

# **REGIONAL STUDIES**

**39:4  
Winter 2021**

**INSTITUTE OF REGIONAL STUDIES ISLAMABAD**

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# REGIONAL STUDIES

Quarterly Journal of the  
Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad

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**39:4 Winter 2021**

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# ROLE OF RELIGION IN BOLSTERING STATE POWER: POLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF ISLAM IN PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH

ZUNAIRA INAM KHAN\*

## Abstract

*The histories of Pakistan and Bangladesh are rife with the misuse of religion to bolster political power and gain legitimacy. Although it managed to confer temporary legitimacy that kept these regimes propped up, in the long run, the use of religion has only managed to weaken state power if defined in terms of the robustness of state institutions. While large scale Islamisation has been attempted in Pakistan, its history in Bangladesh has been largely tampered because of cultural constraints which give competing definitions of nationalism and state ideology. Even though religion has been used in myriad ways to confer legitimacy upon regimes and to prop them, it has not led to greater power of the state. The use of religion in this way, especially by dictatorial and authoritarian regimes, has only masked the tensions and problems that exist within the state apparatus and society while not doing much to strengthen democratic state institutions.*

**Keywords:** *Pakistan, Bangladesh, Islam, state power, Islamization, popular Islam, purist Islam, religious intolerance, extremism, political legitimacy, ideology, nationalism*

## Introduction

Religion in Pakistan and Bangladesh has certainly been used in attempts to bolster state power, especially as a means to gain

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legitimacy. Although it managed to confer temporary legitimacy that kept these regimes propped up, in the long run the use of religion has only managed to weaken state power if defined in terms of the robustness of state institutions. This is especially the case in Pakistan. The Islamization record in Bangladesh has remained checkered and more tempered than that attempted in Pakistan during various regimes. Understanding the contours of political importance of Islam in Pakistan and Bangladesh entails an insight into various dimensions, first being its pre-Independence historical roots. Recently, changing socioeconomic factors and demographics have also resulted in greater political importance for religion. Finally, and very importantly, the political significance of Islam is due to the confluence of international forces, geostrategic factors and regional conflict. While examining each of these dimensions, the article juxtaposes Pakistan's experience with that of Bangladesh and tries to highlight some similarities and differences.

### **Popular Versus Purist Islam**

To understand the political importance of Islam in Pakistan and Bangladesh, it is imperative to first understand the distinction between low vs. high Islam or popular vs. purist Islam. While Islam has had political importance as a manifestation of both these variants, their distinction is a big clue to understanding the growing tide of religious extremism and demands or attempts towards Islamization. Popular or Low Islam in its ideology is apolitical and is associated with khanqah/shrines of Sufi saints. In this sense, it is more of a cultural expression fused with local traditions, folklore, superstitions etc. practiced primarily in the rural areas. It is mainly associated with the Barelvi tradition, especially in Pakistan. On the other hand, what Riaz Hassan calls purist Islam, and which has been referred to as High Islam by others, is a religio-political ideology stemming mostly from Deobandi/Wahabbi movements and also the pre-Independence Faraizi Movement in Bengal. This Islam is the "strict, puritan,

scripturalist religion of scholars.”<sup>1</sup> While the former conception of religion could sit well with a secular ideology, the latter explicitly calls for the establishment of a theocracy.

The conception of Islam followed by the Pakistan movement was of the popular type. However, over the last two decades there has been a marked shift towards the growing political importance of purist Islam. Riaz Hassan offers an explanation for this phenomenon in the Pakistani context by looking at the interaction of state-society dynamics. Even during colonial times, popular Islam was co-opted by the State. Since pirs (descendents of Sufi saints) had influence over millions of followers, the British felt it was in their interest to have their support. They were classified as ‘landed gentry’ and were bestowed with ‘jagirs’ (land grants) which “extended their influence to economic and political spheres” and consolidated their interests with other landed classes which led to a pir-zamindar alliance that gained great political significance. The support of this alliance was absolutely crucial for the success of the Pakistan Movement and actively sought to placate them later in post-Independence Pakistan where they became a dominant political class, as has also been argued by Hamza Alavi.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, not just the leaders of the Pakistan Movement but also the first few governments, all made concessions to popular Islam. For example, even Ayub Khan, notwithstanding the fact that he was a moderniser and sought to reduce the role of Islam in state functioning, still pandered to the popular Islamic forces by measures such as introduction of the Waqf Properties Ordinances of 1959 which institutionalised the control and management of shrines.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto also revived the idea of shrines as welfare centers. On the other hand, the proponents of purist Islam, i.e., the ulema tried to break the nexus between the state and popular Islam.

While popular Islam still remains politically significant in both Pakistan and Bangladesh and the landed pirs are still a force to be reckoned with in Pakistan, nonetheless there has been a shift towards

purist interpretations and an increased importance of Islamic parties and religio-political groups. Writing in 1987, Riaz Hassan mentioned changing socio-economic circumstances such as urbanisation, increasing literacy and industrialisation which led to a shift towards the urban purist version of Islam and a greater role of Islamic political parties. Till about three decades ago, purist Islam had largely remained concentrated in urban areas whereas popular Islam was more of a rural phenomenon, though still having widespread salience in the lives of the older urban generations, especially women. In recent years purist interpretations have made inroads into the rural areas. One of the most important reasons for this in both Pakistan and Bangladesh has been the return of Gulf migrants who have imported Wahabi political ideology back to their villages. Also, the Saudi government has also been directly funding Sunni religio-political groups and madrassas in these countries.

### **Use of Religion to Bolster State Power**

The use of religion to bolster state power has been attempted in two ways. First, as the basis of nationalism and state ideology. It has been argued that religion was the very basis for the creation of these states. Granted that the leaders of the Pakistan Movement were not adhering to the idea of the creation of an 'Islamic State' and rather a 'State for Muslims' as authors such as Hamza Alavi<sup>4</sup> have argued, it also remains a fact that their rallying cry was 'Islam in danger' and the basis of the two nation theory was in fact religious difference. This inevitably politicised religion, consequently creating conditions for its later manipulation by various opportunistic regimes, both civil or military. Especially in the Pakistani context, the entire idea of nationalism was linked to religion since there was really not much else in common to the areas that were grouped together as Pakistan. Since there was no such thing as a common 'Pakistani culture', though one could speak of Punjabi culture or Pathan culture etc, the political leaders had to espouse religion as state ideology and as the basis of nationalism. In



this regard, the secession of East Pakistan to become Bangladesh was a defining moment in Pakistan's history. As Lawrence Ziring has argued, "the notion of an Islamic community and polity was significantly shaken by the creation of an independent Bangladesh."<sup>5</sup> Thus, Zia believed that just the concept of a modern nation state was not enough to unite Pakistanis, they rather required a unifying ideology which in the Pakistani context could best be provided only by Islam. No doubt the recourse to Islam was also to grant legitimacy to his government which had gained power through unconstitutional means and later as the best way of ensuring the continuity of his rule, the author holds that Zia genuinely believed that Islamic ideology was the best course of action for Pakistan in terms of developing a sense of nationhood. Above in view, the fact that instead of unifying the nation, the seeds of sectarianism were also sown during Zia's era which later festered and erupted in some of the worst types of violence that the country has seen, becomes and ironic undeniable reality.

On the other hand, in the case of Bangladesh, the sources of national identity were derived not just from religion but mainly from Bengali culture. Especially the independence struggle was "effectively a cultural resistance to the Pakistani regime." Thus, at the time of its creation in 1971, religion was not used as a basis for nationalism in Bangladesh. The Mujib ur-Rahman government espoused the principles of socialism, secularism and democracy and tried in very overt ways to secularise the State. Later, the failures, incompetence and corruption of the Mujib ur Rehman's regime led to a rejection of all that it espoused by the people, including secularism. In that sense, the rise of political Islam can be understood as a reactionary ideology, at least in the years Mujib ur Rehman's rule and led to a re-definition of nationalism in terms of Islam. The emphasis shifted from Bengali to Bangladeshi nationalism which was more overtly Islamic. However, the contradictory claims between Din-ul-Islam and Bangla Samaj (religion and culture) have not been resolved.

The second way in which religion bolstered state power is by conferring legitimacy to the State during times of economic, political or military crises and to prop up failing regimes, both civil and military. This has been especially true for military regimes that confiscated power in an unconstitutional manner and thus lacked legitimacy, as has been mentioned for the case of Ayub Khan and Zia ul Haq in Pakistan. While Ayub was pandering to popular Islam, Zia, for the first time gave great leeway to Islamic religious parties espousing a purist version of Islam. The most important party amongst these is of course the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) which gained 'ideological hegemony' in the state during Zia's regime at the expense of popular Islamic tradition and its leaders. Similarly, both military rulers in Bangladesh also made recourse to religion to bolster their regimes. In 1976, Zia ur Rahman, like his namesake in Pakistan, deleted secularism from Bangladesh's Constitution and began a process of state-sponsored Islamisation. Zia "required an ideology to counter the official secularism of the Awami League and to undermine its still-considerable support. Islam offered an obvious and powerful alternative to win over right-wing Islamic elements who had been discredited by their Pakistan policies in 1971", especially the Jamaat-e-Islami which had supported Pakistan State and whose leader Ghulam Azam was later convicted in a 'people's court' on charges of war crimes in 1971 war and was awarded death penalty.<sup>6</sup>

However, it was not just military regimes that took recourse to religion to bolster their failing governments; this was also the case for almost all civilian regimes. For example, in the Pakistani context both Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto tried to appease religious lobbies and built alliances with religious parties to gain political support. Nawaz Sharif, who is considered as a protégé of Zia ul Haq, carried on the Islamisation process initiated by his mentor, albeit in a muted manner. He introduced a Shariat Bill to deflect the attention away from the economic crisis that the country was in. Similarly, Benazir Bhutto, who "was viewed as a secular and lacked legitimacy" cinched an alliance

with the Jamiat-i-Ulama-e-Islam or JUI, especially as a means of making inroads into the Sunni vote bank. In Bangladesh, the Awami League and BNP have had to use Islamic rhetoric and symbolism, especially during election time, in order to appease the religious sentiments of a large section of society, despite their secular leanings. Outside of KPK in 2014, PTI joined forces with right-wing Islamist preacher Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri for orchestrating a mass sit-in in Islamabad. This prolonged sit-in demonstration, called the Azadi March (Freedom March) targeted the 'corrupt elite' and symbolically displayed PTI's willingness to form coalitions with Islamist right-wing groups.

It is noteworthy that while religion has been used in these myriad ways to confer legitimacy upon regimes and to prop them, it has not led to greater power of the state. The use of religion in this way, especially by dictatorial and authoritarian regimes such as that of Zia ul Haq, has only masked the tensions and the problems that exist within the state apparatus and in the society while not doing much to strengthen democratic state institutions. Such use of religion and suppression of popular political processes lets things fester under the surface which later erupt in hideous ways when given the opportunity. For example, the state links established with sectarian groups during Zia's time and later fostered during Benazir Bhutto's government (like the tacit alliance with Sipah-e-Muhammad) in later years resulted as a driving force behind the worst sectarian violence in the history of Pakistan.

### **Ascendancy of Political Islam due to International Factors**

So far the explanation has largely focused on an analysis of state-society interaction. To understand the various dynamics at play in the ascendancy of political Islam in these two countries, it is absolutely crucial to look at international factors. Firstly the fact that the rise of political Islam is not an isolated phenomenon in Pakistan and Bangladesh needs to be emphasised. Worldwide, there has been a

growing trend of Islamism premised as a set of political ideologies that view Islam not just as a religion but as a political system whose teachings should be eminent in all facets of society. The history of Islamism can be traced back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but its modern version can be attributed to developments such as the end of Caliphate in 1924 and the consequent rise of the Khilafat movement, which was also very important for pre-independence Indian Muslims. Furthermore, various anti-colonial struggles such as in Egypt against the British or in Algeria against the French also used Islam for nationalist causes which later had ramifications regarding the role of religion in politics in these countries. Central figures of modern Islamism include Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Abul Ala Maududi, Sayyid Qutb and Ayatollah Khomeini.

While too much attention cannot be accorded to personalities in the explanation of such a complex phenomenon, one person that deserves a mention is Abu Ala Maududi. Maududi founded the Jamaat-e-Islami in 1941 and has had considerable influence in shaping political Islam in not just Pakistan and Bangladesh, but also in his influence over other organisations such as the Islamic Brotherhood. Maududi provided a blueprint for what an Islamic State should look like and the role of religion in state and politics. While his ideology is rather fundamentalist and traditionalist, it is simultaneously also modern in its outlook. For one, it accepts the nation state as the basis of the establishment of Islamic rule and democracy as the system of government. Furthermore, it accepts the use of modern education and technology for the continuance of its goals.

In the context of Bangladesh, the most important international factor that had an impact on the rise of religion in politics has been what has been termed 'Indiaphobia' by authors such as Taj ul-Islam Hashmi. There has been a pervasive insecurity in Bangladesh with regard to its neighbor that has led to further support for religious political parties that have adopted anti-India stance. Another

underlying reason behind this is the fact that the Mujib government and Awami League were supported by India. Following the fall of the said government, the disillusionment of the people also led towards hostility towards Indian and Bangladeshi Hindus and a turn towards Islamic political parties that offered an alternative.

Pakistan's insecurity towards India has also resulted in a turn towards religion, but in terms of the support of religio-political militant groups that have been fighting in Kashmir.<sup>7</sup> While militant Islamic groups have been operating in Kashmir with the alleged tacit support of the Pakistani state, the growing importance of religio-political groups really became pronounced as a consequence of regional conflicts which eventually led to a militarisation of the society. In this regard, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 had the effect of mobilising and politicising the Shias in Pakistan. To counter their growing influence, Zia's regime adopted a strategy of supporting Sunni sectarian groups. Similarly the Soviet-Afghan war which began in 1980 brought much funding, military training and institutional support for various militant religio-political groups in Pakistan. Although, these militant groups are not active in the formal political arena and must be distinguished from the religious parties nevertheless, there exists a 'symbiotic relationship' between them (Kukreja, 183)<sup>8</sup> in the sense that the political parties have fostered linkages with them to serve as their extended militant arms. Similarly, the religio-political groups also benefit from their links with these parties (as also with the military and the ISI) in order to bail them out when they run into trouble with the law because of their criminal activities.

## **Conclusion**

While large scale Islamisation has been attempted in Pakistan, its history in Bangladesh has been largely tempered because of cultural constraints which offers competing definitions of nationalism and state ideology. However, this is not to say that political Islam in Bangladesh, especially the constant battles between the Jamaat's

militant student wings and secular forces, have not had negative repercussions for the Bangladeshi state and society. Overall it can be contended that while attempts have been made to bolster religion through the use of state power, by both civil and military regimes seeking legitimacy and defining state ideology and nationalism, in the long run this has only resulted in the weakening of the state by unleashing the forces of religious intolerance, extremism, terrorism and sectarianism which have taken very violent forms in recent years.

## Notes and References

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- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*,183.

