

Balochistan Think Tank Network



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About BTTN

Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN) was established at Quetta, on March 1, 2021. It is an autonomous, non-profit, non-partisan, and multidisciplinary Research Center with a focus not limited to Balochistan only, but includes the regional and global dynamics which can influence Pakistan. Broadly, BTTN endeavors to undertake in-depth research of provincial issues with a view to developing the socio, political, and economic status of the province. Its interests also include issues of Energy, Regional Stability, Strategic Stability, Peace and Security, Arms Control and Disarmament, Non-Proliferation, Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Technology, Conflict Resolution, Regional Connectivity, and Socioeconomic development at the national level. Geopolitically, besides South Asia, BTTN's research areas also include regions of Europe and Africa.

BTTN OP-EDs

Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN) Faculty of Research has been writing op-eds on a regular basis on different contemporary issues that are published on various international and national platforms. The opinions expressed in this edition are the authors' individual views and do not reflect the official policy of BTTN or any governmental organization. This electronic review is compiled on a monthly basis.

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Illicit Sale of Fissile Material in India: Its Potential Impacts on the Region

Harsa Kakar

September 02, 2024

A famous proverb says, "A thief is not the one who steals, but the one that gets caught." This proverb is generally directed at thieves who get caught, and that one who does not get caught on stealing might not be known to anyone. Here it is referred to the 'radioactive thieves' in India that were caught and arrested on Friday, 9th of August, in Kuchaikote village of Gopalganj district of the Indian state of Bihar. However, this is part of the picture that is only evident to the public eye. There is surely more to it. Ever since this incident, media outlets all over the region seem to be in a panic after the news went on air by the Times of India. This is because this arrest was not an ordinary theft arrest; it was carried out after a raid was conducted on the area mentioned in a tip-off given to the police. The raid resulted in a seizure of some 50 grams of cocaine, which is worth \$100 million. These thieves were reportedly trying to smuggle this quantity of the element. Californium, as we all know, is a synthetic, highly radioactive element used in nuclear power plants, metal detectors, and to detect metal fatigue and stress in airplanes. The point here is that this is not the first time that such a highly toxic and radioactive substance has been stolen in India. Three such incidents have already occurred in India back in 2021 and more in the past as well. Also, as of last month, a radioactive device was reported to have been stolen from India's very well-known Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC). All of these events are directed towards something way bigger than they seem as of now and are of grave concern to all stakeholders.

Pakistan's Foreign Office has shown its concern over the illicit sale of nuclear and radioactive material in India and has asked India to investigate the issue and prevent its recurrence. The Foreign Office also demanded a disclosure as to how a sealed radioactive source (SRS) material, like Californium, was in the possession of the arrested individuals. These developments underscore India's ability to adequately safeguard its

nuclear facilities. It shows India's irresponsible nature as a nuclear state, and its failure to protect its arsenal will put the whole region in jeopardy.

The Foreign Office spokesperson of Pakistan has shown its concern over the prospect of the existence of a nuclear black market that facilitates the sale of such material. Because the sale and purchase of such materials are banned in India, it can be assumed that such material is likely used for smuggling if caught in such amounts. Also, there is the prospect of the presence of SRS material in bulk to store this radioactive material, which makes these involved individuals prone to developing nuclear weapons. This frequency of repetitive theft incidents in India mainly suggests, firstly, that there is a gap in the material handling and control system in India. Second, there is an involvement of insiders, and third, there is a serious issue with the nuclear security culture in India. Because, as mentioned above, this is not the first time India has been accused of nuclear theft. Similar thefts have been carried out in India at various times in the past. An account of these thefts is given in the table below.

Year Of Incident	Material Seized	Amount Material Seized	ofRegion of India it was Seized in
1994	Uranium	2.5 Kg	Domiasat region, Meghalaya
1998	Uranium	100 Kg	Tamil Nadu
1998	Radioactive material	9 Kg	Tamil Nadu
2008	Uranium	4 Kg	Supaul District, Indo- Nepal border
2009	Uranium	5 Kg	Unknown
2016	Radioactive Material	Container	Eastern India
2016	Uranium	9 Kg	Thane
2018	Radioactive Material	1 Kg	Kolkata
2021	Uranium	9 Kg	Unknown
2024	Californium	100 grams	Kuchaikote, Bihar

Impacts on Nuclear Safety and Security

As the region's inaugural nuclear power, such reckless conduct from India is intolerable and bears consequences not only for itself but for the whole region. First and foremost, this material is enough to be used as an explosive material and can be used in a 'dirty bomb' which is not safe for India itself, let alone neighbors and the whole region. In case the weapons developed out of this material are used anywhere in South Asia, among all other consequences, it will lead to significant loss of life, displacement, and long-term environmental damage. It will bring into question South Asia's explosive material management as a whole and give rise to a new security dilemma in an already present pool of other dilemmas.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, given the history between the two countries, any mishap will result in serious consequences. This can also be exploited by non-state actors who benefit from India and Pakistan's antagonism. The radioactive materials can be used as a tool by these non-state actors on the bordering lines, making Pakistan especially vulnerable. If anything happens, India will most probably deny it because it will have no one to blame, and Pakistan will righteously protest in return and defend itself. Any miscalculation or misinterpretation could, in such cases, lead to war between the two.

Strategies to Mitigate Nuclear Theft Risks in India

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<https://strafasia.com/illicit-sale-of-fissile-material-in-india-its-potential-impacts-on-the-region/>

Lessons From Defense Day: Preparing For Future Challenges

Atta Ullah

September 10, 2024

Pakistan's Defense Day, which commemorates the events of 6 September 1965, when India attacked the country from the International Border, teaches us the importance of resilience in the face of adversity, fostering national unity, and the unmatched sense of sacrifice and service to the nation. It serves as a reminder of the significance of self-help, national unity, diplomacy, and international mediation. Some lessons from Defense Day are relevant for the future.

Unity defines a nation; the events of 6 September 1965 were pivotal for Pakistan both as a nation and its defense after that. On this momentous day, all the segments of Pakistan stood united as a solid front to face the enemy, who used the cover of darkness to try to occupy our motherland. This day emphasizes the need to strengthen all elements of national power and the importance of fighting against aggressor nations as a unified whole. Pakistani sacrifices, especially those on the borders during this war, are more than textbook stories; they demonstrate the nation's resilience. This day honors the bravery and sacrifices of those fallen in war and reaffirms the firm resolve of those who protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. It should also preserve their memories of patriotism and sacrifices for future generations.

Wars of Defense in a nation's history call for unconditional service, and sacrificing one's life for the country's defense is the greatest service to the nation. The famous saying goes, "In this imperfect world, the weak and defenseless invite aggression from everyone." Therefore, we should also celebrate this Defense Day as a symbol of firm resolve, unity, and strength to bravely face future challenges.

