

RAPPORTEURS REPORT

**Ideology, Politics and New Security  
Challenges in West Asia  
January 19-20, 2016**



## Session – I: Inauguration and Keynote Address

The Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi organised a two-day long West Asia Conference on September 10-11, 2014, the first of a new series of annual conferences focusing on the region. The theme of the Conference was “Geopolitical Shifts in West Asia: Trends and Implications”. The Conference was inaugurated by the Honorable Minister of State for External Affairs, General V.K. Singh (Retd.), who also delivered the keynote address.

In his welcoming remarks, Brig. Rumel Dahiya, Deputy Director General, IDSA, outlined the basic objectives of the Conference: to understand the rapidly changing political, security and strategic environment in West Asia, to assess its implications on the Asian security scenario, and to deliberate on India’s stance and the possibility of its policy options for engaging more pro-actively with the region. Short-term geo-political alliances are under severe strain and the boundaries of the region’s states are sought to be redrawn in a manner that the conflict may be perpetuated for many years to come. Sectarian violence is on the rise and terrorist groups have proliferated. This could not have been possible without the support of countries within the region. More importantly, the rise of the Islamic State (IS) poses a threat not only to the security and territorial integrity of Iraq but also to the whole region. In order to deal with these challenges mentioned above, a coordinated international response is required. Thus far, the international community has not been able to come up with a definite strategy.

Brig. Dahiya also underlined the significance of West Asia in India’s foreign policy. India has huge stakes and interest in the region with trade surpassing US \$200 billion, energy imports of more than 63 percent of its total energy consumption, and close to 7 million Indian diaspora living in the region. The security of India and the region is interlinked and, therefore, India is concerned regarding the developments in the region. Recent reports of some Indian youths from India joining the IS is a very disturbing trend.

In his keynote address, General V.K. Singh congratulated IDSA for organizing a conference on an extremely topical issue. While reiterating West Asia’s importance to India, he flagged some issues which require in-depth deliberation. He noted that the ongoing crisis situations in Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Libya, Syria, have continued to challenge traditional actors all alliances in the region. In this emerging order, there has been a greater devolution of power to regional powers and it is not clear how much space would remain for outside players. However, they will continue to have leverages. According to him, in the current volatile security environment in West Asia, there is immense scope for India to play a constructive role. The text of his full speech can be viewed at [http://www.idsa.in/keyspeeches/1westasiaconference\\_vksingh.html](http://www.idsa.in/keyspeeches/1westasiaconference_vksingh.html).

***Report prepared by Pranamita Baruah.***

## Session II: Current Geopolitical Situation in West Asia

Chairperson: Amb. Chinmaya R. Gharekhan

Dr. Mostafa Torkzahrani	Prof. Gencer Özcan	Amb. Mohamed Fathy Abdel Hamid El Shazly	Amb. Ahmed Salem Saleh Al-Wahishi	Dr. N. Janardhan
-------------------------	--------------------	--	-----------------------------------	------------------

The session was chaired by India's former special envoy for West Asia, Ambassador Chinmaya R. Gharekhan. In his opening remarks, the chairperson noted that the political and geographical map of the region is changing and coming years are crucial when determining the future trajectory of the West Asian region. He referred to the declining centrality of the Palestinian issue and how the whole region is beginning to be engulfed in pure jihadi agenda involving the establishment of the Caliphate as one single state. Iran, Amb. Gharekhan noted, is an indispensable power in the region and without its involvement regional problems cannot be resolved. Iran is not part of the problem but has a crucial role in the solution. The chairperson alluded to the role of big powers, the big game, and noted that the current situation is a by-product of what the United States has been doing in the region. He also emphasized the role of Turkey, which he argued, committed blunders in past and has acted as a jihad highway.

Dr Mostafa Torkzahrani divided his presentation titled "A New Paradigm in Understanding the Current Developments in the Middle East" broadly into three parts: where the region stands today, why it is there, and what needs to be done for the future. He noted that no one in West Asia really knows what to do. Iran, he noted, has a good experience in dealing with terrorism—a problem which is everywhere and no one is immune to it. The developments in Syria, he noted, were a new phenomenon. Terrorism has acquired new dimensions and today these groups have become more competent. They are a strategic group that can change the status quo in a moment, and they can even alter the status of the world order. Their techniques and access to media has enhanced their reach. In times of globalization, they do not need a solid organisation-pockets of different groups can do what they can. With their growing influence, the actors who created them are also endangered. He talked about universalism and particularism—secularism as universalism and particularism to be jihadism. Referring to Europe, Dr Torkzahrani noted, that just because it does not have a Muslim population does not mean that it is not threatened. He rejected the concept of Shia-Sunni conflict in the context of the West Asian crisis. According to him, the notion of state sovereignty in West Asia is eroded from inside and from outside and the merger between state and non-state actors is dangerous. The legitimacy of a state is important and somehow territory has become a source of legitimisation of the state. The political culture of shaping a state comes from outside and fundamentally nation-building is a long process. Today, no one can say where West Asia stands as far as nation building is concerned. The region is deprived of the positive aspects of globalization. The Arab Spring was not the globalization of democracy anyway.

