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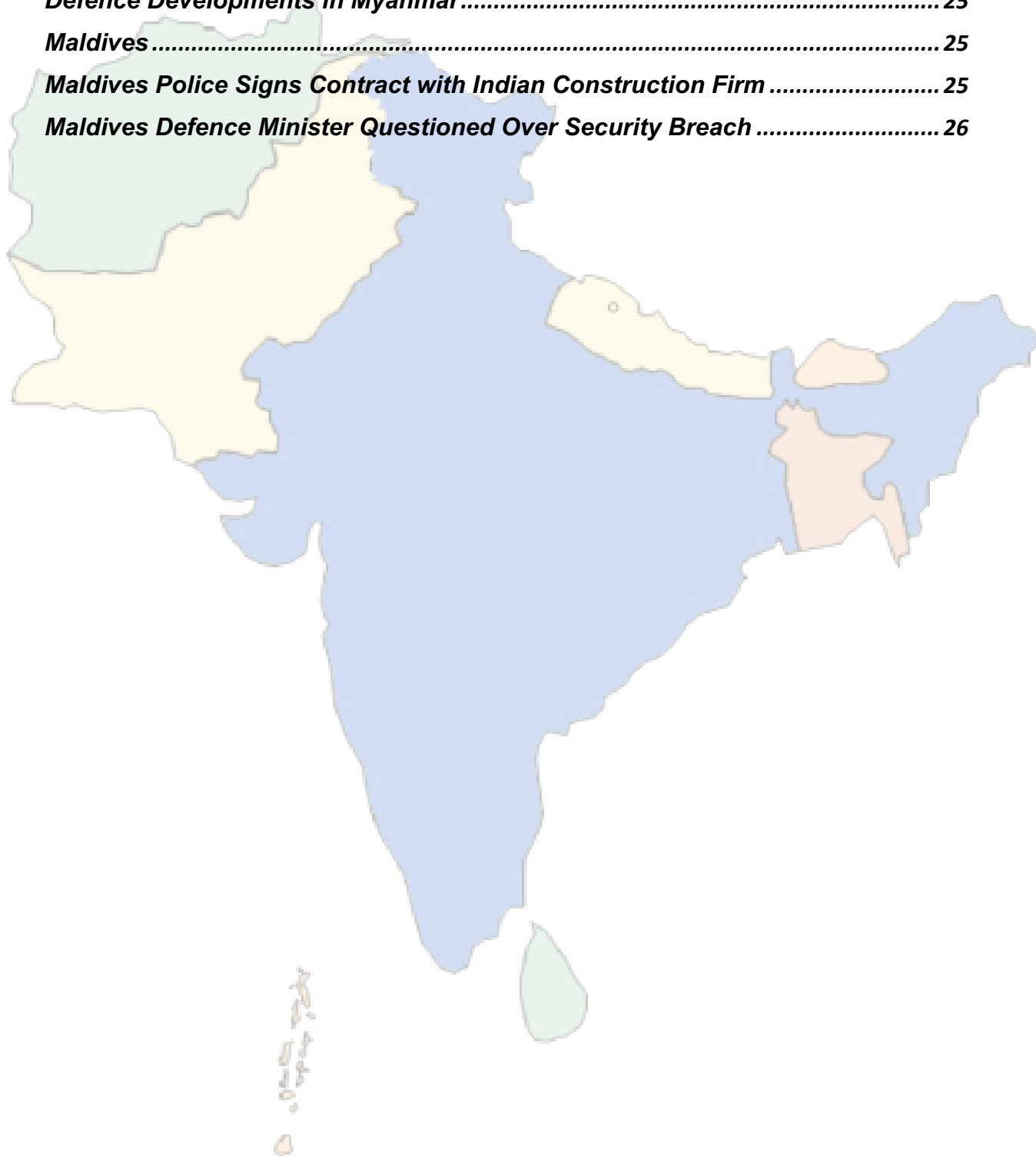


**EDITORS: Major General Jagatbir Singh, VSM (Retd)
Samriddhi Roy**

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Note from Head of CS3

Dear all,

The current gigantic shifts in South Asian geopolitics and the likelihood of more of it in the future, necessitates a better understanding of the security trends and the linked history. The balance of power seems to be shifting and one needs to revisit the contours of many foreseeable and unforeseeable power-dynamic developments taking place in this region.

Undoubtedly the current developments in Afghanistan have occupied the centre stage. With the US and NATO pulling out this action has granted a dangerous fillip to the egoistic and powerful rise in the Taliban's barbaric activities. The Afghan media showcased the expeditious fall of district centres, cities. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) showed a lack of fighting precipitated by inadequate, air support and reinforcement. The tactical pull by the US has pushed back Afghanistan by several years and opened old wounds.

In Myanmar, a few months post the coup, the internal situation is deplorable, to say the least. Civilian mutinies coupled with the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) has fired protracted violence nationwide. Normalcy in Myanmar has observed a prolonged paralysis, adding to the burden is the rise in refugee flow to the Indian state of Mizoram. India finds itself in a sticky position as it struggles to openly support either the military, civil society or popular political leadership in resolving the complicated, long-drawn conflict without taking substantial risks. Hence, such complexities can only be unboxed through navigating relational and security waves through systematic inquiry. Thus, the endeavour of South Asian Monitor is to unravel some of these issues through analytical articles and journals, written by informed academicians. I am sanguine that this Monitor will generate interest and help you in your future research projects.

Maj Gen RPS Bhadauria, VSM (Retd)
Head, Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (CS3)
The United Service Institution of India

ANALYSIS

Taliban's Pyrrhic Victory is escapable

-Samriddhi Roy

After twenty years of war, an uneasy clam rests over Afghanistan as foreign troops march out with carriers, heavy tanks leaving behind a deafening silence for Kabul to uphold. In the conflict-ridden zone of Afghanistan, the flashpoints remain as precarious civil unrest, internal displacement of population, civilian casualties, catastrophic insurgencies, which by measure is fatiguing to the world's second-largest refugee state. The withdrawal of the United States and its NATO allies has led to concerns over the Kabul government's ability to tame the aggressive Taliban onslaught. The peace process, earlier initiated by the US between the Afghan and Taliban government has also stalled without achieving a settlement.

