowledging that Russia's actions there had something to do with keeping NATO out, and said, "If we had faltered in 2008, geopolitical arrangements would be different now and a number of countries ... would probably be in NATO".<sup>49</sup> Though the war was short, Moscow made it very clear to Georgia and Ukraine that any close association with the West would come at a price. Also, Russia was prepared to act forcefully to protect its sphere of influence among the member states of the CIS. Consequently, Georgia and Ukraine were not included in NATO, but Russia was also denied membership of the WTO, and threatened with expulsion from the G-8. On its part, Russia announced its intention not to continue to

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47. Thom Shanker and Nicholas Kulishaug, "U.S. and Poland Set Missile Deal", August 14, 2008; <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/15/world/europe/15poland.html>. Accessed on November 14, 2019.

48. Donaldson and Noguee, n. 10.

49. As quoted in Karl Roberts, "Understanding Putin: The Politics of Identity and Geopolitics in Russian Foreign Policy Discourse", *International Journal*, 2017, Sage Publications, pp. 14-15.

**The beginning of Putin's third term (2012-16) as the president of the Russian Federation marked a departure from the phase of weakness, and declared its resurgence as a prominent regional and international actor with the reconstruction of Russia's past, and its imagined destiny resurfacing in the foreign policy thinking.**

participate in the Russia-NATO Council and raised the stakes even higher by granting recognition to Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states.<sup>50</sup>

The Georgian conflict in 2008 heralded a new stage in Russo-Western relations, with Russia clearly heading towards a more vigorous pursuit of its interests. President Medvedev laid down five principles of the Russian foreign policy, one of which was Russia's privileged interests with priority regions with which it historically has a special relationship. Another was that Russia would strive

for a multipolar world as "unipolarity is unacceptable and domination is impermissible".<sup>51</sup> Similar aspects were clearly defined in the Foreign Policy Concept of 2008 as "rethinking of the priorities of the Russian foreign policy with due account for the increased role of the country in international affairs ... the strengthening of the positions of the Russian Federation in international affairs ... best meet the interests of the Russian Federation as one of influential centres in the modern world ... and to create favourable external conditions for the modernisation of Russia."<sup>52</sup> Similar views were expressed by Vladimir Putin in his address to the State Duma in April 2012 when he said that the "post-Soviet period is over", and called for focussing on the "strategic principle meaning and connection with the historical perspective as a nation".<sup>53</sup> He further said that "creation of a common economic space

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50. Donaldson and Noguee, n. 10, pp. 372-376.

51. Paul Reynolds, "New Russian World Order: The Five Principles"; <https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7591610.stm>. Accessed on November 11, 2019.

52. "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation", January 12, 2008; <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116>. Accessed on June 13, 2019.

53. Ezekiel Pfeifer, "Archived Live Blog: Putin's Address to the State Duma", *The Moscow Times*, April 11, 2012; <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/04/11/archived-live-blog-putins-address-to-state-duma-a13996>. Accessed on November 11, 2019.

is the most important event in the post-Soviet space since the collapse of the Soviet Union".<sup>54</sup> Clearly, the beginning of Putin's third term (2012-16) as the president of the Russian Federation marked a departure from the phase of weakness, and declared its resurgence as a prominent regional and international actor with the reconstruction of Russia's past, and its imagined destiny resurfacing in the foreign policy thinking.

**RUSSIA'S EURASIAN VISION AND EURASIAN INTEGRATION:**

Russia's ambitions to integrate with its "near abroad" were clearly defined by the then Prime Minister Putin in his article "A New Integration Project for Eurasia: The Future in the Making" published in 2011. He called it the "Eurasian Union", an association of post-Soviet states, which would first intensify economic ties among themselves, followed by greater political integration.<sup>55</sup> While elaborating on his vision, he stated, "The project is, without exaggeration, a milestone not only for the three countries<sup>56</sup> but for all post-Soviet states. ... we propose a powerful supranational alliance capable of becoming one of the poles in the modern world and playing the role of an effective bridge between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific region. ... we propose to set up a harmonised community of economies stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok, a free trade zone and even employing more sophisticated integration patterns."<sup>57</sup> He further advocated, "... by opening up our markets to each other, which means that the goods will be

**Close integration of all the post-Soviet republics, politically and economically, was not a new idea. For more than 20 years in the post-Soviet era, the idea had been prevalent to have some sort of single economic space among the newly independent states.**

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54. Ibid.

55. Vladimir Putin, "A New Integration Project for Eurasia: The Future in the Making", Press Release, The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, October 4, 2011; <https://www.rusemb.org.uk/press/246>. Accessed on March 20, 2019.

56. The three countries are: Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

57. Putin, n. 55.

brought to our markets at cheaper prices, which will, in turn, provide better conditions for starting new joint ventures, will increase the competitiveness of all our economies".<sup>58</sup> Clearly, the third term of Putin as president of the Russian Federation set the tone for institutionalising Russia's relations with the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which Russia considered as the "area of its strategic interests".

### HISTORY OF INTEGRATION

Close integration of all the post-Soviet republics, politically and economically, was not a new idea. For more than 20 years in the post-Soviet era, the idea had been prevalent to have some sort of single economic space among the newly independent states. Various attempts were also made to integrate the CIS, established after the disintegration of the USSR on December 8, 1991, and the agreement on the creation of a Free Trade Area (FTA) among some of the republics (that could be considered as a first attempt) was signed in September 1993. The signatories of this agreement were Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz republic.<sup>59</sup> In January 1995, a Customs Union was formed by Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus that was joined by the Kyrgyz republic in 1996, and Tajikistan followed suit in 1999. The aim of this Customs Union was to remove the obstacles of free interaction between the economic entities of the parties involved and ensure free trade and fair competition. But these measures could not yield success because of various political and economic factors. Prominent among them were lack of mutual trust, different interpretations of economic integration by the members, huge differences of development levels since most of these were weak economies, therefore, not prepared to face competition; also there was a lack of motivation. Hence, it is believed that the period of the

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58. Ibid.

59. "Free Trade Agreement Between Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, The Russian Federation, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and The Kyrgyz Republic"; <https://wits.worldbank.org/GPTAD/PDF/archive/CIS.pdf>. Accessed on November 18, 2019.

1990s was more one of disintegration than integration.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, the process of integration between Russia and some of the post-Soviet countries like Belarus and Kazakhstan picked up in the beginning of the year 2000. Russian President Putin, after coming to power, signed an agreement with the republics of Kazakhstan, Belarus, the Kyrgyz republic and Tajikistan to form the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC), with an objective of effectively developing and promoting the formation of a Customs Union and a Single Economic Space (SES). Eventually, in 2003, an agreement was signed among Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine to establish the SES. However, following the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, Kyiv did not ratify the agreement and it collapsed in 2006. In the same year, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan announced a proposal to form a new Customs Union and Common Economic Space and to formally launch it in 2010. In 2007, they signed a treaty for the same. The global economic crisis of 2008 emerged as a new economic factor that forced these countries to establish new formats of economic cooperation for sustainable economic growth and to minimise economic risks. It was felt that opening of borders between the important CIS countries would be an important step to achieve it.<sup>61</sup> This further accelerated the process of the “launch” of the Customs Union. Thus, in November 2009, the Customs Union agreement was signed and a common external tariff and customs code was established in 2010. Additionally, it was also stated that the countries would seek to join the WTO simultaneously and form a single economic space in 2012.<sup>62</sup> Thus, for the first time since 1991, the Customs Union was formally launched within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Community, and an inter-

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60. Iwona Wisniewska, “Eurasian Integration-Russia’s Attempt at the Economic Unification of the Post-Soviet Area”, *OSW Studies*, no. 44, Warsaw, July 2013; [https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/prace\\_44\\_eurasian-integration\\_net.pdf](https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/prace_44_eurasian-integration_net.pdf). Accessed on May 8, 2019.

61. “Eurasian Economic Integration: Facts and Figures”, [http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/Documents/Брошюра%20Цифры%20и%20факты%20ит%20\(Англ\).pdf](http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/Documents/Брошюра%20Цифры%20и%20факты%20ит%20(Англ).pdf). Accessed on November 22, 2019.

62. Irina Tochitskaya, “The Custom Union Between Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia: An Overview of Economic Implications for Belarus”, *CASE Network Studies and Analyses*, no. 405, 2010; [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1670130](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1670130). Accessed on November 22, 2019.



state council and the Customs Union Commission (as an executive body) were established to manage its functioning and take decisions on various issues. Not only did this set the first stage of the process of these countries' economic integration but also in a way met their aspirations to formalise and establish a Eurasian Economic Union with other countries, international economic associations and the European Union on the basis of harmonious, complementary and mutually beneficial cooperation.<sup>63</sup>

Vladimir Putin's article on "A New Integration Project for Eurasia: The Future in the Making"<sup>64</sup> in October 2011, was followed by Belarus' President A.G. Lukashenko's article "About the Fate of our Integration"<sup>65</sup> and the then Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev's article "Eurasian Union: From Idea to Future History".<sup>66</sup> These gave a new expression and strong foundation to the process of Eurasian integration as the leaders of the three countries projected similar approaches for the creation of a Eurasian Union. For instance, the three of them emphasized on:

- Establishing a globally competitive Eurasian Economic Union based on the principles of equality, non-interference in the internal affairs of each other, respect for sovereignty and inviolability of state borders;
- The Union would act by consensus, keeping in mind the interests of each participating country;
- It would be an open project with a possibility of integration with other countries and other regional/global organisations, and, hence, emphasised on the "integration of integrations" process;
- It should not be seen as a "restoration" or "reincarnation" of the USSR as these were just ghosts of the past.

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63. "Declaration on the Formation of a Single Economic Space", <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/802>, (translated version, original text in Russian). Accessed on November 24, 2019.

64. Putin, n. 55.

65. A.G. Lukashenko, "About the Fate of our Integration", <http://iz.ru/news/504081>. Accessed on November 24, 2019.

66. Nursultan Nazarbayev, "Eurasian Union: From Idea to Future History", <http://izvestia.ru/news/504908>. Accessed on November 24, 2019.

On November 18, 2011, the Presidents of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan signed the agreement to establish a Single Economic Space (SES) in 2012 and a full Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) by 2015 for deeper integration. The SES began with the primary objective to provide effective functioning of the common market for goods, services, capital and labour. It was also supposed to provide cooperation between Parliaments, business communities and citizens of member states, including spheres such as culture, the formation of effective patterns of inter-regional and cross-border collaboration, and the development of cooperation in foreign policy.<sup>67</sup> Further, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, signed the Eurasian Economic Union Treaty on May 29, 2014. Putin's original "Eurasian Union" formulation was seen as too political, so the term "Economic" was added to define the nature and limits of the agreement. Armenia's accession was agreed to in October 2014, followed by the Kyrgyz republic's in December. The EAEU entered into force on January 1, 2015, among Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Armenia.<sup>68</sup>

Thus, the idea of integration among the CIS countries, that was considered as rhetoric in the past, found new direction in the form of the EAEU, and is quite different from its predecessors. It is not only a deeper stage of integration that promotes a free trade area but it manifests itself in the existence of the common customs territory and common customs tariff, as well as a common institution governing trade policy.<sup>69</sup> It has written rules, regulations, laws and procedures that are essential for the effective running of a union. In line with the European Union (EU), it has developed a number of institutions and essential bodies for the effective operation and implementation of its policies.<sup>70</sup>

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67. Maria Lagutina, "Eurasian Economic Union Foundation: Issues of Global Regionalization"; [http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/BorderStudies/en/publications/review/data/ebr51/V5\\_N1\\_06Lagutina2.pdf](http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/BorderStudies/en/publications/review/data/ebr51/V5_N1_06Lagutina2.pdf). Accessed on November 22, 2019.

68. "The Eurasian Economic Union: Power, Politics and Trade", International Crisis Group, Europe and Central Asia Report N°240, July 20, 2016; <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/240-the-eurasian-economic-union-power-politics-and-trade.pdf>. Accessed on November 12, 2019.

69. Alexander Libman, "Russian Power Politics and the Eurasian Economic Union: The Real and the Imagined", *Rising Power Quarterly*, vol. 2, issue 1, 2017, p. 81.

70. Golam Mostafa and Monowar Mahmood, "Eurasian Economic Union: Evolution, Challenges and Possible Future Directions", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, no. 9, 2018, p. 165.

**Initially, Moscow's primary interest in establishing the EAEU was not solely the economic side of the integration, but the larger geo-political gain. Regional integration became an area of competition between Russia and the EU for influence in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.**

Now, besides the internal motivations to move towards creating the EAEU, global factors like the global financial crisis, geo-political rivalry in the post-Soviet region, intensification of the struggle for influence in that region and preventing its neighbours being absorbed into rival regional blocs, etc. substantially affected that process. For example, NATO membership of the Baltic Republics (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) in 2004, the first oil and gas pipelines bypassing Russian territory, the role of foreign companies, and China's increasing footprints in the Central Asian region can be considered as important developments.<sup>71</sup> Further, the EU's initiative

to adopt a Central Asian Strategy and its Eastern Partnership Programme—which envisaged negotiation of EU Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Trade Area Agreements with those eastern partners that had made the most progress in their reform processes—was also seen as a new challenge by Russia.<sup>72</sup> Thus, to a large extent, Russia's decision to advocate economic integration was a reaction to these developments.

#### **RUSSIA'S INTERESTS AND EAEU**

It is argued that initially, Moscow's primary interest in establishing the EAEU was not solely the economic side of the integration, but the larger geo-political gain. President Putin's statement in one of the Valdai Club's meetings in 2013, made Russia's interests very clear, "Russia needs new strategies to preserve its identity in a rapidly changing world, a world

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71. Jeronim Perovic, "Russia's Turn to Eurasia"; [www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/centre-for-securities-studies/pdfs/pp6-5\\_2018.pdf](http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/centre-for-securities-studies/pdfs/pp6-5_2018.pdf). Accessed on June 7, 2019.

72. Wisniewska, n. 60.

that has become more open, transparent and interdependent ... in the 21st century, the international system is breaking into geopolitical zones ... a version of the idea of a multipolar world and Eurasian integration is a chance for the entire post-Soviet space to become an independent centre for global development, rather than remaining on the outskirts of Europe and Asia".<sup>73</sup> Further, it was argued by Sergei Glazyev (presidential adviser) that "Russia is confronting clear choices, i.e., either become a powerful ideological and civilizational centre in its own right ... or integrate with one of the existing power centres and lose its identity". In this regard, the EEU is a mechanism for Russia's influence in its "sphere of special interests" in the post-Soviet republics, where Russia opposes Western political or security influence, particularly achieved through the kind of "colour revolutions" experienced in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine. Russian officials continue to see the West as a destabilising actor in Eurasia, seeking to undermine friendly regimes.<sup>74</sup>

Second, regional integration became an area of competition between Russia and the EU for influence in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. These countries were closely working with Brussels in order to modernise their economies and lessen their dependence on Russia. Therefore, through the EAEU, Russia intended to counteract this move while, at the same time, guaranteeing that Russia maintains its political and economic influence in this area.<sup>75</sup>

**An interesting dynamic is introduced by the fact that many of the states participating in this project are closely linked to Russia, yet appear to be simultaneously hedging against Russia. Thus, while Russia recognises the need to consolidate its influence in a gradual and consensual way within the EAEU, many political realities of the region are working against these efforts.**

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73. "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club", September 19, 2013; <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19243>. Accessed on September 10, 2019.

74. n. 68.

75. Wisniewska, n. 60.

Third, the EAEU as a tool of regional integration is also important for Russia as an image-builder. Through its success, Moscow intended to demonstrate that it is still the centre of attraction for the CIS states.<sup>76</sup>

However, while Russia's main aim in establishing the EAEU was to restore its influence on the post-Soviet space, Moscow has struggled to fulfil its ambitious goal of building a more unified version of Eurasia. It is facing a number of challenges within the union.

- An interesting dynamic is introduced by the fact that many of the states participating in this project are closely linked to Russia, yet appear to be simultaneously hedging against Russia. Thus, while Russia recognises the need to consolidate its influence in a gradual and consensual way within the EAEU, many political realities of the region are working against these efforts.<sup>77</sup> There are wider differences among the EAEU members over the Russian foreign policy, particularly in Ukraine. The EAEU members refused public support to Russia in its conflict with Ukraine and maintained cordial relations with Kyiv. On January 1, 2016, Russia suspended its recognition of a CIS Free Trade Agreement with Ukraine and announced an embargo on Ukrainian food imports; and imposed obstacles on Ukrainian goods transiting to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The rest of the EAEU continued normal trade with Ukraine, with Ukraine being one of Kazakhstan's top five importers as of today. To avoid transit difficulties, an alternative route has been opened through Georgia, Azerbaijan and across the Caspian Sea. Besides, other conflicts also make regional integration more difficult and demonstrate a lack of political solidarity. For instance, an outbreak of fighting around Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2016 exposed stark differences between the members of the EAEU. Kazakhstan has closer relations with Azerbaijan than with fellow EAEU member Armenia. An EAEU summit that was scheduled to be held at Yerevan in April had to be shifted to Moscow after Kazakh officials made it clear they would not attend while hostilities continued around Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>78</sup>

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76. Ibid.

77. Brunon S. Sergi, "Putin's and Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union: A Hybrid Half-Economics and Half-Political 'Janus Bifrons'", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, vol. 9, 2018, p. 54.

78. n. 68.