# MILITARY RULE IN MYANMAR: THROUGH THE LANDSCAPE OF AUTHORITARIAN POWER CONSOLIDATION

AL AMIN AND RABEYA BOSRI CHANDNI\*

## Abstract

*Military government in Myanmar is often considered most durable and powerful military rule in the world. Since 1962, the Junta has been ruling the country facing a lot of internal and external challenges and succeeded to consolidate its rule under various titles (Burma Socialist Programme Party, State Law and Order Restoration Council, and State Peace and Development Council) until 2011. This paper attempts to find out the distinctive factors that contributed to the military's ability to prolong its rule using authoritarian regime consolidation theory. It argues that the junta had strengthened its regime by applying a series of management policies such as establishing patronage network with different civilian sections of people, emphasising national ideology, directing coercive mechanism against anti-government forces, launching educational propaganda, applying media censorship, establishing a monopoly of power under a self-written Constitution, receiving external aid and assistance, etc. It is wholly a qualitative work based on secondary data sources and follows the historical and content analysis approach.*

**Keywords:** *military regime, authoritarian regime consolidation, clientelism, ceasefire capitalism, ethno-nationalism, ideology, authoritarian constitutionalism*

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## Introduction

Most of the underdeveloped and developing countries suffer from military interventions in their early post-independence period. The jump from a subjugated status to a sovereign state heightens people's ambition for more opportunities in all spheres of life. In contrast, poor economy, weak leadership, inefficient bureaucracy, divided society, and illiterate population increases the pressures for the nation. The militaries then shoulders the responsibility of state building and establish their own regime. This type of regime, "basically, a system of managing government by the military"<sup>1</sup> is more or less authoritarian and interestingly Perlmutter finds that this is a fusion of civil and military in composition.<sup>2</sup> Whilst genuinely unable to handle governmental responsibilities and relying primarily on coercion, the military seeks the assistance from technocrats, politicians, businessmen, and even the working class.<sup>3</sup> In the context of Myanmar, a state created as military occupation where the Tatmadaw was seen as the main foundation for safeguarding national sovereignty and considered legitimate heir to Burma's past, had repeatedly indulged in military intervention. The first military intervention occurred in 1958 but the 1962 military coup led by Ne Win led to a military rule over a longer period. Although the Tatmadaw handed over power to the civilian government (backed by its proxy party) in 2011, military still secures a dominant position in government.

This paper explores the strategies behind Myanmar's military regime consolidation (mainly from 1962 to 2011) using the theory of authoritarian regime consolidation. Although literature is available to understand the reasons responsible both for military intervention and its withdrawal from politics in Myanmar, it is not enough to explain how Myanmar's military rule evolved in the course of time in the modern world history in the face of sufficient external and internal obstacles.

In this regard, based on the secondary data sources and the historical and content analysis approach, this study analyses the factors directly or indirectly responsible for Myanmar's prolonged military rule. It also answers why the responses in the shape of public demonstrations or any change of rulers resulted in repeated military coups. It illustrates how the civilian society like students, monks, political parties, ethnic minorities, anti-state groups, business community, media, etc. played a vital role in consolidating the military regime in Myanmar.

This paper is divided into six sections, including an introduction and a conclusion. In the second section, an array of literature is discussed to identify the gaps in the existing body of knowledge on the subject of inquiry. The third section develops the theoretical ground for understanding the authoritarian aspects of military government. Additionally, it introduces three dimensions of power, e.g., discursive, infrastructural, and despotic to show how an authoritarian regime spreads its web of control in the society. A short backdrop of the origination of military force in Myanmar has been drawn in the fourth section. The fifth section is divided into eight subsections to discuss the major target groups and social issues identified by the Tatmadaw in terms opportunities and threats. This section finds out that people had not only been brutally oppressed through the strong coercive apparatus of the state but had also been facilitated through maintaining patronage networks in order to strengthen the military regime. In addition, civil society protests and ethnic insurgencies aimed at achieving greater autonomy were not only unable to challenge the Tatmadaw's control over the country but also provided a strong pretext for it to stay in power through a continuous emphasis on national ideology. While the generals repeatedly insisted on national ideology to highlight the civilian government's fragile rule, it was inherently just a ruse for enhancing the Tatmadaw's legitimacy to rule. In the face of sanctions,

condemnation from Western countries, however, assistance and diplomatic support from China, India, and Japan played a key role in advancing the stability of military rule in Myanmar.

## **Literature Review**

Chu and Min<sup>4</sup> have contributed to build a theory on the repeated return of military to power after short spans of civilian government, termed 'military relapse'. The theory claims that the plausibility of relapse decreases if the political elite and military enjoy coequal unity. Chu and Min opine that in spite of inability to govern and in the face of domestic as well as international condemnation, the Tatmadaw did not give back power to civilian government due to a fear of retribution and the perceived higher cost of remaining in the barracks for them. It is true that these reasons cannot be ignored for explaining the willingness of the military to continue stay in power but are not enough to understand the tactics followed by the military regime to consolidate its control over the government.

Huang<sup>5</sup> has traced the current developments in Myanmar politics as 'a diminished form of authoritarianism'. According to the author, all institutional settings and historical succession of the Tatmadaw's role in state-building provide it with the ample opportunity to establish its dominance over the future government. In contrast, this work focuses not only on the institutional mechanism but also the socio-political, economic, and diplomatic factors responsible for Tatmadaw's regime consolidation.

The work of Bunte<sup>6</sup> argues that the military's withdrawal from direct rule does not mean return into the barracks; instead it expounds additional institutionalisation of military domination over the civilian government through setting up of a serious autocratic system called 'disciplined democracy' and, thus, ensuring its safe return to barrack. Jones<sup>7</sup> shows that the 'disciplined democracy' has originated from a methodology of coercive state-building, diplomatic setting, and economic incorporation through 'ceasefire capitalism' that reduces centrifugal challenges and makes the system adequately certain to impose its preferred settlement. Although Bunte and Jones have tried to find out the reasons behind the Myanmar military's

prolonged rule, their explanation was limited to 1988-2010 period based upon the disciplined democracy. Moreover, Jones's political-economy explanation fails to articulate the Tatmadaw's response to the social obstacles.

Thawngmung<sup>8</sup> addresses four contributions that non-armed members of ethnic minority groups may make to the political system:

1. Supporting the status quo;
2. Transforming or undermining the status quo;
3. Promoting collective identity and culture and addressing humanitarian needs; and
4. Helping to mediate ceasefire agreements.

Her concentration only on the decisive role of non-armed minorities does not include the contribution of media or authoritarian Constitution in legitimising military rule.

Cook<sup>9</sup> has highlighted the multifaceted relationship between Myanmar and China. Although Myanmar wants to maintain a strong relationship with China for its 'more powerful global position', it follows 'equal distance diplomacy' because of China's affinity with its ethnic groups. However, this work does not cover the most important external actor's responses to the military government in Myanmar even though its role is crucial.

Guilloux<sup>10</sup> has tried to find out the possible key external interveners in case of an internal chaos leading to a transfer of power, based on their strengths and multifarious interests in Myanmar. Bert<sup>11</sup> points that the close ties between China and Myanmar have been built up as a complement to their self-interest. According to Zhao<sup>12</sup>, since 1990s, China has conducted a long-term strategy of developing its border regions as well as to monitor the important sea-trade routes through Myanmar. However, all of these papers focus on Myanmar and its neighbours' relationship after 1988 and that is why these cannot answer how the military regime survived during its self-isolated period (1962-1990).

In fact, Myanmar is a very exceptional state in the modern world which wants to keep itself aloof from all sorts of communication from the outside and this tendency has made it a land of curiosity. Many scholars have

worked hard to understand its government, politics, economics, society, foreign relationship, and so on but all attempts are fragmented in timeframe, national issues, or societal divisions. Here, the authors have tried to give a comprehensive account of military strategies for establishing control over society and eradicating the obstacles toward its reign.

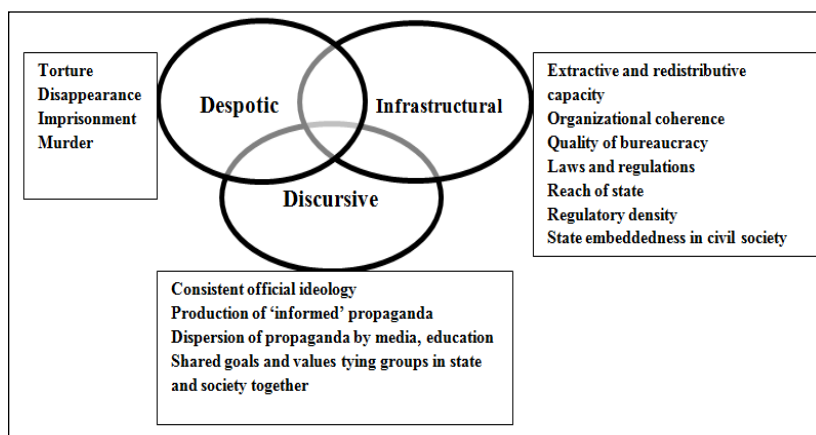
## **Theoretical Framework**

Regime is a name “given to a government or sequence of governments in which power remains essentially in the hands of the same social group”<sup>13</sup> and it “determines who has access to political power, and how those who are in power deal with those who are not.”<sup>14</sup> In a military regime, military rulers consider themselves the main political actors by strengthening their coercive means of power<sup>15</sup> in which they take important actions to maintain their regime’s persistence and control over government. Usually, the military regime arranges necessary measurements to strengthen its control over the government.<sup>16</sup> Generally, authoritarian consolidation is a process of regime maintenance as well as a procedure of state that figures out how authoritarian leaders manage coercion by establishing state mechanisms to increase regime stability for governing society. It tends to build strategies to prevent factionalism in leaders and appease demonstration or protest by reaching assistance with opposition as well other sections of society. According to Goebel,<sup>17</sup> “authoritarian consolidation is understood to be a deliberate state project driven by political elites seeking to secure their ruling position.” He has shown three distinctive forms of power such as despotic, infrastructural, and discursive to strengthen its non-autocratic capability to be connected with social, political, and business communities. These powers, influential over each other, recognise the capacity to force one’s will on individuals, institutional capacity for managing society, and the ability to make individuals need what the government needs them to want. The authoritarian government usually exerts despotic power (imprisonment, lawlessness, torture, disappearance, murders, illegal

seizure of private property or business, media censorship and intimidation, disappearance of anti-regime forces, and systematic terror against the whole population or race) in order to prevent regime breakdown and these acts of coercion help to develop infrastructural and discursive power for managing society.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 1**

**Indicators for the Three Power Dimension<sup>19</sup>**



Goebel also explained three levels of authoritarian consolidation which is mostly focused on infrastructural and discursive power. At the macro level, authoritarian leaders consolidate their regime by developing institutional structure and granting citizens incentives to ensure people's belief in the regime 'logistics of political control'.<sup>20</sup> This enables the regime to reduce complexity, social grievances, and increase the capability of the state to coordinate society. This explanation denotes three dimensions to deal with infrastructural power. To be specific, 'state capabilities', 'their sub national variation', and their impact on society, that is, the 'weight of the state'.<sup>21</sup> State capabilities indicate the "resources at the disposal of the state for exercising control over society,"<sup>22</sup> where the second dimension refers to the 'territorial reach' of the state, or "the ability to penetrate society not only with respect to policy issues, but also to

maintain a state presence in even the remotest parts of the state territory."<sup>23</sup> The third dimension is explained at the meso level that depends on how state aims to penetrate in society. In its regime consolidation game, the military builds links between state and society through its dense state apparatus in order to legitimise government decisions. Furthermore, it "feeds the preferences and grievances of different social groups..."<sup>24</sup> instead of developing democratic manners like competitive or institutionalised party system, highly diverse civil society, autonomous media, etc. In a micro sense, authoritarian consolidation refers to discursive power which "means securing the active complicity of the subjects of power in their own self-regulation" to construct political and societal minds.<sup>25</sup> This contributes to authoritarian leaders with a greater attention toward identifying social issues and regime challenges than cracking down on opposition which inflicts a huge price in terms of gaining legitimacy in both internal and external spheres as well as indicates state failure.

**Table 1****Levels of authoritarian consolidation<sup>26</sup>**

	Authoritarian consolidation	Power dimension
Macro-level	Communication, bureaucracy, legal system	Infrastructural power: density and reach of state organisation
Meso-level	Meritocratic, networks, semi-competitive, elections mass, organisations, complaint mechanisms	Infrastructural power: embeddedness
Micro-level	Attitudes and behaviour (elites, population)	Discursive power

## **The Independence struggle and the Military**

The independence struggle of Myanmar is deeply connected with the Second World War. This battle provided the Burmese nationalists with an opportunity to revolt against the British administration. Aung San decided to defeat the British forces in collaboration with Japanese invaders in Myanmar and, thus, to free his motherland. For this purpose, he fled to Japan with a few of his colleagues (later known as *the thirty comrades*) and received military training there. Then he set up the Burma Independence Army in December 1941 and started combating against the British army. On the contrary, other ethnic minority groups, specially Karen, Kachin, and Chin assisted the allied force as the continuation of their loyalty to British. However, the Burmese revolting Burmese soldiers, upon reluctance of Japan to free Myanmar, revolted against Japan and entered into the British camp in March 1945. Before joining the opposite side, Aung San formed the 'Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League' (AFPFL) in a secret meeting with the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), the Burma National Army, and the Socialist People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) in August 1944. At the end of the war, the interim military administration of the colony composed of the new Burmese army, an uneasy coalescence of two flanks: a) nationalist Burman forces of the Burma Independence Army, and b) non-Burman minority units from the old colonial army on 28 September 1946. Following the 1947 general election for a Constitutional Assembly, Aung San was appointed as the fifth Prime Minister. After being criticised for working with the British by the Burmese Communist Party, the Premier banned all communists from his AFPFL on 3 November 1946. A delegation led by him signed an agreement with Lord Attlee (then British Premier) on the conditions of Burmese freedom on 27 January 1947. However, the Prime Minister and his new cabinet were assassinated by a political rival in a meeting on 19 July 1947. On 4<sup>th</sup> January 1948, the country was declared independent. The



Union of Burma started as a democratic republic and U Nu took the office of the premier. By August 1948, the Burmese military and various insurgents, even the communists and ethnic troops, were engaged in a civil war. For the first time in the independent Burma, the military got itself entrenched into politics in the guise of a caretaker government in 1958. Although it handed over power to the civilian government after a general election in 1960, it returned as the military junta in 1962 and prolonged the position under different titles like the BSPP, SLORC, and SPDC until 2011. During this period, it held elections in 1974, 1978, 1981, and 1990 only to legitimise the military in power. Public demonstration also broke out several times against the military dictatorship but all ended in smoke in the face of severe military oppression except in 1988 that led the Tatmadaw to replace the national ideology.

