



MODI'S NEIGHBOURHOOD FIRST POLICY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN



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Abstract

The rise of Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi in 2014, led to introduction of hardline policies in its regional engagement with smaller states. Under his new 'Neighbourhood First Policy', PM Modi gave a new orientation to the India's foreign policy. To secure economic and security interests, the region was polarized into 'friendly' and 'enemy' states: The containment of China and isolation of Pakistan were aimed through sub-regional connectivity and selective integration with the neighbouring states. With the involvement of the US in regional affairs, India tried to achieve strategic balance in its favour and coerce smaller countries to align with Indian policies. PM Modi's multilateral regional approach created an environment of mistrust affecting regional economic growth while creating economic and security challenges for Pakistan. The least integrated region with lack of economic growth, became susceptible to China's increased economic investment presenting lucrative opportunities to Pakistan to counter India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy. 'Neighbourhood First' policy could not make headway due to Indian reluctance to resolve disputes with neighbours, China-Pakistan economic strategy, Pakistan's diplomatic outreach, and India's interference in the sovereignty of the small states. This article is aimed at analysing Indian 'Neighbourhood First' policy and its implications for Pakistan's security, economy, diplomatic outreach, and would proffer way forward to counter India's hardline approach.

Keywords

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), South Asia (SA), Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJK), Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ETCA), Free Trade Agreement (FTA), Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Gulf Council (GCC), African Union (AU), Bangladesh-Bhutan-India and Nepal (BBIN), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Introduction

India's geo-strategic location and sharing of maritime borders with all the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries provides it geostrategic ascendancy over the regional states significantly giving it central and influential role for securing its strategic and economic interests at regional and international level.¹ Aspirant to become global power, India has been endeavouring to establish its hegemony in South Asia to signal its potential of a 'regional influencer' to the world powers for earning space for itself in the global decision-making process. To this end, India always projected itself as a 'big brother' with self-assumed role of 'net security provider' in the region.

Despite significant potential for collective growth, South Asia is the least integrated region with lack of development and economic cooperation despite shared culture, colonial past, common security threats, and religious linguistic legacy.² India being the largest state of the region, could not play a responsible role in the regional connectivity instead severed its relations with the neighbouring states. Its rigid position over the territorial and water disputes, interference in the sovereign affairs of the small states, hegemonic designs, and reluctance to continue dialogue process led to creating of trust deficit among small neighbours against India. Despite individual growth, the regional states are lacking in infrastructure development, energy needs, and are confronted with challenges of terror, extremism, border disputes, refugees, and natural calamities due to climate change. Amid growing trade and financial crisis, the smaller states became more inclined towards China's growing military and economic clout which led to huge Chinese investment due to accelerated pace of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Pakistan-China economic and strategic partnership created conducive environment towards regional connectivity and economic integration which is viewed with concern by India projecting it as economic and security threat to India's survival. Regional states remained wary of Indian collaboration with foreign powers, interreference in the sovereign affairs of the neighbours and assumption of 'big brother role' unilaterally.

The mistrust further increased with the rise of PM Modi government in 2014. He pledged to pursue

traditional Indian objective of becoming absolute regional power with right to international resources and decision making through regional integration for economic growth and security paradigm. He departed from the previous foreign policy pattern and announced 'Neighbourhood First Policy' emphasising the need to realign the region towards economic and security cooperation, regulate development orientation, and effective utilisation of the regional resources. In a diplomatic gesture, he invited heads of all SAARC countries on his swearing in ceremony in 2014 and arranged individual meetings with all the leaders.

To contain China and isolate Pakistan at regional and global forums, PM Modi created an environment of polarisation in the region. The small states were urged to integrate against the 'enemy states', i.e. China and Pakistan. Economic securitisation, trade connectivity, creation of sub-regional forums, investment in neighbouring states, and coercion through interference and increased military power were instrumental in creating favourable environment for India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy. SAARC was downplayed and was replaced with other sub-regional forums. Similarly, Indo-US strategic relations were based on common interests of containing China, regional economic growth and enhanced security in Indo-Pacific region thereby involving US in the regional affairs. These measures contributed to the wide trust deficit already existing against India.



Though PM Modi's 'Neighbourhood First' policy could not succeed in relegating Pakistan at regional and global forums due to frequent changing preferences of the players in the international politics. However, it involved Pakistan in a web of challenges by maligning it as 'terror sponsor' state. Through its alliance strategy, Pakistan was relegated to Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list to degrade it and weaken its engagement with regional states. The US was urged to constantly pressurise Pakistan for stern measures against terror and abandon military support for Pakistan. Pakistan was disengaged in dialogues on bilateral issues and was subjected to hybrid warfare and political disturbance to sever its relations with regional states and damage its capacity to maintain regional influence. These policies resulted in economic, diplomatic, and security implications for Pakistan which were managed successfully and tactfully by Pakistan.