- There is a difference of opinion regarding the scope of the EAEU. While Russian officials have not disguised the importance of the EAEU to their vision of Russia as a “Great Power”, Belarusian and Kazakh officials repeatedly stress that the EAEU is an economic initiative, free of overt political commitments. The tension between these views is one of the central challenges faced by the EAEU.<sup>79</sup>
- Further, after the demise of the Soviet Union, the United States, the EU and China increasingly became important players in the post-Soviet space, thus, making the whole environment in the region very competitive. The slowdown in the Russian economy and its involvement in a series of sanctions regimes since 2014 has badly damaged the goal of improving regional trade.

Due to these challenges, the EAEU has not been able to achieve the breakthroughs it has advocated because of the lack of a coherent policy acceptable to all the members. Nevertheless, one cannot dismiss the EAEU as just another failed project of the region, as some critics have done. To overcome its difficulties, another pragmatic approach has been adopted by Russian President Putin, i.e. opening it to the outside world and working towards establishing a Greater Eurasia. It has been realised that the effectiveness of the EAEU can be enhanced by engaging with other regional organisations, countries and global trade regimes, thereby attempting a renewed commitment to regional economic growth and modernisation.

### **RUSSIA AND GREATER EURASIA**

The idea of Greater Eurasia was first voiced by Russian President Putin at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum in 2016 where he declared that over 40 states and international organisations have expressed their desire to establish a free trade zone with the Eurasian Economic Union. Therefore, he declared that “our partners and we think that the EAEU can become

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79. Ibid.

one of the centres of a greater emergent integration area. Therefore, we propose considering the prospects for more extensive Eurasian partnership involving the EAEU and countries with which we already have close partnerships—China, India, Pakistan and Iran—and certainly our CIS partners, and other interested countries and associations”.<sup>80</sup> Russia’s shift from the creation of ‘Greater Europe’ to creating ‘Greater Eurasia’ was a practical move because it realised that it had no way to avoid isolation from the West. After Russia’s annexation of Crimea, the destabilisation of Eastern Ukraine and the Western sanctions, relations between Russia and the West had reached a very critical level. Amidst these circumstances, connectivity with global markets and modernisation emerged as the biggest challenges for the Russian economy. However, Russia’s crisis with the West corresponded to a period in which China started making inroads into the Central Asian region with its One Belt One Road Initiative (BRI) that Xi Jinping announced in Kazakhstan in 2013. That made the BRI and the Silk Road Fund to facilitate infrastructure investments and finance them, attractive to Russia. Therefore, the Greater Eurasian Partnership has two broad economic goals. First, it aims to connect Russia and the EAEU to China’s BRI. In other words, it is Russia’s strategy to keep China in check. Second, it aims to move beyond China and connect the EAEU with Iran, India and Southeast Asia<sup>81</sup> because this venture also intends to assist the diversification of Russia’s external trade. This entails tapping into Asian markets, in areas where Moscow possesses comparative advantages, viz. arms, energy supplies, infrastructure, nuclear technology, food and water security, etc. This will also provide Russia diversification of markets from its traditional European partners.<sup>82</sup>

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80. “Plenary Session of St Petersburg International Economic Forum”, June 17, 2016; <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52178>. Accessed on February 18, 2019.

81. Seçkin Köstem, “Russia’s Search for a Greater Eurasia: Origins, Promises and Prospects”; [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/kennan\\_cable\\_no\\_40.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/kennan_cable_no_40.pdf). Accessed on July 18, 2019.

82. Bobo Lo, “Greater Eurasia: The Emperor’s New Clothes or an Idea Whose Time Has Come”; [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/bobo\\_lo\\_greater\\_eurasia\\_2019.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/bobo_lo_greater_eurasia_2019.pdf). Accessed on July 19, 2019.

Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping first agreed to connect the EAEU with the BRI during Xi's visit to Moscow in May 2015 to attend the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. Negotiations between China and the members of the EAEU took a year, from October 2016 until October 2017. In May 2018, in Astana, China and the EAEU signed the Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement, which covers areas including customs cooperation and trade facilitation, non-tariff barriers, and intellectual property rights.<sup>83</sup> Collaboration between the EAEU and BRI will help in positioning Russia at the centre of the expanding routes between Europe and Asia. Also, promoting Greater Eurasia is an attempt to seize the initiative rather than remaining a mere spectator of the Chinese projects. On the other hand, for Beijing, closer cooperation with Moscow works as insurance for strategic stability in Eurasia. More importantly, Greater Eurasia is an important area for the construction of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, as three of the four economic corridors that are part of this initiative go through the EAEU: the New Eurasian Land Bridge, that goes through Kazakhstan and Russia, the China-Mongolia-Russia corridor, and the China-Central Asia-West Asia corridor.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, Moscow has suggested EAEU collaboration with other regional organisations also, like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Within ASEAN, Moscow looks to enhance its partnership with Vietnam—with which Russia had signed a strategic partnership as early as 2001 and had elevated this relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2012—as it would provide a gateway to the region. The EAEU has already signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Vietnam in 2015. In November 2018, the EAEU and ASEAN signed a memorandum on the establishment of a dialogue platform between the two organisations. China and Serbia are the other countries that have signed an FTA with the EAEU; a similar deal with Singapore is at the final stages, and negotiation with India, Israel and Egypt are ongoing for the same. A preferential trade agreement has been

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83. Köstem, n. 81.

84. Lo, n. 82..



signed between Iran and the EAEU. Moscow also hopes that other non-Western organisations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) and EAEU can be combined within Greater Eurasia; this will make Greater Eurasia more of a 'geo-economic' space.<sup>85</sup>

Furthermore, the Greater Eurasia vision encompasses specific regional goals, i.e., attracting investments to Siberia and the Russian Far East and strengthening its opening to China and the Asia-Pacific. With a rising Asia, Moscow feels that leading Asian economies are potential sources of windfall investments, and are key to the revival of the region.<sup>86</sup>

It is impossible to fully understand Russia's purposes for creating a Greater Eurasia without considering Russia's vision of its international identity. Similar to the EAEU, this new project strengthens Russia's self-conception as a great power. This new idea is also an extension of Russia's vision for a multipolar global order, which has been constant since the mid-1990s. Russia's ruling elite fully understands that the shifting centre of power in the global economy requires a response. However, Russia's Greater Eurasian Partnership is an economic project undertaken mainly in pursuit of Russia's great power aspirations.<sup>87</sup>

Russia presents a highly ambitious vision through its Greater Eurasia project. However, it is still at its infancy stage. Russia's role as a centre for integration between Europe and Asia demands a great deal of efforts from it. Because it has to traverse through the competitive and conflicting interests of various major stakeholders of the region; it has to take into account their unsettled disputes and internal problems; it has also to come out of its own economic difficulties. In short, a bumpy road lies ahead for Russia to fulfil its dream of establishing a Greater Eurasia. Having said that, one also needs to analyse the future discourse of Eurasian integration after Putin. Ever

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85. Timofei Bordachev et al., "Eurasian Economic Integration: Between Absolute and Relative Benefits", <https://www.valdaiclub.com/a/reports/eurasian-economic-integration-report/>. Accessed on May 14, 2019.

86. Lo, n. 82.

87. Köstem, n. 81.

since coming to power in 2000, Russian President Vladimir Putin has used every opportunity to proclaim his intention of re-establishing Russia as a great power. He has quietly and carefully chosen his tactics to achieve it. Events like the invasion of Georgia, armed seizure of Ukraine, annexation of Crimea, or tackling the colour revolution in Kyrgyzstan are testimony of his determination and how far he can go in pursuit of his goal. Realising his country's weaknesses, his turn towards Asia and glorifying its Eurasian identity through civilisational and ideological linkages, shows his pragmatism. Although Putin and the other Russian proponents have denied that through Eurasian integration they are trying to recreate the Soviet Union—which, of course, is not feasible in the present context—at the same time, the intent to establish Russia as a Great Power in a multilateral international order and seeking a Eurasian civilisation under Moscow's leadership, is quite visible. Seemingly, that is how it intends to avenge the "greatest geo-political catastrophe of the 20th century"—the demise of the USSR. However, once Putin's regime ends, the fate of his flagship project—"Greater Eurasia"—will demand a deeper analysis.

# CHANGES IN CHINA'S NUCLEAR THINKING

SANJANA GOGNA

The Chinese leaders have accorded a limited role to their nuclear weapons. They term them as tools of politics as opposed to weapons of war-fighting, and consider them as a symbol of their industrial and technological prowess. The basis of the Chinese thinking lies on its leaders' historical fear of coming under attack due to their shortcomings in areas such as economics, science and technology, and military affairs. Thus, the ideology underpinning their nuclear weapons programme has been to master the same technologies as of other major powers.<sup>1</sup>

During the Mao era, nuclear weapons signified the triumph of socialism over imperialism, and politics over superiority in arms.<sup>2</sup> The leaders held the view that small numbers of nuclear weapons would suffice to neutralise more massive arsenals. Over time, as China established its economic and military clout, changes in its nuclear strategy have been conspicuous even as the basic tenets of China's nuclear thinking continue to hold. To wit, China has dynamically modernised its nuclear force and declared its nuclear weapons as a cornerstone of its national security, yet it continues to maintain a minimum nuclear deterrence.

This paper traces how the Chinese leaders have perceived nuclear weapons over the years, and their attempts to bring out subtle changes

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1. Jeffrey G. Lewis, *Paper Tigers: China's Nuclear Posture* (London: Routledge, 2017).
2. Ibid.

**Historically, Chinese leaders have held the view that success in warfare depends on the strength of the people instead of weapons. Mao gave form to this thinking in his conception of "People's War".**

in China's thinking on the nuclear strategy on deterrence and non-proliferation.

**THE NUCLEAR WEAPON: A PAPER TIGER**

Historically, Chinese leaders have held the view that success in warfare depends on the strength of the people instead of weapons.<sup>3</sup> Mao gave form to this thinking in his conception of "People's War". This view took form in the period between 1839–1949, popularly illustrated as the "century of humiliation", wherein the

experience of using inferior equipment to fight better-equipped enemies led the Chinese leaders to value the human element in warfare.

On the emergence of nuclear weapons on the global scene in the 1940s, Mao remarked that they do not change the basic rules of warfare. He asserted that warfare is about winning hearts and minds, suggesting that it is the people who decide the outcome of a war, not the possession of nuclear weapons. He posited that the atomic bomb was only a paper tiger, used to scare people,<sup>4</sup> suggesting that nuclear weapons would not lead to the destruction of humanity but remain an extension of politics. He believed that nuclear weapons would not stop the trend of national liberation or independence and people's revolution.

With time, however, the Chinese leadership realised the salience of advanced strategic weapons for national security, and developed the thinking that "to lag behind means to be exposed to invasion".<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding, the dominant thinking has remained broadly consistent with the Maoist emphasis on ideological considerations over material factors in the outcome of any struggle. The leadership, thus, strives to master the same technologies

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3. Xu Weidi, "China's Security Environment and the Role of Nuclear Weapons", in Bing and Tong Zhao, eds., *Understanding Chinese Nuclear Thinking* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016), pp. 19-51.

4. Lewis, n. 1.

5. Weidi, n. 3.

as other major powers by continuously modernising its nuclear weapons, but keeps them in a low alert system in the anticipation that they will never be used.

### **DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AND THE BOMB**

The Chinese nuclear thinking is also partly grounded in the Marxist theory of dialectical materialism<sup>6</sup> that posits that political and historical events are a result of the conflict of social forces which are caused by material needs. At the start of the Cold War confrontations in the mid-1940s, Mao grew concerned about the intensifying US imperialism. He referred to the United States as the “forces of world reaction” and believed it to be preparing for another war. He feared that the United States, under the cover of its anti-Soviet slogans, was attempting to turn all its targets of external expansion into its dependencies, and suspected that the part of China under the Kuomintang rule could very well be a target.

Mao declared that the Communist Party must unite with other international revolutionary forces, led by the Soviet Union. He argued that only after beating the reactionary forces, namely the United States and its allies, could China do its business and establish diplomatic ties with other countries on an equal footing. The start of the Cold War also coincided with the dawn of the nuclear age. However, at this stage, Mao was not much concerned about the US’ nuclear weapons. He reasoned that the United States and the Soviet Union would compete for the lands that lay between them, and the US nuclear supremacy had little relevance in this confrontation. However, he believed that the Chinese revolutionaries could not hold on, on their own, if they did not align with the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup>

**The Sino-Soviet alliance was established on February 14, 1950, and provided a joint contract to fight US imperialism. The Soviet Union’s assistance led China to significantly enhance its air force and navy capabilities when it entered the Korean War.**

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6. Ibid.

7. John W. Lewis and Litai Xue, *China Builds the Bomb* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 7.

The Sino-Soviet alliance was established on February 14, 1950, and provided a joint contract to fight US imperialism. The Soviet Union's assistance led China to significantly enhance its air force and navy capabilities when it entered the Korean War. Nevertheless, China suffered massive losses during the war, which included 57,700 casualties, 73,000 non-battle casualties and 16,500 surrendered prisoners of war. The losses in the war brought home the realisation that China needed technological modernisation and professionalism, even while the leaders, including Mao, publicly clung to the "men over weapons" doctrine.<sup>8</sup>

### **CHINA'S THREAT PERCEPTIONS DURING THE COLD WAR AND ITS NUCLEARISATION**

The Chinese leadership considers any dangerous situation that can potentially cause harm to China as a threat to its national security. In other words, the perceived challenges are often based on situations that do not pose a direct threat to the country's security but could be potentially detrimental to its security interest.<sup>9</sup> This frame of thinking is distinct from the thinking of the United States, its prime nuclear adversary, that holds that national security threats are determined by an assessment of an external adversary's capabilities and intent.<sup>10</sup> As a result, the Chinese leaders often tend to conflate China's security threats and challenges. Additionally, China's insecurities often have domestic roots that stem from its deficiencies in military capabilities: the fear of coming under attack due to its weak military strength.<sup>11</sup> The fundamental difference in the threat perceptions of China and the United States explains the security dilemma that besets the nuclear dynamics between the two countries.

Three events that involved confrontation between China and the United States, namely, the ending of the Korean War in a Standstill Agreement in

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8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Li Bin, "Differences Between Chinese and U.S. Nuclear Thinking and Their Origins," in Bing and Zhao, eds., n. 3, 2016, pp. 3-18.

11. Ibid.

1953, the crisis in the Taiwan Strait between 1954 and 1955, and the hostilities in Indo-China during 1964 that led to the defeat of the US backed French forces, set the basis for the Sino-US rivalry and the consequential development of China's nuclear weapons. The United States had begun to believe that the revolutionary expansionism under Mao's leadership would spread across Asia and threaten vital American interests in the region. The US, thereupon, unleashed efforts to contain the Communist expansion in Asia.

John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, in their trenchant historical account of China's nuclear weapons programme in *China Builds the Bomb*, have argued that the Chinese leadership saw these events as partial victories. They have written that the Chinese leaders were convinced that the United States would not take the challenge posed by China lightly and would indeed fight back. They suspected that the United States would begin to view China as its adversary and, therefore, would seek pretexts to hit mainland China directly. Mao feared that the United States might engage in a nuclear confrontation with China. Although China was receiving nuclear protection from the Soviet Union, Mao doubted if the Soviet Union would risk its survival to help China.

The Chinese leaders began to fear an imminent nuclear threat from the United States, but they could not predict where that threat might lead. The first nuclear threat by the United States came at the close of the Korean War when the president of the United States at that time, Dwight Eisenhower, signalled China of a possible nuclear use against its territories if the armistice negotiations remained a stalemate. Eisenhower believed that a combined strategy of warnings and blandishments was necessary to make the Chinese leadership hasten the end of the Korean War.

At this juncture, the prevailing thinking in China was that it should exercise greater caution against the American nuclear threat even as the world opinion at large undermined the possibility of the United States making good on those threats. During this period, China engaged in several negotiations with the United States that included the exchange of the sick and wounded prisoners of war; however, the Chinese leadership was resolute about not

making any concessions against the American nuclear threat that could be perceived as a sign of weakness. In response to the US nuclear threat, the Chinese leadership ramped up the process to construct fortifications, such as frontline battlefields and nuclear shelters, to give out signals of the Chinese preparations.

Shortly after that, the United States unleashed its 'New Policy' that laid out a long-term strategy against the Soviet Union and its allies. The policy relied heavily on nuclear weapons and called for a significant deployment of the weapons in military custody. Although the policy was primarily targeted towards the Soviet Union, it also revealed the US hostility towards China. The White House Document titled "US Policy Towards Communist China" released in November 1953 confirmed this view. It perceived China as a formidable power possessing capabilities and laid out a strategy for the attrition of those capabilities and the impairment of Sino-Soviet relations. The document also recognised Taiwan as an important asset of the United States in the Far East.

By 1953, the United States started its military build-up in Asia and sought to incorporate Taiwan into its defence network. American Vice President Richard Nixon and Taiwanese leader Chiang Kai-Shek agreed to pose a military threat towards China. However, before a defence treaty with Taiwan could materialise, the United States became preoccupied with the concerns related to the collapse of the French garrison in Indo-China that provided China with the opportunity of overt intervention in the region. By this time, the US leadership began to put greater emphasis on the military side of its policy towards China. The central view within the American military establishment was that "the real solution for Far Eastern difficulties lay in the neutralisation of Communist China". Lewis and Litai reveal that the top leadership in the US also had discussions about the possible use of nuclear weapons against China in case the latter intervened in Indo-China.

