

# Pakistan in **Changing World Order**

One-day Seminar's report





# PAKISTAN IN CHANGING WORLD ORDER

JANUARY 2019

A REPORT PREPARED BY

**Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)**

**Islamabad**



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# Summary

**P**akistan can benefit from the changing world order, once it puts its own house in order. At the same time, it needs to rid of the binary thinking that being one's ally means being someone else's enemy.

These views were expressed in the daylong seminar on “Pakistan in Changing World”, held on January 21, 2019 in Islamabad. International and national experts spoke on the occasion.

The seminar noted that the world is changing: US's global posture, if not power, is changing; China is rising; the Middle East is in throes of violence fueled by regional rivalries; terrorism still is a potent threat. All these and many other developments are affecting Pakistan.

As discussed, China's rise and what it means for US is over speculated . Will there be cooperation or outright conflict, or something in between? While some are not ready to lend cooperation on global issues, the current administration in the US, it is said views China as more of a strategic rival.

In Pakistan, there is a tendency of viewing US-China competition as inevitable. Even Pakistan's own diplomatic struggles or India's closeness with US, is traced to the latter's outdoing China. But one strong view warns against falling too much for a Cold-War binary thinking.

Yet, Pakistan's alignment with China, manifested in the shape of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is credited for opening diplomatic and economic space for Pakistan beyond its existing options. At the same time, Pakistan should not let go of its ties with the US. Those ties have their own history and should not even be linked to US's relations with India.

Regionally, the rivalry between Middle Eastern countries, in particular, Iran and Saudi Arabia, can limit Pakistan's choices, forcing it to choose one over another. How Pakistan manages that is yet to be seen. Pakistan's key concern, it was noted, is the potential export of terrorist ideologies by groups like Daish, which presents an ideology calling for establishing an Islamic State.

On a positive note, many terrorist groups in the country are on the run. This, some say, can provide space for Pakistan to move ahead.

While Pakistan can do little in changing the world around, it can mitigate its negative effects with foresight, by taking benefit from competing players.

Pakistan's inability to play to the fullest emanates from the economic difficulties it faces, coupled with a sense of insecurity dodging it for the last ten years.

As the world becomes multipolar, so would the discourse be, with reference to power politics dominating it at the behest of human rights. Yet connectivity too seems to be the way forward, which China has been propounding.

## KEY POINTS BY

# Muhammad Amir Rana

Director, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)

**A**fter thanking the participants and the guests, he said the world today is in a flux: it cannot be said for certain if US's predominance is fading, but clearly its own global posture is changing. Parallel to this is the rise of China, a topic of much speculation, especially how its relations will transpire with the US or the world in general. Scenarios range from conflict to competition to cooperation. Moving on, he said, for the first time, the noble idea of EU has been put to question. While US sees itself as natural ally of EU, many in that bloc differ with US on Russia. Similarly, he said, there has been rise of strongmen, believing in aggressive posture at home and abroad. India's aggressive diplomatic approach is a case in point, he noted.

All these developments, he summarized, will have impact on Pakistan. Yet, he argued while there are challenges, there are some advantages too:

For one, he said, Pakistan's geo-strategic and political realignment with China and Russia had helped the country to defuse the hostile diplomatic posture of India towards Pakistan. Similarly, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) had helped to remove the impression that Pakistan has limited geo-economic choices except of the US.

Yet, Mr. Rana noted, managing the relationship with China requires more efforts especially for the success of the CPEC without losing any other opportunities of economic growth. This is also important for creating strategic balance with other old and new strategic and economic partners of the country

The changing geopolitical landscape of the Middle East has also brought many advantages and challenges for the country, noted Mr. Rana in his introductory remarks. Balancing between Iran and Saudi Arabia remains a major challenge for the country.

Inside the country, apparently most lethal terrorist groups of Pakistan are on the run. This reality is reshaping the strategic priorities of the global powers, he said.

Mr. Rana also noted that in Pakistan'sneighbourhood, the Taliban have been acknowledged as a legitimate actor in Afghanistan and raised hope of the global



community about the role of Pakistan. So far Pakistan is managing the issue successfully but there are few hindrances in the way of success, such as how to include ultra-hardline elements within the Taliban and how to deal with the internal political compulsions of Afghanistan that can sabotage the on-going peace talks.

