

- Israel and Saudi Arabia: allies, adversaries or something else?
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- Russia vs the West: A war Scenario and A New Logic of Confrontation
- Time has Come for the Reunification of the Korean Peninsula

# Rising Asia

April-June 2018 Issue 13



China-India: Why is Modi Meeting Xi Now?

## HANDS ACROSS THE DIVIDE



North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in met in a historic summit on 27 April, 2018 in the Demilitarized Zone separating their countries, declaring their hope to rid the Peninsula of nuclear weapons and to formally end the war that started 68 years ago.



## In Pictures: Modi's Visit to China on 27-28 April, 2018





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# Rising Asia

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*Striving for Asian Solidarity*

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### Beautiful Quote

It was the greatest contribution towards the whole of human race, made by China, is to prevent its 1.3 billion people from hunger.

*Xi Jinping*





## Editor's Note



On 27 April, 2018, Peace House at the truce village of Panmunjom witnessed a historic summit where the top leaders of the two Koreas endeavored to break the ice and nurture a bond of peace from the pain of division. Historically, the Korean War began on June 25, 1950 and is 'technically' still ongoing in the absence of a valid peace treaty- although, the fighting ended with the signing of an armistice by North Korea, China and the US (South Korea was not a signatory) on July 27, 1953.

The world watched closely, with hopes for progress, as the two sides confirmed in a joint declaration issued after the meeting that a common goal of complete denuclearization had been established and both sides agreed to push for multilateral talks to turn the current armistice agreement into a peace treaty. We are hopeful that these results have demonstrated the willingness of both sides to usher in a new era of lasting peace in the Korean Peninsula.

For decades, China, a major stakeholder in the Korean Peninsula issue, has been working hard to play its pivotal role in contributing to lasting peace and stability in the region. China's dual track approach and the 'suspension for suspension' proposal have proved to be an effective way for creating the basic conditions for a nuclear-free peninsula.

Hopefully, Panmunjom, a symbol of tragedy of national division, can find a place in the history books to come as an icon of peace, and the Peace House summit has led to a "new start" for permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on 27 April, 2018 that China and India had plenty of opportunities to work together as he arrived in China for a visit intended to reset ties between the two nations after last year's border stand-off. Modi began his two day informal visit in Wuhan, Capital of Hubei province, where he was given a museum tour and private dinner and held at least six meeting with President Xi Jinping.

We are confident that these "heart to heart discussions" between the two leaders would help minimize the overarching issues and try to build mutual trust to resolve their outstanding differences. This has fundamentally signaled a new start for China-India relations. The two leaders have developed enough chemistry between themselves to stay motivated for discussion in the two days of their interaction which included many private talks.

Best Regards

**Nasim Mahmud**

Chief Editor

Rising Asia Magazine (RAM).

## PM Sheikh Hasina honored with Global Women Leadership Award



*Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina receiving the Global Women Leadership Award from the President of the Summit Irene Natividad in Sydney, Australia. [Photo: PID]*

Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina is honored with the prestigious Global Women's Leadership Award for her outstanding leadership in advancing women education and women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, Asia and Asia-Pacific region.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 27 April received the award at an event at International Convention Centre (ICC) in Sydney, Australia. The award, a lifetime honor, is conferred on Sheikh Hasina by US-based NGO Global Summit of Women in Sydney during '2018 Global Summit of Women' held on April 26-28 in Sydney, Australia. President of the Summit Irene Natividad handed over the award to Sheikh Hasina at the Global Women's Leadership Award Gala Dinner on April 27, 2018.

The Prime Minister has delivered her speech after receiving the award highlighting women empowerment, equal rights, bringing women in the mainstream of development, steps taken by the government and achievements made so far, she also said.

"Together, we must act on our shared culture, tradition and values to benefit millions of women in need. Let's mobilize

our strength. I particularly count on all of you,"

Several thousand women delegates, came to Sydney from across the world to join '2018 Global Summit of Women'. The Global Summit of Women focuses on women's advancement in the global economy. For over 27 years, the Summit has been connecting women worldwide.

Former Governor General of Australia Dame Quentin Bryce and Chief Executive of NPY Women's Council of Australia Andrea Mason were also given the Australia's Women's Leadership Award on the occasion.

Sheikh Hasina reached Sydney on a three-day official visit from 26-28 at the invitation of her Australian counterpart Malcolm Turnbull to receive the Global Women's Leadership Award. The PM also held a bilateral meeting with her Australian counterpart on Saturday April 28 at the Commonwealth House in Sydney. Bilateral and multilateral issues, including the Rohingya crisis, were discussed at the meeting.

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*Desk Report: Rummanuddin Ahamed, Associate Editor, Rising Asia.*

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## India China: Why is Modi meeting Xi now?

Shashank Joshi



On 27 Aprl, 2018 the informal talks between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping mark an improvement in relations. Analyst Shashank Joshi explains why. Last year, India and China were locked in their most serious border crisis in the last three decades. China's state-controlled

media was issuing near-daily threats of war, as both sides built up forces on the edge of the tiny Kingdom of Bhutan. It would have seemed implausible that, just eight months on, Mr Modi and Mr Xi would be meeting at an informal summit. But this is exactly what was happening in the Chinese city of Wuhan, as the two leaders convene far from their capitals, without aides or an agenda, and plenty of time to discuss their mounting differences. But the meeting does not come out of the blue. After the border dispute was defused in August 2017, Mr Modi and Mr Xi broke the ice at the BRICS summit in September 2017, alongside the leaders of Russia, Brazil and South Africa. A flurry of high-level visits to China fol-

lowed, including by India's foreign secretary, national security adviser, foreign minister and defence minister. There were also some olive branches. In February, the Indian government sent out a private note asking officials to keep away from events marking the 60th anniversary of the Dalai Lama's exile from Tibet. It quietly informed Beijing of this.

China considers the Dalai Lama a separatist and tries to isolate the spiritual leader by asking foreign leaders not to see him. In the last March, Mr Modi followed up with fulsome congratulations to Mr Xi on his re-appointment as president, saying it showed Mr Xi enjoyed the "support of the whole Chinese nation". China reciprocated. It will resume sharing hydrological data on the rivers that run into India and has offered to re-start low-level military exercises; both activities were suspended during last year's crisis.







### Mutual interests

So why is this thaw occurring now? There are several reasons.

**Firstly**, India believes that last year's crisis marked a dangerous phase in the relationship and that tensions need to be kept in check - especially with national elections in 2019. More broadly, China's economy is five times bigger than India's and its defence spending is three times as large. While India has a local military advantage at many points on the border, it still needs time to build up its strength.

**Secondly**, India hopes to secure Beijing's cooperation on several issues where China's role is crucial, such as putting pressure on Pakistan-based terrorist groups and securing India's admission to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), a body that controls nuclear trade. In recent years, Indians have grown increasingly frustrated at what they see as Chinese efforts to thwart India's rise, but Delhi has not given up on nudging Mr Xi in a more flexible direction.