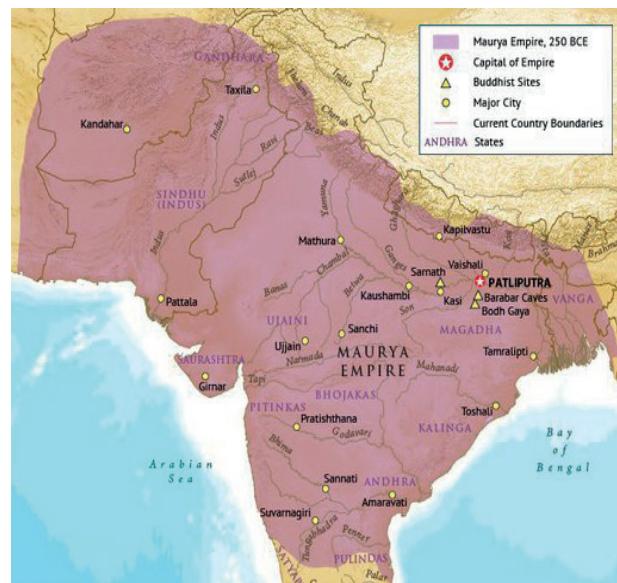
This article is intended to critically analyse the 'Neighbourhood First' policy of PM Modi's government and draw its implications for Pakistan's economy and security. It will weigh out the prospects of economic and regional integration for Pakistan through China-Pakistan relations and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Neighbourhood First Policy-Changing Orientation

Indian sub-continent emerged as a significant region during cold war and was renamed as 'South Asia' in the US strategic mapping.³ India's historians claim that the vast region from Afghanistan to Myanmar have been part of greater Indian civilisation of the past therefore for India, the immediate neighbourhood expands to the edge of the Himalayas in the North and Indian Ocean in the South giving India a vast 'sphere of influence'.⁴ India always visualised greater dominance over the neighbouring region due to rich Indian culture, vast geography, better economy, military might, and political strength hence assert a superior standing among the regional states. Considering its vast resources and power potential, the regional states are perceived mostly dependent on India for their economic and political growth. With the shift of US strategy towards South Asia, India realised its importance as a springboard to acquire global standing, hence India outlined a policy of integrating region and enhanced

connectivity for consolidating its significant geo-politico and geo-economic presence to project itself as a regional power with the potential to become global player.

Underpinning Kautalyan ideology of 'you can change friends but not neighbours', Indian neighbourhood foreign policy has historically been based on economic and security interests of the country.⁵ Under Nehruvian approach, the principles, and boundaries of the neighbourhood were defined and the principle of 'no interference' was adopted. Indira doctrine also urged for keeping the international powers away from its traditional sphere of influence considering it the 'regional security framework'.⁶ Whereas, the 'Neighbourhood Policy' of PM Modi had a different orientation than the PM Nehru's and PM Indira Gandhi's policies. 'Neighbourhood First' became the striking and dominant factor of PM Modi's diplomatic outreach to the regional states commonly renamed as 'Modi doctrine'. He visualised serving India's economic and security interests by promoting selective regional and sub-regional connectivity at regional level. 'Modi doctrine' became the foundation of the South Asian Policy through which he would drive for global ambitions. Moreover, Pakistan and China factors emerged as the overriding factors necessitating formulation of Indian South Asian Policy.



Indian strategists divided the region into 'friendly' and 'enemy' states hence the policy was based on three principles. The first principle was establishment of strategically secure, politically stable and economically cooperative neighbourhood which could promote



prosperity and economic growth. To this end, India announced respecting neighbour's sovereignty and autonomy. To pursue economic and trade objectives, a focused approach was preferred in bilateral engagement with the neighbouring states. The second principle was to address and resolve regional water and territorial disputes amicably with the neighbouring states through talks and dialogue. It was aimed at enhancing cooperation and regain the lost trust due to derogatory policies of the past. To soften the grounds for Indian ingress, PM Modi and his team preferred mutual visits with the neighbouring countries for economic and security cooperation.⁷ Unlike past, he preferred visiting Bhutan and Nepal immediately after taking oath instead accessing US and the West. His visit to Nepal in last 17 years and address to its parliament was significant to bridge the widening gap between the two neighbours.⁸ The change of content in PM Modi's vision marked the beginning of a new era of India's relations with its neighbours.⁹

China-Pakistan strategic alliance and their joint venture of CPEC project were projected as a threat to India's survival and economic growth. India views Chinese investments and projects with concern and considers them threat to the geo-political and geo-economic environment of the region. Strategists believe that the South Asian Policy of PM Modi derives strength from containment of Chinese influence denying it space for any regional discourse. To counter their political and economic ingress at regional level, India polarised the region urging small neighbours to align with India in its rivalry against China and Pakistan.