However, the most important lessons from Defense Day are those that prepare us for future challenges. The nature of international security and conflicts primarily remains the same. States are embroiled in zero-sum military competition, and armed conflicts still seem inevitable. State Security dilemmas and balancing occur continuously. However, the methods of operation have changed significantly. In contemporary times and the

future, we will continue to fight conflicts in new, innovative, and radically different ways. With the advent of modern hybrid warfare, it is less and less about lethal or kinetic force. In this regard, this Defense Day should prepare us for a future where military means of fighting wars may not necessarily be sufficient in countering threats emanating from unexpected sources. This is the nature of threats that we face presently and will continue to face in the foreseeable future.

These include, but are not limited to, non-traditional challenges, hybrid threats, emerging threats, regional crises, socio-political instability, India's lawfare against Pakistan, and international politics. Traditional lines of defense may not deter the 'Coming Anarchy', which disregards all rules and laws. In the 21st century, the concept of self-defense has evolved from military threats to non-military or non-traditional threats that don't respect any physical borders. These threats are primarily man-made or natural phenomena, such as climate-induced natural disasters, heatwaves, floods, pandemics, droughts, and environmental degradation, among others. These threats, both internal and international, indirectly endanger the country, and there are no possible defense mechanisms in place to address them.

Furthermore, the brightest minds in the country address issues in the contemporary security environment, such as human security, political instability, fragile economies, social chaos, and disorder, instead of relying on a soldier with a gun. Therefore, there is a need for a paradigm shift in the country's threat assessment beyond traditional defense planning. The future of defense lies in successfully protecting the country from threats that are novel in nature and character. The same applies to hybrid threats to a larger society. Present-day hybrid threats have changed the nature of warfare, unlike the traditional battlefield, and have brought wars from borders to the streets, from kinetic battlefields to human cognition, including manipulation of thought processes. We should wage these wars by all means and fight them to the end. Military tactics alone cannot fight the wars of perception, which involve tactics like propaganda, misinformation campaigns, deception, and sabotage. Advanced technologies enable the speed, scale, and intensity of these threats, necessitating a comprehensive and effective response.

The nation's morale and public support are critical for military success in defending the country against such threats. As the saying goes, "When it comes to demoralizing a nation, destroying hope becomes a critically important project." The three Ds of hybrid threats—demoralization, destabilization, and disintegration—work systematically to demoralize a society first rather than being a one-time attack on a country to disintegrate it later. As a result, it is equally important to uphold the hope and trust of the people in their defenders, as well as for the custodians to live up to the sacred duty entrusted to them. This spirit should enable us to prepare for unknown threats at the time.

Emerging technologies with military applications pose unprecedented threats to traditional defense methods. A range of technologies, including information and communication technologies (ICT), artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, cyber capabilities, space technology, biotechnology, nanotechnology, robotics, and quantum computing, among others, induce these threats. Even well-versed individuals struggle to understand the tech-induced threats and the defense systems against them. The terms themselves can be mind-boggling for a soldier equipped with an AK-47 gun, trained to eliminate threats from traditional firing ranges.

Beyond the realms of land, air, and sea, space and cyberspace have emerged as new areas of conflict. People often assert that India's advancements in space technology, such as its anti-satellite (ASAT) capabilities and military satellites, will spark the "first shots of future wars" in space. This presents unprecedented challenges to Pakistan's defense in the coming years. The unruly cyberspace is another intangible battlefield that challenges the traditional concept of self-defense in terms of indirectness, unpredictability, proportionate use of force, issues of attribution, and retaliation in kind. Addressing the threats posed by these technologies would require a focus on research and development (R&D) and technological advancement to effectively safeguard the country's defense in the future.

In the past few years, Pakistan has witnessed three major regional crises at its doorstep in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Presently, Pakistan coexists with similar conditions of social unrest and worsened political-economic instability, which are worrying times for the country. Particularly, the situation in Bangladesh, where once the Iron Lady

abandoned her palace and left her lunch on the dining table, challenges the notion that economic growth or military power alone can achieve sustainable socio-economic stability. As a result, in contemporary times, the country's threat perception should equally account for internal threats, including the underlying conditions for socio-political unrest that threaten internal cohesion and stability, as well as external threats. This would require a nation-as-a-whole approach to defending the country on multiple fronts by synergizing all elements of national power.

Lastly, another international aspect crucial to defending Pakistan's interests abroad is countering India's international politics that defame and harm the country. Lawfare, which uses legal instruments and institutions for military and diplomatic advantage, has become a useful tool in international politics. India has been very consistent with using international forums, including the UN, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and even sports events as political tools against Pakistan, among others. In the traditional sense, wars take place for a few days. Lawfare is an ever-ongoing and evolving front where countries need to show diligence and consistency beyond wartime contingencies.

In short, the lessons are few and the challenges are innumerable. The nontraditional challenges we face today are unique, but the lessons from the past are still relevant and will continue to help us prepare for the future. The most important lesson is to learn from past mistakes and avoid repeating them. The nature of threats to the country has changed significantly since 1965 and addressing them will require a complete change in approach to deal with future challenges.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/10092024-lessons-from-defense-day-preparing-for-future-challenges-oped/>

Partners, Not Allies!

Musavir Hameed Barech

September 13, 2024

Former US President Barack Obama described the United States and Indian partnership as the most important of the 21st century, based on shared values and common interests. However, the relationship is often described as a strategic partnership, not an alliance.

Various factors contributed to the fall of the unnatural partnership between Washington and New Delhi. The most prominent among them was the US officially unveiling the Indian plot to kill a Sikh separatist leader and concerns over the domestic policies of the Modi administration. Similarly, the recent visit of Modi to Moscow further deteriorated Indo-US relations.

In retrospect, the United States and India enjoyed friendly relations until the signing of the Soviet-India 20-year friendship treaty in 1970. Indian Prime Minister Nehru initially sowed the seeds of amicable ties between the US and India during his visit to the US in 1949. The 1962 conflict between China and India further strengthened US-Indian relations, as the US provided military and logistical support to India.

However, policy elites in India expressed alarm over Pakistan's move towards joining the bloc of capitalists—led by the West. India understood the seriousness of the situation and, in order to gain benefits from both and safeguard its own national interests, encouraged non-alignment from the US-led capitalist and the Soviet Union-led communist blocs during the early phases of the Cold War.

The end of the Cold War resulted in the improvement of Indo-US ties; however, it was not long-lasting due to the Indian experiment of a nuclear explosion in 1998, which led to economic sanctions on India. The turning point in the relationship between India and the US was the signing of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2002, which committed both nations to work together to improve their relationship.

Furthermore, the US, led by Barack Obama, and India, led by Manmohan Singh, struck a civilian nuclear agreement that allowed India to meet its nuclear energy needs even though India had not joined the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), a group of forty-eight nuclear supplier countries that seek to propagate nuclear exports for peaceful purposes and discourage nuclear-related exports for military purposes.