**Thirdly**, India is responding to an uncertain period in world politics. India's concern is that Beijing will improve ties both with Washington, because of the North Korean crisis, and with Moscow, because of the rupture in West-Russia relations, all at Delhi's expense. Better, in this view, that India hedges its bets now. "With a strengthening Russia-China axis and with the US taking its eye off China to deal with Russia," warned PS Raghavan, a former ambassador and chairman of a body that advises the Indian government on national security, "it is prudent for India to maintain a harmonious dialogue with China, even as we deal with the wrinkles in our relations with the other two great powers." Of course, there are advantages for China too. Last year, India was the only country to publicly reject China's flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a network of infrastructure investment stretching from Asia to Europe.

### Geopolitical realignment

More recently, the US, Japan and even the EU have grown more sceptical of the project, which they argue is skewed towards Chinese companies, saddles small countries with unsustainable debt and masks strategic, rather than economic, ambitions.

China is eager to dampen India's hostility to the scheme. It is also concerned about last year's meeting of India, the US, Japan and Australia - informally known as the Quad - after a decade-long hiatus, and their



joint efforts to develop alternatives to the BRI. By engaging Mr Modi, Mr Xi hopes to slow India's steady drift towards America and its allies. Nevertheless, it is premature to see this as a rapprochement. Beneath the thaw, the currents of competition swirl stronger than ever - on air, land and sea. India just concluded its largest-ever air exercises, pointedly demonstrating how it could move hundreds of aircraft from its Pakistan-facing western sector to the China-facing eastern sector in under 48 hours. On the ground, the dispute at the heart of last summer's standoff is dormant rather than resolved. China has built up its forces a stone's throw from the flashpoint, while India has upped its own presence and patrols the border more aggressively.

The maritime contest is most vigorous of all. China, fresh from opening its first overseas military base in Djibouti, on the Horn of Africa, is deepening its involvement in the small island nations to India's south. The Indian Navy, whose most important task is now watching the Chinese naval vessels that roam the Indian Ocean in growing numbers, has recently signed agreements giving it access to the facilities of the US, France and Oman. No doubt the relaxed surroundings of Wuhan will help the two leaders have a candid discussion on the issues that divide them, and we may see a further softening of tone. But beyond the bonhomie, this strategic competition for power and influence is unlikely to slow down.

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**Shashank Joshi** is a Senior Research Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), London.



# The SDGs and challenges facing Bangladesh in achieving goals

Prof. Sarwar Md. Saifullah Khaled



The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) sponsored by the United Nations (UN), otherwise known as the Global Goals or Agenda 2030, are a universal call action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people irrespective of their country of origin enjoy peace and prosperity. These 17 Goals build on the suc-

cesses of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), while including new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among other priorities. The goals are interconnected – often the key to success on one will involve tackling issues more commonly associated with another.

The SDGs work in the spirit of partnership and pragmatism to make the right choices now to improve life, in a sustainable way, for future generations. They provide clear guidelines and targets for all countries to adopt in accordance with their own priorities and the environmental challenges of the world at large. The SDGs are an inclusive agenda. They tackle the root causes of poverty and unite us together to make a positive change for both people and planet. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) administrator Achim Steiner said that “Poverty eradication is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda, and so is the commitment to leave no-one behind. The Agenda offers a unique opportunity to put the whole world on a more prosperous and sustainable development path. In many ways, it reflects what UNDP was created for”.

The SDGs came into effect in January 2016, and they will continue to guide UNDP policy and funding for the next 15 years. Achim said that as the lead UN development agency, UNDP is uniquely placed to help implement the Goals through UNDP’s work in some 170 countries and territories. He added that UNDP’s strategic plan focuses on key areas including poverty alleviation, democratic governance and peace building, climate change and disaster risk,

and economic inequality. UNDP provides support to governments to integrate the SDGs into their national development plans and policies. This work is already underway, as UNDP support many countries in accelerating progress already achieved under the MDGs.

The government of Bangladesh is politically committed to meet the UN-sponsored SDGs. But challenges are there. One of the main challenges in achieving SDGs is the need for improvement in implementation of projects and programmes taken in hand. It is to be kept in mind that the efficiency gain in public sector spending is a must to that end. Delays in project implementation have deleterious impact on cost as well as on the intended benefits to be accrued. It is also true that improving tax-effort by 9.0 percentage points over the next 12 years will not be an easy task to do.

The SDGs include 17 goals and 169 targets that set out quantitative and qualitative objectives. That also illustrates an inspiring vision for the world in the years until 2030. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), focused primarily on the least developed or poor countries like Bangladesh. But the SDGs are more global and applicable for all world countries. It is evident that challenges that concerned countries face worldwide irrespective of how developed they are, such as climate-change, migration, conflict, cannot be dealt with isolated efforts from individual countries. As many countries were not able to make sufficient progress on many Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), this aspiring agenda is a reminder of the challenges the world faces to this date.

The newly incorporated goals in the SDGs are more comprehensive and expansive in nature. And thus it will explore development schemes of vital importance to humanity at large. The “SDG Need Assessment and Financing Strategy: Bangladesh Perspective” prepared by the General Economics Division (GED) of the Bangladesh Planning Commission provides a well-defined work plan that highlights the actions necessary to attain significant progress in SDGs implementation in Bangladesh. A full-blown needs assessment



study helps us to identify the key development interventions and develop a well-defined roadmap for long-term planning. The GED of the Bangladesh Planning Commission Report on SDGs financing strategy provides an estimate of the annual resource gap and an opportunity to revise the government interventions and financing strategies accordingly. The National Board of Revenue (NBR) must embark on new initiatives based on reforms, automation, capacity development and audit to improve revenue mobilisation to the required level to meet the need necessary.

The access to climate fund critically depends on our capacity to negotiate with the development partners. In this context, Bangladesh has already identified areas of strengthening for SDGs implementation. Nonetheless, it is to be asserted that these should be ensured on a priority basis to meet the demand. The Seventh Five Year Plan of the country states that the international experience with the implementation of infrastructure Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) suggests that this policy has worked best

when the legal framework is well-thought-out and when the management of the initiative involves competent and skilled professional staff. The legal framework needs to lay down clear rules of engagement, and the incentive framework and dispute resolution mechanism should compare favourably with international good practices.

Achim said that UNDP's track record working across multiple goals provides it with a valuable experience and proven policy expertise to ensure all reach the targets set out in the SDGs by 2030. But UNDP cannot do this alone. For achieving the SDGs, we in Bangladesh, like all other countries, require the partnership of governments, private sector, civil society and citizens alike to make sure that we all together leave a better country for future generations. For this political reconciliation between the contending political parties and peace is a prime prerequisite to achieve the desired goals.

**Prof. Sarwar Md. Saifullah Khaled** is a retired Professor of Economics, BCS General Education Cadre.

# Russia vs the West: A War Scenario and a New Logic of Confrontation

Ivan Timofeev

The aggravation of rivalry between Russia and the West in the past few months is raising the urgent question of a possible further escalation of tensions and its forms and consequences. Political relations between Moscow and Western capitals have gone beyond the critical point. The threadbare thesis about the lack of trust can be confidently discarded. Things are much worse. The sides do not want to and cannot listen to each other. Official positions and signals are perceived as provocations and trolling. Any opinion is described from the very start as manipulation, propaganda or diversion. Pragmatic voices are sinking in the growing flow of populism. The small islands of dialogue on common issues are rapidly narrowing or disappearing altogether. Hysteria in the media, hostility and vulgarity of rhetoric far exceed Cold War levels. We have entered a new and much more dangerous stage of the conflict, a stage that did not exist several weeks ago.