The Chinese leadership, on the other hand, interpreted the talks of a defence pact between Taiwan and the United States as a move of aggression and sought to respond aggressively. China began to open heavy artillery



firing over the offshore Taiwanese island of Quemoy in September 1954. Later, in November, China began to use its planes in the bombing of the Dachen Island. In retaliation, the Taiwanese nationalist forces seized several Chinese bound ships, including a Soviet oil tanker. The Chinese newspaper *Renmin Ribao* alleged that the United States backed such hijacking of ships bound for China.

By the summer of 1954, the United States initiated an open nuclear confrontation with China by sending two nuclear-capable carrier aircraft into the East China Sea. The United States sought to test the Chinese defences by this move. As the Indo-China armistice concluded by July 21, 1954, the tensions in East Asia mounted further. Taiwanese nationalists increased their overflights on the Chinese territories that resulted in the downing of a British airliner by the Chinese forces. The United States responded by using its aircraft carrier to shoot down two Chinese patrol fighters and gunboats. In August, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, in a press statement, declared that the United States would finalise a military treaty with Taiwan and use force to prevent the Chinese conquest of Taiwan. Zhou Enlai, China's foreign minister at that time, responded a week later by declaring China's intent to liberate Taiwan in a widely distributed governmental report.

At this juncture, China lacked the military means to take action against Taiwan, therefore, as Lewis and Litai note, China's intent was political rather than military whereby it sought to challenge the US policy of alliances and its designs on Taiwan. The American officials were aware of Mao's intent as the declassified US intelligence reports through the mid-1956 reveal that the American leadership was convinced that China would not make further aggressive moves into Taiwan to risk a war with the United States.

Notwithstanding, Eisenhower formalised the defence treaty with Taiwan on January 5, and additionally passed the Formosa Resolution that sought to protect Taiwan from further aggression. The purpose of the resolution and the treaty was to stabilise the situation. It also sought to balance the psychological effect of the defeat of the US in the island of Dachen. Subsequently, the United States halted taking further steps to bolster its military forces in Taiwan and

**In 1963, a year before the first Chinese nuclear weapons test, the Chinese leadership offered two rationales for its decision to acquire nuclear weapons: first, the Chinese intended to use nuclear weapons as a means of defence against nuclear blackmail and nuclear war. Second, they sought to offset the power politics whereby a few big powers use their nuclear weapons to make the majority of countries obey their orders.**

began to count on the right to use nuclear weapons as a means to defend Taiwan's offshore islands. The Chinese leadership perceived the Formosa Declaration as the US resolve to fight a nuclear war against China. Consequently, the Chinese leadership issued urgency to its strategic military programme and began the process to acquire its nuclear weapons.

#### **BUILDING THE NUCLEAR BOMB**

The decision to acquire nuclear weapons was a Chinese response to the immediate security threat emanating from the United States as well as its need to safeguard its national interest. Mao was keen on restoring China's international position through a greater reliance on

its military such that it would distinguish the new state of China from its humiliating past and destroy the 'nuclear monopoly' of its adversaries.

In 1963, a year before the first Chinese nuclear weapons test, the Chinese leadership offered two rationales for its decision to acquire nuclear weapons: first, the Chinese intended to use nuclear weapons as a means of defence against nuclear blackmail and nuclear war. Second, they sought to offset the power politics whereby a few big powers use their nuclear weapons to make the majority of countries obey their orders. This view was further reinforced when the nuclear weapons states initiated non-proliferation efforts to prevent other countries from acquiring nuclear weapons.

During that time, Mao had stated that the atomic bombs should not be taken casually, as their use would amount to a crime.<sup>12</sup> He disagreed with Russia's Premier, Nikita Khrushchev's strategy of immediate retaliation in

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12. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China and CCCPC Party Literature Research Office, eds., *Mao Zedong on Diplomacy*, p. 453.

response to a nuclear attack by an adversary. He even asked Khrushchev not to engage in an all-out attack if the United States were to attack China. The Chinese leadership held the view that a threat of a little revenge was enough to deter an adversary.<sup>13</sup> Insufficient financial resources and technological capabilities also had put quantitative restrictions on China's nuclear armoury. The Chinese leadership, at this point, did not wholly disclose its strengths and resources, and kept information pertaining to its nuclear weapons capabilities vague in order to safeguard its interests.

French scientist Jean Frédéric Joliot-Curie, who was indignant about the non-proliferation efforts by the nuclear weapons states, felt motivated to help China break America's monopoly over nuclear weapons. Joliot-Curie helped arrange for China's physicist Qian Sanqiang—who was initially charged to develop China's nuclear programme—to purchase nuclear instruments in England and France. They also gave Chinese radio-chemist Yang Chengzong ten grams of radium salt standardised for radioactive emissions.

Mao also sought to take Soviet assistance, but only to a limited extent. Mao reasoned that having a stronger Communist power towards its east would be in favour of the Soviet Union, and, therefore, it should assist China in developing nuclear weapons willingly. He sought dual paths for its nuclear weapons programme: the first, albeit short-term programme, involved assistance from the Soviet Union in the initial phase; the second, focussed on an independent long-term approach for the creation of indigenous capabilities. Further, China's status as a neophyte in the arena of nuclear weapons compelled Mao to take the path of self-dependency.

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13. Bing and Zhao, eds., n. 3, pp. 3-18.

The Chinese leadership shifted its military doctrine parallel to that of the Soviet Union to facilitate cooperation between the two Communist powers. The cost suffered by the Soviet Union at the hands of the imperialist forces by its covert involvement in the Korean War also motivated it to strengthen its military relations with China. In April 1952, the Soviet Union committed to providing China with a nuclear cyclotron along with fissionable material to advance its research. At the beginning of 1953, a delegation of 26 Chinese scientists, led by Qian arrived in the Soviet Union to facilitate scientific collaboration between the two countries and learn from the Soviet experience.

The mobilisation of Chinese scientists began as early as January 15, 1955. The cadre of the Chinese bomb builders comprised the Chinese youth, a handful of older officials, scientists, and technicians. Lewis and Litai note that the Chinese bomb builders were charged with a sense of nationalism. They were fuelled by the threats of use of nuclear weapons issued by the United States against Asia, and shared a sense of pride in the Korean Armistice where China fought the United States to a standstill.

Mao instructed China's nuclear bomb builders to begin research on hydrogen bombs before taking on the course of developing the atomic bomb. He emphasized on the possibility of war by the imperialists and urged a sense of urgency in developing nuclear weapons. In reality, though, he worried about the effects of the impending Cultural Revolution on the progress of China's nuclear programme and the possibility of future constraints imposed by the US nuclear non-proliferation efforts.

The organisational structure of China's nuclear programme that began to emerge from 1950 onwards consisted of a three-member group at the helm of affairs. It comprised a leading Chinese economist, Chen Yum, a senior battlefield commander, Nie Rong Zhen, and a political commissar in the war-time army, Bo Libo. Further ahead, the 'Third Office' was created to oversee the concrete affairs of China's nuclear industry. This office laid out policies for heavy industry and construction, and served as the administrative head to the two other organisations created for the launch of China's nuclear weapons programme, namely the 'Third Bureau' and the 'Bureau of Architectural

Technology'. Additionally, the Bureau of Architectural Technology, headed by Qian Sanqiang, was created to supervise the construction of the experimental nuclear reactor and cyclotron that was being supplied by the Soviet Union. The Chinese leadership had chosen this name for the bureau to obscure its real mission.

In 1955, the 'Third Ministry of Machinery Building' was established to direct China's nuclear industry and replace the three-member group. Little information about this ministry exists in the literature as it functioned in extreme secrecy. It supposedly played a dominant role ever since its establishment by overseeing several projects covering all aspects of the comprehensive nuclear programme. By October 1957, China and the Soviet Union signed an agreement whereby the Soviet Union provided China with a 'sample of an atomic bomb' and technical data. Subsequently, a gaseous diffusion uranium enrichment plant was constructed in Lanzhou to produce weapons-grade uranium. Between 1955 and 1959, the exchange of scientists between the two Communist powers increased significantly. Approximately, 260 scientists from both sides worked in each other's facilities.

Between 1959 and 1964, the organisational structure of China's nuclear weapons programme began to take a militaristic form, the reason being that the Communist Party's Great Leap Forward policy, launched in 1958 to overhaul the organisation of science and technology from the bottom, had disrupted the centralised control within the organisation and brought chaos to the nuclear weapons programme.<sup>14</sup> The State Science and Technology Commission was established to oversee the civilian part of the nuclear programme, while the Defence Science and Technology Commission was established to oversee its strategic aspects. The Defence Commission emerged as the powerful body that controlled the scientific and technological resources of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) as well as the State Council's military industrial system. It also oversaw the ministry's Fifth Academy that was established later to manage China's strategic missile programme.

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14. Ibid.

During this period, the relations between the Soviet Union and China turned momentarily bitter. A significant reason for the deteriorating relations, as Lewis and Litai note, comprised the differences in their leaderships' views on the implications of nuclear weapons. While Mao regarded nuclear weapons as paper tigers that were never to be used, Khrushchev regarded them as weapons to fight the imperial forces. The gradually embittering relations resulted in the withholding of the prototype of the atomic bomb developed by the Chinese scientists with the help of the Soviet scientists in Moscow. However, anti-Soviet eruptions in Hungary and Poland led the Soviet leadership to resume cooperation with China.

#### **CHINESE CONCEPTION OF NUCLEAR DETERRENCE**

China successfully tested its first atomic bomb on October 16, 1964. Throughout the 1960s, Chinese scientists also worked towards developing thermonuclear weapons and an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM). China tested its thermonuclear weapon in 1967 and conducted tests of a partial-range DF-5 ICBM in 1971.<sup>15</sup> There existed a significant gap between the progress in China's technical programme and the development of a nuclear strategy. China's nuclear thinking continued to remain highly ideological; however, the operationalisation of China's nuclear weapons required a break from past thinking and involved articulating a defence strategy that incorporated the concept of nuclear deterrence.

There is also a marked difference in the way the United States and China perceive nuclear deterrence. While scholars in the United States consider deterrence as an appropriate strategy in both strategic and conventional military terms, the Chinese scholars think of it as an act of intimidation.<sup>16</sup> The term associated with the concept of 'deterrence' in Mandarin is '*weishe*', and refers to the coercive strategy of the United States. Many Chinese speakers use the term '*weishe*' only to mean coercion.<sup>17</sup>

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15. Lewis, n. 1, p. xx.

16. Bing and Zhao, eds., n. 3, p. 18.

17. Ibid.

In the standard definition, as developed by the United States, deterrence refers to the use of threat of force to prevent an adversary from taking action. It is closely related to the term compellence, which refers to the use of threat to force an adversary to take action.<sup>18</sup> The distinction between the two concepts also lies in their outcomes. In the case of deterrence, a state, while forcing an adversary to forgo action, seeks to maintain the status quo; in the case of the latter, the state, while compelling a rival to take any action, seeks to change the status quo. In the Western conception, therefore, there lies a thin line between nuclear deterrence and compellence.<sup>19, 20</sup>

The Chinese scholars, however, do not make a distinction between nuclear deterrence and compellence, and often tend to conflate the two. The *PLA Encyclopaedia* defines deterrence as “the display of military power or threat of use of military power, in order to compel an opponent to submit”. China’s leadership perceives it to be analogous to the Western concept of coercion which encompasses defensive as well as aggressive actions. Thus, for a long time after China’s first nuclear test, its leadership refrained from using the term deterrence in describing its military strategy. The leadership’s opposition to the strategy of deterrence was reflected in the 1998 Defence White Paper, wherein the nuclear weapons states were condemned for accepting the concept of nuclear deterrence.

Following the test of its first atomic bomb, the Chinese government declared that it had developed “nuclear weapons for defence and for protecting the Chinese people from US threats to launch a nuclear war”, and that it “will never, at any time or under any circumstances, be the first to use nuclear weapons.” After Mao’s death, Deng Xiaoping first articulated the Chinese conception of deterrence by stating in a public speech that “if you want to destroy us, you have to suffer a little retaliation.”<sup>21</sup> The Chinese leadership believes that an act of slight revenge, as opposed to a reciprocated

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18. Tomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966; reprinted with new Preface and Afterword, 2008), pp. 70–71.

19. Susan T. Haynes, *Chinese Nuclear Proliferation: How Global Politics Is Transforming China’s Weapons Buildup and Modernization* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), p. xx.

20. Weidi, in Bing and Zhao, n. 3, pp. 19-50.

21. *Ibid.*

**China's conception of nuclear deterrence is based on the minimum means of reprisal, meaning whereby that it seeks to maintain a survivable retaliatory nuclear strike capability. The guiding principle for China's nuclear deterrence, thus far, has been to resist intimidation by the adversary's nuclear weapons by striving to acquire similar capabilities.**

retaliation, serves the purpose of making the adversary afraid. Thus, China maintains a small arsenal that serves as a restraining force to discourage its adversary from acting rashly.

The Chinese leadership conceives a limited role for its nuclear weapons. Historically, it has dealt with the weapons of mass destruction with caution. Sun Tzu wrote in the *The Art of War*: "The highest form of generalship is to thwart the enemy's plans; the next best is to prevent the alliance of the enemy's forces; the next is to attack the enemy's army in the field; and the worst of all is to

besiege cities." Thus, while nuclear weapons seemed to alter the methods of combat, the Chinese leadership continued to believe that they serve no war-fighting purposes. Moreover, through the 1960s, lack of financial resources and technological constraints did not allow China to think otherwise. The theory of the 'few weapons' afforded China the freedom from intimidation from its nuclear adversaries and served the purpose of creating fear within its adversaries.

It was, however, only in the 2006 Defence White Papers that China officially began to change its thinking on the strategy of deterrence. In the paper, China accepted deterrence as its policy and noted that the objective of China's Second Artillery Force is to "to deter other countries from using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against China". Since then, China has continued to regard deterrence as a strategy in the Defence White Papers that have followed.

China's conception of nuclear deterrence is based on the minimum means of reprisal, meaning whereby that it seeks to maintain a survivable retaliatory nuclear strike capability. However, as the United States began



to develop anti-ballistic missile systems following its abandonment of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002, China has been responding to the challenge by modernising its nuclear weapons capabilities to ensure that its small strategic nuclear arsenal continues to be reliable. The guiding principle for China's nuclear deterrence, thus far, has been to resist intimidation by the adversary's nuclear weapons by striving to acquire similar capabilities.

**On the day China tested its nuclear weapons, the Chinese government issued a statement proposing the global, comprehensive prohibition of nuclear weapons through their systematic destruction.**

#### **CHINA'S THINKING ON NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT**

In the 1950s, when China was in the process of acquiring nuclear weapons, it tended to support the Soviet policies and proposals on arms control. However, as the Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated by the late 1950s, China withdrew its support to the Soviet Union on negotiations leading to the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT). The ban on atmospheric testing, that formed a significant component of the treaty, imposed significant constraints on China's nuclear weapons programme. To deflect the pressure from the developing countries on signing the LTBT, China offered several alternate arms-control proposals including the creation of nuclear weapons-free zones, especially in Africa, and a summit of world leaders to discuss the "complete prohibition of nuclear weapons".<sup>22</sup>

On the day China tested its nuclear weapons, the Chinese government issued a statement proposing the global, comprehensive prohibition of nuclear weapons through their systematic destruction. In the statement, the Chinese government maintained that China was compelled to develop nuclear weapons due to the persistent nuclear threats and nuclear blackmail it faced.<sup>23</sup>

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22. Lewis, n. 1.

23. "Statement by the Government of the People's Republic of China," *People's Daily*, October 17, 1964.

China also put forward its policy of No First Use (NFU) whereby it stated that it would not be the first to use nuclear weapons at any time or under any circumstances in a conflict. It also urged the United States and the Soviet Union to accept the NFU proposal. Additionally, China condemned the existence of nuclear monopolies and criticised the United States and the Soviet Union for forcing the agenda of disarmament even as they significantly aggrandised their own nuclear capabilities. Following the tests, China dropped its campaign for a nuclear weapons-free zone in Asia and instead laid out a proposal for a summit of world leaders to discuss the prohibition of nuclear weapons. Jeffery Lewis in his book *Paper Tigers* argues that its policy of NFU, more than offering assurance to the other nuclear weapons states, served to support China's claims that a larger nuclear inventory, as possessed by the United States, has little coercive value.

The international environment began to change 1976 onwards once China developed formal diplomatic relations with the United States. During this time, the Chinese deputy foreign minister also held successive consultations with his Soviet counterpart that restored the channels of dialogue between the two countries. During those diplomatic interactions, China maintained its focus on planning the course of global disarmament. China also increased its participation in various international dialogues and promoted its goal of global nuclear disarmament. It dispatched representatives to the First Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly on Disarmament in New York and the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. In 1983, it sent its first ambassador for disarmament affairs. In 1986, China presented two proposals on nuclear and conventional disarmament for the first time at the UN General Assembly, pointing out that the United States and the Soviet Union had special responsibilities for both nuclear and conventional disarmament.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 had put an end to the great power competition. The risk of another world war was tremendously reduced, and the countries began adjusting their military strategies according to the new order. Lewis notes that as the United States and Russia intermittently engaged in disarmament negotiations and made some progress in the reduction in the

size of their nuclear arsenals, China found itself in a complicated position regarding the global nuclear arms control and disarmament initiatives. China came under pressure by the mainstream non-proliferation regime to step out of its nuclear secrecy and participate in the global nuclear disarmament efforts. Notwithstanding, China complied with the efforts as it also led to a reduction in the arms race between Russia and the United States, especially in the hotspots in China's neighbourhood.