While President Ghani has asserted that the Afghan forces are prepared to tackle the violent challenges¹, foreign policy analysts are fairly pessimistic about the possibilities. The US interests in Afghanistan are much different from what they were post 9/11 terror attacks². Under Biden's rule, US officials have claimed to continue "over-the-horizon" counterterrorism endeavours after withdrawal. However, questions remain as to how the hasty evacuation of military troops results in practicality impacting, regional stability, financial, political and logistical challenges in Afghanistan³. Afghan officials sought to trivialize the inimical impact of US withdrawal, nonetheless continue to seek financial support for the Afghan forces⁴. Currently, the on-ground situation has turned from bad to worse, United States has laid out a fresh platform for the Taliban to act on

¹https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewiSmaeGhpDyAhXf8XMBHchnB0sQFnoECAkQAw&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thehindu.com%2Fnews%2Finternational%2Ftaliban-has-won-battles-we-will-win-war-afghan-president-ghani%2Farticle35379659.ece&usq=AOvVaw0Rwf7mr_Qprxec4Zfet9mT

² <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2011-06-21/agreeing-afghanistan>

³<https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-bidens-washington/biden-finally-got-to-say-no-to-the-generals>

⁴ Zahra Rahimi, "ANDSF Showcases Air Force as Country Braces for US Pullout," *TOLOnews*, April 26, 2021.

their agenda, only now, with a foreign audience and status of international “prestige”. Shukria Barakzai, a well-known women’s rights activist and former politician in Afghanistan, in her weekly newspaper *Aina-e-Zan* (meaning: Women’s Mirror), writes on her fears of a Taliban victory crumbling over twenty- years of humanitarian stride achieved by the women of Afghanistan. The reestablishment of an Islamic emirate will not only terrorize the growth of human rights but also adversely impact any proliferation of a politically just society in Afghanistan⁵.

The uncomfortable questions over whether or not a civil war is in play are no longer appurtenant to the conflict since the Afghan government and security bodies are not only battling the local Taliban. International terrorist aggressors such as Pakistani militants, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Chechens, Al Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba are all destructive tentacles of the menacing Taliban today. The vein of the throbbing conflict, as many identify, was former US President Donald Trump’s Doha Agreement, stamping a Taliban return to power and leadership.

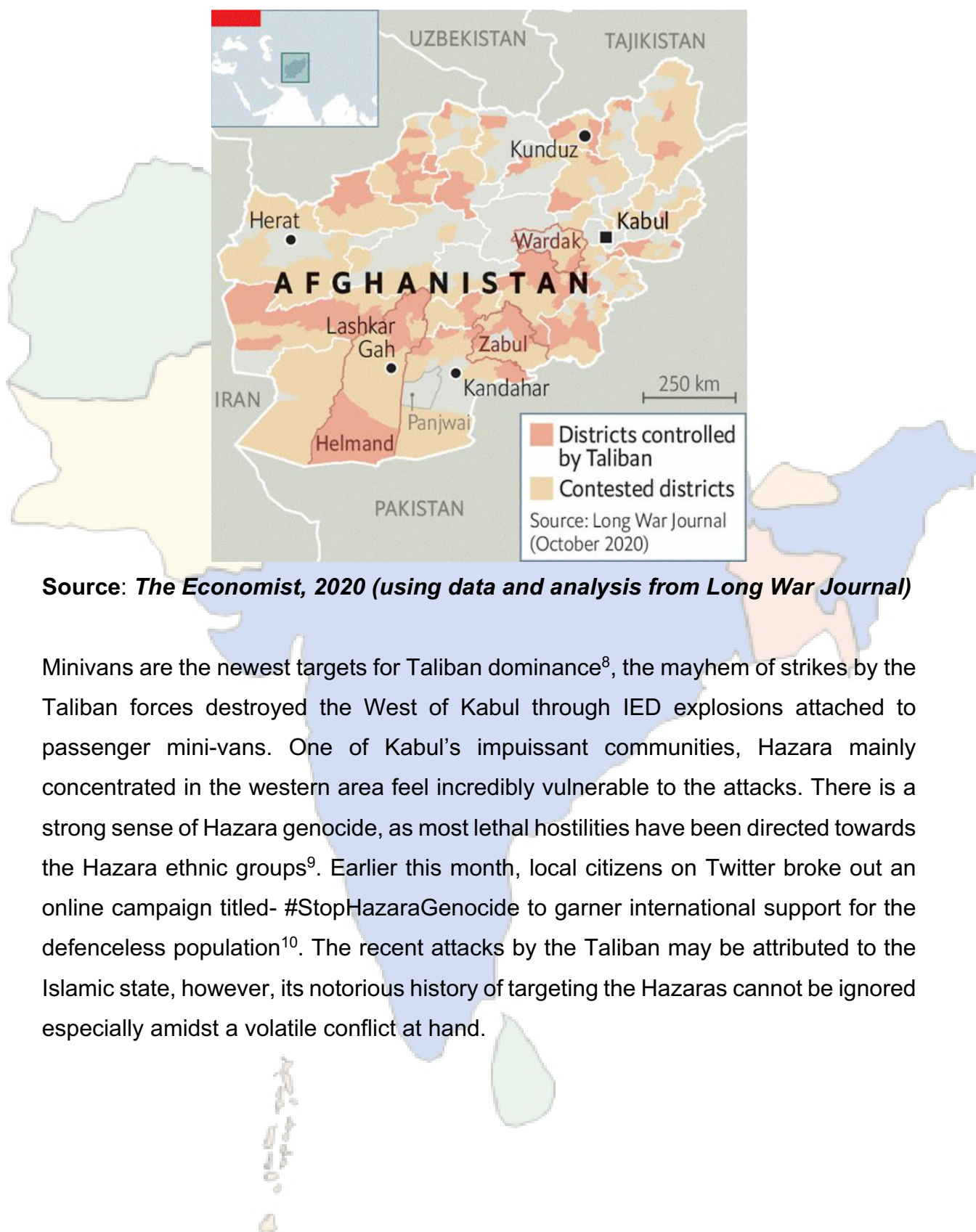
Violent Disorder

Today, the Taliban asseverates control of 85 per cent of Afghanistan’s land. While the state officials have defenestrated such claims by the Taliban, Afghan locals have visibly retained the territorial changes experienced by them in real-time. Emboldened by the US’s leave, Taliban forces have marched to capture essential districts in Herat province, sheltering lakhs on minority Shi’ites⁶. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) reported on 01 August 2021, about 1,677 civilians were killed and as many as 3,644 were brutally injured in the first six months of 2021, thereby reporting an 80 per cent increase in casualties post-withdrawal of US troops⁷.

⁵ <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1903906/world>

⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/militia-commanders-rush-aid-afghan-forces-against-taliban-2021-07-09/>

⁷ <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/afghan-watchdog-records-80-pc-increase-in-civilian-casualties20210801210205/>



Source: *The Economist*, 2020 (using data and analysis from Long War Journal)

Minivans are the newest targets for Taliban dominance⁸, the mayhem of strikes by the Taliban forces destroyed the West of Kabul through IED explosions attached to passenger mini-vans. One of Kabul's impuissant communities, Hazara mainly concentrated in the western area feel incredibly vulnerable to the attacks. There is a strong sense of Hazara genocide, as most lethal hostilities have been directed towards the Hazara ethnic groups⁹. Earlier this month, local citizens on Twitter broke out an online campaign titled- #StopHazaraGenocide to garner international support for the defenceless population¹⁰. The recent attacks by the Taliban may be attributed to the Islamic state, however, its notorious history of targeting the Hazaras cannot be ignored especially amidst a volatile conflict at hand.

⁸ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/bombs-hit-2-minivans-in-kabul-7-dead-afghan-official/articleshow/83461744.cms?from=mdr>

⁹ <https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-group-shootings-05612533bbcbfa2d836d46d84b82ee92>

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23StopHazaraGenocide&lang=en>

Where are the Prospects of Peace Now?