The opportunities and challenges in the changing global order require a dynamic and creative approach and well-articulated statesmanship, he furthermore added.

He hoped that the discussion will generate rich discussion on the topic, by covering all aspects and sharing all possibilities.

KEYPOINTS BY

## Michael Kugelman

Deputy Director, Woodrow Wilson Centre for International Affairs

**H**e said he will talk about three key US relationships: a) The US-China relationship, b) the US-India relationship, and c) The US-Pakistan relationship. After that, he said, he will comment on the changing world order and how it affects Pakistan, “as seen from things here in Washington.”

Starting with US-China relationship, he argued, the US government views of China have typically been very complicated, as some take a more hawkish approach and others a conciliatory approach. As of now, he said, with the Trump administration, the approach is quite hawkish.

Sharing examples, he said President Trump has essentially plunged the two countries into a trade war, and that the administration-in-power takes China “not only as a strategic rival, but also as a national security threat.” The Trump administration’s first National Security Strategy identified strategic rivalry as America’s top national security threat. Kugelman said it was a “huge” change because in post-9/11 era, terrorism had been described as a top US national security threat. So essentially, he said, the US views China as its biggest strategic rival.

Yet, he said, China and the United States could certainly be partners on geo-political and strategic levels specifically in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. They have common interests when it comes to the issue of stability and terrorism. China wants to build its road initiative through Afghanistan, and therefore desires stability.

Unfortunately, he admitted, cooperation is still desired. If, he argued, US officials were to apply an economic lens to China and its activities around the world including South Asia, they could see it positively. Even in Pakistan, CPEC will create better infrastructure, improve energy security, develop ports and bring prosperity and stability. This, he said, is the exact same goal that the US has for Pakistan. US should rather be happy, because China has helped US achieve the very outcomes that it wants. Unfortunately, Washington

would always look at China through a strategic lens because China is its strategic rival, he said, adding that the US sees China expanding its footprints for military purposes.

The second relation he talked about was that of the US-India. He said it is actually not quite as strong as many think, adding that the US-Pakistan relationship is actually stronger than many people think.

As to the US-India relationship, he said, it is growing and is driven mainly on the defence side, with increasing momentum towards arms deals and defense agreements. He said US-India relation is one of the few to thrive under the Trump administration. Although there have been some ups and downs over the last two years, the relation continues to thrive, which indicate its strength.

Yet at the same time, he warned that the strength of this relation should not be overstated. For all the talk of goodwill and cooperation, he said, the US and India have never agreed to what should constitute a strategic partnership. They describe their partnership as strategic but they never really define what exactly a strategic partnership should be, he said. For India, he argued, a strategic partnership is one that entails a lot of arms sale and technology transfers. For the US, the strategic partnership should certainly consist of those elements but it should also consist of operational cooperation like joint patrols in waters and fighting wars alongside each other. India does not see it that way. This way, he said, there is a disconnect between the two countries.

Reiterating this point, he said, the US sees India as a key country in Asia to help US achieve its goals with its Indo-Pacific strategy, in particular to help push back against China and its rise. India, on the other hand, may not be very comfortable with it, as it values its relationship with China. The India-China trade relationship is the largest bilateral trade relationship in the world.

As to the third relation, US-Pakistan relationship, he said, the Trump administration has verbally taken a hard line on Pakistan. He posted some critical Tweets. But, Kugelman asked, has anything really changed in this relationship, answering in the negative. The US, he said, has not taken more draconian or coercive steps which were speculated under Trump. To be sure, he said, there have been cuts in security assistance, but, he reminded the audience that this is not a new thing. It has happened before as well.

Kugelman argued as long as the US had troops in Afghanistan, the US is not going to push Pakistan too hard, and is not going to make too harsh demands. The US knows that if

sufficiently provoked, Pakistan could resort to as “shutdown of NATO supply routes.” The US, he also said, has its hands tied to an extent in terms of what it can do.

