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CISS - Strategic Assessment 2019 and Forecast 2020



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Abstract

The CISS Strategic Assessment 2019 surveys major global and regional developments with a focus on South Asia. It includes Global and Regional Perspectives on Emerging Technologies; Trends in Global Arms Control, Disarmament and Nuclear Nonproliferation; Pakistan's Foreign Policy and Relations; and Developments Affecting Deterrence Stability in South Asia. This Assessment also offers a Forecast for 2020 that is based on the trends and trajectories in these four areas and is likely to affect the strategic outlook of South Asia.

Introduction

The global strategic environment in 2019 was characterized by growing great power competition between the United States on the one hand, and China, Russia, Iran, North Korea on the other. The past year continued to see instability in conflict prone regions such as South Asia, the Korean peninsula, South China Sea, the Middle East, Syria, Libya, and Afghanistan. Pakistan faced major external and foreign policy challenges coupled with a struggling economy amid rising inflation in the country. The most significant event in South Asia was the Pulwama-Balakot Crisis that peaked with an attack by the Indian Air Force on 26 February 2019 prompting instant retaliation through "Operation Swift Retort" conducted by the Pakistan Air Force (PAF). Pakistan's resolute and proportionate response restored the status-quo-ante and reinstated the efficacy of Pakistan's Full Spectrum Deterrence Posture. Pakistan also facilitated the Afghan peace process for enabling a political settlement of the war in Afghanistan and to secure a withdrawal of US-led forces. The major highlight of Pakistan's foreign policy was Prime Minister Imran Khan's maiden visit to Washington D.C. that helped forge his personal rapport with President Donald Trump resulting in a thaw in US-Pakistan relations. Their meeting was a notable success that served to mitigate the effects of years of anti-Pakistan narrative and rhetoric within think tanks and key government departments in the United States. Pakistan was also able to thwart Indian efforts to put Pakistan on the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) blacklist and made considerable improvements in domestic laws and their implementation.

This Assessment examines four key developments during 2019 and a Forecast for 2020 in Emerging Technologies, Arms Control and Disarmament, Foreign Policy and Deterrence Stability in South Asia.

Emerging Technologies: Global and Regional Perspective

The most important feature of the past year was the emergence of emerging technologies and the unprecedented focus on how this is likely to unleash a new wave of innovation and development. The Fourth Industrial Revolution involving Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, Robotics, Cyber technologies, Virtual Reality and Facial Recognition, will also produce enduring global and regional implications for economic growth, science and technology, strategic stability, and great power competition through the application of these technologies in the civilian and military domain.

Global threats emanating from an upsurge in the quantity and quality of conventional and nuclear weapons is increasingly being supplemented with the emerging technologies, and hybrid generation warfare. The latter includes, disinformation warfare on social media and the Internet, and fake news. These technologies and methods are beginning to influence the threat parameters of national security of nation-states. During 2019, the threat and occurrence of cybercrimes, cyber frauds, hacking, and cyber-espionage multiplied. The involvement of individual, non-state actors and states, equally powerful in the cyber domain, has made the management of cyber threats difficult. Throughout the past year, countries constantly remained under cyber-attacks by other state-sponsored or non-state hackers for espionage, data gathering and, financial and political gain. In June 2019, US officials announced that they had launched offensive cyber operations against Iranian computer systems employed in controlling missile and rocket launches. There were other important cyber incidents during 2019, such as the hacking of an Indian nuclear power plant by North Korean malware, Chinese group's hacking into more than hundred universities' databases for intellectual property theft in different countries, and Israel's cybersecurity firm sold spyware, Pegasus, to target senior government and military officials in at least twenty countries, including targeting Pakistani officials, by exploiting a vulnerability in WhatsApp. A list of significant cyber incidents in 2019 is published by the Washington-based think tank, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).¹ The United States, Russia, China, Israel, UK, North Korea, Iran, Australia and some European countries remained active players in cyber domain in 2019.

Besides state entities, international organizations, private companies, business, and the financial sector, especially banks were the major targets of cyber-attacks. For example, in February 2019, the European aerospace company 'Airbus' claimed that it had been targeted by Chinese hackers and lost its personal and IT identification information. A cybercrimes report in 2019 estimated that cybercrimes would cost \$ 5.2 trillion globally by the end of 2021. In addition to the issues discussed above, disinformation warfare on social media, fake news and AI deep fake have intensified the threat to democratic values of states, to influence elections

¹ <https://www.csis.org/programs/technology-policy-program/significant-cyber-incidents>

and trigger political disruptions. Acknowledging the need of hour, the US, Russia, China, and some European countries released or updated documents on a national Artificial Intelligence Strategy, to innovate the industry and deal with the upcoming threats to national security.

Besides global powers like the US, Russia, China, smaller nations such as Iran and India are also investing resources in building their AI and cyber capabilities. India's Tri-Services Defence Cyber Agency (DCA) is in the final stage of its operationalization. DCA will be a dual-purpose cyber agency, first to fight virtual wars in the cyber domain and second, to formulate a doctrine of cyberwarfare. In June 2019, Lt. Col. Rajesh Pant, the National Cyber Security Coordinator announced that the new cybersecurity strategy policy would be released in 2020. The cyber offence policy has consistently been part of India's military doctrines. India's 'Cold Start Doctrine' or limited war strategy, identifies seven forms of information warfare, including cyberwarfare, entailing attacks on computer-based systems of the enemy. During the last five years, India concluded seventeen agreements/MOUs with several countries, including the US, UK, France, Australia, and Israel to standardize the cybersecurity infrastructure.

India's Department of Defence Production issued a government order on February 8, 2019 to establish a Defence Artificial Intelligence Council (DAIC), with the Minister of Defence as head of the council, and Defence AI Project Agency (DAIPA). The purpose of establishing the AI Council was to have strategic direction towards AI-driven transformation in defence; provide guidance in addressing issues related to data sharing; enable strategic partnership with industry; decide acquisitions of technology; review ethical, safety and privacy assured usage of AI in defence; and set policies in partnership with government institutions and industries. Moreover, this initiative will also assist the Indian Armed Forces with some other steps such as building capacity within defence organizations through R&D, providing training in AI in defence training and academic institutions, and creating a critical mass of AI specialists within defence organizations by encouraging higher studies in AI.

Fake news and disinformation warfare on social media is another way of intensifying conflict and crises in the region. For instance, after the Pulwama-Balakot crisis in 2019, fake news and disinformation campaigns on social media were unleashed to promote a distorted version of events, contrary to facts, designed to project India as the victor, such as unsubstantiated claims of having shot down a Pakistani F-16 fighter. Moreover, the EU Disinfo Lab uncovered hundreds of online sites run by an Indian group disseminating anti-Pakistan narrative on the Kashmir issue and CPEC in different countries.