## **Military Strategies for Regime**

### **Consolidation in Myanmar**

By and large, among various type of authoritarianism, military regimes are viewed as the most fragile type. As per Barbara Geddes, who examined the durability of 163 authoritarian regimes from 1945 to 1998, military regimes have a normal life expectancy of just seven years, while single-party regime have a normal life expectancy of 35 years.<sup>27</sup> The tide, however, is turning<sup>28</sup> because some military regimes have more durability prospects than others. The persistence of “an authoritarian regime increases to the extent that regime elites manage to substitute coercion for governing by organization, regulation and the management of discourses.”<sup>29</sup> This section of the paper discusses how the junta government had been able to constantly sustain its rule over society and kept up the record of lengthy predominance in politics notwithstanding serious obstacles like ethnic conflicts, economic crisis, massive demonstrations, foreign sanctions, civil dissatisfactions, etc.

### **Game of Ideology**

The Burma Independence Army (BIA) was established by the command and force of the politicians during the independence struggle of the country, most of them were very strongly connected with the socialist or communist parties in their pre-war political career. The nationalist leaders Aung San, Ne Win, and Setkya were especially trained in the military camp to form the Burmese government. In fact, Aung San was appointed as the fifth Prime Minister and Ne Win was made commander-in-chief of the BIA later. Thus, the ideological contexts and backgrounds of a number of influential colonels<sup>30</sup> illustrate why these nationalist leaders in military uniforms preferred the 'new professionalism' than 'old' for demarcating the role of military in politics. Moreover, the declaration of founding 'a people's democratic socialist state'<sup>31</sup> through the parliamentary democracy not to practice democratic values made by demagogues (from different ideologies) gave a good opportunity to the military to emphasise the 'ideology' (goal) instead of the type of government (the means for achieving the goal). Thus, they had successfully exploited ideology as a pretext for seizing power and rule legitimisation. Depicting civilian government's switch toward privatisation as a divergence from the nation's spirit,<sup>32</sup> General Ne Win captured power through the 1962 coup. On the contrary, he lacked much interest in national ideals and his revolutionary council had just followed previous ideological foundations. In Mehden's words, "The difference was primarily a hardening of tone and position."<sup>33</sup> Therefore, when the national ideology was enunciated by the military, the politicians reacted very mysteriously. The first military coup in the guise of a caretaker government might gotten people's support because the army had vowed to hand over power to the political parties after easing the communal tensions against the civilian government's various unpopular programmes. The fear of torture, detention, and conspiracy were not less responsible for providing military with supports.

However, it was late to perceive the substantive intention of the Revolutionary Council of Ne Win. A series of student-led protests of 1976, 1987, and 1988 that ultimately took the form of mass uprisings had recurrently demonstrated the failure of the 'Burmese Way to Socialism' to unite the citizens. At the peak of movement, Ne Win was compelled to resign from the post of the Chairman of the 'Burma Socialist Programme Party' (BSPP) on 23 July 1988. Within two months of the replacement of the government by Ne Win's close friends General Saw Maung and Khin Nyunt,<sup>34</sup> the second innings of 'ideology'-centred politics had already been upheld by the SLORC regime (The State Law and Order Restoration Council). Hliang<sup>35</sup> claimed that the SLORC Generals being irritated with the mess caused by the pro-democracy movement removed the previous government. However, the unrestrained mass anger coerced the SLORC to declare a general election for establishing parliamentary democracy. The previous ideological goal of 'sociology' had been replaced by the new objective 'democracy' as a strategy of the Tatmadaw to appease the domestic and foreign grudge in addition to drawing their attention to the next regime. Invalidating the forecast of the Tatmadaw that "their own National Unity Party would win,"<sup>36</sup> the 1990s election compelled them to resort under 'disciplined democracy' (in 2003) that assisted the military in coming back to power in a legitimate way.

### **Authoritarian Constitutionalism**

Authoritarian constitutionalism denotes the manipulation of the constitutional order and the purposeful use of constitution making through the autocratic exercise of power to enhance further stabilisation and undermine democratic practice. The factor behind the non-existence of a constitution is direct military rule, yet some other regimes use old constitution or others may intend to make a new constitution for keeping the military a key political actor in order to consolidate their power. According to Crouch,<sup>37</sup> the pre-emptive function of constitution-making in regimes that may have endured for

many years without a constitution is to stave off threats of constitutional democracy. After independence, within a short span of time, the constitutional rule in Myanmar had been ended by a military coup in 1962 condemning the existing civil government as they intended to accept the demand of federation which was considered a threat to territorial integrity and by then the junta was governing the state through extra-constitutional rule. Surprisingly, the military government had to embrace the same demand of federation in the 1974 constitution which later proved to be merely an instrument used by Ne Win to remain in power. It also failed to provide actual autonomy to the ethnic minorities as the power was concentrated in the hands of a few representatives of the Council of State and especially of Ne Win, the Council Chairman. Even they promoted the 1982 Citizenship Law, which fragmented citizens into three levels of citizenship: citizens, associate citizens, and naturalized citizens by limiting the rights of associate and naturalized citizens.<sup>38</sup> For an example, the 1982 Citizenship Law denied citizenship and institutionalised the Rohingya's statelessness. Their "ancestry related documents prove that the government enacted the new law simply to deny the Rohingya identity."<sup>39</sup> This misappropriation facilitated the military with a new civil unrest issue to validate its power position. The continuation of constitution-making game for prolonging power had been continued under SLORC after their seizing of power in 1988 as they abolished previous existing constitutional norms (1947, 1974).

Consequently, they had a logic to prolong their imposition in the name of developing a new constitution. In 1993, the SLORC arranged the National Convention (NC) which was unsuccessful due to the junta's suspicious rules and lack of proportional and justified representation of the political parties and ethnic minorities. "Lacking the strength to simply impose its will"<sup>40</sup> the Tatmadaw came to end the convention in 1996. However, the junta has finally succeeded in ensuring military dominance over the democratic government in the

second call for NC (2004-2007), reserving 25% seats in regional and national parliament with a privileged position to access executive power in the emergency period and exercise influence on state resources and power as well as military's autonomy in security-related ministries. Besides, the constitutional change needs 75% military consent to get approval in the parliament.<sup>41</sup> By these self-written constitutions centred on the 'three national principles' (non-disintegration of the union, non-disintegration of national unity, and the protection of national sovereignty),<sup>42</sup> the junta intended to continue the Union and establish its monopoly power.

### **Strategy on Ethnic Minorities**

The non-Burman groups, such as the Karen, Chin, and Kachin were recruited for the army, police, and bureaucracy<sup>43</sup> and accepted for self-governance in the British period (1886-1941, 1945-1948). The difference in political experience along with culture, tradition, language, and even territorial possession led the Burman and non-Burman relation toward hostility, which exploded during the liberation struggle. Some minorities like the Shan, Karen, Kachin, Kayah, and Chin, proposed to dwell autonomous under British rule, even the Mon and Arakanese called for establishing own states. Centring these issues the ongoing conflict consolidated the military regime for a long time in Myanmar. The Tatmadaw took the advantage of it in two ways:

- a) justified its power capture calming down the mutineers; and
- b) showed as pretext for staying longer to remove the disunity within the ethnic groups.

The BSPP government adopted two kinds of strategies for armed and non-armed members of ethnic minorities. Ne Win implemented a black 'four-cut policy' that targeted armed resistance organisations (those who fighting for self-determination) by cutting off their food, funding, intelligence, and popular support.<sup>44</sup> In this period, the Tatmadaw displaced millions of people while taking billions of dollars in profit from jade mines, teak forests, and other

natural resources. The non-armed members action (supporting government or acting in government-controlled areas) and inaction (silence against governmental programmes) augmented the political and economic power of government elites.<sup>45</sup> With the culmination of economic sufferings and insecurities, end to interaction with the armed mutineers, and the prolonged period of bloodshed changed the view of the masses about the warring tribes. The governments' assimilation and co-optation strategy also exposed the success in altering their mindset. It patently split the non-armed residents from their counterparts integrating them as 'good citizens' by different tactics. The domination of Burman and Buddhist over government's representation to educational curriculum had generated a negative impression, but development programmes and long military rule accustomed the new generation of minority with political acquiescence for their rudimentary survival.<sup>46</sup>

The SLORC used the same strategy to strengthen its position in statecraft. Moreover, the border states had extended their cooperation in handling insurgents by ceasing all economic, logistic, and asylum support for them in exchange for economic relationship with the Myanmar government. By this chance, the Tatmadaw compelled the mutineers to fight until final defeat or to push them to resume normal lives. The 'ceasefire capitalism' continually inserted rebels into a national system "through economic means: development spending; joint business ventures; and the re-routing flows to benefit the regime"<sup>47</sup> in return for abandoning armed struggle. Consequently, the military established more administrative, economic, and military control in the remote areas of the country.<sup>48</sup> In the SPDC period, only four major groups remained in armed resistance—the Chin National Front, the SSA-South, the KNU, and the Karenni National Progressive Party<sup>49</sup> by 2009. The Tatmadaw was also aware of the intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic rivalry and took advantage of the strife. It grinded all probable unifying forces that would inspire ethnic based nationality

among the people in future. For example, the Shan region has been kept under three military commands: a) the Triangle Region Command, b) the North-East Command, and c) the Eastern Command after 1989 and the other communities especially the Wa and Pao are stimulated to contest with various groups of Shan. The military has intentionally propagated resentment and phobia among the Buddhist against the Rohingyas and consequently many inter-communal riots to military confrontation took place there.<sup>50</sup>

### **Management of Political Parties**

Every period of military regime was determined with cruel application of despotic power over the opponents. In order to justify their actions, the despots displayed the antagonists as enemies of national sovereignty, solidarity, and ideology through the fulcrum of discursive force. Nonetheless this strategy could not gather much popularity for the generals if they had not enhanced their capacity to rule over the state.

During 1962-88, all political parties were abolished and the BSPP—consisting primarily of army officials—was declared the sole political representative of the people which “eliminated their civilian counterparts once and for all.”<sup>51</sup> The opponents were coerced to join the BSPP or to leave the political career. Ne Win’s authority over both the military and the party swiftly helped him to purge the probable competitors from any field. ‘The divide and rule policy’ assisted him to keep the subordinates weak and control without much trouble. However, the government adopted two types of strategies for different groups of activists. First, those who expressed royalty to the leadership were co-opted by the patron-client relationship where it donated luxury goods and different legal permissions to those leaders so that they could move their colleagues and subordinates toward the regime’s support. Secondly, those raising voice for any kind of change in economics, politics, or even in society were labelled as the enemies of the country and suppressed with a high hand. For example, when

the Pyidaungsu Party leadership was decimated by arrests, its Secretary-General, Thakin Kyaw Dun, was the first opponent who joined the BSPP.<sup>52</sup> Ne Win's leadership increased political turmoil with the oppression and repression towards minority groups.<sup>53</sup> Stokke, Win, and Aung<sup>54</sup> show three types of political parties during the time: a) parties associated with Myanmar's authoritarian legacy, b) society-centred pro-democracy parties, and c) ethnic parties. Although the general arranged several elections, he failed to reduce mass anger. Failed economic policies, administrative incompetency, rampant corruption and isolating foreign policy of the Tatmadaw led people against Ne Win but flinched in establishing a civilian rule. In Mydans'<sup>55</sup> observation, the lack of concentration, disarrangement of the movement and failure to lead people unitedly against the government ended all the efforts in smoke. The SLORC regime showed "a dual role of pro-democracy suppressor and 'principled democracy' promoters."<sup>56</sup> In spite of approving multi-party politics, opening economics for private entrepreneurship, legitimising the ethnic armed groups, and particularly, holding a national election, the defeat of its backed National Unity Party (NUP), the successor of the former BSPP, rang bells for its departure. Hence, it resorted to its predecessor's mood, boycotted the results of election and started to arrest pro-democracy and NLD (National League of Democracy) members including the leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. Only ten legal parties existed between 1990 and 2009.<sup>57</sup> The military officers, having connection with activist friends or relatives, were deprived of promotion even forcefully retired.<sup>58</sup> However, the prosperity of the higher class of the military at the cost of antecedent political and social elites<sup>59</sup> caused them to fear any changes in the regime that could bring them under penalty for misappropriation. Hence, the SLORC had no choice except sheltering under the massive 'state-building project' after the 1990s election to appease both the Burman people and ethnic leaders. But the SPDC's gradual move towards liberalisation upheld its strength



and confidence.<sup>60</sup> It ensured the victory of its proxy party the 'Union Solidarity and Development Party' in the 2010 election where its legal barricade coerced the main opposite party the NLD to boycott the contest.

### **Clientelistic Approach**

After independence, the colonial weak economic structure of Myanmar had the practice of clientelism which also turned into state's fundamentals in the military regime after nationalising the economy. During the BSPP rule, the patron-client relations among party-state officials involving illegal business community had hugely appeared, wherein the officials wished to get high-ranking appointments in both state and local party committees. Local officials (clients) intended to consolidate their connection with the patron to prevent their replacement. In return, they offered resources, management of local tension, and arrangement of enormous ceremonies in the name of their entertainment and honour.<sup>61</sup> In that case, local officials required financial support from both legal and illegal business communities who had the ability to fund their activities. With the assistance of their patrons (local officials), the associated business community figured out access to the scant resources required for their business or to shield their business (illegal/black market) from the intervention of government officials. Police and customs authorities, hence, didn't trouble illicit business group known to be old buddies of local state officials.<sup>62</sup> They were either downgraded or moved to peripheral assignments for making any disruption or coercing cash from the clients. In the SLORC and SPDC periods, borderland elites were facilitated to invest their illegal resources in the national economy to augment the government's expenditure capacity in various development projects. After paying a 25% 'whitening' tax, drug barons and smugglers could launder their money through state-owned banks and invest in legitimate national businesses. Loyal individuals who rendered useful services again received extensive patronage, with

borderland kingpins establishing large-scale conglomerates, receiving lucrative government contracts, and dominating the emerging private banking sector.<sup>63</sup>

After independence, Buddhist monks had profound influence and connection in society and civilian government. The junta regime, especially in the BSPP period, banning all the political activities of the Buddhist monks permitted only religious organisations and even incorporated nine sects of monks to control the politically active monastic community. In spite of facing coercion and restrictions, Monks participated in the 1988 pro-democracy protests alongside anti-government students and also extended their anti-military agitation even in SLORC rule. Although, SLORC government initially used coercive apparatus, it later altered the despotic path by adopting the co-optation policy that facilitated the monks with particularistic benefits such as building up more religious institutions, opening universities of culture and of Buddhism, offering huge donations and luxury goods, treatment facilities, cultural, religious and sports activities, cremation rites for renowned monks, titles to powerful monks to encourage them to control politically, etc.<sup>64</sup> Many monks became so influential that local party and state officials lobbied with them to influence the central decision. Despite a few monks who distanced themselves from the benefits, notable monks mostly in the 1990s joined state-backed Sangha Council at divisional and township level to appease the anti-state activities of monastic communities and build support systems for the military regime in exchange of special favours.