In 1992, China officially joined the mainstream non-proliferation regime by signing the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). It had opposed the treaty for several decades as it previously held the view that all countries have the same right to develop nuclear weapon capabilities. The signing of the NPT was a marked shift in China's thinking on nuclear non-proliferation as, after condemning the then non-nuclear proliferation regime for nearly four decades for monopolising the possession of nuclear weapons, it ultimately integrated itself within the global nuclear order created by it. China also officially declared that it would continuingly report to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) about any export to, or import from, non-nuclear weapons states involving nuclear materials of one effective kilogramme or above.<sup>24</sup> In July 1993, China formally promised that it would voluntarily report to the agency about any import or export of nuclear materials, and all exports of nuclear equipment and related non-nuclear materials.<sup>25</sup> In 1996, China signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and, at the same time, issued a government statement whereby it reiterated its position on the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of all nuclear weapons.<sup>26</sup>

At the turn of the century, China began to realise that its goal of achieving comprehensive disarmament was unrealistic as nuclear weapons had become

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24. Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *White Paper, China: Arms Control and Disarmament*, Beijing, 1995.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, "China's Signature on Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty," [n.d.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/ziliao\\_665539/3602\\_665543/3604\\_665547/t18043.html](http://n.d.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18043.html).

a cornerstone of its national security.<sup>27</sup> It also had overlapping security interests with several of the new states acquiring nuclear power, the reason being their shared animosity towards the United States or other adversarial states. As Susan Turner Haynes in *Chinese Nuclear Proliferation: How Global Politics is Transforming China's Weapons Buildup and Modernization*, notes, China has been subtly empathetic towards North Korea's predicament caused by the United States on the issue of the former's nuclear weapons programme. In many non-official statements, the Chinese leaders have downplayed the security challenge posed by North Korea's weapons programme. Similarly, China has diverged from the stance taken by the mainstream non-proliferation regime on Iran's nuclear programme that has included a series of economic sanctions, as the two countries share friendly relations and cooperate in various areas, including energy, trade and military technology.

The US congressional report published in August 2006 revealed that China had also offered nuclear material and expertise to Pakistan to establish Pakistan's enrichment programme on the 1990s.<sup>28</sup> China has also offered the designs and technology of its 'M' series of ballistic missiles to help Pakistan develop the medium-range ballistic missiles, Shaheen I and II, that came under scrutiny because of violation of the terms of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).<sup>29</sup> China has sought to proliferate nuclear material and expertise to Pakistan in an effort to threaten India's security.

In recent times, China's efforts have been primarily geared towards persuading nuclear weapons states to provide security assurances to all non-nuclear weapons states unconditionally. It has actively campaigned to establish an ad hoc committee to facilitate the security assurances in the Conference on Disarmament (CD).

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27. Tong Zhao, "Changes in, and the Evolution of, China's Nuclear Thinking", in Bing and Zhao, eds., n. 3, 2016, pp. 262-272.

28. Federation of American Scientists, "Science for a Safer, More Informed World"; <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RL34248.pdf>. Accessed on January 8, 2020.

29. "Pakistan and China's Almost Alliance", RAND Corporation Provides Objective Research Services and Public Policy Analysis | RAND. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2015/10/pakistan-and-chinas-almost-alliance.html>. Accessed on January 8, 2020.

### CHINA'S THREAT PERCEPTIONS POST-COLD WAR

By the 1990s, the Chinese leaders had adjusted to the view that a major war was unlikely to take place. They had begun to believe that China's national security environment had stabilised and that it was heading towards a long period of peace. The momentum of this optimism continued well into the turn of the century when its leaders declared that the first two decades of the 20th century would provide China with significant strategic opportunities that China must grasp.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, China made significant strides in its economic growth in the period following the end of the Cold War. From the 1990s, it consistently achieved 10 per cent annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, owing much to the liberal international economic order that prevailed in that period.<sup>31</sup>

China's relations with the United States also transitioned from being defined by zero-sum thinking, wherein China held that any country that is not its friend is an adversary, to a more complex relationship involving both cooperation and suspicion.<sup>32</sup> Such complex relations further reduced the risk of nuclear war, and the vicissitudes of their relations shaped the nuclear dynamics in this period: the salience of nuclear weapons dramatically increases when states get involved in a conflict and rapidly subsides when they engage in some form of cooperation.<sup>33</sup>

China often views the developments in Russia's nuclear programme with caution. Although both countries remain strategic partners as a result of marginalisation and vulnerability caused by the rise of the United States after the end of the Cold War, they have had a history of nuclear confrontation, wherein the Russian military newspaper issued a nuclear threat against China during their border conflict of 1969.<sup>34</sup> Notwithstanding, Haynes notes that despite Russia's sizeable nuclear arsenal and competitive

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30. "China's National Defense in 2002," State Council Information Office, December 4, 2002.

31. The World Bank. "China Overview." World Bank; <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview>. Accessed on December 23, 2019.

32. Weidi, n. 3, p. 31.

33. Ibid.

34. Lyle J. Goldstein, *Do Nascent WMD Arsenals Deter? The Sino-Soviet Crisis of 1969*, p. 60.

**United States continues to be a heavyweight in China's nuclear calculus, and China's threat perception continues to be shaped by the US presence in its neighbourhood. The Taiwan issue continues to be a bone of contention and often brings the armed forces of the two countries face-to-face within the conventional domain.**

delivery capabilities, China views Russia as a declining power that would not be able to sustain its large inventory of nuclear weapons or invest in advanced technology in the coming times.<sup>35</sup>

Further, China remains concerned about Japan's potential acquisition of nuclear weapons, given its high stockpile of separated plutonium and available technological expertise, and long history of devastating wars. Japan has made claims over the disputed Senkaku and Diaoyu Islands, and while its Parliament passed a resolution in 1967 to never produce, procure, or store nuclear weapons, China remains sceptical of such promises and

believes that Japan might use nuclear coercion to gain leverage over the issue. China considers India to be a peripheral threat, but it publicly rejects it as a threat to its national security.<sup>36</sup> Notwithstanding, China has sought to counter the challenge posed by India by aiding the latter's adversary, Pakistan, in developing its nuclear weapons programme, often by violating the terms of various non-proliferation efforts.

Nevertheless, the United States continues to be a heavyweight in China's nuclear calculus, and China's threat perception continues to be shaped by the US presence in its neighbourhood. Following the end of the Cold War—that coincided with heating up of the Taiwan independence movement—China has continuously claimed that the United States has been secretly providing support to the forces that are fighting for Taiwan's independence.<sup>37</sup> The Taiwan issue continues to be a bone of contention and often brings the armed

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35. Susan Turner Haynes, "China's Nuclear Threat Perceptions", *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2016, pp. 25-62; [www.jstor.org/stable/26271504](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26271504). Accessed on January 8, 2020.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

forces of the two countries face-to-face within the conventional domain.

In its first Defence White Paper released in 1998, the Chinese leaders referred to the development of a relatively stable international security environment. The paper stated that the region of the Asia-Pacific had grown stable but pointed out that hegemonism and power politics remain the main sources of threats to world peace and stability; the Cold War mentality and its influence still have a certain currency, and the enlargement of military blocs and the strengthening of military alliances have added factors of instability to international security.

However, when the United States identified the Taiwan Strait region as one of the seven possible nuclear weapons targets in its 2002 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), China termed the US military presence and its bilateral military alliances in East Asia, along with its plans of the development and deployment of the Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) system as a particularly negative development. During this time, the United States also began working on its Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) systems and improving the precision strike capabilities of its conventional long-range missiles to target China's nuclear assets.

In the 2005 Defence White Paper, the Chinese leadership raised concern regarding the complicated security factors in the Asia-Pacific where, as it pointed out, the United States was reinforcing its military presence. It also raised concerns regarding the constitutional overhaul in Japan, whereby it contended that Japan was adjusting its military and security policies and developing the missile defence system for future deployment. It stated that these developments had led China to enhance its nuclear counter-attack capabilities. In the several Defence White Papers that followed, China reiterated its concerns regarding the US interference in its neighbourhood. In the 2013 Paper, it stated that China would maintain an appropriate level

**In the 2019 Defence White Paper, China stated that its nuclear capabilities remain a strategic cornerstone in safeguarding its national sovereignty and security.**

of readiness in peace-time, and further added that it would combine peace-time needs with war-time needs and maintain vigilance at all times to deter the enemy from using nuclear weapons against it.

By 2017, the US military footprint had expanded well into South Korea where it deployed the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD), a globally transportable anti-ballistic missile defence system.<sup>38</sup> In 2019, the United States made plans to deploy medium and intermediate-range ground-based missiles in the Asia-Pacific region following its announcement to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) agreement it had signed with the erstwhile Soviet Union in 1987. The deployment of these missiles allows the United States to encircle China effectively. A potential counter-force use of such missiles against China poses a threat to the survivability of its nuclear weapons.

For China, these developments not only challenge its nuclear deterrent capabilities but also disrupt the regional balance of power. In the 2019 Defence White Paper, China stated that its nuclear capabilities remain a strategic cornerstone in safeguarding its national sovereignty and security. Subsequently, it has responded to these challenges by adopting a hedging strategy that has resulted in a sharp accretion in its nuclear capabilities.<sup>39</sup> In the last few years, China has rapidly modernised its nuclear weapons capabilities, and significantly expanded the range of its ICBMs to surpass the range of the US ICBMs. It has also incorporated new penetration capabilities such as Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGVs), decoys, or Multiple Independently Reentry Vehicle (MIRV) systems to counter the US Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) systems.<sup>40</sup>

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38. Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Views on South Korea's Deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD)," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Last modified February 2, 2017; <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/02/02/chinese-views-on-south-korea-s-deployment-of-terminal-high-altitude-area-defense-thaad-pub-67891>.

39. "China's PLA: New Weapons, New Approaches," IISS; <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2019/10/china-national-day-parade-pla>. Accessed on October 12, 2019.

40. Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, "Chinese Nuclear Forces, 2019," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 75, no. 4, July 2019, pp. 171-178; <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2019.1628511>. Accessed on October 12, 2019.



## CONCLUSION

This paper has traced the history of China's nuclear programme to identify changes in its nuclear thinking. The Chinese ideology that nuclear weapons are akin to paper tigers that are used to scare people and don't determine the outcome of war, continues to hold true. The Chinese leadership continues to modernise its nuclear weapons to be a nuclear power to be reckoned with, but remains committed to its principles of NFU, whereby it pledges not to be the first to use nuclear weapons at any time or under any circumstances. However, the Chinese thinking on the strategy of nuclear deterrence and non-proliferation has undergone changes.

With regards to nuclear deterrence, it has come a long way from condemning the use of nuclear weapons for nuclear deterrence by the nuclear weapons states during the Cold War to adopting the strategy of nuclear deterrence as a means of protecting its national security interests. In the earlier times, its leaders held the view that nuclear deterrence did not depend on immediate and precise counter-attack capability, but on the capacity to conduct nuclear retaliation. In contemporary times, however, its leaders seek to respond to China's threat perceptions by keeping China's nuclear weapons at an "appropriate level of readiness". This change in thinking has been continuously reflected in China's national Defence White Papers wherein it has emphasized the need for improving its nuclear quick-response capacity and nuclear strategic-warning capacity.<sup>41</sup>

China's thinking on non-proliferation has been directly influenced by its changing perceptions of the global security situation. It has ranged from resisting the non-proliferation efforts led by the United States in the 1950s and 1960s for monopolising the possession of nuclear weapons to joining the non-proliferation regime as the security environment in East Asia turned in China's favour in the 1990s. However, despite China's active participation in various non-proliferation programmes, there have been instances where China has either condoned the possession of nuclear weapons or proliferated nuclear weapons to its strategic partners when it suited its security interests.

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41. Zhao, in Bing and Zhao, eds., n. 3, pp. 262-272.

Thus, while China's nuclear thinking in terms of the purpose of its nuclear weapons has been linear, changes are conspicuous in its nuclear thinking on the strategy on deterrence and non-proliferation.

# CHINA'S EMERGING ROLE IN THE KOREAN PENINSULA

ANU SHARMA AND ADITYA MANI

## INTRODUCTION

The basic geography and geo-political positioning of the Korean peninsula are quite relevant and significant for Chinese interests and form the broad basis for this paper. Traditionally, the Korean peninsula has often been viewed as both a “menace” and an “opportunity” by all the regional powers in the Southeast Asian region. Chinese thinking has always regarded this peninsula as a “mountain rigged natural buffer protecting its northeastern hinterland from possible invasions of various maritime powers.” Chinese versions of its relations with the two peninsular nations have often been described as proximate enough to be on the lines of “lips and teeth.”<sup>1</sup> At the same time, a hostile Korean peninsula can become troublesome for Chinese policy-makers. In this context lies the salience of this study. At the same time, for the peninsular nations, i.e. North and South Korea, the relationship with China was pivotal throughout Korean history. China has served as a source of

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1. Lips and teeth means very close and proximate relations. This term is often used for describing China-North Korea relations. Yu Hua Chen, “China and North Korea: Still ‘Lips and Teeth’”, *The Diplomat*, July 21, 2018; <https://thediplomat.com/2018/07/china-and-north-korea-still-lips-and-teeth/>. Accessed on November 10, 2019.

**China has served as a source of political legitimacy, military protection and economic assistance, as well as a partner for the success of their development model.**

political legitimacy, military protection and economic assistance, as well as a partner for the success of their development model.

The historical antecedents related to China-Korea relations were visible in the close political, military and economic relations, along with the shared cultural background. The peninsula has been crucial in terms of Chinese security, and this relationship has always been considered significant as compared to China's relations with other neighbouring countries such as Vietnam. Its

importance for China lies in the fact that in case any adversary force tries to control the peninsula, China would be deprived of an indispensable security buffer for both its capital and industrial region. In this context, it becomes imperative to analyse Chinese influence in the Korean peninsula in terms of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) plans. It will also be interesting to evaluate whether China's BRI plans will have an impact on its contemporary relations with both North and South Korea. At the same time, while discussing these relations, it is necessary to keep in mind that North Korea is a staunch Chinese ally and South Korea that of the United States. In the context of the ongoing China-US rivalry and trade war, this paper will try to emphasize the relevance of the Korean peninsula in the contemporary Chinese foreign policy.

Chinese interests in the Korean peninsula are based on three important factors, namely: (i) the regional power equilibrium; (ii) China's shifting ideology based on geo-politics under President Xi Jinping; and (iii) the growing economic interests of China in the region.<sup>2</sup> All these factors combined have been responsible for China's emerging contemporary policy related to North and South Korea. Besides this, China's quest to keep the Korean peninsula in its sphere of influence can have multiple reasons. This paper will

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2. Jia Hao and Zhuang Qubing, "China's Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula", *Asian Survey*, vol. 32, no. 12, December 1992, pp. 1137-1156.

try to analyse these reasons in detail in order to understand China's quest for increasing its BRI influence in the Korean peninsula region.

Since the 1980s, the geo-political shifts and the changing international politics of this region have changed the course for China, North Korea and South Korea. These have also altered the traditional and rigid pattern of relationships among the three nations. The shifting power balances and the emerging multipolar structure of the region have

eventually led the major powers to play a significant role in the region. In this context, the ideological antagonisms and the power play had been prominent in the region. These can be characterised by Soviet/Russian and Chinese support to North Korea, whereas South Korea derived its support from the United States. The disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, and the somewhat relaxation of tensions between Moscow and Washington, and the rapprochement between Moscow and Beijing and Moscow and Tokyo had also dominated international power games in the region to a certain extent.

In contemporary times, China's BRI has been more focussed on investment and infrastructure building in Central and Southeast Asia, Africa, and Europe. The Chinese government's Vision and Action Plan also envisages the economic opportunities in its neighbouring regions. Chinese territories adjacent to the Korean peninsula also figure in the Chinese BRI plans, thereby providing an opportunity for the two Korean peninsular nations to foray into China's grand plans. However, given the increased tensions in the peninsula after the North Korean nuclear tests and deepened American sanctions, the room for cooperation among China, South Korea, and North Korea has shrunk even further. At the same time, China's desire to extend its BRI plans to the Korean peninsula can affect these relations. In this context, this paper will try to analyse the

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relations between the Korean peninsular nations and major powers, and understand the power play among these three players.