On the other hand, in Pakistan, efforts on the national level in the cyber and AI domains are not encouraging. The International Telecommunications Unit (ITU) scaled Pakistan as one of the worst/least prepared countries in its cybersecurity readiness chart, known as the Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) in 2019. (The Global Cybersecurity Index on Cybersecurity Preparedness is based on the efforts made by countries to strengthen their cybersecurity on five scales, including legal, technical, organizational, capacity building, and cooperation.)

Pakistan was ranked low in GCI due to the absence of Pakistan's National Computer Emergency Response Team, national cybersecurity policy and strategy, and lack of cyber cooperative measures with other countries. Pakistan's financial sector remained the worst hit and saw an enormous rise in Advanced Persistent Threat activities in 2019. Foreign production and adoption of advanced communication technologies, such as fifth-generation (5G) wireless networks, will challenge Pakistan's data security and Pakistan does not have any data protection laws in the country, while current progress in quantum computing indicate challenges to existing methods of protecting data and transactions. In December 2019, five leading banks were de-faced over a period of a few hours which resulted in several fraudulent fund transfers. Apart from the financial sector, government officials and websites, diplomats and businesses have been major targets of cyber-attacks this year.

For capability building of the youth, the President of Pakistan launched the "Presidential Initiative for Artificial Intelligence and Computing" (PIAIC) in January 2019. Furthermore, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) also established a Cyber Vigilance Division in 2019, to identify, channelize and block reported URLs containing blasphemous, anti-state, hate speech, and pornographic content.

Pakistan's national computer networks, telecommunication systems and services, are vulnerable to severe cyber intrusion and cyber-attacks by state and non-state actors. The Senate's Defence Committee has been working with a group of twenty members, called the Cybersecurity Task Force, to devise a National Cybersecurity Policy and Strategy for more than seven years now. The policy draft, prepared by Cybersecurity Task Force, was presented for discussion, but never agreed upon due to lack of political will. Pakistan needs to develop a national cybersecurity legal and policy framework, on urgent basis, to be able to deal with current and emerging threats in this realm. There is also a dire need to establish a National Computer Emergency Response Team (N-CERT) and regional CERTs under the control of provincial and the relevant government departments. To protect important national data and privacy, Pakistan also needs to approve the pending Data Protection Bill. Pakistan already has many young professionals working on AI and Machine Learning, Cloud Computing, and other related technologies. Therefore, there is a need to develop an AI strategy for industries and the defence sector, to increase the skilled work force and offer them the necessary facilities and incentives to work on innovative projects.

Forecast 2020

1. Amid the enormously disruptive Covid-19 pandemic, businesses and the private sector around the world has resorted to "Work from Home" which has increased internet use. It can give hackers, state sponsored or non-state actors, the opportunity to misuse unprecedented amount of internet traffic for financial gain. Lack of encrypted communication with sectors working on national-security or data centric documents can be also be made vulnerable due to interception both by state and non-state actors.

2. Pakistan's Minister of Science and Technology Mr. Fawad Chaudhry, during a roundtable on Pakistan's cybersecurity issues in late November 2019, acknowledged the need to have a National Cybersecurity Policy for Pakistan and pointed out that Government is working on a draft Cybersecurity Policy which is near completion and is expected to be submitted for approval in 2020.
3. Pakistan needs to adopt an Artificial Intelligence Strategy encompassing civil and military areas. The strategy ought to focus on capacity building of human resources, development of associated platforms, services and hardware and allocation of resources to improve Pakistan's digital landscape, adapt its human resources from adverse effects of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and provide institutional and technological capacity to figure among the leading countries in the field of Artificial Intelligence.
4. The increased magnitude of cyber-attacks globally along with laying out of the National Strategy on Artificial Intelligence will require allocation of resources for research and development of AI related applications, tools and hardware, in both civil and military applications. However, some products requiring development of narrow-AI application tools will become operational sooner than tools requiring augmentation of complex functions. In this regard, India too is directing financial resources for development of AI related applications, which can have critical implications for Pakistan in the military and civil domain.
5. There is an urgent need to formalize and operationalize legislation on data regulation and cyber-security related mechanisms such as National Computer Emergency Response Teams in order to expedite long pending commitments for having an institutional arrangement in place to counter cyber threats to state entities and private corporations.
6. Presence of fake news in social media, patronage by state institutions in South Asia, particularly India in a future crisis with Pakistan is likely to employ troll-armies to spread disinformation. Employment of such means can aggravate national security challenges for Pakistan, that can also compound regional and strategic stability. In such instances, tendencies of state actors that deliberately sponsor the spread of misinformation during a crisis can use it to compromise regional stability by undertaking offensive action or future misadventure against their adversary.

1- Arms Control/ Disarmament and Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Geo-politics and geo-economics are increasingly shaping the global order characterized by strategic realignments and producing shifts in alliances and cooperation amongst states at multiple levels. The major development in this respect during the past decade has been the rise of China as an economic and a military power that is projecting soft power and influence through regional and global economic outreach. Over the past fifteen years, the United States has been supporting India's rise as a strategic partner against China with the singular goal of

containing China's rise. China on its part, has come closer to Russia as partners with shared strategic goals with respect to limiting US influence in the Asia-Pacific. Nevertheless, despite these shifting geo-economic and geo-strategic trends, nonproliferation and arms control continues to remain relevant for maintaining global peace, security and stability, (particularly in the wake of the US withdrawal from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces in Europe (INF) Treaty in 2019 and the growing great power strategic competition) as all the major regional and world powers are engaged in large-scale military and strategic force modernization and the nuclear armed states have been investing in improving their nuclear arsenals.

i- NPT- Review Conference Overview

The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT)—the foundation of the global nonproliferation regime—was coming up for review in 2020 but has been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite some procedural and bureaucratic successes, the final preparatory meeting before the 2020 NPT Review Conference foreshadowed further challenging times ahead. The 2019 NPT Preparatory Committee ended its session May 10, 2019 after two weeks of debate that prevented participants from reaching consensus on the recommendations for the Treaty's 10th Review Conference when the NPT marks its 50th Anniversary of its entry into force. The debate underlined the nonproliferation crisis in Iran, which announced midway through the meeting that it would cease to abide by some of the restrictions imposed by the 2015 multilateral nuclear deal formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Iran's announcement came one year after the United States withdrew from the deal and after recent U.S. moved to re-impose sanctions waived by the deal and to levy additional punitive measures. The U.S. "continues to exert maximum pressure to dismantle the JCPOA and [UN Security Council] Resolution 2231," while North Korea continues to add to its nuclear and missile capability.

ii- Implications of Changing Nuclear Order on India and Pakistan

The following are some factors that affect South Asian Strategic Stability:

- Despite other shortcomings of the NPT framework, the three basic observations are: the status of nuclear weapons states that are not signatory to the NPT; maintaining a balance between non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy; managing deterrence stability at the regional level; and connectivity between regional states to move forward toward the goal of global disarmament.
- India and Pakistan are developing their respective nuclear triads and modernizing their conventional military capabilities. The Pulwama-Balakot Crisis tested the efficacy of Pakistan's Full Spectrum Deterrence Posture and re-established the efficacy of its conventional deterrence, thereby preventing the escalation of any major military conflict.²

² Please see the CISS Special Issue on the Pulwama-Balakot Crisis and Operation Swift Retort for a detailed analysis. <https://ciiss.org.pk/PDFs/Special-Issue-f.pdf>.