### **Educational Propaganda and Coercive Apparatus**

Students acted as an anti-government force that was always concerned about the shortcomings of governmental policies and led massive demonstration to overthrow the regime or to bring changes to the system. Myanmar's military government had exerted an all-surrounding approach to manage several sections of students

alongside its consecutive repression and crack down. It basically applied three-pronged tactics (discursive, despotic, and infrastructural) targeting two types of students: a) students organised under political affiliation and b) general students not having an interest in risking their career and livelihood for political reasons. For the former group, the government offered political incentives not to join anti-state force and to support the government. The TBSPP established few youth unions namely Te-za Youth, She-saung Youth, and Lanzin Youth Organizations, mostly focused on students in opposition political forces. These unions not only supported the government activities but also checked students' participation in anti-government protests. There was a fear of retribution for opposing the junta government among the students. On the other hand, it could be beneficial for them not to be in any protests against the government and supporting or joining the association to show dedication and secure positions. The students who were found in protestations or such any activities that questioned the governments' legitimacy or accountability, or even contained different political views, became victims of detention, disappearance, and even assassination. During the series of anti-government movements (1965, 1969, 1970, 1975, 1976, 1987, and 1988) several students sacrificed their lives. Especially after the immediate crackdown on the pro-democracy agitation, more than ten thousands youth took shelter in border areas.<sup>65</sup> During this period (since 1988), all schooling had reached a conclusion in the border areas.<sup>66</sup> Although students fought against the military government in cooperation with ethnic revolts and the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), the lack of funds, division within the organisations, and inadequacy of modern military technology compelled them to step back.

For the latter part of students who were concerned about their future, the military government dealt with them indirectly by providing them incentives and making them politically apathetic. The

study of Hlaing<sup>67</sup> showed that merely 2% of the students intently participated in student unions. Many of them left the ideologies, very few engaged with political parties after getting degrees, and mostly joined the civil services. Besides, the government had directed various propaganda as well as martial law regulations to suppress educational freedom, murder and torture of protestors, the shutdown and reorganisations of educational institution (through strict monitoring and scrutiny), attack on decadent Western culture, building up universities to segregate student clusters, etc.<sup>68</sup>

### **Media Censorship**

After independence, Burma witnessed a golden period of mass media. Especially in Rangoon around 30 daily newspapers were published in Burmese, English, Chinese, and South Asian languages. But over the last five decades (mostly from 1962 to 2011), the draconian censorship in Myanmar has added to a culture of denial. The junta government was intolerant of any criticism against the government and cut the regime off from the other nations not to be cognisant about Myanmar's internal circumstances. The privately-owned print media was highly restricted and only a couple of state-run newspapers that were published were committed to government propaganda.<sup>69</sup> The junta imposed restrictions on freedom of speech and media were severely persecuted in the name of protecting state security and public order.<sup>70</sup> The Tatmadaw targeted the press and while imprisoning news editors it created two state-own newspapers, the *Working People's Daily* and *Forward Weekly*.<sup>71</sup> Besides, the junta did not accept the opposite political view, foreigners movement was restricted by short visa periods, media was censored and restricted by the Burma Press Council (only few shortwave radios but no television), monitored all books and magazines.<sup>72</sup> Even their different undefined regulations provided the military government with their very own interpretation and ability to enforce authoritarian decisions. The repeatedly regulatory density of the junta on media and freedom of

speech was also an important factor behind their prolonged rule in Myanmar.

**Table 2**

**Different Regulatory Mechanisms<sup>73</sup>**

The Printers and Publishers Registration Law,1962	Books and publication were required to submit to the Press Scrutiny Board for obtaining permission
The Constitution, 1974	Declared freedom of speech and Media under restrictive interpretation in order to prevent dissemination of anti-government opinion
The State Protection Law, 1975	Granted up to five years' imprisonment as well as detention without trial for disseminating certain information that was deemed to be threatening the sovereignty, security, or order of the state.
The Printers and Publishers Registration Law,1989 (Amended)	Imposed penalties from up to five years to seven years and fined maximum 30,000 kyats on those convicted of violation
Martial Law Order 3/89	Publications required permission from the Ministry of the Interior and Religious Affairs, otherwise it was considered a criminal offence
1995, Memorandum to All Printers and Publishers Concerning the Submission of Manuscripts for Scrutiny	Imposed restrictions on publications presenting anything threatening to the Burmese socialist programme, ideology of the state, the socialist economy, national solidarity and unity, security, the rule of law, peace

	and public order, criticism of the functions of government departments, etc.
The Television and Video Act, 1995	To have TV and video device acquire prior permission of the Ministry of Communications
The 1996 Motion Picture Law	Need to get approval (before censor) from the Myanmar Cinema Company to produce films.
The Computer Science Development Law of 1996	Required permission of the Ministry of Communications to own and use a computer to publish on internet
Wide Area Network Establishment and Service Providing order No. 3/2002	Taking prior concern for creating a computer web.
The Electronic Transactions Law, 2004	Imposed punishment on crime (undefined) using electronic transactions technology
The constitution, 2008	Granted freedom of Media only on paper, the junta never abolished previous restrictive Acts related to the media

### External Assistance

The colonial experience and the contemporary politics of the cold war period left a deep mark over the thought of Myanmar politicians and generals that its cautionary moves aimed at avoiding the same hardship of the third world countries had entrapped itself. Both Japanese and British forces led to widespread modernisations of the military in the colonial period that left the military as the only cohesive social unit after achieving independence in Myanmar.<sup>74</sup> The colonialists' cross alignment with different sections of society had both intensified and systematised the conventional conflict between the

Burman and other ethnic groups. In addition, their mass militarisation disintegrated the indigenous social and political order that even continued in the post-independence time.<sup>75</sup> This sagacity led the nationalist leaders to have recourse to complete isolation policy from the outers and to emphasis on national security that was depicted as a combination of “strong nationalism, notions of self-reliance, and distrust of foreigners, the West in particular.”<sup>76</sup> The Generals had a fear of overt intervention from the big powers like in Iraq and East Timor.<sup>77</sup> However, it accepted a confined level of cooperation from its neighbouring country, China, until the 1967 anti-Chinese riots. China maintained a strategic alliance with Myanmar by providing political, economic, and military assistance to consolidate authoritarianism, fulfilment of their tactical interest, and to terminate foreign influence especially to protect the whole struggle of anti-US imperialism in Southeast Asia. Even it notified Ne Win personally through its Burmese delegate (Geng Biao) about three issues: “1. The plot of military coup against him; 2. Inquire on what kinds of aid Burma urgently need; 3. To inform Ne Win that Zhou Enlai or Chen Yi willing to go to Rangoon to exchange views with him if necessary.”<sup>78</sup> But the countrywide anti-Chinese riots in Myanmar created a wedge between the two neighbours that lasted until the 1988 massive pro-democracy movement. In that time, Myanmar received a good amount of economic assistance from Japan that became a vital part in the Burmese economy. In 1988, the proportion of Japanese assistance represented 78% of all respective aid to Myanmar. Besides, the economic remodel in Myanmar during the 1990s stirred trade connection with external industrialist economies particularly with the Chinese. To accomplish its superpower status, trades security, and countering Indian domination in the South and Southeast Asian territory, Chinese diplomacy prioritised Myanmar’s geo-strategical position, natural resources, and relations as an important political and military ally. Since then, Chinese constant aid and assistance toward

Burma under various diplomatic and military agreements kept aside the other external powers like Japan, Thailand, India, and the US as well as other Western nations and regional organizations (ASEAN)<sup>79</sup> that advanced higher stability of the military regime. Furthermore, India had no major connection with Burma till 1990 because of its limited interest and capability to extend influence beyond its borders and Myanmar's undemocratic principles. But the Sino-Burmese strategic involvement pushed India toward more participation with Burma regarding joint military activities and coordinated efforts to stifle insurgents groups. Later, Indian efforts toward road connectivity, gas pipeline projects, deep sea port, and border security issues with Burma was noticed in the military regime.

Additionally, Burma's membership in ASEAN (1997), which prohibits direct interference in member nations' domestic issues, would have allowed the junta government to expand its economic volume and contacts with the rest of the world. This enrolment of Myanmar also aided the junta in expanding some spaces for common society and acceptance of global standards,<sup>80</sup> reducing the junta's total reliance on China. Thailand, Malaysia, and North Korea also assisted Myanmar's military regime's stability by different development programmes in order to resolve longstanding rivalry and tensions stirred up by steady issues with refugees, severe border incidents (2001-2002) and insurgent groups fighting against the junta through several summit meetings.<sup>81</sup> The hardliners (Australia, the US, and the European nations) imposed economic sanctions and banned on aid, travel, and arms trade considering of Burmese government as a threat to regional security. These hardliners kept their pressure on the junta to transfer power to civilian and return to the barracks. In return, the military leaders accused the Western sanctions as an attempt to establish neocolonialism and interference in Myanmar's internal affairs. However, the growing competition between China and India made hardliners to pull out the Western influence over Myanmar. The



US and the UK's less likely attention, lack of political engagement and disinterestedness, absence of the execution of responsibility to protect (R2P) principles, steady position for a pluralistic or liberal political framework rather focusing on empowering the cycle of democratization into Myanmar helped junta regime to get its peak.

## **Conclusion**

The interdependence between the Tatmadaw's origin, the national leaders' dimensional political career, and the liberation struggle of Myanmar had crystallised the new professional sentiment of the military and provoked to establish its control over the state apparatus in the face of severe political violence. However, like the civilian government, the military regime failed in bringing social, political, and economic advancement. A circle of public demonstrations and strikes proved the governments' unpopularity, albeit it repeatedly justified its necessity for remaining in power through an emphasis on national ideology, imagined external threat, and danger of different ethnicities' demand for more autonomous power. However, the Tatmadaw had finally succeeded in power consolidation through a series of group management. The ethnic minorities, political parties, student organisations, business community, monks, and media press were the principal rivals for the generals but they successfully handled them following Goebel's three types power, i.e., despotic, infrastructural, and discursive. It built up a business network with black-market by which the junta had just continued economic survival during its period of isolation from the outside world. A patron-client network has also been constructed that not only enriched the generals but also incorporated various sections of civilians. The fear of being a victim of different deprivation policies with coercive laws and the hope for an advantageous opportunity to have incentives for supporting the government had developed a group within the society that worked as a power-base for the military regime. Beside, the disorganisation, lack of focused and united

leadership, shortage of fund and disconnection with outside world, closure of educational institutions for a long time, as well as military guidance and training for academicians led to the failure of all the attempts for military overthrow. Access to resources and monitoring power over rebel groups through ceasefires consolidated the military's position in state apparatus with more economic, administrative, and diplomatic capacity. Although the Western countries recurrently emphasised transfer of power to a democratic government, constant Japanese aid and Chinese investment had both reduced the economic sufferings and encouraged the pro-democracy supporters like India to be more involved with the military government in Myanmar. Indirectly, all of these made room for the military government in world politics without providing overt support and enabled the regime to consolidate its control over state and society.

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# PROSPECTS OF MIDDLE EASTERN QUAD AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

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## Abstract

*In the contemporary international environment, the US has been exhausted financially in its prolonged wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Furthermore, the Afghan and Iraq debacles, i.e., the fall of Kabul and political instability in Iraq, have also cost the US its prestige. For its compensation, the US is now involved in consensus-based network arrangements which have two prominent features. First is the US attempt to enable its allies in economic and military domains to formulate their own regional security framework. This will help the US in minimizing its own war cost. Second is the shift from multilateralism to minilateralism (i.e., region specific) which will converge the threat perceptions of the US with that of the regional states towards framing the mutual threat or challenge. The US initiative in the Middle East, dubbed as Quad 2.0, is the practical manifestation of its aforementioned policy. Middle Eastern Quad, comprises of US, India, Israel, and the UAE is yet to get formal recognition, nevertheless, its anti-China outlook is apparent. For Pakistan, this development is of utmost attention for two reasons, i.e., Pakistan's inherent interests in the Middle East and India's participation in the Middle Eastern security framework. This paper attempts to explore the probability or improbability of Quad 2.0 and to analyse its possible implications on Pakistan through open source secondary research.*

**Keywords:** Quad 2.0, Indo-Israel, Middle East, security, multilateralism

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## Introduction

The world has been witnessing an emerging international order shaped by the rising economic powers. The undisputed supremacy of the US is now challenged by China's rise and attached to it is the rise of other powers like Japan, South Korea, EU, India, Australia, and Brazil. Nevertheless, whereas these powers excel in economics, they still lag behind in military terms to assert their will geopolitically. With the exception of China which has built up its military might and has transformed itself into the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest military spender, other states still require defence assistance from the US. However, the contemporary dynamics of the US assistance to its allies are drastically different from the past for certain reasons. First, the nature of the threat has changed. During the cold war period, it was the communist threat while in the post-cold war era—especially after 9/11—it was terrorism which had tempted the US to engage other states in a multilateral security arrangement under its leadership. Today, the ideological rift has vanished and geopolitics has taken prominence in which the US is increasingly challenged by China's influence across Eurasia and Africa. Second, in the past, the burden of responsibility lied primarily on the US since Europe was financially incapable of leading the war against communism and the stakes of the US were higher in the global war on terrorism. Hence, the US had to lead the efforts against any threat while other states remained in a hub-and-spoke system in the alliance.

Today, however, the US is reluctant to initiate any formal arrangement against any other state owing to the fear of a domestic backlash and the emergence of new anti-US alliances. Hence, the US is adopting a similar strategy across various regions to build regional security frameworks. In recent times, the US has concluded two major joint security frameworks i.e., the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad (including Australia, India, Japan, and the US) and the new grouping of Australia, the UK, and the US, referred to, in short, as

AUKUS. In extension to these developments, the US has been adopting a new strategy in the resource rich region of the Middle East where it has managed to gather Israel, the UAE, and India to form Quad 2.0 or Middle Eastern Quad.

This paper is an attempt to explore the probability or improbability of Quad 2.0 and to analyse its possible implications on Pakistan.

### **Defining the Purpose of Quad 2.0**

The Quad has gained momentum in the US policy circles in recent years. Having shifted its focus from the Middle East to Indo-Pacific as illustrated in former US president Barack Obama's 'Pivot to Asia' policy, the US has been involved in formulating security arrangements with like-minded states to curtail China's rise.<sup>1</sup> In Quad, three other states—India, Japan, and Australia—also share similar apprehensions regarding China owing to border clashes and China's assertive role in the South China Sea. Since its formal proposition by Japan in 2007, Quad has largely been limited to an informal setting focusing on free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific. However, during Donald Trump's presidency, the scope of Quad had been expanded to military collaboration as well. The foremost is the Malabar Naval Exercises of November 2020, in which all the Quad countries participated.<sup>2</sup> Apart from joint military exercises, Quad member states have security treaties (US-Japan and US-Australia), security cooperation frameworks (India-Japan and India-Australia), and defence collaboration (India-US) with each other as well.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the prospects of Quad becoming a formal military alliance is minimal because of two reasons. Firstly, the Quad member states are reluctant to institutionalise their cooperation that would give an overt impression of being anti-China. Forming a new NATO-like military alliance against any state wouldn't be received positively by the public as well. Secondly, unlike the US, other states in the Quad have greater stakes vis-à-vis China due to their geographical proximity

like India and Japan. Hence, these states, though wary of China's role, are less enthusiastic to actively confront it. It is imperative to assess the purpose of Quad 2.0 (Middle Eastern Quad) with this background of original Quad since the former is like an extension of the latter.