### **HISTORICAL CONTEMPLATION OF CHINA-KOREA RELATIONS: SECURITY EXTERNALITIES OR ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCE**

Traditionally, the orientation of the Korean peninsula has been related to the historical rivalries among the Asian powers. In this, the strategic choices of both North and South Korea can be considered as important indicators of how East Asian relations may reorder themselves in the context of China's current economic and political rise, as also depending on the role of other external players in this region. Prior to the 19th century, the Korean peninsula was firmly tied to Beijing as part of a political order in which China's leadership exercised tremendous influence on the conduct of security and foreign affairs related to Korea, in return for Korean obeisance to the Chinese leadership. This state of affairs was reflected in the regular tribute missions that the Korean king sent to the Chinese emperor, a form of obeisance that reflected China's dominant political, cultural, and socio-economic role vis-à-vis the Korean kingdom.<sup>3</sup> By the late 19th century, this traditional China-centric order began to break down in the context of the weakening of Qing China, the slow decline of the Korean Joseon dynasty, and the rise of Japanese influence in the Korean peninsula in the context of the Meiji Restoration.<sup>4</sup> And, the arrival of the Western imperial powers and the domination of the Chinese dominated system in the East Asian region in the late 19th century,

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3. Kirk W. Larsen, "Comforting Fictions: The Tribute System, the Westphalian Order, and Sino-Korean Relations", *Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, Special Issue: International Relations and East Asian History: Impact, Meaning, and Conceptualization, May–August 2013, pp. 233-257; [https://www.jstor.org/stable/23418776?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3Ad5522ddc9e6cc632ecf603c8613dd752&seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23418776?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3Ad5522ddc9e6cc632ecf603c8613dd752&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents). Accessed on December 18, 2019.
  4. Meiji Restoration: In Japanese history it means the political revolution in 1868 that brought about the final demise of the military government of the Tokugawa Shogunate. The Meiji Restoration, 1868, came to be identified with the subsequent era of major political, economic, and social change—the Meiji period (1868–1912)—that brought about the modernisation and Westernisation of the country.

led to a number of battles and wars between various East Asian powers such as Japan, China, Korea, etc.

In the first half of the 20th century, the Chinese influence on Korea was minimal. However, China's role in Korea's domestic politics was not nullified as it assisted the Korean provisional government.<sup>5</sup> In 1945, the Allies' victory over Japan in World War II made the Sino-Korean relationship become entangled with the two superpowers, i.e. the US and the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War period.<sup>6</sup> After the brief recess period in China-Korea relations following the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937), it again gained momentum during the Korean War (1950). China assisted the North Korean regime during the war. China's age-old influence and sense of ownership of Korea were also seen when Mao Zedong stated in 1951 that "the Chinese comrades must consider Korea's cause as their own ... just the way we feel about our own country and treat our own people."<sup>7</sup> However, with the partition of Korea, China was not able to wield unrestrained influence over the peninsula. Also, in the following decades, China has been able to exert its influence in Korea due to the insecurity prevailing in North Korea for which China has been a significant lifeline. North Korea's tremendous dependence on China eventually made it an indispensable player in the Korean peninsula for a long time.<sup>8</sup> In fact, it should be noted here that China has had negligible diplomatic relations with South Korea; these were normalised only in 1992. At the end of the 20th century, China, Japan, and Russia, all sought a foothold in the Korean peninsula as the vehicle for pursuing their broader regional security interests.

In the 2000s, various international relations theories such as the realist theory of balance of power and power rivalry, liberal theory of interdependence and peace, democratic peace theory, and even certain constructivist theories concerned with regional integration and a security community provide partial insights into the relationship between economic

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5. Bae Ho Han, "The Current Korean Political Relations and China-Korea Relations", *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1, Spring/Summer 2002.

6. "China's Rise and the Two Koreas", *CFR*, Excerpt from Scott A. Snyder's Book of the same title, <https://www.cfr.org/excerpt-chinas-rise-and-two-koreas>. Accessed on November 24, 2019.

7. Titli Basu, ed., *Major Powers and the Korean Peninsula* (New Delhi: KW Publishers, 2019).

8. Srikanth Kondapalli, *China and its Neighbours* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2010).

**For a substantial time, China had maintained the position that the nuclear issue in the Korean peninsula was a bilateral one between North Korea and the US. But the rise of China and its quest to establish itself as a major player in international affairs provided an opportunity to China in terms of denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.**

interdependence and political influence in China's relations with both North Korea and South Korea. An in-depth examination, however, reveals that such theories are inadequate to fully explain the nuances of these relations.

The beginning of the North Korean nuclear programme and its testing of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), gave an impression of the waning of Chinese influence on North Korea, possibly due to China's inability to rein in North Korea's development and testing of its WMDs. At the same time, China is still apprehensive of the presence of nuclear weapons in its

backyard.<sup>9</sup> It has also been observed that the undue pressure (of sanctions) on North Korea did not lead to the desired results. In fact, it gave further momentum to North Korea's WMD programme. But, at the same time, North Korea's nuclear conundrum is also an opportunity for China to showcase its prowess and influence in the peninsular politics. For a substantial time, China had maintained the position that the nuclear issue in the Korean peninsula was a bilateral one between North Korea and the US. But the rise of China and its quest to establish itself as a major player in international affairs provided an opportunity to China in terms of denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula. China's approach towards North Korea and frequent (friendly) meetings between President Xi and Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) leader Kim Jong-un indicate that there are slim prospects of China abandoning North Korea in spite of its nuclear issues. The several meetings between President Xi Jinping and leader Kim Jong-un before the

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9. Jane Perlez, "North Korea's Nuclear Arsenal Threatens China's Path to Power", *The New York Times*, September 5, 2017; <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/05/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-weapons-china.html>. Accessed on December 27, 2019.



DPRK leader's meeting with President Trump are also an indication that North Korea is in no position to engage with the US without Chinese support. However, anxieties still prevail in Beijing regarding denuclearisation and the peace process in the Korean peninsula due to the geographical proximity to China.

Going by the recent Trump-Kim summits and inter-Korean summits—which are widely believed to be the result of America's maximum pressure tactics—an impression of unease in the Chinese leadership could have been created that the American engagement with North Korea (with South Korea also being on board) may be the future order in the peninsula. Here, it is important to mention that there are approximately 28,500 American troops in South Korea.<sup>10</sup> In the current scenario, leaving behind China is definitely going to be a setback for China that does not want to weaken its grip on North Korea.<sup>11</sup>

**In China, North Korea was considered as the buffer corridor; if it had fallen into American hands, it would have proved to be detrimental to the security of China's northeast frontier.**

#### CHINA-NORTH KOREA RELATIONS

China and North Korea share an inimitable relationship. The diplomatic relations between the two nations were established in October 1949. In fact, the common thread in the China-North Korea relations, since then, remains the mutual antagonism towards the US. However, in 1950, the primary reason behind China's entry into the Korean War was the presence, and crossing of, the 38th parallel by the US and its allied forces. In China, North Korea was considered as the buffer corridor; if it had fallen into

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10. Huileng Tan, "As Trump and Kim Meet, One of Beijing's Chief Concerns is the US-South Korea Alliance", CNBC, February 27, 2019; <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/27/trump-kim-summit-china-concerned-about-us-south-korea-alliance.html>; Tom Vanden Brook, "Pentagon Bases About 28,000 US Troops in South Korea", *USA Today*, June 5, 2018; <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/06/05/u-s-bases-28-000-troops-south-korea-summit-june-12/671126002/>. Accessed on December 27, 2019.

11. Basu, n. 7.

American hands, it would have proved to be detrimental to the security of China's northeast frontier. North Korea also served as an opportunity for the Chinese leadership to embolden its position within China, with the Chinese leader Mao Zedong being concerned about the US-led reactionaries gaining strength at that time.<sup>12</sup> An American victory would have meant a major setback for China in the region, both politically and psychologically. The extensive reactionary forces then would step up their offensive against what Mao termed the world "revolutionary front" and Communist China might very well be the next target. This proved to be the strongest reason for Chinese support to North Korea in the Korean War. It will be correct to say that since then China has been North Korea's closest ally.

The year 1961 witnessed the conclusion of the bilateral Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between China and North Korea. This was extended twice, in 1981 and 2001, and is valid till 2021. This led China to become North Korea's security guarantor, along with the Soviet Union at that time. On the economic front also, China has been the largest trading partner of North Korea. Until the 1980s, North Korea was the recipient of a large amount of Chinese economic aid that served China's political and ideological purposes. However, with the structural changes and reforms in the Chinese economy, this relationship also witnessed a few changes and alterations.

Along with that, it was the North Korean nuclear programme that became burdensome for China. But in spite of the strained relations due to North Korea's testing of ballistic missiles and fission devices, China has made sure that the regime in North Korea does not collapse. China's strategy has been to pull the strings on the North Korean economy as well as engage the North Korean leadership to maintain the status quo in the region. This can be seen in China endorsing the sanctions by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). There were strains in the relationship which surfaced when Pyongyang tested a nuclear weapon in October 2006 and Beijing

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12. Daniel Wertz, "China-North Korea Relations", *Issue Brief-The National Committee on North Korea*, November 2019; [https://www.ncnk.org/sites/default/files/issue-briefs/Issue\\_Brief\\_China\\_NK\\_Nov2019.pdf](https://www.ncnk.org/sites/default/files/issue-briefs/Issue_Brief_China_NK_Nov2019.pdf). Accessed on December 15, 2019.

backed UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1718, which imposed sanctions on Pyongyang.<sup>13</sup>

In spite of having China as a sole messiah, North Korea's nuclear programme has put China in a security dilemma where it finds the US military build-up unacceptable in the region. In October 2006, North Korea tested its first nuclear device, inviting widespread condemnation from the international community. The tests came after China froze North Korean accounts in Macau over money laundering, in agreement with the US.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned above, China too condemned the act by supporting the UNSC economic and commercial sanctions on North Korea. During the six-party talks in 2008, Pyongyang had also refused to accept China's draft verification plan that would allow inspectors to remove samples from North Korean nuclear sites for outside analysis.<sup>15</sup> In 2009, North Korea tested another device, attracting the new set of sanctions from the UNSC. China's endorsement of the sanctions was a clear hint that it was concerned about another nuclear power on its eastern border that may result in the intensification of tensions in the Korean peninsula. The shift in China's earlier passive strategy towards North Korea was visible in its response to the sinking of the South Korean ship by North Korea and bombardment of the South's Yeonpyeong Island in 2010. China's response to this, with calls for stability, was a hint that China did not want any further dispute in the Korean peninsula that could act as a pretext for the US military build-up in the region. However, North Korea's constant testing of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles had unsettled Beijing at that time, which began considering North Korea more as a menace than a strategic asset.<sup>16</sup>

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13. Eleanor Albert, "The China-North Korea Relationship", *CFR*, June 25, 2019; <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-north-korea-relationship>. Accessed on December 28, 2019.

14. David Lague, "Bank Freeze Stalls North Korea Talks", *The New York Times*, March 22, 2007; <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/22/world/asia/22cnd-korea.html>. Accessed on December 26, 2019.

15. Scott Snyder and See-Won Byun, "China-Korea Relations: Sweet and Sour Aftertaste", *Comparative Connections*, Asia Foundation, January 2009; <https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/SnyderByunSweetSourTasteCSISJan09.pdf>. Accessed on December 15, 2019.

16. Isaac Stone Fish and Robert Kelly, "North Korea is Ultimately China's Problem", *Foreign Affairs*, June 8, 2018; <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-06-08/north-korea-ultimately-chinas-problem>. Accessed on December 16, 2019.

A relatively harsher reaction in this regard came when Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi registered a protest with North Korea's ambassador after North Korea tested another device in 2013. This was succeeded by unanimous sanctions from the UNSC. UNSC sanctions—albeit much harsher this time—were imposed yet again, after North Korea tested a device in January 2016, followed by another nuclear test in September 2016.

Ever since North Korea started its WMD programme, all the coercion techniques of the Western powers have failed to rein in the country. In fact, these pressuring techniques have given the North Korean regime an excuse for further strengthening its WMD programme. Pyongyang's actions have presented an obvious pretext for the US for stationing its troops in the Korean peninsula which China considers its backyard. It undermines China's influence in the region as well as curtails its endeavours to attain great power status. This was evident after North Korea's nuclear tests in 2013 that enraged China; however, China found itself incapable of stopping North Korea's WMD programme. Since then, especially after Xi assumed power, China's long-time strategy of sustaining the status quo—to avoid any confrontation in the Korean peninsula—has seen quite a shift.

President Xi Jinping's unease regarding North Korea's actions has led China to embrace a new approach towards North Korea. Under President Xi's leadership, the relations with North Korea were transformed into routine bilateral relations between the nations, leading to a change in China's earlier approach of dealing with North Korea with ideological ideals. On the economic front, Chinese imports from North Korea dropped 88 per cent in 2018 year on year, while China's exports dropped by almost 33 per cent. This was a steep decline as compared to the trade figures between the two nations which were at the peak in 2014.<sup>17</sup> Going by the numbers, it can be seen that the relations between North Korea and China have been on the downswing after the new leadership assumed power in both countries. With this, China opened a window of intensifying its ties with South Korea, which have been constrained by the strong American-

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17. Basu, n. 7.

South Korean security relationship and a potential South Korea-US-Japan security apparatus. However, there is a limit to China's relations with South Korea at the cost of North Korea. This was evident in China's continuance of an earlier approach of maintaining stability in the region after North Korea tested its nuclear weapons in 2016. President Xi's much discussed and analysed China Dream also includes the unification of Korea, though it has not gained much traction.<sup>18</sup> Another reason behind China's dampening its open support to North Korea can be the BRI which may not need the participation of the sluggish economy of North Korea that will add little or no value to the BRI.<sup>19</sup>

At a time when both President Xi and DPRK leader Kim Jong-un are not on the same page on a number of issues, including the nuclear one, it becomes imperative for China to avoid escalation of tensions in the Korean peninsula. In spite of its open condemnation of North Korea's actions, doubts are often cast over China's intentions. China wants to maintain an edge when it comes to negotiations between the US and North Korea on WMD. This puts China in a unique position. North Korea negotiating with the US independently will reduce China's clout in North Korea and in the region. Mediating through China will make China an indispensable factor in the negotiations. Through this, China can continue maintaining its economic and diplomatic influence on North Korea. China's attempt to keep itself relevant in the region was evident with Kim Jong-un's meetings with President Xi in the past two-three years. Till now the North Korean leader has visited China four times, while President Xi visited North Korea once, in June 2019. These visits have conveyed a message to the international community that China remains relevant to the Korean issue and maintains considerable clout in North Korea.

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18. Jonathan D. Pollack, "Is President Xi Jinping Rethinking Korean Unification?" Brookings, January 20, 2015; <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/is-xi-jinping-rethinking-korean-unification/>. Accessed on December 23, 2019.

19. Heung-kyu Kim, "China and the U.S.-South Korea Alliance: Promoting a Trilateral Dialogue", CFR, November 7, 2017; <https://www.cfr.org/report/china-and-us-rok-alliance-promoting-trilateral-dialogue>. Accessed on December 16, 2019.

**China's entry into the Korean War on the side of North Korea was one of the major reasons for the antagonistic relations between China and South Korea. This policy of enmity with South Korea and ideological proximity with North Korea remained at the forefront in the bilateral relationship between China and the two Koreas throughout the Cold War period.**

#### **CHINA-SOUTH KOREA RELATIONS**

Throughout the Cold War period, China and South Korea belonged to different blocs. The antagonism started soon after the Korean War broke out in the Korean peninsula in 1950. China's entry into the Korean War on the side of North Korea was one of the major reasons for the antagonistic relations between China and South Korea. This policy of enmity with South Korea and ideological proximity with North Korea remained at the forefront in the bilateral relationship between China and the two Koreas throughout the Cold War period. It was only after the end of the Cold War in

1992 that China and South Korea established formal diplomatic relations.<sup>20</sup> The Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping was the one who took the initiative to normalise relations with South Korea. This normalisation did not come all of a sudden, but was the result of a series of events. In 1983, when a Chinese plane was hijacked and forced to land in Seoul, negotiations started between China and South Korea. This was followed by several sports exchanges between China and South Korea. All these factors eventually helped in the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two nations. Also, one of the important reasons for normalisation was the 'Northern Policy or *Nordpolitik*'<sup>21</sup> by South Korean President Roh Tae Woo in 1988. According to this policy, South Korea extended its foreign relations and engaged with the

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20. Hong Liu, "The Sino-South Korean Normalisation: A Triangular Explanation, *Asian Survey* vol. 33, no. 11, November 1993, pp. 1083-1094; [https://www.jstor.org/stable/2645001?read-now=1&seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2645001?read-now=1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents). Accessed on December 18, 2019.

21. The *Nordpolitik* or Northern Policy of South Korea, which was the idea of former South Korean President Rho Tae Woo, was an ambitious attempt to normalise South Korea's foreign relations with the two neighbouring northern giants i.e. Russia and China. This policy is often cited as the 'new détente' in the politics of the Korean peninsula. It is often contemplated that this policy measure was adopted following the emerging international order in the post-Cold War world.

two Communist nations.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the normalisation process was deliberately kept slow in order not to antagonise North Korea. Although this was the decade that saw China establishing and normalising relations with a lot of other nations, the South Korean case was different; it was theoretically a bilateral affair but in reality it was a trilateral one. China's decision (to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea) was met with heavy criticism from North Korea, but due to the newly emerging international scenario following the demise of the USSR, North Korea did not have any other strong ally except China.<sup>23</sup> The transformation of the ideology-oriented alliances of the Cold War in both North and South Korea was the need of the hour as the end of the Cold War had led to significant structural change in the international system. This period also coincided with the opening up of the Chinese economy and its integration into the international financial institutions. Unlike North Korea, which was the recipient of huge economic aid from China, South Korea enjoyed a stronger economic status and support from the US. In such a scenario, opening up of the Chinese economy provided both China and South Korea an opportunity to engage in a stabilised trading relationship. The progress of this economic relationship made China the leading trade partner of South Korea, with approximately \$40 billion trade surplus every year. China gets 26.8 per cent of the total South Korean exports worth \$162.2

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22. Sung Hack Kang, *Korea's Foreign Policy Dilemmas: Defining State Security and the Goal of National Unification* (Folkestone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2011).