The current situation is fundamentally different from

what existed since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis and up to the Skripals case. The former logic of relations was obviously confrontational. The sides had sharp differences on major issues. But they continued political dialogue that was generally rational and relatively predictable. Any hostile actions against one another had a specific and more or less verifiable pretext. The exchange of sanctions was based on understandable reasons. Various incidents were thoroughly and repeatedly verified and taken with much caution. We might dislike Ukraine-related EU sanctions but Brussels carefully avoided any escalation of sanctions for “promoting propaganda and undermining democracy,” an accusation that is hard to verify but easy to turn into a conflict-prone and provocative form. We might dislike Robert Mueller’s investigation and the very pretext for it but it was at least systematic and relatively transparent. It was hard to suspect the EU and the US of encouraging Russia’s restrictions on their food exports





but, albeit unpleasant, Russian counter-sanctions had a transparent and understandable logic. Both sides were concerned over potential incidents at sea or in the air but the military actively cooperated with each other to prevent them, despite deep political differences. Apparently, in the current confrontational conditions “stable deterrence,” a scenario that seemed to be the least harmful, is receding into the past.

At least three events have triggered the new logic of confrontation: the Skripal case, Washington’s new sanctions and the chemical incident in Syria. The Skripal case stands out because the collective West went for a sharp escalation without having authentic and transparent facts indicating Russia’s involvement in the incident. Not a single fact meeting these requirements has been presented to the public at large so far. The theory of Russia’s involvement is based on verbal lace, references to its “bad reputation” and some “secret information” whose value as evidence equals zero unless it is openly presented to the public. At the same time, more and more questions and discrepancies are arising, starting with the nature and origin of the toxic chemical and ending with the methods of its use. Symptomatically, the case of the recovering Skripals has become the subject of a growing number of jokes. However, the grotesque does not reduce the danger of it being a precedent. What if a similar provocation is staged tomorrow? What if several provocations are staged at the same time? What will our Western partners do and how will Russia react to this? Expel the remaining diplomats, including security officers and chefs? Or adopt some



tougher measures?

The second event is Washington’s new sanctions against Russian companies, politicians and entrepreneurs. It would seem that everyone has already got used to sanctions. However, politically today they are like a nervous cowboy from a Western comedy, who is firing his two six-shooters, whether he has to or not. Previously, new sanctions were based on a specific pretext, whereas today they are becoming similar in nature to daily carpet bombings. No doubt, they are doing harm to Russia’s economy, business and citizens. But this version of sanction policy can only anger Moscow and perplex observers by the absence of any clear-cut strategy. Sanctions are losing their value as a tool of diplomacy and becoming an implement of war. Such an approach to sanctions is good for the domestic audience. Probably, it would have been rational in its own way were it not applied to a nuclear power that should hardly be overrated but certainly should not be underrated.

The third event is yet another chemical attack in Syria. This event was expected but is no less dangerous for that reason. Any objective investigation is highly unlikely under the circumstances. The sides will consider any version of events as fake, with the threat of force emerging as

the only argument. And this is where the main danger lies. Today, Syria is the place where there is the greatest danger of the confrontation between Russia and the West turning into an open armed conflict. Such a scenario is easy to visualize.

Suppose another “chemical” or some other incident takes place in Syria. The “chemical” trigger looks most likely. This theme is well-covered by the media and is a serious pretext. Suppose Washington decides to use force, not just a cosmetic strike with ten or twenty Tomahawks, but a massive attack on the remaining military and civilian infrastructure of the Syrian Government. This is the scenario’s first bifurcation, or the matter of Russia’s involvement. Its bases can remain intact. But if Moscow uses its forces (as its military promised) a strike will be delivered at Khmeimim and Tartus. Technically it is possible to launch such a strike and destroy both bases and their military personnel, especially if US troops die during an attack on Bashar al-Assad.

This course of events could be unintentional but it could also be planned. The Russian group in Syria has done an excellent job fighting terrorists but it would be vulnerable in the event of a clash with the Americans. The TO is remotely located and it is difficult to deliver supplies. The Americans have an advantage as far as the concentration and support of their attack force is concerned. Stakes may be made on an utterly tough, hard-hitting and humiliating defeat of Russia as the result of a lightning strike. This could be like a new 19th-century Crimean war, albeit extremely compressed in time and space.

This scenario may seem extremely risky (if not crazy) but upon closer analysis it has logic of its own. And here comes the next bifurcation. What will Moscow do, if this happens? The first option (that would be the most desirable for Washington): Russia would have to bite the dust and admit defeat. Yes, Russia is a nuclear power but will it mount a nuclear strike because of a clash with the Americans in Syria, knowing that its strike will result in retaliation? In other words, the stakes here are on the hope that Moscow will not press the button because this would

mean suicide. In this scenario, victory would be on Washington’s side without reservation. It will show that it is possible and necessary to cut down to size an opponent that has crossed the line. This will be a powerful signal to all the rest while America and Trump personally will gain the reputation of an uncompromising and tough player.

But there is also a second option. It is difficult to analyze it on the basis of the theory of rational choice. It may simply not work within Russia’s strategic culture and tradition. The Russians may press the button. Moscow is not confined to the option of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). It can also offer a limited, albeit very painful, response. Technically this is also possible and dangerous in its own way. If, say, an aircraft carrier or a big warship is demonstratively sunk, it is Washington that risks biting the dust. But this is not in the US tradition, either. As a result, tensions will escalate, considerably increasing the risk of MAD.

This scenario may seem excessively alarmist. The consciousness of people, who lived amid the stability of the Cold War and the subsequent 30 peaceful years, naturally rejects it as unrealistic. However, history shows that disasters happen contrary to usual patterns and are merciless to their makers.

It is possible to avoid the disaster in two ways: either by starting negotiations and finding a compromise or by strengthening alliances and maintaining a balance of power. The current realities are making the second option more likely. In all probability, Moscow will continue its course towards a rapprochement with China and other players and a new model of bipolarity will take shape in the world. However, making forecasts in international relations is a thankless task. History will follow its own path, a path it alone can fathom.

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**Ivan Timofeev** is PhD in Political Science, RIAC Director of Programs, RIAC Member, Head of "Contemporary State" program at Valdai Discussion Club, RIAC member.