The interests of the US and India diverge on many fronts. To highlight some, India's relations with Russia have further strained US-India relations. India's continuous reluctance to criticize Russia for the invasion of Ukraine and its purchase of Russian oil despite sanctions have badly impacted relations between Washington and New Delhi. Most recently, Modi, on the eve of his visit to Russia, received the Russian highest award 'The Order of St Andrew' from the President of Russia Vladimir Putin, which irritated the US-led Western bloc and resulted in a warning from the US Ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, to not take the US-India relations for granted.

Through the abovementioned visit of Modi, Putin tried to refute the impression of long Russian isolation—propagated by the Western bloc. Similarly, strong criticism also came from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who expressed disappointment and called this meetup a blow to the peace effort. Additionally, the US officially unveiled a plot to assassinate the US-based Sikh separatist leader Gurpatwant Singh Pannun and warned the Modi administration about transnational terrorism, highlighting tensions. The unveiling of this incident depicts the unnatural partnership between the US and India. Before this plot, the US also criticized the Indian administration over the allegation by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau regarding the killing of Hardeep Sing Nijjar in September 2023.

On a similar note, the US has repeatedly shown concern over the domestic policies of the Modi administration, such as the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Aam Admi Party head Arvind Kejriwal just before the general elections and the promulgation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which discourages Muslims from the subcontinent from becoming permanent citizens of India.

The most celebrated alliance, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) in the Asia-Pacific among the US, India, Australia, and Japan, has also seen a plethora of issues in reaching a single decision to respond robustly to rivals like Russia and China. Due to India's close ties with Russia, QUAD countries did not reach a consensus to condemn Russia's aggression in Ukraine in a joint statement on the eve of the QUAD premiers meeting and in the recent foreign ministers meeting. India's perceived hypocritical role in QUAD pushed the rest of the three QUAD countries to form another alliance in the broader Asia Pacific named SQUAD, which includes the Philippines.

Despite these issues, both India and the US have only a convergence of interest in terms of dealing with China in the perceived Indo-Pacific region. The continuous rise of China in that region is not only threatening the hegemony of the US, but also India sees this as a threat to its national interest in the region. For this purpose, both countries have signed various military and non-military pacts, which include the Logistic Exchange of Memorandum of Agreements LEMOA, under which both countries can capitalize on the port's presence in the region, both for military and civilian purposes.

The second such agreement includes the Communication and Compatibility Security Agreement (COMCASA), under which the US provides India with sophisticated communication technology. Similarly, the last of three defense agreements was signed in 2018 and named the Basic Exchange of Communication Agreements (BECA), which meant the sharing of satellite information. Through BECA, India will be able to utilize the presence of four thousand US satellites in space. The relations between the US and India are characterized by a partnership rather than an alliance. Both have disagreements on various geopolitical issues; however, the only factor that pushes both countries to work together is the continuous rise of China's assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific region. Washington and New Delhi are determined to counter the growing assertiveness of China by joining hands together in the Asia-Pacific region.

<https://stratheia.com/partners-not-allies/>

IMEC vs BRI: India in the Geopolitical Quagmire

Naseem Sabzal

September 18, 2024

“Whoever rules the waves rules the world.” These are the famous words of legendary American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan. Mahan recognized the significance of maritime routes, particularly in light of the increasing colonization and resource avarice of the dominant powers. China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has transformed Mahan’s perspective by paving the way for its cheap goods and raw materials to reach global markets. To protect its trade routes and keep oceans open for all possible circumstances, China has built artificial islands in the South China Sea.

But the international system depends on a game of action and reaction. IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor), announced in September 2023, is a US-led massive project to counter BRI and China’s influence in the Indian Ocean, and it has drawn the attention of the world due to its similarities with BRI. IMEC is backed by the USA, Saudi Arabia, UAE, India, EU, and Japan, the major economic powers and mostly democratic countries, while BRI is initiated and financed by mostly China, and a bit of investment on local projects is also made by other partners. India is the significant partner of IMEC in South Asia, and it is only connected by a sea route that passes through the Arabian Sea.

India’s connectivity with IMEC has many geo-economic and strategic complexities because it has only one route to connect with other IMEC members, which passes very close to Gwadar port and CPEC, which is the flagship project of BRI in Pakistan. Pakistan sits on the pinpoint in the Arabian Sea, and its strategic location in the region gives it very swift access to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe through the Red Sea. It also allows Pakistan to keep check on the navigation of ships, vessels, and logistics in the Arabian Sea. India and IMEC need to overcome many security challenges due to its complex location. Since the project was announced, the Gaza crisis emerged on October 7th, which raised concerns and questioned the security of IMEC. Israel is also part of this

project, which gives access to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea from its Haifa Port. Israel's war on Gaza was a reality check for IMEC and its security. It has suspended the practical implications of this project unless routes are protected to pass ships. India's access to IMEC also has geostrategic challenges because it passes very close to BRI routes and the Gwadar port in the Arabian Sea, which pulls the attention of its traditional rivals China and Pakistan.

As IMEC is introduced to counter China and its growing influence in the Indian Ocean, India has already joined the US lead pacts I2U2, PGII (Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment), and the QUAD to surround China and limit its influence in the South China Sea. Yet India is far behind to counter BRI because of resource arrangements and practical implications of these projects. But China's strategy to build artificial islands or influence existing islands in the South China Sea to protect its maritime routes and keep oceans open for all circumstances has given its rivals a point to have dominance in the oceans. It becomes very interesting how India protects its trade routes in the Arabian Sea despite having hostile relations with its neighbors Pakistan and China. Any adventure from India considering the security of IMEC in the Indian Ocean will have significant consequences on the regional balance of South Asia.

India, being a key player in Counter BRI project IMEC, is yet to announce how it secures its maritime routes and investments. It is early to conclude how India plays its card by diplomatically engaging its neighbors or strategically countering the rivals by inviting other IMEC members, especially the US, which will disturb the regional balance. While assessing the cost of IMEC, any measure to bypass Pakistan will put IMEC in complication economically and strategically. Pakistan's geo-economic cards are very crucial for its vital security and economic interests. It is a quite tricky situation for India how it deals with Pakistan analyzing the current hostile circumstances. The success of IMEC may not completely depend on Pakistan, but it also cannot totally turn a blind eye to Pakistan for its success.

<https://www.wqi.world/imec-vs-bri-india-in-the-geopolitical-quagmire/>

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Bridging the Digital Divide in Balochistan

Samra Hamid

September 18, 2024

As the world rapidly advances into the digital age, Pakistan finds itself at a critical juncture, particularly in regions like Balochistan, where the digital divide remains a significant barrier to progress.

