

## RAPORTEURS REPORT

# Emerging Trends in West Asia: Regional and Global Implications February 13-15, 2013



## *Inaugural Session*



In his opening remarks, Dr Arvind Gupta, Director General IDSA, extended a warm welcome to the Defence Minister, Shri A.K. Antony, all the participants of the 15th Asian Security Conference, distinguished guests and scholars. Dr Gupta began by referring how West Asia was currently in a state of transition giving way to popular aspirations for bringing change and democracy. Beginning with the uprising in Tunisia in December 2010, hoping to bring reform and change, the popular movement has proceeded to other states in the region culminating in the recent bloody end to the dictatorial regime in Libya. While demands for reform in some states have been fulfilled, in some others it has been put on hold. New forces have emerged and there is widespread violence in most parts of the region, which implies that the so-called Arab Spring is yet to unfold fully. The danger of violence is stark and new forms of threat and sectarian faultiness have been exposed during the turmoil in the Arab region. Amidst uncertainty, there is a raging debate on the nature and scope of humanitarian intervention—the ongoing Syrian turmoil is the best case to explain this dilemma.

Dr Gupta further cautioned how the current situation is conducive for groups such as the Al Qaeda gaining a foothold in these countries. This kind of churning in the Arab world is bound to have geopolitical implications. Most importantly, Indian cannot afford to be indifferent to the situation in West Asia as its security interests are intertwined with the developments taking place there.

Delivering the keynote address, Defence Minister, Shri A.K. Antony stated that since December 2010, several states in West Asia have undergone political and socio-economic transformation yielding to popular aspirations and demands. These changes have unfortunately been accompanied by rampant violence and uncertainty. Extremist elements have benefited from this phase of uncertainty and disorder and taken over control in countries such as Mali. Shri Antony noted that no government can afford to ignore popular aspirations; that the voice of the youth is a critical force in these countries; that the Arab Spring has just started and there is still a long way to go; that transformation in this part of the world can potentially alter the geopolitical and the regional landscape; while older political and social institutions have been transformed, there is need to consolidate new structures; and democracy needs to be strengthened. The Defence Minister appreciated the positive role of the social media in projecting comprehensively the popular angst and demands for change, during the entire phase of public protests in Arab world.

The Defence Minister elaborated on India's stakes in the peace and stability of West Asia. A sizeable number of Indians live in the region and a substantial part of the remittances come from them. Shri Antony also referred to the trade relations between India and the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council), which in the year 2011-12 was to the tune of more than \$145 billion. He also stated how India, with its rich tradition of democracy and a pluralistic society, can benefit the countries of West Asia which are presently undergoing political and socio-economic transformation.

Giving the vote of thanks, Brigadier Rumel Dahiya, Deputy Director General IDSA, thanked the Raksha Mantri for delivering the keynote address and commended the conference team for their efforts in organising the 15th Asian Security Conference. He noted that India's Look East Policy is relatively new, but the Look West Policy has been persistent and, therefore, it is hoped the deliberations over the next two days would be intellectually stimulating. He also thanked the diplomatic core and members of the media present on the occasion.

***Report prepared by Priyanka Singh, Associate Fellow, IDSA.***

## *Session I: Political Transformation in West Asia: Prospects for Peace, Stability and Prosperity*

Chairperson: Amb. Chinmaya Gharekhan

Amb. Talmiz Ahmad

Dr. Ahmed al Wahishi

Dr. Hadi Soleimanpour

Prof. Tim Niblock



The first session was chaired by Ambassador Chinmaya Gharekhan. He began by noting that the process of change happening in the Arab world had medium to long-term benefits and warned against being pessimistic about Islamist regimes coming to power in the region. Instead, he pointed out that the Arab Spring had resulted in the empowerment of people who have now lost fear of the authorities. Ambassador Gharekhan argued that countries in West Asia which have seen minimal external meddling are doing better than the ones where external powers have interfered consistently and to a greater extent. While acknowledging that the US might have the best intentions for West Asia, he pointed out that the best service the Americans could render would be to not interfere or aim to shape the future of the region. He cautioned that the sectarian Shia-Sunni tensions triggered after the US intervention in Iraq were a major factor influencing the situation in West Asia.

The first speaker was former Indian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Oman and UAE, Talmiz Ahmed, who presented his paper titled “Islamist Discourse and Politics in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring”. He noted that the Arab Spring had made Islam (and its influence on political life) a part of the government and it was no longer in the Opposition, which had been its traditional role while countering elite secular forces that wielded authoritarian power. Tracing the historical foundations of Islamist discourse, Ambassador Ahmed criticised the representation of Islam as rigid, intolerant and pointed out there was no consensus either historically or at present about the content or interpretation of Sharia. He said that Bin Laden and Al Zawahiri represent only one strand of Sharia. Pointing out that there was a clear separation of mosque and state in Islam, he said that huge areas in Islam were part of the secular domain that was beyond the domain of the religious scholar, who had great autonomy in interpreting Islamic law.

Ambassador Ahmed shed light on how political Islam emerged from the experience of colonialism, leading to a political domain controlled by secularists who were influenced by the West. Thus, the oppositional character made the dominant Islamic discourse more radical, literalist and intolerant over time. He pointed out that it was one of the ironies of modern history that global jihad was engineered by the US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia for short term gains, and it instead had led to negative long term consequences. He stressed that there was an interplay of three powerful sources of Islam at present – Wahhabiya, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Al Qaeda and other radical Islamic groups.

He noted that Islamist groups, who have traditionally been in the opposition, have made their discourse more liberal since the Arab Spring in order to become adapt to the role of governance. Ambassador Ahmed warned that radical Islam had become pervasive today, with Al Qaeda and groups related to it cashing in on states that are failing or have failed. Arguing that the burgeoning divide due to the Iran-Saudi Arabia confrontation has been given a sectarian character, he pointed out that the present battleground between Wahhabi Sunni elements and Shias is in Syria, and that the Syrian conflict has become both a sectarian and geopolitical conflict.

He concluded by saying that the Arab Spring had caused a fundamental change in the political order of the Arab world, where tyranny and appeasement of the West, as had been the case in the previous regimes, was completely unacceptable today.

The second speaker, Dr Hadi Soleimanpour, provided an Iranian perspective on the political transformation in West Asia. He stressed that West Asia was an integral part of the historical turn of this “Asian century”, where power was shifting from the West to the East. According to him, the main cause of the Arab uprising was the fact that people had long endured challenges like lack of political independence, accountability, and transparency in their political system. He called for a new security paradigm for the region of West Asia based on greater cooperation between countries and shared values. Dr Soleimanpour pointed to Afghanistan as an area of common regional interest and noted that Afghanistan’s location at the crossroads of South and Central Asia and the Persian Gulf would affect the safety and stability of the region, especially after 2014. He stressed the need for more Iran-India interaction in order to serve mutual interests and contribute to developing regional cooperation.

The third speaker, Professor Timothy C. Niblock, presented his paper on “The Future of Political Transformation in West Asia”. He pointed out the Arab spring had caught everyone by surprise, both by how quickly regimes fell and by how the revolution spilled from one country to another. There was the faulty assumption that these were regimes that could not be removed by popular protest because of the power of the regime and the fear it generated among the people. The Arab Spring has changed this dynamic, he said, by making regimes become more fearful of their populations, while the people have become more powerful.

Professor Niblock said that a second faulty assumption was that the levels of inequality and injustice were, though recognized, tolerable because they were part of the globalization process. In practice, however, the combination of extreme inequality, flaunting wealth by elite, unemployment and increasing education meant that the situation was not tolerable to the common man.

He noted that characterisations of the revolution were increasingly negative now, with the phrase “Arab Winter” gaining popularity. Professor Niblock elaborated that the West had initially reached a consensus that the Arab Spring was a series of democratic revolutions which was bound to make other authoritarian regimes in the region fall sooner or later. They also believed that the new regimes would be liberal democratic regimes committed to providing solutions for social and economic problems.

He noted that a different consensus was emerging in the West: characterized by the failure of the Arab Spring. This consensus reasoned that these uprisings have failed to achieve objective of overthrowing regimes and led to civil war (for example, Syria); other regimes have been adept at managing this change (for example, the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula); successful uprisings that have led to elections have brought to power movements whose commitment to democracy is suspect; and new governments, which have come to power in elections, have been seen to have failed to address the socio-economic issues plaguing their countries, and they are seen to focus on petty constitutional issues and not going in for economic reform (for example, Tunisia and Egypt).