- In addition to the Indo-US Strategic partnership, the United States and India signed a renewed 10-year Defence Framework, the sanctioning of STA-1 (Strategic Trade Authorization) Status to India and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA). The latter manifests the US policy to mainstream India in the multilateral export control regimes that regulate the export of items related to nuclear dual-use, chemical, missile technology as well as conventional weaponry. As a result, India became a member of three of the four multilateral export control regimes, i.e., Missile Technology Regime (MTCR), Australia Group (AG), and Wassenaar Arrangement (WA).
- India's entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) is still pending, primarily due to lack of consensus within the NSG and China's principled stance of not admitting non-NPT states. But the biggest consequence of the US political decision on an NSG waiver given to India was access to uranium, nuclear fuel and reactor technology, that is promoting vertical proliferation in India.
- The trend of nuclear cooperation for peaceful purposes specifically with India affects regional strategic stability. For instance, the India-Australia Nuclear Agreement 2014, the 2016 India-Japan nuclear deal, and the import of uranium from France, Kazakhstan, Bangladesh, and Russia. The supply of nuclear fuel for peaceful uses will allow India to divert indigenous resources to the military nuclear program which is aggravating strategic anxieties in South Asia.

iii- Addressing the Challenges and the Way Forward

For addressing global nuclear order in line with nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament issues following pathway can be pursued:

- An element of flexibility is required in the non-proliferation regime, as has been already shown in the India-US nuclear deal. The US decision to give unprecedented exception in nuclear cooperation, under the India-US deal, despite the fact that India has not signed the NPT in open defiance of the non-proliferation principles, was a sea change and major departure from for the NPT principles, that affected its credibility. There is an urgent need to envisage a new consensus on disarmament, arms control, and nonproliferation under the UN Charter, and following the standard principle of "equal security for all". This may not be politically feasible for a few states, but in the context of broader global security, uniformity in criteria binds all states and maintains the norms within the nonproliferation regime.
- The NPT clauses related to non-proliferation and peaceful uses require rethinking to build a balanced and fair nonproliferation regime. The rising demand for energy security in developing countries in Asia and the shifting of global energy trends from fossil fuels to alternative energy sources requires the formation of a set of new supply criteria for non-NPT states to meet their energy requirements. Unilateral integration of countries such as India without some agreed criteria would undermine the credibility and universality of the nonproliferation regime.

- Efforts towards entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and negotiations towards conclusion of a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty that accounts for existing stockpiles and a cut-off of future production, is also a way out to rationalize the nonproliferation regime.
- Seeking a balance between crisis, arms race and deterrence stability is the baseline to maintain regional strategic balance to address associated risks and challenges to mitigate regional security dilemmas. In pursuit of regional stability, Pakistan's proposal of strategic restraint regime offers three interlocking elements of nuclear restraint, conventional balance and dispute settlement to India. Such a regime could be a starting point for regional stability.
- An official dialogue process between India and Pakistan should be resumed to moderate risks posed by the vertical proliferation of destabilizing military technologies that undermine deterrence and strategic stability.
- The role of big powers in mediating between India and Pakistan may help in facilitating the resolution of deep-rooted conflicts such as Jammu and Kashmir by moving beyond debates surrounding the widely accepted rational deterrence model.

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If an NSG membership for India goes ahead without following a criteria-based approach, it would once again grant an exemption in violation of the spirit of the NSG and undermine nonproliferation norms.

Pakistan's application for NSG membership is based on following a criteria-based approach for non-NPT states as the country has legitimate energy needs for socio-economic development. It requires a robust and varied energy mix to guarantee energy security and nuclear energy is one of important and efficient sources of energy. Pakistan is also looking to develop renewables and other alternatives but to have a base load energy security, it is seeking to develop its nuclear energy program under IAEA safeguards by installing additional nuclear power plants through international cooperation. Pakistan can therefore contribute to the global promotion of peaceful uses of nuclear energy on the basis of its proven and successful record of operating nuclear power plants for several decades.

As a nuclear-weapon state outside the NPT regime, Pakistan seeks access to advanced nuclear technologies for peaceful purposes. To secure international cooperation from NSG supplier states, as a starting point, Pakistan may consider the option of announcing adherence with Article 1, 3 (2) and 6 of the NPT. From here onwards, a non-proliferation and strategic stability dialogue between Pakistan and NPT-Nuclear Weapon States and select members of the NSG can be initiated, focusing on FMCT and CTBT, declaratory nuclear policies, Pakistan's integration into the export-control regimes and membership of the NSG. Only through sustained high-level dialogue can these objectives be achieved.

Pakistan as a responsible nuclear weapon state has tried hard to support the global objectives of nuclear non-proliferation, nuclear safety and security. This responsible nuclear stewardship by Pakistan has contributed in improving international perceptions and positive relationships in the global nuclear order specifically with the IAEA. However, significant impediments remain in accomplishing a mainstreamed relationship in the nuclear order including the membership of the NSG. Consistent with its official stance of a criteria-based approach for inclusion in the nuclear export control regimes, Pakistan would have to follow legal commitments associated with them eventually. In this context, it would be prudent for Pakistan to contemplate a possibility for mainstreaming by considering the country-specific Additional Protocol for its civilian nuclear facilities. This alone may not be sufficient for nuclear mainstreaming but it will be useful in enhancing Pakistan's credentials for entry into the NSG and other export control arrangements.

Finally, it is important for the global strategic cooperation and initiatives to direct and draw attention towards the need for innovative thinking regarding approaches concerning major issues of non-proliferation and disarmament, in order to cope up with the complex and multi-faceted challenges ahead.