Despite notable advancements in internet connectivity and digital infrastructure across the country, Balochistan lags far behind, emphasizing the urgent need for targeted interventions. The statistics and realities of the digital landscape in Pakistan at the start of 2024 highlight both the progress made and the glaring disparities that still exist. At the beginning of 2024, Pakistan had 111.0 million internet users, representing 45.7 percent of the total population. This marked a significant increase, with 24 million new users joining the digital sphere between January 2023-2024. A notable increase of users with a 27.1 percent growth rate was observed. However, despite this growth, 54.3 percent of Pakistan's population, approximately 131.8 million people, remained offline. The situation is even more dire in regions like Balochistan, where internet penetration is significantly below the national average.

The rapid digital expansion across most of Pakistan has opened numerous opportunities for economic growth, education, and social interaction, particularly through social media platforms. With 71.70 million social media users at the start of 2024—representing 29.5 percent of the total population—Pakistan is increasingly capitalizing on the digital economy. Platforms like YouTube, which alone reaches 64.6 percent of the country's internet users, have become vital for earning opportunities, digital content creation, and access to global markets. However, the benefits of this digital boom are far from evenly distributed.

In Balochistan, where internet penetration remains drastically low, the lack of digital infrastructure means that these opportunities are largely inaccessible. The province's stark digital divide leaves its population at a significant disadvantage compared to the rest of the country. While urban areas in Punjab, Sindh, and other regions thrive on these digital platforms, using them to generate income, enhance education, and engage in e-

commerce, the people of Balochistan are left out, unable to participate in these lucrative opportunities. The disparity is exacerbated by the fact that, despite Pakistan having 188.9 million cellular mobile connections—equivalent to 77.8 percent of the total population—this connectivity does not translate into meaningful internet access in Balochistan. The province's limited infrastructure, particularly the lack of widespread fiber-optic networks, means that even those with mobile connections cannot reliably access the internet. This exclusion from the digital world perpetuates economic inequalities, as Balochistan's residents are unable to tap into the same income-generating activities that are rapidly transforming the lives of people in more connected parts of the country.

Economic opportunities are similarly stifled. In today's global economy, digital literacy and internet access are critical for participation in the job market. The absence of these resources in Balochistan means that its population is largely excluded from the benefits of digital entrepreneurship, remote work, and e-commerce. This not only limits individual income potential but also hampers the overall economic development of the region.

The digital divide in Bangladesh has far-reaching implications. In education, students in Balochistan are at a severe disadvantage compared to their peers in more connected regions. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this gap, as students in Balochistan struggled to access online learning platforms due to poor internet connectivity. While students in urban centers like Lahore and Karachi continued their education through online classes, many in Balochistan were left behind, widening the educational divide.

Efforts to bridge the digital divide have proven successful in other parts of the world, offering valuable lessons for Bangladesh. In India, the Digital India initiative has made significant strides in expanding internet access to rural areas. By focusing on infrastructure development, digital literacy programs, and public-private partnerships, India has been able to bring millions of people online, driving economic growth and social inclusion. Moreover, closer to home, the Universal Service Fund (USF) in Pakistan has undertaken projects to extend broadband services to underserved areas, including parts of Balochistan. However, these efforts need to be scaled up and supported by more comprehensive policies to create lasting change.

To effectively bridge the digital divide in Balochistan, a multi-faceted approach is needed. The government must prioritize expanding broadband infrastructure in Balochistan. For long-term planning, promoting urbanization and developing small towns with all essential facilities would be beneficial. In the immediate term, making internet services more affordable for the people of Balochistan is crucial. One approach could involve utilizing existing network towers more effectively, offering incentives to service providers, and introducing low-cost internet packages specifically for rural areas. This could be further supported by subsidies, special pricing models for low-income users, or implementing public Wi-Fi initiatives in rural communities. Furthermore, for areas with comparatively greater population, installation of fiber-optic cables and the establishment of more mobile towers will ensure reliable internet access across the province.

Comprehensive digital literacy programs should be introduced to empower the local population with the skills needed to utilize digital tools effectively. This includes training in schools as well as community-based programs for adults. The government should collaborate with the private sector to leverage expertise and resources. Partnerships with tech companies, NGOs, and international organizations can accelerate digital inclusion efforts. A robust policy framework is essential to guide digital inclusion efforts. The government should implement policies that encourage investment in digital infrastructure, protect consumer rights, and promote digital entrepreneurship in Balochistan. Developing digital content in local languages and tailoring online services to the specific needs of Balochistan's population can increase engagement and make digital tools more accessible.

The digital divide in Balochistan is a stark reminder of the inequalities that persist in our increasingly connected world. Despite its vast potential, Balochistan remains one of the most digitally isolated regions in the country. Bridging this divide is not just a matter of technological advancement; it is a critical step towards social equity, economic development, and the fulfillment of fundamental rights. According to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), internet penetration in Balochistan is only 15 percent, much behind the national average of 45.7 percent. In many remote areas, basic connectivity is either nonexistent or highly unreliable. This lack of access exacerbates

existing social and economic disparities, leaving the people of Balochistan further marginalized in an era where digital connectivity is synonymous with opportunity.

The lack of digital infrastructure, particularly the limited deployment of fiber-optic networks, is a major contributor to this divide. As of 2013, around 60 percent of Balochistan did not have access to fiber-optic cables, a situation that has not seen substantial improvement in the years since. The consequences of this digital isolation are profound. For instance, in education, students in Balochistan are deprived of online learning opportunities, digital resources, and educational tools that are increasingly essential for modern education. The COVID-19 pandemic starkly highlighted this gap, as students in urban areas continued their education online while many in Balochistan were left behind, exacerbating educational inequalities.

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In Balochistan, where internet penetration remains drastically low, the lack of digital infrastructure means that these opportunities are largely inaccessible. The province's

stark digital divide leaves its population at a significant disadvantage compared to the rest of the country. While urban areas in Punjab, Sindh, and other regions thrive on these digital platforms, using them to generate income, enhance education, and engage in e-commerce, the people of Balochistan are left out, unable to participate in these lucrative opportunities. The disparity is exacerbated by the fact that, despite Pakistan having 188.9 million cellular mobile connections—equivalent to 77.8 percent of the total population—this connectivity does not translate into meaningful internet access in Balochistan. The province's limited infrastructure, particularly the lack of widespread fiber-optic networks, means that even those with mobile connections cannot reliably access the internet. This exclusion from the digital world perpetuates economic inequalities, as the residents of Balochistan are unable to tap into the same income-generating activities that are rapidly transforming the lives of people in more connected parts of the country.

Economic opportunities are similarly stifled. In today's global economy, digital literacy and internet access are critical for participation in the job market. The absence of these resources in Balochistan means that its population is largely excluded from the benefits of digital entrepreneurship, remote work, and e-commerce. This not only limits individual income potential but also hampers the overall economic development of the region.