Professor Niblock pointed out that this consensus was misleading and argued that slotting these events into pre-conceived categories of Islamist/democratic revolutions distorts the fact that while all those who protested on the streets wanted more political space to express their views, they did not necessarily have common views about the kind of political system they wanted. He argued that political power can no longer be considered as taking the form of a single, integrated force and that new forms of mobilization are taking place due to a feeling of empowerment among people. He noted that the patterns of government over the next decade will see negotiated power between different groups with popular involvement.

Professor Niblock predicted that political systems will become more diverse and dynamic compared to what they were prior to the Arab Spring, and cautioned against viewing ideological positions as being fixed and unchangeable. When political groups which have hitherto been outside of the political structure come closer to gaining power or when they gain power, they adapt themselves to change. He also argued that the extent of social and economic inequality in the region has been and remains an unstable base on which to build participative, representative systems. Drawing on the example of Iran, he pointed out that the Arab Spring's impact on the domestic politics of non-Arab West Asian countries has been limited.

The central issue, Dr Niblock concluded, remains the same as prior to the Arab Spring: creating and maintaining political systems where those who govern are accountable, where socio-economic problems are addressed, and where the population feels a common sense of identity.

There was a robust discussion in the Question and Answer session after the presentations, with very specific questions directed at individual speakers. The discussion concluded that Saudi Arabia was in a state of transition and uncertainty, especially pertaining to leadership; the Gulf was of significant importance to India and indeed Asia; that the Arab Spring effectively ended centuries of domination of western powers; that the forces of change in the present day were stronger than the forces seeking to maintain the "status quo", that is, the conflict was essentially between forces of change and those opposed to change; and that although it cannot be accurately predicted when the turmoil in the region would end, it is possible that this would occur in the shorter rather than the longer term.

***Report prepared by Neha Kohli and Medha***

## *Session II: Future of Political Transformation in West Asia*

Chairperson : Prof. Gulshan Dietl

Dr. Muhammad  
Abdul Ghaffar

Mr. Atul Aneja

Dr. Ahmed A. Saif

Dr. Abdulkhaleq  
Abdulla

Prof. Amin Saikal



**CHAIR: Prof. Gulshan Dietl**

### **SPEAKERS**

1. **Dr. Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar:** 'Potential Strategic Cooperation among Pivotal States in Western Asia'
2. **Mr. Atul Aneja:** 'Media: Game Changer in West Asia'
3. **Dr. Ahmed A. Saif:** 'Emerging Trends in West Asia: Regional and Global Implications'
4. **Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla:** 'Impact of the Arab Spring on the Arab Gulf States'
5. **Prof. Amin Saikal:** 'The Changing Political and Strategic Environment in West Asia'

**Prof. Gulshan Dietl** noting that 'Arab Spring' is into its third year stated that she preferred the term to other categorisations. For her, 'spring' did not so much refer to change in seasons but rather should be understood as a metaphor for change. It signified that the time of fossilised political structures was over. Prof. Dietl stated that the ongoing transformations are not necessarily limited to regime change but should be understood as 'regime-in-change'. These changes may take place over many months or years or even decades but what is important is that the momentum for change is on the upswing. She concluded her opening remarks by stating that the changes associated with the 'Arab Spring' were an irreversible development.

**Dr. Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar** stated that GCC countries as 'pivotal states' (having a degree of social, economic, political and organizational integrity among other criteria) can establish a cooperative model for security and stability with countries like India based on economic development and commercial cooperation distinct from the strategy of power politics. He pointed out that three factors could help foster such cooperation. These included common historical and cultural links, common security challenges such as illegal trade and piracy and the ongoing changes at the regional and international levels (including

emergence of India, China and changing US role) which require close cooperation among Western Asian countries.

Dr. Ghaffar however noted that such cooperation will not be fruitful until problems causing the current state of instability are resolved. These included the Palestinian conflict, proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Arabian Gulf and the Middle East along with the regional and international conflict in Syria. He stressed that cooperative frameworks for regional cooperation are essential to ensure security and stability as well as following the principles of non-intervention in internal affairs of countries.

**Mr. Atul Aneja** noted that media was undergoing a profound transformation, departing from its traditional role as the 'fourth estate'. He talked about the influence of 'globalists' in setting the agenda for media organisations. These included powerful neo-conservative figures like Zbigniew Brezezinski and others like David Rockefeller and George Soros of the Open Society Foundation.

Mr. Aneja specifically noted the workings of organisations like the Council for Foreign Relations (CFR), the Trilateral Commission among others to highlight the power, influence and 'imperial ambitions' of the globalists. According to him, during the war in Yugoslavia, the media justified humanitarian intervention by publishing blatantly false or exaggerated version of events on the ground in most cases. Mr. Aneja highlighted the workings of the Henry Jackson Society and its staff like Michael Weiss who are currently relentless in advocating military intervention in Syria. Radio Farda and the Iran Democracy Fund of the Bush administration were pertinent examples of such agenda-setting policies queering the pitch as regards Iran. He pointed out Iranian initiatives like Press TV which was started in 2007 to counter such 'cultural NATO' propaganda. He specifically noted that such efforts were being deliberately targeted, pointing to the death of Press TV personnel in Syria.

Mr. Aneja closed his presentation by noting that the emergence of the social media was a significant development which is empowering citizens from below. The mainstream media culture is in a tangible flux as a result of this development as its hegemony was being challenged. Prof. Dietl on her part noted that the 3 million Twitter users in Saudi Arabia along with the 4 million Facebook users can be said to constitute Saudi Arabian civil society.

**Dr. Ahmed A. Saif** echoed the opinion of the other panelists regarding the use of the term 'Arab Spring'. Rather than 'spring' or 'renaissance', Dr. Saif suggested that West Asia is currently undergoing a 'transformation.' Furthermore, he cautioned that this transformation will not be a linear process and may in fact take several years or decades to be completed and may face set-backs along the way.

Dr. Saif explained that rather than demanding a very Western style of democratic government founded on secularism and liberalism, the popular groundswell across the West Asian region is about dignity and freedom. He argued that the roots of this Arab transformation could be traced to the Middle East Partnership initiative instituted by Colin Powell in 2002. This initiative selectively supported civil society in the Middle East and provided literature on topics such as toppling governments, challenging the police and managing the media.

Dr. Saif further argued that no regime in the West Asian region is immune from the popular demand for reforms. He cautioned that the leadership in Saudi Arabia will also have to take initiative and institute adequate political, social and economic reforms in order to avoid popular agitation.

Regarding the future political and strategic outcomes in the region, Dr. Saif suggested six possible scenarios: Mid-East mosaic; Arab Spring on steroids; Things that fall apart; redrawing of territorial borders; resurgence of authoritarianism; and federated Sunni caliphate.

Outlining some key implications, Dr. Saif cautioned that the role of non-state actors in shaping the political and security environment will remain important. Recent trends in Israel point towards a period of domestic uncertainty; combined with the changing dynamics and Egypt and Syria, a redefinition of Israel's security calculus could make the country more insecure and unpredictable. On the other hand, Turkey may potentially emerge as a winner in the region as it competes with Saudi Arabia and Iran for greater power and influence.

**Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla** began his remarks by arguing that Arab Spring is simply the unleashing of forces of change throughout the Arab world in the last two years ending nearly six decades of political stagnation. While there is no clarity on what the outcome of this Arab Spring may be, it is clear that this movement has already had an impact on the balance of power in the Gulf as well as the region at large.

Furthermore, the Arab Spring has also unleashed three megatrends. First, it has resulted in a vacuum of power, as nearly all regional powers (particularly Iran and Saudi Arabia) find themselves diminished and unable to exercise regional hegemony. Second, smaller states in the region (especially Qatar) are becoming more powerful and assertive. Doha, he argued, is becoming the new political, diplomatic and media capital of West Asia. Third, events of the last two years have in fact strengthened the forces of status quo and government across the Gulf.

**Prof. Amin Saikal** focused on five contrasting variables while presenting his opinion. First, the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria have devastated these states and will be instrumental in shaping the future security and strategic context of West Asia. With regard to Afghanistan, Prof. Saikal argued that unless the Karzai government is able to strike some sort of deal with the opposition that garners the support of a cross-section of the country at large, then the post-2014 situation could unravel rapidly. In Iraq, perhaps one of the biggest problems is that the US-led invasion transformed it from a country with a strong state and weak society to one with a strong society and weak state today. Continued bloodshed and conflict between the Shia, Sunni and Kurds could lead to the disintegration of Iraq.