2- Pakistan's External Relations

i- India-Pakistan Relations

In 2019, there were three major developments in the India-Pakistan relations: The Pulwama-Balakot Crisis; Annexation of Indian-Occupied Jammu & Kashmir; and, the Kartarpur Corridor.

a- The Pulwama-Balakot Crisis

Pakistan made diplomatic and military breakthroughs in the India-Pakistan Pulwama-Balakot Crisis in February 2019. Initially, after the attack on an Indian paramilitary convoy in Pulwama, a city in the Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan offered to cooperate with India in the investigation of the attack based on actionable evidence. Failing that, and in response to Indian airstrikes across the Line of Control on February 26, 2019, the PAF launched a restrained counter-strike near Indian military facilities in Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir and deliberately avoided hitting military targets, demonstrating the resolve to retaliate in kind, but keeping the scope for de-escalation through a calibrated and restrained response. Lastly, even as India threatened to escalate the crisis and strike Pakistani targets with cruise missiles on Pakistan's mainland in the wake of the PAF's shooting down the Indian Mig-21 and capturing its pilot, Abhinandan, Islamabad released the pilot as a gesture of peace and goodwill. The crisis was primarily defused through third-party mediation involving not only the United States, but active participation by other powers such as China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and the European Union.

We draw two broader inferences from the Pulwama-Balakot Crisis. One, in an event of a terrorist attack in India, New Delhi is likely to resort to military action against Pakistan, primarily due to domestic political reasons and the commitment trap of India's increasingly belligerent and irrational Hindu fundamentalist government. There could be other multiple motivational factors for such a strike: the growing conventional and strategic force asymmetries and increasing power differential; military and diplomatic support of the U.S. and other Western powers; and, New Delhi's newfound assertiveness in the region as a net security provider as part of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy for containing China's rise as the next superpower of the twenty-first century.

The second inference is about Pakistan. Pakistan demonstrated its resolve for retaliation and reinforced its conventional deterrence in the Pulwama-Balakot crisis. Also, it was a diplomatic success of Pakistan as all its political and military institutions performed commendably well in the crisis. However, there are a few challenges to grapple with.

First, Islamabad will have to play proactive diplomacy and ensure that no group linked to Pakistan is implicated by Indian or Western media for any terrorist attack without verifiable and actionable evidence. Islamabad can be blamed for helping in the planning or abetting of a terrorist attack in India by Indian intelligence agencies and can be reported in international media by circulating a false acceptance by a Pakistan-based group. Second, none of Pakistan's strong strategic partners condemned India's violation of Pakistan's territorial sovereignty and only issued statements for restraint on both ends. The possible reasons are India's profound market potential, both as an economic powerhouse and a lucrative defence market.

b- Annexation of Indian-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir

By revoking Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, India's BJP government has been claiming that by making the disputed area a part of Indian territory, it will be legally feasible for foreign and local investments to come in that will increase employment opportunities and help eradicate separatism and terrorism from Indian-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

To India's disappointment, local Kashmiris, including common citizens as well as the political leadership, stood against the Indian government's violation of their constitutional right of self-autonomy. Fearing the massive demonstrations by Kashmiris, the Indian government has, since August 2019, imposed an unprecedented and appalling curfew and communication blackout. It is self-explanatory that the decision does not represent the popular will of the Kashmiri citizens in a country that claims to be the world's largest democracy.

Against the derailment of democratic principles and human rights violations, the U.S. Congress and the European Parliament, the biggest proponents of New Delhi, have condemned the Indian government's decision. Besides, international news media, including New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal—the most popular and widely read newspapers in

the U.S., have reported the Indian violation of democratic and human rights. By abrogating the self-autonomy of Indian-Occupied Jammu & Kashmir and sidelining the democratic principles, New Delhi has internationalized the territorial dispute between India and Pakistan (including China whose Aksai Chin region bordering Ladakh is claimed by India) , as more countries and world leaders are pressurizing India to respect democratic and human rights in Kashmir.

Pakistan has played a commendable role in motivating international diaspora and engaging with World leaders in major powers, especially in Washington, London, and Brussels, for the resolution of the Kashmir crisis and ending the inhuman suppression and imprisonment of the people of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. The Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan and U.S. President Donald Trump have developed effective personal chemistry as seen in Mr. Trump's remarks for mediation between Islamabad and New Delhi on the Kashmir dispute. All told, Pakistan may have to continue to exert diplomatic and political pressure against the elements of democratic and human rights violations in Kashmir to garner international support on the Kashmir dispute. It must ensure that New Delhi or its media does not get through projecting the Kashmir dispute as one of separatism and terrorism by invoking Pakistan-based religious groups' involvement in the Indian annexed Jammu and Kashmir.

c- Kartarpur Corridor versus the Indian Citizenship Act

Pakistan and India are following very conflicting policies on religious harmony and freedom. Islamabad inaugurated the Kartarpur Corridor in 2019, invited Sikh pilgrims from all over the world, in addition to Sikh political leaders from India. The Kartarpur Corridor is a milestone in Pakistan's efforts of respect for all creeds and religious coexistence.

On the other hand, New Delhi published a National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the state of Assam and identified only those immigrants as legal ones that resided in India on or before March 25, 1971. Besides, the promulgation of the Citizenship Amendment Act assures non-Muslim communities from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Pakistan that they will be granted citizenship if they prove that they or their ancestors belonged to a persecuted community from the three countries and that they resided in India before December 31, 2014. Those immigrants—largely Muslims—who fail to prove their residence before March 25, 1971, will be deported to their respective countries. The BJP-led Government of India seeks to consolidate the Hindu majority vote and ethnically cleanse India of its Muslim population. Both the NRC and the CAA have anti-Muslim undertones and undermine India's secular and pluralist credentials. These laws could severely affect India's ties with Bangladesh, which is already facing the large influx of Myanmar refugees and will have to bear an additional burden of deported Muslims from Assam. Above all, the Sheikh Hasina-led Government in Dhaka has questioned the BJP Government's claim that Hindus and Sikhs were persecuted in Bangladesh. Reportedly, the scheduled visits of Bangladeshi high officials to India were canceled due to the apprehensions regarding the NRC and CAA.

ii- U.S.-Pakistan Relations

The Afghan peace process has dominated the U.S.-Pakistan relationship for the past two decades. While it may appear that the U.S.-Pakistan relations are improving, the fact of the matter is that this relationship had been entirely centered on the progress in the Afghan peace process. This has successfully culminated in a peace deal between the Afghan Taliban and the US, thanks to the sincere and far-reaching good offices of Pakistan, Qatar, and others.

President Donald Trump's mediation offer on the Kashmir dispute with India remains purely symbolic talk to ingratiate himself with Pakistan's civil and military leadership. Islamabad should not read too much into Donald Trump's talk or the outreach of U.S. top diplomat for South and Central Asia, Alice Wells, for economic engagement. To wit, these positive political engagements signify an effort to perk up strained ties since 2011.

