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FAKE NEWS AND DISINFORMATION IN MODERN STATECRAFT

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Abstract

The revolutionary development and spread of information technology added a new dimension to domestic and external political relations. In modern statecraft, media has been the biggest facilitator of implanting and diffusing public narratives. Information resources have also become instruments of power for states, primarily motivated by realpolitik. In the given circumstances, creating fake news, disinformation, or exaggeration of information has become an instrument of conducting statecraft. This practice largely compromises the fundamental ethics of journalism. Additionally, with the rapid development of modern communication tools, the means for achieving state interests have also diversified. Fake news and disinformation are now increasingly manifest in internal politics and the advancement of interests across borders. In this post-truth era, states must be capable of responding to the challenges created by such disinformation. This paper discusses the incidents of disinformation in major powers like China, the United States, Russia, India, and Pakistan. The paper also debates the moral and ethical dimension of fake news and disinformation in modern statecraft by mainly analysing the practice whilst employing a realist approach.

Key words*: Post-modernism age, modern statecraft, realpolitik, information technology, digital media, fake networks, disinformation warfare, favourable perception, political advantage*

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Introduction

Statecraft entails skilful management of the government and diplomacy. It depends on various elements of power. In this age of information technology, the methods of conducting state affairs are also changing. The world has become a global village. In this post-modernist period, the fast and easily accessible means of communication play an incredible role in restructuring economic and political development in the world. On the other hand, the development of social networks has seemingly created challenges for the state's sovereignty and overall security. The world is facing the fallouts of the rapid advancement of technology without actually being prepared for the challenges. Emerging issues such as cyber-attacks, hacking and the phenomena of fake news and disinformation call for serious attention and require effective remedies.

Statecraft or state affairs have a history of being compromised by lies and deceit even before this rapid growth of information technology. There are many instances in history whereby leaders used tactics such as lies and spreading misinformation for promoting national interests or personal political interests. However, the tools used for disinformation in the past were limited in their scope and minimal in terms of their impact. In the contemporary world, the modern tools of information dissemination bear the worrying potential of multiplying the impact of lies. As much as they seem alike, there is quite a variation in the objectives and forms of disinformation. Unlike the past events, the current order involves multiple actors engaged in creating and spreading disinformation. This multifaceted engagement of various actors further renders disinformation to bear dangerous consequences in the contemporary scenario.

As this paper is aimed to examine the role of disinformation with regards to state affairs, it is important to study the growing influence of modern media tools in international relations. In view of the above, the growing role of non-state actors and forces such as

multinational groups and corporations in international politics led to new (and more evolved) theoretical debates in the 1970s and 1980s.[1] These debates further led to the rise of transnational and interdependence theories, which argued that multinational actors changed the 'traditional balance of power politics' by diminishing a state's dominant position in international relations.[2] The discourse revolving around non-state actors strengthened with the entry of postmodernism in world politics in the latter part of the 1980s with the advancement of communication technology.[3] This phase was marked by the 'expanding role of media', civil society organisations, and well-informed individual citizens. The transborder influence of these actors has been enhanced by new communication technologies and mass media. The role of media in international policymaking is now a recognised approach to studying international relations.[4]

The 'political role of media in this regard, can be assessed from the fact that access to the entire world now stands one click away. With extensive outreach and accessibility, mass media has a correspondingly large influence in shaping narratives, opinions, and policy orientations. Internet and the introduction of smartphones have further energised this process. It is understood that individuals, groups, or states use media for promoting certain agendas. However, the increasing role of disinformation and fake news disseminated through the newly developed tools of communication in state politics has not been studied extensively.[5] Whereas it can and must be studied in the relations between rival states. Such as the Indian propaganda war against Pakistan in the post-Pulwama attack in February 2019 and the revelation of India's disinformation network to discredit Pakistan, as discovered by the EU DisinfoLab on 9 December 2020.[6] Another example of the rival states resorting to disinformation and propaganda war is that of the Russian and US involvement in generating propaganda and disinformation. The Western media has the advantage of disseminating its narrative through its powerful

international media outlets such as CNBC, Reuters, The Guardian, New York Times, CNN, BBC, DW, and many more along with NGOs and various influential think tanks. To make the impact of these various information sources speedier, social media tools have been employed such as Twitter, Facebook, and Google. Such social media tools are strengthening countries' narratives against each other and the element of disinformation is also becoming a tool of statecraft for achieving certain interests against rivals.

With this massive impact of media on modern statecraft, the element of disinformation and propaganda can be considered a tool of war for one state and national security threat for another. Therefore, in today's world, states are guided to not only protect their geographical boundaries but also to defend against information warfare.[7] Within this context, this paper is aimed to focus on the usage of disinformation in modern statecraft. The paper analyses this phenomenon within the purview of realpolitik in which states or political leaders advance their interest in the given circumstances without any regard for morality or ethics.

Statecraft in the Age of Information Technology

In war, the truth must be protected by a bodyguard of lies.
– Winston Churchill[8]

Statecraft is the art of conducting state affairs within the country and with the outer world.[9] Foreign Policy is the major instrument used by the states to further their national interests across the border. Negotiations, international agreements, and laws help states in the peaceful conduct of their external relations. That said, the primary objective of statecraft is safeguarding and preserving the country's independence, security, and integrity. These core national interests provide legitimacy to the statecraft apparatus with regard to acting in a certain way. To achieve such objectives, information is added as another element of national power. It is now regarded as a key instrument or powerful tool in state-to-state relations and public

diplomacy.[10]

States have seemingly adapted to the new technological tools in policymaking. New terms are now used to describe external relations such as digital diplomacy. The tools for the acquisition of power, influence, and then wielding that power for the achievement of the countries national interests have also changed.

Recognising the importance of digital diplomacy, the US Department of State dedicated a special Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Digital Strategy who uses several official Twitter accounts in different languages including English, Arabic, Farsi, Spanish, etc. This "U.S. focus on digital networks and technologies to serve foreign policy goals has been referred to as 21st Century Statecraft."[11] In the words of the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "To meet these 21st century challenges, we need to use the tools, the new 21st century statecraft."[12]

In addition to mass media, social media has wildly become a force multiplier and an effective medium for strategic narratives and successful information operations in modern statecraft. Several developed countries, including Israel, the UK, and the US, have equipped their militaries with the usage of social media against the psychological warfare of adversaries and also to control narratives during war times. Among them, the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) was the first military that developed its social media force in the 2000s to strengthen itself against the "powerful information and psychological operations that Hezbollah had conducted during the 2006 Lebanon war and which contributed to Israel's defeat by creating a normative environment depicting Israel's operation as a failure."[13]

Role of Media in International Politics

In the 1990s, the concept of 'the CNN Effect' earned prominence in international politics. The term CNN effect was used for the overall impact of mainstream news media in foreign policy

decision making. Television coverage of various crises in different corners of the world had motivated the humanitarian intervention of the US and the United Nations.[14] In addition, in the 2000s, the advent of the internet and other networked technologies accelerated the information influence on global politics, especially on democratisation and terrorism, which came to be known as 'the Al-Jazeera Effect'.

It is important to understand how these media outlets promoted certain abovementioned agendas.[15] Media is not just effective in domestic politics but also plays a significant role in "building a global civil society, public sphere and political activism."[16] However, the importance of social media in politics is widely recognised in today's world given its undeniable role in bringing people from across the globe together. In internal politics, diplomatic ventures abroad and getting influence in international organisations, the social media tools are extensively used by state's leadership, business corporations, civil society organisations, and individual citizens. According to NATO Review, in 2009, there were 4.1 billion mobile phones in the world. In 2011, there were more than 5 billion, with 75 per cent of that growth in the developing world. Out of these users, 2 billion consumers are connected to the internet. The internet as a transnational infrastructure is not only a generational shift but represents the shift of mass media from print to broadcast and digital. While mass media played a gigantic role in the political developments of many states, social media proved way more effective as it reflected its efficacy and influence right from the beginning a decade ago in the 2011 Arab spring.[17] With the development of 5G, the quality and speed of information sharing have increased manifold. The sources of information have become a strategic industry with its ever-increasing role in every sphere of life.[18]

Digital media also played a significant role in the redistribution of power among different types of actors. The role of mass media can also be discussed in the context of the rise of global terrorism. The

battle of narratives uses similar instruments of communication both by states and non-state actors, such as terrorist groups like Al Qaeda, ISIS, and other criminal networks.

Alister Miskimmon introduces the idea of strategic narratives constituting a critical aspect concerning content production when it comes to false news and disinformation. Miskimmon describes strategic narratives as " means by which political actors attempt to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors."[19] Strategic narrative is a vital component in today's statecraft to establish and maintain influence in the world and the modern communication tools are the facilitators.

According to Joseph S. Nye, shaping others' preferences through persuasion without using coercion is soft power. That in view, strategic narratives can be considered as "soft power in the 21st Century."[20] In the interaction of soft power with hard power, which Nye calls smart power, modern communication tools can be the primary asset.[21] In this postmodernist age, "the battle of narratives has become the bedrock of international politics, and social media a powerful tool to fight this battle."[22] In this battle, "Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, or Instagram all have become strategic actors on their own."[23]

Another major, and perhaps the most crucial role of media in modern statecraft is its expanding influence on elections. In the 21st century, media is an essential component of the electoral process. Social media has further accelerated the interference of media in domestic politics.[24]

The Concepts of Disinformation and Fake News in International Relations

Disinformation can be defined as the spreading of false or misleading information deliberately to deceive with the perceived objectives and results. While the debate on disinformation is quite old,

it can be categorised into different kinds, depending on the desired objectives, the magnitude of its impact, and the actors involved. The involvement of state actors in disinformation against a rival state accords it an international aspect. Information manipulation has become a prominent instrument at domestic, bilateral, regional, and global levels. Ideational influence is believed to support material power.[25] Information warfare has two components, i.e., Perceptions and attacks on important information infrastructure. Using both against the rival are components of hybrid warfare. "Over the past two decades, state and non-state actors have increasingly used the internet to pursue political and military agendas, by combining traditional military operations with cyberattacks and online propaganda campaigns."[26] In military-strategic terms, this practice is known as foreign influence operations. The disinforming state aims to strategically benefit and ultimately increase its relative international influence against the other to achieve the desired objective without a material loss.[27]

Fake news is also defined as those "news stories that are false, fabricated, with no verifiable facts, sources or quotes."[28] According to the Ethical Journalism Network, fake news is not only misleading but also causes doubt about the 'verifiable facts'.[29] Council of Europe's Information Disorder Report of November 2017 calls the phenomenon an information disorder. They also included mal-information into the ecosystem of news which they defined as "based on reality but used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country."[30]

The issue of fake news is mostly studied under the domain of poor-quality journalism for which different causes and remedies are suggested.[31] However, disinformation is widely discussed not just in media studies is inherently a significant part of the evolving political discourses in the wake of such maligned dissemination. Some experts also consider it as a deliberate strategy of deceit. Propaganda can be differentiated from disinformation as it is used mostly to persuade

internal masses with mixed objectives and unclear results. That is the reason that propaganda is not considered as harmful as disinformation. However, it must be noted that disinformation is employed with a clear objective and intended results of achieving an advantage over the adversary even without engaging in a formal armed conflict and without wasting any material resources. Disinformation can be considered more lethal in modern statecraft because it is used as a stab in the back tactic by the rival country.[32]

Historically, is rife with various examples of deception, disinformation, and propaganda in interstate politics. After the Second World War, the United Kingdom responded to Soviet Union's propaganda by setting up the Foreign Information Research Department (IRD) in 1948. Deception can be different from lies or fake news but, according to the expert Gill Bennett, "In military context its meaning can be positive, even celebratory."[33] Whereas disinformation constitutes deception. Deception has different forms like "subterfuge, media manipulation and decoy tactics, lies and disinformation."[34] Some of the aforesaid were also used during Operation Fortitude to deceive Hitler in World War II and Operation Desert Deception in the First Gulf War.

Moreover, disinformation is an ancient concept. Thucydides discovered the impact of information manipulation and distorting facts on "the political polarisation on truth and democracy; Plato thought it was fine for rulers to lie to the populace in the interests of public safety and state security. Both agreed that the intention of those disseminating the information makes a difference."[35]

Another important example explains the interstate interference and manipulation to sabotage the election results. Zinoviev's letter in this regard was "a classic piece of disinformation. Probably forged, this document was passed through secret service channels and leaked to right-wing interests during the British General Election campaign of 1924 to damage the Labour Party."[36]

These historical instances illustrate the practice of disinformation in the past. The technological advancements in the current times have only added to the tools and tactics of spreading fake news and disinformation. Concerning as it is, with the current communication tools and growing political instabilities across regions,[37] disinformation is taking the form of war without borders among rival countries.

Disinformation and Fake News as Unrestricted Warfare

According to André W.M. Gerrits, manipulation of information is becoming a "strategic foreign policy toolkit of a great deal of governments, at bilateral, regional and global levels."[38] According to Jarred Prier, the evolution of internet technology supplemented by expanding social media platforms has become a tool of modern warfare. "Social media creates a point of injection for propaganda and has become the nexus of information operations and cyber warfare."[39] Social media by changing the traditional tailorable form of communication[40] made it easy for state entities, political forces, and extremist outfits to shape perceptions for their desired objectives.

The term 'fake news' became popular in the wake of the election victory of the United States President Donald Trump. Hence, Western media's debate over fake news is more about the interference in President Donald Trump's election campaign 2016. Mostly, it is referred to as a 'new Cold War media strategy' designed to undermine the domestic political processes of the Western democracies.