Moving on, he said, the US-Pakistan relations has one of the biggest opportunities now, in the context of reconciliation process in Afghanistan. The US believes Pakistan can be a helpful partner, not necessarily in bringing the Taliban to the table to talk, but in urging the Taliban to help achieve US goals in the reconciliation process. Pakistan can, for instance, convince the Taliban to speak with Afghan officials, something resisted so far, he said. The US, he said, always views Pakistan through the lens of Afghanistan.

He also touched upon US troops bid to leave Afghanistan, saying the question is of “when”, not “if.” President Trump wants to get out of Afghanistan and he may be willing to do so even if there is no peace deal, he said. Once US troops have left Afghanistan, then, he said, all bets can be off with the US-Pakistan relations. At that time, perhaps the US could decide on not cooperating or taking more punitive steps, or perhaps may decide to make efforts to move with India to get Pakistan deal with anti-India groups. But, he reiterated that there will be a stalemate, as long as there is US presence in Afghanistan.

Kugelman concluded by saying that “Pakistan is a beneficiary of a changing world order.” This unipolar moment is about to disappear because you could see other countries rise like China, India, Russia, and Turkey. A number of mid-level powers are getting stronger. Pakistan, he said, has good relations with the rising powers like China, Russia and Turkey. It means that as the world becomes more multi-polar, Pakistan will stand to benefit because it would have some alliances with these emerging powers. He wondered how it can be said that Pakistan is getting isolated in the international community. As long as the CPEC exists, Pakistan is the key lynchpin in this whole story.

## KEY POINTS BY

### Dr Riffat Hussain

Academic/Member, Prime Minister's Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs

**S**tarting off, he said he would tend to disagree with the optimistic tone of Kugelman, who, Dr. Riffat argue, did not take into consideration the difficult economic conditions of Pakistan and the decisions it has to take in this regard. “If you were a Pakistani, you would worry too much about the economic features of the country”, he said, adding that the country’s economy is not in a good condition, thereby constraining the ability to take advantage of many such opportunities in existence.

Still, Dr. Riffat said, he agreed that the emerging multipolar order offers Pakistan many opportunities. As the world becomes multi-polar, there are emerging power centers; for instance, China’s rise is a huge bonus for Pakistan. Yet, he added, such advantages are somewhat constrained by Pakistan’s internal economic difficulties.

He said Pakistan has links with the external world, shaped under a broader sense of identity. Pakistanis, he said, are part of Central Asia, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. There is thus a wider canvas available for Pakistan to play its role. It also means that Pakistan cannot purely be constrained in South Asian geographical terms.

Pakistan faces economic difficulties largely due to the massive corruption in the past. At the same time, the country has, in particular since 9/11, been in the habit of looking towards the external sources of help. The Americans gave Pakistan Coalition Support Fund (CSF) to bear expenses of war against terrorism. The aid has recently been cut off. He said there have been economic difficulties because of the security situation, massive corruption and energy shortages. All these are structural bottlenecks, which, unless addressed will skew Pakistan’s ability to play its role.

To be sure, he said, these are huge challenges. But he added that Pakistan’s challenge is more internal than being regional or external. Certainly, Pakistan’s rivalry with India puts a huge constraint; even relations with Afghanistan remain somewhat paradoxical. Pakistan is feeling the economic burden of defending eastern and western fronts; yet, he said, Pakistan can set its own house in order.

He said Pakistan made great strides recently by managing to curtail the threat of extremism. The graph of massive or large-scale attacks has almost gone down to zero, he said. As of now, he said, we need to put our house in order. He wondered what will happen to the youth if the government cannot create enough jobs and economy lags behind. Arab Spring was also sparked by economic conditions, he said.

At the same time, he said Pakistan needs external space so that Pakistan can move around its internal agenda. But that space has not been available to Pakistan until recently because of the Indian conspiracies against Pakistan. As of now, he said, Pakistan is not threatened as much from the external front as from internal economic difficulties.

Dr. Riffat also talked about connectivity in South Asia, saying that India is the only country bordering with all the South Asian countries. None of other South Asian countries have borders with each other. This geographical positioning gives India a certain edge over all other countries when it comes to connectivity. But because of the India-Pakistan rivalry, India has not come on board to integrate the region, denting Pakistan's efforts to present itself as an inclusive model of regional connectivity.