## Strategic Location of Pakistan

Raja Abdul Qayyum

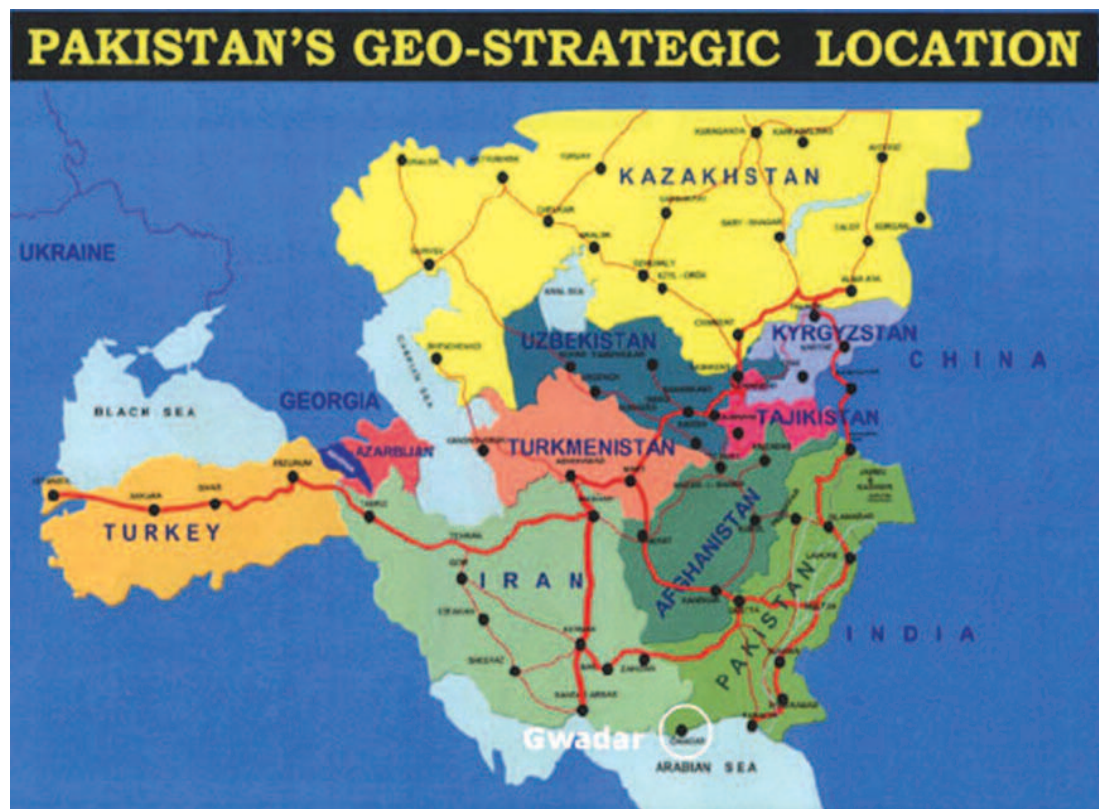
Pakistan occupies a unique position being situated at the cross roads of world civilizations. The provinces of Sindh and the Punjab are on the North Western tip of Indian tectonic plate while larger part of KPK and whole of Balochistan are found on the Eurasian tectonic plate.

Pakistan shares borders with Iran on the West, Afghanistan in the North-West, China in the North East and India in the East. There is only a narrow 'Wakhan Strip' which separates the Northern areas of Pakistan from Tajikistan. Pakistan's Western borders include the Khyber Pass and Bolan Pass have remained invasion routes between Central Asia and South Asia throughout the History. Pakistan shares a border line of 2,640 km with Afghanistan, 500 km with China, 2,912 km with India and 909 Km with Iran while its coastline is 1,046 km with the Arabian Sea which looms large on the south of the country.

Pakistan is also home to world's highest mountain ranges; the Karakoram, the Himalayas and the Hindukush which meet in the Northern highlands commonly called the Northern areas of Pakistan which contain world's second highest peak K-2 along with more than fifty peaks which reach above 6,500 meters. Several large passes cut the ranges along the border with Afghanistan.

Among them are the Khojak Pass, about eighty kilometers Northwest of Quetta in Balochistan; the Khyber Pass, forty kilometers west of Peshawar and leading to Kabul; and the Baroghil Pass in the far North, providing access to the Wakhan Corridor. Being a neighbor of an economic giant and a future super power, China we are also strategically placed in the extended neighborhood of Russian Federation and six Central Asian land locked Muslim States, Pakistan can serve as a link between the Gulf States, Central Asian States and the continents of Africa and Europe.

Similarly, the long coastline of Pakistan extends 1,050 km (650 mi), 250 km falling in Sindh province and 800 km in Balochistan. It borders the productive Arabian Sea famous for its upwelling phenomenon. Its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) covers an area of 196,600 sq.km. and the territorial waters cover an area of 24,000 km. The continental







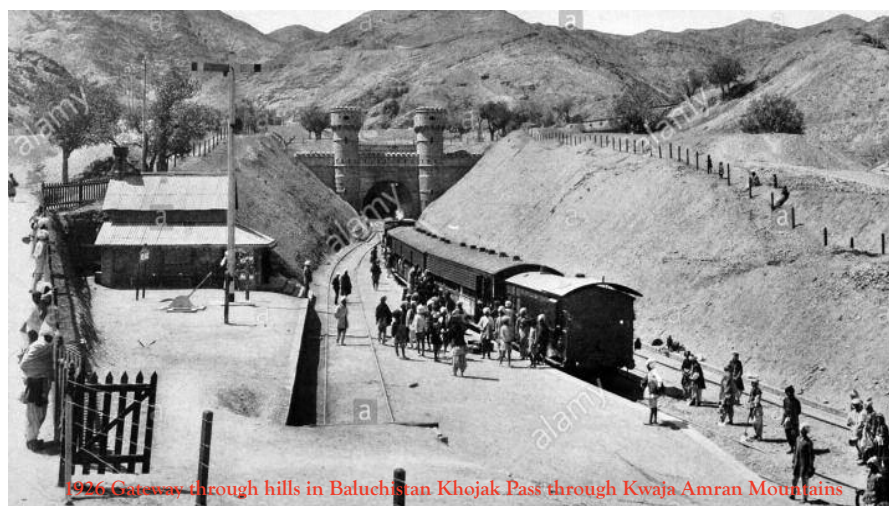
shelf of the Sindh coast extends to a distance of 150 km whereas that of Balochistan only measures 15-40 km. Its open throughout the year due to moderate temperatures. Consequently, there are a series of Muslim countries from the Middle East to the African Continent which are easily accessible from Pakistan. Thus, it connects almost all the Muslim countries of the world from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Sea.

Pakistan also provides the shortest possible route to China's rapidly develop-

ing Southern provinces through Gawadar Port, which is only 2,500 Km away from Xingjian. Hence, Gawadar port with its deep waters is an Ideal Port for the maritime trade ships from China, Central Asian Regions and South East Asian Countries. It is bound to play a pivotal role between the energy and resource rich countries of central Asia, Middle East, Iran and energy deficient South Asia and China. Geostrategic significance of the country increases manifolds due to the fact that China finds shortest way to Indian Ocean and Arabian sea through Karakoram Highway, which will tremendously reduce the cost and time of transportation of goods from China to the destinations in Middle East, Africa and Europe and vice versa.

Thus, Pakistan is bound to play a vital role in boosting up the economic development of the Asian and African Continents initiated by China. The phenomenal investment by China in the regions of Asia and Africa will enhance the peace and stability through progress, prosperity and social development. Pakistan is a lynch pin in the quick, efficient and cost effective movement of goods and services from China to the rest of the world and vice versa.