This assessment only suggests a cautious optimism toward the United States. Pakistan must always remain open to foreign investments. A wide-ranging engagement of multinational corporations of the US or any country for that matter, in Pakistan's economic and defense markets will lead to the US's favorable foreign policy toward Pakistan. Essentially, economic interdependencies will make it less likely for the relationship to slide down, thanks to mutual vulnerabilities and stakes in each other's markets. China-U.S., China-India, and Indo-U.S. relationships are cases in point. Pakistan's interests will be better served if it can diversify its economic and defence relations with multiple countries and desist from over-reliance on a limited number of partners.

The US is one of Pakistan's largest export markets. Islamabad can enhance its engagement with Washington in multiple sectors ranging from education, health, agriculture, and energy in the socio-economic sphere to counter-terrorism, anti-sea piracy, military training and education, and defense equipment supplies in the military domain. Expanding US business engagements in Pakistan can offer effective leverage to maximize Pakistan's national interest and extract diplomatic benefits from Washington on issues ranging from FATF and IMF loans to non-partisan mediation on the Kashmir dispute, and criteria-based NSG membership.

iii- Pakistan-China Relations

Pakistan has enjoyed an "all-weather" friendship with China which has stood the test of time. It made headway in both the economic and strategic domains during 2019. In the first phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), twelve projects were completed, of which seven energy-related projects contributed 3,240 megawatts to the national electric grid; the 392-kilometer Multan-Sukkur motorway was completed; and, 823-kilometer fiber-optic cable network was laid out. Now, the CPEC has entered a new phase of industrialization and smart city development projects. It is hoped that the focus of these investments will be on social sector development, a vast network of manufacturing industries, robotics, and other high-tech

industries, which will generate not only employment opportunities for Pakistani labor force but also contribute a significant value-addition in the GDP.

In the defence sector, Pakistan and China signed several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) during 2019 for enhancing the defense cooperation and capacity-building of Pakistan's armed forces. Since 1991, Pakistan has been the largest single export destination of Chinese arms exports. Pakistan purchased 37 percent of Chinese arms during the 2014-18 period. Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) and Chinese National Aero-Technology Import & Export Corporation (CATIC) co-produced eight dual-seat JF-17 aircraft in a record period of five months. In naval cooperation last year, Karachi Shipyard and Engineering Works (KS&EW), in collaboration with Chinese Ship-building and Trading Company (CSTC), launched a 1500-tonne state-of-the-art Maritime Patrol Vessel (MPV), with employability for maritime security, search and rescue missions and anti-sea piracy campaign. Pakistani and Chinese navies have also conducted joint naval drills in the northern Arabian Sea.

China remains Pakistan's key ally and partner at international forums, in particular for raising the Kashmir dispute with India; requesting the international community to acknowledge Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts; endorsing Pakistan's stance of criteria-based membership in the NSG; and along with Turkey and Malaysia, supporting Pakistan's case at the FATF.

Islamabad needs to ensure that its economic and diplomatic engagement with the United States must not come about at the expense of its ties with China. Pakistan will have to balance its relationship with two rival strategic partners to maximize its national interest by engaging with both great powers. Not the least, economic and defense diversification are the right courses of pursuing foreign relations for securing long-term strategic objectives.

Forecast 2020

i- Pakistan-India Relations

Relations between India and Pakistan are expected to remain strained in 2020, in terms of crisis instability, Kashmir crisis, and the Hindutva nationalism.

Crisis Instability: The BJP-led Government of India has adopted a policy of assertiveness in the region, fueled by its domestic political imperatives and world powers' appeasement of India's revisionist regional approach. Crisis stability requires political will and statesmanship; the BJP-led Government of India lacks both. Instead, BJP's domestic politics thrives on national security rhetoric, anti-Pakistan tirade and belligerent actions like surgical strikes against Pakistan. It would be no surprise if the Indian Army creates another excuse to conduct military strikes against Pakistan or takes aggressive initiative without any justification to conduct an attack on Azad Kashmir or Gilgit Baltistan to occupy a part of the territory.

To avert such an eventuality, Islamabad has declared the policy of Quid Pro Quo Plus. The objective of such a strategy is to reinforce the efficacy of Pakistan's conventional deterrence against India's limited conventional attack against Pakistan. In the future, if New Delhi ever

contemplates a misadventure on Pakistan's mainland or Azad Kashmir, Pakistan is likely to respond with a matching or disproportionate counterstrike. By adopting such a strategy, Pakistani strategists believe that they will be able to deter an Indian attempt to carry out a military strike against Pakistan.

However, some strategic analysts in Islamabad argue that there will always be a room for surgical strikes a la Balakot for India. It will be hard, if not impossible, for Pakistan to deter such hit-and-run military strikes. Moreover, Pakistan's resolve to retaliate in kind may not achieve similar results in the future. This is rooted in the belief that manpower or material losses in any future clash might trigger escalation. Hardly anyone can forecast the future trajectory of the conflict in terms of whether it will remain a limited war. Pakistani strategic analysts believe that the limited warfare suits the country's military capacity while a prolonged conflict of attrition will favor India prompting vertical escalation.

Nonetheless, Pakistan has indeed demonstrated a strong resolve to retaliate with a larger magnitude, in case the country's territory is violated again. New Delhi knows that the costs of taking military action against Pakistan will outweigh the benefits. The Pulwama-Balakot crisis has proved that the operational readiness and superior training of Pakistani pilots tipped the scales against the Indian Air Force. Nonetheless, Pakistan's Full Spectrum Deterrence Posture is developed for deterring all levels of the evolving threat and India does not currently enjoy a decisive conventional edge. However, if asymmetries in conventional and strategic forces continue to grow in India's favor during this decade, it can seriously undermine deterrence stability.

ii- Kashmir Crisis

It will be far-fetched to expect any reversal on the part of the Indian Government on its decision to revoke the annexation of Indian-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir or to restore its autonomous constitutional status. There is, however, a possibility of restoration of internet and communication services even though it is hard to forecast if New Delhi would allow free movement in 2020 or release the Kashmiri political leaders. Indian leaders might be perceiving the Covid-19 pandemic as a blessing in disguise to justify the indefinite extension of a lockdown in India, as in many other countries. If the Covid-19 pandemic persists, New Delhi may not face criticism on the Kashmir-wide restriction on mass movements.