At the same time, he said, Pakistan has contested borders with Afghanistan, and has problems with India, and the Kashmir issue is still unresolved. Unless and until Pakistan manages to resolve the border issues on eastern as well as western frontiers, he said, its ability to play as an independent player will remain somewhat constrained. India uses both these difficulties that Pakistan has to put further pressure on Pakistan.

Pakistan, he said, has been presenting a vision of regional connectivity, which not only connects the borders, but would also connect its people. He reminded the audience about an agreement signed in 1988 between India and Pakistan, which talked about the free exchange of students, scholars and artists between the two countries. This agreement lapsed in 1998 and was not renewed since then. That agreement should serve as the basis of developing people to people contact.

When India had the leadership of SAARC four to five years ago, the main objective was connectivity but they didn't do anything to connect the capitals of the world. He asked how any region can be integrated when people there do not have access to each other's airlines. He called for making conscious efforts to integrate itself with the world economy. He lamented that SAARC conference could not be held for the past three years due to Indian objections. India, he said, has been using terrorism as an excuse not to hold the SAARC Summit.

Moving on, Dr. Riffat said, China has a direct stake in resolution of the Kashmir dispute by virtue of the 1963 border agreement with Pakistan. The agreement even says that the boundary settlement between Pakistan and China will be finalized, depending on the settlement of the Kashmir dispute. This gives China a direct stake in the resolution of the Kashmir dispute. Chinese position, he said, has shifted a little bit. After signing of the Simla Agreement, if Kashmir can be resolved peacefully, with the consent of Pakistan, India and Kashmir, China will have no objections. It means, Dr. Riffat said, the Chinese are not necessarily looking at the UN mandatory resolution, but emphasize that India and Pakistan should seek a peaceful resolution of the dispute.

The learned academic was also asked about Afghan peace process. He said the peace process should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. In real terms, what Pakistan wants is the cessation of armed violence that has been going on in Afghanistan for the last 30 years. Pakistan feels that unless this armed conflict comes to a halt or there is a significant null in this armed conflict, peace can never return to Afghanistan. Pakistan's biggest fear is that with the anticipated withdrawal of the American troops from Afghanistan in the near future, there might be a return to the Afghan civil war which will force most of the Afghan refugees to flee Afghanistan towards Pakistan. If that happens, it will also put a break on Afghanistan's desire to emerge as a part of CPEC, he said.

For these two reasons, peace in Afghanistan is a top priority for Pakistan and that's why Pakistanis have responded to the call of the Americans, and they have used their influence to bring the Afghan Taliban on the negotiating table.

Responding to another query, on resolving problems, he said we are not here to resolve the problem, adding that we are here to raise the issues we think are important. It's very important to talk about the role of Pakistan in the changing world order, because Pakistan has been a prisoner of the Cold War mentality that prevailed in the international system from 1945 onwards. But now we see that winds of change are blowing, CPEC is emerging and America is withdrawing from Afghanistan. These open up a space for Pakistan to play its important role.

On yet another question, he replied that Pakistan's dream has been hijacked by the retrogressive forces. With that perspective, he said, "I do not think that Pakistan could make or take a step forward." But more importantly, what kind of a cooperative security does Pakistan want? He wondered will Pakistan be able to expand all its energies in pursuing zero-sum competition with India or can Pakistan look at the rise of India and

China as the two largest economies of the world by 2030. China would definitely take over the United States, and India could be the second largest economy by then. Can Pakistan craft a foreign policy which looks at the potential of these largest economies as win-win situation? It depends on what kind of framework we are willing to adopt. And I think Pakistan has an adversary relationship with India because of the Indian attitude. Despite that, he said, he thinks we need to continue to push for peace with India amid all these problems and if Pakistan pursues that and if it's in the position to put its own house in order, then sky is the limit for Pakistan.





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KEY POINTS BY

## Haitham Naseer

Former journalist

**M**r. Haitham touched on how the situation in Middle East will affect Pakistan. He argued that recently, Saudi Arabia and UAE have been supportive to Pakistan economically but overall it is evident that they are not much interested in investing in Pakistan to get it out of the economic crisis it faces today.

He said there are a lot of actors on the global board, and Pakistan has an opportunity to play a role in different scenarios and in different regions. But, he added, Pakistan is more into receiving aid, roles, and demands from other actors. America, some Gulf countries and other regional powers, he said, are always asking Pakistan to do more.