**Raja Abdul Qayyum** – a retired Pakistani Civil Servant.



# Time has come for the reunification of the Korean peninsula

John Wight



The historic summit between the leaders of North and South Korea confirms that the time has come for the idea of peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

Indeed, this meeting of the leaders of the two Koreas – the DPRK's Kim Jong-un and South Korea's Moon Jae-in – is an event of world-historical importance after decades of enmity during which conflict seemed far more likely a prospect than sustainable and meaningful peace in this tortured land.

It is fair to say also that the rapidity of the thaw currently

underway on the Korean peninsula has taken the world by surprise. We have undoubtedly traveled a long way in just a few short months, when we consider that US President Donald Trump was threatening the DPRK via Twitter at the beginning of 2018.

So, what has brought about this sea change? What factor is now in place that was absent previously when it comes to applying the brakes to a peninsula that was akin to a speeding train, hurtling down a track towards disaster?

Here, it is impossible to overlook the significance of the election of South Korea's President Moon Jae-in in May 2017, after his predecessor Park Guen-hye came unstuck by a political scandal, leading to her impeachment. Moon, a



*South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un © Reuters*



former student activist and human rights lawyer, has, it appears, arrived on the scene as the living embodiment of the dictum 'Cometh the hour, cometh the man'.

Crucially, a central plank of Moon's foreign policy is his belief in the peaceful reunification of North and South. It is an objective which, if it were to come to pass, would close the chapter on generations of suffering and strife under the shadow of nuclear Armageddon.

Kim Jong-un, meanwhile, despite being viewed in the West through the goggles of grotesque caricature reserved for leaders who refuse to kowtow, has demonstrated a commitment to peace and reconciliation that is consonant with a deep understanding of the legacy of suffering in a region whose development has been deformed by the asphyxiating pressure exerted against it over many decades by US-led Western imperialism.

It is a key point of which Western ideologues are either ignorant or choose to ignore – i.e. the impossibility of a society being able to flourish and develop while being strangled by economic blockade, sanctions and/or the threat of imminent war and nuclear obliteration. It is akin to squeezing someone's neck while berating them for not breathing properly.

The common representation of the DPRK has been of a hermit kingdom in which the country's 25 million people have been reduced to unthinking automatons, ideologically conditioned from the moment they are born to cultishly obey and venerate their 'Dear Leader' under a system of ineffable inhumanity, brutality, and cruelty. It is a state and society, we are meant to believe, which resembles the one



Ri Sol Ju (L), wife of North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un, and Kim Jung-sook (R), wife of South Korea's President Moon Jae-in, walk together during a farewell ceremony at the end of the historic inter-Korean summit at the truce village of Panmunjom on April 27, 2018. (AFP)

depicted in George Orwell's celebrated novel '1984' – a despotic, totalitarian dystopia and vast prison house.

But is this the whole story when it comes to North Korea? Moreover, is it even part of the story? And if not the whole story or part of the story, when it comes to North Korea, what is the story?

Writer and novelist Andre Vltchek is someone who has visited the DPRK as part of an international peace mission. In an open letter to Donald Trump at the height of the nuclear sabre-rattling emanating from the White House against the DPRK, Vltchek wrote:

“North Koreans are supposed to look and behave like a nation of brainless robots, lacking all basic emotions and individuality, staring forward without seeing much, unable to feel pain, compassion or love.





*South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un meet with Moon's wife Kim Jung-sook and Kim's wife Ri Sol Ju at the truce village of Panmunjom inside the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas, South Korea, April 27, 2018. (REUTERS)*

*"You don't want to see the truth, the reality, and you want others to be blind as well.*

*"Even if you'll blow the entire DPRK to pieces, you'll actually not see much anyway, you'll see almost nothing: just your own missiles shooting from battleships and submarines, your own airplanes taking-off from aircraft carriers, as well as some computer-generated images of powerful explosions. No pain, no reality, and no agony: nothing will get to you; nothing will reach you and your citizens."*

If, up to now, the DPRK has been a state and society that has turned away from engagement with the West, who could possibly blame them given the deep scars left by decades of Japanese colonialism and imperialism, allied to the mammoth destruction wrought by the 1950-53 war against the US and its allies? And this is without factoring in economic sanctions, the thousands of missiles that are pointed at the country, plus the presence of thousands of US troops in the South and the nuclear-armed US Navy battle groups patrolling off its shores. While such a state of

affairs may be conducive to the aims and character of US imperialism, it flies in the face of the yearning for peace and reunification on the part of the Korean people themselves, thus inimical to their interests and future.

Again and again, only when the world wakes up to the truth that the enemies of progress are those who pontificate about democracy and human rights, while laying waste to country after country, will peace and stability rather than chaos and conflict reign. The historic meeting and summit between Kim Jong-un and Moon Jae-in allows us to hope that not only the Korean peninsula but the entire world may finally be ready to throw off the dogs of war and embrace instead the merchants of peace.

Such an embrace is long overdue.

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**John Wight** has written for newspapers and websites across the world, including the *Independent*, *Morning Star*, *Huffington Post*, *Counterpunch*, *London Progressive Journal*.

Yalta Forum 2018

## Yalta links Russia with the Islamic world

Shahriar Feroze



Vladimir Putin is reported to have said, "In Russia, Islamic world will always find a reliable ally". If he genuinely means what he said ~ he intends to build a strategic partnership with 24.1 per cent of the global population living in 49 Muslim majority countries worth more than USD 5.7 trillion in combined GDP growth. More than that, the partnership his Russia eyes today is to share the common grounds and thrive jointly despite all religious and ideological differences. However, the forum organised by the Russia-Islamic World Group (RIW) at Yalta on 23-24 April this year was a part of Russia's grand scheme.

Upon receiving the invitation to participate at this year's forum titled "4th international media forum of journalists from Muslim countries for partnership of civilisations" ~ the first question I asked myself was why Yalta and not Moscow? Being fond of travelling and participating at international summits and conferences, I quickly responded by accepting the invitation, thus began my long list of queries and collecting information on the forum.

Having gone through whatever I could browse, at least one point became clear. Apart from holding the forum in the South Coast of the Crimean peninsula otherwise Yalta ~ Russia perhaps also planned to open up and expose the Crimean reality to the journalists from Muslim countries, thus provide them with first-hand opportunity to draw lines between Western media reports and the real world.

Nevertheless, at first thought it appeared, President Putin was once more placing Yalta in the world map by reviving the spirits of the famous "Yalta conference". It was attended by Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin for deciding the future and international relations of a post-war world. All three statesmen are dead. The Cold War has ended long ago, and today it is we, a handful of Muslim journalists who would replace them with a different agenda, at a different time but at the same scenic Black Sea resort town. Russia wants her Muslim friends to get closer and they joyfully responded. Having arrived at the VIP terminal of the Sim-

feropol airport at the capital of the Republic of Crimea, this writer wasn't sure exactly what to expect. The two hour flight from Moscow followed another couple of hours of taxi ride, and Crimea began to fast unfold.