PM Modi adopted Mandala Theory of Kautaliya which urge that 'a state's neighbour is its natural enemy and its neighbour's neighbour is its friend'.¹⁰ The basic thrust of this ideology is still relevant in case of India's relation with Pakistan where India is exploiting its relations with small neighbouring states and regional forums against Pakistan.



The third principle was China and Pakistan oriented alleging them for regional instability and confrontation. China has pledged huge investments for trade and economic activities in the small regional countries through BRI which would contribute to poverty alleviation and economic growth.

Strategic Theme of PM Modi's Policy

PM Modi's policy remained practically focused on containment of growing Chinese influence and isolation of Pakistan at regional level. He devised a strategy to achieve India's national interests by employing all means disregarding morality and legitimacy.

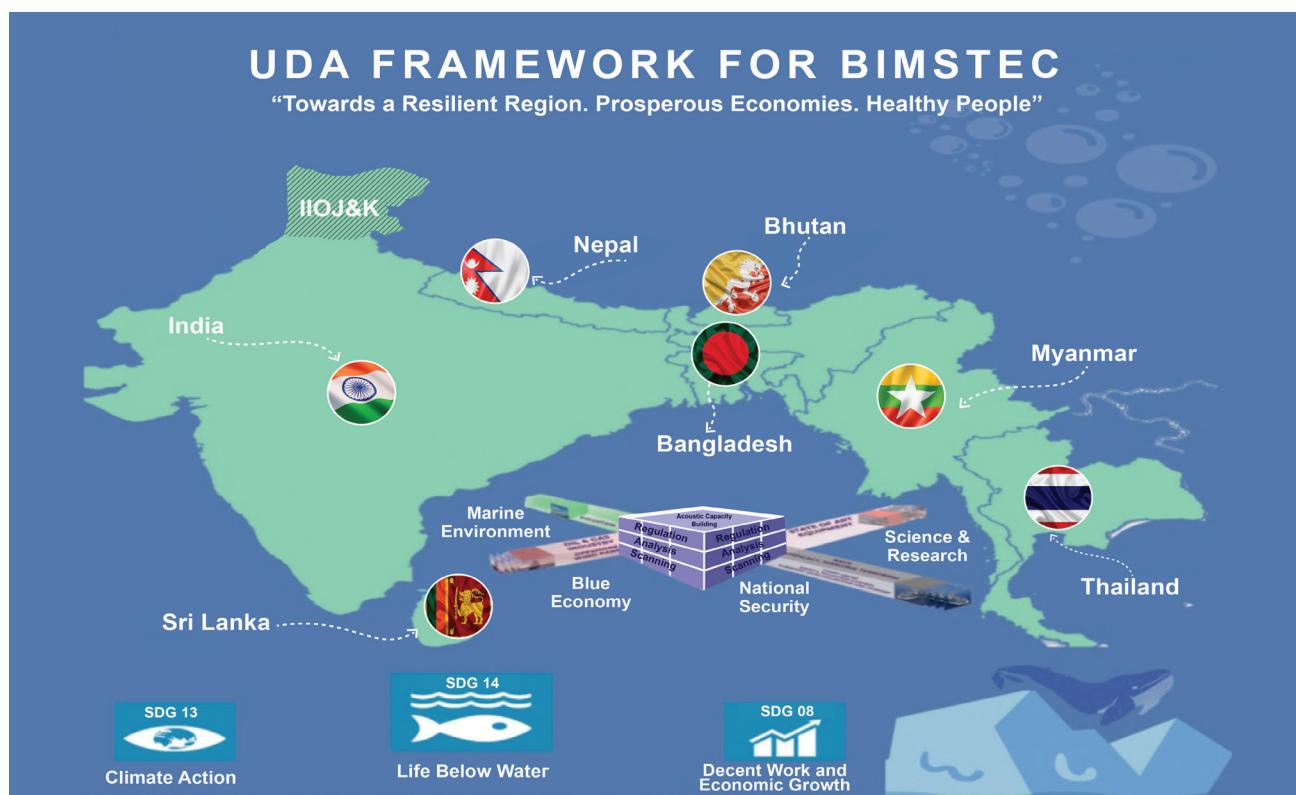
Sub-Regional Connectivity

Under PM Modi's preferred strategic thinking, India's orientation was towards sub-regional connectivity to acquire economic growth. SAARC being the largest regional forum structured to improve economic situation of the member countries, was downplayed and selective engagement was focused in bilateral relations. To malign Pakistan as 'terror sponsored state', terrorism became an overriding factor in bilateral engagement with regional states. India's diplomatic attention has consciously shifted from SAARC to Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), giving an eastward shift to India's neighbourhood policy. During 2014-2019, India has redoubled its diplomatic focus on BIMSTEC. After India hosted the BIMSTEC leaders to the BRICS outreach summit in Goa in 2016, support for BIMSTEC has been gaining momentum. In the 2018 summit in Nepal, the group passed a resolution against states that encourage, support or finance terrorism, provide sanctuaries