The debate revolves around Russian President Vladimir Putin who, the Trump government believes waged an information war against the Western democracies by disrupting their 'information infrastructure'. The rise of 'right-wing political groups' and the growing 'anti-globalisation sentiments' are also accorded with Russian disinformation.[41] Western experts trace Russia's involvement in events and accusations pertaining to them predating Trump's election to

polarise Western societies. This was broadly aimed at displacing "the liberal internationalist conception of world order based on globalization and freedom of the world media."[42]

The US and Europe accuse Kremlin of creating fake news, especially after its annexation of Crimea in 2014 to harm the neighbouring states. "For some observers, the Russian state is hell-bent on civilizational conflict – determined to weaken western states (and the EU) by generating fear, mistrust and schism using so-called 'wedge issues' including the status of minority communities, LGBT rights and immigration."[43] The US report gives the example of a fake story of Russian Channel One on 12 July 2014. According to the story, there is a woman who claims about the torture of a three-year-old boy to death and the dragging of his mother to the back of a tank by a squad of Ukrainian soldiers near the Russian border. However, an investigation into the story by an independent Russian journalist revealed no evidence of such an occurrence. This report suggests that the story was doctored and it was reported ahead of leading the way for Russian troops to capture Crimea.[44]

Apart from the Cold War debate in which the Soviet Union was blamed for disinformation, in later history, liberal democratic states not only violated various international norms but also used lies for the attainment of certain defined motives. The US and Britain lied to its public about the intended attack by Iraq with the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) within 45 minutes.[45]

Moreover, a diplomatic spat started between China and Australia over China's foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian's Twitter post. The spokesperson posted the picture of an Australian soldier holding a bloodied knife to the throat of an Afghan child on 30 November 2020. Australia protested over the post but China refused to apologise amidst the then ongoing tensions in trade relations between the two countries. Chine did provide explanations that the photo described the reality narrated in Australia's investigative war

crimes report. "The United States called China's use of the digitally manipulated image a "new low" in disinformation."[46]

False and fabricated audio and videos are considered the most dreadful content in terms of interstate relations. It is argued that a picture cannot be believed easily as much as a video or an audio recording. An article in the Foreign Affairs pointed out the consequences associated with fake videos and audios for states with fragile and hostile relations in the Middle East, such as Iran and Israel.[47]

Western media's emphasis on the human rights violations in Xinjiang, the media coverage of Taiwan elections in 2020, and the Hong Kong protests of 2019 with the anti-communist party narrative was declared as propaganda war against China by the Chinese government. Similarly, the western media also accused China of its propaganda war and disinformation. Some scholars like Huang put China and Russia in the same basket when it comes to destabilising democracies and weakening the governance in the West "by sowing doubts and chaos in its society, undermining its self-confidence, and increasing polarization and disunity."[48] Huang, who is a Taiwanese citizen and a strong supporter of the democratic rule in the island, highlighted that the Chinese government was employing various tactics including disinformation to create disunity by polarising the Taiwanese society. The study also indicates that China, along with other social, political, and economic tools, manipulated the weaknesses in Taiwan's information sector. That said, the author also mentions the success of Taiwan's government to counter the Chinese disinformation in its 2020 election.[49] Such views and studies support the Western narrative against the Chinese Communist Party. However, the unfolding reality is contrary to what it looks like. "The balance of power has been shifting in Beijing's favour in important areas of US-Chinese competition, such as the Taiwan Strait and the struggle over global telecommunications networks."[50] China's high-tech company

Huawei also accused the US of spreading misinformation about its products.[51]

The US is very critical of what it refers to as the triad of disinformation, i.e., China, Iran, and Russia. "The coronavirus pandemic has brought authoritarian narrative convergence against the United States to new heights,"[52] according to Cint Watts. Furthermore, the West criticised China for earning praises for its aid to the affected countries of a pandemic for which the US trade war was considered a barrier. Russia was also criticised by the US for "promoting martial law in different countries, generating class warfare, and takeover of foreign governments."[53] Iran was criticised for considering the US sanctions as a reason for its "inadequate response to coronavirus pandemic while also suggesting that an Israeli-U.S. partnership might have created the virus."[54]

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the war of propaganda further intensified between China and the US. US President Donald Trump called it a Chinese Virus, which he referred to as a slip of tongue later. But the western media criticised the Chinese political system for censoring the news of the spread of the virus.[55] Such a narrative was rebutted by China through its media and diplomatic sources. According to some analysts, this criticism over China for controlling the virus harmed its hard-earned international image for its peaceful economic rise. The World Health Organisation (WHO) was also alarmed by such interstate propaganda warfare over the source and spread of the virus. Some conspiracy theorists, without any strong evidence, called it a human-made virus developed in a lab; a claim which was denied by the scientists.[56] Moreover, the WHO was also appalled by the misinformation on the cure and spread of the virus circulating on various social media sources. WHO issued a notice to all nations to report any kind of misinformation that will be detrimental to the control of pandemics. "There seems to be barely an area left untouched by disinformation in relation to the COVID-19

crisis, ranging from the origin of the coronavirus, through to unproven prevention and 'cures', and encompassing responses by governments, companies, celebrities and others,"[57] said Guy Berger, a Director at UNESCO.

Fake News and Disinformation in South Asian Politics

The role of false/fake news in the domestic politics of many countries in South Asia can be assessed through the Facebook closure of fake accounts. Facebook shut down many leading news outlets and fake personal accounts just ahead of the elections in Bangladesh on December 20 2018. Similarly, Twitter also closed around 15 accounts. Both social networks blamed state-sponsored actors for irresponsible information sharing. State-sponsored fake news in Bangladesh was aimed at maligning the opposition. According to the head of Facebook's cybersecurity policy Nathaniel Gleicher, the investigation proved that individuals from the Bangladesh government were involved in the activity.[58]

The fake news problem is widely recognised in India given the growing consumption of WhatsApp. In 2013, before the elections of 2014, there was a fake video of a lynching spread through WhatsApp in the town of Muzaffarnagar, which led to Hindu-Muslim riots. On another occasion, in the Indian state of Assam, fake news about the involvement of foreigners in the abduction of children instigated violence against innocent people in July 2018.[59] Moreover, to discredit other political parties, a massive disinformation campaign was launched on WhatsApp before the Indian elections in 2019.[60]

Facebook was criticised for its contribution to sectarian and intra-communal violence in Sri Lanka and Myanmar. In response, Facebook began working towards the removal of deliberately inciting content from several accounts.[61]

In South Asian politics, the classic example of disinformation in interstate rivalry is that of India and Pakistan. Kashmir conflict is central

to the rivalry between India and Pakistan but the opposing national identities and the antagonistic strategic culture has also deepened the mistrust. Fundamentally, the conflict between the two countries is both territorial and ideological. The opposing national narratives have already played a damaging role in furthering animosity between India and Pakistan. Disinformation and fake news, in this lieu, has added much fuel by shaping and reshaping antagonistic public opinions in both countries.

Despite tense relations between India and Pakistan since 2014, a media war emerged as a prominent feature in their conduct of relations. In such an environment, local political forces with conservative and more hawkish views against the enemy gain more support from the public. After the two terms in government, the Indian National Congress was defeated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) based on his two strong slogans. He appealed to the public through his aggressive economic agenda and his approach towards Pakistan in the post-Mumbai attack scenario.

Indian public attached strong expectations to the Modi-led government, particularly with regards to Pakistan. The terrorist attacks in Pathankot and Uri in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) in 2016 tested Modi's election rhetoric and his strong opposition to the Congress party. To satisfy public expectations, India, under Modi, resorted to fake claims. As an all-out war is not possible with Pakistan due to nuclear deterrence, media and disinformation war has substantially benefitted BJP in its five-year rule so far.

India blamed the attack on Pakistan without any credible evidence. It claimed surgical strikes inside Pakistan administered Kashmir with much media hype on 29 September 2016, with the desired results of destroying terrorist sanctuaries. Pakistan strongly denied any such strikes or damages to any kind of infrastructure.[62]

To add weightage to its claims, Modi while speaking to the Indian diaspora in London made another fake claim contending that India had informed Pakistan about the military action before announcing it to the media. He justified the move, saying that an attack on Indian soldiers deserved such a response.[63] Even though Pakistan, time and again, denied all these claims, an insight into how the Indian government continued to build this narrative with India as the dominant power while relying on media resources, is critical to this study.

Close to another term election in India in 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi got another opportunity to play the Pakistan card to bag votes. India blamed Pakistan without any credible evidence for the terrorist attack in Pulwama in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) on 14 February 2019 in which 40 security persons were killed. India also conducted an airstrike inside Pakistan territory in Balakot on 26 February as revenge for the Pulwama attack claiming to have killed 300 persons in Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) camp.[64] The media hype for this occurrence was much louder in India. In a tit-for-tat move, Pakistani media was equally responsive in shunning down every misinformation propagated from the other end of the border. . Pakistan once again rejected Indian claims of destroying any such facility. In its formal denial of any such incident taking place on its soil, the Pakistani government contended that Indian planes actually 'intruded' inside Pakistani territory but the attempt of the airstrike was foiled by the Pakistan Air Force. "Under forced hasty withdrawal aircrafts released payload which had free fall in open area. No infrastructure got hit, no casualties," Major General Asif Ghafoor, the then DG ISPR mentioned in his tweet.[65] Some independent media groups such as Reuters came up with the facts that uninhabited areas were hit with payloads. By providing satellite images of the alleged JeM facility, it was proved that the area stood unharmed.[66]

Pakistan's response through airstrikes two days later started a new saga of fake claims. Pakistan shot down two Indian planes and captured a pilot in a dogfight. India claimed that it shot down Pakistan's F-16 fighter jet. No proof was found of such an incident.[67] This claim from India was aimed to create controversy on the issue of F-16 which Pakistan purchased from the US in the lieu of countering terrorism. However, this attempt failed too as the US refused to take any position on India's complaint against Pakistan by arguing that they were closely following the situation.[68]

According to Reuters, "with India and Pakistan standing on the brink of war several false videos, pictures and messages circulated widely on social media, sparking anger and heightening tension in both countries."[69]The author Akash Sriram called the framing of these events by media in both countries 'the war of words'. The impact of the media content and popular statements of leaders in both countries seemingly produced the desired results in each country.[70]

Although India also accused Pakistan of using 'social media platforms' to create fake news. India's Permanent Mission to the United Nations "quoted a report by the Stanford Internet Observatory that as many as 103 Facebook Pages, 78 Groups, 453 accounts, and 107 Instagram accounts were taken down on August 31, 2020, for engaging in 'coordinated inauthentic behaviour'."[71]Another small instance of fake news occurred in October 2020, which was an explosion after a gas leak in Karachi and Indian media reported it as a civil war situation. "A fake video circulating on Twitter even claimed to show some of the alleged unrest. In reality, none of it was true.[72]

The discovery of a big disinformation network active since 2005, by the European Union DisinfoLab was a watershed moment for accentuating the threat of disinformation warfare. In this investigation, 750 media accounts were identified operating in 116 countries. In its forward note, the report asserts that the researchers engaged with the task were at first "[….] astonished by the multiplication of layers of

fake, something we had never encountered in other investigations"[73] which they named as 'Indian Chronicles'. This network had "resurrected dead media, dead think-tanks and NGOs, as well as dead people. The actors behind this operation highjacked the names of other people and institutions, tried to impersonate regular media and press agencies such as the EU Observer, the Economist and Voice of America, used the letterhead of the European Parliament, registered websites under avatars with fake phone numbers, provided fake addresses to the United Nations, and created publishing companies to print books of the think-tanks they owned."[74] This investigation found the biggest chunk out of this network as 265 fake media in 65 countries were found to be active against Pakistan — 'reproducing negative content about Pakistan online'. The report reveals that the network was created by the same 'malicious actors who were the architect of the EP Today'. EP was a fake magazine of the European Parliament in Brussels from 2006 which actively served as a platform for the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and other politicians to express their views in favour of the Indian interests and against those of Pakistan.[75] The main target of this disinformation network was aimed at changing perceptions against Pakistan on influential forums.

It is noteworthy that India's disinformation campaign not only shaped negative perceptions regarding the general image of Pakistan but also hampered Pakistan's economic development. Additionally, the narratives created in the lieu of this organised campaign had a direct negative impact on Pakistan's attempts for pursuing the case of Indian occupied Kashmir in the UN. The 9/11 bombings provided India with an opportunity to wrongly project the Kashmir freedom struggle as terrorism. Pakistan's soft image that it had built for itself over the years was distorted. Ironically, based on Pakistan's frontline role in the US-led war on terror, India managed to project Pakistan as a 'dangerous' place. Whilst, in reality, Pakistan's decision to engage with

the Americans on Afghan soil had some reckless consequences for the country to bear at home. The phrase 'haven for terrorists' resonated with the US. For many years, the US demanded of Pakistan 'to do more'. It tried to neutralise the Kashmir issue both on the domestic ground and internationally. Such damaging perceptions disenfranchised Pakistan's efforts for achieving its national development goals on various fronts.

In recent times, India has shifted its focus of disinformation and propaganda towards the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It has seemingly already joined the bandwagon of the Western propaganda against China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), perhaps to cater to its historical tussle with the rising power. By referring to the multi-billion dollar project as a 'debt trap for South Asian countries' India has managed to malign the positive aspects of CPEC for developing countries. India spread the narrative that CPEC passes through parts of the disputed territory which impinge on Indian sovereignty.[76] The premise of such a narrative can perhaps be to question the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the CPEC project and also to justify its hardening position on the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan. Such narratives also serve the Indian government's purpose to divert the Indian public's attention from the prospects of the economic development of Pakistan through CPEC. Indian newspapers particularly highlight the chances of a debt trap crisis for Pakistan and the problems of slowdown of some projects in CPEC or the delays in the funds' release from China for a particular project.[77] Overall, these highlights are aimed to build a negative narrative against Pakistan's strategic partnership with China.

Moral and Ethical Dimensions of Fake News in Modern Statecraft

According to realist thinkers, it is essential to have a framework for bringing ethical questions into contact with the real situation. The debate between moral reasoning and politics is complicated. It is

believed that leaders exercise little control over large events of world history and politics. According to Robert H. Jackson, the situational understanding of international ethics becomes the moral equivalent of Bismarck's definition of politics as the "art of the possible".[78] Bismarck within the classical school was a situational ethicist who, like the classical school of European diplomacy itself, joined idealism and realism in a 'nervous and tentative embrace'.[79]

Cathal J. Nolan argues that lying is, at times, a requisite of diplomacy even for democracy. He supports this assertion with the example of Franklin D. Roosevelt's defensible deceit of its public during World War II. He further contends that there are occasions in state affairs that render a national leader morally obligated to lie to its public beyond justification.[80] According to Darwinian struggle, nations could expect to cling to existence only by embracing Realpolitik.[81]

John Mearsheimer believed that lying within a state is different from the lies a state uses for its national interests. The international system does not have any sovereign authority to protect one state against another. Therefore, lies in inter-state relations are different from what occurs within a state. Unlike the international system, the higher authority is the state itself to which individuals can turn for protection.[82]

It is noteworthy that international disinformation campaigns are mostly intended against the adversary than the friendly countries. However, international anarchy does not mean that disinformation can and will only harm the targeted state. That said, disinformation does have the potential to shake up the norms and damage the trust for cooperation on certain matters. Although the gains from the distortion of facts through waging disinformation campaigns can be different in domestic politics. But in international relations, the objective of such disinformation campaigns against the enemy country is mostly to induce favourable changes or prevent unfavourable changes in the behaviour of the others.

The incident of the Pulwama attack serves as a classic instance of the lies for domestic political gains. The incident is believed to have turned the election results in favour of Narendra Modi who seemed vulnerable after failing on the economic progress in the first term and losing three state elections to the Congress party just before the national elections.[83] Through fake claims against Pakistan Modi constructed a national security reason and projected the impression that only his party dares to evade any future threats to India, particularly from Pakistan. During the Ladakh military standoff with China, even after losing a territory, Indian leadership used lies to avoid public criticism and began referring to the stalemate in dialogue as an achievement.[84] By aptly manipulating the media and state resources, India managed to portray its significant loss as a meaningful and strategically beneficial win.

However, India's disinformation campaign uncovered by the EU DisinfoLab comes under the domain of international disinformation campaign and it reveals India's attempt to induce favourable gains in its objective against Pakistan in international forums over the issue of Kashmir by maligning its image.

Although international disinformation campaigns undermine international trust and cooperation, the realist approach justifies the acts of states under the given circumstances. The questions of ethics and morality are overlooked by the state under the compulsions of survival and the quest for preserving national interests. The given circumstances provide the leaders with reasons to employ lies in the statecraft to achieve the set national interests. According to the realist approach, wartime statecraft entails that leaders may be morally obliged to lie. Propaganda and disinformation as a military strategy are used to deceive the enemy. "Releasing misleading or false information, maintain extreme secrecy and other such wartime deceits are generally accepted by the vast majority of its citizens."[85]

The ethical question for disinformation in the national interest of the state is understandable in those countries where it is easier to separate the national interest from the politician's political interests.