Vast swathes of countryside, construction worksites and a smooth highway were leading us up to the mountains overlooking the Black Sea ~ understandably, Yalta has all the potentials to become the next European Riviera. And as I and another Bangladeshi journalist Shuprova (working for the Dhaka Tribune) got out from the taxi a gigantic upscale spa resort set on the White Beach on the Black Sea stood before us. Located some 13 kilometres away in the outskirts of Yalta the roaming clients inside the resort exposed a different Crimea under Russian rule where healthy living, wealth, status, power and beauty all blended in the same mould. It was an eye-opener for nostalgic people like us who were accustomed to the communist depiction of the old USSR. Briefly it felt like I was somewhere in Western Europe until the signs and the language barrier erupted.

However, this year's forum was attended by more than 50 journalists from Russia, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Bangladesh, Morocco, Algeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Albania, Indonesia, Jordan and the UAE. Even though we were not introduced to other journalists, but a peculiar trait about a journalist is that he or she is somehow easily identifiable. Based on personal observations, I would say, in a foreign land they are usually restless and nervous until they check in their rooms; looks at every one with suspicion, likes to keep their luggage close to them and are shabbily dressed. They move from one place to another rather hesitantly and these traits become starkly noticeable at plush resorts like at the Mryia since they don't fit in it, and I am one of them. That having said ~ when it comes to raise voice against injustice, shaping public opinion, speaking a thousand words through a single photo and penning the truth ~ none is above a journalist.

It was, however, a fascinating experience for me to come under a single umbrella to unite and deliver our speeches in accordance with the topic of this year's forum. The



speeches lasted for nearly 12 hours and despite the speakers frequently going beyond their topic and time limit ~ they repeatedly stressed on the importance of strong bilateral and strategic relations with Russia. The speeches of participants covered vital information on historical ties between Russia and Muslim countries, current affairs, and geopolitical issues. An award was handed over to a luminary scholar. Many had spoken about the political situation and ongoing crises in their respective countries. The Bangladesh team specifically mentioned the ongoing Rohingya crisis.

To cut a long story short, my understanding was, we the participants, eagerly awaited to see Russia in the seat of a global leader ~ leading the road to peaceful and harmonious co-existence despite all differences. Russia's Middle Eastern policy to its engagement in the Syrian crisis, the close relationship between Islam and Orthodox Christianity, revival and expansion of Tatar Muslims under the Putin government to renovation and reconstruction of Islamic heritage sites in Crimea - all of these realities had turned the forum into a very deeply meaningful conference.

In particular, forums in the like of the journalists' forum at Yalta has become crucially important for exchange of ideas and information and promoting dialogues between Russia and the Islamic world. Such platforms also help to resolve bilateral disputes, since I believe the UN should always not be the global platform where nations should take up their conflict issues. It's right on this point, where such forums can hugely contribute in arranging dialogues amid a friendly atmosphere. On the last day we had the opportunity to interact with journalists from other countries for a limited time while visiting a couple of Islamic heritage sites at Crimea. A separate day for interacting with them and the Crimean Muslims would have only done us good to get a deeper understanding of the local Islamic culture and customs.

Regarding the modality of the Yalta forum, the organisers, and especially the Group for Strategic Vision must acknowledge some of its existing flaws and weaknesses. Other than just delivering speeches there should be some open room for cross-cultural dialogue between the host

and guest journalists. In case of too many speeches the conference should be divided in two days. A lengthy session, even with intervals often becomes exhausting. Also the language barrier should be taken care by engaging more interpreters on various languages. On the point of selecting topics, we mustn't forget it is the age of radicalisation of beliefs and political ideologies, I request it is high time Russia introduces a similar forum for clerics and scholars in order to wipe-out prevailing misperceptions and misinterpretations of Islam and other religions. A clergy exchange programme could be effective in this regard. The forum should also engage the non-Muslim Russian public in various capacities. Markedly, it is an established fact that Islam is the second most widely professed religion in Russia. It is also considered as one of Russia's traditional religions, legally a part of Russian historical heritage, and is subsidized by the Russian government under Vladimir Putin. While the Western World deliberately keeps tarnishing the global image of Islam, Russia stands defiant to protect Muslim interests at home and abroad. When the emergence of populist and extreme-nationalist regimes prevents Muslims from migrating and seeking jobs ~ Russia arranges international forums to embrace its Muslim friends.

The message: in today's world of growing intolerance suffering from a leadership crisis the Islamic world looks up to Russia with a lot of hope. It was once more echoed at Yalta this year. Yet, we hugely missed Russia's pro-active engagement in resolving the Rohingya crisis. Whatsoever, millions in Bangladeshi still believes it can still play a greater role in repatriating the Rohingya refugees by getting involved formally or non-formally with Bangladesh and Myanmar. Can't we envision of a Rohingya forum held between Myanmar, Bangladesh and other Muslim countries arbitrated by Russia? We surely can. Last but not least, conferences, forums or symposiums must make a positive impact on decision and national policy making, and the forum which has just ended in the picturesque Yalta will most likely bridge the gaps between Russia and the Islamic world.

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## Asia's geopolitical chessboard is changing

Andrew Hammond



The leaders of South Korea, China and Japan announced on 23 April, 2018 that they will meet on May 9 for their first trilateral talks since 2015. The session is only the latest example of the changing geopolitical chessboard in the region, following the mini-rap-

prochement between North and South Korea. Yet it is not just the implications of warming ties between Pyongyang and Seoul that is driving the trilateral session. Another key driver behind the May 9 meeting is uncertainty evoked by US President Donald Trump's agenda, including the trade tariff measures against Japan and China in recent weeks that give both nations greater incentive to engage, despite the fact that relations have been at a relative historical low point in recent years over claims both have made to islands in the China Sea.

To this end, Chinese President Xi Jinping will make a full diplomatic visit to Japan, as part of the trilateral dialogue, from May 8-11. His trip represents the latest salvo by both Beijing and Tokyo to enhance relations in advance of the

40th anniversary this summer of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which established the diplomatic baseline for bilateral relations. Xi and Abe will also be keen to use the trilateral dialogue to get insights from South Korea President Moon Jae-in about last month's inter-Korean summit. Given the deep interests of both Beijing and Tokyo here, neither wants to watch this dialogue completely from the sidelines. Hence why North Korea's leader Kim Jung Un was summoned to Beijing in March – his first foreign trip since taking power in 2011.

Both Xi and Abe are acutely aware that plans appear to be advancing fast for the proposed Trump-Kim meeting in May or June, with the US president saying this week he is looking at Singapore and the demilitarized zone in Korea as possible locations. This follows new US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's statement on 29 April that there is a "real opportunity" for a nuclear deal, especially following Kim's announcement that North Korea's main nuclear testing site, Punggye-ri, is to close this month.

All these developments underline the potential extent of the changing geopolitical chessboard in the region. Even hawkish new US National Security Advisor John Bolton contributed to the positive mood music by suggesting on



*Chinese President Xi Jinping*



*Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe*



*South Korean President Moon Jae-in*



29 April, 2018 that a US-Korean agreement could be modeled on that agreed by Libya on eliminating its weapons of mass destruction program in 2003 in return for the lifting of sanctions.