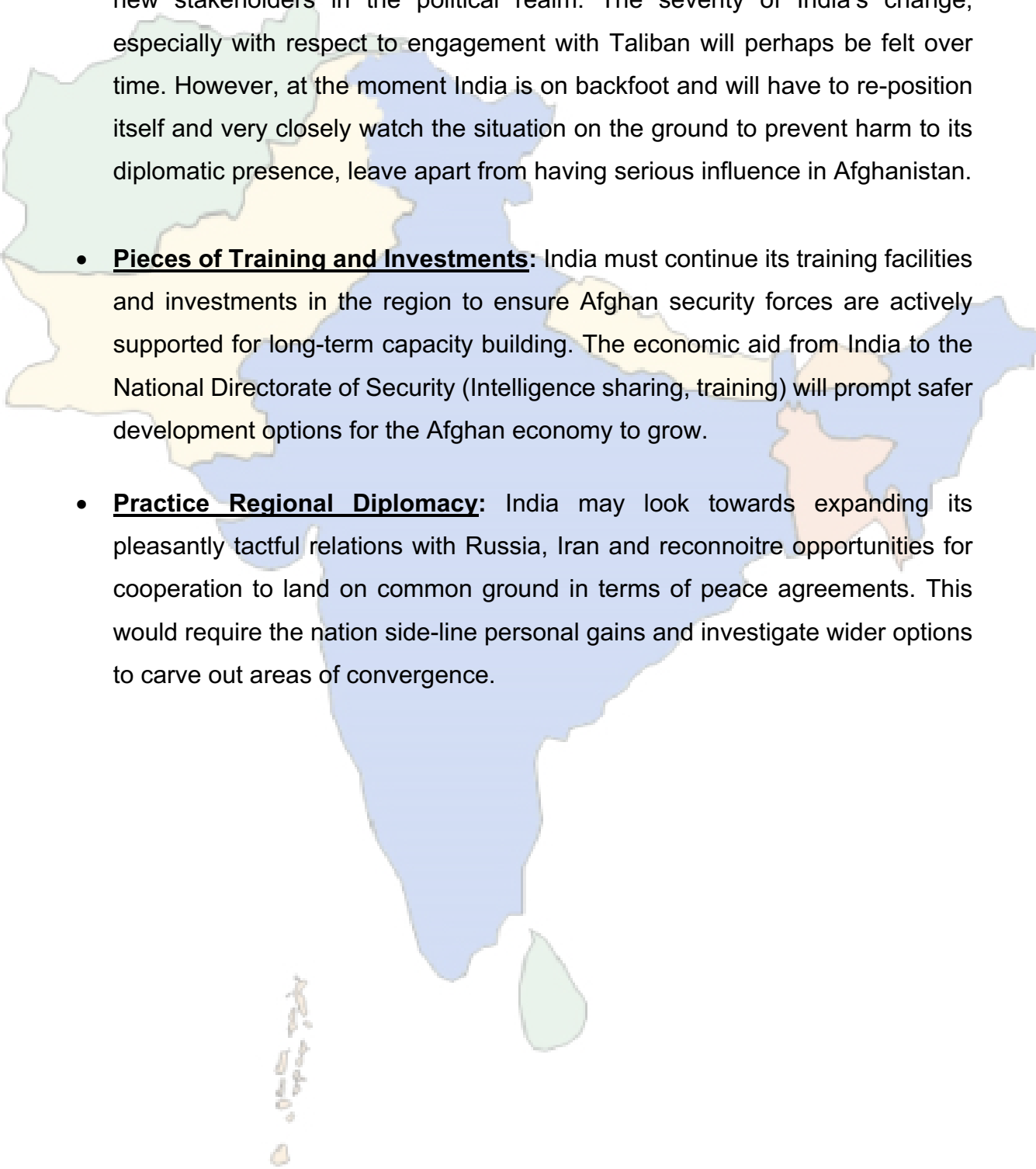
The prospects truly depend on who defines and directs the aspects of peace amongst the stakeholders. The Taliban is setting the terms of table talks as whatever seems beneficial for itself. In the immediate future Taliban's ideals are likely to be asserted much more firmly. To unpack the idea of peace, it is imperative to consider the likelihood of a ceasefire which perhaps would lead to a broader negotiation but not necessary for all of the Afghan government to fall under the umbrella of negotiations. As of now, we have not seen any signs of a ceasefire, the military initiatives are in place to maintain a defensive balance in the conflict zone. However, there is no compelling reason why Taliban would not use coercion as a tool to rise to their desired power status. Policy-analysts are decently pessimistic about serious prospects of peace, one may be simply looking at the conflict transitioning from one 'type' of a conflict, from US taking a step back to a greater focus on the 'internal' conflicts in the country. Thus, the internal conflicts in Afghanistan continue in different shapes and forms.

India looking Back and Ahead

There is a well-founded schmeat of assessing Indian risks and interest in the Afghan conflict. India very evidently has recast its policy towards Afghanistan, wherein for the very first time it is more open to participating in formal communication channels with the Taliban¹¹. In addition to widening its bond with the Afghan political sphere¹², India wants to engage with ruling bodies beyond those in governance. While India is immensely concerned by the massive rise in violence perpetrated by Taliban in Afghanistan, it recognises the need to embrace all stakeholders, including the Taliban for an immediate ceasefire and resumption of the peace process in Afghanistan. The current conflict is a very serious inflexion point for India's Afghanistan policy. For India to secure its interests in the regional conflict, it may resort to a combination of interlinked mitigation strategies such as:

¹¹ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/in-a-first-india-opens-communication-channels-with-afghan-taliban-factions-101623165405972.html>

¹² <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/jaishankar-meets-afghan-peace-negotiator-abdullah-abdullah-11627045446060.html>