To counter China's influence on the regional states, India being a larger and promising economy of the subcontinent, would improve connectivity and extend access to the neighbouring states and open up its markets for goods and services. Access to India's transportation network, port facilities, transit through its territory would enhance commercial activities in the region creating environment of interdependence.¹¹

Alliance-Based Strategy

India is wary of China's increased economic and political clout at regional and global level which would enhance its assertion in South China Sea, Indo-Pacific Region and Central Asian Republics. To maintain its relevance and geopolitical balance against China and contain China's ingress in India's 'sphere of influence', India resorted to alliance-based strategy at regional, and international level. Its strategic alignment with the US on common interests in the region has become imperative for its regional standing.¹² Creating an



to terrorists and terror groups. The declaration also included issues such as poverty reduction, energy cooperation, action on climate change and ease of visa. The invitation to BIMSTEC leaders for PM Modi's swearing-in ceremony in May 2019 fits into this pattern, and marks a shift in India's neighbourhood diplomacy.

alliance through regional balancing strategy would prove beneficial for India's strategic interests. To secure its maritime interests, Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a new domain in the Indian foreign policy engagement.¹³ This shift in India's strategic environment would redefine India's role in Indo-Pacific



region creating opportunity for its increased influence against China. Moreover, to cement its collaboration for strategic gains and implement its new strategic thinking, India joined Quadrilateral Security Dialogue—commonly known as QUAD.¹⁴ To exploit the global power politics against China and improve its global standing, India engaged in QUAD with the US, Australia, and Japan.¹⁵ Moreover, through Indo-Pacific strategy, India would manage its 'Act East Policy' and 'Extended Neighbourhood Policy' for regional and global influence. Similarly, under extended neighbourhood policy, India has been engaged with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states for economic and security gains. PM Modi has improved its military cooperation with Japan, Australia, US, Vietnam, and Singapore.

Interference Based Strategy

Considering itself as a regional power, India has been interfering in the internal affairs of the neighbouring states. Its turbulent relations with Pakistan due to its unilateral illegal actions in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK), crackdown on Muslims, sponsorship of terror organisations, and consistent refusal to dialogue for peaceful settlement of issues has further worsened the security situation in the region. Its air strikes inside Pakistan in February 2019 reflect India's changing orientation towards bilateral relations with Pakistan. Similarly, India has been interfering in the internal sovereign affairs of Nepal by supporting the demands of Madhesi people and opposing Nepal's new constitution in 2015. To coerce Nepali government, India carried out economic blockade of the country which antagonised the people of Nepal.¹⁶ In Afghanistan also, India has been endeavouring to support anti-Taliban forces and opposed Pakistan's efforts for peaceful settlement of the Afghan crisis. The current India-Taliban engagement is also viewed with concern by Pakistan for provoking differences between Taliban-Pakistan. India's involvement in Afghanistan would prompt a new wave of terror attacks inside Pakistan due to its support for anti-Pakistan terror groups, in terms of training and finance. PM Modi's invitation of Lobsang Sangay-Tibet's PM-in-exile, on Modi's swearing in ceremony created divergence in the bilateral engagement with China.¹⁷ Initiating road construction in the disputed Galwan valley by India further imbalanced the relations with China. The policy of interference clearly reflects India's orchestration of environment leading to its hegemony at regional level.

Economic Securitisation

India has been projecting China's increased economic and military clout in the region as 'security threat' to its survival. Hence, securitisation of South Asia emerged as the best response to prevent China influencing the small states and help India develop security cooperation with the neighbouring states. Economic policy and regional integration of India became instrumental towards securitisation of the region. Economic relations are aimed at enhancing security and military cooperation to deny space to Pakistan as well as China.