Given the above theoretical explanations from the realist school of thought, Modi's war hysteria and then the hype over retaliation enabled him to avoid an all-out war with Pakistan and also to earn praises for his heroic acts or to bag more votes. Needless to say that it was not in the national interest of India because of its status as a nuclear state. This was the realpolitik in which the means for achieving the desired objective were fake claims and media propaganda.

Conclusion

Statecraft has its requisites in this postmodernist age. The utilisation of modern communication platforms for conducting state affairs is one of them. The scholarly debate over fake news and disinformation in the context of statecraft is evolving. However, the role of disinformation in state affairs sheds light on the deliberate usage of lies by leaders for internal political gains and in the conduct of foreign relations. Disinformation or lies in favour of the state's national interests are an accepted norm according to the realist approach. The situational analysis of statecraft also adheres to this fact.

Research proves that media plays a crucial role in international politics. In this age of digital diplomacy, states are not the only influencers. Social media networks have revolutionised the conduct of state affairs. The rise of new forms of journalistic practices and the involvement of many actors in interpreting the daily developments is also causing a rapid decline in public trust in traditional journalism.[86]

Shaping and reshaping opinions and interpretation of developments through widespread tools of communication are posing new security challenges to states. In the US and Europe, fake news and disinformation is attributed to their rivalry with Russia. However, media in South Asia has highlighted more localised

consequences of fake news such as communal violence, etc. However, the state-sponsored lies and disinformation can be associated with modern statecraft in South Asia as well.

In South Asia, the issue of fake news predominantly exists in internal politics. However, in the case of India and Pakistan, the issue encompasses both, domestic politics and interstate relations between the two countries. Blaming Pakistan for the terrorist attacks without credible evidence to exert pressure on Pakistan can also be cited as an instance of statecraft lies. The strategic objective of India behind such an attitude is to change the narrative over Kashmir and also to discredit international support and perception over the resolution of the Kashmir dispute. In this regard, the EU DisinfoLab's report on India's disinformation network is a case in point.

Although the results of staging fake surgical strikes with Pakistan might have helped India in achieving domestic political gains, the issue of 'Deep fake'(audio and video manipulation) can have lethal consequences for the two nuclear-armed countries. The study proves that leaders while using lies for their selfish political gains can be dangerous in the long run. In such conditions, to avoid any misunderstanding both India and Pakistan need to work on media CBMs.

According to Gill Bennett, all countries need to be on the lookout to mitigate the negative effects of misinformation. Bennet suggests that "defence against disinformation means understanding what might happen if information is compromised, collaborating with others to identify the risk and working together to mitigate it."[87] Although the realist perspective justifies the act of lying for the sake of the state's national interests, as Bennet pointed out, the relentlessness in the creation and consumption of disinformation would have dire consequences for the individual and collective security of the world. Such as the spread of nuclear technology for defence purposes has been banned because of its consequences for the entire world,

similarly, compromising on the truth can lead to gruesome consequences. Therefore, there must be internationally binding principles on discouraging all forms of disinformation in domestic and international affairs.

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INDIA: THE CHANGING SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND REGIONAL STABILITY

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Abstract

The Sino-Indian border clash in summer 2020 had a serious impact on India's security discourse, casting a significant change in New Delhi's strategic calculus. To secure its national interests in an unbalanced strategic environment, India sought US support. The US, on its part, orchestrated practical engagement with its alliance partners in Asia to counter China's assertiveness in the region. Its relationship with India has ever since entered into a new phase of cooperation, where the policies of both countries towards Beijing converge on mutual points of interest. This strategic partnership between the two countries, particularly following border clashes, had an impact on regional equilibrium as well. The decades-old structure of conflict and cooperation and the embedded network of bilateral relationships in the region began to alter. The complex trajectory of the triangular relationship between the US, China, and India emerged as a challenge for Pakistan considering its role as Beijing's frontline partner. Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka having balanced China and India, re-oriented their focus toward China and India/US. The Indo-US partnership, however, has its limits since there is a fundamental difference in both states' approaches to push back China's assertiveness. India, in its renewed role, is all set to strengthen its strategic depth in bordering areas. The US expects India to play an active role in Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) in which New Delhi is incapacitated in terms of both military and technology. Given the aforementioned, the apparent

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convergence of interests seems rather short-lived. Nevertheless, multi-sectoral cooperation has the potential to grow.

Introduction

Balancing a powerful entity in the international system has always been central to the realist school of thought. In an anarchic and imbalanced security environment, every state seeks to ensure its security, either through forming new alliances or by joining existing power poles, depending upon their capability and the existing world order. For instance, in a bipolar system, major powers particularly focus on internal military buildups. In a multipolar system, however, states usually form counterbalancing alliances.[1] This balancing mechanism or equilibrium of power manages the co-existence of states in international and regional settings.

Border clashes between India and China have continued to influence New Delhi's security asymmetries. While exploiting its security umbrella, New Delhi persuades, and often, forces small states of the region to take its side. Unlike China, India's geographical proximity with smaller South Asian states provides New Delhi with an opportunity to swiftly execute its strategies. The same situation seems to prevail following the border clashes. The border conflict cannot be viewed in isolation or as a localised border dispute between China and India. It appears to be a part of a larger strategic game in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. Thereby, South Asia is now entering into a new phase of conflict and cooperation wherein the increasing Indo-US partnership has a pivotal role to play.

In line with the aforementioned, this paper attempts to link the differing outcomes of the previous balancing acts with the contestations from the present day to deliberate on two striking factors, i.e., the nature and the structure of change that has been

taking place and how it provokes India to rebalance the emerging security environment in South Asia as well as in the Indo-Pacific Ocean.

The paper seeks to explore the changes and breakthroughs that have occurred since the Indo-US strategic partnership was cinched following the civil-nuclear deal between the two countries in 2005. It further aims to elaborate on how the US-India partnership in the post-Sino-Indian military face-off has the potential to disturb the regional equilibrium and the impacts that such disturbance might have on the bilateral and multilateral relationships of South Asian states. Additionally, the paper also focuses on the response of the South Asian states towards the said emerging developments. Lastly, the paper aims to explore the spillover effects of conflict escalation between India and Pakistan, between China and the US, and between China and India.

This paper follows an interpretative approach to answer the above questions. In doing so, data has been obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consulted for this paper include statements, excerpts of speeches, official websites and social media accounts, published interviews, and discussions from open sources. The secondary data has been obtained from reports, articles, books, newsletters, and magazines. The paper attempts to infer different perspectives through a detailed analysis of the data. In doing so, it combines those perspectives to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of the balance of power in South Asia, China's increasing role, and the US-India nexus in addition to its impacts on regional stability. Central to the study is the theory of balance of power that provides the conceptual framework for analysis.

Indian Balancing Acts: Historical Background

In South Asia, Indian dominance has always been a concern for small states of the region. Right after the partition of the subcontinent, Pakistan's partnership with the US, arguably, counterbalanced Indian

assertiveness. However, New Delhi's big-brother behaviour with its immediate neighbours went unchecked as the US, as well as the Soviet Union, were least interested in India's neighbourhood policy. Pakistan also failed to leverage the US role in subduing India's influence in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. India's hefty presence in the aforementioned states as well as the geographical barrier kept Pakistan at bay.

Regional equilibrium right after the independence was mostly shaped in view of Pakistan's pro-West approach rooted in maximising its security against New Delhi and India's non-alignment policy rooted in strengthening its position in the immediate neighbouring states. This worked well until the Chinese annexation of Tibet in 1950. Later, the Sino-Indian war in 1962 sensitised Indian strategic thinking. Pakistan being China's close counterpart and US ally had gained immense importance in the region. Pakistan's role in the Sino-US rapprochement further strengthened its position. India desperately sought to rebalance the then-emerging situation. New Delhi's friendship with the Soviet Union to maintain a formidable military profile was an obvious outcome. It was a significant shift in India's position during the cold war era.

Although approaching the Soviet Union was an unhappy development, the US turned a blind eye towards it primarily because the US did not wish to lose India, a big market in the region and also because the US focus was more on Afghanistan to contain Soviet influence, wherein Pak-China cooperation was integral. It was not until the nuclear tests in 1974, that a complete estrangement between the US and India took place. India's refusal to allow International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect nuclear facilities further deteriorated its relations with the US.

India's foreign policy vis-à-vis its neighbours, particularly after the 1962 Sino-Indian war, became more interventionist. With the Soviet backing in terms of arms supply, New Delhi was able to

manoeuvre Dhaka's war of liberation that led to the dismemberment of Pakistan. Nepal and Bhutan also faced rapid Indianisation of their respective militaries and economies. Being small and landlocked, both countries remained vulnerable to Indian strategic manoeuvrings. Indian readiness to sign the Friendship Treaty with Nepal in 1950 was nothing but an effort to enter Nepal's strategic locations. The Indian forces, since the 1962 war with China, are still stationed at the high altitude of Nepal's Kalapani area. In the case of Bangladesh, Indian support to Shanti Bahini in 1976, a secessionist movement in Chittagong Hills Tracks, was targeted at dismembering the nascent state. Likewise, India also supported Tamil rebel groups to bring Sri Lankan government under its sway. India's neighbourhood policy, in sum, has been exploitative and interventionist.

China's increasing footprints in South Asia, however, forced India to overhaul its foreign policy. From neighbours to 'neighbourhood first' was an apparent shift seen in New Delhi's bilateral relationships. However, this policy failed to deliver the desired outputs. More recently, Bangladesh's entry into China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) despite Indian pressure, Sri Lanka's decision to put India- and Japan-sponsored projects at the back burner, and most importantly the bold step of documenting the territorial conflict with India by the Parliament of Nepal, have exposed the deep-rooted mistrust between New Delhi and its neighbours. Modi's extremist policies have played a decisive role in it.

The enactment of the 'Citizenship Amendment Act' for instance, has not only complicated its relations with Bangladesh but has also dented India's own Neighbourhood First policy. Rahul Gandhi, former President of the Indian National Congress (INC) while expressing his dismay over the deteriorating situation said:

> Modi has destroyed the web of relationships that Congress built and nurtured over several decades. Living in a neighbourhood with no friends is dangerous.[2]

Moreover, the revocation of Article 370 of its own constitution which protects the autonomous status of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), further deteriorated New Delhi's relations with both, Pakistan and China.

In the given situation, the border clashes in June 2020 between India and China at Ladakh in which more than a dozen Indian soldiers were reportedly killed, has pushed New Delhi to a defensive position. With the deployment of 'an unprecedented number of soldiers, armoured columns, missiles, air assets, as well as other weapons and platforms along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), both India and China were all set for a major confrontation.[3] There have been sporadic flare-ups along the LAC for quite a long time, but last year's military assertion in Ladakh in the backdrop of the revocation of Kashmir's special status and cartographic manoeuvring of the Kalapani region along the India-Nepal border has served as an effective deterrent against New Delhi's hawkish moves. However, the incident has reversed the progress achieved in concluding India-China agreements since the 1990s to maintain peace along the LAC.

Post-Ladakh Regional Environment

Following Chinese strategic supremacy in its border conflict with India, Beijing's relations with India's 'neighbourhood first' countries have come under the spotlight again. In this imbalanced environment, New Delhi is desperate to regain its lost prestige. India is aggressively following a single-point agenda, that is, countering Chinese influence in its neighbouring countries as well as in the Indo-Pacific Ocean to sabotage bilateral or multilateral cooperation with Beijing. For this reason, New Delhi is looking for enhanced cooperation with the US. The following section briefly discusses the tug of war between India and China in the aftermath of the military standoff at Ladakh.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is an important country for India. Both countries have maintained a close relationship since 1971. Against the backdrop of reverberating geopolitical dimensions of South Asia, India began ramping up its relations with Dhaka to neutralise Chinese influence. In late December 2020, India and Bangladesh signed a framework of understanding on cooperation in the hydrocarbon sector. The initiative was lauded by the US State Department. Nevertheless, India's relationships with Dhaka remained on the lowest ebb following the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act which targeted a large number of migrant Muslims from Bangladesh. This has seriously undermined people-to-people contact between the two countries.

India is cooperating with Sheikh Hasina's government on several development initiatives. Recently, it sent 1.2 million doses of the Covid vaccine as a goodwill gesture, but the situation did not improve significantly. Arguably, Modi's recent visit to Bangladesh to celebrate 50 years of bilateral friendship was not as welcoming as expected. The visit set off violent protests in the country that claimed at least 12 lives and left dozens injured. The demonstrators vehemently criticised Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for inviting Modi who is a hardcore anti-Muslim.[4] The US is equally concerned with this situation as it seeks India's active role in reaching out to Bangladesh considering it as an important country in the Indo-Pacific region.

On the other hand, China, right after a month of border clashes, increased tariff-free export facilities for the Least Developed Countries in which Bangladesh was a major beneficiary. With the extended list, Dhaka can now export additional 5,161 products to China and the total number has reached 8,256. China has also offered sister-city alliances with Bangladesh's six cities to extend technical and financial support to tackle the Covid and other diseases and also to develop them like Chinese cities. Dhaka is also a member of China's BRI initiative and several projects between the two are in the pipeline.

China has been supporting Bangladesh in building infrastructure, transportation, energy and electricity, telecommunications, and other fields.

Sri Lanka

Rajapaksa regime in Sri Lanka has traditional ties with China. This puts India in a position where it is aggressively countering China and Pakistan's influence in the region. After border clashes at Ladakh, New Delhi rushed to get assurance from Sri Lanka for any actions that could potentially jeopardise New Delhi's strategic interests. Jayanath Colombage, Sri Lanka's Foreign Secretary, in an interview while addressing New Delhi's concerns assured that Colombo will adopt an 'India first approach' as the key to strategic security.[5]

India is also concerned about whether India, Japan, and US-sponsored projects would keep their momentum under the pro-Chinese regime or not. Statistics and figures in this regard reveal that what China has offered to many littoral states in Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is much bigger than what IMF and other developed countries have lent them so far. Recently, Sri Lanka has decided to scrap the East Container Terminal (ECT) project, which was supposed to be run jointly by India and Japan.[6] This has added to New Delhi's worries.

Nepal

Before the border incident, the Indian cartographic manoeuvring of the Kalapani region in 2019 renewed an old controversy between Kathmandu and New Delhi. India released its updated map that showed the Kalapani region as its part. The map also showed IIOJK and Ladakh as its Union Territories. Nepal, on its part, updated its map by including Limpiadhura, Kalapani, and Lipulekh and subsequently got it approved by its parliament. This came as a surprise for India since Nepal has always been under Indian influence. New Delhi strongly believed that Nepal took this bold step with support from China.

Nepal's firm stance on the Kalapani region heightened Indian security concerns since the Kalapani region serves as a buffer between China and India. Also, the area is said to be India's strategic depth. Amidst the uproar, New Delhi advanced its forces along the LAC that resulted in the bitter clash in the Galwan valley of Ladakh, killing a dozen soldiers. After the border clashes, the 'India-locked' Nepal is under immense pressure from New Delhi. It has further consolidated its position in the Kalapani region. China, on the other hand, is determined to safeguard its vital interests in the Tibetan and adjacent areas. Thus, Nepal being in the middle of ongoing and perhaps unending India-China border rifts is surviving through balancing its relationship with both sides.