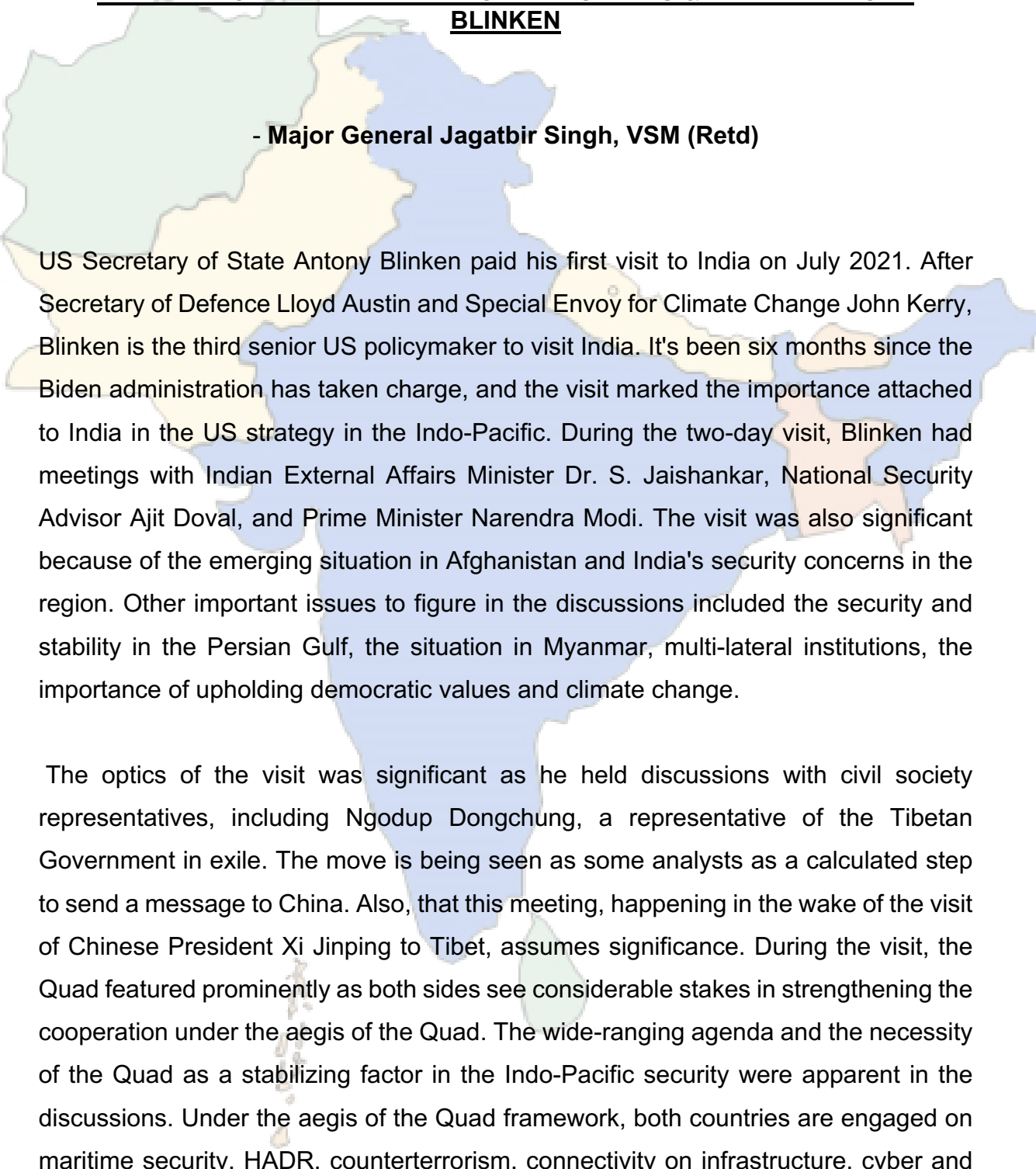
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- **Increasing Diplomatic Engagement:** India must consider appointing a special-case envoy committed to Afghan reconciliation. The role of the envoy may include expressing India's views in every meeting, widen engagement with new stakeholders in the political realm. The severity of India's change, especially with respect to engagement with Taliban will perhaps be felt over time. However, at the moment India is on backfoot and will have to re-position itself and very closely watch the situation on the ground to prevent harm to its diplomatic presence, leave apart from having serious influence in Afghanistan.
 - **Pieces of Training and Investments:** India must continue its training facilities and investments in the region to ensure Afghan security forces are actively supported for long-term capacity building. The economic aid from India to the National Directorate of Security (Intelligence sharing, training) will prompt safer development options for the Afghan economy to grow.
 - **Practice Regional Diplomacy:** India may look towards expanding its pleasantly tactful relations with Russia, Iran and reconnoitre opportunities for cooperation to land on common ground in terms of peace agreements. This would require the nation side-line personal gains and investigate wider options to carve out areas of convergence.

ANALYSIS

“THERE ARE FEW RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WORLD THAT ARE MORE VITAL THAN THE ONE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES & INDIA.”: ANTONY

BLINKEN

- Major General Jagatbir Singh, VSM (Retd)



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken paid his first visit to India on July 2021. After Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin and Special Envoy for Climate Change John Kerry, Blinken is the third senior US policymaker to visit India. It's been six months since the Biden administration has taken charge, and the visit marked the importance attached to India in the US strategy in the Indo-Pacific. During the two-day visit, Blinken had meetings with Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The visit was also significant because of the emerging situation in Afghanistan and India's security concerns in the region. Other important issues to figure in the discussions included the security and stability in the Persian Gulf, the situation in Myanmar, multi-lateral institutions, the importance of upholding democratic values and climate change.

The optics of the visit was significant as he held discussions with civil society representatives, including Ngodup Dongchung, a representative of the Tibetan Government in exile. The move is being seen as some analysts as a calculated step to send a message to China. Also, that this meeting, happening in the wake of the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Tibet, assumes significance. During the visit, the Quad featured prominently as both sides see considerable stakes in strengthening the cooperation under the aegis of the Quad. The wide-ranging agenda and the necessity of the Quad as a stabilizing factor in the Indo-Pacific security were apparent in the discussions. Under the aegis of the Quad framework, both countries are engaged on maritime security, HADR, counterterrorism, connectivity on infrastructure, cyber and digital concerns, COVID-19 response, climate action, education, and resilient and reliable supply chains. Further collaboration on all these issues were discussed as

also the importance of observing international law and rules and norms, including UNCLOS. Foreign Minister Jaishankar, stated that it "is not strange" for groups of countries to work together. "People need to get over the idea that somehow other countries doing things is directed against them."

The situation in Afghanistan was another crucial area discussed in the visit. The US withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and the growing power of the Taliban have a direct bearing on India's security as it opens up a host of issues. It is likely that Blinken shared the U.S. assessment of the state of the fight and the capacity of Afghanistan government forces to hold the line against the Taliban. However, while both countries share an interest in keeping the Taliban out, it is clear that the US is unlikely to do very much other than helping to support the government forces. Blinken stressed that "any future government in Afghanistan has to be inclusive and fully representative of the Afghan people." He assured that the US would "remain very much engaged in Afghanistan. We have not only a strong embassy there but also important programmes that continue to support Afghanistan, economically through development assistance through security assistance." Owing to the fraught relationship between the US and Russia, India has to do the difficult balancing act, which is most visibly seen in the S-400 deal as there is a looming threat of sanctions under CAATSA. On India's purchase of S-400 air defence from Russia, Blinken said the US has shared its concerns with India on this. Beyond that, he refused to provide any concrete indication about the likely course of action. The answer by Blinken points to the dilemma faced by the US in dealing with this issue as India is an integral part of the QUAD and has its security concerns that need to be mitigated by induction of this equipment.

US and India also explored ways to deepen defence collaboration, including exercises, defence transfers and technologies ahead of the next edition of the 2+2 defence and foreign ministerial dialogue to be held in the US later this year. Blinken also pledged \$25 million for India's vaccine drive and said that both countries will work together to end the COVID-19 pandemic. The visit saw a particular focus on expanding vaccine production to make it globally affordable and accessible. The global issue of the Covid-19 pandemic and the travel challenges resulting from it were also featured in the meeting. A secondary consequence of the pandemic is to fuel economic recovery, both countries must continue to grow the trade relationship, and beyond

need to keep working through the barriers that stand in the way of greater bilateral investment and deeper commercial ties.