Many regional powers are playing in the Middle East. The US has recently announced its withdrawal from Syria. It is giving upper hand to Turkey in South Syria, allowing them to fight against Daish and Kurdish fighters. This affects other countries too.

Pakistan's key concern is the potential export of terrorist ideologies by groups like Daish, which presents an ideology calling for establishing an Islamic State. Their slogans attract desperate youth with no jobs and hopes otherwise.

He set aside the impression that Daish is on the run, saying it is still functioning in some areas. In any case, Daish is just the latest edition of extremism. "Such groups can create a new skin, a new name, a new color to still function under the influence and funds from regional and great powers", he said.

In Pakistan, the security challenge is dealt by force mainly, but the ideology is still there, as ideology travels from the Middle East to this region. Pakistan may pay higher price for this ideology than Saudi Arabia or other Middle Eastern countries.

He discussed the news reports of Pakistan interested in mediating between Saudi Arabia and Iran. He said this applies to both regions, that is Pakistan-India too. The question is not about someone willing to mediate, but to what extent are both sides interested in



mediation, and what are their common grounds. When the potential mediator on both sides are interested about mediation, then it is very easy. But as of now, he said, both sides – Iran and Saudi Arabia – are going in different directions.

He said contrary to the perception that Iran-Saudi rivalry started recently, it is actually more than 30 years old. The Iran-Iraq war in 1970s and 80s was technically a proxy war for Saudi Arabia, he said. Saddam Hussain was the fighter but he used to get funds and support from all the Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia, against the Iranian threat. This competition for regional influence between Saudi Arabia and Iran is not new, and will not end soon.

In this regional rivalry, Haitham said, great powers and some regional powers are trying to get the maximum benefit. Some are buying and selling weapons from these countries, some are exporting information; some other countries are just watching or getting the negative impact from this rivalry.

In the coming one or two decades, he said, there is no indication of any kind of peaceful settlement between the two sides. Other regional powers are competing for influence, for instance, Turkey and Egypt are stepping inside Syria. It means, he said, that what started with Saudi Arabia and Iran has now been populated by other players too. Then, there is Russian influence too, especially in Syria. All these factors will affect the direction of the proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

## KEY POINTS BY

### Marco Mezzera

Senior Adviser, NOREF

**S**tarting off, Mr. Marco said, in the last ten years, even though conflicts have grown, there has been an increase in the number of peace agreements. But peace is yet to be achieved. What, he asked, are the main reasons for this situation?

He then cited three reasons in response:

Firstly, he said, geopolitics is back. Previously, the US was mostly in control of the world order. The rise of China, Russia and India and other regional dynamics have changed the previous world order. The old landscape has, therefore, become much more complex. That is one of the reasons why it has become difficult in achieving peace worldwide.

Then, he said, there is another trend of the network of physically-dispersed individuals, the global terrorists. They pose a big challenge.

Thirdly, the spread of conflicts across borders has become common. Conflict nowadays has become virtual. There is no need for physical interaction, while recruitment by terrorists is done across borders. In case of Pakistan, the trans-boundary issues have become crucial particularly in case of Taliban who are probing both ways across the borders. The rising conflict in Balochistan is also important, keeping in mind that most of the victims of violence last year in Pakistan were from Balochistan.

These three main factors are important when looking from the conflict-resolution perspective.

Mr. Marco said Europe is more self-centric in its approach, and we are facing the dilemma when it comes to the issue of conflict resolution. The dilemma is not only between justice and peace but about how to respond to violations of human rights, while you are also trying to solve the conflict. Sometimes, you have to focus on your main objective.

He said there has been no progress on Kashmir. He said India-Pakistan relationship can also come to depend on how China positions itself in the region. China is going to

expand its business in the region. The main issue, he said, is of Afghanistan, which should be looked at from the regional perspective. The best thing is to sit together and start sharing. China needs to look at India in terms of economic cooperation.

Finally, he said, the US is going to be the determining factor in the changing world order. The position of China is getting stronger which is irritating many of the countries including the US.