The formation of Middle Eastern Quad is actualised after the idea of 'Quad-plus' in March 2020 when representatives from New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam also participated in the Quad meeting.<sup>4</sup> Their participation symbolised the inclusion of 'like-minded' countries to jointly take up the responsibility of the Indo-Pacific region. Since then, the US has been engaging other states elsewhere to form regional security frameworks, including the Middle East. Officially, the Middle Eastern Quad is purposed to increase cooperation in the domains of energy, economic, maritime, and Covid response.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, the inclusion of India in an otherwise different regional settings imply a renewed US approach of tackling China beyond the Indo-Pacific region through upgrading the status of India as the pivotal state in countering China's rise.

However, the functioning of Middle Eastern Quad is far more complex than the original one for various factors.

### **Limitations**

**First**, the original Quad comprises of states with similar political structures, i.e., democracies, and can advocate their policy of 'rule-based navigation' with a greater intent. Contrary to that, in the Middle Eastern Quad, UAE is a monarchy while Israel is more of an 'ethnic democracy' since the Palestinian citizens do not enjoy the same rights. This differentiation in the internal political structures contradicts the very notion of 'like-minded states'. **Second**, in the Indo-Pacific region, certain states do share their apprehensions over China's role, although, they are not willing to confront China yet the resentments exist. In the Middle East, however, neither the UAE nor Israel perceive China as a concern let alone a threat to their interests. Instead, both these states view China as a welcome power, necessary

to elevate their economic status and the region in general.<sup>6</sup> It is evident by the fact that the UAE and China have signed the 'comprehensive strategic partnership'—the highest level of engagement by China with any country—while Israel is consolidating its commercial ties with China by granting its companies infrastructure projects (i.e., construction of container facility at Haifa Port) and being interested in importing the 5G technology.<sup>7</sup> From their point of view, their cooperation with China is also vital to curtail China's overwhelming association with Iran which further emboldens the latter in the region. **Third**, the issue of Russia is paramount. Russia has already expressed its concern with the original Quad which has led to divergence of strategic objectives between Russia and India.<sup>8</sup> It is noteworthy that unlike the Indo-Pacific, Russian interests in the Middle East are far more entrenched and Russia's response to the US-led security initiative in the region would be a lot more robust. In this regard, the major consequences would be faced by India and Israel. India imports nearly half of its military hardware from Russia and, hence, fostering security initiatives with Russian rivals would not be the policy preference for India. Similarly, Israel requires close ties with Russia to thwart Iranian influence from its border with Syria and, thus, cannot afford to be a part of the US-led regional security framework. Although it receives \$3.8 billion in military aid from the US, it is only to maintain its 'qualitative military edge' over its regional neighbours. **Fourth**, by participating in a security framework which includes the US, Israel, and the UAE, all of whom are averse to Iranian role in the region, India is putting its relations with Iran in jeopardy. Indo-Iranian ties have already witnessed a decline in recent years for various reasons like consolidation of Indo-Israel ties, reinstatement of US sanctions on Iranian oil under the 'maximum pressure campaign', and Iran's increasingly vocal stance against Indian atrocities in Jammu and Kashmir. By engaging in yet another minilateral security partnership over which Iran shares deep concerns, India would fall into the

complexities of regional conflicts. **Last**, competition with China in the Middle East is also not pragmatic for India. Both China and India depend on Middle Eastern energy resources for their economies and both have enjoyed good relations with the Middle Eastern states. In fact, the Middle Eastern states require both China and India to invest in their infrastructure for the diversification of local economies as outlined in various regional economic visions, i.e., Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 and Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030, etc.

Having these limitations in the Quad 2.0 proceedings, it is important to address the respective interests of member states to better understand their motivation behind joining this security framework.

### **Divergent Interests of Quad 2.0 Member States**

For any political or security alliance to succeed, it is necessary that its member states have similar objectives. For example, during the cold war and the post-cold war era, NATO emerged as the premier security alliance as all the member states shared the idea of collective security against communism and terrorism. EU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) became the frontrunners in the domain of integrated economy which strengthened the indigenous economies of member states. On the other hand, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) couldn't succeed as the notion of regionalism was blown into smithereens due to prevailing Kashmir Issue, border tensions, and India's ambition to dominate the region. Similarly, for the Middle Eastern Quad to be recognized as the pivotal forum of bringing peace in the region, it is important that the interests of member states converge, however, it seems unlikely.

### **The US**

The motive of the US behind spearheading the Middle Eastern Quad is primarily to counter Chinese influence, alongside its policy of disengagement from the region and its urge to pass on the

responsibility of regional security to regional states as evident from Abraham Accords. By aligning its regional allies into an integrated framework, the US also aims to deter anti-US forces—most notably Iran and its proxies—from threatening its interests or its partner states. This will help the US in multiple ways. First, it could reduce tensions among the US allies in the region that could draw a global powers' competition. Second, it could promote stability in which a coordinated counter-terrorism effort can flourish. Third, the security of Israel, being a paramount issue for the US, can be ensured as Arab supporters of Palestine are now more inclined towards having a diplomatic solution. Fourth, the US seeks to establish its sway over regional affairs through forming its own bloc where its global competitors (China and Russia) are consolidating their military and political relations with its regional adversaries (Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah).

## **India**

The most astonishing participant of a Middle Eastern security framework is India. India neither belongs to that region, like the UAE and Israel, nor has trans-regional interests, like the US. The US purpose for bringing India to the front seat of Middle Eastern security is to utilise its economic potential for regional development vis-à-vis China. However, Indian intent of countering China in an otherwise alien region is questionable. It is also supported by the fact that India's motivation behind joining the Middle Eastern Quad drastically differs from that of the US. Instead of being engulfed in great powers' rivalry, India is primarily concerned with having its footprint in the Middle East for two basic reasons. First, it would allow India to increase its bilateral economic relations with the Arab States which are vital for its financial (through remittances) and industrial (through oil imports) requirements.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, by enhancing its diplomatic presence in an otherwise Muslim-dominated region, India is seeking to shift the focus away from the pertinent Kashmir dispute and anti-Muslim policies (like communal violence) inside the country.

### **The UAE and Israel**

It is the first time that an Arab state is formally engaged with Israel to coordinate the joint security apparatus for the region. Previously, both Arabs and Israelis have remained either in a state of warfare or cold peace. However, in the contemporary regional proceedings, their mutual threat perception has changed. Instead of viewing each other as adversaries, both of these actors now perceive Iran as a threat to their territorial integrity. For the UAE, the issue of three islands located strategically in the Strait of Hormuz is the major bone of contention with Iran along with the latter's incessant threats in the Persian Gulf. Iran and the UAE are also in opposition to each other in Yemen where the former supports Houthis while the latter backs the Southern Transitional Council (STC). On the other hand, Israel feels itself steadily encircled by Iran through Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iranian-backed militias in Syria, and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Hence, both the UAE and Israel have joined hands solely to counter the Iranian influence in the region by nurturing their security ties with the US. However, none of them seems interested to counter Chinese influence as mentioned previously.

### **Implications for Pakistan**

From the aforementioned analysis, two deductions can be made. First, Quad 2.0 or the Middle Eastern Quad is presently a preliminary framework which is yet to be formalised. Before its formalisation, its functioning will remain ineffective. Second, even if in the near future Quad 2.0 gets formal recognition yet three out of its four member states would remain unwilling to counter China. Nevertheless, the platform would inevitably enable the member states to strengthen their bilateral relations. For India, it would be beneficial as its political, defence, and economic ties with the US and Israel would be consolidated and, hence, the ripple effect would be borne by Pakistan.



## **Indo-US Relations**

Indo-US relations have been gaining momentum since 2005 and the commitment of mutual collaboration has been reiterated through various agreements. The Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal (2008), Defence Framework Agreement (2005 and 2015), Strategic Partners on Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region (2015), and Major Defence Partners (2016) are some of the vital pacts which have helped India to cultivate its relations with the US. Owing to the US apprehension about China, Indo-US ties have been rejuvenated, yet the US policy of granting favours to India has upset the status quo in the region. During the same time as the US was favouring India, its relations with Pakistan gradually withered. In 2009, the US policymakers coined the term 'Af-Pak' to hyphenate or combine Pakistan and Afghanistan into a single theatrical operation.<sup>10</sup> This policy of the US completely neglected the traditional geopolitics of South Asia which is marked by incessant Indo-Pak rivalry. Moreover, in his eight-year tenure as president, former US president Barack Obama never visited Pakistan while at the same time appeared as the Chief Guest on India's Republic Day in 2015. This symbolic downgrading of relations took a practical turn when President Trump suspended \$300 million worth of economic assistance to Pakistan in 2018.<sup>11</sup> Because of this policy outlook of the US, the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan is being neglected as India has increased militarisation on its side of Kashmir after the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35-A of its Constitution in August 2019 to abolish the special status of the state and convert it into two union territories. Considering this background, the Indo-US partnership in Quad 2.0 would lead to further intensification of ties between two countries much to Pakistan's concern. Owing to its centrality in the Indo-Pacific Quad and Middle Eastern Quad, India may use this leverage to further its regional ambitions through the US. It is already evident from the CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) legislation.

According to CAATSA, the procurement of any energy or defence related equipment from the US adversaries (Iran, Russia, and North Korea) is prohibited. Nevertheless, India is planning to purchase S-400 missile defence system from Russia over which the threat of US sanctions is looming. Still many analysts in the US are lobbying to provide India the waiver citing the pivotal role India could play against the US adversaries.<sup>12</sup> These circumstances point towards the fact that Indian influence over the US policy for South Asia would be detrimental for Pakistan, especially when the US and Pakistan disagree over the future discourse of Afghanistan. Furthermore, this could also embolden India to increase its activities inside Kashmir and Balochistan that could weaken Pakistan's case internationally and destabilise the internal security situation, respectively.

### **Indo-Israel Relations**

More challenging for Pakistan is the consolidation of Indo-Israel ties. Already in the upward trajectory, Indo-Israel relations further thrived when PM Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel in 2017 followed by Netanyahu's visit the following year. Both countries cooperate extensively in the defence sector. India is the largest buyer of military equipment from Israel while Israel is the second largest exporter (first being Russia) to India in the defence sector.<sup>13</sup> Both the countries share a similar vision on terrorism and Islamic militancy. Although India does not openly support Israel's strikes over Gaza, its condemnation of Israel over its policy regarding Palestine is merely limited to rhetoric. On the other hand, Israel explicitly weighed behind India's treatment of Kashmiri Muslims. Much to the distress of Pakistan, in 2008 and 2009, the two countries jointly launched the Israeli TecSAR border control imaging satellites.<sup>14</sup> India and Israel also collaborate on cyber security and it was revealed that India has purchased Israeli spyware software, named Pegasus, for surveillance and disinformation. These steps, now under the renewed partnership of Middle Eastern Quad, are expected to grow in future.

The Middle Eastern Quad has also allowed India to freely engage with Israel and Arab states simultaneously without having the fear of backlash from either side. Thus, the Abraham Accord and now the Middle Eastern Quad have paved the way for India and Israel to increase their mutual cooperation that would be challenging for Pakistan's security.

### **Options for Pakistan**

For Pakistan, Quad 2.0 itself doesn't pose any threat. It is the prospects of more deepening ties of India with the US and Israel under the auspices of Quad 2.0 which are the main cause of concern, both for its internal security and regional interests. To counter the Indian inroads into the Middle East and the US policy circles, Pakistan's response must be vigilant. Pakistan can secure its interests through the following ways.

### **Outreach towards Middle Eastern States**

In the Middle East, Pakistan has three sorts of allies. First, the Arab States which are a vital source of energy and finance for Pakistan. As per a research study in 2018, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have remained the largest remittance providers of Pakistan.<sup>15</sup> Pakistan also shares strategic ties with Saudi Arabia as nearly 5,000 Pakistan troops are stationed in the country to defend the kingdom. Second, Turkey has emerged as the major ally of Pakistan in recent years. Both Prime Minister Imran Khan and Turkish President Rəcəp Tayyib Erdoğan are vocal against Islamophobia while Turkey has also been supportive of Pakistan's stance over Kashmir while condemning the Indian suppression in the Kashmir Valley. Third, Iran is yet another crucial state in the Middle East for Pakistan. In recent years, especially after the lifting of sanctions in the post-2015 period, both the countries have been collaborating on various issues like border security, situation in Afghanistan, and bilateral trade. All of these developments indicate that Pakistan has both substantial stakes and significance in

the Middle East. Furthermore, Pakistan is also an active member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Under these circumstances, Pakistan's stance on Islamophobia and its support to Palestine, in collaboration with Turkey and Iran, could prove to be a major rebuttal for India in that region. India's partnership with Israel can also be exploited by Pakistan through associating with Turkey and Iran, the latter being a major energy partner of India, provided that both these states share aversion towards Israel and openly support the Palestinian cause. Lastly, Pakistan cannot neglect the role of Arab States. Although the Arab states are drawing closer to Israel, Saudi Arabia, the most crucial Arab States, has not established formal relations with it. This testifies that at the societal level, Arabs are still wary of Israel's role in their region. On the other hand, the ill-treatment of Muslims in India, especially in the state of Assam, has also irked the Middle Eastern people to the extent of launching a 'boycott Indian products' campaign.<sup>16</sup> Hence, whereas at the state level, Pakistan could increase its commitment with the Arab states, specifically by inviting them to join CPEC, at the societal level, Pakistan can have its public outreach through highlighting India's attitude towards Muslims.

### **Assessing Relations with the US**

Although in the second decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century, Pak-US relations have degraded and Pakistan has shifted towards China yet in Pakistan's interests, it is vital to maintain a balance between two global powers. In the context of Indo-US relations, Pakistan can adopt two policies. First, Pakistan can expand its relations with China and Russia in the domains of economics and defence. Pak-China joint venture of CPEC has already consolidated mutual ties. With Russia, Pakistan's relations have also been growing, especially after the finalization of Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline Project which is to be built by Russia. Apart from economic affairs, Pakistan is crucial for both the states owing to the security situation in Afghanistan. Russia has a historic legacy in Afghanistan. But more than that, it fears the spill-over of

instability in Afghanistan into Central Asia. On the other hand, China also shares similar fears owing to Uyghur community which shares religious affinity with Afghanistan. Hence, this provides Pakistan an opportunity to seek a regional consensus on Afghanistan and reiterate its status as a pivotal state of the region. However, Pakistan cannot afford to completely align itself with China and Russia while ignoring the US. In relation to current Afghan situation, Pakistan can utilise this leverage to revamp its deteriorated ties with the US. An understanding with the US over Afghanistan can grant Pakistan the space to expand this cooperation to the entire region, at least in view of its relations with India. Such an approach could diffuse the threat for Pakistan even if India and the US continue to work on their partnership.