Following spiraling tensions in 2017 over the North's nuclear weapons and missile programs, the remarkable diplomatic respite that 2018 has brought has so far been remarkable. Characteristically, Trump has taken much credit for this, and his hardline policies may indeed have been part of the mix of events that have brought Kim to the negotiating table. Yet as much as US pressure may well have been important in creating this diplomatic window of opportunity, Beijing's role has also been key given its own increasing support for international sanctions against Pyongyang. Traditionally, China has been reluctant to take too sweeping measures against its communist neighbor for fear of squeezing it so hard that it becomes significantly destabilized.

Xi believes that this is probably not in Chinese interests for at least two reasons. Firstly, if the communist regime in the North falls, it could undermine the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party too. He also fears that the collapse of order in the North could lead to instability on the border, a potentially large influx of refugees that China would need to manage, and ultimately the potential emergence of a pro-US successor state. As positive as the atmospherics currently appear to be around the planned Trump-Kim meeting, all sides will know that there remain significant

risks as well as opportunities in play. While Trump appears keen to meet Kim, he has previously said: "Talk of appeasement with North Korea will not work, they only understand one thing!"

This commentary reflects not just Trump's volatility, but also the political pressure he is personally under on this issue, having drawn a political red line previously on Pyongyang possessing a nuclear warhead capable of being fitted onto an intercontinental ballistic missile that could strike the US homeland.

Strikingly, the US Union of Concerned Scientists calculated that if the last missile launched by the North – in November – had flown on a standard trajectory rather than a lofted one, it would have had a range of 13,000 km – enough to strike Europe, Australia, or any part of the continental US. This is why Trump will continue to keep all options on the table.

Taken overall, the Japan-China-South Korea announcement is only the latest indicator that the geopolitical chessboard is changing in Asia. Yet while the mood music is presently mostly positive, significant risks remain. And if the North-South dialogue ultimately proves to be a mirage, Trump will seek to pile the pressure on Pyongyang again given the pressure he is under on this issue.

**Andrew Hammond** is an Associate at LSE IDEAS at the London School of Economics.

## Quotable Quote



A good person can make another person good; it means that goodness will elicit goodness in the society; other persons will also be good.

— Bhumibol Adulyadej —



**Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem**

(Photo: Courtesy of Pixabay)

## Israel and Saudi Arabia: allies, adversaries or something else?

Nagapushpa Devendra



For all intentions and purposes, the coming together of Israel and Saudi Arabia in the changing regional dynamics of West Asia raise many questions. The shifting of alliance in the region had started under Obama regime and the recent development in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon has further pushed these countries to work

together against Iran's increasing influence. In addition, the U.S decision to play cautious in the regional conflicts, particularly the reluctance to use force against Iran has given leverage for Israel-Saudi alliance. Their alliance was further strengthened by the US president's senior advisor and Jewish son-in-law Jared Kushner, who share similar zeal to isolate Iran from the regional dynamics as Saudi.

### Genesis of Israel-Saudi alliance

The basic understanding of international relations is that two opposing parties can or should work together against a common enemy. The origin of this pragmatism is conceded to Kautilya Arthashastra, but most world leaders have invoked it at least once in their life time to justify their strategies and actions in international relations. For example: In World War II, U.S President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill recognized the need to align with the Soviet Union under the leadership of Joseph Stalin against the threat of Adolf Hitler. The simple logic and advantage of this strategy is to fight a common enemy or a 'greater evil', which increases the probability of victory. Under this pretext, given Saudi Arabia's understanding that Iran becoming a threat to its regional hegemony and challenging it in Bahrain, Syria, Yemen and Iraq, its willingness to forgo generations of refusing to recognize Israel and turn into major allies is inevitable.





In contemporary politics thus, both Saudi Arabia and Israel share common enemy in the region: Iran. On one hand, growing Iran-Hezbollah dominance in Iraq and Syria is gradually becoming a matter of security concern for Israelis. In Syrian war, Hezbollah's Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah has already declared "victory", and stated that what remained was "scattered battles." Iran is also gaining its roots in Iraq by supporting the Shia militias and the ruling Dawa Party. Iran is also providing logistic support to the newly formed group named, "Golan Liberation Unit" who had vowed to liberate the Golan Heights from Israeli troops under any circumstances. Moreover, Israelis believe that the emergence of Iran as a nuclear state would bring their world to the threshold of abyss. Charles Ellis Schumer, the senior United States senator said that, "one nuclear weapon, hurled from Iran to Israel, could end the Jewish state and could kill almost as many Jews as did Hitler." They fear that Iran's nuclear competence will also significantly embolden its proxies in Syria, Palestine and Lebanon posing imminent threat to Israel's security predicament.

As a result, Israel decided to counter Iranian threat by forming an anti-Iran "coalition" with the Arab Sunni bloc led by Saudi Arabia. The kingdom, too, has been trying cautiously building closer ties with Tel Aviv, as its rivalry with Iran has become one of the persistent feature of West Asia's geopolitical issues including, interpretation of Islam, oil political, and the aspiration to dominate the Islamic world since 1979 Iranian revolution. The tug-of-war between both the countries intensified during post Saddam Hussein era in an attempt to consolidate power in Iraq. Since then both the countries have been drawn along contemporary power-politics in regional paradigm. So far, they have also hosted opposing factions in Lebanon and Iraq. At present, they are confronting through proxy war in Syria and Yemen where Iran seems to be gaining as it is able to consolidate and fill the power vacuums created by the crises in these countries. Iran has also attempting to tighten its grip in Bahrain, Kuwait, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

In sharing a common enemy, Saudi Arabia and Israel became strategically aligned, and to some extent, the ideological and social barriers were papered over at least for time being. Two factors have pushed Israel and Saudi close to each other. One, the gradual shift of the US under President Trump from the issues of West Asia. Some analysts

have argued that Saudi Arabia and Israel share disappointment with US. They see the diminishing role of the US as paving way for Russia-Iran dominance in the region. Second key element is the Iranian nuclear deal, also known as JCPOA. Israel and Saudi Arabia agree and have enunciated at various regional and international forums that Iran should never be allowed to become a nuclear power. Both the countries have persistently asked President Trump to scrap the nuclear deal, if the conditions for Iran could not be toughened. However, the growing uncertainty about the facets of the international bargain that would curb Iranian nuclear project is making Israel and Saudi Arabia nervous. As a matter of fact, Saudi Arabia which is a signatory to the Non-proliferation treaty, now threatens to acquire nuclear weapons with covert support of Israel. Although the Israelis will significantly benefit from finding allies across the Arab world who share similar common interest in standing up against Iran and its proxies in the region, they have different approach and tactics. In order to substantiate their differing approach, let us have a look at the recent Lebanese political unrest orchestrated and bolstered by Israel-Saudi coalition.