In sum, the post-Ladakh situation has established a clear divide between India and China, wherein the smaller states, particularly Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal, are struggling to overcome binary constraints. The US is equally concerned about China's rise in the region. This concern has heightened after the border clashes since Washington believes that New Delhi's downfall would eventually endanger its long-term geo-strategic and geo-economic interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Many American analysts mark China's actions in Ladakh as "the end of Beijing's foreign policy restrain in which the world got first sense of what a truly assertive Chinese foreign policy looks like."[7] Thus, to counter China's rise, the new Biden administration has renewed its partnership with India.

In late October 2020, India and the US inked the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA). This defence cooperation has provided India access to American geo-spatial intelligence that will enhance the accuracy of Indian missiles and drones. The underlying rationale here appears to be the development of an inter-operability between the US and Indian forces and the exchange of sensitive and classified information.[8] Additionally, the US is also reviving its relations with alliance partners in the Indo-Pacific

region. The recent Quad Virtual Summit in this regard manifests Washington's resolve to handle common threats posed by China besides climate change, cyber technology, and terrorism in maritime domains.

Apart from taking resounding measures to counter the Chinese threat, India has launched disinformation warfare to discredit the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and, the Pak-China relationship. Debt trap, trojan virus, the Chinese way of colonising are a few examples of distorted narratives that India and the like-minded states continue to spread. Pakistan, being China's close ally, also faces a targeted disinformation war aimed at sabotaging its image abroad by projecting the latter as an 'unsafe country'. New Delhi is also lobbying to push Pakistan onto the blacklist at Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Moreover, the Pak-China relationship, particularly the CPEC have become a potential target of Indian propaganda. While doing so, India is actually following an approach similar to that of Israel to keep engaging the US in the region by exaggerating its role as a counterweight to China's dominance.

These narratives serve as pressure points for both China and Pakistan. Chinese treatment of Uyghurs, the question of Taiwan's independence, human rights abuses in Tibet, and the impact of Chinese projects on climate change are once again in the limelight. Similarly, Pakistan is under pressure to deal with terror financing despite the systematic arrests of the top leadership of several banned outfits. Moreover, Pakistan's effective role in Afghanistan has been made rather questionable. These narratives have a deep impact on the key stakeholders in China-led projects as well, making it difficult for them to strike a balance between their economic prosperity and security. This, in addition to other factors, continues to narrow the chances of economic integration in the region.

In the present situation, it is difficult to decide whether India will be successful in neutralising Chinese impact in the region or not. Nevertheless, New Delhi's offensive approach has significantly altered the contours of regional peace.

Conclusion

Indian influence on the smaller states of the region has largely been compromised with the rise of China in the region. India's quest to neutralise Chinese influence in the region has resulted in a renewed Indo-US partnership. Washington, while acknowledging India's role in its Indo-Pacific strategy, has vowed a meaningful working relationship with the latter to balance China's influence. The US is seeking to further operationalise India's "major defence partner status."[9] In this partnership, however, India's prime focus is the security of its borders and protection of its interests in the neighbouring states. Realising its potential, India needs US support for military modernisation. New Delhi is also seeking financial assistance to offer its neighbouring states a 'Marshall' package to maintain its strategic depth.

On its part, the US wants India's role as a watchdog in the Indo-Pacific region, primarily to monitor Chinese advancements. Any major role concerning containment cannot be anticipated in the near future since Washington does not appear certain. Secondly, Washington's expectations with regard to India's role in safeguarding its interests in the Indo-Pacific region cannot be high as India is, after all, a difficult country. Its religious, ethnic, and social problems are deep-rooted and protracted. Contrarily, the US has a natural alliance with Australia and Japan in the Quad.[10]

Furthermore, the US and Indian interests are fundamentally contrasting. For India, partnership with the US means an endorsement of New Delhi's own South Asia policy in other words 'India's Neighborhood First Policy', wherein New Delhi is looking for the continued support of the former for its regional policies. For US

partnership means compliance rather than an endorsement of its larger Indo-Pacific strategy. In this context, The Indo-US partnership is challenging since both states are following different approaches to their so-called shared goals.

The responses of other states over the aforementioned emerging shifts in policy orientation are noteworthy to discuss. A collective response to neutralise the impact of US-China competition from the regional states remains less likely, essentially because of the differing nature of bilateral relations between them as well as their relations with the US and China. All South Asian states are revisiting their respective policies to stay up to the mark and get maximum benefits out of the evolving situation. However, none of them has adopted a principled approach by drawing concrete boundaries of their bilateral relations, which again is not possible, considering their structural incapacities to do so. For instance, dealing with China amidst growing competition and friction between China and the US would not be a piece of cake for Dhaka. Bangladesh has been very calculated in dealing with China in the past. But with the deepening Chinese role in the region amidst US and India's opposition will constitute a severe blow to Dhaka's balancing approach.

In this challenging time where small states are struggling with binary choices, Pakistan is emerging as an interesting case study. Its foreign policy approach does not seem to be a pick and choose between China and the US. Islamabad, though a major partner of Beijing's BRI, is looking for a meaningful engagement with the Biden administration. Even with India, Pakistan wants a peaceful resolution of all conflicts. Pakistan's repeated peace overtures vindicate its stance. It has also offered Sri Lanka to be a part of the CPEC. With Bangladesh, Islamabad is all set to revive its bilateral relations. In Afghanistan, Pakistan continues to play a proactive role to reach out to the Taliban in pursuance of penning down the peace deal. With Iran too, bilateral engagements are increasing.

In sum, Pakistan is following a 'just regional approach'. It is timely as the US shift has diverted to the Indo-Pacific region and India is struggling to get its lost hold in neighbouring states. India's offensive foreign policy approach, the intense competition between the US and China and between India and China, will significantly affect Pakistan's choices.

Biden administration is not likely to undo Trump policies vis-à-vis South Asia in general and China in particular. To further the US foreign policy goals, Biden has renewed a commitment to work closely with its 'allies' which he termed in his first speech as 'America's greatest assets'. Apparently, multilateralism has taken a special place in Biden's foreign policy. In relations with India and Pakistan, a de-hyphenation policy can better serve Washington's interests in the region. With this policy, consensus on counter-terrorism mechanisms between India and Pakistan might be possible. In the case of China, Islamabad has little to offer to the US. Washington is quite knowledgeable on China-Pakistan relations. However, things can get tricky if Islamabad fails to de-hyphenate Beijing while engaging with the US particularly amidst heightened tensions between the US and China. China will remain central to Washington's South Asia as well as Southeast Asia policies.

The sustainability of recent convergence largely depends on future trajectories of the Sino-US relationship. The partnership between the US and India on the other hand, cannot be said to be resilient enough to withstand all odds. The recent downgrading of India's status from 'free' to 'partly free' on account of India's deteriorating political and civil liberties by Washington based 'Freedom House' and 'Electoral Democracy' to 'Electoral Autocracies' by Sweden based 'Varieties of Democracy Institute' has affected bilateral relationships. To argue, Lloyd Austin, the US Defence Secretary of Biden administration raising the issue of deteriorating human rights situation with Indian ministers during his three-day visit

to India was meant to convey a bold message to India to 'adhere to democratic values'.[11]

More recently, India's refusal to vote at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) over a resolution on Sri Lanka's war crimes, further accentuated the difference between the US and India's approach to human rights issues.[12] However, realistically, the US would continue to pay lip service for holding India accountable for gross human rights violations both at home and in IIOJK as long as New Delhi serves the US interests.

Washington's policy of ignorance towards Indian human rights violations and manoeuvring in bordering areas along the LAC and LOC has its implications for regional stability and its relations with India. This policy is also discrediting Washington's image as a country of 'liberal and democratic values'. India's offensive foreign policy approach vis-à-vis China or Pakistan, on the other hand, can potentially undermine Washington's peace efforts in Afghanistan and may also weaken the efficacy of the quadrilateral alliance in the Indo-Pacific region.

However, the Biden administration's approach with China, Pakistan, and India depends on how the internal situation develops in Afghanistan, how China deals with New Delhi in the coming days, how Beijing's relations take shape with Colombo, Kathmandu, and Dhaka, i.e., the strongholds of India, and, finally, how the situation in Kashmir evolves in the near future.

China will continue to shape Indo-US relations. The growing nexus between China and Pakistan and China's increasing footprints in Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh will continue to push New Delhi towards the Washington camp. The US, on its part, will continue to support New Delhi in neutralising China's influence. Resultantly, the region will remain virtually divided between the US and China.

New Dehli with its renewed role will accelerate its efforts to undermine Pakistan's endeavours to help bring peace in Afghanistan

as well as its fight with homegrown extremism, money laundering, and terror financing. While doing so, New Delhi will invest more in the religious/sectarian divide in Pakistan. India would continue to warm up its forces along its borders with both China and Pakistan. To regain its lost prestige, New Delhi may attempt to strike back with surprising moves.

Additionally, India's role in pursuing America's China policy has its limitations as New Delhi does not have the capacity as well as the privilege of choosing between the US and China. Sooner or later, India will have to review its policies to manage the rise of China since the Chinese-owned development projects can potentially dilute the US role in the region.

In a time of intense competition between China and the US, Pakistan will be under tremendous pressure and if Islamabad's de-hyphenating China policy fails, the relationship with the US may revert to the 'do more' mode.

The smaller states of the region are comparatively in a better position in terms of getting maximum benefits from major power competition. However, it would be difficult for them to manage in a time of severe crisis that may force them to take a side.

Multilateral economic cooperation would remain a pipe-dream, even the bilateral relations in the region will run under the shadow of the strategic divide between the US and India on the one hand and China and Pakistan on the other. India and Pakistan being central to this divide can play a decisive role in leveraging their relationship with China and the US, respectively, towards bringing peace in the region as there is no clarity over the future course of Sino-US bilateral relations. Chances of cooperation on 'rules-based order' in the Indo-Pacific cannot be ruled out.

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CRIMINALISING NUCLEAR WEAPONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW

ZUNAIRA INAM KHAN[*]

Abstract

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) entered into force on 22 January 2021. It is the right step in the direction to eliminate nuclear weapon possession and deployment. However, the fear remains that this is merely a symbolic step. The tangible and concrete legal consequences of TPNW for nuclear power states remain negligible. No nuclear state or NATO member has ratified the treaty and it seems very unlikely that they will do so in the future. This paper aims to address the illegality of nuclear weapons and argues that the concept existed throughout international law, even before the TPNW was ratified. The examples of various other treaties, of which the nuclear power states are signatories, highlight the already existing illegality of such weapons. Their refusal to sign the treaty can be viewed as nothing more than a hesitancy to give up indiscriminate power. The nuclear power states cannot, legally or in good conscience, refrain from becoming signatories.

Keywords: *Nuclear weapons, disarmament, non-proliferation, NPT, TPNW, laws of war, deterrence, self-defence, reprisals, St. Petersburg Declaration, Hague Conventions, Geneva Protocol, Nuremberg Principles, ICJ*

Introduction

The nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought the

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Second World War to a close. It was the first time a nuclear bomb had been used as a means of warfare[1] and the world bore witness to a catastrophe that had previously been unimaginable. The bombings caused more than 120,000 immediate deaths[2] and the unprecedented nuclear destructive power shocked the world. Nuclear weapons can annihilate populations and cause extensive damage to the ecosystem. A soldier may be able to differentiate between a civilian and a combatant but long-range missiles cannot do so. In the wake of a nuclear attack, the civilian population will suffer the most due to the indiscriminate nature of the bombs.

Nonetheless, legal voices have remained largely silent on this problem since 1945.[3] The Allies were so elated at their victory that the issue of the legality of an atomic attack was not even discussed. The use of an atomic weapon was considered a necessary lifesaving act.[4] During the cold war, possession of nuclear weapons was perceived as a necessary counterweight in the precarious balance between the two superpowers. The concepts of 'deterrence' and 'Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD)' were developed to explain and justify the possession of nuclear weapons.

Ever since the invention and the first use of nuclear weapons, there has been a secret trade of nuclear weapons and their related technologies. Considering the specific characteristics of such weapons and how they could completely violate the principles of humanity, it was suggested that nuclear weapons should be openly termed as illegal. To this effect, according to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons[5] (TPNW) which entered into force on 22 January 2021, the possession and ownership of nuclear weapons has been deemed illegal by the United Nations (UNGA, 2006).[6] However, very significantly, none of the states with nuclear weapons or nuclear capability has signed the treaty, none of the NATO members is signatory nor any state that currently has a nuclear umbrella agreement.[7] Conversely, the United States actually sent a letter

through diplomatic channels to a significant number of states urging them not to join the TPNW. It even stated that the countries that have signed and ratified the treaty, should ideally withdraw their support. The letter further stated that the TPNW was dangerously counterproductive to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).[8] According to Thomas Hajnoczi, Austrian Foreign Ministry Director for Disarmament, Arms Control, and Non-proliferation, "The TPNW did not create a parallel universe to the traditional one founded on the NPT…on the contrary; it makes the existing universe of legal instruments around the NPT stronger."[9]

In the preceding two decades, the threats of nuclear proliferation have mainly emanated from smaller countries, whose ambitions can be controlled or restricted. However, a relatively new threat reflects a scenario where the economic and diplomatic giants might try to consolidate their dominance via this method. That threat would be much harder to counter for the world. Nuclear proliferation may not be a chain reaction but it has the potential to be contagious. It is also apparent that nuclear powers have not upheld their commitments under the NPT. According to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the nine nuclear power countries have collectively spent $72 billion on nuclear weapons.

Nuclear Weapons

These devices are in the possession of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, i.e., China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. Along with these countries, India, Israel, Pakistan, and North Korea also possess nuclear weapons.[10] The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has stated that the great damage caused by the heat and energy emitted by these bombs is greater than any other weapon. There are also a lot of radiation emissions which render the weapons potentially catastrophic. The radiations lead to genetic mutations and damage to the ecosystem

and environment. These weapons can destroy the entire civilization and ecosystem of this planet.[11]

Cause of Destruction

The 1986 Chernobyl disaster proves that even if the explosion is unintentional, the accidental emission of nuclear radiation can and does lead to the same amount of environmental damage and radiation pollution as a nuclear attack.[12] Roughly 130,000 people were displaced by the nuclear reactor disaster and the levels of cancer and birth defects have increased exponentially. In light of the risk of even unintentional release of radiation, the storage, transportation, and even possession of these weapons should have a high level of attention and criminal culpability.[13]

Distinct from Conventional Weapons

Nuclear weapons cannot be characterised as conventional weapons. Though the purpose of both is to kill, the nuclear explosion causes greater damage to the geography, ecosystem, and the sustainability of life in the area. They alter the chemical makeup of all living things and leave long term genetic repercussions. This means that they are not just more destructive than conventional weapons, but also lead to long term destructive effects.

Nuclear Weapons and the Laws of War

The laws of war are applied in conditions of armed and military conflict, regardless of whether the conflict is officially declared or acknowledged as a war. Any conflict or warfare has specific laws of war that apply to it. The international military tribunal constituted at Nuremberg stated that the laws of war comprised of treaties, accepted state customs and practices, and the general principles of justice which are applied by jurists. [14]

Treaties on Nuclear Weapons

The application, production, and even storage of most other WMD have been declared illegal by various conventions. Due to the long-term adverse effects and the great devastation caused by such weapons, they should be held as even more dangerous and illegal than other biological weapons. There are treaties that control nuclear testing,[15] ban nuclear weapons in certain locations, and treaties prohibiting the proliferation of these weapons,[16] and now a treaty that unambiguously disallows the production and possession of nuclear weapons.