### **Conclusion**

From the aforementioned discussion, it can be concluded that the formalization of Quad 2.0 is yet to be actualised. Even if it is to be fully functioning, the objectives of its member states drastically vary from each other. Through this perspective, Pakistan's interests are less likely to be affected. However, such an arrangement is always a prelude for extended state-to-state relations and it is precisely what Pakistan should be analysing. The bilateral relations of India with the US and Israel are a major source of concern for Pakistan and to address that concern, it is essential that Pakistan actively engage with the region, not to the extent that it may engulf Pakistan into a regional crisis but to safeguard its interests. On the other hand, Indian over-ambitious approach and policy of becoming a trans-regional power is far-fetched and is likely to result in a backlash owing to the intra-regional crises of the Middle East. Nevertheless, in this ever-changing international structure, Pakistan's interests are linked with its strategy of balancing the global powers especially with regards to the regional situation.

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# RISE OF HINDUTVA AS A CREED: ITS IMPACT ON INDIA'S POLITICS AND SOCIETY

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## Abstract

*The Hindutva ideology is taking a toll on all walks of national life in India. The current resurging of Hindutva-based socio-political discrimination has its roots in the historic RSS doctrine, which has adversely impacted the Nehruvian concept of secular India, turning it into a collage of ghettos of innumerable communities and faiths of people living in world's largest democracy. This study examines how the rise of Hindutva-based political exigency has affected Indian nationhood and torn its social and communal fabric.*

**Keywords:** Hindutva, BJP, Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), Muslims

## Introduction

The Indian political leadership during initial years of independence promoted its image as a secular and a democratic country. Pluralism, socialism, secularism and democracy were once considered as the hallmarks of the Indian society. 'The Nehru Consensus' earned India the status of a democratic secular state. It professed the idea of 'Mother India' as a place where people from various castes, creed and religions can live freely.<sup>1</sup> The Indian leadership by adopting such policies tried to negate the idea of Hindu-

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Muslim divide (as reflected in the *Two Nation Theory*), which was the bastion thought of Pakistan Movement. In fact, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru propounded for the first time the policy of Non-Alignment on September 7, 1946. He declared, "We propose as far as possible, to keep away from the power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past to World Wars and which may again lead to disasters to even vaster scale."<sup>2</sup>

This concept brought India and countries of Commonwealth on same page. This also enabled India to lead from the front in marshalling countries with creed to various beliefs under one platform.<sup>3</sup> This notion of leadership and secularism helped India become a Guest of Honour at the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) as well.<sup>4</sup>

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was created in the 1980s. The party's emergence was largely supported by Hindu nationalist organisations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Bajrang Dal, Shiv Sena and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP).<sup>5</sup> The involvement of Hindu nationalist forces in the corridors of country's politics reflected their desire for constitutional power and a strong will towards Hindu India. In the words of Fascism scholar Robert Paxton, "For Hindu fundamentalists, their religion is the focus of an intense attachment that the secular and pluralist Indian state does not succeed in offering. In such communities, a religious-based fascism is conceivable."<sup>6</sup> This interpretation confirms the vulnerability of BJP's rise in Hindu India. At present, the BJP is in power in India (in its second term). The BJP leader, Narendra Modi, is the same man who as Chief Minister of Gujarat (2002) 'abetted' the killings of Muslims. Modi's election to the Prime Minister's office furthered the impression that the inhumane treatment toward the minorities, especially Muslims, did not essentially create any obstacle on the path of assuming the high office. The courts too, were silent and enabling Modi to establish his government on Hindu democratic grounds. The Citizenship

Amendment Act (CAA) clearly signaled Modi's anti-Muslim stance.<sup>7</sup> The BJP government's Hindu centric policies have additionally reinforced the insecurities among the Muslim populace of India. The Muslims of Bihar<sup>8</sup> and Assam<sup>9</sup> despite being natives face identity crisis and their nationalities are being questioned in India. The implementation of National Registry of Citizens (NRC) intended at targeting illegal immigrants, resulting in further singling out the Muslims.<sup>10</sup>

Seeing the BJP led Hindu nationalistic politics and its impact on the country's foreign policy outlook, India by abrogating Article 370 (on August 5, 2019) sealed the fate of nine million Kashmiris as stateless citizens in India.<sup>11</sup> The scrapping of Article 370 implied the simultaneous elimination of Article 35-A. Furthermore, the Modi government's decision to demote the status of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories (Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir-IIOJ&K and Ladakh) is to bring the Muslim majority Kashmir valley under the direct control of New Delhi. BJP has described the move as "correcting a historic mistake of the first government of India under the leadership then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru."<sup>12</sup> With the revocation of the Article 35-A, IIOJ&K has been opened for non-Kashmiris, in particular Hindus to settle in the area.<sup>13</sup> This amounts to bringing demographic changes in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and to construct a new Kashmir as an Indian territory.<sup>14</sup> The forceful measures by India to control the eight million Kashmiris has led to a deep humanitarian crisis. The worst sufferers of the inhumane acts are the infants, children, women and old people living in valley.<sup>15</sup> Under the draconian laws operative in IIOJ&K, people have been shipped to jails all over India, showing the true face of Indian democracy and secularism.<sup>16</sup> The BJP's actions in occupied Jammu and Kashmir are similar to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the paramilitary organisation, which was behind the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>17</sup>

## **Indian Society and Politics: From Indian Nationalism to Hindu Nationalism and Hindutva**

The party which embodies Hindutva first came to power at national level in 1996, for just 13 days; then for 13 months in 1998-1999;<sup>18</sup> and then again for the third time from 1999 to 2004. Whereas, in 2014 it swept the national landscape – a death blow to erstwhile secularism.<sup>19</sup>

The struggle of Hindu nationalist political parties towards constitutional empowerment has brought in religion as a political and social factor in India. Whether, it has strengthened the country's political credentials or it has made India a Hindu democracy is a debatable issue. India's democracy and its secular character are often cited as tools of pragmatism. There is, no doubt, that the democratic institutions in India are well-established and the political culture does not entirely revolve around dynastic politics. The Modi's rise to power reflects that to be Prime Minister one does not need to be from an elite political background. Modi's win additionally, also reflects an empowerment of the middle class. Another perspective to view Indian politics is the role of religion as a driving force behind its political apparatus. Hindus look up to Narendra Modi as a staunch proponent of ideological outlook, as he has made faith an integral part of politics. Thereby, Prime Minister Modi's election is the outcome of a combination of social and religious factors.

The narrative of Hindu insecurity was a political trap for the Hindus of India, as much as it was an issue for the Indian Muslims, who had made a place for themselves in the body politic as intellectuals and compassionate members of a multiethnic state. The BJP slogan invoked the concept of 'rule and decorum' by the majority. This is where Secularism failed, and succumbed to the highhandedness of state-centric majoritarianism. The concept turned so draconian that in no time it called for changing the very fabric of Indian nationalism. Many so-called intellectuals in India now openly endorse a new curriculum based on and driven by faith. They have drawn 'politico-ideological'

maps of Greater India – an apparent recourse to *Akhand Bharat* – wherein the geography of India would include Bhutan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh, apparently a reminiscence of Ashoka the Great's rule.<sup>20</sup> The only difference, however was that Ashoka promoted Buddhism. Today, as Modi and his inner coterie call for recourse to Shivaji cult, it is the historic invincibility that dominates their mindset – ignorant of the fact that it comes at the cost of pluralism in multilingual-polarised India.<sup>21</sup>

In the 2014 Indian election, BJP's Hindu ideology outmatched the secular principles of Congress. Rahul Gandhi's cultured outlook and moderate thinking could not withstand Modi's rhetoric and extremist views. Ashish Nandi who interviewed Narendra Modi in the 1990s, wrote that "I still remember the cool, measured tone in which he elaborated a theory of cosmic conspiracy against India that painted every Muslim as a suspected traitor and a potential terrorist."<sup>22</sup> Prime Minister Narendra Modi previously as the Chief Minister of Gujarat is blamed for the death of 2,000 Muslims in India. The Supreme Court verdict (in April 2004) called Modi "one of the modern-day Neros." Modi faced criticism by the West for the Gujarat massacre. During his visit to England in August 2003, protestors called him as "Narendra Modi: The butcher of Gujarat."<sup>23</sup>

### **Who is Narendra Modi?**

Modi defines his life through ideas of Hindutva. Modi is for Hindu supremacy – an India for Hindus as full citizens – through the vehicle of BJP politics.<sup>24</sup>

In an interview with the *Washington Post* in 2008, the then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi uttered, "Why even talk about 2002? We are almost in 2008. It's the past. What does it matter? My focus is only on development. It starts with development. It ends with development. And that is what I will talk about."<sup>25</sup>

Narendra Modi today is the Prime Minister of India, the country which had once been once ruled by Gandhi and Nehru, and visionaries

like Ambedkar. Modi has had a history of hatred towards the Muslims of India. He had been in lead roles in organising of mobs of hate that demolished the Babri Masjid. He also presided over the pogroms of Muslims in Gujarat. And, it was not without a reason that several countries including UK<sup>26</sup> and the US had banned provision of visa to him.<sup>27</sup> The irony is that despite Modi's hatred towards Muslims of India, he has been twice elected as Prime Minister by the Indian people.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, Modi as Prime Minister has been welcomed in the West as head of a democratic secular India. "The Prime Minister of India will be welcomed to the United States. As head of government, Mr. Modi would be eligible for an A-1 visa," said the US State Department's spokesperson Jen Psaki.<sup>29</sup> President Donald Trump termed Prime Minister Narendra Modi a "tremendous leader."<sup>30</sup> Modi's support in India and abroad reflects the fundamental tenets of 'realism' that it is the 'convergence of interest' which determines the likes and dislikes of people and political actors, whilst principles of democracy, secularism and humanity have no weightage, other than academic purpose/ or moral speeches.

The assertiveness of Hindu nationalism in politics has further widened the divide with the Muslims and other minorities. India's Opposition Leader, Rahul Gandhi once remarked, BJP only wants to divide people, make people fight each other.<sup>31</sup> BJP's political ascendancy is inevitably linked to Hindutva and, of course, anti-Muslim rhetoric. These two elements have been the corner stone of party's election manifesto. During election campaign in 2014, Modi called Kerala with substantial Muslim population a nursery of terrorism, and threatened illegal Bengali Muslim migrants.<sup>32</sup> BJP-led Hindu nationalism has reinforced polarisation in the politics of India.<sup>33</sup> The drivers of Hindutva ideology are to promote the Hindu elite status and to push back the minorities to subservient positions. This shows that the proponents of Hindutva are mostly driven to see the Indian society divided on religious lines with Hinduism being at the top. This may get

votes and political dividends however, at the cost of weakening the democratic polity of India and its secular character. The dangers of Hindutva ingress in India were described by India's pristine scholar, A.G. Noorani, as he says, "It splits the nation into 'us' and 'them' and discards Indian nationalism in favour of Hindu nationalism."<sup>34</sup>

## Hindutva

The term "Hindutva" was initially coined by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Savarkar was an advocate of Hindu militarism and was opposed to Gandhi's non-violence movement. Savarkar was also jailed during the British rule for his rebellious posture. In his book titled *Hindutva Ideology Developed-1920 and Hindutva: Who is a Hindu-1928: Hindutva is regarded as "a collective Hindu identity for Bharat (India)." Hindustan, on the other hand is described as Hindu's pitribhoomi (fatherland) and punyabhoomi (holy land).*<sup>35</sup> Savarkar's coining of term Hindutva at a time when Britain was in power and there was an influence of Muslims in subcontinent shows that Savarkar tried to limit the influence of Christians and Muslims over Hindu identity. These two religions, in particular Islam attracted the lower caste Hindus. Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Kailash Chandra wrote in *Vishwa*, "Christian missionaries and later Muslims tried to destroy the caste system."<sup>36</sup> Thereby, the fear to loose political elitism was the compelling force behind the drivers of Hindutva ideology.

Dr. BR Ambedkar, the Father of the Indian Constitution, defined Hindutva as a menace to liberty, equality and fraternity, referring to it as incompatible with democracy.<sup>37</sup> The ingredients and salient features of RSS are, inspiration from the Nazi theory of racial superiority, recourse to Xenophobia – wherein one state encroaches more land from neighbours – an apt policy these days of India for Bengal and other Muslim states; and last but not least it breeds intolerance and terrorism in society.

The Sangh Parivar and its affiliates brought Hindutva on the front stage as a religious force to attain political objectives. The idea of

'Hindu nation' was promoted; 'Rama' was regarded as the common historical founder, and Ayodhya was declared as the Hindu religious city.<sup>38</sup> The Sangh Parivar advocates the social and political principles of Hindutva ideology. Hindutva advocates and campaigns for a sole Hindu state in India, termed as *Hindu Rashtra*. Thus, the new ideologue says, "Our one supreme goal is to bring to life the all-round glory and greatness of Hindu Rashtra Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh."<sup>39</sup> BJP, the ruling party in India is the "prominent political branch of Sangh Parivar", and is also the modern political manifestation of Hindutva ideology.<sup>40</sup> Seeing BJP's political journey to the corridors of power, Hindutva has been central to the party's ideological orientation.<sup>41</sup>

### **Hindutva and India's Politics and Society**

The Hindutva ideology, led by the Hindu elite, intentionally portrays minorities as a threat. This certainly puts a question mark on the secular character of India. Staring from the demolition movement of Babri Masjid back in 1992 to Gujarat riots in early 2000, this communal violence has been exploited by the Hindu nationalists to provoke the anti-Muslim sentiment. This Hindu-Muslim rivalry has acted as a political tool to win support in country's elections.<sup>42</sup>

It would be interesting to analyse as to 'how and why' Hindutva and Narendra Modi's BJP triumphed in an egalitarian society like that of India!<sup>43</sup>

The reason is primarily academic. It boasted itself as a theory meant for nation-building in a traumatised caste-based environ. Secondly, it made inroads politically with a tongue-in-cheek, as it castigated the freedom leaders and dubbed them, especially Muslims, as people who undermined the rights of Hindu majority.<sup>44</sup>

Lastly; the ideology touched the conscience of many abroad who funded it wholeheartedly.<sup>45</sup> Prime Minister Modi's Manhattan speech on President Obama's invite, and the sprawling arrangements made by NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) are a case in point.