Second, Prof. Saikal argued that the growing popular drive in the region is for more political pluralism and greater accountability. The outcomes of the transformations underway will not be a replica of Western liberal democracy. Establishing democracy in the region will require a long-term change of political culture founded on ideals such as the rule of law, separation of powers and individual freedoms—pillars that are currently lacking in most states in the region. Instead, we can expect the region to witness more reformist rather than combative Islamism in the region in the coming years. Additionally, it is likely that the policies of Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood will change as their political status changes from opposition to government.

Third, more political and sectarian splits can be expected in the region. Furthermore, while small states may be becoming more assertive, big states such as Iran will remain substantive actors in the region.

Four, Iran's problems today relate to both domestic and foreign policy. There are also pressures from within the regime, with tensions in relations between the Supreme Leader and the President, as well as among factions. But Iran has lived through sanctions in the past and despite increasingly factionalised and fractured politics, it remains very capable of reform. The next presidential election is important. There is also the possibility of an agreement between Tehran and Washington, which could lay the foundations for US-Iran rapprochement.

Finally, for sustainable stability in the region, the Israel-Palestine issue must be resolved. Israel is finding itself increasingly isolated, even as Palestine has been granted observer status at the UN. A reform of Israeli policies is crucial at this stage.

Overall, the situation in West Asia is likely to remain volatile over the next few years. Arab Spring has given people the courage not to be afraid anymore. Genuine self-determination, political pluralism and liberty are the need of the hour going forward.

The presentations were followed by a brief round of **Q&A** from the audience. While responding to a question regarding the political future of Afghanistan, Prof. Saikal argued that electoral and political reforms are urgently required to ensure free and fair elections in 2014 and ensure post-US withdrawal political continuity and stability.

In response to a question regarding the prospects for a Gulf Union in the medium to long-term, Dr. Abdulla and Dr. Saif agreed that experiences in the last few years have proved that increased cooperation among the GCC states is possible and mutually beneficial. The region could achieve greater economic prosperity in the future through regional integration. Although integration will be a slow process, they were of the opinion that a Gulf Union could materialize in about ten years.

*Report prepared by S. Samuel C. Rajiv and Manali Kumar.*

## Session III: West Asia's Security Dynamics-I: Role of Extra-Regional Powers

Chairperson: Amb. Rajendra Madhukar Abhyankar

Mr. Fyodor  
Lukyanov

Dr. Julie Taylor

Prof. Yang Guang

Mr. Waiel  
Awwad

Mr. M. Ashraf  
Azim

Prof. P R  
Kumaraswamy



### Chair: Amb Rajendra Madhukar Abhyankar

The Chair set the stage for the presentations that followed by underlining that the Arab Spring that had started out as an internally generated process has eventually become an externally steered exercise. Extra-regional powers have their own political, economic, social and strategic agenda, and so it is not clear if they are forces of change or forces of status quo.

In his presentation, Fyodor Lukyanov traced Russia's role in the Arab Spring from an initial indifference to serious engagement with the Syrian crisis. Syria came to occupy an important place not only in Russia's foreign policy but also its domestic politics. Russia's involvement in Syria was not driven by commercial or geopolitical interest; rather it was a matter of how international order was to be organised on the basis of the principle of non-intervention. He argued that for Russia the 'Libyan model' (of intervention by external forces supporting one side over the other) was a conceptually wrong approach. Therefore, a positive outcome in Syria would be a political process or change brought out by the people themselves.

The second speaker, Waiel Awwad began his presentation by referring to the Arab Spring as the 'Islamic tsunami'. He traced the origins of the Arab Spring to high levels of poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, gender inequality, suppression of political Islam among other causes. Commenting more specifically on the Syrian crisis, he underlined the role of the culture of jihad that had penetrated the country from Morocco, Nigeria, Egypt and Yemen. If Syria falls to these forces, it would also have serious implications for India's security as the arc of terrorism would extend all the way from West Asia to South Asia. He sounded a word of caution regarding the use of social media to flare sectarian divisions.

Making a case for continued American support to promotion of democracy in the Middle East, Julie Taylor contradicted the realist premise that setbacks to democratic experiments in the Arab world would necessitate a shift back to supporting authoritarian allies in the region. She argued that there were distinct social trends in the region that would ensure the sustenance of such movements and therefore in the long

run US interests would best be served by supporting them through these difficult times. While realists focus on anti-Americanism, they tend to neglect terrorist threats that emerge from the region, which is a cause of greater concern for America. She contended that its allies in the Gulf were unreliable as they encouraged support to Salafism and did not curb their spread. On the other hand, the new regimes in the region, while being more autonomous in their foreign policy, were unlikely to abandon the US. In conclusion, she recommended that while the US should not abandon its allies in the region, its policies should be more consistent with its rhetoric of democracy promotion.

The last speaker of the session, P R Kumaraswamy in his presentation stated that India had not made any official statement on the Arab Spring but it could not afford to remain indifferent to the developments in the Arab world. Since democracy promotion has never been part of India's foreign policy agenda, it could neither sympathise with the protestors nor support the unpopular regimes. Therefore, it opted for a cautious approach of watching out for its nationals in the region by issuing travel advisories when required. India's position on the crisis was articulated only after a national consensus emerged (like in the case of Egypt) or when a regional consensus became apparent in the cases of Libya and Syria. India was thus guided by calculated realism and displayed the most sensible case of Indian diplomacy since Independence.

In the discussion that followed, the following points were highlighted.

- While promotion of democracy has always been an important policy plank for America, the Bush administration sought to promote democracy regardless of whether it was propitious to do so. On the other hand, the Obama administration believed that the Arab world was ready for being democratised.
- On the future of Syria, it was noted that the new regime will be hostile towards Russia. Yet, Russia will not support military intervention to overthrow the current regime. In the decades to come, the Middle East is likely to lose its priority for Russia.
- Lack of a pro-active approach from the Indian side was explained as being a calculated and deliberate approach considering India's limited leverage in the region and its domestic considerations. However, India continued to remain active at the Track II level and closely monitored the developments in the region.

***Report prepared by Keerti S. Kumar and Dr. Arpita Anant.***

## Session IV: West Asia's Security Dynamics-II: Role of Regional Powers

Chairperson : Amb. Ranjit Gupta

Prof. Efraim Inbar	Prof. Mohammad Hassan Khani	Dr. Serhat Güvenç	Dr. Adel Soliman
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Session IV of the 15th ASC on “West Asia’s Security Dynamics: Role of Regional Powers” was chaired by Ambassador Ranjit Gupta. The speakers included Professor Efraim Inbar from Israel, Professor Mohammad Hassan Khani from Iran, Dr Serhat Güvenç from Turkey and Dr Adel Soliman from Egypt. The session focused on the role of the regional powers in the West Asian security. The Chair introduced West Asia with an emphasis on the dependence of the world on its energy resources. Asian countries are particularly dependent of the region due to a large number of their citizens living and working in this part of the world. Syria, a pivotal state, is in the grip of a destructive civil war and the regional powers have the responsibility to bring it to an end rather than fuelling it.

The first presentation was by Professor Efraim Inbar, who said that the region is experiencing the decline of the Arab states. The growing power differential between Israel and its neighbours leading to the inability of its neighbours to challenge Israel has improved the strategic situation. Strategic surprise is one of the main problems in the region along with the growing alienation of Israel from its neighbours, especially Turkey. According to him, Political Islamisation is not an agent for modernization. Non-Arab states who have dealt better with the challenge of modernization have risen. Though there is a perceived retreat of the American power temporarily which started even before the Arab Spring, it still is present there.

The region is in danger of seeing more terrorists since the US is losing control. They will have more access to arms and greater control of the region. The eastern Mediterranean region, along with Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, is becoming Islamist in nature and taking control of the Suez Canal. In fact, the Mediterranean has become an Islamic lake. Sinai, in Professor Inbar’s opinion, is becoming the next Somalia. Finally, because of the Arab Spring, Iran has gained another year in its quest for becoming a nuclear power. Israel’s strategic environment is uncertain and thus it needs to spend more on defence and invest in research and development activities. There is also a need of developing friendships with Greece, Sudan and Cyprus.