On 7 July 2017, the TPNW was adopted at a UN General Assembly Conference. Some of the provisions that it addressed included the banning of "developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, otherwise acquiring, and possessing, stockpiling, transferring, and receiving nuclear weapons, bars states from assisting, encouraging or inducing anyone to engage in any activity prohibited by the treaty, and seeking or receiving any assistance, in any way, from anyone to engage in activity prohibited under the treaty. The treaty also prohibits states parties from allowing another state to station, install, or deploy nuclear weapons in its territory. Most notably, the treaty completely bans using or threatening to use nuclear weapons. Simply put, the treaty seeks the total elimination of nuclear weapons to ensure they are never used again."[17]

"TPNW plugs a huge gap in international law, and its entry into force must be met with a change of course by those states who still support, in any form, the use of nuclear weapons […]. Ending the threat of nuclear weapons is the responsibility of all governments in accordance with their obligation to ensure respect for international humanitarian and human rights law", said Verity Coyle, Amnesty International's Senior Adviser on Military, Security and Policing.[18] This treaty seemed to solidify the fact that nuclear weapons are considered by a majority of countries as immoral, dangerous, and unstable. This is

a fact that the nuclear powers and their allies sometimes choose to ignore.

It must be stated, at this point, that the United States and other nuclear powers have publicly adopted the deterrence theory and policy. Some of these states have also vowed to adhere to the 'no first use' policy. Furthermore, it has been more than 70 years since any state actually deployed a nuclear weapon which appears to signal that this policy is working. However, the nuclear power states have all shown a willingness and acceptance to deploy nuclear weapons in the rare case where deterrence fails to work. Thus, the fact that nuclear weapons have not been used cannot be seen as the emergence of state practice leading to prohibition, simply because countries continue to possess and acquire these weapons and also repeatedly state that they will use them under certain circumstances.

It must also be highlighted that the United States has expressed their right to deploy nuclear weapons in certain conditions or circumstances to protect and defend its interests and the interests of its allies. The same sentiments were expressed by other countries, such as the United Kingdom, China, Russia, and France. It is concerning that none of the states currently possessing nuclear weapons has ratified the TPNW or even seem likely to do so in the near future. Even though nuclear weapons have not been used since World War II, this should not be taken as a sign that a Customary International Law rule has emerged.

The illegality of Nuclear Weapons

The technological developments of military arms and weaponry necessitated conventions and declarations that could optimally cater to the adverse consequences and effects of war. These conventions and declarations stress the prevention of callous warfare and the safeguarding of rights of non-combatants and states that remain neutral.

St. Petersburg Declaration

The 1868 Declaration of St. Petersburg prohibited the use of weapons which caused excessive suffering and undiscriminating assaults. It stated;

"Considering that the progress of civilization should have the effect of alleviating, as much as possible, the calamities of war: That the only legitimate object which States should endeavor to accomplish during war is to weaken the military force of the enemy; That this object would be exceeded by the employment of arms which uselessly aggravate the sufferings of disabled men, or render their death inevitable; That the employment of such arms would, therefore, be contrary to the laws of humanity."[19]

According to the principles mentioned in this Declaration, there is a clear precedent as to why the UN has explicitly prohibited nuclear weapons. Firstly, the necessities of war cannot trump the permissible scope of devastation and suffering. Secondly, state sovereignty in times of war is not absolute, so they cannot do whatever they want just because a treaty does not specifically ban the said activity. Thirdly, human security should be given more value than state security.[20]

Hague Conventions

The prohibition on causing unnecessary misery can be seen reasserted and reinforced in various other treaties, declarations, and conventions throughout UN history, such as the Hague Convention of 1899 and its Regulations of 1907, the Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases and Bacteriological Methods of Warfare of 1925 (herein after the 1925 Geneva Protocol), the Nuremberg Charter of 1949, and the four Geneva Conventions. Article 23(e) states that "to employ arms, projectiles, or material calculated to cause unnecessary suffering" is forbidden. [21] Thus, nuclear weapons cannot be considered a legal means of warfare due to their inhumane and horrible characteristics.

1925 Geneva Protocol

38 countries signed the 1925 Geneva Protocol declaring "the use in war of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and of all analogous liquids, materials or devices" as a means of warfare.[22] The prohibitions are general and loosely defined to cover all the threats from the production, usage, and emission of poisonous substances. This protocol is customary international law and is binding on all states, including the non-participatory ones.

Uranium, being an exceedingly toxic chemical, comes under the category of poisonous materials. The protocol particularly prohibits substances based on their poisonous nature rather than the harm caused. So, even if more people are dying from the explosion rather than the radioactive effects, it does not have any effect on its legality under the Protocol.

**The 1949 Geneva Conventions
and the 1977 Protocol 1**

The main concern of the four Geneva Conventions is the protection of the victims of war. These conventions also occupy the place of customary law.[23] The fourth Geneva Convention talks about the difference between civilians and combatants. This is the very basis of the laws of humanity and laws of war. It has also been termed Geneva Law. The 1977 Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions classifies a humanitarian principle barring indiscriminate attacks. It stipulates that the goal of war should not and cannot be the complete annihilation of the enemy.

The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki very clearly reflect that nuclear bombs are indiscriminate in their effects. They do not distinguish between civilians and combatants. It may be possible to target specific military locations: However, the range of destruction caused by the bombs and their radioactive fallout will be potentially catastrophic. Thus, logic implies that the Geneva Convention also categorises nuclear weapons as illegal.

Nuremberg Principles

After World War II, in a determining judgement, Nuremberg Tribunal looked at problems with the application of the laws of war; the doctrines that came out from those deliberations and verdicts are declared as the Nuremberg Principles. "The law embodied in the 1945 Nuremberg Charter had become part of customary international law; some of the Nuremberg Principles were incorporated in the statutes of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court."[24]

The Nuremberg Charter declares three crimes in Article 6 [25] i.e., "(1) crimes against peace namely, planning, preparation, initiation, or waging of a war of aggression, or a war in violation of international law; (2) war crimes namely, violation of the laws or customs of war, such violation shall include, but not be limited to murder of civilian population, wanton destruction of cities, or devastation not justified by military necessity; (3) crimes against humanity namely, murder, extermination and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population, before or during the war."

Use or even the threat of using nuclear weapons can be argued as a threat to humanity and a crime against peace and humanity, according to the principles outlined in the Nuremberg Charter. Since the damage caused by nuclear weapons is foreseeable and predictable, possession and deployment of nuclear weapons is a crime against humanity under the Nuremberg Charter, the Genocide Convention, and the Geneva Protocol I.[26]

Opinion of the International Court of Justice

In 1996, the UN General Assembly requested the ICJ to come up with an opinion regarding the legality of nuclear weapons. The advisory opinion of the court held that there is no clear prohibition or authorisation on the possession and usage of nuclear weapons,

however, their use is in opposition to the UN charter and humanitarian laws.

Theories Supporting Non-Compliance with TPNW

Self-defence

Self-defence is a fundamental right that is granted to states and is accepted by all aspects of international law. However, it is not unrestricted and should be asserted in line with the general principles of law. The nature of weapons used and the damage inflicted must be in proportion to the level of the attack. States cannot act howsoever they choose citing self-defence. The conditions of indiscrimination and disproportionality render it unlawful to deploy nuclear weapons in situations of self-defence under UN charter and humanitarian laws.

Reprisals

These are actions taken which may be characterised as illegal but which are deemed lawful when undertaken in the response to illegal steps/actions from the other party. Reprisals must be taken to make the enemy stop their violations of the law but they must also be proportionate to the violations. Deploying nuclear weapons can result in reprisals that are indiscriminate in nature. They would inflict damage on civilians as well as military personnel. Hence, the use of nuclear weapons, even for the purpose of reprisals, must be deemed illegal.

Deterrence

Deterrence, as cited by the nuclear power states and their allies, can be considered as a political justification and certainly not a legal justification. As stated by Judge Weeramantry in his dissenting opinion,[27] deterrence is not a reasonable argument: Some states argued that nuclear weapons have had a very important role in maintaining international security since the end of World War II. Even if that line of thinking is deemed acceptable, it has little effect on the

legal decisions. "The threat of use of a weapon which contravenes the humanitarian laws of war does not cease to contravene those laws of war merely because the overwhelming terror it inspires has the psychological effect of deterring opponents. This Court cannot endorse a pattern of security that rests upon terror."[28]

The purpose of deterrence is to prevent war by subduing the other party with a threat of annihilation. Terrorising others by threat of destruction is a crime according to the Nuremberg Charter. As a result, if the laws of war are present and followed by states, there has to be a ban on such weapons of terror and that ban should be considered a rule of law.[29]

The South Asian Challenge

Possessing and developing nuclear weapons creates an unsafe environment globally. Coming to the case of South Asia, it is thought to be "the most dangerous nuclear flashpoint in the world." There is always fear that increasing conflicts and a nuclearised weapons race could lead to a nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan.

What complicates matters even more is that there is a strategic nuclear chain in South Asia where Pakistan is trying to keep up with India; India is trying to balance Pakistan and China, while China competes with the United States. In such environments, de-escalation can only be considered a pipedream. India and Pakistan have both stated categorically that they are not bound by any of the obligations laid down in the TPNW. The Pakistani spokesperson also purported that since the TPNW was negotiated outside the UN disarmament negotiating forums, none of the states possessing nuclear weapons was a part of these negotiations and, as such, it has failed to take into consideration the interests of the stakeholders.

Conclusion

There is a stockpile of more than 13,000 nuclear warheads around the world, 90 per cent of which are in the possession of the

United States and Russia. The characteristics of nuclear weapons, their indiscriminate nature, and the massive damage caused, make them illegal under the laws of war and humanity.

However, nuclear arms control agreements are only temporary solutions. The overall goal must always be the one mentioned in Article 6 of the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. This article states, "Each of the parties to the treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."[30] Universal nuclear disarmament is the only legally defensible, morally acceptable, and logical stance to be taken. The declared illegality of nuclear weapons would serve to convince the international community that the weapons are a manifestation of lawlessness and a crime against humanity.

If the German invasion of Belgium was considered a war crime, the employment of nuclear weapons leading to damage to neutral states, is a clear war crime. If the killing of a single civilian is illegal, killing entire cities and attacking entire regions and countries is also illegal. If the use of indiscriminate and disproportionate means of warfare is banned, then these principles cannot be withheld from their application on nuclear weapons. Such weapons are unlawful and it is irrelevant whether they are being employed in lawful or unlawful wars, or for self-defence, reprisals, or deterrence.

It is certainly a celebratory occasion that the TPNW has now come into force, and it is the right step in the direction to eliminate nuclear weapon possession and deployment. However, the fear remains that this is merely a symbolic step rather than a customary prohibition of nuclear weapons entirely. Even though the treaty will enter into force, its tangible and concrete legal consequence for

nuclear power states remains negligible. No nuclear state has ratified the treaty and it seems very unlikely that they will do so in the future.

It is necessary to note, though, that the law on the use of force (namely the *jus ad bellum*) would still apply to the use of nuclear weapons under Articles 2(4) and 51 of the UN Charter and their customary international law counterparts. This also includes the prerequisites and conditions of proportionality and necessity. It must also be kept in mind that, similar to the use of any other weapons, the law of armed conflict will be applicable to oversee the conflict, including proportionality, distinction, and the condition of taking precautions in an attack.

It makes no sense to plan to use weapons or threaten to use them to prevent their use. This makes the world unstable and violates the humanitarian values it is seeking to protect. International humanitarian law is necessary to maintain peace and limit war. Till the time that powerful states are using the threat of nuclear weapons to maintain peace and their national interests, and less influential states are seeking to acquire those weapons to 'balance' the power of the powerful states, there will be a threat to human civilisation.

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SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT ZONES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE IIOJK AND THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

NABIYA IMRAN*

Abstract

Irrespective of the role that women play in conflict zones, they face sexual violence in several forms such as rape, sexual slavery, forced marriages, etc. History bears witness to sexual violence against women in cases such as Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Congo, and Rwanda, and among others. The UN recognises conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) as a punishable war tactic that has severe detrimental impacts on the victims. This paper explores CRSV in the context of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) and Occupied Palestinian Territories, perpetrated by the Indian and Israeli security forces, respectively. The crux of this paper is that Kashmiri and Palestinian women are being exploited based on their gender in the ongoing conflicts as a socio-political expression of patriarchal power, inflamed by religious ethnonationalism. The paper begins with an introduction followed by a discussion of the background and scope of this study and an overall description of women as weapons of war. It further probes into why sexual exploitation of women in conflict zones takes place. Then, the case studies of Kashmiri and Palestinian women are discussed separately in addition to a comparative analysis, followed by a conclusion.

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Introduction

Traditional theories in International Relations (IR) including realism and liberalism have been 'gender-blind'.[1] Their core assumptions and tenets exclude the element of gender from global politics. In the latter half of the twentieth century, emerging paradigms such as feminism attempted to incorporate gender in IR. In addition, human security has emerged as a dominant theme in world politics over the past few decades. A shift in the focus from traditional issues towards individuals has broadened the scope of security studies, resultantly, adding to the relevancy of several issue areas. Ending violence against women and ensuring that they are given their due place in society has become an important agenda worldwide. This includes eliminating sexual violence against women in conflict zones where there is still a long way to go.

The UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence of Conflict defines conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) as "rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilisation, forced marriage, trafficking in persons when committed in situations of conflict for sexual violence/exploitation and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity, perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict."[2] This definition indicates that men and women can both be victims of sexual exploitation in conflict zones, but the latter are significantly more affected by this act, which is why this study primarily focuses on women's experiences. UN Security Council Resolution 2467, adopted in 2019, recognises the possibility and prevalence of CRSV in detention settings such as prisons.[3] Out of many conflicts where women have endured sexual exploitation, some of the most notable instances are those of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) and

Occupied Palestinian Territories. Women continue to be an important element of these conflicts as non-mutually exclusive active combatants as well as passive victims. In the case studies opted for this paper, the primary forms of CRSV include rape, forced pregnancy, forced marriage, sexual harassment, and sexual intimidation during prison interrogations to extract information. The past few decades have seen a rapid rise in gender equality and women empowerment movements across the world. Sexual violence against women has been discussed widely but, by and large, the discourse on the case studies presented here remains rather scanty. The following sections discuss case studies of Kashmiri and Palestinian women separately and carry out in-depth comparative analysis to arrive at conclusions.

Background and Scope

The role of women in war and the unique challenges faced by them in conflict zones are the topic of research in a number of academic circles. Women's sexual exploitation in conflict zones is not a novel topic. However, most of the literature discusses selective case studies such as Bangladesh, Congo, Japan, and Yugoslavia. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by taking women from the IIOJK and Israeli-occupied Palestine as case studies to add to the diversity within this field and also shed light on how convoluted Indian and Israeli state practices are despite their insistence on being successful democracies. The reflections on the two case studies, particularly from a gender-driven perspective are rather thin. This paper aims to fill in the said gap by presenting the horrors (mental and physical) associated with gender-based violence.