23. Yang Xiu, "China-Korea Relations", Audio File, *The Korea Society*, October 9, 2019; <https://www.koreasociety.org/policy-and-corporate-programs/item/1320-china-korea-relations>. Accessed on December 21, 2019.

billion.<sup>24</sup> The trade volume increased from \$6.4 billion in 1990 to \$221 billion in 2011.<sup>25</sup> Participation of the leaders of both China and South Korea in various multilateral economic forums such as the G20, Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM), and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) led to further enhancement of the ties which were elevated to 'Strategic Cooperative Partnership' in 2008.<sup>26</sup> The diplomatic and economic relations got a boost with the opening of the South Korean consulate in Wuhan, China.

Historically, ever since the breakout of the Korean War in 1950, the persisting tensions in the Korean peninsula, and the imminent threat from North Korea, pushed South Korea to forge a strong security alliance with the US. At the same time, South Korea's close security cooperation with the US and its robust economic partnership with China have often put Seoul in a dilemma on several occasions; the trade war between the US and China in recent times is just one such example. It has become increasingly difficult for South Korea to balance its security and economic ties between the US and China. At the same time, there have been times when Seoul has been compelled to take sides. For instance, the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system in South Korea by the US, joining the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and China's stance on the shelling of the South Korean islands by North Korea in 2010 have all fuelled the tensions between China and South Korea. China's retaliation to South Korea deploying the THAAD took a heavy toll on the South Korean economy. This eventually led South Korea to look for new avenues to diversify its economic portfolio. The situation for South Korea is complex as its policy-making is often burdened due to its security alliance with the US and its trading partner, China. In all of this, President Trump's urgings to American allies to take care of their own security has also emerged as a concern for South Korea.<sup>27</sup>

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24. Daniel Workman, "South Korea's Top Trading Partners", updated January 27, 2020; <http://www.worldstopexports.com/south-koreas-top-import-partners/>. Accessed on February 5, 2020.

25. Ibid.

26. Tan, n. 10.

27. Mark Landler, "Trump Orders Pentagon to Consider Reducing U.S. Forces in South Korea", *The New York Times*, May 3, 2018; <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/03/world/asia/trump-troops-south-korea.html?>. Accessed on January 23, 2020.



Following these statements, a general dilemma has been emerging in South Korea: with the diminishing American security and nuclear support, should South Korea develop its own nuclear weapons capability? However, the idea is unsettling for China as it certainly will not want to see another nuclear state in its backyard.<sup>28</sup> This step-back from the US is ultimately providing a chance to China to step in as a security guarantor to South Korea. The denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula favours both China and South Korea. If North Korea dismantles its nuclear infrastructure, China can make a case for the US withdrawal from the region. At the same time, with the US having a reduced or no role in South Korean security, South Korea would not opt for THAAD—something that has greatly antagonised China.<sup>29</sup> The favourable statements of the South Korean leaders related to BRI definitely indicate that Seoul is intending to expand into other markets to reduce its economic dependence—and, therefore, its political vulnerability—vis-à-vis Beijing.

## **EXTERNAL PLAYERS IN THE KOREAN PENINSULA: THE US AND RUSSIA**

### *The US*

Apart from China, the US and Russia are the other major external players in the Korean peninsula. The direct American involvement in Korean affairs began after the war broke out in the peninsula in 1950. Since then, the US has had a considerable presence in the Korean peninsula. As mentioned earlier, there are close to 28,000 US troops stationed in South Korea, which

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28. Se Young Jang, "The Limited Roles of U.S. Nuclear Deterrence in Northeast", *Carnegie-Asia Policy*, January 30, 2018; <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/01/30/limited-roles-of-u.s.-nuclear-deterrence-in-northeast-asia-pub-75374>; Byeong Chul Lee, "Don't be Surprised When South Korea Wants Nuclear Weapons", *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, October 23, 2019; <https://thebulletin.org/2019/10/dont-be-surprised-when-south-korea-wants-nuclear-weapons/>. Accessed on January 20, 2020.

29. Uri Friedman, "How to Choose Between the U.S. and China? It's Not That Easy", *The Atlantic*, July 26, 2019; <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/07/south-korea-china-united-states-dilemma/594850/>. Accessed on January 20, 2020.

is under the security of the US nuclear umbrella.<sup>30</sup> Referred to as the United States Force Korea (USFK), it aims at defending South Korea from any North Korean aggression.<sup>31</sup> The active presence of US troops in the Korean peninsula is in response to the conventional threat to South Korea from North Korea; especially the possession and continuous development of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons by North Korea.<sup>32</sup> Precisely because of this issue, the recent Trump-Kim summits in Singapore in 2018 and Vietnam in 2019 became crucial. However, both have resulted in failure. Though the summits have not yielded any results, they certainly were a slight departure from the policy of maximum pressure. If the US' active involvement can achieve the denuclearisation of the peninsula, it will be a most significant achievement for President Trump in his tenure, apart from relief for both South Korea and China. For China, the denuclearisation of the peninsula can be a breather since it has consistently expressed its displeasure with the US military presence in the region.<sup>33</sup>

Another important aim behind the American role in the peninsula is to restrain the rising Chinese influence not only on North Korea but also on South Korea. China has traditionally maintained its strong influence on North Korea ever since the war broke out in the peninsula. Despite the stringent sanctions against North Korea, China has consistently assisted the North Korean regime. However, the relationship has been strained for quite some time owing to North Korea's WMD programme which has irked China and has given the US an excuse to maintain its presence in the region. For instance, the deployment of THAAD is credited to the reckless behaviour of North Korea towards South Korea. Washington is most interested in

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30. Diana Stancey Correll; <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-pushing-south-korea-to-pay-more-to-host-troops-2019-11?IR=T>

31. Oliver Holmes, "What is the US Military's Presence Near North Korea?" *The Guardian*, August 9, 2017; <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/09/what-is-the-us-militarys-presence-in-south-east-asia>. Accessed on December 28, 2019.

32. Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Conflict and Chaos on the Korean Peninsula: Can China's Military Help Secure North Korea's Nuclear Weapons?", *International Security*, November 7, 2018; [https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00330](https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/isec_a_00330). Accessed on January 24, 2020.

33. Basu, n. 7.

containing the increasing Chinese influence on the South Korean economy. It is being argued that to counter China in the region, diplomatic engagement between the US and North Korea is crucial as therein lies a possibility of a constructive US-North Korea relationship which can further reduce the diplomatic dependence of the US on China.<sup>34</sup> This is perhaps the reason behind the shift in the US' stance from antagonism to sharing the table with DPRK leader Kim. The US' involvement in the Korean peninsula also comes with the involvement of other states such as Japan, India and Australia to contain the Chinese influence. Although the North Korean regime is perceived to be a serious threat to the US, the situation in the Korean peninsula provides an effective opportunity for the US to maintain its primacy in the region by engaging with, and strengthening, its allies in the region.

### *Russia*

Russia's role, like that of China and the US, in the Korean peninsula goes back to the time of Korean War (1950) when the Soviet Union provided significant assistance to North Korean leader Kim Il Sung. To a large extent, Russia's interests in the Korean peninsula coincide with US interests. Like the US, Russia too is wary of the North Korean nuclear and missile programme that can pave the way for an arms race in the region, which will be detrimental to Russian security. Russia is also wary about the consequences of the North Korean regime's collapse. After the Cold War, with the US emerging as the sole superpower, Russia tried to regain and maintain its hold and influence as a great power; the opportunity came in the form of the North Korean nuclear crisis. Consequently, in 1994, Russia put forward a suggestion for the Six-Party Conference comprising Russia, China, America, South Korea, North Korea and Japan, and also including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United Nations (UN). This was aimed at resolving the North Korean crisis; however, the suggestion was eventually disregarded. When

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34. David Jonathan Wolff and William R. McKinney, "Imagine This: North Korea and America Becoming Allies Against China", *The National Interest*, October 2, 2019; <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/korea-watch/imagine-north-korea-and-america-becoming-allies-against-china-85086>. Accessed on January 25, 2020.

**The Putin-Kim summit highlighted that Russia could play a stabilising role and help promote détente on the Korean peninsula. Russia, like the US, lays emphasis on the non-proliferation agenda and is interested in the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.**

the 2+2 mechanism broke down, and with the second nuclear crisis, the prospects of adding Russia to the multi-party talks gained traction.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, one of the primary interests of Russia in the Korean peninsula is to retain its relevance as a major power.

As mentioned above, sharing the concerns of China and the US, Russia is also wary of the North Korean nuclear conundrum which might prove to be fatal for the Korean peninsula's security. In the backdrop of North Korea's WMD programme, Russia has consistently endorsed the UN sanctions. At the same time, Russia has maintained that extreme sanctions could prove to be counter-productive and make North Korea go rogue. For instance, in November 2017, North Korea fired an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) travelling a distance of 960 km and landing in the Sea of Japan.<sup>36</sup> Following this line of not completely isolating North Korea, Russia has assisted the DPRK regime on several occasions such as against the oil embargo on North Korea by the US. The over-reliance of North Korea on China has also provided Russia with an opportunity to enhance its clout in North Korea and play out its niche diplomacy. North Korea has also realised the significance of its northern neighbour in balancing its relations with other major powers. The Kim-Putin summit in April 2019 can be seen in this context, wherein Russia can play a major role. This was evident in the Russian president's speech in which he stated that Russia seeks North Korea's involvement in bringing about the settlement.<sup>37</sup> While the Kim-Putin summit may not have resulted in any

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35. Georgy Toloraya, "The Six Party Talks: A Russian Perspective", *Asian Perspective*, vol. 32, no. 4, Special issue on North Korea and Regional Security, 2008, pp. 45-69; [https://www.jstor.org/stable/42704653?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/42704653?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents). Accessed on December 24, 2019.

36. "North Korea Launches 'Highest Ever' Ballistic Missiles", BBC, November 29, 2017; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42160227>. Accessed on December 28, 2019.

37. Yacqub Ismail, "Russia's New Role in the Korean Peninsula", *International Policy Digest*, April 27, 2019; <https://intpolicydigest.org/2019/04/27/russia-s-new-role-in-the-korean-peninsula/>. Accessed on December 28, 2019.

tangible outcome, it has certainly sent a message that Russia is ready to play a greater and definitive role in North Korea. Overall, the Putin-Kim summit highlighted that Russia could play a stabilising role and help promote détente on the Korean peninsula. Russia, like the US, lays emphasis on the non-proliferation agenda and is interested in the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula. Russia, with its expertise as an official nuclear power with advanced technologies, could contribute to formulating a realistic, phased approach more akin to arms reduction, and verifying its implementation. However, the prospects of such a plan depend on both Russia's diplomatic efforts and the desire of the other powers to bring Russia to the negotiation table.

**In the year 2017, the North Korean regime regarded the progress of its nuclear and missile programme as being able to act as a powerful and reliable deterrent against any foreign intervention in its territory.**

#### **KOREAN PENINSULA: SITUATION AT PRESENT**

The diplomatic situation in the Korean peninsula is changing at an enormous pace due to the conjunction of three factors: (1) the rapid development of the North Korean nuclear programme; (2) the policies of the US under the leadership of President Trump; and (3) the election of Moon Jae-in as the president of South Korea. North Korea spectacularly developed its nuclear capacity in a very short span of time, acknowledging the *Byungjin* doctrine,<sup>38</sup> which emphasizes the parallel development of the national economy and the nuclear programme. This type of developmental programme raised the apprehensions of the international community—especially the US—about North Korea. American President Donald Trump's exchange of heated rhetorics with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and his coercive diplomacy considerably increased the risk

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38. The *Byungjin* Doctrine is a political term in North Korea that refers to Kim Il Sung's (the first ruler of North Korea from 1948-1994) policies in the 1960s to simultaneously develop the military and economy. Under the current leadership in North Korea, it refers to the simultaneous development of nuclear weapons and the economy..

of a military conflict on the Korean peninsula, and war seemed likely by the end of 2017.<sup>39</sup>

In the year 2017, the North Korean regime regarded the progress of its nuclear and missile programme as being able to act as a powerful and reliable deterrent against any foreign intervention in its territory. In his New Year's speech in 2017, this was further proclaimed by Kim Jong-un himself as the success of the North Korean nuclear programme; he highlighted the fact that North Korea had completed its deterrence mechanism in order to counter any threats emanating from the US. In turn, this would prevent North Korea from entering into an adventurous war with the US.<sup>40</sup>

This position of strength has allowed the North Korean regime to suspend its missile and nuclear tests, thus, fulfilling a key prerequisite to enable the South Koreans and Americans to engage in public negotiations with Pyongyang.

Another factor pertains to the three leaders. All three statesmen, i.e. of the US, North Korea and South Korea, had strong incentives related to their internal political objectives to take part in the negotiation process at that time. These efforts further softened the perception against the North Korean leader a bit, in turn, solidifying his (Kim Jong-un's) position within his own country. Furthermore, this rapprochement at that time, created by following the diplomatic route, improved North Korea's security situation while avoiding the threat of new sanctions. In the case of President Trump—who had been associated with abandoning a number of international treaties (including the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Iran nuclear deal, and the Intermediate-Range

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39. Mario Esteban, "The EU's Role in Stabilising the Korean Peninsula", *Working Paper*, Real Instituto Elcano, January 2019; <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/49ffc71b-569c-4c88-bcab-b9bffc485716/WP1-2018-Esteban-EU-role-stabilising-Korean-Peninsula.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=49ffc71b-569c-4c88-bcab-b9bffc485716>. Accessed on January 20, 2020.

40. "Full Text of North Korean President Kim Jong-un's New Year Speech 2017", The National Committee on North Korea, January 2, 2018; [https://www.ncnk.org/sites/default/files/KJU\\_2017\\_New\\_Years\\_Address.pdf](https://www.ncnk.org/sites/default/files/KJU_2017_New_Years_Address.pdf); Ankit Panda, "3 Takeaways From Kim Jong-un's 2018 New Year's Address", *The Diplomat*, January 1, 2018; <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/3-takeaways-from-kim-jong-uns-2018-new-years-address/>. Accessed on December 23, 2019.

Nuclear Forces Treaty)—this provided him an opportunity to consolidate his dwindling image. For South Korea, it meant more popularity for President Moon at that time, both at home and abroad. There has been huge scepticism about the possible outcome of the negotiations between the leaders of the US and North Korea. Still, there is an international consensus related to the expediency of promoting a dialogue to reduce the threat of war in the Korean peninsula region.

For Beijing, the scenario after the abrupt ending of the second Hanoi summit is almost like the worst-case scenario. For a very long time, China's policy toward the peninsula has swung between anxieties over two extreme possibilities: a war anxiety where China is dragged into a second Korean War between the US and DPRK, and an exclusion anxiety where China is excluded from the solution of the North Korea issue and future arrangements on the peninsula.<sup>41</sup> The escalation of tensions between the US and North Korea also raised the apprehensions in Beijing. However, after the Hanoi summit in 2019, it was clear that North Korea still considers China as the net security provider in the region as the prospects of peace and reconciliation with the US remained uncertain. Also, for China, North Korea has always been the anchor of China's role in the future of the Korean peninsula, rather than South Korea or the US.<sup>42</sup>

Another area where China is engaged in competition with the US is over South Korea. Although China's relationship with South Korea suffered critical damage during the THAAD deployment episode, it increasingly puts the South in the crossfire between Washington and Beijing, forcing it to choose between the two. Heightened great power competition will delay and hinder any compromises necessary for a future solution between Beijing and Washington regarding the Korean peninsula. In the process, the choice before South Korea will inevitably antagonise one or both sides, deepening their distrust and contest on the peninsula.<sup>43</sup>

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41. Yun Sun, "China and Korean Peninsula after Hanoi Summit", *The Asian Forum*, July 1, 2019; <http://www.theasianforum.org/china-and-the-korean-peninsula-after-the-hanoi-summit/>. Accessed on December 24, 2019.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

The 2018 inter-Korean summits between the leaders of North and South Korea seem like a big step for the nations, and provide China hope to expand the BRI plans into the Korean peninsula. Beijing appears to regard the rapprochement of the two Koreas as a strategic opportunity to exert its influence on the divided peninsula. Definitely, President Xi's BRI may be the start of a new policy aimed not only at containing American influence but also at expanding the Chinese leverage in the whole of Korea by exerting its economic leverage. From the Chinese perspective, its BRI plans in the Korean peninsula can serve four major purposes. First, cooperation with Seoul can boost the potential of China's three northeastern provinces. Second, through the BRI projects, it will be considerably easy to push North Korea's reform by providing economic incentives and transportation and energy infrastructure, thereby creating a peaceful environment conducive for the BRI's successful implementation. Third, the connectivity linkages with Russia's Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)—which is one of Putin's key policies to develop its isolated Far East region—would help in alleviating Russia's concerns over the BRI. Fourthly, cooperation with Seoul can reduce the risk of exacerbating security tensions on the Korean peninsula, thereby altering the regional structure from a hostile balance of power to one of peace and order, where cooperation and non-competition become the norm. From the South Korean perspective, a trilateral framework with China and Russia towards North Korea's opening and reform can be realised. Also, it is a general belief that in international politics economic engagement and connectivity are the factors favourable for peace. Creating momentum for such a spill-over effect to take place in the Korean peninsula is what China aims to achieve through its BRI. Furthermore, from the Chinese perspective, although it seems a little far-fetched, the BRI has multiple modes of cooperation that can contribute to the regional development of the Korean peninsula.