The second speaker, Dr Mohammad, Hassan Khani traced the causes for the Arab Spring from the historical perspective. West Asia has not gone through any change after the decline of the Ottoman Empire (except Iranian revolutions). Hence, this turmoil was expected sooner or later. Along with other stimulants like corruption, poverty, lack of justice, heavy dependence on foreign investment, and for long the rulers’

ignoring of the Islamic nature and identity of the societies in the region has also been a cause of the uprising. People really want freedom, democracy, political participation and accountability along with recognition, acknowledgement and respect to the Islamic aspect of their societies. Professor Khani also noted that, after the Arab Spring, political Islam as a discourse will be taken more seriously by both academia and politicians in the West. The long-term foreign policy implication of the upheaval would include adoption of a more independent and balanced policy approach by the new governments in the region. A fragile, cautious and cold relation with the West in general and the US in particular (no more allies for the US in the region) is the current trend. This wave of revolution will not end, and Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf would see many more changes.

According to Serhat Güvenç Turkey has been transforming from national security state to a trading state since 1990s. Trade, economy and prosperity are as important as military security. Hence, Turkey has developed and implemented policies to balance these two perspectives. After the 1990s, Turkey resorted to more use of force due to domestic challenges in tandem with external threats and the power vacuum in northern Iraq. Israel emerged as a partner for Turkey. It supplied arms to deal with Greece, Syria and the PKK. All these ended in 1998 when Turkey coerced Syria to hand over the chief of the PKK.

In the first decade of the new millennium, Turkey moved towards to the other end, i.e., becoming a trading state and soft power. Turkey's status in the EU, the worst Turkish financial crisis in 2001 and the 9/11 incident are the factors responsible for the country adopting a policy of shift from a national security state to a trading state. Old political elites were liquidated by elections and the Islamists rose to power. The second Iraq war was a challenge for the new Turkish rulers. Turkish Parliament voted to support for the war, but due to some constitutional and procedural reasons it could not favour the US, ultimately losing support from the Pentagon. Now, the ability of Turkey to use force against Greece and Cyprus is very limited.

The JDP in Turkey represents the rising middle class and aligning its foreign policy objectives accordingly. Trade and economic reality tops the agenda nowadays. The process of Europeanization is on and Turkey has changed tremendously. Military is the net loser of all domestic, national and regional dynamics: it failed whenever it tried to reassert. Recently, however, the constructivists in Turkey argue for seeking influence in the region and the zero-problem with neighbours' policy has been reviewed after the Arab Spring. The Turkish PM is mending its relations with the military and its foreign policy, particularly regional approach, is based on pragmatism/realism, economic considerations and ideology. The assumption is that the West is on decline and the rest are rising. Turkey is re-westernizing and re-militarizing, and remaining committed to the NATO, which also believes that Turkey should be kept in a multilateral framework.

The fourth presenter, Dr Adel Soliman, highlighted that Islamists came to power in Egypt and in other countries owing to the popular will. Their emergence would reshape the region and the alliances within. The old rule is collapsing and new cases are emerging, and regional sectarianism is getting new importance. Egypt, undoubtedly, is undergoing a structural change in the political, social and economic systems and its real challenge is about cooperation with the regional powers and inclusion domestically. He said that Iran and the GCC have different perspectives. The GCC alone is unable to maintain the regional balance of power. Hence, the US comes as its key partner.

Soliman further said that the Middle East Peace Process should be taken forward to resolve the Palestine-Israel problem. According to him, the Iran-Arab issue has become very difficult due to the nuclear dimension. He suggested that the efforts to establish a nuclear free zone in the region must be supported. He remarked that West Asia is extremely important for both India and China due to the movement of oil and gas through the Suez Canal. In any case, Egypt is not able to influence the region. NATO has become

more important in the Gulf security and a multilateral security framework is required to stabilize the region. He concluded by pointing that India and Egypt can play a leading role in the region.

The following points came up during discussions and the Q& A round:

- Most of the problems in West Asia develop along the artificially drawn borders during the colonial period.
- There is an urgent need for a change in mindsets on both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides to take forward the Middle East Peace Process. Currently, the discourse on this issue has been one of arrogance.
- The region has rejected Israel and it is on the region to accept it. Israel is for peace but not on the cost of certain things. Till certain facts on ground do not change, there is no possibility of any integration between Israel and the Arab World.
- Israel is sensitive towards the Egyptian position.
- The Jews, if they so wish, should be allowed to live even as minority in the conceived Palestinian state.
- It was pointed that there was no Jewish pogrom under the past long Muslim rule in West Asia. European Jews dominate the current discourse in Israel on West Asia, and that the Palestinians are victims and the Arab peace plan should be given a chance.
- The states in the region are antagonistic vis-à-vis their neighbours for a variety of reasons and need an external threat to keep united.
- Turkey is trying to get a strategic depth in the region.
- Tunisia and Egypt have to find out how they are going to engage with the secular and the liberal elements in their country.
- There is no way for the army to return again in Egypt. It would be interesting to see Egyptian policies without the military's involvement.
- Iran would be the largest beneficiary from security and stability in the Gulf region. Denying Iran its role is not the solution. Iran played a positive role regarding Iraq and Afghanistan.
- There was a speculation about the possibility of a third democratic revolution in Iran.
- The developments in the region should also be seen in the light of the shifting focus towards the East.
- Nuclearization of Saudi Arabia may come as a strategic surprise.

**Report prepared by Saurabh Mishra and Eshita Mukherjee**

## Session V: India and the Gulf

Chairperson: Amb. Ishrat Aziz

Prof. Girijesh Pant	Ms. Shebonti Ray Dadwal	Dr. Sami Alfaraj	Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla
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Session V of the 15th ASC on “India and the Gulf” was chaired by Ambassador Ishrat Aziz. The participants included Professor Girijesh Pant (“Premising India-Gulf Relation in the Context of the Arab Uprising”), Shebonti Ray Dadwal (Impact of Arab ‘Spring’ on Energy Markets), Dr Sami Alfaraj (“India and the GCC”), and Dr Abdulkhaleq Abdulla (“India and the Gulf: A Perspective from the UAE”).

Professor Pant began this session by sharing his views on developments in the region. He viewed the Arab uprisings as an unfolding process, and hence though it unfair to term it either a “spring” or a “winter”. The current crises in the region do not concern a specific regime; rather they are related to more systemic issues. He examined the uprisings and their relevance for India in the context of some key factors:

- Erosion of rentier power, where the rising expectations of populations in these countries cannot be met by a rentier mechanism.
- Deepening alienation and marginalisation felt across society, influenced by high cost of living, unemployment, economic crises, loss of traditional values, and conflicts in the region.
- The youth and the generational shift, where the youth constitute more than 50 per cent of the population in most of the GCC countries. New social communication technologies have given this segment of the populace a sense of empowerment and community, and the ability to communicate not only amongst themselves but also with the state. High unemployment among the youth due to flawed education systems was a prime factor for this segment to assert themselves during the uprisings. Young women also formed a key segment of protesters, pushing for more civil rights.

The problem of rising unemployment of GCC citizens is influenced to a great extent by the fact that the majority of the GCC populations comprise expatriates. Among the 7 million new jobs that GCC countries created over the past 10 years, fewer than 2 million went to their own nationals. Expats dominate private sector jobs, while the state remains the main employer of the local population. Female unemployment is significantly higher among nationals of most these countries. Pant views this problem as being structural in

nature and going beyond the absorptive capacities of rentier economies. The large presence of expatriates in the Gulf region is hence seen as an emerging pressure point.

Another issue for the GCC states that was highlighted by Professor Pant was that of food dependency and vulnerability, in a region that barely has agricultural lands or fresh water resources. The dependence of the GCC states on external markets makes them vulnerable not only to price variations and high food commodity prices, but also changing food policies of exporting nations.

With respect to India-GCC economic exchanges, India's trade with the region is dominated by exchanges with the UAE (50 per cent) and Saudi Arabia (25 per cent). Hence, portfolios need to be diversified to maintain desirable trade volumes. Professor Pant also touched upon the potential for creation of a regional supply chain with reference to the convergence in food economy between India and the Gulf states. Also, India must leverage its expertise in the knowledge services sector. With relation to creating a role for Asian countries in the GCC region, he suggests a collective Asian approach that includes China, India, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and Indonesia, for sustainable security architecture that should also factor in non-traditional security concerns.