As mentioned earlier, the geographic scope of this study is limited to the IIOJK and the Occupied Palestinian Territories where the exploitation of women has been rampant over the past several decades. In the IIOJK, non-Muslim women especially Kashmiri Pandit women have also been at risk.[4] However, this paper focuses on the

plight of Kashmiri Muslim women at the hands of the Indian security forces which has existed since 1947 but has been on the rise since 1989. Similarly, in Palestine, women are also at risk due to the Israeli occupation and have received even lesser attention in this context. The underlying rationale behind picking these two cases together is that they are both currently outstanding issues, defining the politics of their respective regions. While a comparative analysis of these two cases is presented in the latter part of this paper, it ought to be mentioned that both cases differ in the specific nature and forms of women's sexual exploitation. However, the underlying assumptions about women's role in society and extremist governments in both cases bridge the two together as an appropriate basis for a comparative study. The premise of this paper is that Kashmiri and Palestinian women are being exploited on the basis of their gender in the ongoing conflicts as a socio-political expression of patriarchal power inflamed by religious ethnonationalism.

Violence against Women as a Weapon of War

In conflict zones, women adopt several roles such as actively participating as combatants, working in the medical field to provide health care to the injured, or as household managers by ensuring food and water supply as well as provision of care to combatants and non-combatants. Irrespective of the multiple roles played by women, men belonging to the same or different groups sexually exploit them, inter alia, through rape, sexual slavery, forced abduction, harassment including forced nakedness, forced pregnancy/abortion, forced sterilisation, and sexual torture.[5] Women's bodies are treated as weapons of war by sexualising and objectifying them and the perpetrators view this gruesome practice as completely legitimate. History bears witness to the vulnerability of women to sexual exploitation. Some noteworthy instances include Bangladesh (1971), Rwandan genocide (1994), Congo Civil War (1998-2003), Sudan Civil

War (1983-2005), Sierra Leone Civil War (1991-2002), Rohingyan crisis (2017-present), and the Yugoslavian war (1991-2001).[6] In the Yugoslav wars alone, between 20,000 and 50,000 women and girls, mostly Bosnian and Croats, were raped and in the Democratic Republic of Congo, at least half a million rape survivors live today.[7]

Gender-based violence against women in times of conflict has lasting impacts which continue to affect the survivors for the rest of their lives. At an individual level, women suffer physically and psychologically. There is a high risk of women developing reproductive complications, having to undergo abortions, acquiring sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and possibly even death. Moreover, survivors may develop mental disorders or conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) along with having to deal with the stigma that surrounds sexual violence and assault thus becoming social outcasts.[8] The victim/survivor not only loses agency over her physical body but also over other aspects of life. For example, a survivor may consider forced displacement in view of her gruesome experience(s). Furthermore, sexual violence 'demoralises and destabilises' the basic fabric of societies particularly attacking their cohesion.[9] Such incidents also remind families and communities of their 'collective defeat' which itself can be terrifying.[10] All in all, violence on women's bodies in times of war has lasting impacts for the times that follow.

Understanding Wartime Sexual Exploitation

Experts in fields of gender and peace studies as well as sociology, psychology, and international relations have researched to understand the causes and drivers of sexual violence against women in conflict zones. It is not the result of 'uncontrolled sexual desire' but a manifestation of power and domination.[11] In 1993, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women which especially highlighted the vulnerability of

women in conflict zones.[12] The UN also sees rape during wartime as a crime against humanity which may be treated as a war crime. According to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820, adopted in 2008, sexual violence against women and girls is employed as a war tactic "to humiliate, dominate, instil fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or ethnic group." [13] Women are considered spoils of war whereby raping or sexually abusing them is seen as booty. Rape, especially gang rape and systematic rape, takes place and is sanctioned by commanding officers to "promote soldierly solidarity through male bonding." [14]

The underlying notions of masculinity whereby men are deemed as protectors of women and femininity whereby women are treated as "bearers of traditions and national culture" enable women to be used sexually in conflicts.[15] When a group of combatants sexually violates women of the enemy group, it not only damages the honour of the latter but also carries a 'man-to-man message' displaying a machismo that they were unable to protect their women.[16] Carrying out rape in public makes the impact more intense and in the process, targeted men of the enemy community may see it as an attack on their manliness, integrity, and honour.

Identity also plays a very important role in wartime sexual violence. This identity may be a group's ethnicity, religion, or nationality, among other parameters. Ethnic nationalism paves way for "structural violence and gender-specific crimes."[17] Inciting violence on women of the enemy group is a blatant attack on its identity and honour. Rape specifically can lead to forced pregnancies which are seen as contamination of the 'womb of the enemy', thus making a woman's body an 'occupied territory'.[18] Sexual violence can also be used to punish women for belonging to the enemy group or defending that group. Irrespective of what drives sexual violence, the purpose remains the same, i.e., "cultural elimination of the enemy."[19]

Case Study: IIOJK

Kashmir is one of the most disputed regions in the world. Over the past 70 years, it has been at the centre of three wars between Pakistan and India. This relentless conflict began in 1947 with the British division of the Indian subcontinent following decolonisation which Stanley Wolpert describes as a 'shameful flight'.[20] Kashmir, having a Muslim majority population and a Hindu ruler, was a princely state that had not acceded to either India or Pakistan in due time. The population expressed their right to self-determination to become a part of Pakistan and when Maharaja Hari Singh's intention seemed otherwise, initiating a freedom movement. To deal with this political turmoil, Hari Singh signed an instrument of accession to India on 26 October 1947.[21] This led to an unending war between Pakistan and India because the ruler's actions did not reflect the will of the people. Intervention on behalf of the United Nations resulted in a ceasefire and it was decided that a plebiscite would be held in Kashmir to fully represent the will of the people.[22]

The plebiscite has not taken place since the war in 1948. There have, however, been two more wars in 1965 and 1999, given the heightening tensions over the issue. Today, different parts of the former princely state are under the administration of China, India, and Pakistan with the latter two claiming more than what they already have. In addition to interstate conflict, Kashmir has also been a site of local militant insurgency that was at its first high in the 1990s and since the killing of Burhan Wani in 2016 has rejuvenated.[23] With the rise of the right-wing Hindu nationalist BJP to power in New Delhi, the situation in Kashmir has worsened as evident from Pakistan and India coming to the brink of war in 2019. Most recently, the Indian government abrogated Article 370 of the constitution thus stripping away Jammu and Kashmir's special status.[24]

Muslim women continue to be one of the worst-hit segments of the society living in IIOJK because the heavily deployed Indian

security forces have sexually violated them since the conflict began in 1947. However, since the militancy broke out in 1989 and intensified in 2016, the situation has gotten worse. There are no official figures on the number of abused women but according to one estimate, more than 11,000 Kashmiri women have been raped by Indian security forces since 1989. These numbers do not include violations that are not rape.[25] According to another source, 1,046 rape cases were under trial in Jammu Kashmir over six years until March 2019.[26] The incidents that stand out include Kunan Poshpora, Kupwara, Trehgam, and Shopian. In Kunan Poshpora, 53 women were allegedly raped on 23 February 1991 during a search operation by the soldiers of the fourth Rajputana Rifles. In Shopian, 2 women were allegedly raped and killed by local security forces.[27] Since 1989, more than two rape or molestation cases have been reported in IIOJK per day, but the conviction rate has been 3.26 per cent. These statistics do not include the unreported incidents.[28] While recent reports of The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (in June 2018 [29] and July 2019)[30] do not provide total statistics about incidents of rape, they recognise the rampant presence of sexual violence in the region and the lack of action against it. A 2019 report by the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society assesses how various methods have been used by the Indian state as an instrument of control in the IIOJK. One of the themes that the report focuses on is sexual violence (which it labels as 'sexualised torture'). Of the 432 cases the report studied, 24 were women and 50% of these women were victims of rape at the hands of state perpetrators.[31] Earlier, in 2006, Médecins Sans Frontiers revealed in a report that women in Jammu and Kashmir were heavily subjected to sexual violence in various forms since 1989. 11.6% of the 510 respondents of this study asserted that they were sexually abused and one in seven respondents disclosed that they had witnessed a rape.[32] Both these reports highlight how men in the region are also subjected to sexual violence, but this aspect goes beyond the scope of this study.

An underlying reason for the aforementioned abysmal conviction rate (3.26 per cent) lies in the Armed Forces Special Powers Act passed by the Indian Parliament in 1958. The Act essentially legitimises the security forces' inhumane actions "to maintain public order in 'disturbed' areas" which India has not done away with despite the UN calling for its revocation.[33] Bodies of Kashmiri women have served as unrecognised battlegrounds since 1947. The Congress government in India sanctioned the violence as it did close to nothing for its prevention. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government that has been in power since 2014 has intensified the situation. The BJP and its leader, Prime Minister Modi are closely associated with a right-wing Hindu nationalist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The group is based on the Hindutva ideology, which claims that India is only for Hindus who have the right to reign over minorities. IIOJK was India's only Muslim majority 'state' and Modi's policies, especially the revocation of Article 370 of the Constitution, eliminated that status.[34] Prime Minister Modi, who was labelled by Indian psychologist Ashish Nandy as "a fascist in every sense," has been amassing huge support among the Indian Hindu population such that he was re-elected in 2019. The willingness of his supporters to overlook his fascist policies is more concerning.[35] Kashmiri women are just one group of people suffering under this tyrannical regime. A member of the BJP was reported as saying that the revocation of Article 370 enables non-Kashmiri men to "marry the white-skinned women of Kashmir," just one in many examples of the party's objectification and exoticisation of Kashmiri women.[36]

Typically, two scenarios enable sexual exploitation in Jammu and Kashmir: firstly, during "search and cordon operations for Kashmiri militants" and, secondly, during "reprisal attacks by Indian forces after military ambushes."[37] Muslim women are targeted under the impression that their male relatives might be part of the militancy (there have also been increasing accounts of women taking part in

fighting as well, but the numbers are rather insignificant). These attacks are driven by identity, primarily religious identity, and to some extent, ethnic identity too. In the current political climate, Muslims are 'othered' in India and Kashmiri Muslims also have a distinct ethnicity. By sexually violating Kashmiri Muslim women, the underlying aim is perhaps to dishonour and disgrace the people living in Kashmir. It can also be viewed as a form of 'collective punishment' for the Kashmiris engaged in active militancy.[38] A lot of cases result in pregnancies which is one way of dominating and humiliating Kashmiri Muslims because it is considered as corrupting their ethnic and religious identity. It also shames the men because they are unable to protect their women. Rape and other forms of sexual violence are also a way for developing solidarity among the Indian state soldiers. The ultimate goal of fetishisation, objectification, and violation of Kashmiri women and their bodies is the 'cultural elimination of the enemy',[39] which the Indian state seemingly intends for Muslims in Kashmir. Since individuals in Indian security forces sexually violate Kashmiri women and it is driven by the government's actions, the political structure and religious nationalism, it is both 'personal' and 'structural'.[40]

Case Study: Occupied Palestinian Territories

The conflict between Palestine and Israel is one of the most transformative dilemmas of the Middle East. Palestine, which was historically a part of the Ottoman Empire, became a mandate following World War I. Instead of being given independence as it should have been, the interests of the colonial powers (especially Britain and France) along with those of the World Zionist Organization undermined Palestinian sovereignty. Israel came into existence in 1948 and the next few decades were marked with Arab-Israeli wars and a region-wide conflict.[41] Israel continued making territorial gains and began moving Jewish people into historical Palestinian communities. It also amassed the support of major powers such as the US. By this

time, the original Arab cause was dwindling. Arab states started acting out of their self-interest to gain back their territories. Egypt became the first Arab state to recognise Israel via the Camp David Accords in 1979.[42]

   While the Arab states started stepping back, indigenous movements in Palestine initiated armed resistance against Israeli occupation some of which were organized such as Hamas and others were prevalent among the common masses. Attempts at conflict resolution were also made such as Oslo Accords between Palestine and Israel in 1993 but several issues remained unaddressed and the conflict continued well into the twenty-first century.[43] Throughout this time, Israel (whose politics is dominated by extreme Zionists) continued to make territorial advances, drive Palestinians out of their homes, and intensify its occupation despite backlash from various countries. In recent years, Israel has declared the entirety of Jerusalem as its capital, a movement supported by the US under Trump's presidency.[44] Israeli aggression has also become evident through forced evictions in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, its assault on Al-Aqsa Mosque, and its relentless attacks on Gaza, an open-air prison since 2005.

   Women in Palestine are one of the most significantly affected populations by the conflict. They have several roles to play ranging from fighters in the resistance against occupation to mothers of martyrs, wives of detainees, female relatives of prisoners, and just women in general. The challenges they face living under occupation include but are not limited to women in labour not being allowed to pass through checkpoints to receive medical care, women losing their agricultural work due to the confiscation of land and their homes due to demolition, girls being prevented from attending school and sexual exploitation.[45] Sexual exploitation of Palestinian women is rampant in the occupied territories, the most prevalent form of which is sexual harassment. Most testimonies and reports identify prisons to be the

primary location of this harassment. However, it also takes place both physically and verbally at protests and checkpoints. For example, women may be asked to remove their veil to be inspected by a male Israeli officer. Women who go to Israeli prisons to meet their male relatives are often subjected to sexual violence as well.

Given the fact that Palestinian women take part in the resistance as well, they turn up as detainees too. In this case, they have to deal with sexual exploitation from the moment they are arrested up to their release (even though the effect lasts much longer than that). Several women have recounted their imprisonment and highlighted the torture they have had to go through at the hands of the Israeli forces. These narratives mention the following forms of sexual exploitation: rape, recording of sexual acts to be used for blackmail,[46] sexual comments or gestures, exposition, extreme cavity searches at the time of admission, forced touching and forced nudity.[47] Dena Karmi, a 41-year-old woman, narrated her experience in the prison as: "When I refused to take my clothes off, the jailer attacked me. She ruptured my pants and subjected me to embarrassing searches."[48] Leader of the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees, Khitam Saafin, also reported being strip-searched during her detention by Israeli forces.[49] Sexual intimidation is a systematic tactic employed by the police and intelligence officers to extract information from detained women. This mechanism is known as 'isqat' (i.e., downfall) and refers to the sexual abuse of Palestinian women, done to obtain 'security information' for the Israeli state.[50] While Israeli law mandates the presence of a policewoman during interrogation, it makes little to no difference in how Palestinian women are treated. According to one account, sexual exploitation is "not something that's done by an individual soldier who decided to humiliate or mistreat [the prisoners].......It's part of the process, part of the policy, to affect the entire society and put it under pressure... because they are aware that [gender] is a sensitive subject in Palestinian society."[51]

In addition to sexual violence, Israeli prisons for women also lack basic healthcare and hygiene facilities for the detainees.[52] While Israeli authorities are highly culpable in the violation of Palestinian women's rights, they are not the sole culprits. Violence against women within the Palestinian community is also rampant including rape and honour killings. The two forms of violence on Palestinian women from within the community and from the occupation are interrelated. Because the Palestinian authorities treat the matter of sexual violence against Palestinian women as a matter of 'national security'[53] despite who the perpetrator is, the survivors find it difficult to speak about the violence they face in their communities. It is also worthwhile to mention here that Palestinian men in Israeli prisons have to endure sexual violence as well thus making it even more difficult for the women to voice their experiences (but that area of the occupation goes beyond the scope of this study).