India under PM Modi focused on improving security and economic relations with like-minded states such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar. India ratified the land border agreement during June 2015 due to which India agreed to return 111 enclaves to Bangladesh in return for 51 enclaves. India also supported Bangladesh through announcement of USD 4.5 Billion with an additional USD 500 Million in April 2017 for defence procurement.¹⁸ Both the neighbours have enhanced their cooperation in counter terror measures and combating extremism. Apart from exchange of training visits, they are cooperating for security in Indian Ocean. Similarly, India views Bhutan as strategic neighbour due to its location along the Siliguri Corridor—dominating the only passage to Indian North Eastern States. Immediately after taking over, PM Modi visited Bhutan being closest ally in the region and agreed to initiate economic and development projects including Hydropower cooperation, infrastructure, power plants, roads, and cement plants, education and health in Bhutan. Addressing the Bhutanese Parliament on June 16, 2014, PM Modi said: "The stronger India will be, the better it is for Bhutan and other SAARC nations. A strong and stable India is needed so that we can help our neighbours".¹⁹

Similarly, Myanmar though part of South East Asia, becomes imperative in India's regional calculus. Due to long land and maritime borders in the Bay of Bengal with Myanmar, the avenues for economic, and security cooperation are wide. Myanmar is India's land bridge to ASEAN countries hence connectivity is critical for PM Modi's 'Act East Policy'. PM Modi's bilateral visit to the country resulted in the finalisation of the India-Myanmar-Thailand

Asian Trilateral Highway, the Kaladan multimodal project, and BIMSTEC. The opening of two land-border crossings between India and Myanmar in the state of Manipur in Mizoram in May 2018 is likely to bring both the countries closer. Both the countries are also extensively working for improving maritime security in Indian ocean.

On the other hand, India has engaged other neighbours through economic and trade engagement to deny security space to China and Pakistan. Maldives' inclination towards China and their enhanced security and trade relations due to Maldives interest in BRI were contested through Indian engagement of Maldives in trade relations. In 2016, the Maldivian government leased Feydhoo Finolhu, the nearest uninhabited island to capital Malé, to a Chinese company for 50 years. Despite Indian strong reaction to imposition of emergency in February 2018, India initiated engagement policy of Maldives through exchange of visits, signing of economic, defence, tourism, space research and conservation of Mosque agreements to mitigate the effects of China's increasing investment.

Similarly, to counter Chinese influence in Sri Lanka, India extended huge investment for economic support of the country. Sri Lankan interest in BRI project, provision of additional loan of USD 24 Billion for improvement of its defaulting economy from China and strategic uplift of Colombo port city and management of strategic Hambantota Port raised concerns in India.²⁰ During his visit in May 2017, India pledged investment in development of Mattala Air Port in Hambantota district to address its security concerns.²¹ India is keen to enhance economic cooperation with Sri Lanka through Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ETCA) and revival of existing Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Initiation of Hybrid Warfare against Pakistan

To isolate Pakistan at regional and international level, India initiated extensive hybrid war against Pakistan. It carried out terror attacks inside Pakistan and financially supported Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other terror organisations to undertake espionage and clandestine operations inside Pakistan. Internationally, it alleged Pakistan for all

the attacks inside India to malign its standing in the world community. After US withdrawal from Afghanistan, India proactively engaged Taliban regime and exploited their economic and humanitarian catastrophic situation under international sanctions. It has pledged to resume diplomatic relations with Taliban government and provided food and medicines to Afghan public in order to restore its relations and resume halted development projects in the war-torn country to regain foothold. Such relations would be used to support anti-Pakistan terror groups financially and in planning covert operations inside Pakistan. On the other hand, India has been supporting Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and TTP in sabotage activities inside Pakistan to damage CPEC and peace in the country. The confession of a serving Indian officer, Kulbushan Yadav has become irrefutable evidence in this regard.

Challenges to India's South Asian Policy

PM Modi's 'Neighbourhood First' policy was vigorously conceived but poorly managed. India failed to build strong and peaceful neighbourhood for economic prosperity due to trust deficit created by its tilt towards major global powers. Indian tilt to contain China has been of great concern for the regional states who feel threatened due to US and Western interference in the regional affairs.

India's self-assumed role of 'big brother' and net security provider for the region created an environment of mistrust against India's policies and intentions. Small states suspect that India develops relations for its own national interests and not for regional development and security. According to analysts, Indian diplomatic approach to neighbours is viewed with suspicion as it is facing certain problems, i.e. balance of power, political diversity, India's economic clout, ambitious diplomatic approach, and foreign powers' intervention.²² However, its domination of the others' resources and interference in sovereign states projected it as a hegemon state. India's intention to maximise its power is also perceived at the cost of the small states of the region. Apart from its unresolved border disputes, maritime differences, water sharing issues, and illegal border crossings, India has remained involved in the internal crisis of its neighbours. PM Modi's confession of involvement in the creation of Bangladesh, military interference in Sri Lanka, and Maldives in 1987 and 1988 respectively and active



support for insurgent activities in Nepal and Pakistan, has provoked trust deficit among neighbours against India.²³ India's reluctance to negotiate and resolve issues with neighbours such as Kashmir issue with Pakistan, water issues with Bangladesh, and border dispute with China are hindering regional integration.