Shashi Tharoor, a politician and former diplomat, says, "Hindutva has nothing to do with Hinduism as a faith or a religion, but as a badge of cultural identity and an instrument of political mobilisation. Hinduism is a religion without fundamentals – no founder or prophet, no organised Church, no compulsory beliefs or rites of worship, no single sacred book. What we see today as Hindutva is part of an attempt to 'semitise' the faith – to make Hinduism more like the 'better organised' religions like Christianity and Islam, the better to resist their encroachments."<sup>46</sup>

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's constitutional acts like the Citizenship Amendment Act-CAA (December 2019) refers to Hindu elitism. In fact, it is an elevation of Hindutva ideology. According to the impugned law (CAA), Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Parsis and Sikhs from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are entitled for Indian citizenship. By stressing on religious identity of foreign nationalities, as a precondition to be eligible for citizenship, India has by law declared faith as an instrument in policymaking. This negates secularism. The Act has drawn a line between Muslims and non-Muslims, the latter being offered fast-track citizenship. The denying of Muslims fast-track citizenship will further marginalise the Muslim community in India and it will impede their social growth. The dangerous aspect of CAA is the outright singling out of Muslims. The All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (AIMIM) has duly protested against the new citizenship act.<sup>47</sup> Besides, protests against the Act being carried out in other parts of the country resulted in the killings of 42 people in the national capital.<sup>48</sup> The Indian Union Muslim League has termed the Act to be in conflict with the secular character of the Indian constitution.<sup>49</sup> The Chief Ministers of New Delhi, West Bengal, Punjab, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have also opposed the new citizenship law.<sup>50</sup> West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee remarked that Modi wanted to divide the nation.<sup>51</sup>



On January 10, 2020, the BJP government notified the implementation of the CAA. Immediately, after the notification, the Uttar Pradesh government shared a list of 40,000 illegal migrants for grant of citizenship.<sup>52</sup> Under the CAA, a person (as identified by the impugned law) is entitled for nationality if he/she has lived or worked in India for six years. Previously 11 years were mandatory to apply for citizenship.<sup>53</sup> Many believe that the new law extends nationality to illegal migrants on the basis of their faith. The concern is that with more people having nationality, the locals of the area might be deprived of their rights – in terms of jobs and resources. The objection over the CAA is to secure the indigenous rights, and the fear that the same may be undermined at the hands of new entrants. It could lead to tougher living conditions. In view of the opposition to CAA, other than Muslims, there seems to be resentment throughout the country. The prime factor is social security. However, despite the disapproval and dismay of a sizable population, the political leadership of BJP is bent upon furthering the Hindutva credentials by hook or by crook.

The abrogation of Article 370 followed by CAA, both are political developments one after the other targeted at Muslims. The targeting of one community reflects an unbalanced mindset. Muslims have widely protested against the law. This indicates that there are certain segments of society, which are critical of BJP's Hindu-centric policies. The presence of such segments in society is significant as it carries a balancing impact to the extremist outrageous polarised views. In one of the anti-CAA rally held in Bengaluru, an Indian girl raised the slogan 'Pakistan Zindabad'.<sup>54</sup> It proves beyond doubt that supporting a particular religion or community is an anti-thesis on the path of evolving a society on just lines. Rather, it provokes conflict of interest. The opposition to CAA by political figures like the Chief Ministers of various states (including New Delhi, West Bengal, Punjab, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh) is a positive sign, as it

exhibits the genuine concern over the discrimination of minorities in India.

### **From Monroe Doctrine to Hindutva**

*“Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who expected the neighbours to accept the reality of the power differential, that they will not and cannot be equals in their dealings with India and there is, therefore, no harm in India showing its teeth from time to time.”<sup>55</sup>*

India is a dominating player in the South Asian region, trying to exercise control and influence over other countries.<sup>56</sup> Instances like the India’s support to Tamil separatist movement in Sri Lanka prove India as a spoiler in the region. In the period from 2000s onwards, the South Asian politics continues to be conflict driven. The region’s politics, in the wake of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is experiencing regional integration and trade cooperation. However, political environment, wherein India-Pakistan regional disputes coupled with India-China border tension are a challenge to region’s well-being. India has been critical of CPEC despite the corridor’s economic benefit to the region. India has tried to sabotage the development work in Balochistan, Pakistan; Indian spy Kulbushan Jadhav was arrested from Balochistan.<sup>57</sup>

The Jadhav Jaundice in India-Pakistan relations is worth analysing to interpret rising Hindu communalism in the region. Kulbushan Sudhir Jadhav *alias* Hussain Patel, a retired Indian Naval Services officer, was hobnobbing in the southeastern coast of Chabahar for ulterior purposes. India acknowledged him as a legitimate businessman in the Iranian port city. However, a curious glance at media reports in India, immediately in the wake of Jadhav’s arrest in 2016 in Balochistan, confirmed that he was a member of the Indian intelligence. But since then a silence of the lambs haunts Indian media, and the reports have been taken down. Surprisingly, a section of the Indian Press had also reported that Jadhav offered to spy for Indian intelligence several times between 2010 and 2012. This one way

or the other gives credence to Pakistan's claims on the 'arrested asset'.<sup>58</sup>

This proves that India's anti-Pakistan/ Muslim hatred is detrimental to region's peace and progress. The intolerance within the Indian society, purported by Hindutva forces, has taken the entire region by storm. The abrogation of Article 370 and 35-A have literally stripped the Muslims of IIOJ&K of their constitutional right to life.<sup>59</sup> An Indian academic Badri Raina sees the revocation of Article 370 as, "complete abrogation of democracy, unconscionable suppression of civil and democratic rights and terminal alienation of people."<sup>60</sup> A.G. Noorani the author of the book *Article 370: A Constitutional History of Jammu and Kashmir*, calls the Indian government's decision of abrogating Article 370 as unconstitutional.<sup>61</sup> The situation in Occupied Jammu and Kashmir is worse than a war, the people are physically, psychologically and electronically isolated. The Indian move to transfer Hindus to Jammu and Kashmir has reinforced the insecurity for Muslims of the area. To change the demographic character of the occupied territory is a violation equivalent to torcher and killing. India is trying to suppress the Muslim identity of Kashmiris. Of course, all these acts reflect a fascist mindset. Although India is a democracy and is home to a sizeable non-Hindu population, the unfortunate aspect is that the policies of hatred espoused against the Muslims of Kashmir have a history of prejudice. This biased policy inadvertently reinforces extremist tendencies, which is a direct threat to region's peace and security. India's prejudicial war against Muslims will not only further the communal divide, it will also polarise the society with extremist tendencies.

The BJP's government's Hindutva political outlook has further deteriorated the relations with Pakistan. During the 2014 election, Modi's supporters announced that anyone who opposed the BJP should leave for Pakistan.<sup>62</sup> BJP government has exercised restrained relations with Pakistan. The dramatic acts like Pathankot, Pulwama

attack were staged to suspend the dialogue with Pakistan. In February 2019, there was an exchange of air fighting between the two countries.<sup>63</sup> All these developments depict a deteriorating relationship. However, the bottom line remains that still India views Pakistan with the prism of partition.

India is living through a contrast. The Constitution is still secularist in its essence. However, BJP's rise and its well-entrenching, manifests an ordeal for minorities and Hindus, alike. There was no dearth of people during the freedom struggle who out-rightly questioned the wisdom of Muslim leaders, especially of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, for making it a point that Hindu ideology would be self-centric and Muslims will soon face an identity crisis. Andrea Malji, an Assistant Professor at Hawaii Pacific University, Honolulu, USA commented at the Association of History and International Studies that "Nehru's commitment to secularism was his declaration that India could be a peaceful, multi-religious state. Jinnah maintained his doubts. With the increasing popularity and success of the Hindu Nationalist Party, we will soon know whether Jinnah was correct."<sup>64</sup>

## **Conclusion**

*Hindutva* is a religio-political construct of Hindu extremist-mentality that was inherently reshaped under a jaundiced prism. It drew inspiration from Nazi vehemence, too, as that was the first practical policy-implementation of profiling on ethnic and religious grounds in Europe. Though there was no dearth of biased politicians and peer leaders in the freedom struggle for India from the British tutelage, and especially those who ceded to RSS doctrine, they couldn't realise their manifesto and their rise to the occasion for the simple reason that the subcontinent was multiethnic and pluralist to the core. That said, the vengeance took a toll in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, who was shot by a RSS fanatic. Gandhi preached non-violence and had compassion for minorities; an antithesis of RSS.

With the passage of time, India whether it be under the Nehruvian principles of secularism ruled by Congress for more than five decades or the rise of fundamentalist BJP, its nomenclature of inter-faith relationship kept on changing – and for the worse. Money-boasting Hindu privileged class ruled the roost, and its instant and primary victims were low-caste Hindus themselves; the Dalits. Anti-Muslim profiling followed suit. It was all in contempt to Dr Ambedkar, a Dalit himself, and mentor of India's secular constitution. This was the beginning of religious and racial profiling in India and it slowly and gradually moved on to encroach upon Muslim rights. The demolition of Babri Masjid during the Congress rule and the Gujarat riots under Modi's rule has merely championed *Hindutva's* otherness mindset. Apart from anti-Pakistan and anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies in principle, the Indian establishment made inroads to form and support organisations such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to venom-spitting anti-Red China narrative, which of late came to include bashing of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In its very prelude can be counted sabotage and interference in Pakistan's Balochistan province, which is a testimony of *Hindutva* in vogue. Nevertheless, Bangladesh and Nepal – two of India's once strategic neighbours – were also not spared, and policies with those respective countries, too, became a prologue of *Hindutva*. The ongoing cold shoulder relationship with Dhaka is another case in point.

Thereby, it can be argued that India's political orientation, of late, has been aggression and encroachment on civil liberties of its subjects. *Hindutva*, since it has unfortunately become the political order, has crippled India's identity as a secular and multiethnic state. Once it was a civilization of various faiths and creeds, but now *Hindutva* surge has marginalised it to the footnotes of a struggling nation-state. This new notion of *Hindutva* is at the same time busy in compartmentalizing the society on communal and extremist lines, and inadvertently the Hindu majority is also on the

receiving end. Their enterprise, wisdom and far-sightedness are at the brink owing to politically-engineered biased fiefdom. This was proved on the foreign front too. The Indian policies in the IIOJ&K, and transgressions like Pulwama, are an external dimension and consequence of *Hindutva*. This neo-discriminatory doctrine, *Hindutva*, is proving to be an antithesis of India.

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# INDIA'S INROADS INTO THE MIDDLE EAST: IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

LARAIB FARHAT\*

## Abstract

*India is a strategic player in global politics; more like an octopus, with its arms stretched towards other regional players, either for cooperation or competition. Thus, its inclination toward the Middle East is driven by a similar intent. Its preference in the Gulf has been mostly navigated by two things, i.e., exporting labour and importing oil. The huge Indian diaspora in the region is a living proof of that which has resultantly become a major driver behind India's growing economy. Consequently, India's long-term investments and strong economic relations in the Middle East can be explained given its expat population. It is noteworthy that Indian interest in the region is driven by the vision of amplifying its economic might rather than exercising it. To achieve that, it withholds the focus of its foreign policy vis a vis three key players—Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel. However, the strategic tilt towards the Middle East has not alienated India's historical rival rather its inroads into the Middle East appear to be a multi-dimensional approach inclusive of Pakistan. The basic aim of India's strategy is to strengthen its relations in the Gulf region and engage in counter-narrative diplomatic engagements that would complicate Pakistan's foreign policy. This paper thus looks into major Indian investments in three key players as aforementioned and unfolds the complex relationship between India, the GCC, and Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** *India, GCC, Pakistan, strategic partnership, economic interests, global politics, investments*

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## Introduction

Since its independence, India's economic relations with the Middle East have been based on its urge for development and prosperity. Whereas, the course of its political relations has mostly been determined in the light of its post-cold war allegiances and subsequent formation of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM). Considering India's relationship with the Middle Eastern countries, New Delhi's preference has mostly been quite simple and focused, i.e., to export labour and to import oil. While these preferences have been practised and projected for most part of history, there has been a noticeable shift in Indian policy towards the Middle East in past few years.

India holds exceptional ties with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, i.e., Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These ties range from cooperation in fields of economy, military, investment and trade.<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that this significant interdependence is not the result of some vacuum but can rather be traced back to India's historical geographical proximity<sup>2</sup> with the Middle East as its extended strategic neighbour.<sup>3</sup>

It is imperative to discern the underlying causes behind growing Indian interest in the Middle East. In addition to a history of cordial relations, economic ties, energy trade, and migrant labour, the Persian Gulf is a source of two-thirds of oil and gas for India.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the estimates of Indians living put the figure at 9.3 million. Around 70 percent of these Indians fall under the category of blue-collar workers, while the rest of them belong to a class of skilled professionals.<sup>5</sup> This expat population is also a major driver behind India's growing economy – with about 60% of remittances coming in from the Gulf countries.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the reason for India's long-term investments and strong economic relations in the Middle East can be explained in view of the huge Indian diaspora in the region.

## **India's Look West Policy**

India's 'Look West Policy' emerged as a strategic and diplomatic offshoot of India's Look East Policy.<sup>7</sup> The latter was propagated after the cold war and the subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union; a situation which forced India to assume a closer position to the United States. This policy was destined to fortify relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in specific and East Asia in general.<sup>8</sup>

Driven by its strategic interests, India aims to develop long-term ties with West Asian countries. While India's involvement in the Middle East is smartly projected, it simultaneously balances the ongoing clash between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This is reflective of India's non-interventionist policy and how it keeps itself in a secure position while maintaining relations with the countries beneficial for its economic growth. Since the adoption of the Look West Policy in 2005, there have been several developments in the process. As Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh said:

The Gulf region, like Southeast and South Asia, is part of our natural economic hinterland. We must pursue closer economic relations with all our neighbours in our wider Asian neighbourhood. India has successfully pursued a 'Look East Policy' to come closer to the countries of Southeast Asia. We must come closer to our western neighbours in the Gulf.<sup>9</sup>

Given India's economic development needs, the Middle East has become a vital outlet for fuel imports as well as an economically sound environment for the Indian workforce, in addition to being a dependable source of remittances. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Qatar have all been significant hydrocarbon suppliers. However, the number of Indians living and working in the Gulf countries has increased dramatically since the mid-1970s oil boom. Majority of these Indians belong to southern states such as Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and

Kerala. Presence of such a vast Indian diaspora in Middle East resulted in the creation of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) in 2004 in order to optimally facilitate Indian nationals.<sup>10</sup> The Indian engagement in the Gulf region includes cooperation in the segments of trade, energy supply, and the protection of the Indian migrants in the region. While India is pushing towards a soft power approach by facilitating different educational and cultural exchanges, it is seemingly persevering its non-interventionist policy by not interfering in the political and military segment of its relationship with the Gulf at the same time. To put it simply, India's larger interest in the region is driven by the vision of *amplifying* its economic might rather than *exercising* it. The only instance where India has felt the need to use the defence or military strategies has been to contain the threats of terrorism and other criminal activities.