Around the same time as Secretary Blinken's arrival in New Delhi, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin referred to Chinese "aggression against India" in an address at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Singapore. In a clear reference to the India-China military standoff in eastern Ladakh, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said, "Unfortunately, Beijing's unwillingness to resolve disputes peacefully and respect the rule of law isn't just occurring on the water."

On the perception of India's democracy, he said at a Press conference: "The most remarkable democratic elections in the world, in many ways, are here in India, just by sheer numbers. It's the largest expression of free political will by citizens anywhere on earth ... And we celebrate that the world's oldest and the world's largest democracies are dedicated at heart to a shared set of values that I believe will ensure not only the success of democracy but the success of the relationship between India and the United States." Blinken said, "We view Indian democracy as a force for good in defence of a free and open Indo-Pacific." Blinken's observations on rising challenges to democracies were addressed towards China. "There are few relationships in the world that are more vital than one between the U.S. and India," Blinken said at a joint news conference with Indian Foreign Minister Jaishankar, who said, "our interests are shared, our concerns are similar, and our convergences are strong."

Despite feelings to the contrary before the visit, the visit was significant in highlighting the bi-lateral synergy that has grown between both countries. This relationship has become consequential not only because of the most significant challenges both nations face but also because of the strategic choices they are willing to make and its attendant consequences.

KEY TRENDS

BANGLADESH

China Rushes Establishment of Defence Projects in Bangladesh

Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming is set on introducing Chinese companies as avowed during his meet with Bangladeshi President Sheikh Hasina this month. The meet involved talks of soaring military cooperation between the two nations¹³ wherein the Chinese goals of expanding on several key ventures such as an ultra-modern submarine project in Cox's Bazar, Pekua was brought to life. In its desperate bid, China has already discharged two submarines to the Dhaka Navy (2016-17), operating from a provisional base in Cox, with the intent to enhance its dominance in the Indian sub-continent. Post this deal, Bangladesh approached China requesting aid in erecting a modern submarine base for the national navy of Bangladesh.

Chinese diplomat Li Jiming has played a predominant role in bringing Chinese President Xi-Jinping and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina closer in diplomatic terms. In March 2021, PM Sheikh Hasina applauded Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and also appreciatingly mentioned her plans to boost the defence industry through Chinese assistance- maritime management in the Bay of Bengal and fuelling Dhaka's Naval capacity¹⁴. The submarine base construction will entail facilities such as barracks, ammunition depot, repairing dock and wharfs at the Taka site in Bangladesh.

¹³ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-04/28/c_139911314.htm

¹⁴ <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/were-part-of-chinas-bri-but-india-our-most-important-partner-bangladesh-foreign-advisor/627369/>

Bangladesh Abstains from UNGA Resolution

Bangladesh rebuffed from voting a United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution as it fell short in addressing the “root causes” of the situation in present-day Myanmar. The Bangladeshi delegation vexed deep disappointment in the resolution, claiming it thwarts ideals of peace and stability. The tallied votes tipped in favour of 119 countries who voted for the resolution with one nation against and 36 abstentions. Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN Rabab Fatima at the UNGA explained how sharing a border with Myanmar allows Bangladesh to fosters millions of people from there. Thus, the socio-political stability of the region directly impacts them and so do the prospects of sustainable development. For Bangladesh to chalk out a stable plan of action in bringing justice to the millions of Rohingyas, it is increasingly essential to voice local fundamental issues, which according to the delegation were absent from the proposed UNGA resolution. Following these concerns, India decided to abstain from the resolution of Arms Embargo on Myanmar, labelling the resolution work to be a ‘haste course of action’. Amongst the 36 countries, India along with China and Russia hope for a more comprehensive coherent resolution to justify the gruesome case of the Rohingya community. From South Asia, countries like Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nepal abstained in solidarity with the re-consideration of the document¹⁵.

Tiger Multiple Rocket Launcher System: A Roaring Success for Bangladesh Army

PM Hasina brings the Bangladesh army’s contributions to the public limelight surfacing the key contributions to social infrastructure and security in the past year. She reiterates how the Tiger Multiple Launch Missile system is a boon to the country, as a specialised step towards trapping modernisation in the armed forces. The MLRS missile system was roped in the army on the momentous celebration of the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman father of the nation and Bangladesh’s golden jubilee year since independence.

¹⁵ Compilation of Bangladesh Daily Star, BD 24, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, and Press Information of Bureau India

"This system will be able to simultaneously hit multiple targets more accurately and effectively than other artillery systems in a short period. It will add a new dimension to the existing operational capabilities of the army." "I believe that this modern MLRS will strengthen our army a lot, increase morale and raise the confidence of soldiers," Hasina said the modern MLRS system can very quickly and effectively launch simultaneous attacks on multiple targets and it will add a new dimension in increasing the army's operational capability¹⁶. Turkish defence giant Roketsan has delivered the first regiment of its powerful TRG-300 series Tiger Guided Multiple-Launch Rocket (GMLRS) systems to the Bangladesh Army.

Bangladesh Army Chief of Staff (CAS) General Aziz Ahmed who is due to retire in July disclosed the delivery of Turkish origin GMLRS and Chinese light tanks would be completed by the middle of the year. Bangladesh Army is amid a large-scale modernization that has witnessed procurement of military hardware from Europe, China and US. Turkey has secured itself as one of the major defence equipment suppliers to the Bangladesh Army and Air Force. It is also trying to develop cooperation with the Bangladesh Navy, naval shipyards and the Bangladeshi defence industry. Turkey's own defence industry export agency disclosed the country's arms manufacturers exported nearly \$60 million of military hardware to Bangladesh in April 2021. This is largely accounted for the sale of three regiments of Type B MLRS (Tiger Missile System). Each regiment includes 18 firing units and associated support vehicles. The Tiger Missile System (Type B) is designed to hit potential targets such as artillery systems, air defence systems, radar sites, assembly areas, logistic facilities, C3 facilities and other high priority targets. It is combat proven and has the capability to function in all weather, the terrain in day or night. The system is characterized by its high accuracy precision strike capability and anti-jamming functionality. The 300mm diameter rockets have a warhead weight of up to 670 kg and an effective radius of over 80 m. It is accurate to less than 10 m and its guidance is achieved by GPS, GNSS aided INS. The Tiger missile system utilizes the Russian

¹⁶<https://www.thedailystar.net/bangladesh/news/pm-includes-tiger-multiple-launch-rocket-system-bangladesh-army-2114633>

Kamaz 65224 series 6x6 high-mobility chassis. Turkey has exported this system to several other friendly nations already including Azerbaijan, which used it in combat.