# OIL-GAS DIPLOMACY AND QUEST FOR ECONOMIC AUTONOMY: CONTRASTING CASE STUDY OF IRAQI KURDISTAN AND BALOCHISTAN

**DIVYA MALHOTRA**

## **BACKGROUND**

The semi-autonomous province of Kurdistan in Iraq and Balochistan in southwestern Pakistan are the world's most resource rich conflict zones today. Besides other minerals, Iraq's Kurdistan and Balochistan rest atop vast reserves of crude oil and natural gas respectively. Iraq is one of the top holders of proven oil reserves in the world—estimated to hold over 149 billion barrels of proven crude oil reserves.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 20 per cent of these oil resources (45 billion barrels)<sup>2</sup> are located in Kurdish territory in northern Iraq.<sup>3</sup> Pakistan is home to 53 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of proven

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1. Energy Information Administration (EIA), "Iraq: Executive Summary", January 7, 2019; <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.php?iso=IRQ>
2. The (TOGY), "Kurdistan Region of Iraq: New Alliances", 2019; <https://www.theoilandgasyear.com/market/kurdistan-region-of-iraq/>
3. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report claims that Kurdish regions have only 3 billion barrels in resources as opposed to liberal estimates of 45 billion barrels cited by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). [https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis\\_includes/countries\\_long/Iraq/background.htm](https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis_includes/countries_long/Iraq/background.htm)

**The semi-autonomous province of Kurdistan in Iraq and Balochistan in southwestern Pakistan are the world's most resource rich conflict zones today. Besides other minerals, Iraq's Kurdistan and Balochistan rest atop vast reserves of crude oil and natural gas respectively.**

natural gas reserves out of which 36.4 per cent (19 tcf) is located in the country's largest and least populous province of Balochistan.<sup>4</sup>

While geographically apart, these two provinces are united by a troubled past and shared sense of resentment against their respective regimes. Even though Iraqi Kurdistan has established a strong economic identity for itself; Balochistan remains Pakistan's poorest province, deprived of its own resources. The Kurds in north Iraq rose to forge a strong political platform after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, hinting at the indispensability of international players

in shaping the independent identity of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRD). Certain analysts have made similar predictions for Balochistan too.<sup>5</sup> However, so far, the province has failed to negotiate with Islamabad for greater political or economic autonomy.

There has generally been a dearth of Indian scholarship on Kurdistan's economic diplomacy, despite the fact that the region has the potential to serve (or disrupt) India's energy interests; however, some Indian companies like Reliance Limited have been involved in exploratory activities in Iraqi Kurdistan. Geographically, Balochistan is of greater interest for Indian strategic thinking. Despite the fact that Indian scholarship on Balochistan may be quantitatively sufficient, it is generally limited to the discussion on the security perspective. This article has two main objectives: first, to scan the trajectories of both conflict zones, with specific focus on their oil and

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4. Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), "Natural Resource Allocation in Balochistan and NWFP: Reasons for Discontent", Islamabad, 2009; <https://www.sdpi.org/publications/files/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20A111.pdf>.
  5. Afshan Ahmed, "Analysing Possible Role of USA in Pak-Baloch Conflict", Working Paper 128, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Islamabad, 2012; <https://sdpi.org/publications/files/WP-128.pdf>; Michel Chossudovsky, "The Destabilisation of Pakistan", Global Research, Canada, 2012; <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-destabilization-of-pakistan/7705>.

gas sector; second, to underline the internal circumstances and external factors which explain the different trajectories of these two resource-rich conflict zones in the Asian subcontinent.

### THE TRAJECTORY OF IRAQI KURDISTAN

Oil and gas discoveries in Kurdish Iraq date back to the 1920s, when oil was first discovered in Kirkuk in 1927 and Iraq was still under the British mandate.<sup>6</sup> The Treaty of Sevres (1920) had promised autonomy to the Kurds. But as fate would have it, British support for an independent Kurdistan was withdrawn and the borders were drawn in such a way that the Kurds were split among modern-day Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.<sup>7</sup>

Even though the Iraqi Kurds were not strong enough to fight the regime in the newly independent state of Iraq post-1932, their aspirations for independence never died down, and they continued their struggle. As the Iraqi Ba'ath Party came to the forefront of Iraqi politics in the late 1960s and Saddam Hussein rose to political power, the US started exhibiting interest in the Kurds. Eventually, Iraq cozying up to the Soviets gave Washington a serious reason to strike an alliance with the Iraqi Kurds.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the

**Throughout the 1970s, the US continued to support the Kurds militarily and financially. But US support for them always remained sporadic and strategic, based on its assessment of the regional situation. History is replete with instances when the US abandoned the Kurds in difficult situations.**

6. Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), "Iraq Facts and Figures", 2019; [https://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/about\\_us/164.htm](https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/164.htm); Sean Kane, "Iraq's Oil Politics: Where Agreement Might not be Found", United States Institute of Peace Report, 64(8), 2010, Washington DC. The Oil and Gas Year (TOGY), "Kurdistan Region of Iraq: New Alliances", 2019; <https://www.theoilandgasyear.com/market/kurdistan-region-of-iraq/>.

7. Othman Ali, "The Kurds and the Lausanne Peace Negotiations, 1922-23", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 33(3), 1997, pp. 521-534; <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4283891.pdf>.

8. Steven Cook, "There's Always a Next Time to Betray the Kurds", *Foreign Policy*, 2019; <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/11/kurds-betrayal-syria-erdogan-turkey-trump/>. Bryan Gibson, "The Secret Origins of the U.S.-Kurdish Relationship Explain Today's Disaster", *Foreign Policy*, 2019; <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/14/us-kurdish-relationship-history-syria-turkey-betrayal-kissinger/>.

1970s, the US continued to support the Kurds militarily and financially. But US support for them always remained sporadic and strategic, based on its assessment of the regional situation. History is replete with instances when the US abandoned the Kurds in difficult situations during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>9</sup> However, some real progress was made in the 1990s. In 1992, as Iraq witnessed its first free and fair elections, the Kurdistan National Assembly was established, and thereafter the first Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) was formed.<sup>10</sup> However, the Kurds were hand-tied under Saddam Hussein. The US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the end of Saddam Hussein's regime was the actual moment of victory for the Kurds.

In October 2005, the new Constitution of Iraq extended official recognition to the semi-autonomous status of the KRG, enshrining the local powers over the region's administrative requirements.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the government also assured it a 17 per cent share in the federal Iraqi budget under the Iraqi budget law.<sup>12</sup> However, the KRG's demand for full control of the oil sector remained disputed owing to differential views on the interpretation of the Iraqi Constitution.

The subject of oil (and gas) is dealt with in Articles 111 and 112 of the Constitution,<sup>13</sup> the latter being the main source of contention between the

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9. "A Look at the History of the U.S. Alliance With the Kurds ", NPR 2019; <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/10/769044811/a-look-at-the-history-of-the-u-s-alliance-with-the-kurds>; Mike Giglio, "The Kurds Were Fighting ISIS Long Before the US Was. This is What it Was Like", 2019; <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/mikegiglio/shatter-the-nations-excerpt-kurds-isis>.

10. Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), "The Kurdistan Parliament", 2019; <http://previous.cabinet.gov.krd/p/page.aspx?l=12&p=229>.

11. L Anderson, "Internationalizing Iraq's Constitutional Dilemma", in R. Lowe and G. Stansfield eds., *The Kurdish Policy Imperative* (London: Chatham House/Royal Institute of International Affairs).

12. Andrew Snow, "Kurdistan and Baghdad: A Tangled Web Over Oil and Budgets", United States Institute of Peace, 2018; <https://www.usip.org/publications/2018/01/kurdistan-and-baghdad-tangled-web-over-oil-and-budgets>; World Bank, "The Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Assessing the Economic and Social Impact of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS", Washington, 2015; <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/574421468253845198/pdf/Iraq-Assessing-the-economic-and-social-impact-of-the-Syrian-conflict-and-ISIS.pdf>.

13. According to Section one of Article 112,

*"The federal government, with the producing governorates and regional governments, shall undertake the management of oil and gas extracted from present fields, provided that it distributes its revenue in a fair manner in proportion to the population distribution in all parts of the country, specifying an allotment for a specified period for the damaged regions which were unjustly deprived of them by the former regime, and the regions that were damaged afterwards in a way that ensures balanced development in different areas of the country, and this shall be regulated by a law."*

Centre and the KRG.<sup>14</sup> Thus, constitutional ambiguity, along with the KRG's mistrust of the federal government, determined the KRG's political conduct.

In 2006, the KRG established a separate Department of Foreign Relations (DFR) in Erbil and thereafter companies of many countries (including India's Reliance Industries, which entered into a production sharing agreement in the Rovi and Sarta blocks in 2007)<sup>15</sup> started exploring the oil sector in the Kurdish areas.<sup>16</sup> Twenty-nine countries maintain separate diplomats in Erbil and the KRG official website claims that it has official consular representation in 14 countries.<sup>17</sup>

Post US-invasion in 2003, a geographical shift occurred in the investor outlook. The relatively stable Kurdish regions in the north started attracting most of the investments in view of the instability and violence in central and southern Iraq. However, the oil deals for Kurdish oil were negotiated with the central government in Baghdad, with little autonomy to Erbil. The equation between Erbil and Baghdad remained bitter over the issue, but the relations worsened when the KRG started independent oil trade with Iran in 2013 and Turkey in 2014.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, both these countries also have Kurdish populations and,

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According to Section two of Article 112,

*"The federal government, with producing regional and governorate governments, shall together formulate the necessary strategic policies to develop the oil and gas wealth in a way that achieves the highest benefit to the Iraqi people using the most advanced techniques of the market principles and encouraging investments."*

14. James Denselow, "The Kurdish Kingmakers", Al Jazeera, Qatar, 2014; <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/09/kurdish-kingmakers-2014930132452403344.html>; Divya Malhotra, "Oil as a Tool of Diplomacy in Iraqi Kurdistan" in Sajad Ibrahim, ed., *Twenty-First Century Unrest in West Asia: Socio-economic and Political Scenario* (Kolkata: New Central Book Agency, 2018).
15. KRG, "Ministry of Natural Resources Announces Seven New Petroleum Contracts for Kurdistan Region, Reviews Five Existing Contracts", 207; <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?s=010000&l=12&a=21217>.
16. Owing to political pressure from Baghdad, Reliance Industries divested its shares in 2012; <https://www.oji.com/exploration-development/article/17274573/iraq-chevron-acquires-reliance-stake-in-two-blocks>.
17. KRG, "The Kurdistan Regional Government Department of Foreign Relations", 2019; <https://dfr.gov.krd/p/p.aspx?p=25&l=12&s=010000&r=332>.
18. "Iraqi Kurdistan Opens Official Crude Oil Trade Route Via Iran-Sources", 2013; <https://www.reuters.com/article/hold-kurds-oil-iran/iraqi-kurdistan-opens-official-crude-oil-trade-route-via-iran-sources-idUSL6N0FU4LG20130807>; Dmitry Zhdannikov, "Exclusive: How Kurdistan Bypassed Baghdad and Sold oil on Global Markets", Reuters, 2015; <https://www.reuters.com>.

thus, share concerns with Baghdad over Kurdish unilateralism. At this point, it is important to note that Iraqi Kurdistan's landlocked geography remains its biggest constraint, thereby keeping it dependent on its neighbouring countries for trade.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Iran and Turkey may be using trade connections as a bargaining chip to buy political assurance from the KRG. In other words, by becoming a partner in Iraqi Kurdistan's economic roadmap, these states "can buy KRG's assurance that any action by Iraqi Kurds should not mobilise Kurds outside of Iraq or cause any political disequilibrium in the respective countries. Thus, the ambition of establishing a wider Kurdistan can be checked."<sup>20</sup> Even though the Iraqi Kurds may have been able to use the threat of independence as a strategic tool to get greater concessions from Baghdad and strike deals with neighbouring Ankara and Tehran, what resulted, at best, signals that they succeeded in attaining a semi-autonomous political status and greater degree of economic autonomy. However, to confuse economic autonomy with political independence was a gross miscalculation, proven in the 2017 independence referendum. Despite 93 per cent votes in favour of an independent state, the referendum did not alter the status quo, and rather inflicted upon the Kurds a political backlash from Baghdad, along with financial and territorial losses.<sup>21</sup> The Kurds' last hope was their alliance with Washington against the Islamic State (IS). As Washington withdrew its support to the Iraqi Kurds in 2019, one is again reminded of Lord Palmerston's words that nations have no permanent allies, only permanent interests. Thus, reliance on external powers such as the US may be short-term opportunities to get political and economic concessions from the regime, and it may dawn upon the Kurds now that they will have to fight their own battles.

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com/article/us-iraq-kurdistan-oil/exclusive-how-kurdistan-bypassed-baghdad-and-sold-oil-on-global-markets-idUSKCN0T61HH20151117.

19. Selcan Hacauglu, J. Fairweather, and N. Razzouk, "Oil Odyssey Offers Glimpse of Kurdish Independence in Iraq", *Bloomberg*, 2014; <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-06-18/half-price-kurdish-oil-threatens-iraq-breakup-with-turkish-help>.

20. Malhotra, n. 14.

21. Denise Natali, "Iraqi Kurdistan Was Never Ready for Statehood", 2017; <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/10/31/iraqi-kurdistan-was-never-ready-for-statehood/>.

## EXAMINING BALOCHISTAN'S TRAJECTORY

The province of Balochistan in southwestern Pakistan exhibits certain similarities to the Iraqi Kurdistan as reflected in the writings of certain scholars.<sup>22</sup> However, the nature of the Kurds struggle and their trajectories remain a subject of scholarly speculation.

Balochistan, as the Baloch refer to their homeland, is geographically scattered across three modern nation-states of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. Under British India, the modern-day province of Balochistan was a part of the princely state of Kalat and its strategic location made it attractive for the colonial powers. The struggle for Baloch identity saw its dawn in the 20th century against the British and continued after they left. In the words of Leonard Binder, "The Baloch suffered this unhappy fate simply because they happened to live in an area of vital military importance to the British."<sup>23</sup>

In the 1940s, when India's call for freedom from the British rule became louder, the nationalist Baloch also started demanding independence. Interestingly, the Khan of Kalat declared Balochistan's independence on August 12, 1947—two days before the state of Pakistan came into being.<sup>24</sup> However, post-Independence, the agreement was dissolved and on March 27, 1948, the Khan of Kalat was made to accept the merger with Pakistan.<sup>25</sup> The merger, however, was not acceptable to the Baloch, leading to violent clashes. The region has remained constantly restive ever since. A few years later, Pakistan's first gas field was discovered in 1952 by Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) in Sui sub-district in Balochistan and commercial drilling in the region began in 1955.<sup>26</sup> In the words of Harrison (1981), if it wasn't

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22. John Gee, "Baluchistan—Another Kurdistan?", *Washington Report*, 2018; <https://www.wrmea.org/2018-august-september/baluchistan-another-kurdistan.html>; Andrew Korybko, "Iran Is Being Tricked into Making Balochistan the New Kurdistan", *Global Research*, 2019; <https://www.globalresearch.ca/irans-tricked-making-balochistan-new-kurdistan/5669010>.

23. Leonard Binder, "Islam, Ethnicity and the State in Pakistan", *Middle East Journal*, 11(4), 1987, pp.259-298; [https://www.jstor.org/stable/4322950?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4322950?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

24. Abhijit Bhattacharyya, "Baloch Almost got 'Free' in 1947!", *Asian Age*, 2017; <https://www.asianage.com/opinion/oped/060217/baloch-almost-got-free-in-1947.html>.

25. Muhammad Saeed Dehwar, *Contemporary History of Balochistan* (Quetta: Third World Publications, 1994), pp. 311-324.

26. Rauf Nizami and Sharif Nizami, "Petroleum Exploration and Development in Pakistan", *Energy Exploration and Exploitation*, 5(1), 1987, pp. 187-197; <https://www.jstor.org/>

**Initially, Balochistan remained a cause of worry for the state of Pakistan due to its separatist aspirations. With the discovery of natural gas, the political debate got an economic dimension and the province became vital to Pakistan's energy security.**

for Balochistan's wealth of natural resources and strategic location, no one would be fighting over this "bleak, desolate and forbidding land."<sup>27</sup>

Initially, Balochistan remained a cause of worry for the state of Pakistan due to its separatist aspirations. With the discovery of natural gas, the political debate got an economic dimension and the province became vital to Pakistan's energy security. Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL), a state-owned company, was made exclusively in charge of exploration and production of gas,

and revenues were placed directly under the federal government. As per the Mineral (Acquisition and Transfer) Order, 1961 (PO No. 8 of 1961), the federal government exercised exclusive control over the institutional, regulatory, legislative and operational arrangements concerning the natural resources.<sup>28</sup>

Even though the province was the major supplier of natural gas for the country, the federal government exercised complete control over the management of resources. Denial of proportionate benefits perpetrated resentment among the Baloch and their demand for increased economic autonomy was increasingly being perceived as a threat to Pakistan's integrity and stability.<sup>29</sup>

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stable/43754097?seq=1#page\_scan\_tab\_contents; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan, "50 Years of Pakistan: Volume I (1947-1997)", Chapter 8: Oil and Gas, 1987, p. 115; <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/50-years-pakistan-volume-i-5>; Pakistan Petroleum Limited, "E&P Opportunities", 2016, p. 20; [https://www.ppl.com.pk/EP\\_Brochure\\_Oct\\_2016.pdf](https://www.ppl.com.pk/EP_Brochure_Oct_2016.pdf).