China's growing economic and military clout has become a great challenge for India's South Asian policy.²⁴ Anti-India sentiments and trust deficit with neighbouring countries have antagonised smaller countries further turning the balance of power in China's favour. The BRI project is viewed significant for regional integration and economic upgradation by the regional countries. China and India have conflicting interests in the region.

SAARC being a great hope for regional development, could not provide the promised development and economic growth to the member countries due to India's approach of polarising the region.²⁵ PM Modi's patronage for BIMSTEC is viewed as an instrument to isolate Pakistan at regional level and deprive it of economic cooperation. However, this policy of sub-regional connectivity has deteriorated the true spirit of SAARC. India did not utilise SAARC—the biggest forum for regional integration. India has also focused on sub-regional cooperation by relegating Pakistan such as Bangladesh-Bhutan-India and Nepal (BBIN). India is also promoting the BIMSTEC which includes Indian, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka from South Asia and two ASEAN members including Thailand

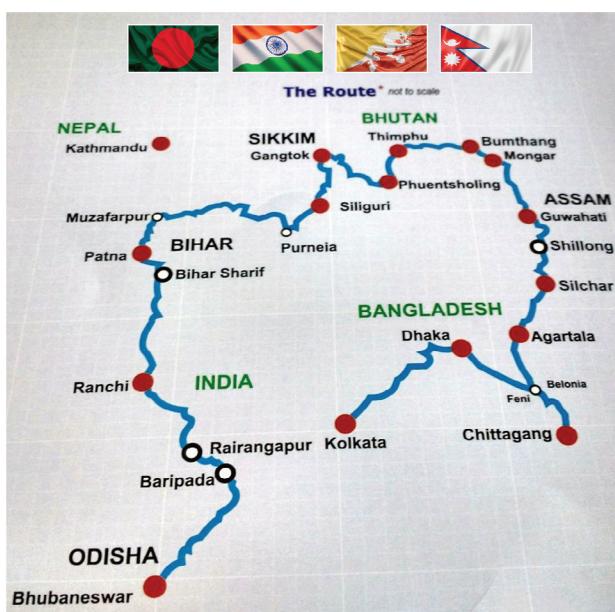
and Myanmar. India has exploited the forum to isolate Pakistan during 19th SAARC summit organised in Pakistan in November 2016 when it forced Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan to deny attendance due to allegations of Uri attack against Pakistan. Since then, regional countries view SAARC as a means of creating Indian supremacy and weakening regional cooperation.

PM Modi's internal policies, human rights violations and ban on religious freedom has also alienated it among its neighbours. Ban on press has also agitated the regional countries. Moreover, the National Register of Citizens like policies have reduced smaller countries to find space for its public to generate revenue for themselves. The domestic politics and resultant policies in India about the Muslims and migrants have severely impacted relations in the region. Moreover, India's relations with regional states are affected by internal politics of these states. The past image of India due to its interference, security threats, and pursuit of economic domination is largely hindering bilateral relations which has been exploited by political parties in the neighbouring states.²⁶

Implications for Pakistan

India has declared Pakistan as an enemy state and has been asserting to isolate it. Its relations with neighbouring states were utilised against Pakistan and in every visit, the bilateral talks would elucidate condemnation of terror activities inside India and announcement to initiate joint measures to prevent terror. The diplomatic and economic relations with these states were intended to deprive Pakistan from developing relations with regional states thus denouncing its influence in the region.

Indian strategists believe the significance of their relations with US, China, and Russia however in a different way with each power.²⁷ India is consolidating gains from China-US rivalry at regional level. The US is investing in India to contain China's ingress and deprive its rise internationally. This would switch the balance of power in favour of India leading to severe implications for Pakistan. India has been critical of the US for their time to time support for Pakistan in terms of economy and security. Hence, India is provoking Indo-US strategic relations against Pakistan urging China-Pakistan as opposite block to Indo-US block.



Despite US pressure, India has been exporting goods to Russia of worth USD 3 Billion while Russia became a top supplier of crude oil to India in April 2022. India has also maintained working relations with China despite growing concerns over the border skirmishes and Indian diplomatic campaign against China. During first quarter of 2022, their bilateral trade reached USD 31 Billion with marked addition of 15% from the last year. India has improved business environment for the investors and attained 63rd position at the global index against Pakistan's 108.

India has been benefitting from bilateral and multilateral engagement with different countries and alliances such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), QUAD (Australia, Japan, and the US), and ASEAN. It is aspiring to become member of the new alliance in the making—the I2U2, which includes Israel, US, and UAE.²⁸ Moreover, to improve its economic and global stature, India has signed free trade agreements with 13 countries including US and Australia and preferential market access and economic cooperation agreements with over 50 countries. Such relations can be used against Pakistan to degrade its economy and hurt it diplomatically the way it was done through FATE.