PAKISTAN

Pakistani Trade Deficit Crosses \$3 Billion in July'21

Alarm bells ring as Pakistan recorded a massive \$3 billion trade deficit in July, the first month of the financial year 2021-22, painting a rosy picture by officials citing the increase in exports. The recorded increase was almost double in comparison to its exports. Regardless of a shoot in exports, the country's economy is hanging loose due to the exponential climb in imports. The last fiscal year invited (which ended in June) the trade deficit to inflate by at least 32.9 per cent, accounting for about a \$30 billion difference between exports and imports. For three consecutive years, from FY18 to FY 20, the trade deficit was on the decline. It touched an all-time high of \$37.7 billion in FY18, \$31.8 billion in FY19, and \$23.183bn in FY20. However, since December last year, the import grew significantly while the growth in exports couldn't match that. And in FY21, it recorded \$30.796 billion. The import bill surged to \$56.091 billion in FY21 from \$44.574 billion the previous year, recording a 25.8 per cent growth.

Officials claim the rise in imports is mainly due to raw material imports, which will pay off later. However, the widening gap in the last seven months doesn't collaborate the claim. In July this month, the import bill is also rising mainly due to increased imports of petroleum, soybean, machinery, raw material and chemicals, mobile phones, fertilizers, tyres and antibiotics, and vaccines. Significantly, remittances, too, have recorded a significant growth, which will let the country finance its import bill. On the expected lines, Shabaz Gill, Pakistan's prime minister special assistance said that exports had touched the highest-ever mark of over \$25 billion in FY21¹⁷.

Furthermore, there is a sword hanging on the country's GSP plus status in the EU market, which provides almost tariff-free access to most of Pakistan's export to the EU

¹⁷ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/875875-july-trade-deficit-widens-on-rising-imports>

market. In April, the EU parliament passed a resolution, calling for suspending the GSP plus status for Pakistan, citing the blatant misuse of the country's blasphemous laws. Pakistan's textile sector has been most benefited from it. The loss of the status could cause a direct loss of \$4 billion in exports and may also herald the collapse of the industry which creates thousands of jobs. The sector accounts for a quarter of the country's total exports.

Pakistan's FM Blames Govt for Mishandling Jadhav Case

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi criticised the previous government for mauling the case of Kulbhusan Jadhav, the Indian national convicted for spying by a Pakistani court four years ago, as legislation related to the cases passes up to Pakistan's Senate. Speaking to the media in the Pakistani city of Multan on Sunday, FM Shah Mehmood Qureshi said a bill passed by the lower house of parliament last week was aimed at complying with orders from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and to deprive India of an opportunity to have Pakistan "dragged back" to the court.

"The PML-N are the ones who mishandled the Kulbhusan Jadhav case," he said, referring to former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party, a main opposition political party. "The steps we have taken are in order to comply with the International Court of Justice's orders and recommendations." Qureshi's comments follow a noisy debate on the bill in Parliament on Thursday, with both treasury and opposition benches accusing each other of incompetence in the handling of the case.

Jadhav was arrested by Pakistani security forces in March 2016, and convicted a year later by a military court for espionage and facilitating attacks by armed groups on Pakistani soil. At the time of his arrest, the military released a video of Jadhav appearing to confess to having operated a network of operatives to conduct attacks in Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province. In July 2019, after a petition lodged by India, the ICJ ordered Pakistan to allow Jadhav full and unimpeded consular access to Indian officials but rejected an Indian plea for his conviction to be dismissed. The court also ordered that Jadhav be given the right of review and reconsideration of his conviction before a civilian court.

The bill passed by Pakistan's lower house of parliament on Thursday gives foreign nationals convicted by military courts in Pakistan the right to file an appeal before a high court, as well as to file petitions seeking consular access. India's government has not so far remarked on the passage of the bill, which will also have to be voted on by the upper house of parliament before it becomes law. In August 2020, India's foreign ministry said New Delhi had asked Pakistan to allow an Indian lawyer to represent Jadhav in his appeals. In defence of the bill, on Sunday, Qureshi said: "India wants that (Jadhav) not be given consular access, and on that excuse, Pakistan be dragged back into the International Court of Justice," he said. "This is what India wants. I hope that our opposition members will not misunderstand things and will understand India's plan." India's foreign ministry has not commented on Qureshi's accusation.¹⁸

Threat Reflex: Pakistan's Car Blast, Terrorist Act or False Flagship?

Gloves are off again as Pakistan broke out of its five-month pause on raising false flagships against India, as it wilfully pins the blame of bomb blast near the home of chief Hafiz Saeed (Jamaat-ud-Dawa) calling it an "India-sponsored act of terror"¹⁹. Mooed Yusuf, Pakistan's National Security Advisor is reported by the media to strongly believe an Indian R&AW (Research and Analysis Wing) agent is behind this attack. PM Imran Khan asserted that the alleged planning and financing of such an attack can be traced back to Indian funding of terrorism in Pakistan. Moreover, Imran Khan took to Twitter, urging the international community to mobilise against such "rouge" acts of terror. Nilesh Kumar in his Op-Ed²⁰ dissects Pakistan's repeated response as its classic blame-game towards India and labels it as 'false-flagship'. The only plausible explanation for such a humungous and incomprehensible security oversight on Islamabad's part is that in all probability, this incident was in essence, a novel '*false flag' operation*' orchestrated by Pakistan's intelligence agencies aimed at serving two purposes. One, to buttress Islamabad's unproven but often repeated allegations that New Delhi was manipulating international terror financing watchdog Financial Action Task Force [FATF] to ensure that Pakistan remained on its grey list a semblance of credibility. Simultaneously, by timing this attack when FATF was in the final stages of

¹⁸<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/pakistans-national-assembly-passes-bill-to-give-right-of-appeal-to-kulbhushan-jadhav/article34786810.ece>

¹⁹<https://www.eurasiareview.com/06082021-lahore-car-bomb-blast-terrorist-act-or-false-flag-operation-oped/>

²⁰ Ibid

deciding whether to retain or remove Pakistan from its grey list, Islamabad probably reckoned that it could use this contrived bomb blast to earn the international terror financing watchdog's sympathy by projecting itself as a 'victim' of terror unleashed by its Eastern neighbour.

SRI LANKA

Japan and Sri Lanka Underprop Defence Ties

A healthy diplomatic virtual meet transpired between Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who holds the defence portfolio, and Japanese Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi to discuss the promotion of defence cooperation and exchanges between the two countries. During the approximately 30-minute video teleconference, both sides exchanged views on bilateral defence cooperation and welcomed the steady progress being made in a broad range of areas, including naval and aerial cooperation, the Japanese Ministry of Defence said²¹.

In this context, both sides welcomed the bilateral exercise JA-LAN EX which was successfully conducted in September 2020, Maritime Self-Defence Force vessel's first participation in Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise hosted by Sri Lanka and the U.S., which took place last week, as well as the successful delivery of the online Air Rescue seminar in May 2021. Both sides confirmed that they will share knowledge and lessons learned from infectious disease control measures taken by the defence authorities, Colombo Page reported. Both sides concurred that Japan and Sri Lanka will further promote bilateral defence cooperation and exchanges based on the Memorandum on Defence Cooperation and Exchanges signed in 2019²².