The digital divide in Bangladesh has far-reaching implications. In education, students in Balochistan are at a severe disadvantage compared to their peers in more connected regions. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this gap, as students in Balochistan struggled to access online learning platforms due to poor internet connectivity. While students in urban centers like Lahore and Karachi continued their education through online classes, many in Balochistan were left behind, widening the educational divide.

Efforts to bridge the digital divide have proven successful in other parts of the world, offering valuable lessons for Bangladesh. In India, the Digital India initiative has made significant strides in expanding internet access to rural areas. By focusing on infrastructure development, digital literacy programs, and public-private partnerships, India has been able to bring millions of people online, driving economic growth and social inclusion. Moreover, closer to home, the Universal Service Fund (USF) in Pakistan has undertaken projects to extend broadband services to underserved areas, including parts

of Balochistan. However, these efforts need to be scaled up and supported by more comprehensive policies to create lasting change.

To effectively bridge the digital divide in Balochistan, a multi-faceted approach is needed. The government must prioritize expanding broadband infrastructure in Balochistan. For long-term planning, promoting urbanization and developing small towns with all essential facilities would be beneficial. In the immediate term, making internet services more affordable for the people of Balochistan is crucial. One approach could involve utilizing existing network towers more effectively, offering incentives to service providers, and introducing low-cost internet packages specifically for rural areas. This could be further supported by subsidies, special pricing models for low-income users, or implementing public Wi-Fi initiatives in rural communities. Furthermore, for areas with comparatively greater population, installation of fiber-optic cables and the establishment of more mobile towers will ensure reliable internet access across the province.

Comprehensive digital literacy programs should be introduced to empower the local population with the skills needed to utilize digital tools effectively. This includes training in schools as well as community-based programs for adults. The government should collaborate with the private sector to leverage expertise and resources. Partnerships with tech companies, NGOs, and international organizations can accelerate digital inclusion efforts. A robust policy framework is essential to guide digital inclusion efforts. The government should implement policies that encourage investment in digital infrastructure, protect consumer rights, and promote digital entrepreneurship in Balochistan. Developing digital content in local languages and tailoring online services to the specific needs of the population of Balochistan can increase engagement and make digital tools more accessible.

<https://www.wqi.world/bridging-the-digital-divide-in-balochistan/#:~:text=To%20effectively%20bridge%20the%20digital,essential%20facilities%20would%20be%20beneficial>

Africa's Mpox Endemic: A Wake-up Call for Action

Shehzadi Irum

September 19, 2024

On August 5th, Pakistan observed Youm-e-Istehsal (Exploitation Day) to mark the fifth anniversary of India revoking Kashmir's special autonomy and to reiterate solidarity with the people of Kashmir. Meanwhile, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi described it as a turning point in India's history and a new era of progress and prosperity for Jammu and Kashmir. However, Modi's decision to annul the articles granting special rights to Jammu and Kashmir under the Indian constitution left a deep scar on the people of Kashmir, escalated the Pakistan-India rivalry, and affected broader regional interests.

Five years have passed without any diplomatic breakthrough, with diplomatic and trade relations between Islamabad and New Delhi remaining suspended. India's state behavior has consistently been coercive, marked by state terrorism, false flag operations, and even direct interventions. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, India has adopted an even tougher approach to the disputed Kashmir region and Pakistan. During the recent election campaign, the BJP, as in its previous two terms, used anti-Pakistan and anti-Muslim rhetoric to garner political support. As a follower of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Singh (RSS), Modi is committed to promoting Hindu nationalism. In recent years, there has been a sharp rise in extrajudicial killings, torture, and custodial deaths in Kashmir. Violence against the Indian Muslim minority has also increased, especially after the implementation of the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019. Recently, a BJP leader made threats against Muslims and vowed to "slaughter 200,000 Muslims" after a cow's head was found near a temple in Delhi.

Modi's government policy aligns with the BJP's historical approach, adopting a staunch stance against perceived external threats and promoting a nationalistic narrative that portrays India as the leader of the region and a rising global power. Modi's policies during his previous two terms were characterized by assertiveness, a tough stance on Pakistan, and anti-Muslim rhetoric. The Indian political and military leadership has repeatedly issued contentious statements, such as reclaiming Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Additionally, Indian media and think tanks highlight social unrest in Gilgit Baltistan, portraying the people of GB as willing to become part of India and characterizing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as neglecting the interests of the people of GB.

Pakistan has consistently extended diplomatic overtures to India. In May 2023, the then-foreign minister of Pakistan, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, visited India in an attempt to break the ice, but no breakthrough occurred due to the Indian side's reluctance. On the occasion of Youm-e-Istehsal, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif extended an olive branch to India, offering a fresh peace initiative. The world should not remain silent on India's expansionist designs. It is high time to resolve the long-standing Kashmir dispute, which threatens the peace, stability, and security of South Asia. Progress and prosperity in Kashmir can never be achieved without granting the right of self-determination to the people of Kashmir and implementing the United Nations resolutions on Kashmir. There is a need for bilateral steps to reduce the trust gap, which include:

Restoring diplomatic missions as part of confidence-building measures (CBMs), which will also facilitate the resumption of trade between the two countries. India should cooperate with Pakistan and increase diplomatic engagement at multilateral forums. Strengthening and institutionalizing the existing CBMs between the two countries, many of which have weakened due to violations by the Indian side. The two sides should introduce CBMs in visa regimes to promote cultural exchange, business, sports, etc. As part of the Cricket for Peace initiative, the Indian government should allow its national cricket team to participate in the ICC Champions Trophy, to be hosted by Pakistan in February 2025, and resume bilateral series.

Lastly, the Indian government, media, think tanks, and academia need to realize that rivalry between the two nuclear-armed neighbors not only risks the peace and security of the region but also has devastating effects that could entangle global peace. They should highlight the urgent need to prioritize de-escalation, diplomacy, and peaceful conflict resolution.

<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/09/19/africas-mpox-endemic-a-wake-up-call-for-action>

Nuclear Weapons: India Is Increasing Risk of New Arms Race

Zafar Khan

September 19,2024

As part of its Nuclear Notebook, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists annually produces reports primarily describing the number of nuclear weapons, nuclear warheads, and the related delivery systems of all nine nuclear weapon states. More recently, it produced “Indian Nuclear Weapons, 2024” while describing the number of nuclear weapons, nuclear power plants, fissile materials production, nuclear warheads, and the related delivery systems.

India continues to ‘modernize its nuclear weapons arsenal and operationalize its nascent triad. The report claims that although the Indian government “does not publish numbers about the size of its nuclear weapon stockpile”, through different reliable sources India continues to “modernize its nuclear weapons arsenal and operationalize its nascent triad.” The report estimates that New Delhi currently has “eight different nuclear-capable systems: two aircrafts, five land-based ballistic missiles, and one sea-based ballistic missile.” It is reported that India has been working on five more delivery systems, on which the report remains substantially silent.