Under 'Act Asia' policy, India engaged Far East countries for trade and investment. In 2021, Singapore emerged as the top investor in India with investment worth USD 15.7 Billion. India also concluded Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with ASEAN countries including Japan and Korea thus accelerating Indian exports to these countries. Indian exports to Korea alone reached USD 8 Billion. On the other side, Indian exports to Saudi Arabia are nearly USD 8 Billion.²⁹ Its exports to Iraq are USD 2 Billion; UAE, USD 28 Billion; Bangladesh, USD 16 Billion; Qatar, USD 1 Billion; Nigeria USD 4 Billion; Malaysia, USD 6 Billion; and Indonesia, USD 8 Billion. Notwithstanding any pressure from the US while maintaining 'autonomy', India has maintained cordial relations with Iran, KSA, and Israel. These relations would create a favourable environment for India to destabilise Pakistan economically and encircle it with conflicting stance.

The improved relations between India and Afghanistan would imbalance the security relations between Islamabad and Kabul. India would provoke

the Durand Line issue, fencing along Western borders by Pakistan, Kabul river water sharing, and infiltration issues to severe their mutual relations. Hence, Pakistan would be relegated to engage Central Asian Regions (CARs) and benefit from the energy rich CARs. With financial and planning support to the anti-Pakistan terror groups, India would encourage another wave of terrorism inside Pakistan.

Way Forward for Pakistan

Pakistan's geostrategic location provides it the opportunity to engage major global powers including US, Russia, and China. With China, Pakistan has strategic relations based on trust and economic cooperation which are further cemented with CPEC and construction of Gwadar Port. These relations can be exploited to engage Russia further improving Pakistan's image in the region. With the US, Pakistan has been involved in combating terror and managing Afghan Taliban thereby creating environment of friendly engagement at regional and international level. Therefore, Pakistan should prefer engaging all major powers without involving in their trade and security competition instead focus on balancing its relations.

Pakistan should focus on improving its economic and political situation which are prerequisite for any foreign investment and trade relations. Bilateral engagement with regional and global powers would be reinforced with improved economic and political conditions. In order to generate economic activity, internal capacity constituting stability, and investment-friendly mechanisms need to be built. Being a nuclear power, Pakistan's strategic capability is a balancer against Indian hegemonic domination hence it should focus on economic and political stability to help integrate the region through CPEC.

Pakistan must achieve consensus among the members towards cooperation in the fields of energy, trade, and dispute resolution which are lacking at present.³⁰ To thwart Indian designs of creating sub-regional grouping to imbalance the region to Indian exploitation, Pakistan has the opportunity to integrate smaller countries through CPEC and Gwadar Port. To enhance cooperation with regional countries, Pakistan needs to assure bilateral engagement on equal footings and on mutual respect for the autonomy of



each other. Emphasis should be laid on addressing the common issues of the SAARC countries including poverty, education, environmental degradation through a focused approach. Counter terror joint mechanism would help achieve greater security whereas differences among the member states could be resolved through dialogue. Moreover, landlocked countries of the region can be offered utilisation of the Pakistan ports for their import and export. Free trade agreements would of course, allow Pakistan to benefit from the trade markets of the region and vice versa.



To neutralise Indian efforts to exploit such forums, Pakistan must enhance its regional standing by participating in other regional organisations including Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Gulf Council (GCC) and African Union (AU) etc. Pakistan must enhance its cooperation with regional countries of the East including China. Addition of China as SAARC member would yield dividends for the regional integration and development and would neutralise India.

Through its film and drama industry, Pakistan can project India's self-centered mindset and hardline approach towards regional states. The internal anti-Muslims and anti-Minority policies should be condemned in coordination with regional states. Moreover, Pakistan should enhance people to people contact and engage academia of regional

states which has the capacity to enhance bilateral relations.

Pakistan should undertake strategic engagement with Taliban government and provide food and medicines apart from technical experts for improving the economic and humanitarian situation in the war-torn country. Pakistan should undertake wide diplomatic campaign to convince the world community about the catastrophic situation in the country which could lead to vulnerability of the Afghan society to terror organisations. Moreover, Pakistan should focus on talks regarding those issues hindering relations and could be exploited by India.

Pakistan should never compromise on the unilateral decisions taken by India about IIOJK. A comprehensive awareness campaign be launched to brief the regional states about the brutalities of the Indian forces in IIOJK thereby convincing them about the legitimacy of the Kashmir freedom movement and illegitimacy of the Indian acts.