The next speaker was Shebonti Ray Dadwal. Her paper set the background for discussion of the impacts of the Arab uprisings on energy markets by pointing out that the uprisings are not the first time that the region has experienced tumult, and neither will it be the last. Every conflict has influenced oil supply shocks and fears of global recession as a result. Instances of previous conflicts when the region's oil supplies appeared endangered are the 1990-91 Kuwait crisis and the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. Dadwal, however, sees the recent developments in the region as potentially having longer and greater implications for the oil market. The significance of these events for India, at least in the energy sector, is clear from figures for India's imports during April-September 2012—62.6 per cent of its imports were sourced from West Asia, with Saudi Arabia being the largest supplier, followed by Iraq, Venezuela, Kuwait and the UAE. Although not all the countries in the region are energy rich, those that are not are still dependent on the energy sector, including on revenues accruing from trade, remittances and commodity price channels with energy-exporting countries. As a result, when revenues of energy exporting countries drop, all concerned countries are affected.

Dadwal also studied the medium and long-term implications of the current wave of unrest in the region on oil markets. When the uprising began in late 2010, oil prices were already high due to a number of factors, including the growing Asian demand. This led to a 5 per cent increase in prices as the uprising spread out of Tunisia. The termination of Libyan exports and reports of the exit of international oil companies from the country's upstream sector also led to an upward spiral of prices. Oil prices remained volatile through 2011 and 2012, and dropped towards end of 2011 owing to several reasons that included the declining demand in Europe as the economic recession deepened there. The uncertainty that prevails in the region's political environment greatly influences the future of critical investments required to maintain and increase supply. As Dadwal pointed out, international oil companies prefer to invest in relatively stable regions. Hence, emerging opportunities in less turbulent regions could lead to diversion of investments away from the WANA region, leading to underinvestment.

She also looked at the important role played by Saudi Arabia in the oil market. The country has the largest conventional oil reserves in the world, and concerns about unrest spreading to and impacting Saudi Arabia is huge factor in influencing the dynamics of the oil market. So far, Saudi Arabia along with the other major Gulf producers—Kuwait, Libya, Bahrain, Qatar—have been able to resort to populist measures to quell signs of major uprisings due to huge revenues accrued from high oil prices over the years. The problem lies in the fact that these economies are overwhelmingly dependent on revenues from oil exports. It would lie

in their interests to diversify their economies and make up for the diminishing exports that would inevitably result from falling oil production.

India's dependence on the region was highlighted by the inter-relationship between energy, resources and national security that underscores the country's policy towards the Gulf states. India's domestic demand for oil has grown exponentially by the year; the uncertainty in the supply of oil would then deem emerging economies like China and India as victims unless they diversify their sources of supply to outside the region. High international oil prices can lead to lower growth and higher inflation. Dadwal also highlighted India's rapid development as a petroleum refinery export hub. She suggested that the current energy relationship between the Gulf countries and India—one akin to a buyer-seller arrangement—should transform into one based on cross-investments and joint ventures in each other's economies and across sectors such as energy, infrastructure and services, so as to derive mutual benefits. However, for the foreseeable future, the West Asian region will remain the most important and largest energy supplier for India, hence making it in India's interest to contribute towards that region's stability and security.

The next speaker, Dr Sami Alfaraj opened his presentation not just by describing his Indian lineage but also by graphically showing the trade ties that existed historically between India-China-Arabia via the Silk route and in the present day via the sea route across South East Asia. He proceeded to express that the impact of Arab Spring had resulted in the retrenchment of established powers into new roles and a shift from the previously mercantilist approach to an "If you can't beat them, join them" approach. He briefly highlighted India's interests in the region that ranged from energy to labour populations.

He followed this up with an elaborate presentation of the vision that Kuwait had for the future. The goal was to rebuild aging infrastructure in order to make the GCC a financial centre by 2025. A historical rivalry always existed between Persia, Mesopotamia and Arabia, and it was highly likely that Kuwait could be the theatre for present day conflict to unfold. To prevent the recurrence of 1990 war, the solution presented by Dr Alfaraj was to create a second Kuwait City. The project has already commenced with the building of an expressway and is to be followed by a super railway link in 2015. About \$122 billion has been earmarked for the project and an elaborate four Five Year Plans are to be drawn in order to show their seriousness for the project. He reiterated the aim to help develop southern Iraq though there is an unresolved dispute over the Bubiyan Island.

Dr Alfaraj posited that Kuwait intends to pursue a Kuwaiti form of socialism in which a new born would be given shares in a company, with the SWF to controlling the largest share. He stressed the importance of "burden sharing" in his presentation, for various regional actors to invest in the peace and stability of the region. It was likely that the Chinese, considering their experience in the construction of high-speed rail, were to build a similar link in Kuwait in the coming years. From India, Kuwait expects not just unskilled labourers but also skilled labourers like managers, etc. Dr Alfaraj was of the belief that the shares markets in the Gulf were inflated as investment have not been made seriously. He presented this vision to India for them to participate in it actively.

The last presentation was by Dr Abdulkhaleq Abdulla. He began by commenting on the theme of the session, stating that it tended to narrow India's relations with the Gulf to oil alone and ignored the rich cultural, diverse and historical relations India has with the region. He was of the opinion that the economic leg of in the relation was the strongest however; a major concern was the Indian bureaucracy who make it overwhelming difficult for UAE investments to fructify.

However, Dr Abdulla was of the opinion that the political leg in the relationship was the weakest because of four key points. Firstly, as India comes shopping for oil to the UAE/Gulf region, the latter are shopping for security. It is the number one priority, particularly for smaller states. The Americans are there for this

very purpose, that is for insurance. However, India's stance on the Iran nuclear ambitions has been ambiguous and unclear. Secondly, India is making the same mistakes like the Western powers: viewing the Gulf through the prism of "oil". This is a big mistake as it neglects the historical ties that have been shared between the two countries. Thirdly, the Arab Gulf states do not like India's growing strategic relations with Israel. The Palestinian issue has been pushed under the carpet. Lastly, he stated that many in the Gulf recalled times when India was idealistic, notions that were propagated by Nehru and Gandhi that were revered, and India was recognised for these notions. However, today India is seen as a capitalistic and self-interested nation; he also expressed surprise that India did not support the Arab people during the revolution.

The Q&A discussion following this session touched upon several key relating issues. The first was the viability of the rupee payments system that India currently has with Iran. Dadwal pointed out that the problem for India lies in the lopsided trade imbalance that it has with Iran. Although India's basket of imports has not diversified, this is a concern that both countries are negotiating on. Another key relating issue is that of sanctions imposed against insurance and underwriters that will influence the India-Iran trade relationship.

Another question posed to the panel was whether the Arab states were repeating their previous mistakes by aligning with an external power to ensure their security, as this resulted in clashes with other powers in the region. In response, a panellist observed that since the US took up the role as security guarantor in the region, there had been three wars. The US had made the mistake of using only a military approach for providing security. This is a gap that India could fill in the region, by employing a more broad-based approach, through diplomatic and economic strengths and not just through military might.

A question was posed to the panel pointing out that the GCC states were not vocal enough about the Iranian nuclear programme, particularly since this affects their security. The counter view by a panellist was that this issue not only concerns regional security, but also international security, and that states in the region have thus deferred the issue to the United Nations and other international agencies. While all the countries in the region recognise Iran's right to a peaceful nuclear programme—indeed many countries have provided technical assistance to Iran—it is also clear that Iran has not been transparent enough about its nuclear programme and has not abided by IAEA protocols. The panellist was of the view that the GCC states would not want to damage regional security through unnecessary provocation with Iran. However, if Iran were to weaponise, the GCC states would not hesitate in matching them "dollar by dollar, weapon by weapon".

The chairperson concluded this session by highlighting a key takeaway from the panel's discussions: that the creation of a structure for Gulf security, in a region which is asymmetrical, would only be possible with much idealism as well as realism, along with mutual give and take.

***Report prepared by Princy Marin George and Rahul Chauhan.***

## Session VI: Nuclear Issues in West Asia

Chairperson: Air Commodore (Retd.) Jasjit Singh

Dr. Mahmoud Karem	Prof. Rajesh Rajagopalan	Dr. Ephraim Kam:	Prof. Mohammad Hassan Khani
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Session VI of the 15th ASC was on “Nuclear Issues in West Asia” was chaired by Air Commodore Jasjit Singh. The participants included Dr Mahmoud Karem from Egypt, Professor Rajesh Rajagopalan from India, Dr Ephraim Kam from Israel, and Professor Mohammad Hassan Khani from Iran.