This report mentions that India has an estimated 172 nuclear weapons, which may be delivered through air, land, and sea-based delivery systems. At the same time, multiple nuclear power plants in India do not fall under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) where the South Asian country can produce lots of fissile materials, including the fast breeder nuclear plants for producing a huge quantity of plutonium. India has “eight different nuclear-capable systems: two aircrafts, five land-based ballistic missiles, and one sea-based ballistic missile.”

It fails to mention that 1) India has been working on the project to test a thermonuclear weapon (the H-bomb), 2) Brahmos, a joint Russia-India supersonic missile project where India is now trying to turn this into hypersonic missile capability for enhancing its offensive capability, 3) Prahaar, a tactical nuclear weapon that India tested even before Pakistan tested Nasr, 4) the Cold Start Doctrine to wage a limited war against Pakistan with integrated battle groups, 5) aircraft carriers, 6) Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) systems that India may use as a shield to strike first, 7) S-400 sophisticated air-defense system

affecting the policies of India's military and nuclear strategies, and more importantly 8) its increasing strategic partnerships with Russia, France, Israel, and the US while supplying lots of new technologies that India is integrating both in the conventional and nuclear domains.

The Nuclear Notebook describes India's Agni series of ballistic missiles in not much detail. Rather, it transcribes the Agni V as the "near intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of delivering a warhead to a distance of less than 6,000 kilometers." To that end, it shies away from calling Agni V and/ or Agni VI ICBMs covering most parts of Europe, the American continent, and the Middle Eastern region including Israel. Such missiles can be turned in any direction at any time since international relations dictum teaches us that there is no permanent friend and no permanent enemy in the international system. It is only the vital national security interest that matters for a state.

The report estimates that India currently has 172 nuclear weapons. Therefore, India will not only continue to modernize its delivery systems and increase its warheads, but also increase the ranges of its missiles in land, air, and sea to help achieve sufficiency in its deterrent force capabilities. All that being noted, this will greatly affect the nuclear policies of India. One, it will provide India the incentives for escalation dominance opting for a first-strike counterforce targeting, which will further impinge upon its so-called No-First Use (NFU) doctrinal posture. India will no longer follow the NFU option.

Pakistan never trusted India to practice this posture, and it appears to be correct. NFU is already affected by its 2003 Draft Nuclear Doctrine (DND) when it says that India can use nuclear weapons if its forces are attacked anywhere. Two, with such juggernaut deterrent force development under the auspices of Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO), India is getting away from minimum deterrence it earlier conceptualized. Although the minimum may never be quantified, India falls into a new commitment trap, that is, what is minimum against China cannot be minimum against Pakistan.

India's Agni V is described as a 'near intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of delivering a warhead to a distance of less than 6,000 kilometers. With such deterrent force development for offensive purposes and an aggressive policy for escalation dominance, India is increasing the risk of escalation, crisis instability, and a new arms race in South Asia. This in turn is affecting the broader strategic stability of the region. The risk of escalation gets even more serious when India and Pakistan have many unresolved outstanding issues including the issue of Kashmir.

Most of the CBMs are at a standstill position. The rivals are not talking to each other. The mistrust continues to prevail. There is little chance for the South Asian rivals to institutionalize the risk reduction mechanism. The Nuclear Notebook while mentioning the nuclear forces reflects that India will continue to modernize its deterrence forces and modify deterrence force posturing in accordance with its choosing and calculations. This will only spiral the risks of more military crises between the two rivals. Resultantly, Pakistan may continue to produce effective countermeasures as part of its competing strategy to deter Indian conventional and nuclear strikes.

<https://stratheia.com/nuclear-weapons-india-is-increasing-risk-of-new-arms-race/>

Passport backlog holding the country back

Sadia Zahra

September 25, 2024

Pakistan is currently facing a severe passport backlog, with thousands of citizens experiencing long delays in obtaining their travel documents. Administrative inefficiencies, technical issues, and increased demand have overwhelmed many passport offices, leading to significant frustration among applicants. This backlog creates substantial obstacles for those who urgently need passports for travel, work, or study abroad, affecting their ability to pursue essential opportunities.

The impact of these delays is far-reaching. For many Pakistanis, especially students seeking education abroad, workers pursuing overseas employment, or families needing to travel for emergencies, the passport backlog is more than just an inconvenience it's a barrier to crucial life opportunities. As a result, individuals are losing job offers, missing educational deadlines, and facing personal hardships due to the inability to travel.

The passport backlog is largely a result of administrative inefficiencies, outdated processes, and resource constraints. Slow manual processing and outdated systems struggle to meet the growing demand for passports. Many regional passport offices face staff and equipment shortages, exacerbating the delays. Furthermore, the lack of digitization in the application and issuance process contributes to corruption and bureaucratic red tape, forcing applicants to repeatedly visit offices for simple updates or corrections.

Recent statistics highlight the scale of the problem. For instance, the Directorate General of Immigration and Passports (DGIP) reported over 500,000 passport applications pending in mid-2023, with processing times extending to several months. In major cities like Karachi and Lahore, citizens have reported waiting up to six months to receive their passports. The surge in demand post-pandemic, coupled with insufficient staff and resources, has further strained the system. This backlog is not just a temporary inconvenience; it reflects systemic inefficiencies that urgently need reform. The tout

mafia, already established, profited massively by extorting citizens, students, and patients in need of passports.

Looking at the crisis in Pakistan a question arises: Could the passport delay be intentional? With increasing numbers of people leaving Pakistan and relocating abroad, is it possible that the government is deliberately slowing the passport process to prevent emigration? Regardless, these delays are damaging Pakistan's international reputation and presenting a negative image on the global stage.

The economic and social consequences of passport delays in Pakistan are significant and far-reaching. Economically, the backlog affects overseas workers who rely on timely passport renewals to secure jobs abroad, particularly in the Middle East. Many of these workers send remittances back home, a critical source of income for their families and a vital contribution to the national economy. Delays in passport issuance lead to missed job opportunities, resulting in financial strain for both the individuals affected and their families.

Socially, the impact is equally severe. Students seeking to study abroad often face strict deadlines for visa applications and admissions. Passport delays can cause them to miss out on scholarships, academic programmes, or even entire academic years. Families needing to travel for emergencies such as visiting sick relatives or attending important family events are left helpless when faced with prolonged waiting times. This creates logistical and emotional stress, straining personal relationships.

The passport delays have also sparked protests, most notably in Chaman, where workers have been demonstrating for over seven months. The protests began after authorities mandated that only individuals with valid passports could cross the Durand Line between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This decision disproportionately impacted workers who relied on daily cross-border movement for their livelihoods. Overall, these delays are more than just administrative inconveniences; they disrupt lives, hinder economic mobility, and

exacerbate the sense of uncertainty among Pakistanis looking to improve their futures abroad.