Foreign countries expect that New Delhi will handle the situation in Occupied Jammu and Kashmir democratically and much of the international community considers it as India's domestic political matter due to India's growing international economic and diplomatic influence, and the impact of its soft power. This pattern will continue in the future. China, Turkey, Iran, and Malaysia have endorsed Pakistan's and the United Nation's stance on the disputed nature of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. It is, however, unclear if Mahathir's successor in Malaysia will continue to raise the Kashmir issue with India in the future. In the US, President Trump may once again offer mediation, but the State Department, and the

bureaucracy in Washington D.C., considers the Kashmir issue as an internal matter of India and does not appear to be willing to overcome Indian objections on third-party mediation. Some of US Congress members may also continue to raise intermittent voices against India's falling standards of democratic and human rights, but their rhetoric does not shape the US foreign policy. Similarly, international media, when it gets space after covering the Covid-19, may also sporadically publish editorials and opinion pieces on the Kashmir issue, but this is unlikely to make any considerable dent on New Delhi's political standing globally.

Indian Citizenship Act and Hindu Nationalism: If there is one element in Indian politics that could affect New Delhi's international credibility as the largest democracy is the incumbent Government's Hindutva ideology and its drive for Hindu nationalism. The BJP-led Government plans to publish the National Register of Citizens (NRC) nationwide and is poised to disregard the large-scale demonstrations against the NRC in the state of Assam or potentially in other states as well where it will be launched. Since most of the immigrant Muslims are Bengalis, the NRC could prove to be bone of contention in the India-Bangladesh ties, when a large chunk of illegal immigrants, henceforth, are deported to Dhaka.

It should be noted that the Citizenship Amendment Act does not cover either sects within Islam or Muslim ethnic communities; if it did, the Act could also worsen relations with Pakistan. For a certain number of Pakistani nationals (ethnic Balochi or Shia Hazaras) might have immigrated to India in the past. As far as Afghanistan is concerned, the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, called on the Indian Government to grant citizenship to Afghan Muslims (largely Shia Hazaras), who might have migrated to India as a result of the Taliban's targeted persecution against them. Even so, this issue does not portend to affect India's relations with Afghanistan.

Lastly, if the NRC is rolled out nationwide, as the BJP's agenda goes, it could ignite massive protests across various states in India. Besides, the international community, including media and political and civil society leaders, will also continue to condemn India's long-held secular and pluralist credentials. This issue could be the single most important determinant of New Delhi's loss of moral high ground in the international community.

iii- U.S. Pakistan Ties

First, there isn't much in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship at the bilateral level; for most of the history of the relationship, the United States has looked toward Pakistan from a regional political landscape and the relationship has remained a transactional one. One can argue that the U.S. is Pakistan's largest export destination; hundreds of students go to the U.S. every year for higher education; and, U.S. development agencies are working efficiently in Pakistan. But, in the realist perspective, the level of military-to-military ties that the two countries had in the first decade of the 21st century is not there anymore. In the future, the two countries will have modest bilateral economic and security ties and challenging ties from a regional perspective, thanks to India's designation as the key to the success of the US Indo-Pacific strategy.

On the question of Afghanistan: To reiterate what is stated in the assessment part, the U.S. Pakistan relationship will continue to be largely governed by the progress in the Afghan peace process. In case of the U.S. troops withdrawal, Washington may look toward Pakistan to continue to diplomatically support the Afghan Government in addressing terrorism and stability concerns. U.S. officials, as well as political analysts, recognize Pakistan as an effective and capable counter-terrorism partner of the United States. This paradigm toward Pakistan will persist in the future as well. This may, at some point, allow for the resumption of sale of military hardware to Pakistan, although on a limited scale.

India as a factor in the U.S.'s strategic calculation will not augur well for strategic stability in South Asia that Pakistan desires. Though Islamabad expects the U.S. to look toward the sub-continent on the parity basis, and not empower one country in ways that creates a security dilemma for another country, the U.S. views the region from the prism of the Indo-Pacific strategy. Washington will continue to regard New Delhi as a net security provider and counterweight to China's political and military rise in the Indo-Pacific region. The U.S. will continue to arm India with high-tech military hardware to boost its military power to rival China. Washington will not take into account Pakistan's security dilemma as a result of India's growing military potential. Nor will India's bad record on democratic and human rights standards influence the U.S.'s perception of it as a potential counterweight to China. To be sure, New Delhi's domestic politics does not appear to factor in the U.S. strategic assessment. This pattern will continue for the foreseeable future.

Regarding Pakistan's relationship with China, Pakistani officials will continue to receive the anti-China rhetoric and criticism of whatever China is doing in Pakistan from US officials. The U.S. National Security Strategy 2018 designated China as a strategic rival and competitor. Whatever China does anywhere in the world, one could notice the American officials and academia and political analysts highlight "problems" in Chinese investments. The anti-China discourse is constructed by officials and political scientists in the U.S. and propagated by them world-wide. The U.S.'s criticism of Chinese economic investments in Pakistan, including the development of Gawadar port, and technological and industrial infrastructure, implies an effort to malign China. Washington also tends to coerce countries all over the world not to buy Chinese products, or use its technological services. The communication technology from China is used by Chinese for surveillance, but one from the U.S. is for connectivity nationwide and worldwide—so the argument goes.

U.S.'s criticism of Chinese technology and investment has not necessarily pushed countries of Europe, for example, to abandon the economic relationship with China, nor have they stood up against the U.S. and criticized it for its instructive discourse. They continue to pursue their relationship with the U.S. and China on their terms. Pakistan's interests will also be better served if it does not become a partisan to the U.S.-China strategic competition and pursues its relationship with both the powers independent of each other.

iv- Pakistan-China Relationship

China will continue to remain Pakistan's unwavering strategic and economic partner and will continue to support Pakistan at various multilateral and diplomatic forums.

Economy: CPEC will continue to make a significant contribution to Pakistan's industrialization, smart city projects, operationalization of Gawadar port, road and railway network, transport system, and enhanced quality in the speed of internet communication and connectivity. Unfortunately, despite China being the largest trade partner, with the bilateral trade volume of \$15.7 billion, Pakistan's exports represented only \$1.7 billion, with a trade deficit of \$14 billion. China's investment in Pakistan's Special Economic Zones and Economic Processing Zones could boost Pakistan's export volume to China.

Special Economic Zones (SEZs): The groundbreaking of Rashakai Economic Zone, Nowshera, Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa, is scheduled for mid-2020 which is expected to be inaugurated by Chinese President Xi Jinping. This SEZ will consist of industries related to various textile and food-processing industries. The Allama Iqbal Industrial City (AIIC), Faisalabad, spread over approximately 3000 acres, was inaugurated last year. Textile, pharmaceuticals, engineering, and food processing industries will be established in the AIIC. Also, the Dhabeji Special Economic Zone in Thatta, Sindh, was launched for the bidding process last year. The provincial government of Sindh invited proposals for investment in Dhabeji for building and operating various projects under the economic Zone.

Infrastructure projects: The second phase of the Karakoram Highway (Thakot-Havelian Section), which is 118 km long, was scheduled to be completed by March 2020. Last year, the Multan-Sukkur section (392 km long) of the Karachi-Peshawar Motorway was completed and became operational in November 2019.