The first presentation was by Dr Mahmoud Karem who elucidated on two important disarmament initiatives presented by Egypt in 1974 and later on in 1990. A historical explanation of both initiatives to establish a nuclear weapon free zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East and a zone free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) was outlined. He emphasized on the necessity to arrive at a definition of security as equal security for all, as the present security asymmetry has pushed military doctrines away from reconciliation and cooperative security towards a doctrine of confrontation. According to him, in the absence of a negotiating process or a venue in which parties can discuss their security concerns, some have attempted to achieve parity by non-traditional means—poor man’s nuclear weapon—such as what transpired with Iraq and Libya. This has forced specialists to conclude that the Israeli policy of nuclear ambiguity or nuclear veto has disseminated mistrust instead of building confidence. In this vein, what the region requires at this stage is the revival of arms control discussions such as the ACRS talks that started after the Madrid peace conference in the 1990s.

Dr Karem opined the “Arab Spring” or “Arab awakening”, should not be used as a pretext or alibi by any party to hamper efforts to deal with illicit nuclear capabilities in the region, even if some proclaim that the Arab world is over burdened or short circuited with its transition towards democracy. According to him, a zone free from weapons of mass destruction including their delivery systems should be part of the solution, part of restructuring the security setting of the region. Democracy, human rights, and good governance are all central and crucial objectives Arab revolutions strive to realize. As far as Iran is concerned, the matter remains that Gulf countries will not accept to be cornered between a nuclear Iran and a nuclear, weaponized Israel. Additionally, a nuclear weaponized Iran will pose threats to neighbouring Turkey and will constitute a threat to NATO territories and frontiers. Europe will feel threatened since it remains within the range of

Iran's newly developed Shahab III missiles that are capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. This will force western military strategists to redraw, re-assemble, and re-organize their flanks, move the nuclear theatre or strike force closer to the Middle East region, and make crucial adjustments in their military and rapid response deployment capabilities.

Dr Karem stated that the Middle East in the absence of a sound security setting, the lack of the implementation of arms control and non-proliferation agreements such as the establishment of a NWFZ or a Zone Free of WMD in the Middle East is doomed to failure. The lack or absence of political arms control initiatives, negotiations, collective talks and efforts, may even lead the region to military escalation.

The second speaker, Professor Rajesh Rajagopalan, began his presentation by pointing that despite the status of Iran's nuclear programme, the objective is still unclear. In 2003, there was a fatwa issued against nuclear weapons in Iran. Thereafter, the US National Intelligence Estimates 2007 reported that the programme has been halted. However, the information was believed to be misrepresented. In 2011, the NIE report suggested that some aspects of the Iranian programme has been restarted. The report was, however, not made public. The IAEA report of November 2011 also stated that the Iranian programme has been halted; however, the report did not speak of Iran's uranium enrichment programme. In the 2012 NIE report, it was mentioned that parts of Iran's nuclear programme had restarted. This was a very detailed report stating that Iran had undertaken various studies for development of its nuclear programme. These studies had no civilian use.

According to Professor Rajagopalan, the key concerns emerging out of Tehran's nuclear programme are the uranium enrichment process and its nuclear facilities in Natanz, Fordow, Arak, and maybe covert facilities in other places. Though the nuclear facilities in Natanz, Fordow, Arak are under IAEA safeguards, they are believed to be only the overt parts of it. It is believed there are several covert nuclear activities which are still going on. In addition, the number of centrifuges has doubled since 2009.

Professor Rajagopalan stated that the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme has intensified over the last year and it is likely to come to boil in the current year. Iran appears to be building a capability to build nuclear weapons very quickly, while prudently staying short of actually crossing the line. This posture might change once Iran acquires sufficient capacity to build several weapons because Teheran might then see greater value in acknowledging its capabilities more openly, just as India and Pakistan did. He opined that the key reason for uranium enrichment in Iran is sense of insecurity from Israel and the US. The international condition is also permissive for Iran's nuclear programme, the reasons being:

- Dissonance between the US and Russia/China. There is breakdown of consensus over the course of action against Iran.
- Israel's capacity for attack on Iran has declined.
- Israel capability to do significant damage to Iran is in question.
- Though US is capable of taking military action against Iran, it is unwilling to do so.

He cited the case of noted IR scholar, Kenneth Waltz stating that Iran should go for the bomb as this would provide regional stability. Iranian leaders are not risky; they will not proliferate and hence it is safe for them to have the bomb. If Iran should get the bomb, it will help in using it as a pretext for covert war as a shield. This can be discerned from the South Asian experience. Professor Rajagopalan said that, at present, Iran is playing smart. They will not give up the nuclear option. This will not place the regional security interests in dire nor let the region be safe or stable.

Touching on India's position on the issue, he opined that India will fence-sit. Indian policy, especially on Iran, is subject to multiple pulls and pressures, the most significant being the perceived pressures from

domestic political groups. The reasons of domestic pressure and the Muslim vote bank will prevent India from taking a stand against Iran's nuclear policy. In consequence, India's policy is likely to be unsteady, with an emphasis on legalisms.

The third speaker, Dr Ephraim Kam, highlighted the fact that until nine years ago, intensive debates took place among governments and experts regarding Iran's drive to acquire nuclear weapons; that debate is now over as so many details have been revealed about the Iranian nuclear programme that it leaves no room for doubt that Iran has made intensive progress in its nuclear weapons programme. There is consensus among Western intelligence communities regarding the timetable of the Iranian nuclear programme. They estimate that, at present, Iran has not decided to break out for the nuclear bomb, for two reasons: first, the Iranians want to minimize the costs of the decision to produce the bomb and are, therefore, are waiting for the optimal timing to do it; and second, the Iranians intend to produce not only one bomb but an arsenal of at least several bombs, therefore, they are building simultaneously a wide range of various nuclear capabilities that will allow them, once they decide, to produce a number of bombs within a short time. Leading Western intelligence agencies estimate that once Iran decides to break out for the bomb, technically it can produce its first nuclear bomb within about a year after the decision is made.

He also argued that the debate focuses on two further questions: firstly, can Iran be stopped before it acquires nuclear weapons and, secondly, what are the implications of a nuclear Iran? Focusing on the first issue, there are two main options to stop Iran. The first is the diplomatic option to convince Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment programme through negotiations. While all the relevant governments prefer this option, there is an understanding that just negotiations will not convince Iran to suspend its nuclear programme. The other option to stop the Iranian nuclear effort is the military option. However, it is a problematic and controversial option and due to the difficulties involved only two governments have considered a military option—the US and Israel.

Dr Kam also remarked that the implications of nuclear Iran are manifold: the prevailing view is that the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran will significantly contribute to the instability of the Middle East. Iran with nuclear weapons might conduct a more aggressive policy toward moderate Arab regimes as also to strengthen its position as the cornerstone of the radical Islamic camp; and will increase the pressures on moderate regimes in the Middle East to adapt their policy to its own. In addition to the above, Israel would also have to take into account the possibility of an Iranian nuclear attack against its territory. This threat perception has two roots: first, if Iran goes nuclear, it will be the first time in the history of Israel that an enemy country will acquire the capability to inflict a fatal blow against Israel; and second, Iranian top leaders speak explicitly about the need to eliminate Israel.

He also considered the question of Iran launching an attack against Israel. He argued that if Iran acts like a rational actor, it will probably not attack any country. However, this is subject to three reservations. First, the assessment that Iran possibly will not carry out a nuclear attack against Israel, though it is a rational assessment, could be mistaken, since strategic assessments are wrong in many cases. Second, it is difficult to judge the role of religious, ideological and fundamentalist motivation in the Iranian decision-making process. And third, even if Iran does not decide to launch a nuclear attack against Israel, one should take into consideration an unintended nuclear confrontation as no communication or dialogue between the two countries currently exists.