CLOSING REMARKS BY

## Inam ul Haq

Former Foreign Secretary, Pakistan

**H**e said many thinkers, writers, scholars and analysts are describing the current age as “age of disillusionment.” Others talk about uncertainty, anger, disruption, fragmentation and some would go on saying that the world has in fact disintegrated from the way we knew it. There have been many theories in recent years regarding the decline of the West and the rise of Asia, he said.

But, he said, let us go back a little into history. There was a battle between three ideologies, namely fascism, communism and liberalism. The battle was first won against fascism in the Second World War; and by 1991, against communism, with the ideology of democracy, open markets and protection of the human rights making waves. He, however, added that the victory which came about in 1991 was supposed to move towards kinder and gentler world, and it was believed by many to be permanent. It was then that the theories of “The End of History” by Fukuyama and “The Clash of Civilizations” by Samuel Huntington came forward.

Today, he said, liberalism and globalization are in a retreat, in the face of the rise of ultra-nationalism, racism, tribalism, authoritarianism, xenophobia, far-right extremism, and neo-fascism. The far-right authoritarianism, which is termed Populism these days, he said, is also gaining ground in the West and in other countries as well.

He asked who are these populists, and then responded that they are pro-nativism and even anti-politics, anti-elite, anti-establishment, anti-intellectual and anti-system. These populists, he said, don’t really believe in democracy. They believe in authoritarianism. Thinkers in the West today are apprehensive, he said. Democracy is in a crisis and is actually dying and is being replaced by neo-fascism and hyper-nationalism, he furthermore added.

Mr. Inam then shared examples of four leaders of major powers. Putin who ruled Russia for almost 20 years, with an iron hand, trying to bring back the lost glory of the Soviet Union. Trump of the United States who is known as a maverick but a strong leader, trying

to impose his will on the world and on his own country. His style of imposing effort of his will is making him lose his saner advisors. China's Xi Jinping has changed the constitution, so that he can stay in power for more than ten years and perhaps for life. Finally, India's Narendra Modi, the chief of the BJP, is bringing Hindutva into a so-called secular country, and converting it into a Hindu state.

He also touched on global economy, saying there are warnings of another global recession. It is being projected that perhaps the US, which goes into the cyclical recessions, may again go into a recession. And if the US goes into a recession and the Chinese economy slows down, the world is in for major economic trouble.

In the end, he said there are two immediate threats to mankind and to the planet Earth. The first is the threat of a nuclear holocaust. But the second one to which no one is paying attention is climate change/global warming. It is an existentialist threat for a country like Pakistan, he said. According to some projections, Pakistan could well turn into a desert in the next one hundred years. We are amongst the ten worse-affected water scarce countries. Our population is exploding at an unprecedented rate and we are doing nothing about any of these issues, he said.

He said even other countries are not doing sufficiently enough about climate change. The US has pulled out of the Paris Accord. Instead of cooperating and working together to save the world, powerful states of the world are building strategic alliances and coalitions to protect their strategic, political and economic interests and to maintain their dominant position in the world. The international political, military and economic outlook appears to be eroding trust and confidence among the states. Trump has moved away from multilateralism, he said.

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) is an independent think-tank committed to provide an in-depth understanding and objective analyses of regional and global issues. PIPS provides international strategic thinkers a forum to play an active role in understanding and researching real and perceived threats to regional and global peace and security. The objective is to engage leading regional and international strategic thinkers, academicians and media persons in pursuance and production of knowledge of national, regional and global security issues and to promote awareness about the importance of peace and democracy. The goal will be achieved through independent policy analysis, and collection, processing, interpretation and dissemination of information and skills/training.

PIPS carries out and disseminates policy analyses and research studies on the regional and global strategic issues such as conflict and development, political violence, religious extremism, ethnic strife, terrorism (including state terrorism), economics, governance and democracy, foreign relations, and cultural learning of policy-making processes. It also conducts dialogues, trainings and other educational programs for strengthening partnerships and resolving inter-state conflicts, and clashes between the government and the public. At the national level, the institute is dedicated to build a knowledge base for peace and enlightenment of the society. PIPS is building one of the largest database on peace and security issues at the regional level.

PIPS has also developed a vast regional and global network for information sharing and research on some of the key security issues facing Pakistan, which also have a profound impact on regional and global security.



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