IMF Grants \$800 Million for Economic Boost

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has decided to provide USD 800 million in August to Sri Lanka to boost the country's economic strength, said Ajith Nivard

²¹ <https://www.ft.lk/front-page/Sri-Lanka-and-Japan-to-strengthen-defence-cooperation/44-720276>

²² <https://www.indianarrative.com/world-news/sri-lanka-and-japan-hold-talks-to-enhance-defence-ties-101439.html>

Cabraal, Minister of State for Money & Capital Markets and State Enterprise Reforms. Cabraal also stated that this is a grant and not a loan to be repaid, because of the global coronavirus crisis, the IMF has decided to provide USD 650 billion to its member countries²³. Cabraal said the amount would be given to Sri Lanka under that program. The minister recalled the IMF had made similar grants to its member countries during the global economic downturn, during which time Sri Lanka received USD 510 million under the program. Cabraal added that the money will be used to develop the country's economic strength, Colombo Page reported.



BHUTAN

India-Bhutan Development Cooperation Talks

On 28 June 2021, the third round of India-Bhutan Development Cooperation Talks was held virtually. Mr Rahul Chhabra, Secretary (Economic Relations, MEA) headed the Indian delegation and from Bhutan Mr Kinga Singye, foreign Secretary led the way. Keeping in mind the importance of Bilateral Development Cooperation talks, India has committed Rs. 4500 crore for implementing bilateral developmental projects divided as Rs. 400 crores for the transitional Trade Support Facility during Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan (2018 - 2023). 77 large and intermediate projects and 524 Small Development Projects (SDPs)/ High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) are at various stages of implementation under the 12th Five Year Plan²⁴.

As Bhutan's 12th Five-year Plan is closing in on its third year, India and Bhutan examined the wholesale progress of Project Tied Assistance (PTA) projects, as well as the SDPs/HICDPs. India's role in the socio-economic aid to Bhutan was very well summarised by the Foreign Secretary as the "impact of HICPs at the local level". During the talks, both sides also agreed to implement some new PTA projects across

²³ <https://economynext.com/imf-to-allocate-sdrs-on-august-23-sri-lanka-expects-around-us800mn-84515/>

²⁴ <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/india-bhutan-review-development-partnership-agree-over-new-projects-2474563>

various sectors including road infrastructure, water management, industrial parks and COVID-19 management. India deeply values its privileged partnership with Bhutan.

Diversifying Export Markets

Bhutan will diversify its export market outside the SAARC region, the country's Economic Minister Loknath Sharma said, adding that five more exportable items will be identified in the future. "Bhutan would participate in a trade fair other than the SAARC region to introduce our products," Sharma was quoted as saying by Kuensel newspaper in parliament on Monday. He further said that the government has started a trade information portal to understand export avenues. The minister's remark came in response to a question from a lawmaker who asked about the government's plans for the diversification of the country's export. "Today, we export 90 per cent to India. Markets have to be diversified. The top 10 export goods are mostly raw materials, such as silicon, stone, and dolomite, which lacks value addition," Passang Dorgi, Bhutanese lawmaker, highlighted in parliament. Last year, Bhutan exported goods worth around \$650 million while imported goods worth around \$904 million, resulting in a trade deficit of \$254 million. Exports increased by two per cent, mainly because of energy exports from the Mangdechhu Hydropower Project. However, non-hydro power export reduced by 31 per cent. Sharma, while responding to questions, acknowledged that export opportunities for the country are scarce given the economic condition and its limited resources. "Our export is mostly mining and mineral products. "Ferrosilicon, silicon carbide, and cement are value-added products," he said²⁵.

NEPAL

Nepal Standing at Foreign Policy Crossroads

During the parliamentary session earlier this month, Nepali PM Sher Bahadur Deuba said that Kathmandu's foreign policy will exhibit values of mutual friendship and cooperation foundational to national interests and effective vaccine diplomacy. "There are no permanent friends and enemies in foreign policy and international relations but

²⁵ <https://kuenselonline.com/local-processing-firm-eases-turmeric-marketing-challenges-in-dagana/>

there is always a permanent interest,” said Deuba. “Securing vaccines will be my first and foremost foreign policy priority.”

His elevation to the top post has significantly reduced the sway China used to have in Nepal’s domestic politics under the previous government. In 2018, it was Beijing that had helped to bring together different communist parties in the country under the single party. However, the infighting and later a judgment by the apex court nullified the unification of communist parties. Calling Deuba a pro-Indian leader, Global Times, which is considered as the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, in an opinion piece said, “The Nepali Congress (Deuba’s party) will likely lead Nepal’s foreign policy towards a favourable direction for India”²⁶.

Soon after the trust vote, Indian Prime Minister Narendra congratulated Deuba, and this week US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also held a telephonic conversation with the new prime minister. “It would be wrong to say that Beijing is wary of the government change in Nepal but it does have some concerns and will keep a watchful eye on Nepal. And it would be more so because of the United States rather than India,” Anil Giri, a senior Nepali journalist, wrote in a piece in The Kathmandu Post newspaper²⁷. China will watch carefully how Deuba takes the Millennium Challenge Corporation compact forward. In the past, he has pushed for early ratification of the US program under which Nepal is set to receive \$500 million in grants. However, parliamentary ratification is still pending. China looks at the MCC compact as part of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy aimed at countervailing its own Belt and Road Initiative, which Nepal signed up to in May 2017. Significantly, on Tuesday evening, when Blinken rang up Deuba MCC was said to be part of the discussions. Arun Budhathoki, another senior Nepali journalist wrote in The Diplomat magazine, “As a small neighbour of gigantic China and sandwiched between the two Asian giants, India and China, Nepal has to tread carefully. It cannot afford to get caught in their geopolitical battles.”

Another aspect that could put Nepal in a tight spot is the renewed focus of the US and India on the Tibet issue. Nepal is home to over 20,000 Tibetan refugees. Both India

²⁶ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202107/1229067.shtml>

²⁷ <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2021/08/07/consensus-foreign-policy-desirable-but-can-parties-have-it>

and the US support the cause. Despite repeated attempts by Beijing, Nepal has not signed the extradition treaty with China, allegedly under pressure from western countries and India. Budhathoki further said “Deuba faces complex geopolitical challenges as rivalries between regional and global powers plays out on Nepali soil. He will need to tread cautiously, especially on issues that are of core importance to these countries.” However, experts say the presence of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist Centre (CPN-MC) led by Dahal will be beneficial to China. Dahal has always stalled attempts to tilt Nepal’s foreign policy towards the US.



MYANMAR

Myanmar’s Unresolved Democracy

Myanmar’s unresolved history shines an appearance of its successful political and economic reformation; however, this is far from the reality on ground. A country once hailed as a “successful” democratic transition operation, where 2015 was seen as the crest of this move towards a full-fledged democracy, the transition underwent a complete 180 degree. In the year 2017, the military untethered merciless campaigns against the Rohingyas, after a militant group (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army) launched attacks on military outposts in the northern Rakhine State, discharging a humanitarian crisis that brought Rohingya to feel their country and find safer refugee abroad. The international community views this ethnic cleansing orchestrated by the Tatmadaw as crimes against humanity²⁸. Including the Genocide, which in fact, is crucially essential to record the reforms that birth out in 2011 deliberately avoided highlining long-standing tensions between the military and NLD- only to lead to a massive confrontation in 2020 and 2021.