It is understandable that passport offices face numerous challenges, including severe staff shortages that hamper their ability to process applications efficiently. Technical issues with outdated systems also contribute to the delays, as manual procedures slow down the application and issuance processes. Additionally, bureaucratic red tape complicates and prolongs the handling of applications. These persistent issues reflect broader systemic problems that require comprehensive reform to effectively resolve the backlog.

To address the passport backlog in Pakistan, a multifaceted approach is needed. Upgrading technology by implementing modern digital systems and automating the application process can significantly enhance efficiency, as demonstrated by countries like Estonia and Singapore. Increasing the number of staff at passport offices would help manage the high volume of applications and ensure faster processing. Simplifying the application process by reducing bureaucratic red tape and streamlining document requirements can make the system more user-friendly and efficient. Learning from international models, such as the fast-track services and efficient e-passport systems used in Germany, could provide valuable insights and practical solutions for improving Pakistan's passport issuance system. Integrating these measures would not only alleviate the current backlog but also improve overall service delivery for citizens.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2024/09/25/passport-backlog-holding-the-country-back/>

Bangladesh crisis and its implications for Pakistan

Nomeen Kasi

September 29, 2024

History is filled with many fatal uprisings and revolutions, each for different reasons, carrying different outcomes and lessons. The French Revolution shook the monarchs of Europe. Additionally, history is replete with anti-revolutionary movements and individuals like Klemens von Metternich of Austria, who aimed to uphold supremacy of monarchy and suppress revolutionary uprisings in Europe. Despite these efforts, revolutions have always prevailed and succeeded. Revolutions are like fire; they start with a small spark and then spread quickly, covering a large area, completely changing everything in their path. This is the nature of revolutions. They begin with a spark and spread quickly. A small uprising can transform into a revolution, completely changing the system. The recent uprising in Bangladesh is a perfect example. A protest against the system led to the prime minister's and government's overthrow.

Sheikh Hasina Wazed, the longest-standing prime minister of Bangladesh, confronted the protests from the student union. She is the daughter of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman, who played a key role in the formation of Bangladesh in 1971. Initially, the anti-government protests began in July among university students. In the beginning, there were peaceful protests against the quota system in civil service jobs. Relatives of veterans from Bangladesh's 1971 independence war occupied one-third of these jobs. Although most of the demands were met, these peaceful protests turned into wider and more violent demonstrations. During the state's suppression, more than 300 individuals lost their lives in these uprisings.

According to the World Bank FY 2022-23), Bangladesh was one of the fastest-growing economies in South Asia the world, with a growth rate of 7.2% after the global pandemic. The GPD was growing positively, but the economic conditions of the people did not improve, and they were unable to produce the required jobs for around 18 million potential job seekers. The unemployment rate reached 5.1%. Additionally, there was a hike in inflation. As a result of this, students started their agitation, which later on turned violent and toppled the Hasina Regime, forcing her to flee from her country.

Among the quota issue, another reason for such unrest was the increasing corruption. The prime minister herself was facing the corruption allegations in particular and the government officials at higher ranks in general. While protests were largely due to the quota system, several grievances had built up against the government officials due to corruption allegations, bribery, nepotism, and money laundering charges. As the violence grew, the situation became more unstable and out of control.

The recent events in Bangladesh have had a massive impact on the region. The neighboring countries, such as India and Pakistan, face the same challenges and unemployment issues; therefore, the youth can be easily instrumentalized and mobilized by the political actors for their personal economic and political gains. With increasing technological advancement and the role of social media, the public is more aware of the political and social flux than ever before. Youth today are politically more engaged and aware of the changing dynamics, therefore showing more involvement. Bangladesh students' uprising gives a sense of hope to the youth elsewhere, as they believe they can also bring about a change in the political arena and can be successful. The politicians of Pakistan today concentrate more on their youth followers, knowing the potential they carry. The political parties are trying to gain more youth support as the educated youth can create a sense of change. The unemployed, educated male youth have been historically the initiators of rebellions and uprisings.

Historically, Pakistani politics has been marked by student activism. Even before the partition of the subcontinent, educated male youth played a key role in the struggle for. After the partition, students participated in politics and were key actors in protests against the government. And with the emerging populist leaders. Such events in the neighborhood strengthen the Pakistani youth to stand against the political system and bad governance, which is alarming in the current political and security situations.

The issue arises when these students' ideologies are unclear, leading them to blindly follow any charismatic leader, failing to address core issues causing political chaos in the country. They fail to address or suggest any political or social reforms. One of the reasons

for this could be a lack of knowledge, exclusiveness, and less participation in students' unions. As a result, students fail to develop and understand the political and social fabric. They are blank in ideology. However, it is impossible to maintain a social and political vacuum for students. The questioning youth is taking a key interest in the situation and demands change. They are the future leaders; hence, they play a significant role in shaping society and the political arena.

To avoid such situations and pseudo-revolutions, engaging the youth in a positive and fruitful way is essential to making them an asset to the country rather than an unwanted, unmanageable political burden. Students' unions with negative mindsets need to be managed. The student unions based on ethnicities and sectarian basis are more volatile and deserve the attention of the state. For any positive change, they should be encouraged. These unions provide a platform for the youth to raise their voice and contribute to improving governance. Unfortunately, our ethnicity-based students' union has taken the wrong direction of closing the gates of the institutions, promoting propaganda without ascertaining the truth, and shouting against the perceived wrongdoers. With proper knowledge and guidance, youth can become an important asset to the country and a step towards change against corruption and bad governance. Pakistan can learn from Bangladesh's experience, such as promoting youth engagement in politics and addressing corruption and unemployment.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2024/10/01/bangladesh-crisis-and-its-implications-for-pakistan/>

Pakistan's Enduring Loyalty and the Strategic Betrayal of United States

Usama Khalid

September 29, 2024

In a press briefing, the US Department of State's spokesperson, Mathew Miller, was being asked by one of the journalists that since the US has usually ostensibly claimed that Pakistan is historically a long-term ally of the States, despite such a so-called assertive stance, the latter is occasionally being subjected to US sanctions on its defense production projects.

In response, Miller said that though there is no doubt that Pakistan is a longstanding ally of the US, the US sanctions show that any such relationship could not hinder the US from following the policies it deems necessary for its national interest. He further clarified that though US-Pakistan has a long-standing partnership, there are still some points where the US has disagreements.

However, US duplicity, when it comes to dealing with Pakistan vis-à-vis India, is quite visible. Pakistan and India both emerged as the declaratory nuclear weapons states in 1998 with a few days gap. Both the South Asian states received harsh punitive sanctions, but India received different treatment as compared to Pakistan. Indian activities have always been ignored and neglected by the US.