The justice system in the occupied territories makes it virtually impossible for Palestinian women to voice their concerns. Since the topic is seen as taboo in the Arab world, Palestinian women often do not speak up because what they endure as a violation of their bodily autonomy would automatically categorise them as honourless. Moreover, since the Oslo Accords, civil society in Palestine depends on foreign funding and their work on women's rights is almost always limited to the socio-economic sphere and rarely highlights the role Israel and its occupation play in the violation of women's rights in Palestine.[54] Another challenge in this fight is that there is a lack of authoritative data on sexual violence conducted against Palestinian women in prisons. By 2014, 23,000 Palestinian women had been placed in Israeli prisons since the 1967 war.[55] A 2020 publication revealed that about 4,300 Palestinians were placed in Israeli prisons out of which 41 were women.[56]

As has been mentioned several times in this paper, the treatment of women's bodies as battlegrounds is not caused by men

not being able to control themselves. It is not just an accident of war rather a systematic military strategy that serves to undermine the identity of entire communities.[57] Research of Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, a renowned scholar in this field perfectly explains why Palestinian women are seen as weapons of war by Israeli forces: "The way nationalist discourses constitute the female body *as a way to claim it for an imagined national body [...].*[58] In other words, women are seen as bearers of the nation's honour and any attack on them is an attack on the nation.

Comparative Analysis

Kashmir and Palestine are two of the most striking flashpoints in global politics. Both communities have been facing occupation for a long time and a comparison is often drawn between them. Pakistan has even gone to the extent of hyphenating Kashmir and Palestine and maintaining Israel and India as similar occupants. The problem in both polities emerged around the same time and the role of the UK and its colonisation cannot be ignored. It was Britain's Balfour Declaration that enabled the creation of Israel and it was Britain's shameful flight from the subcontinent that caused a hurried partition of the subcontinent in which princely states particularly Kashmir had to face forceful accession.[59] Both the Kashmiris and the Palestinians have had to face despicable human rights violations in the form of torture, rape, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, and extra-judicial killings at the hands of India and Israel respectively. Modi and Netanyahu have been instrumental in inciting violence on Palestinians and Kashmiris. Furthermore, Zionism and Hindutva are both extreme religious nationalist ideologies. Both Israel and India have received a lot of vain criticism from the international community due to their atrocities in Palestine and Kashmir. Perpetrators in both cases violate, in addition to several UN Security Council Resolutions, Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or

Punishment, the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.[60]

In the specific context of sexual exploitation of women, both cases have similarities as well as differences. In both cases, gendered power dynamics are exhibited during the conflict. It is not just men sexually violating women. It is men of one particular group (Israelis/Indians) who are sexually exploiting the women of another group (Palestinians/Kashmiris). The goal remains the same for both of them: humiliation, intimidation, and cultural elimination of the enemy.[61] While both cases are similar, there are certain points of divergence as well. Women in Palestine are significantly a part of the resistance movement while those in Kashmir are mainly stay-at-home, and their representation is based on how they are related to the Kashmiri resistance fighters. In the latter, sexual exploitation of women takes place primarily in homes during search operations while prisons are the main sites of sexual violence against Palestinian women. Interestingly, there is less coverage on the sexual abuse faced by Palestinian women. Moreover, men are also subjected to sexual violence in Israeli prisons and Israeli policewomen are perpetrators in this situation as well.

Conclusion

Kashmiris are trapped in a vicious cycle of violence since 1947 and Kashmiri women continue to endure violence on their bodies, femininity, and lives as their voices get lost in the confrontation between the two South Asian neighbours. Likewise, Palestinian women have not only had to experience the loss of their homeland to make space for Israeli settlers but have also had to endure living under occupation. The resolution of the Kashmiri and Palestinian conflicts must highlight the concerns of the people living there before looking for political gains. The UN was successful in punishing perpetrators of sexual violence in the Yugoslavian Civil War of the 1990s, but Kashmir

and Palestine have not received significant attention globally in the context of sexual violence. The willingness of the same international community that champions women's rights to stand by when women in Kashmir and Palestine are objectified, tortured, raped, forcefully impregnated, and sexually humiliated speaks volumes of the importance that states' political and strategic interests have over humanitarian concerns. The international community needs to uphold the human rights it has so proudly adopted in the United Nations Declaration with basic decency. We also need to understand that violence against women in Kashmir and Palestine is just one symptom of a bigger problem—the underlying notions about female bodies and their association with honour and objectification. Since sexual violence is a war tactic that has named perpetrators, it can and must be punished.

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RISE OF CHINA AND THE NEW INTERNATIONAL ORDER

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Abstract

The 21st century is referred to as the Asian century by many International Relations scholars, where the rise of China has been one of the most important events in the global political arena. Chinese economic diplomacy in Asia, Latin America, and Africa through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been seen as a challenge to US interests and that of its allies in these regions. China's bold and assertive policies in the South China Sea has led many in the US to believe that under the garb of this 'peaceful rise', China is slowly and gradually winning its turf. On the contrary, many scholars have also argued that the rise of China might strengthen a multi-polar world order based on economic interdependence and sustainable peace, allowing greater cooperation among world powers. However, this study argues that competition between an existing hegemon and an aspiring one has been a norm in international relations since antiquity. Therefore, the possibility of cooperation between China and the US is very limited. In this regard, the West is already raising concerns related to the rise of China. On the one hand, many consider China's cooperation as a means to establish its hegemony through a debt trap while others view it as an attempt to promote mutual economic interests. Therefore, the study elucidates whether the rise of China threatens the existing global order through its imposition on weaker partner states with its growing economic

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interdependence and whether a rising China will threaten the US supremacy and change the current world order.

Key words: *China-US competition, power transition theory, belt and road initiative, South-China sea, economic integration, debt-trap diplomacy, peaceful rise*

Introduction

States have to survive in an anarchic system created by great powers to exercise their influence in the present world. Throughout history, this struggle for the acquisition of power and hegemony has dragged states into conflicts, wars, proxies, and/or competition. At the end of the Second World War, the world was divided into two distinct blocs: one spearheaded by the United States and the other led by the former Soviet Union. Meanwhile, China under the dynamic leadership of Deng Xiaoping embarked on reforms that enabled it to achieve phenomenal economic growth. The central tenant of the reform was a peaceful rise. It is due to these reforms that China has become an economic powerhouse of the world. The remarkable Chinese investments in almost every continent have increased both its soft and hard power elements. China's rise in the last few decades is a challenge to the US, which brings the two into a race of power and domination.

The emerging powers, particularly non-Western ones, have an interest in overturning the Western international order and revising the rules of the game set by the West to maintain its control over 'others'. The West has continued to avail the market of developing countries and exploit its material resources. However, in this struggle for domination, China adopted a unique strategy of making alliances through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The megaproject is aimed at promoting mutual economic cooperation and development. In the past decades, most of the Asian countries have shaken hands with China and have welcomed the projects initiated under the BRI.

From Greek city-states to contemporary times, trendsetters are the states that have both tangible and intangible forms of power. France, Germany, Great Britain, Russia, and the US are textbook examples of how important resources are important for the growth of a state. China has the experience as well as resources needed for the assumption of the responsibility of great power. Historically, China has viewed itself as the 'Middle Kingdom' trying to occupy the centre stage among the comity of nations. With the onset of the Opium War in 1839, the Chinese believed that their century of humiliation had begun. The fall of Manchuria to Hong Kong wounded the pride of the Chinese, the dominant power of that time. The Chinese are aware of the ill-treatment accorded to them by the Western powers and Japan before the communist revolution. Mao promised the Chinese after assuming power that days of humiliation of China were over.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) aims to make China the Middle Kingdom once again for the rest of the world to revolve around it. In the present world order, China's aim is clear, i.e., to regain her lost glory. In this regard, President Xi Jinping, in 2013, announced the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China claimed that the BRI would support the long-term growth of partner countries through the development of infrastructure and mutual cooperation, without perturbing the existing world structure. China's conduct in future rests majorly on how the rest of the world, predominantly the current hegemon, the US, will react to its rise to growing economic might.

Given the rising global focus on the rise of China, theorists and scholars have been involved in rigorous theoretical debates on the conduct and future of rising powers. 'Power Transition Theory' is central in this regard and explains the phenomenon of the rising powers and its implications for the existing international order. The purpose of this paper is to carefully scrutinise the increasing role of China as a rapidly emerging international economic power and potential global shareholder. The paper explores how China is creating

opportunities for cooperation for partner states and how this cooperation can establish and maintain Chinese supremacy in the evolving international order. Moreover, it also explains how a shift in power structure might impact the dynamics of the international system through the framework of power transition theory, which deals with the power structures in the international system while examining power relations in view of the rise and fall of states.

Rise of China through the Lens of Power Transition Theory

Power transition theory is a prominent theory in international relations. There are three intellectual generations of the power transition theorists: A.F.K. Organski,[1] who conceived the basic concept of the theory in 1958, Jacek Kugler,[2] who joined Organski for the empirical evaluation of the theory, and Douglas Lemke[3] and Tammen,[4] who extended the theory beyond great power interactions. Power transition theory provides an effective and systemic model for analysing essential transformations in the international political order and anticipating the conditions of cooperation or causes of conflicts at all levels of analysis.[5] It focuses on the hierarchical nature of the international system, the pace of economic development, power transformation, the change in the international order, as well as the means through which these transformations occur. Powerful states control the resources and dictate the trends of the international system. On the other hand, the less powerful states or the relatively weaker ones then decide whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied with the existing hegemon.

The actors in the international system who are content with the dominant state do not challenge its position and rather make efforts to ensure peace and stability. Whereas, a rising power dissatisfied with the trends set by major powers and existing resource structures can create problems, thus, leading to conflict. Historically, the rising states tend to create an environment of competition to

challenge the existing status quo and this creates a ground for conflict. The power transition theory attempts to explain the international system in a unique manner. It negates the realist assumption regarding the international order being anarchic, having no police force or supreme regulatory authority. Power transition theory holds that the international system is hierarchical wherein the dominant state lies on the top of this hierarchical pyramid, constituting maximum power as compared to the other states in the system.

Moreover, the international system is configured in a manner that is similar to the domestic political system. The actors in this international system acquire a certain position and accept or reject the influence of dominant actors based on their levels of satisfaction with the rules set by the major powers.[6] Just like the political groups in constant competition with each other in the domestic system, states continue to compete with one another over deficient resources. The dominant power ensures stability in the international system with the support of great powers who are satisfied with the policies of the existing hegemon. On the other hand, dissatisfied countries are not pleased with the functioning and management of the international order. If the dissatisfied states are comparatively weaker, they cannot threaten or challenge the dominant state. However, if the dis-contended state is also a strong power, it becomes the challenger and, thus, challenges the predominant power. Due to the rise of a potential challenger, the chances of conflict increase as it aims at establishing a new place for itself, which it believes its growing power entitles it.

The international order is very likely to shift when a discontented state reaches parity by increasing in power more rapidly than the predominant nation. According to Kugler and Organski, in the post-cold war period, the international order led by the US was supported mostly by the major powers of the world, including the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, France, Italy and India whereas China and Russia became potential challengers. The challengers in

such a situation have some basic objectives which include, surpassing the dominant nation and challenging the existing rules of the international order. Consequently, the dominant power prepares to resist this change.

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the patterns of growth in the Asian continent changed. It compelled the thinkers and policymakers to consider a new dimension in international politics. This new dimension was the fast-growing Chinese economic power in the region. Kenneth Organski had predicted the rise of China in 1958, long before it happened. He argued that the concerning part was not whether China will become the most powerful state in the world, but rather how long will it take China to achieve the status of a global hegemon.[7] According to the power transition theory, if China surpasses the power of the United States, and has no considerable demands for a change in the existing principles of the international order, the possibility of any major conflict can be avoided. In this case, China will be characterised as a 'satisfied' rising power, similar to the role that the United States assumed when it acquired the position of international leadership from the United Kingdom. Contrarily, if China poses a threat to the US power and challenges its hegemony while holding deep-rooted grievances against the Western-imposed global principles and standards, the probability of conflict is likely to increase. Thus, the power transition theory, at its heart, focuses on the current most important concern of world politics, which is the international order and great power stability.

China - A Satisfied or Dissatisfied Rising Power?

The world power composition is based on a hierarchical structure that reflects variations, motivated by fluctuating growth rates and movement of resources across states. The countries dissatisfied with the international order established by the more significant power tend to reorder the hierarchy. The cost of conflict is

high for the relatively weaker powers and thus leading power aims at maintaining the status quo allowing less powerful states to adjust in the order established by the former.[8] Several pieces of research indicate that a situation wherein a challenger figures out how to overpower the predominant country crosses the capabilities of the latter is the most concerning/worrying stage in this game of power-balancing.[9]

Since the post-Cold War era, the US has enjoyed the status of being the only dominant power and its dominance had remained unchallenged. Now, the US and China are in a long-haul rivalry as the latter continues to develop at an alarming rate. Thus, strategically, this places China as an equal counterpart of the United States. In contrast to the rivalry with the USSR, it is believed by many that over time, China could surpass the United States in terms of GDP. If such a situation occurs, China's subsequent economic equality might transform into military predominance as well, particularly given China's gigantic population. If China develops to its maximum capacity, it would turn into the pre-eminent country in the global system in the near future.

The important concern or debate is not whether China will be the dominant country in the international system, but rather, the concerns regarding the said predominant China challenging the existing worldwide regime, or joining or even leading the international system. History is replete with such instances of power dominance. For instance, the US overtook the British in the early 20th Century. British accepted US leadership peacefully and have cooperated with them ever since. However, when Germany tried to confront the United Kingdom in a power struggle, it resulted in two world wars to decide on who would dominate the world. Stability is possible given that the challenger is satisfied with the existing status quo. The key issue with the current world order remains to determine whether China is

satisfied or dissatisfied? An array of factors must be taken into account when determining the aforementioned.

The first factor is the role of any land/territorial disputes capable of feeding dissatisfaction and the possibility of a conflict. An important concern is to be certain about any outstanding territorial dispute between the United States and China. Historically, both powers have been confronted with territorial implications from the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Taiwan. In recent times, Taiwan is seen as part of its core territory by China and represents the most threatening example of a territorial dispute.

The second factor is the build-up of armaments to counter the threats to each other. Furthermore, it is important to consider if the two countries are engaged in an active arms race. Chinese defence expenditure has increased and is likely to cope with that of the US and Russia. Also, the maximum of the Chinese military expenditure is off-budget. It is not revealed in official budget documents. China is also buying and trying to secure co-production rights for advanced arsenals from Russia.

The third important factor is to ascertain whether China is unhappy/dissatisfied with the existing international rules of world politics. The Chinese leaders portray their rise as a peaceful phenomenon with a benign agenda to advance the development of the partner countries. They have exhibited their foreign policy as being that of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states. Considering the growing impact of China, it is currently engaged in bilateral as well as multilateral initiatives. Its economic expansion has overtaken the US export market and is now becoming the economic hub of South Asia. This depicts a long-term Chinese strategy for casting regional influence. Internationally, China has always been prudent in choosing its affiliations with the organisations operating in the world. For instance, Chinese leaders chose to enter the World Trade Organisation (WTO) but refused to extensively cooperate with

the conventions and organisations dealing with the escalation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and its associated delivery systems. This Chinese approach reflects its level of dissatisfaction with the existing international order set by the United States.