### **Lebanese political quagmire – A primer of Israel-Saudi alliance**

In early November 2017, Saudi Arabia had orchestrated Hariri's resignation. It had many objectives. Firstly, Prince Salman was signaling the Lebanese as well as regional political elite that they will put their political and financial support from the kingdom in jeopardy if they continue to provide political cover and international legitimacy to the Hezbollah.[6] Secondly, Saudi Arabia wanted to curb Hezbollah, Iran's key strategist which has established its stronghold in the region. In today's time, Hezbollah has the power to block the Lebanese cabinet's political decision. Its militia is larger, stronger and partakes the potential to intimidate, infiltrate and dominate Lebanese army. Geographically, Hezbollah has also succeeded in partnering with Syria, Iraq and Yemen by providing them a wide range of resource support. Thirdly, the Saudi Crown Prince has been desperately trying to brand the Iranian outpost as an international terror outfit in the region in order to bring more sanctions on Iran and Hezbollah. As Hussein Ibish, a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, says "the removal of Hariri is a trap for

Hezbollah, daring it to fully reveal its power and dominance in Lebanon and take complete responsibility for the Lebanese state which from Saudi perspective, in effectively controls anyways. The next step would be for Hezbollah and Lebanon itself to suffer the consequences of being completely identified with what is widely considered to be an international terrorist organization". Lastly, Saudi Arabia intended to provide a context for Israelis to invade Lebanon by disrupting its vulnerable political structure in which Hezbollah and Sunni parties have ruled together in an uneasy alliance for decades.

While no one was sure about the Israel's response to the Saudi Arabia's strategy in Lebanon, the declassified documents revealed Israel urging its ambassadors to support Saudi's effort to expel Iran backed Hezbollah from the Lebanese government and politics. Following which the Israel's foreign ministry issued a statement saying that "the resignation of Al-Hariri and his comments on the reasons that led him to resign illustrate once again the destructive nature of Iran and Hezbollah and the danger they pose to the stability of Lebanon and the countries of the region". Many other Israeli officials have also called international community to take action against Iranian aggression on various regional and international platforms.

However, Saudi Arabia wanted Israelis to flex its military muscles in Lebanon apart from its rhetoric exigency. In fact, Saudi had also mobilized F-15 fighter jet fleet to launch a military operation against the Iranian-backed terrorist militia of Hezbollah in Lebanon.[11] But before a new regional disorder exacerbates, Saudi Arabia faced resentment like never before from across the globe for meddling in Lebanese internal affairs. This led Israel also to take a step back, despite indicating all signs to invade Lebanon. But it does not explain Israeli official's decision to go public with their cooperation. It came as a surprise when in a televised speech an Israeli official publicly expressed disenchantment with the Idea of Saudi prince trying to use them as a proxy to fight their battle in a regional power struggle. A senior Israeli intelligence official told Al-Monitor that in principle, the Saudis do not take anyone else into consideration. The Crown Prince is trying to lead a progressive and aggressive new policy in which Israel has no plan to get entangled.

It appears that Israel wanted to hint Saudi Arabia that they do not intend to become proxy players in the regional power struggle. For Israel, antagonizing Iran through Hezbollah means confronting all its proxy forces and its allies like Russia and Turkey in the region. In such case, Israel would need U.S support if their objectives is to succeed. But Trump flip-flop decision-making does not make the US a reliable partner in the region. Although Israel wants to restrain growing Iranian influences, it understands the consequences of waging-all-out war against more advanced adversary or one able to deploy larger forces. In other words, Israel is likely to approach diplomatic path of putting pressure on its allies and international communities to fight Iranian interest in the region.

### Implications for West Asia

Most significant feature of Israel-Saudi alliance is that despite having differing tactics and approach, their pact is still alive and intact. Though Israel-Saudi alliance encountered problems in Lebanon, it was resolved by Netanyahu's diplomatic skills. It seems that an overwhelming external threat often concentrates allied mind is true here. As long as Iranian nuclear deal and his proxies are in the ground, Israel-Saudi alliance is assured, notwithstanding the mutual displays of annoyance. In fact, Lebanese political series was a learning lesson for Israel-Saudi alliance to set policies, recognizing that global communication plays a central role in problem definition and negotiation for solutions. For example, after Lebanon, Saudi-Israelis eyes are set on Yemen and Syria. But this time Saudi and Israel are coordinating from behind the scene, giving space for global player to fulfill their objectives. In Yemen, Israeli have started raising concerns over Houthi's threatening international maritime security as the situation near the Bab-al-Mandab is worsening on daily bases. Online media also allegedly reports that Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu has issued an order to send warplanes to help Saudi-led coalition in their fight in Yemen.[13] This has stimulated debates on whether the US must provide military aid to Saudi-led coalition in the fight against Houthi's insurgency in Yemen.

Recently, both Israel and Saudi Arabia reiterated their support to the US led attack against alleged use of chem-



ical weapon by Damascus this month. At present, Britain is moving its submarines, Russia and Syria are re-locating their military base, and Israel-Saudi eyes joining the game. It appears that Israel-Saudi Arabia is gradually expanding their footprint in the region, trying to become a combined driving force against Iran. Israel and Saudis in various occasions have made it clear that their government view countering the threat from Iran as a primary foreign policy goal. However, growing Israel-Saudi alliance is likely to bring other Arab countries like UAE, Bahrain and Egypt in an anti-Iran crusade which is threatening Iran. Recently, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani stated that Iran would not resume its ties with Saudi Arabia unless Riyadh ended its friendship with Israel. The new realpolitik of the Middle East means that Tehran may face even greater strategic challenges in the future. This will have significant implication for the region, especially Lebanon. After being postponed twice over electoral deadlock, Beirut is hosting election in May 2018. And it is fair to assume that the Israel-Saudi alliance by now has understood that in today's scenario, weapons do not win war, strategies do. As a result, they will attempt to influence the Lebanese government as their ultimate errand. However, this time Israel-Saudi proxy role in the Lebanese election will be limited to theoretical approach rather than taking extreme measure. While the Saudi Crown Prince will attempt to financially support Hariri or Sunni candidates running for the Prime Ministerial post, Israel will enrich its crusade

to denounce Hezbollah, accusing them of spreading terror. On the other hand, Iran and Hezbollah are now monitoring Lebanese internal politics rigorously. Hariri's resignation announcement threatens the fragile act of balancing power in the system, placing the country at the verge of collapse: Iran-Hezbollah is more cautioned now. It is likely that the Hezbollah will equally attempt to influence the election or would nominate a candidate who is pro-Shia [Iran-Hezbollah] in order to sway balance of power in their favor. Yet, again the chance of instability in Lebanon will further destabilize an already volatile region. The winds of political instability caused by Israel-Saudi alliance will have a serious repercussion in already devastated region. In addition, the outflow of refugees will exert demographic pressures for the neighboring states like Syria, Iraq, Libya and Egypt who are already struggling with major socio-economic and humanitarian crisis. This will not only undermine economic growth that the region is struggling desperately to escape but may also give rise to Islamic extremist groups to new unpredictable level, dashing hopes of many ordinary citizens to live peaceful and prosperous lives in the region.

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### Quotable Quote



Asean is obviously a very important association for us. Over the past 30 years Asean has made great strides in regional cooperation covering a number of areas, although recently it has been under strain because of the financial crisis and other challenges.

— *Hassanal Bolkiah* —



## **“Kunming, City of Eternal Spring” Yunnan, China**





# ‘One Belt and One Road’: Connecting China and the world



**Rising Asia**

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