In the next five years, Pakistan and China have planned the simultaneous development of Gawadar port and smart city projects. It is estimated that the Gawadar East-Bay Expressway, the main artery of Gawadar Port, which will be connected with the entire network of traffic for the transit of import and export to and from the rest of the country, will be completed in October 2020. Also, the work on New Gawadar International Airport started in October 2019.

v- Defence Sector Developments

Pakistan will acquire four Type 054AP frigates from China by 2021. These are some of the most technologically advanced surface combatant naval ships, with the capability of conducting anti-surface, anti-submarine, and anti-air warfare. Its air defense system can engage with aerial targets at a distance of up to 40-70 kilometers and is capable of firing medium-range anti-ship anti-air defense missiles. The Pakistan Navy is also scheduled to begin receiving four ADA Class guided missile corvettes from Turkey in the coming years and will receive the second Damen Class guided missile corvette from Romania by May 2020. These inductions will give a quantum jump in Pakistan Navy's overall combat capability.

The Pakistan Air Force will deploy the latest version of JF-17 Thunder Block-III multirole fighter aircraft in 2020. Pakistan also plans to buy the latest Chinese Z-10ME attack helicopters to match India's acquisition of the Boeing AH-64E Apache attack helicopters. It should be noted that the Chinese attack helicopter was the third preferred option in Pakistan's acquisition plan. Earlier, Pakistan was interested in purchasing 12 Bell AH-1Z Viper helicopters from the U.S. under the Financial Military Sales agreement. The U.S. State Department also approved the sale in 2015 and the delivery by Bell was agreed in 2016 that was to arrive in Pakistan in 2017. However, due to President Trump's suspension of security assistance to Islamabad, the delivery did not materialize. Failing that, Pakistan sought to acquire the Turkish T129s attack helicopters, which also uses an American engine. The U.S., however, didn't grant Turkey the export licenses for that engine, resulting in the suspension of its sale. Turkey is now building its engine indigenously. Pakistan has planned to make a final decision in the mid-2020 whether it would go for the Turkish T129s or Chinese Z10-ME, which are the upgraded version of Z10 helicopters and possess the equivalent capabilities of what Pakistan was buying from the U.S.

These potential developments in the future suggest that despite Pakistan's facilitation of the Afghan peace process and the "honorable exit" of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, Washington does not appear to resume the "financial military sales (read subsidized sales)". Does this imply that Pakistan can buy the American military equipment by paying full amount of the sales? Probably yes. But the U.S. will not subsidize military sales of its military technology to Pakistan. All of this boils down perhaps to Islamabad's financial capacity to buy the high-tech military hardware from anywhere in the world. Nevertheless, Pakistan will continue to depend on Chinese or Turkish military technology for meeting its defence requirements.

vi- Multilateral Diplomacy

It appears certain that China will continue to endorse Pakistan at the multilateral forums on the Kashmir issue and the FATF grey-listing. China is the only major power that supports Pakistan at multilateral forums; other major powers, including the U.S., Britain, France, and Russia have strong defence ties with India, and therefore more often than not, endorse New Delhi's stance at global forums. This pattern is likely to continue in the foreseeable future until Pakistan strengthens its economy and offers trade and investment incentives through a sustained GDP growth rate.

3- Developments in Deterrence Stability in South Asia

Some Highlights of Strategic, Arms Control and Disarmament Developments are as follows:

1. On January 30, China indicated it would continue to block India's entry into the NSG.
2. On January 24, India's Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) in cooperation with the Indian Navy successfully test-fired long-range surface-to-air (LR-SAM) Barak-8 missile system.
3. On January 18, India successfully test-fired a new generation air-to-surface anti-radiation missile called NGARM.

4. According to Sputnik on February 12, India successfully tested its indigenously developed high-altitude interceptor missile Prithvi Defence Vehicle (PDV).
5. On February 8, India successfully test-fired an air-to-air version of an anti-tank missile.
6. On February 6, the US agreed to sell two missile defence systems to India for two Boeing-777 aircraft at an estimated cost of \$190 million.
7. On February 8, India's Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) successfully flight tested the second indigenously developed 'Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR)' propulsion-based missile system.
8. On March 7, India and Russia signed a \$3 billion lease agreement for a Russian nuclear-powered attack submarine (SSN).
9. According to the *Times of India* on March 14, India's Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) conducted two successful tests of the Anti-Tank guided missile on March 13 and 14, 2019, respectively.
10. According to *The Hindu* on March 13, India conducted three successful trials of the Pinaka-guided missile at Pokhran; two trials were conducted on March 11, 2019, and one on March 12, 2019.
11. On March 13, the US assured India of its commitment to strengthen bilateral security and civil nuclear cooperation with the country, including the establishment of six US-designed nuclear power plants in India.
12. On March 12, the PAF successfully test-fired an indigenously developed extended range "smart weapon" from JF-17 multi-role fighter aircraft.
13. On March 11, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) released its annual report titled 'Trends in International Arms Transfers-2018,' indicating that the five largest global arms exporters between 2014 and 2018 were the US, Russia, France, Germany and China.
14. On March 28, Russia and Pakistan agreed on the need for preserving multilateralism in the field of international security and disarmament. On March 20, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov discussed new problems faced by arms control treaties.
15. On March 27, India claimed to have successfully tested an anti-satellite (ASAT) missile destroying an orbiting satellite at an altitude of approximately 300 km.
16. According to *The News*, on March 25, Pakistan deployed the Chinese-made medium-range air-defence system in several cities and military bases to prevent possible new strikes by the Indian Air Force (IAF).

Like previous few years, India continued to modernize its strategic missile program in 2019 as well, whereas Pakistan continued with its own measured pace of military modernization and development. On comparison, India conducted 17 tests of nuclear capable missile systems in 2019, whereas Pakistan test fired just 6 missiles. India tested four types of land-based, nuclear-capable ballistic missiles: the short-range Agni-1 (1 tests), Prithvi-II (5 tests), the medium range Agni II (1 test), the Intermediate-Range Agni-III (1 test). Currently, Agni I, Agni II, Agni-

III and Prithvi-II are operational in India's Strategic Forces Command (SFC). It was reported that Agni-V may enter service in 2020 after few more tests. Agni-VI is already said to be in the developmental phase. In 2019, India remained focused on its annual training cycle for combat readiness of its SFC, as all the ballistic missiles (Agni-II, Agni-III and Prithvi-II) were tested at night. The Agni-I was designed specifically with a range to hold Pakistani targets at risk and the Agni-II is largely considered as the backbone of the India's land-based nuclear deterrent, whereas, the Agni III was designed to hold at risk targets in all of Pakistan and much of China.