Conclusion

Pakistan should also improve its relations with Iran and Afghanistan through joint security mechanism and economic collaboration. Re-activation of SAARC and other regional forums would help Pakistan counter Indian policy on regional and bilateral disputes.

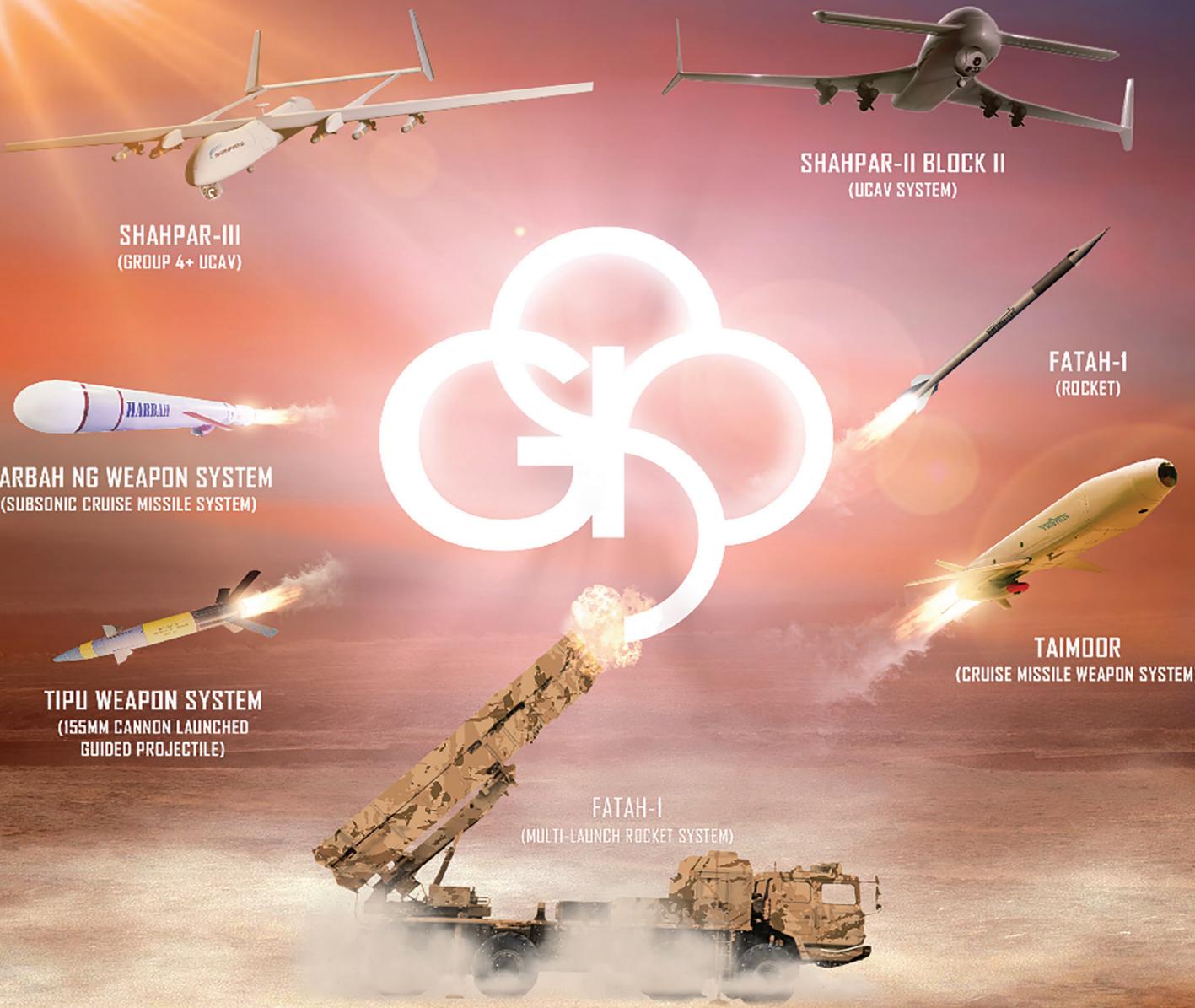
Similarly reconciliation efforts in the Middle East would project Pakistan's image and enhance unity of Muslim countries. Improved economic situation of the country would attract GCC investment defining future orientation. Pakistan should align itself with Palestinian cause and oppose India-Israel partnership. These policy measures will project Pakistan's efforts towards Muslim unity.

Pakistan should also improve its relations with the US, Russia, and global forums and must avoid involvement in the global power conflicts. Increased relevance of Pakistan in economic and strategic domain will enhance its global significance. Active contribution towards combating global challenges will also certify positive role of Pakistan. Contribution towards global peace and climate awareness will have to be increased.

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