The fourth presenter, Professor Mohammad Hassan Khani, provided an Iranian counter-view on the issue. He argued that Iran's nuclear programme is not aimed at acquiring nuclear weapons capability as Iran is a member of the IAEA and a signatory of the NPT. The nuclear industry and institutions are all under full monitoring of the IAEA inspectors and IAEA cameras are installed and routine inspections—in the range of 100 visits without notice and 7,500 hours and person visits are undertaken routinely. It is against basic

teachings of Islam and Iran's Supreme Leader has issued a fatwa forbidding producing, possessing and using nuclear weapons as "haraam", and deemed it an illegitimate act according to the principles of Islamic jurisprudence. In addition to this, public opinion in Iran is against nuclear weapons and there is consensus among the Iranian leadership and elites that nuclear weapons are not needed. The Iranian defense doctrine is a non-nuclear doctrine. He also argued that Iran already possesses deterrence in the form of home-made advanced and sophisticated missile system. The range, payload, accuracy and self-sufficiency in producing these missiles are enough to ensure that Iranians feel safe and secure. Moreover, the Iranians have the capability to indulge in asymmetric warfare and the political system enjoys overwhelming support of the nation. He stressed that nuclear weapons do not ensure victory, neither do they ensure that the countries possessing them remain safe and immune from collapse.

Professor Khani further put forward the view that even if Iran joins the nuclear states club, it will not be a threat to regional and global peace and security as Iran is a rational actor and it has a very good and clean record in this area, as evidenced by the fact that it didn't use chemical weapons against Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war despite having the capability to do so. According to him, the way out of the stalemate is negotiations and engagement based on recognition of Iranian legitimate right to have nuclear technology for peaceful purposes and moving towards a Middle East Nuclear Weapon Free Zone.

In the Q&A round, some important issues were underscored. These included:

- Iran does not sign the Additional Protocol because it considers it to be part of a political game meant to force Iran to dismantle its nuclear programme.
- Iran is now better placed to deal with cyber-attacks.
- Iran does not see Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorists. Israel have tried to talk to Iran but the latter does not consider it important to talk to them.
- It is important to revive the diplomatic conference between Iran and Israel which was earlier delayed by the US in consultation with Israel.
- Iran must give unfettered access to its nuclear facilities to international observers.

*Report prepared by Reshmi Kazi and Nupur Brahma.*

## *Session VII: Roundtable on Role of Asia in Evolving Security Dynamics and Architecture of the Gulf Region*

Chairperson: Shri Sanjay Singh

Prof. Timothy C. Niblock:	Amb. Ranjit Gupta	Amb. Talmiz Ahmad
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Session VII of the 15th ASC was a Roundtable on the “Role of Role of Asia in Evolving Security Dynamics and Architecture of the Gulf Region”. The session was chaired by Sanjay Singh, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, and included three panellists Ambassador Ranjit Gupta, Professor Timothy C. Niblock and Ambassador Talmiz Ahmad.

The chair set the agenda for the roundtable by saying that the security dynamics of the Gulf region have undergone substantial change in the post 9/11 period. The main focus of the roundtable thus was to examine whether there are any possibilities of Asia’s potential involvement in the changing security dynamics of the region.

The key element in the security arrangements in the Gulf over the last four decades has been the US determination to ensure that no other external power can exert a dominant influence over the region so that it could have an unhindered access to Gulf oil. However, with the development of alternative sources of energy in its home territories, the US dependence on Gulf has been declining. On the other hand, India and China’s dependency on the Gulf oil has been increasing. Both countries have established themselves firmly as leading trade partners of the Gulf countries. The most important dimension of the change in the balance of economic interest in the Gulf region is that the Gulf States are in a stronger position than before to lessen external strategic involvement in the region—whether from the West or East. Western powers have less economic incentive than before to seek (or agree to) deploy their naval and armed forces in the region; and the leading Asian military powers (China and India) have no reason to do so: oil will not be a particularly scarce commodity over the next two decades. All sides have an interest in a stable and peaceful Gulf where every country has equal access.

According to Professor Niblock, the best security setting for the Gulf states is one where they would be collectively responsible for their security (and for the sea lanes leading out into the Indian Ocean), within the framework of a regional collective security organization. In such a scenario, the framework and the resulting organization could benefit from the support of external powers, but without any direct security presence. External support, here, would need to be balanced, with the involvement of Asian as well as Western powers. He argued that in case some space is vacated by the US, Asian countries would have an opportunity to occupy that space: to support this he highlighted the fact that in 2005, India and China were not in top four trading partners with the Gulf, but in 2009, they were in top four. In 2012, data which is yet to be made available, China is going to become number one trading partner with the region and India would be at number three. Professor Niblock highlighted some major arguments in favour of two different sides: whether the US's presence in the region would decrease or the US would retain its interest and presence in the region. His understanding was that US's interests are global and there is no evidence that the US's Asia Pivot policy will mark reducing US's presence in the Gulf.

According to Ambassador Ranjit Gupta, the Gulf region is an integral political and geographical part of Asia. Stronger strategic synergies in the energy and economic domains between countries of the Gulf region and those of the Asia-Pacific region are making the Gulf region an integral part of the unfolding Asian growth story. Therefore, the significance of its connections with the rest of Asia is a strategic factor of growing importance for the Gulf region, on the one hand; on the other, ensuring peace and stability in the Gulf region are becoming factors of increasing strategic and even existential significance for the major Asian countries. A new regional security framework more in tune with these current and evolving realities is needed. He argued that existing security arrangements may not be enough for future security in the region as they are based on zero-sum exclusivist approach. The need of hour is that the region should have inclusive security structures. The key lies in finding interlocutors who have credibility and good relations with the GCC countries and Iran on the one hand, and the US and Israel on the other. Asia provides these interlocutors: China and India in particular and even Japan; all three are major global powers with rising stature. Asia's alignment with the Gulf will thus create a win-win situation. Asian countries make honest interlocutors in the region. Ambassador Gupta highlighted the role of Indian and other Asian Diaspora, particularly the Filipino Diaspora, in the prosperity of the Gulf region. He cautioned that the presence of this large Diaspora sometimes might create some security concerns and cultural resentment in local communities, which needs to be taken care of.

At the outset, Ambassador Talmiz Ahmed underscored the economic clout India enjoys in the region. He pointed out the following possible challenges the new regional security framework is going to face:

- Developing an Asian consensus.
- Challenges emanating from within the Gulf region.
- How to make the former hegemon—the US—to compromise on its interests.
- How to convince the Europeans to play a constructive role in the region.

Ambassador Ahmad went on to underline the segmentations in Asian politics. According to him, building consensus in Asian politics, where every sub-region is full of various faultlines, is not an easy task. He was critical of hegemonic role played by the US in the region for many decades. He was of the view that the US conception of alliance is terribly flawed as it does not know how to respect its allies and has usually treated allies and enemies shabbily.

During the Q&A session, the wisdom behind encouraging greater Chinese role in the region was questioned. It was feared that, in the process, the US hegemony will be replaced by Chinese hegemony. Therefore, India should play a more prominent role in the region. However, the panelists argued that Asia cannot play an effective role by excluding an important country like China. Moreover, China cannot behave

like the US in the region and it can play a positive counter-balancing role to the Western presence in the region. It was also noted that the Chinese are not obsessed with discourse of Islamist terrorism. Their main preoccupation is larger strategic confrontation with the US.

On the role of Russia and China in Syrian crisis, it was argued that Syrian crisis is not part of Arab Spring or Arab movement. It is basically a Muslim Brotherhood movement. Russia (and China too) have ensured that the regime is not toppled down by the external forces and that Syria does not have to face human casualties like those seen in Libya in Tripoli and other cities. However, it was also noted during the course of the Q&A that the Russian role has considerably diluted in the region. Russia does not clearly define its interest in the region and neither does it have a serious interest in Syria. In fact, the Russian position on Syria was basically about its larger principled position on sovereignty.

On the question of the possibility Indian troops' presence in the Gulf, it was clearly spelt out that India was not in the business of competing with Pakistan in the region. In fact, Pakistani troops in Bahrain are object of public anger and India does not need to emulate Pakistan. Besides, the footprint of Pakistani troops in the Gulf has been very insignificant. Concerns were also raised on cooperation between India and Pakistan on the Gulf. It was viewed that both the countries can work together at multilateral level. It was hoped that India, Bangladesh, Pakistan can have consensus, at least, on the Gulf owing to various factors.

The Human Rights issues in the Gulf, particularly in Saudi Arabia, were discussed. The panelists sympathized with the concerns; however, they were of the view that in general the situation is improving. In terms of Indian repatriates, the environment is benign. Lastly, it was emphasized that after the Mumbai attacks, the perception of GCC has changed towards Kashmir. Earlier it used to counsel India to accommodate Pakistani concerns and views on Kashmir. It has stopped doing so after the Mumbai attack. It was also argued that the resolutions and proposals of the OIC on Kashmir carry no weight. In fact, this organization is not a matter of concern for India: what matters more are India's bilateral relations with the regional countries.