Historically, the parameters of India's West Asia Policy have mostly been multi-directional. For instance, during the ideological clash of the communist and capitalist bloc, India maintained relations with the rival poles of the regional geopolitics, i.e., Iran and Saudi Arabia. Recently, however, the Indian policy approach towards the Middle East has become more multifaceted. The focus of Indian foreign policy *vis a vis* the Middle East has been subject to three key players—Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel—now.<sup>11</sup>

### **India-Saudi Arabia Relations**

Saudi Arabia and India have been trading partners since 1947. The cooperation between the two countries is stated to be based on peaceful co-existence, tolerance, harmony, diversity, and emphasising dialogue along with peaceful dispute resolution. An era of new developments in their bilateral relations began with the visit of the Saudi Monarch to India in the year 2006 and the subsequent signing of the Delhi Declaration.<sup>12</sup> Initiatives based on mutual cooperation as per the Delhi Declaration focused mainly on fighting terrorism and crimes that exceed transnationally such as money laundering, drugs, and



arms smuggling.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Saudi Arabia in April 2016 proved highly successful in terms of political, economic, security, defence, energy, trade, and investment cooperation.<sup>14</sup> India's ties with Saudi Arabia deepened further with two other high-level visits in 2019. These visits of Narendra Modi and Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman further bolstered the already existent bilateral ties between the two and were followed by announcement of some major economic commitments including investment opportunities worth \$100 billion by Saudi Arabia in India, increased Hajj quota to 200,000 which currently accounts for 170,000, release of 850 Indian prisoners in Saudi prisons accused of minor offences and a proposal for setting up a High-level Partnership Council.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, substantial trade between the two countries has also been a vital component of the bilateral relationship. Saudi Arabia is India's fourth largest commercial partner, following China, the United States, and the UAE. Saudi Arabia is seen by India as a dependable and long-term energy partner in ensuring its energy security. The hydrocarbons trade with Saudi Arabia accounted for roughly 61.1 percent of India's bilateral trade in the fiscal year 2020-21. In the same financial year, India imported 34.2 Million Metric Tonnes (MMT) of crude oil, accounting for 18.20 percent of total crude imports.<sup>16</sup>

Despite extensive engagement on bilateral level and cooperation in trade and energy sectors, the relationship between India and Saudi Arabia is beset with some complications, mainly due to their distinct preferences towards other regional players, especially Pakistan. Although Saudi government has not been as responsive to Indian accusations of terrorism against Pakistan, it has purposefully refrained from openly criticising the revocation of Article 370 and 35-A. The statement of Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi about Saudi Arabia delaying the peace process and dragging its feet on Kashmir could be an outcome of the growing Saudi silence on

matters related to Indian excesses.<sup>17</sup> More recently, India and Saudi Arabia have discovered a strategic compatibility for establishing a regional order that is safe and stable.<sup>18</sup> Arguably, it could be a consequence of Shah Mahmood Qureshi's statement regarding Saudi Arabia, and similar disconcert with the invitation to India as the guest of honour at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) session by the Foreign Minister of UAE.<sup>19</sup> Qamar Javed Bajwa's call for a meeting with the Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman that was rejected, is reflective of the clear disruption in the bilateral relations.<sup>20</sup> Although the Army Chief's meetup was focused on mending ties between the two historically linked countries but this declination seemingly appeared due to Saudi Arabia's increasing tilt towards India. One of the very crucial factors keeping Saudi Arabia and Pakistan interlinked was the ideology and the vision of a Muslim bloc. In case Pakistan chooses to step back and tries to build an alternative Islamic bloc<sup>21</sup> (substantially with Iran, Turkey, and Malaysia) then the vision and ideology will both slip away, leaving minimal grounds for future cooperation. In this regard, the choices that the Saudi government will make will be based on easy dispositions with a concluding opinion that, a tilt towards India is a far-reaching and a more rewarding choice.

### **India-Iran Relations**

The alliance between India and Iran has had its highs and lows. With Iran being an Islamic Republic and India a democracy dominated by a Hindu nationalist party, the two countries have overcome the friction collectively and have entered into a mutually benefitting relationship. India formally established its relations with Iran in 1950.<sup>22</sup> Prior to the partition of the subcontinent and the creation of India and Pakistan as separate states in 1947, India and Iran maintained a common border as neighbours, with cultural and linguistic links dating back to thousands of years. Indeed, the legacy of Persian influence on

Mughal architecture can still be found in significant constructions from Lahore to New Delhi, including that of the Taj Mahal.<sup>23</sup>

India's relations with Iran can be traced back to Iran's alignment with the US and its participation in the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) at a time when India was more inclined towards the Soviet Union and was in the process of founding the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The Iranian revolution of 1979 led by Ayatollah Khomeini and the fall of the Soviet Union greatly altered the stance of both the countries towards each other. With its rising economy, the Indian need for oil imports from Iran was further augmented, resultantly, enhancing the need for creating bilateral trade.<sup>24</sup> There is a nexus between Iran and India which keeps both countries together despite the complications of their relationship. For Iran, a balanced relationship with India saves it from strategic isolation, considering that it has been labelled as a part of the 'Axis of Evil' by the US. Similarly, for India, a stable relationship with Iran serves as an opportunity to fulfil India's increasing oil and energy needs.

Bilateral relations between Iran and India are subject to three key elements, i.e., trade, education, and religion. When compared to the same period last year, the value of Iran's exports to India increased by 240 percent during the first quarter of the current Iranian fiscal year (i.e., between March 21-June 21).<sup>25</sup> Economic activities between the two countries further expanded with the construction of the port project in the city of Chabahar, Iran. This port appears as a new stream for geopolitical competition and a bastion-to-be for global trade. India has contributed \$85.21 million in capital and \$22.95 million annually to equip two berths at Chabahar port for Phase I. It is further building a \$1.6 billion railway line from Chabahar to Zahedan which is close to the Iran-Afghan border.<sup>26</sup> Indian interest in the Iranian cities through the construction of Chabahar port has a far-reaching goal. The port connects Delhi to the Afghan and Central Asian markets and ultimately reduces India's dependence on Pakistan's land routes.

Furthermore, the port might improve Indo-Iranian ties by potentially offsetting rising Sino-Pakistani collaboration. Simultaneously, China has grown its influence in Iran, seeking access to important natural resources and transportation routes.<sup>27</sup> For Iran, the port might develop new diplomatic and commercial ties and given Iran's position as a pariah state in the West, the country sorely needs to discover other possibilities.

From religious point of view, India is home to one of the world's largest Shia communities. It is safe to assume that Iran's official strategy of employing the sectarian card as a foreign policy weapon played a crucial part in the current state of bilateral relationship between the two countries. Iran too, has an Indian Shia minority of nearly 30-million people.<sup>28</sup> Despite the lack of official numbers, it is estimated that the Shia community in India accounts for around 15% of the country's overall Muslim population.

A successful Indo-Iranian relation is a strategic move in Southwest Asia and the Arabian Sea, leading to the elevation of the regional influence of both countries. Perhaps, this can be consequential for Pakistan and Saudi Arabia but being key players in the region and strategically equated in the realm of geopolitics, both can enter into a myriad initiatives facilitating peace, prosperity, and changing dynamics of politics in West and South Asia.

### **India-Israel Relations**

Although India had recognised Israel in 1950 two years following the latter's independence in 1948,<sup>29</sup> it only opened its Embassy in Tel Aviv in 1992 owing to its longstanding non-aligned policies. Since then bilateral relations on the levels of economic, military, agriculture, and politics has continued to progress.<sup>30</sup> Historically, both countries were under the colonial rule and got independence around the same time.<sup>31</sup>

The initial few years following independence were difficult for both countries. Israel was marred by the constant trouble over its

existence leading to its isolation in the global arena and India was held back by the inter-religious quarrels followed by widespread illiteracy, unemployment, and financial challenges to the detriment of its already fragile democratic setup. Similarly, their policy preferences led both countries in different directions. Israel's policy of non-alignment linked it with the United States for a more balanced relationship and likewise, India pursued a policy of non-alignment with both the western and eastern blocs.<sup>32</sup> However, Israel's inclination towards the foreign policy of non-alignment did not guarantee her a place in the expanded NAM due to the opposition of the Arab countries. Arguably, the initial driving force behind India's policy on Israel was Jawaharlal Nehru. After the opening of consulates in both countries, he stated:

"It is not a matter of high principle, but it is based on how we could best serve and be helpful in that area. We should like the problem between Israel and the Arab countries to be settled peacefully. After careful thought, we felt that while recognising Israel as an entity, we need not at this stage exchange diplomatic personnel."<sup>33</sup>

More recently, India's deepening cooperation with Israel has gained tremendous momentum under Prime Minister Modi's proactive policies. Beginning with high-level visits, including the one in July 2017. Prime Minister Modi made the first visit to Israel during which the relationship was elevated to a strategic level with the signing of seven Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) in the domains of research and development (R&D) innovation, water, agriculture, and space. Similarly, Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister paid a visit to India in January 2018 during which four G2G agreements on cyber security, oil and gas cooperation, film co-production, and air transport were signed along with five additional semi-government agreements. Before these trips, former Indian president Pranab Mukherjee also conducted a state visit to Israel in October 2015. In November 2016, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin

visited India. Such increased high-level exchanges and ministerial visits from both sides have boosted collaboration in a variety of functional sectors, including commerce, agriculture, science and technology, culture, and security.

This bilateral cooperation is anticipated to grow further in the battle against Covid-19 as both countries have entered into cooperation for the development of test kits to deal with the pandemic. Amidst the standoff with China at Ladakh, both countries have continued their cooperation in the field of military and cyber security as well.<sup>34</sup> The relations between the two have apparently become institutionalised and any disruption in regional dynamics of West Asia will seemingly stand incapable of reversing the course of this relationship. The reason behind this is the realisation of how important it is for India to maintain bilateral relations with Israel. However, leftist parties in India continue to question the reasons behind smooth bilateral relations with Israel. Nevertheless, the pragmatic approach adopted by both the countries has only reiterated their respective role as significant regional players.

### **Striking a Balance: Iran vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia**

Easy choices are a luxury in a complex geopolitical situation. While India expands its engagement with the Middle East, it faces a stark rivalry between two important players, i.e., Iran and Saudi Arabia.<sup>35</sup> The Saudis, on the one side, are backing the anti-government Islamist group in Syria and Iranians, on the other side, staunchly stand behind the Bashar Al-Assad regime. Riyadh and Gulf allies are in support of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi's government, whereas Iran continues to back the Shia Houthi rebels because of the Shia majority in its country.<sup>36</sup> Thus, amidst all of these complexities, being drawn into the Middle Eastern cold war is the last thing that India would choose to indulge in. Interestingly, India holds a competitive advantage as both Saudi Arabia and Iran want it as an ally and an economic partner. For instance, the Kingdom is going through an

economic transition and according to its 2030 vision, Saudi Arabia aims to diversify its economy. In that, India can play a huge role in providing the sought stream of economic opportunities.<sup>37</sup> Relatedly, US sanctions have affected Iran's economy and have led it towards global isolation. India through its partnerships with Iran is a beacon of hope to keep Iran's economy stable. Thus, India is balancing the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia just as Saudi Arabia is striking a balance between India and Pakistan.

This balancing tactic reflects India's active participation in the region predicated upon political realism anchored in harmonious rapport with all regional countries instead of antagonism against any. However, as India's regional image and economic strength grow, it will need to broaden the scope of its participation. It is in that situation that India will be inclined to pick a side. It will also be put under pressure to make judgments that it would not have made otherwise. However, to protect its long-term interests, India must reject such temptations and pressures and avoid becoming entangled in regional rivalries.

### **Implications for Pakistan**

While India makes inroads into the Middle East, one factor is of immense significance. It is vital to take note of India's interests behind its balanced stance with Israel, its continued support for the Palestinian cause, and its inclination towards Saudi Arabia. The first and foremost driving force is India's need for hydrocarbons and oil in the Middle East. However, one often overlooked reason is Pakistan. There are two possibilities concerning Pakistan that India is countering through its foreign policy in the Middle East:

1. Neutralising Pakistan's foreign policy in the region and suppressing its efforts to create a Pan-Islamic support for its causes.
2. Due to a large number of Muslims based across the country, India is at the risk of a conflict within, particularly in view of its

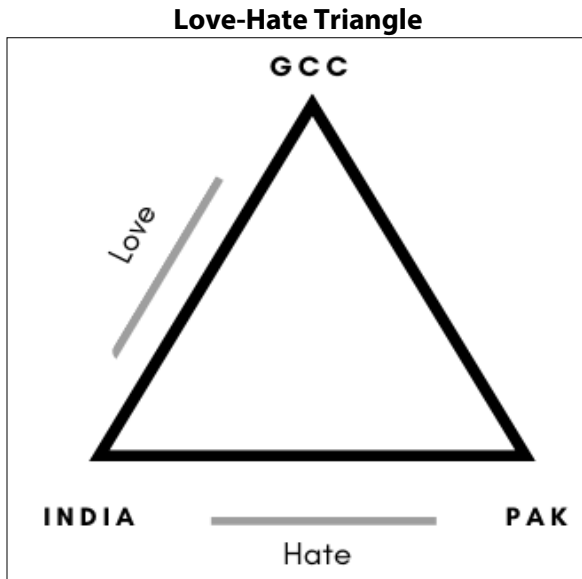
stance towards Israel. Thus, to minimise radicalisation, India has resorted to a rather balanced relationship with Israel.

Nehru's observation serves well to justify the aforementioned:

Any action that we may take must be guided not only by idealistic considerations but also a realistic appraisal of the situation. Our general policy in the past has been favourable to the Arabs and at the same time, not hostile to the Jews. That policy continues. For the present, we have said that we are not recognising Israel. But this is not an irrevocable decision and the matter will no doubt be considered afresh given subsequent developments."<sup>38</sup>

## Understanding the complex relationship

Figure.1



A 'Love-Hate Triangle' aptly defines the depth of the relationship between the GCC, Pakistan, and India. Figure 1 explains a double-ended adoration arrow between the GCC and India and it can apply to Pakistan-GCC relations as well. On the other hand, there is a long-held antagonism between India and Pakistan. While Winston Churchill did say that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend", there is



little to no explanation about what kind of a relationship transpires with 'the friend of one's enemy'. It is a strange analogy as to why a friend could possibly be friends with the enemy because there is a simple equilibrium model of structural balance that represents a connotation of positive and negative relationships. For instance, two common friends share an enemy but two enemies sharing a common friend is quite anomalous. Thus, some relational patterns come out to be balanced whereas others do not. In this case scenario, the anomalous existence of the GCC as a 'friendly' figure for two historically rival countries makes this triangular relationship rather debateable.

The fundamental question remains that why do Indian interests continue to grow in the region in addition to Saudi Arabia's strategic inclination towards India which is seemingly driving the former away from Pakistan. The biggest implication for Pakistan in view of the Indian expansion in the Middle East is other actors distancing themselves from Pakistan. As for the Middle Eastern countries, the choice to get along with India seems rational given its economic might and the strategic opportunities that the latter has to offer. There can be deliberate complications between the GCC and Pakistan but there is no chance that Islamabad would let the GCC slip away from its hands, keeping in view the importance of these ties and the huge economic activity that it has generated over the years. Their relationship could, however, be viewed under different lenses because of Pakistan's tilt towards China. In some areas, Pakistan would have to compromise too. For instance, in an upcoming potential reality where Israel and GCC would foster in their relationship, Pakistan can play the role of a neutral party and a non-interferer — securing its national interests without upholding the placards of its religious agenda.

## **Conclusion**

India's inroads into the Middle East are not just focused on its energy security but rather appears to be a multi-dimensional approach

inclusive of Pakistan. The basic aim of India's strategy is to strengthen its relations in the Gulf region and engage in counter-narrative diplomatic engagements that would complicate Pakistan's foreign policy.

Thus, Pakistan should take steps such as including Gulf countries in foreign investment opportunities and engaging them in CPEC projects. This is an important step in facilitating Pakistan's economic situation, which continues to wane in the Middle East. Furthermore, India at this point is unstoppable. Thus, instead of focusing on how to exclude India from the Middle East, Pakistan should focus on how to make a comeback with a firm and a stronger foothold. This would result in a non-zero-sum game where the win of one party will not determine the loss of the other.

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