India is also modernizing its cruise missiles that can be launched from a variety of platforms. The sub-sonic cruise missile Nirbhay, was tested once, however the super-sonic, Brahmos, was tested nine times in 2019. Significantly, the conventional warhead of Brahmos can be replaced with a miniaturized nuclear warhead while Nirbhay is also potentially nuclear capable and is dubbed as the "Backbone of Cold Start." The BrahMos has been graded as the world's fastest cruise missile with multi-role and multi-platform abilities from land, air and sea. This supersonic cruise missile is being viewed as a strategic asset against China and Pakistan with high-accuracy and supersonic speed of Mach 2.8 and low cruising altitude of 10 meters.

BrahMos's test from Indian Navy's stealth destroyer, INS Kochi, was declared as a big leg up for India's defense preparedness as this ship can carry 16 BrahMos missiles in two 8 cell Vertical Launch Systems. It was also reported that India will be testing BrahMos with extended range of 800 km in 2020. Currently, two IAF Su-30 MKI fighters have been converted to carry the air-launched variant of the BrahMos. Whereas, a total of 40 Su-30 MKIs are expected to be retrofitted to carry the 2.5-ton the Brahmos Air Launched Cruise Missile under the SFC, thus giving it a dedicated nuclear role. India is also in the process of securing export contracts for the Brahmos to Vietnam and other South East Asian countries.

India also operates a range of sea-based missiles. To further strengthen its capabilities of hitting enemy targets from submarines, India tested its 3,500 km range K-4 Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM). At least one K-4 was tested at a depressed trajectory, this making it another Pakistan-specific missile, launched from a second-strike SSBN platform.

In May 2019, India test fired a medium range surface to air missile Akash MK1S, which is an advanced version of the existing Akash air defense missile and is capable of neutralizing advanced aerial targets such as fighter jets, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles. India is focusing on boosting its air defense capabilities. To this end, India also tested two indigenously developed Quick Reaction Surface to Air missile (QRSAM) in February 2019.

Initial reports suggested that the DRDO carried out a successful test of the indigenously developed unmanned demonstrator aircraft that can operate at hypersonic speeds carrying missiles, but later reports suggested that the DRDO could not achieve the desired results. India also test-fired an anti-satellite missile in March 2019 that shot down one of its own satellites, escalating the strategic anxieties in China and Pakistan, and showing a strategic capability in

space that few countries possess. It could allow India to blind an enemy by taking out its space-based communication and surveillance satellites.

The most important trend in 2019 is that India mainly tested its dual-capable missile capabilities with Pakistan-specific ranges. The improvement, production and induction of a greater number of short-range systems in 2019, such as ballistic and cruise missiles i.e. Agni-I, Agni-II, Prithvi-II, BrahMos and Nirbhay cruise missiles, points towards the development of a counterforce capabilities against Pakistan.

Pakistan conducted two flight tests of the short-range Nasr, with a strike range of about 70-km, designed to defeat all known missile defence systems. These tests are designed to improve the efficacy of Pakistan's strategic forces against India's acquisitions of missile defense systems from Russia and the United States. Moreover, Pakistan's Directorate General of Munitions Production also indicated that Pakistan might be working on the development of a supersonic cruise missile.

Forecast 2020

While Pakistan has not added any new unsafeguarded nuclear plant or facility to its existing strategic nuclear infrastructure in recent years, India continues work on its 125 MWt Dhruva-II production reactor and a 35 MWt research reactor. India also approved the construction of ten 700 MWe power reactors and continues work on expanding its uranium enrichment capacity to 126000 Separative Work Units per year by the end of the decade. India's Department of Atomic Energy is also increasing the size and efficiency of its fuel reprocessing plants which will allow it to separate much larger quantities of weapon-usable plutonium accumulated from its unsafeguarded power reactors. India's elusive quest for commissioning its first Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor was again delayed time due to technical hurdles. It was the initially designed to be commissioned in 2010 but has suffered repeated delays in its start-up for ten years in a row. Nevertheless, India remains committed to operationalizing its three-stage nuclear power program—intended to serve the dual purpose of its civilian and strategic weapons program outside IAEA safeguards. Coupled with India's aggressive missile development and testing program and investments in building a new class of nuclear submarines and missile defences, vertical nuclear proliferation in India is still the largest such enterprise dedicated for dual-use purposes outside the NPT nuclear states and continues to exacerbate strategic instability in South Asia.

Concluding Comment

With the start of 2020, the world began to be engulfed in the Covid-19 pandemic that originated in China and has spread over 200 countries. Since January, it has dominated every facet of national life and societies across the globe. With the world economy shut down and millions of infections and thousands of fatalities, forcing much of the world's population to stay

indoors, an altogether new and unprecedented challenge has emerged which has effectively disrupted normal life. The economic and social impact around the world brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic can be termed as a “Weapon of Mass Disruption.” While the Covid-19 pandemic will force countries to readjust their immediate and short-term priorities, challenges and opportunities presented by cyber technologies and AI applications will complement conventional military and nuclear capabilities and would together constitute elements of Cross Domain Deterrence. In the wake of the intensifying competition between Russia and China on the one hand and the US-led Quadrilateral alliance in the Asia Pacific and NATO in Europe on the other, arms control prospects, both at the international and regional levels, are expected to further diminish. This is endorsed by the recent US statements alleging the possibility of China conducting clandestine nuclear tests—most likely to justify a possible US withdrawal from the CTBT and resumption of nuclear tests.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, none of the major global or regional powers have cut down their conventional and strategic development and modernization programs and projects. In fact, the unparalleled plummeting in US and European Gross Domestic Products, and resultant unemployment figures, while China’s relatively effective management of the Covid-19 outbreak within its borders and its steady opening up of the economy, coupled with China’s outreach to the world affected countries, will only heighten western fears of China’s soft power expansion.

In South Asia, despite India’s continued suppression and persecution of minority Muslims in Occupied Jammu and Kashmir and India itself, along with repeated targeting of civilians along the Line of Control in Azad Kashmir will only add to the existing polarization and tension in the region. India’s own massive military and nuclear buildup will add to the irrationality and belligerence of the extremist BJP ruling elite. Pakistan will have to continue its efforts to aggressively engage the international community and flag the gross human rights violations against Kashmiris in India, while maintaining a credible deterrence posture without falling prey to dangerous provocations. The only silver lining for regional peace is the prospect of a political settlement of the Afghan conflict in the wake of the US agreement with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Finally, the full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which is still unfolding, will shape the contours of global politics for the next decade, as it would unleash another round of competition for resources, influence, and global dominance. But the fundamental elements of the great power competition, and regional rivalries, will remain unchanged and traditional, and emerging geo-strategic challenges will continue to shape the international system.



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