***Report prepared by Prashant Kumar Singh and Gulbin Sultana.***

## Session VIII: Panel Discussion on Way Ahead

Chairperson: Dr. Arvind Gupta

Rumel Dahiya	Ishrat Aziz	Mohammad Hassan Khani	Sami Alfaraj	Talmiz Ahmad	Adel Soliman	Sheel Kant Sharma
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The concluding session of the 15th Asian Security Conference saw a panel discussion on the future roadmap for India and the region, based on the discussions, debates and interactions in the conference thus far. The session was chaired by IDSA Director General, Dr Arvind Gupta. He began the discussion by setting the agenda which would entail the amalgamation of the various strands of thought and analysis that emerged over the past three days. The focus of the session as laid out was to highlight the most important issues as felt by the panellists as well as practical suggestions for both policymakers and the IDSA in terms of taking the dialogue forward. Dr Gupta remarked that the conference had brought various crucial issues to the fore, such as the dynamics of political Islam, regional rivalries, and the debates surrounding the Iranian nuclear programme, among others—yet these discussions could not alone generate an in-depth analysis, which should most certainly be taken up. Keeping this in mind, he urged the panellists to voice their thoughts on how the future of the region would evolve.

The first speaker, Dr Sami Alfaraj, noted that the economic dimension of security had been repeatedly highlighted in previous sessions. However, other issues apart from oil and energy were equally vital, such as the establishment of free trade zones, this idea being attractive to China and Russia. Dr Alfaraj stressed the importance of India's participation in the fruition of such an idea as it makes its own strides in terms of trade with the region. He also expressed great confidence that it would be the western part of Asia that will emerge, by 2025, as the future international financial hub rather than its Eastern counterparts. For this vision to emerge however, security in the political and military sense would be vital. Dr Alfaraj was impressed by India's education standards and professional services as potential sources of investment and partnership for development within the West Asian region, essentially calling for greater engagement. Although India is reluctant to intervene in Gulf issues, it is perceived in the region to be a moral power and its diaspora is a very respected community. Additionally, Dr Alfaraj urged Iran to direct its energies towards development and infrastructural investment than, say, war-making. Iran also has an important responsibility in the protection of the sea lanes of communication and safe passage of ships.

Ambassador Talmiz Ahmad spoke eloquently on the unique aspects of the Arab Spring that impacted different states in the region differently: how the revolutionary developments led to effected change (Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen), accommodated change (Oman, Jordan and Morocco), and thwarted change

(Bahrain). He further mentioned that subversive elements had utilised the turmoil to achieve a sectarian agenda, which had erstwhile been a mere artificial construct. The US forces divided Iraq along sectarian lines and today Saudi Arabia and Iran are engaged in a sectarian competition. Nonetheless, Shia Iran and Sunni Egypt under an Islamist government are warming in their relations, which is why the GCC minus Qatar are now estranged from Egypt. Israel, on the other hand, has not developed any capacity or new ideas to deal with the recent developments. In terms of the future outlook, Ambassador Ahmad felt that in the short to medium term (five years), Islamist parties would dominate the political scene with competition among all parties and shades of opinion and there would be the institutionalisation of constitutional monarchies (in Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco). The radical Islamists have opportunistically taken advantage of Libya and Syria where turmoil will continue. In the longer term, he believes that the old orders will give way to a more participative and pluralistic political system, and that Libya and Syria will remain in turmoil. The US policy towards the region needs to be understood: does the US have a policy or is it reactive; would it be proactive or work through surrogates; and, if so, which surrogates and what forces would they back—forces of change or those preserving the status quo. Questions that need to be answered involve the resolution of US-Iran relations in the face of right-wing opinion in the US and the strength of the Israel lobby. Moreover, Israel needs to move beyond its siege mentality and exclusive extra-regional identity. Most importantly, will we achieve a broad Asian, Gulf and Asian-Gulf consensus?

The next speaker, Brigadier Rumel Dahiya, spoke of the possible worst case scenarios for India in terms of the heightening of instability and insecurity in the Gulf, leading to an energy crisis and the evacuation of the substantive and economically vital expatriate community. He concisely listed the major problems afflicting the region in sectarian divides and differential ambitions with the bigger states competing to dominate the region. However, war in the region, for instance in Syria, is not inevitable as there are too many imponderables. Further, there needs to be a diversification in the states' economic structures and in India's economic relations with the region.

He was followed by Adel Soliman, who raised the need for a multilateral framework for Gulf security to maintain peace and stability in cooperation with local actors in the GCC, Iraq, Iran, regional partners and direct neighbours, such as Yemen, Egypt and Israel as well as extra regional partners like China and India along with international actors such as the US, NATO and the EU. There hasn't been close cooperation between the major Gulf powers such as on security, human, economic and technological divides. Further, India-Egypt relations need to recover lost ground.

Ambassador Ishrat Aziz predicted that the change in global power equations is inevitable with far reaching ramifications and consequences; between the next 10-15 years, the rise of Asia and the relative decline of the West will be much faster than what is expected. In his view, the Gulf is not that big a gas station for the world but the dependence of the world on the Gulf region for oil and gas is not expected to decline, even though the US has a declared aim to be a net exporter of oil and gas by 2020. He said that all the countries should make an attempt to see that everybody has economic access to the Gulf.

Also it is very important for the region to be peaceful as there are 14-15 million Asians working and living in that area, and in the event of instability in the region the situation could become unprecedented. The trajectory of the Arab Spring in the Gulf will be different for reasons such as small population and huge wealth resources; and moreover, the relationship between the ruler and those who are ruled in these states is different and not the same as that seen in a republican dictatorship. Hence, the Arab Spring can be managed better in this area.

Ambassador Aziz added that the rise of the Islamists to power will be unavoidable in the first round of elections, as is being seen in Egypt, for example, but if they are unable to provide for the masses then they will lose the second election; the reason being that what people want is freedom from poverty, hunger and

ignorance. Peace and security in the Gulf can be achieved if all the countries come together and decide to have regional and inclusive security, as there is asymmetry as far as the size of the countries are concerned. India has bilateral interests in the Gulf and should help in any such arrangements if the Gulf countries want the same.

Using the analogy of the analogue age versus the digital age, the next speaker, Sheel Kant Sharma, spoke on how some of the perceptions of the powers involved in the region were stuck in analogue as seen in the deterioration of Libya and Afghanistan, ignoring the pixels of individuality. Departing from the major trend of asking India to intervene in the security architecture of the Gulf and not focus on economics alone, Sharma urged the Gulf to assist in providing security to the other half of Asia—witness to gross asymmetry such as in providing support for the reformation of international fora like the UNSC. He felt that Iran needs to be engaged with, not accusatorily, but transparently and through credible international fora like the IAEA. The US today has reached a level where it could be more conducive to such engagement with Iran, the solution of whose problems will strengthen the region's economic, security and development status.

The last speaker of the 15th ASC, Mohammad Hassan Khani, made two very distinctive points; the first was the need towards common understanding of security, threats and common interests in the Gulf area. The second was India's role on the Iranian nuclear issue. He emphasized on the point that both India and Iran should forget their problems, which led to India voting against Iran in the IAEA and move ahead in forging new bonds.

Concluding the presentation, Dr Arvind Gupta emphasized the point that though quite a lot of work is happening with regard to West Asia but requires more articulation. India should build its resources and act in a more active and diplomatic way without a meddling attitude.

The Question and Answer session highlighted some of the following points:

- The Gulf plan needs to be crisis management-oriented and an investment in development rather than in war-making.
- The Iranian foreign policy decision-making is not centralised but involves multiple political actors such as the Supreme Leader, the President, Parliament, National Security Council, Foreign Ministry, etc.
- Asia needs to generate its own political discourse instead of using Western precepts of secularism and liberalism that fit very differently in the Asian and Indian scheme of things.
- American imperialism is undeniable and will be significant among the factors shaping the Arab Spring. The GCC has for the past four decades and more committed itself to the US and these circumstances will not change overnight as there have been ups and downs in the past as well.
- Real change would mean a civilian authority dominating, an army that is a security provider from the barracks, and a separate force accountable to the government in charge of internal security. These can be some parameters to adjudge the success of the Arab spring.
- The OIC is irrelevant to Indian concerns.
- There needs to be a common vision among the region's members and focus must shift to the balancing of interests than the balancing of power.

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