On September 12, 2024, the US Department of State issued a press release on its website revealing the new sanctions on three Chinese and one Pakistani entity, as well as the sanctioning of one Chinese national named Luo Dongmei. This sanction has been imposed under Executive Order 13382 in reference to Missile Sanction Laws, which prohibit the proliferation of WMDs and their delivery means. According to the press release, this has been done to prohibit Pakistan from pursuing the long-range ballistic missile program.

Currently, Pakistan has intermediate-range ballistic missiles. The latest in this regard is the Shaheen III with the stated range of 2750 km, which covers the complete land mass of not only mainland India but covers its offshore Nicobar and Andaman Islands as well. Consequently, analyzing from the security angle of threat perception, it could be

concluded that Pakistan should not have to aspire for longer-range options, but it is not how things work in the international political arena where states are ambitiously aiming for more and more power beyond a certain limit.

However, this is not the first time such action has been taken against Pakistan's defense program; if critically evaluated, several such cases of such biased unilateral actions are on record. In April this year, similar sanctions on the same suspects had been imposed by the US, claiming that the sanctioned entities are assisting Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile program. Out of four entities, three were Chinese and the fourth one was Belarussian that were targeted.

US duplicity gets exposed when it comes to Indian development of long-range Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) programs. India currently possesses ballistic missiles with a range up to 7000 km, which not only covers the whole of China's entire landmass but also threatens the European and Western hemispheres. The US has never imposed any sanctions on India for carrying out such aggressive developments; instead, the US has always been the generous ally of India. India has been granted the status of the Major Defense Partner of the US in the region to counter the Chinese threat, for which India has received several strategic deals such as LEMAO, BECA, and COMCASA, and the most vital among them is the waiver of Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), the same NSG that was being established in the aftermath of the Indian covert nuclear tests of 1974, in order to prevent the future theft of nuclear fissile material.

On the other hand, Pakistan has always been subjected to the biased attitude of the US. Pakistan has almost always helped the US whenever it required it. In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, Pakistan provided the intelligence support and the on-ground resources to the US-backed Afghan militias, commonly known as 'Mujahidin', who were the frontline fighting force against the Soviet Army. Additionally, after 9/11, the US invaded Afghanistan, Pakistan provided the US, though not manpower, but airstrips, airspace, and intelligence. The consequences of both mentioned assistance by Pakistan are having a horrific implication on the social and political spectrum of Pakistan.

The jihadi fundamentalist mindset was groomed not only in the religiously Islamic seminaries but through the school literature as well. Since then, Pakistan has shifted from

the moderate Islamic republic to the ultra-fundamentalist Islamic republic. Thousands of people have lost their lives since the start of the War on Terror (WoT) in Pakistan because the entities that have fled Afghanistan came to Pakistan and established their networks and began their terror activities from and in here as well.

It is quite high time for Pakistan to realize that in this power-hungry world of politics, it has to choose its friends and allies very wisely because alliances can be formed and reformed but calling someone a friend requires a lot of stamina and courage to fulfill its commitments. Pakistan has always proved to be the all-weather friend of the United States, not an ally, while the United States has always been an unfaithful partner.

<https://www.wqi.world/pakistan-s-enduring-loyalty-and-the-strategic-betrayal-of-united-states/>

AI's Dark Side: Misinformation and Disinformation

Shahmeer

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Philosophers and social scientists consider information – not matter and energy – the building block of human existence. It establishes human networks and allows mass cooperation. It equips people to identify reality, flourishes political systems, integrates social order, allows economic activities, and advances research and development for the continuous growth. Throughout history, the means to accumulate, analyze, and disseminate information evolved with the existing technologies. From the printing press to the age of AI, each advancement in technology has resulted in innovation and profound challenges in the information landscape. In the AI-driven digital age, the flow of information has become faster and more accessible. Alongside its immense potential, AI has amplified misinformation and disinformation that has overarching implications for human affairs. Misinformation is an unintentional error that occurs while accumulating, analyzing, and disseminating information. Disinformation, conversely, is a deliberate lie or error that someone knowingly does in search of a vested interest. AI-led information platforms such as Facebook and YouTube among others amplify misinformation and disinformation due to the latter's sensational and violent nature helping them to attract 'user engagement' on their respective platforms.

The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2024 identifies misinformation and disinformation as severe threats in the coming years, and what they result in is intense polarization, weakening appetite for tolerance, trust erosion, diversion in the state machinery, and the potential rise of domestic propaganda and censorship. Empirically, in August 2017, The Rohingya crisis in Myanmar was highly believed to have been caused due to Facebook's failure to moderate the hate speech and fake news and allow them to circulate for user engagement. That resulted in a mass exodus of 7 lakh Rohingya to Bangladesh. In June 2024 in Quetta, a school teacher attempted to suicide, but Facebook was used to falsely portrayed him as a hero injured while saving a child from a train. Seeing his apparently heroic role, the Chief Minister of Balochistan rewarded him with

free healthcare and family employment. However, days later, it was unveiled that there was no child, and he was attempting suicide. Resultantly, a man with a single Facebook post diverted the entire state machinery. There are other platforms by the name of deepfakes that are used for face swapping and voice mimicry and are widely used during election campaigns to astray the voters. These tools fuel the populist layer, undermine the trust of the people in elections, and challenge the legitimacy of existing institutions. There are also prospects that authoritarian rulers use such tools to consolidate their reign. In the ongoing US presidential election campaigns, the deepfakes of Joe Biden have been circulated in which he urges the residents of New England not to vote and save their vote for the November election.

It was a robot call used artificial intelligence to mimic his voice to dissuade Democrat voters from casting their votes in the primary. Such phone calls reached nearly 5,000 voters just before the state primary. Therefore, at least 20 US states have passed regulations against deep fakes before the elections. In this year, people from 70 countries are supposed to head to the polls this year, and it is expected that we are going to see the largest AI deception in the history of humanity thus far. Hence, the application of AI in the information domain comes with remarkable opportunities and genuine risks. To better harness AI-led innovations, some proactive steps must be taken by the relevant stakeholders and authorities. First, a global legally binding instrument is essential that acknowledge the innovations and threats of AI. Second, it must oblige nation-states and non-state actors, especially tech giants to a swift collaboration for the regulation of AI.

The instrument must include improving AI algorithms for content moderation, addressing algorithm biases, encouraging collaboration between tech companies and national governments, and highly regulating the use of deepfakes and other AI manipulations. Third, AI developers must initiate and implement robust safeguards including transparency measures and accountability frameworks. Finally, it is equally important that high regulations and censorship for controlling the flood of AI generated misinformation and disinformation must not compromise free speech and peoples' voice.

<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/09/30/ais-dark-side-misinformation-and-disinformation/>