The deeper issues of race, religion, economic disparity, and ethnic discrimination continue to plague Myanmar. The predominantly Burmese NLD — led by Myanmar’s beloved and the world’s dethroned peace icon Suu Kyi — ignored the deeper socio-political framework that needs to be rectified, resulting in gross human rights violations that Suu Kyi herself justified at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). There, she

²⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/14/war-crimes-judges-approve-investigation-violence-against-rohingya-icc-myanmar>

defended²⁹ the Tatmadaw's decision to commit atrocities against the Rohingya and refused to recognize the genocide that a “democratic” party allowed — and by extension, enabled — under its aegis. As recently as January 20, 2021, Myanmar submitted³⁰ preliminary objections to the ICJ over the charges of genocide against the Rohingya Muslims brought³¹ forth by The Gambia.

Another event that occurred under the leadership of Suu Kyi's “democracy-championing” NLD was the troublesome disenfranchisement of ethnic minorities, which affected an estimated 2 million of Myanmar's 37 million eligible voters. The disenfranchisement stifled the voices of ethnic minorities in conflict-ridden areas (notably the Rakhine, Shan, and Kachin states) on the pretext of security concerns, followed by the closure of voting stations. The controversial nature of this action illustrates the cosmetic democracy that the popular political parties and military in Myanmar stand for. Thriving on systemic oppression, a discriminatory “democracy” will continue stripping the rights of the very people affected by the military's violence and the NLD's majoritarian rule — those whose voices matter most in the process of choosing a fair government. The very institutions meant to protect the people have taken it upon themselves to focus on holding onto power, instead of ensuring that all citizens are treated fairly.

The lack of an institutional framework is the root cause stalling any real progress towards a sustainable democracy in Myanmar. The country's history of military repression – where coups were carried out on three separate occasions – will ensure that an all-embracing participatory democracy remains but a far-fetched dream without steadfast institutional checks to ensure civilian control of the government. Comprehensive institutional reforms, checks and balances, and an active civil society must form the basis of a durable and participatory political structure. This, in turn, will allow Myanmar to establish an authentic democracy. Upholding the rights and dignity of all citizens — irrespective of their faith, ethnicity, race, migratory history, or national identity — is not an impossible feat, but it requires tackling the systemic challenges at the root of the ongoing political disorder.

²⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55902070>

³⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/4/myanmar-lodges-objections-in-rohingya-genocide-case>

³¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/10/at-top-court-myanmar-urged-to-stop-genocide-of-own-people>

Defence Developments in Myanmar

Thirteen civilians and three social workers were killed in Mandalay, Magwe and Sagaing regions by Myanmar's security forces in June³². Reports surface gruesome violence unleashed by Myanmar's junta troops as they set a village on fire in Pauk Township, torching homes and stabbing civilians on June 15. Roughly around 800 soldiers have fled the military to join the Civil Disobedience Movement since February 2021, the movement is said to be led by a former Captain of the Military. Their army officers have regrouped themselves to join the People's Defence Force (PDF) to revolt against the undemocratic regime. These officers include ranks such as including major, captain, and lieutenant numbering a total of 100 army men soldiering the movement today. Most of the defectors are from the Navy and Air Force as army soldiers in infantry regiments have found it more difficult to flee due to fear of repercussions against their families.

In an interview with Hong Kong-based Chinese language broadcaster Phoenix Television on May 20, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing was candid to admit that he had not expected stiff resistance to the military coup. To a question by the interviewer, Min Aung Hlaing replied: "I have to say I didn't think it would be that much." The General also said that the military is not under control. "I can't say they are now 100 per cent under control. There are still some destructive activities in some areas," he said.

Maldives

Maldives Police Signs Contract with Indian Construction Firm

Maldives Police Service has signed a \$48 million agreement with India's ABL Indira Projects JV to develop multiple projects related to police infrastructure. Mohamed Hameed, the Maldives' police commissioner, and ABL Indira Projects JV's Chairman Bhupesh Nagarajan signed the agreement on Saturday to develop 61 police facilities and buildings for the archipelago's police. The agreement includes a custodial facility and expansion of two existing buildings in K. Dhoonidhoo. It also includes 23 police

³² <https://eurasianimes.com/death-toll-in-myanmar-violence-reaches-962-un-envoy/>

stations in the atolls, 21 police posts, eight atoll police stations, a police station in Male', and a police station and four accommodation buildings in Hulhumale' Phase II, according to a report in Sun news. The Indian firm will complete the projects in two years. The projects, police said, will lead to the establishment of police stations across the Maldives, and facilitate the delivery of modern and democratic services in a decentralized manner. The decentralization of key services has been a key priority for the current administration. India's Exim Bank will give a loan to fund the 85 per cent cost of the project and the remaining 15 per cent will be financed by the Maldivian government, Maldives Police said in a press release³³.

Maldives Defence Minister Questioned Over Security Breach

Defence Minister Mariya Ahmed Didi was questioned by the parliament's committee on national security services on Monday. The committee, commonly known as the 241 committees, is conducting an inquiry into the security breach that led to an assassination attempt on Speaker and former President Mohamed Nasheed. Nasheed was the target of a remote-controlled bomb in capital Male' City on May 6. He had just left his house and was about to get into his car when a bomb attached to a motorbike exploded.

While the 241 committees launched the inquiry into the security breach on May 24, it faced public criticism over the delay in questioning the defence minister who had said that Nasheed's security level had been heightened two months before the attack. However, committee Chair and North-Hithadhoo constituency MP Mohamed Aslam had assured them that she will be questioned when it reaches that point in the inquiry. The committee has questioned several individuals concerning the inquiry. This includes senior government officials –both former and current- as well as officers of the Maldives Police Service and Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) despite the latter's decision to not send individual officers for questioning.

As such, officers from the former president's Special Protection Group (SPG) have been questioned as well as some officers from his "close protection team" appointed

³³ <https://avas.mv/en/103783>

by MNDF. Further, a three-member team from the 241 committees visited the MNDF headquarters on June 19 as part of the inquiry.

Others that have been questioned in the inquiry include Commissioner of Police Mohamed Hameed as well as Assistant Commissioner of Police Mohamed Riyaz as well as officers from the police's Intelligence Unit. Further, Chief of Defence Force Major General Abdulla Shamaal was questioned as well as other senior MNDF officers. Housing Minister Mohamed Aslam, Home Minister Imran Abdulla and former Male' City Mayor Shifa Mohamed have also been questioned in the security breach inquiry. Further, Governor of Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA) Ali Hashim, Deputy Governor Ahmed Imad as well as the Head of MMA's Financial Intelligence Unit Ibrahim Ahmed Nasir were questioned last Thursday. The 241 committees are working to conclude the inquiry and forward the report to the parliament floor by the end of August³⁴.

³⁴ <https://edition.mv/news/22692>

Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the organisation that he belongs to or of the USI of India.



SUBSCRIBE