The fourth essential factor is to consider the possibility of a lingering ideological conflict between the US and China. State-supported and implemented ideology is the required cost of constrained individual freedom. This arrangement of ideological convictions is disturbed, however, when the enforcement mechanisms of the government and its emphasis on party predominance have been rather steady. The two ideological frameworks: one led by the United States and the other by China, stand at variance with each other over the role of primacy in the political domain. The long history of Western invasions in China, the sentiment among some Chinese leaders that the West treated China disrespectfully and the sense of humiliation that China has been compelled to swallow bitterness on account of the West, complicates this conflict further. With the addition of rising patriotism, these enemy anti-West and xenophobic frames of mind, make a vague mix among the Chinese political elite. There are domestic elite groups in China, comprising particularly of the business community and other blocs of the civil society that act as key components in setting internal as well as external preferences away from nationalism in the pursuit of the global agenda. Thus, the elites or interest groups support the international order set by the global hegemon, leading to the acceptability of the world rules.

The fifth factor to ponder over is to ascertain if there are any patterns of trade and partnership between the two states. There is significant economic bonding between the US and China. The phenomenon of economic interdependence is also rising. China represents the largest bilateral trade deficit with the US and is its third-largest trading partner. The loss of momentum in the existing economic ties between China and the US has the potential to cast a

significant impact on both countries. Therefore, future cooperation between the two is essential to ensure economic stability. The US and China have the choice of opting for conflict or cooperation or even integration. Integration would mean China's adjustment within the current global order while cooperation would entail no arms race or military build-up between the two powers, moderation of nationalism, promotion of internationalism, and trade enhancement in pursuit of mutual interest. The challenge for the US in future will be to carefully observe the patterns of economic growth and rising nationalism in China. The United States will need to create a balance in avoiding the conditions that would result in China's dissatisfaction while not fully letting the latter expand its influence over the world. US strategy should be reciprocal yet interlinking, self-interested, and binding towards China.

The primary issues between the two powers include debate or dialogues over copyright laws, fiscal transparency, the dollar as international standard currency, access to world markets, labour standards, migration patterns, environmental concerns, exchange rate controls, etc. For China, tackling these issues will be more difficult as there is a deep gap between the individual productivity of the Chinese labour and that of the US. Individual productivity refers to the effectiveness of productive effort, calculated in terms of the rate of output per unit of input.

The alternative for the US will be to alter the timing of parity by bringing out a structural change to avoid confrontation with China. This might include the enlargement of NATO or any similar arrangement to gather Russia, India, and Japan under one umbrella of the Western alliance in order to delay parity with China for a considerable range of time. China could also join an international structure like NATO but such a possibility seems a little far-fetched given China's foreign policy and her geopolitical interests. However, if China along with India follows this strategy, it would ensure global

peace and stability. Although the power structure is changing in a way that China is becoming the focus of the international political system, the reality that the US has widened the power gap with other states to a considerable extent cannot be neglected. This argument can be supported considering the military might of the US which is clearly demonstrated in its armed conflicts with various countries of the world.

The US is superior in terms of technological capabilities and modern military tactics and has a considerable lead in military proficiency. Dating back to the first Iraq war, the military capabilities of the US have been very well-demonstrated. The US exhibited skilful and unique airpower and an efficient plan that employed deception, speed, and substantial firepower to win an astonishing victory against a massive military force, despite being weakened by a decade-long engagement in war. In the Bosnian war as well, the United States conducted an air campaign and achieved a full range of war objectives, without the use of ground forces. This adroit military success cast anxiety and a sense of competition among international players. Similarly, in the second Iraq War, the US military tactics astonished worldwide military planners. China's richest asset is its manpower, i.e., its human resource. However, modern US military tactics made China realise the fact that manpower can no longer provide a strategic advantage. China has focused more on developing its economy over its military ever since. The Chinese leadership needs to reconsider the strategy and discover approaches to reach the level of tactical supremacy of the US if it is to compensate for the imbalance.

Chinese Geo-Economics via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

China's rise in such a short time is unparalleled in the history of the world. Its economic gains have fascinated the great powers. The kind of geo-economic clout that China carries in the contemporary international system is changing the individual perception about the

essence of international relations of the current century. BRI is an important component and catalyst of this growing influence. China directs its external and strategic initiatives through the BRI spectrum which has become an anchor to its emerging power. Fairly and unquestionably BRI is seemingly the most momentous economic and social accomplishment of the century.

Some commentators correlate that BRI is a modern form of the Marshall Plan with a Chinese attribute.[10] According to Beeson and Li, "Indeed, if the BRI becomes a reality it will quite literally cement China's place at the centre of a regional network of production processes that will inevitably enhance China's overall economic and geopolitical importance."[11] It is very obvious now that the strength of states is displayed by their comparative alterations in the economic spheres than by other critical conventional factors. It is a known fact that progress and transformation in the economic field have visible impacts on geopolitical outcomes. As pointed out by Gilpin in 1981, change in the basic tangible areas and revival of the economy have a visible effect on the power-sharing, it upsets the existing settled structures and constitutes provisions for 'hegemonic transitions'.

The current relationship between China and the United States has again diverted the debate to these concepts. According to some experts, the US rise after WWII followed the same economic pattern as China is currently following. The analysts who consider the BRI as an evolved version of the Marshall plan present many supporting arguments. "While the instant goal of the Marshall Plan was to offer a direct boost to Europe's ailing economies, in the eyes of its architects it was seen as the key to social harmony, to the survival of private-enterprise capitalism and the preservation of political democracy."[12] In the view of analysts, if this so-called 'Chinese Marshall Plan' becomes a reality, it will function in different political and strategic circumstances. To understand its significance, it is important to discuss the essence of

geo-economic power that changes the more crucial international prospects in contemporary times.

Geo-economics has become an important part of the contemporary academic debate. However, there is a lack of consensus over the definition of geo-economics. Geoeconomics refers to "applying economic instruments to advance geopolitical ends."[13] Geo-economics symbolises realist power politics by other means; national interests remain pre-eminent. China too is seemingly using these ways to promote its national interests and maintain its stature as an emerging global leader. It has adopted various means and measures to ensure and enforce these national goals and the BRI is one of them. "China's elites are both increasingly confident about their capabilities and their right to occupy a more central position in the mechanisms of global governance."[14]

Japanese expansion into Southeast Asia bears a stark resemblance with contemporary Chinese expansion in Africa. Africa serves as the required testing space for China to emerge as a new epitome of power and influence in the global economic sphere, hence highlighting the importance of geo-economics in contemporary international relations. The Chinese have been taking steps for the restoration of the ancient Silk Road and associated trade routes. These linkages provide China with a rather deep-rooted economic superiority in Asia. The BRI has two main facets, the 'Silk Road Economic Belt' (SREB) and the 'Maritime Silk Road' (MSR). The MSR is particularly designed to connect and harmonise the maritime states of Southeast and South Asia. The SREB on the other hand aims to re-connect and renovate the ground-based linkages with Central and South Asia, connecting them with China and finally with Europe. The infrastructure that will be developed across the old Silk Road will stabilise and strengthen China's position as the centre of economic activity.[15]

According to some commentators, the BRI is the quintessential manifestation of China's potential economic leverage and a more proactive approach to foreign policy-making.[16] The BRI goals also extend to bringing stability to China's internal policy.

US-China Relations in the Post-COVID 19 Era

The pandemic has further widened the gulf between the US and China. It seems that there exists a bipartisan consensus in the US over unilateralism and protectionism. The superpower status of the US demanded it to ensure consensus among the world community against coronavirus, and leadership in the time of a global health crisis. Contrarily, the US adopted an entirely opposite approach and looked inward by adopting an 'America first' approach. It ceased World Health Organisation (WHO) funding, the only world body capable of mounting a coordinated response to the transnational threat of coronavirus. The cessation of funding was due to WHO's refusal to blame China for the emergence of the pandemic. The US cut the supply of essential medical equipment and instead began storing vaccines in silos instead of distributing them.

On the other hand, China generously donated vaccines to developing countries amounting to 1.1 billion doses of vaccines in over 100 countries.[17] The Chinese government declared vaccines as a public good, thus, occupying the position which the US relinquished. Vaccine diplomacy added to China's soft power. The US along with its allies has launched Build Back Better World (B3W). B3W seemingly aims to counter China's BRI, intended to provide alternative sources of funding to developing countries. G-7 are to finance the projects in partner countries. In Indo-Pacific, the US has launched the AUKUS to check the growing influence of China. Under the AUKUS, Australia is to receive nuclear submarines which will strengthen its position in the region.

The Western Perspective

The current debate among the Western policymakers and statesmen is that whether the rise of China is a threat to the US hegemony and the regional countries or a guarantee of peace in the global political arena. The main US anxiety is the rise of China's hegemonic position in the international system and its ideological conflict with the West. China's ideological intentions threaten the US and other countries of the world. Different arguments have been developed to explain the implications of China's rise.

The first one is that the cultural and ideological aspects portray China as a threat. According to Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilisations' thesis, the cultural factor in the struggle between civilisations is of great significance. It maintains that the unholy alliance of Islamic and Confucian civilisations is the most prominent threat to the West.[18] Under this logic, a rational response from the US in the short run could be a containment policy, or a head-on approach if needed.

The second aspect is the geopolitical and geo-economic facets of China's rise. Nationalism can still put China in a confrontational position with the US if the latter refuses to share leadership with China as a growing power. A major apprehension is also that democracy will bring about strong nationalism, making China even more aggressive towards the US.

The third argument is China's downfall similar to that of the former Soviet Union. Proponents of this perspective argue that sudden death syndrome like that of the Soviets can be worse for the region. The huge Chinese population might result in the worst refugee crisis, while state failure might result in an eruption of a civil war, accelerated crime, domestic unrest, etc.

Considering the aforementioned, the US tends to fluctuate between demonisation and romanticisation of China, i.e., from pressure to engagement.[19]

The relatively less powerful Asian countries, particularly closer to China have more than just ideological stakes in China's new move. For them, the presence of a powerful country surrounding them and their growing dependence on the Chinese economy for development has compelled them to be very cautious about their terms with China. In the Asian continent, China has vast territorial land and population as compared to the other Asia Pacific countries. China has an enormous quantity of FDI and provides a large number of exports. In that, China's increasing economic, as well as military might, is often viewed as a threat by other countries. Thus, none of the Asia Pacific states has clearly shown any of its policies against China as it is an emerging power in their view.

China is a tough strategic competition for the United States. The US views China as an aggressive state, pursuing authoritarian expansionism. This is depicted from the remarks made by the former US Vice President Mike Pence contending that China chose 'economic aggression' to expand its influence on the world in addition to 'debt diplomacy'. He mentioned that China was using political, economic, as well as military propaganda to promote its influence across the region and beyond and there was no confusion that in doing so China was interfering in the US democracy.[20]

In the past few decades, the US has placed at risk the privilege of maintaining its position as the global hegemon due to a number of reasons. Statistics and data reveal that in the realm of international trade, China has outpaced the US as a credible trade associate. Of 115 units in Germany that deliberated to shift their production units overseas, 31 per cent preferred China while only 9 per cent wanted the US to be its next production facility.[21] The measures taken by the US against China under the Trump administration depicted US insecurity with the rising global rival. President Trump imposed harsh restrictions on Chinese telecom giant Huawei arguing that technologies such as Huawei could be used as an espionage source for the Chinese

Intelligence. Such a measure by a state whose national intelligence agencies were caught for using user data of various social media websites and communication channels is rather ironic.[22] US Secretary of State later accused the company of its covert collaboration with the Chinese government and the CCP.[23] These steps reflect a misuse of state power to restrict the growth and development of a Chinese company that US companies could not compete with.

China's rise is also visible in the worldwide ascent in Chinese companies in various technologies, including most prominently the advancement in 5G technology. With 5G, the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI), automation, and mechanisation could be fully harnessed. It will change the contours of contemporary technology as well as the various aspects of life associated with it. These factors clearly suggest that China has challenged the US global dominance. Data indicate that Huawei sales amounted to over 50 per cent in the first quarter of 2019, surpassing Apple in its worldwide sales. Huawei sales are increasing exponentially while Apple sales have dropped by 30 per cent in the same duration. Despite all US restrictions, Huawei sales managed to cross $100 billion.[24] China considers the US responsible for the downturn in its bilateral relations with the former. This was declared in a white paper that was issued in the first week of June 2019 in China.[25] The paper also clarified that the People's Republic is ready for cooperation given that it is favourable for both countries.

The Australian parliament passed new laws to stop foreign involvement in Australia seemingly targeting the widespread Chinese interference in their homeland. The increasing concern of nations has also led to restrictions on Chinese telecom companies such as Huawei, ZTE, etc. The Australian government imposed a ban on Huawei and ZTE from providing 5G mobile network technology in the country. The British security committee also expressed worries about Huawei's telecommunications equipment. Additionally, Germany also vetoed

the acquisition of an engineering firm by a Chinese company due to national security concerns.

The BRI is being opposed by many countries due to the fear of debt-trap diplomacy and foreign influence. States like Sri Lanka and Malaysia expressed serious concerns about the mega project.

The Chinese Perspective

In a world that is embroiled in tensions and conflicts, US confrontation with China could further destabilise the already anarchic world order. The Chinese leaders have recognised the need to dispel fears regarding their rise and create an international environment favourable to China's rise and progress. The Chinese government has taken many steps including sponsoring exhibitions regarding China in foreign countries, promoting Chinese language programs, tourism, etc. In light of the peaceful rise of China, there are certain arguments evaluated by Chinese scholars and strategists. China's growth is dependable on world peace and, in response, China will bestow to play its role in contributing to peace. Secondly, China will continue to grow peacefully. It will rely on its resources, not intended to exploit the developing or the underdeveloped states. Also, China is focusing on its development for the upcoming future generations in the long run for their well-being. And lastly, if China seeks its final target of achieving economic might, it shall not create trouble for the rest of the world.

Basic principles of China's peaceful ascension can be summed up as follows:

1. Building a strategic partnership with second-tier powers through strategic partnership pacts with the EU, Russia, and regional powers;
2. Promote a friendly neighbourhood policy in the Asia-Pacific region by expanding trade; and
3. Looking for partnership and avoiding direct confrontation with the US.

Conclusion

Some scholars predict a Sino-centric world in the future while some argue that China would collapse like the former USSR. The US views the rise of China as a threat, whereas the Chinese view the US as an unhappy state that is, directly and indirectly, trying to hinder its rise. The US wants China to be brought into the existing governance structures of international relations. With time, China has evolved its internal composition and technological capabilities to match those of the US but at the same time, the reality of the US military supremacy cannot be disregarded. In order to avoid the possibility of a conflict or confrontation in future, the US will have to find ways to accommodate China into the current norms of the international order. The process of integrating China into the existing order can be initiated by the world states to join and participate in the regional and international organisations. China's path to a smooth rise might be hindered if its leadership is unable to balance between the national imperative to develop rapidly with the careful handling of the overheated economy. So far, China has depicted its rise as a peaceful and non-threatening phenomenon with no intention of replacing the existing international order. What happens in future will depend on how the world reacts to the rise of China, particularly the United States.

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