27. Selig S. Harrison, *In the Shadow of Afghanistan: Baluch Nationalism and Soviet Temptations* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1981), pp. 6-7.
28. Senate of Pakistan, *Participatory Federalism: Rulings of the Chair*, "Operationalization of Joint Ownership of Mineral Oil and Natural Gas; Implementation of Article 172 (3), Constitution, 1973", 2018, p. 73; <http://www.senate.gov.pk/uploads/documents/Ruling%20Book.PDF>.
29. White Paper on Balochistan (1974), Government of Pakistan, in Rehana Saeed Hashmi "Baloch Ethnicity: An Analysis of the Issue and Conflict with State", 2015, p. 15; [http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/history/PDF-FILES/4-%20PC%20Dr.%20Rehana%20Saeed%20Hashmi\\_52-1-15.pdf](http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/history/PDF-FILES/4-%20PC%20Dr.%20Rehana%20Saeed%20Hashmi_52-1-15.pdf).



The historic secessionist desires of the Baloch were further fuelled by Islamabad's discriminatory economic policies such as an unequal share in gas revenues as well as federal revenues. The gas revenue distribution did not take into account the province-wise contribution, even though Article 158 of the Pakistani Constitution (1973) stated that "the province where natural gas is situated would have priority in receiving supplies of that gas."<sup>30</sup> Similar provisions were made under Article 161(a) which specified that federal excise duty and royalty on gas would be the "*exclusive right of the respective Provincial Government*". However, Balochistan remained deprived of its due share. As per some estimates, the province received only one-fifth in royalty payments as compared to the other provinces.<sup>31</sup> Besides revenue deprivation, the Pakistani state has followed a biased employment policy whereby the managerial and technical level jobs were offered to those from "outside Balochistan", while local Baloch were engaged in "low-end jobs as day laborers."<sup>32</sup> The Baloch accused the state of altering the province's political and demographical make-up under the garb of developmental projects. As per some reports, the federal government adopted a policy of systematic "political migration" from Punjab to key positions in Balochistan.<sup>33</sup> Sardar Akhtar Mengal, a Baloch politician, in a newspaper interview, "The problem is that ... we

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30 n. 28

31. Sustainable Development Policy Institute, "Natural Resource Allocation in Balochistan and NWFP: Reasons for Discontent", 2009, p. 5; <https://www.sdpi.org/publications/files/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20A111.pdf>.

32. International Crisis Group (ICG), "Pakistan: The Worsening Conflict in Balochistan", Asia Report No. 119, 2006, p. 16; <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/119-pakistan-the-worsening-conflict-in-balochistan.pdf>.

33. Hashmi, n. 29, p. 74.

would lose our identity, our language, everything. That is why we are not willing to accept these mega projects.”<sup>34</sup>

The influx of workers belonging to other ethnic groups in Balochistan was perceived as propaganda for deliberate demographic changes.<sup>35</sup> Like the Kurds, the Baloch feel entitled to complete ownership and control over the resources while the federal government has been keen on economic integration rather than autonomy.

In addition to disproportionate gas-revenue distribution and skewed employment patterns, Balochistan receives the lowest proportion of total revenues on account of its low population. Before 1971, the federal government based revenue allocation solely on landmass or area. This criterion was opposed by the former East Pakistan which had a larger population but lesser land area. Post-loss of East Pakistan in 1971, the criterion was changed from land mass to population under Article 160 (1): National Finance Commission Award.<sup>36</sup> Balochistan being the least populated but largest in size, was the biggest loser. In 2009, a multiple criteria formula was introduced to include poverty, revenue generation and population density as determining factors (Fig 1).

Based on the new provincial ratios, the population remained the dominant criterion for revenue distribution, followed by poverty and revenue generation by each province. The least important factor was population density. Even though there was some improvement in the pattern of revenue distribution, Balochistan, being the least populated, continued to receive the least federal revenues. On account of such fiscal arrangements, the Baloch have harboured deep-seated resentment against Punjab which dominates Pakistan’s political and financial landscape. As Dr Abdul Hayee Baloch articulates, “Extreme economic poverty and underdevelopment of the province has strengthened our views against the

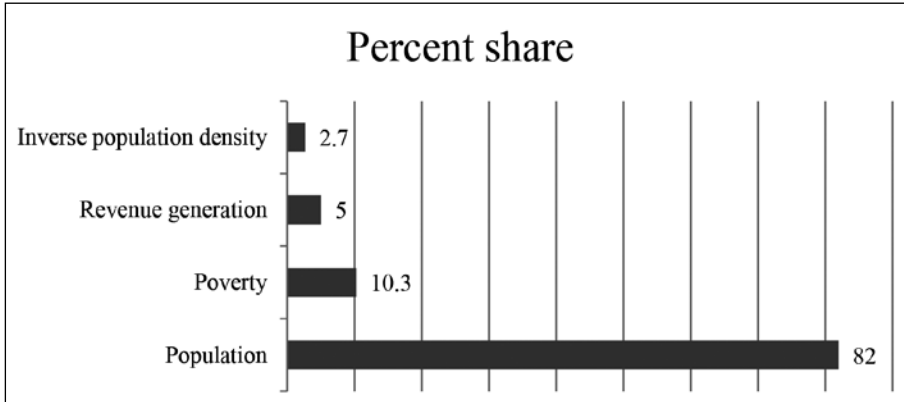
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34. Idrees Bakhtiar. “Mega Projects are a Conspiracy to Turn the Balochis into a Minority in their Homeland,” An interview with Sardar Akhtar Mengal, *The Herald*, August 2004, in Muhammad Anwar and Ebad Baig, *Pakistan: Time for Change* (London: Author House, 2012).

35. Alok Bansal, “Balochistan: Continuing Violence and Its Implications”, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), 2006, p. 50; [https://idsa.in/system/files/strategicanalysis\\_abansal\\_0306.pdf](https://idsa.in/system/files/strategicanalysis_abansal_0306.pdf).

36. Population Council, “Capturing the Demographic Dividend in Pakistan”, 2013, p. 87; [https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2013\\_CapturingDemoDivPak.pdf](https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2013_CapturingDemoDivPak.pdf).

Fig 1: Criteria for Budget Distribution



Source: GOP (2009)<sup>37</sup>

Punjabi dominated central elites”.<sup>38</sup> By end of the 20th century, the country had seen four major Baloch insurgencies, in 1948, 1958, 1962-63 and 1972-73. But the community has not made any substantial political or economic gains.

In 2002, Pakistan got its first Baloch Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali. Interestingly, after his resignation in June 2004, a “Parliamentary Committee on Balochistan” was appointed.<sup>39</sup> The committee made two important recommendations: first, that the producing district should be allocated at least 15 per cent of the revenue received by the provincial government; and second, Balochistan should be given maximum representation on the Boards of Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL), Oil and Gas Development Corporation (OGDC), Sui Southern.<sup>40</sup> The committee also proposed a formula regarding royalty and gas development surcharge which would result in proportionate relations between production and revenue, that is, “*increase in production will*

37. Government of Pakistan (GoP), Federal Budget, Budget in Brief 2009-10, Finance Division, 2009; <http://www.finance.gov.pk/budget/Budget%20in%20Brief%202009-10.pdf>.

38. Abdul Hayee Baloch in Hashmi n. 29.

39. GoP, “Report of the Parliamentary Committee on Balochistan”, Senate of Pakistan, Islamabad, 2006 in Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, “Balochistan Versus Pakistan”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2007; <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40276835.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A679b23f150d558e8dcf07c1204f42943>.

40. n. 31.

result in higher total revenue to the province". The proposals were, however, never implemented.

A major change to the gas ownership arrangement was introduced in 2010 when the 18th Constitutional Amendment was passed by the Parliament on April 20, 2010.<sup>41</sup> As per the Amendment of Article 172 (3) of the Constitution, "Subject to the existing commitments and obligations, mineral oil and natural gas within the Province or the territorial waters adjacent thereto shall vest equally in that Province and the Federal Government".<sup>42</sup> The amendment principally accorded the status of equal stakeholders upon the provinces and central government holders in natural resource ownership. Again the promise remains unfulfilled on the ground.<sup>43</sup> As iterated by Shahid Khaqan Abbasi,<sup>44</sup> the then petroleum minister, during the first implementation meeting held in Quetta in 2016, "No share has been given to the province" of Balochistan. It is equally important to note that the amendment came with a clause which gave the federal government the "exclusive ownership of natural gas situated beyond 12 nautical miles (Territorial Waters) from the base line".<sup>45</sup> Thus, Balochistan's on-shore and off-shore projects close to the coastline remain under the exclusive control of Islamabad. In 2016, a new deal, in agreement with Balochistan's provincial government, was signed under which the Sui gas field was given to Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) while royalty amounting to US\$ 74 billion was to be paid to the province in addition to free gas supply to Sui town, jobs to locals at the Sui gas field,

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41. Development Advocate Pakistan (DAP), "Five Years of the 18th Amendment", 2015; <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/pakistan/docs/DevelopmentPolicy/DAP%20April%202015%20ENGLISH.pdf>.

42. GoP, "Constitution (Eighteenth Amendment) Act, 2010"; <http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/amendments/18amendment.html>.

43. Maqbool Ahmed, "The Federal Petroleum Ministry Should have been Abolished after the Passage of the 18th Amendment", *Herald*, 2015; <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1152845>; Khaleeq Kiani, "Pakistani Provinces Vying for Control of Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources", *Dawn*, 2017; <https://www.dawn.com/news/1358389>.

44. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi in Senate of Pakistan, *Participatory Federalism: Rulings of the Chair*, "Operationalization of Joint Ownership of Mineral Oil and Natural Gas; Implementation of Article 172 (3), Constitution, 1973", Islamabad, 2018, p. 4; <http://www.senate.gov.pk/uploads/documents/Ruling%20Book.PDF>.

45. *Ibid.*

and health and education facilities. As per some reports, the Baloch leaders demanded “entire ownership of the PPL (Pakistan Petroleum Limited) to the province” to compensate for cumulative financial losses to the province and exploitation of their resources: a demand that would never be acceptable to Islamabad.<sup>46</sup> Although the government seems to be accommodating Baloch aspirations to some extent, their demand for total autonomy and control over resources has been totally sidelined.

In retrospect, for the federal government, Balochistan’s importance stems from three main points; its resource richness for internal energy demands, its geographic location as a transit site for major proposed natural gas pipelines [such as the Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India (TAPI)], and ongoing development of the port and energy hub at Gwadar.<sup>47</sup> The ability of the Baloch rebels and militants to attack the installations as well as the foreign workers poses a serious security threat and has, therefore, compelled the government to supplement, if not substitute, its traditional policy of forced repression with negotiation.

## CONCLUSION

Popularly labelled as ‘nations without a state’, both the Kurds and Baloch have been victims of geo-political power struggles. As part of conflict zones, they have faced decades of systematic suppression by the respective regimes, and their resource wealth has further complicated their struggle for autonomy. From a core-periphery perspective, these resource-rich territories occupy the core, while the people belonging to these regions are often marginalised as peripheral entities. Thus, the locus of the struggle has never been the people, but the resources of the land. Based on the assessment of the trajectories of both the Iraqi Kurds and Pakistani Baloch, four points emerge clearly:

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46. Syed Fazl-e-Haider, “Making Balochistan’s Gas, Oil Findings Worthy”, *Pakistan and Gulf Economist*, 2019; <http://www.pakistaneconomist.com/2019/04/22/making-balochistans-gas-oil-findings-worthy/>.

47. Robert G. Wirsing, “Baloch Nationalism and the Geopolitics of Energy Resources: The Changing Context of Separatism in Pakistan”, 2008, pp. 3-5; [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/55132/Baloch\\_Nationalism.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/55132/Baloch_Nationalism.pdf).

**Toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003 in a US-led intervention was a moment of victory for the US, its allies and the Iraqi Kurds also. After decades of suppression, his ouster had opened a political opportunity for the Kurds. Thus, the fight against a common enemy gave the USA and KRG a common ground.**

**Washington's Need for an Ally:** In the latter half of the 20th century, the US needed an ally in Iraq to counter Saddam Hussein. Thus, Washington's strategic need became an opportunity for the Kurds. In the case of Pakistan, however, Washington always managed to strike an alliance with the ruling regime and there was never a void which the Baloch could fill. Unlike the Kurds who emerged as strategic allies for America, the Baloch couldn't garner any substantial support beyond rhetorical sympathies for human rights violations. Donald Horowitz<sup>48</sup> underlines

how the external players and international powers are imperative for an ethnic movement to gain strength, a factor clearly missing in the case of Balochistan. Despite this, there have been sporadic reports suggesting some support for the case. As per the Washington-based EIR News service, the British are covertly supporting the Baloch separatists.<sup>49</sup> The same report highlights the views of Lt. Col. Ralph Peter, an American military analyst who had suggested the breaking up of Pakistan, leading to the formation of a separate country, "Greater Balochistan" or "Free Balochistan." Thus, there could be a possibility of some kind of rhetorical support for the Baloch cause in London and Washington, but it not enough to energise or support any ethnic movement.

**Common Enemy:** Toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003 in a US-led intervention was a moment of victory for the US, its allies and the Iraqi Kurds also. After decades of suppression, his ouster had opened a political opportunity for the Kurds. Thus, the fight against a common enemy gave

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48. Donald L Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 230.

49. Ramtanu Maitra, "Is the Obama Administration Backing London's Plan to Dismember Pakistan?", 2012, pp. 33-34; [https://larouchepub.com/eiw/public/2012/eirv39n02-20120113/33-37\\_3902.pdf](https://larouchepub.com/eiw/public/2012/eirv39n02-20120113/33-37_3902.pdf).

the USA and KRG a common ground. In the case of Pakistan, Washington never faced any direct threat from the regime. Be it countering the Soviets, managing its strategic game-plan in Afghanistan or its War on Terror, the US managed to strike an alliance with Islamabad. Thus, there was never any common enemy or threat which could bring Washington and Quetta to the table.

**Failed State and Internal Political Disequilibrium:** A failed state scenario in Iraq post-2003, gave Iraqi Kurdistan an opportunity to build independent alliances. Political

instability and violence in southern and central Iraq made the northern areas of Iraq more lucrative for investment, and, thus, they continually benefitted from a positive politico-economic climate.<sup>50</sup> Balochistan, on the other hand, has always remained restive and the risks to investment in Balochistan have been higher compared to other parts of the country. Moreover, Balochistan never had any degree of autonomy in fostering trade deals, unlike the KRG which opened its independent Foreign Affairs Department in 2006.<sup>51</sup> A strong federal government always remained a major impediment for the Baloch.

**Interestingly, the geography of Balochistan, with a long coastline, technically offered the Baloch more avenues for autonomous trade vis-à-vis landlocked Iraqi Kurdistan. But geography alone has not been able to offer Balochistan its escape route.**

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50. Prem Mishra, a doctoral candidate in Jawaharlal Nehru University, who paid an academic visit to Iraq in October 2019, said that the economic conditions and infrastructure in Kurdish regions seemed better than rest of the country. Based on his observations and interactions with locals in Erbil, he opined that despite the political pessimism which enveloped the Kurds post-referendum, they were quite optimistic about their future.

51. Besides natural gas, Balochistan is also believed to have approximately 300 million barrels oil reserves, the majority based in Balochistan (Ahmad and Jha 2008: 3). Besides security concerns and shy investment and the oil potential in this region, another lesser known reason could be Iran's concern over oil drilling in Balochistan (Fazl-e-Haider 2017). Tehran is believed to have objected to oil drilling in Balochistan on account of two factors. First, Iran believes that drilling of oil wells in Balochistan might divert Iranian oil to flow towards southern Balochistan due to difference in geographical terrain and altitude. Second, lack of oil drilling in Balochistan offers an alternate market for smuggled Iranian oil in neighbouring Balochistan in likely compliance with the Pakistani security forces (Reuters 2013; Haq 2018; Mukhtar 2019).

**Difference in Resource Profile:** While both Iraqi Kurdistan and Balochistan are resource rich regions, it needs to be highlighted that the former is a global oil exporter, involved in independent oil diplomacy. Balochistan, on the other hand, is crucial for Pakistan's domestic energy needs and an important transit route for the international energy trade. Interestingly, the geography of Balochistan, with a long coastline, technically offered the Baloch more avenues for autonomous trade vis-à-vis landlocked Iraqi Kurdistan. But geography alone has not been able to offer Balochistan its escape route. It has failed to enter the global natural gas market as an independent entity in any manner and remains a hypothetical case study of unilateralism based on gas diplomacy.

It is evident from the above discussion that both ethnic groups have been exposed to different internal political circumstances and geo-political scenarios. Thus, one factor or variable cannot be isolated and seen as the main determinant of their political fate. As we see today, Iraqi Kurdistan emerged as a potent threat to the state, while Balochistan continues to be ignored as a weak entity, despite the apparent similarities in their aspirations, ambitions and research-rich profiles.



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