In his presentation titled, "The Arab Uprisings: The More Things Changed, the More They Stayed the Same", Professor Gencer Özcan from Turkey argued that that no matter how artificially designed by the post-war treaties, the borders and states stood against time and appear to survive the present crises. According to him, the Arab uprisings contributed to the consolidation of the regional order forged in 1979. Providing the historical context, Professor Özcan spoke about the Sykes-Picot Agreement that handed over control of Syria, Lebanon and Turkish Cilicia to the French and Palestine, Jordan and areas around the Persian Gulf and Baghdad to the British. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) claims one of the goals of its insurgency is to reverse the effects of the Sykes–Picot Agreement. He noted that the Arab uprisings that engulfed the whole region in 2011 gave rise to expectations that the authoritarian Arab states would be dismantled and be replaced with democratic ones. The Tunisian exception notwithstanding, not only did

the expectations disappear, the uprisings triggered chain reactions culminating to catastrophic results in the most populous Arab countries, Egypt, Syria and Iraq. Dwelling on the theoretical aspect of the problems, Professor Özcan noted that the uprisings had a conspicuous international dimension and, hence, added a new dimension for the study of International Relations. The uprisings highlighted conceptual insufficiencies of the discipline compelling to devise new approaches to deal with parties, social movements, tribes, armed groups, religious communities. He referred to the contrasting positions that Iran and Turkey took vis-a-vis the Syrian crisis. Iran supported the Assad regime in spite of the atrocities against the civilians while Turkey abandoned the huge political investment it made in Syria and offered staunch support to the Syrian opposition. Professor Özcan outlined Turkey's error of judgment in dealing with the Syrian situation—miscalculations about the strength of the regime, the strength of the opposition, and Turkey's own strength in supporting anti-state elements in Syria. He concluded by stating that the Arab uprisings confirmed the regional order forged by the fateful events of 1979. Although there may be some revision within the national borders, in spite of calls for Islamic union, the Sykes-Picot borders is likely to stay intact in future.

Ambassador Mohamed Fathy Abdel Hamid El Shazly, in his paper titled "Egypt and Geopolitics in West Asia", spoke on "Reasserting the role of the State" in contrast with the "Erosion of the State" under the impact of the revolution that crept into the region towards end of 2010. The uprising, he argued, generated a wide ranging debate about the repercussions on state institutions and functions in face of unprecedented threats to its survival and ability to discharge its conventional functions. The crisis erupted as a result of the social pressures produced by the imbalance between the state and the society; the functional failures of the State as they were unable to adequately confront security threats. On Syria, he noted, the civil war is arriving at a kind of stalemate where neither party dominates. This status, he believed, may hold on for years in the future as a military balance has been established between the forces of the Assad regime and the opposition. On Yemen, Amb. El Shazly described the regional competitions and its impact on the Yemeni state and the domestic political conflicts. According to him, three rebellious groups pose serious threat for Yemen's future: the Houthis, the Southern Movement and Al Qaeda Yemen. On Egypt, the ambassador dwelt upon the identity conflicts, the resultant separatist trends and the pressures from outside. He also talked on Egypt's sectarian affiliations and sedition and how it was trying to regain its tolerant nature. Speaking on the role of the US, he noted that it is believed in certain quarters that the policies of the Obama administration in Syria led to the creation of ISIS. Towards the end, Amb. El Shazly argued that if it could be agreed that 2011 was the year of "Regime Fall" in the Arab Spring countries and 2012 was the year of "Faltering Transition", and 2013 was the year of the "Failure of Islamists in Power", then 2014 would be the year of the rise of popular demands for the return of the State.

Speaking on the "Regional Geopolitical Situation in the Middle East", Ambassador Ahmed Salem Saleh Al-Wahishi noted that one would have to deal with the crisis in the West Asia for a longer time. He spoke on how West Asia has become the growing hotbed of terrorism. All the forces have to come together and take part in helping to overcome these challenges. Beside the security measures, the citizen partnership is also an important element in dealing with the crisis situation. With the end of the Cold War in 1991, there was a vacuum created in the world order. The fundamentalist Islamic forces came and filled this vacuum and is now moving in a very dangerous direction, which we are witnessing today. The growth of radical movements across the region has forced a re-think on whether the natural resources of the region are a blessing or a curse. These resources have helped finance these movements. The rise of terrorism in North Africa and the coming of power of fundamentalist groups has caused breach of the natural resources and the welfare economy in the region. The existing social conditions encourage the growth of these movements and it is essential that economic growth is promoted to curtail such fundamentalist movements. It is also necessary to spread education across sections and focus on best practices to curb the growing tide of radicalism.

Dr. N. Janardhan in his paper titled “Arab uprising and changing geopolitical trends in the Gulf” analysed the 4 Ps as to what drives the foreign policy: principle, profit, power projection and prestige. To begin with, he discussed the parallels drawn between the Arab uprising and the disintegration of the Soviet Union or the 9/11 incident, which somewhat impacted the political–security equations in West Asia. He argued that in the present crisis situation, contrary to international affairs affecting the region’s politics, the events following the Arab uprisings mostly impacted international affairs. Analysing the recent trends, Dr Janardhan argued that while the decade-old experiment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to evolve regional solutions to regional problems is a brave and wise effort, it now appears that there are serious contradictions in their approaches. He also pointed to the instrumental role played by Qatar against recent developments in contrast to playing the role of a ‘neutral’ mediator in regional conflicts earlier. On the Syrian crisis, the speaker noted that the GCC stand, in particular, became one of the factors that widened the Sunni-Shiite divisions in the region, intensifying Saudi-Iranian competition. With the advent of groups such as the ISIS, he asserted, non-state actors have become bigger enemies than states. Dr Janardhan noted that Iran seemed to have gained more from the crisis. The biggest challenge for Iran now is getting economic sanctions lifted and returning to the international mainstream by its rapprochement with the west. He also opined that though the concerns of the West and the GCC countries are different, the short- and long- term GCC-Iran rapprochement is largely linked to Iran-West rapprochement. Speaking on the role of Asia in West Asian region he pointed out that some like-minded scholars have been pushing the idea of upgrading the GCC-Asia buyer-seller relationship to a strategic one and exploring possibilities for a new collective security architecture, which would involve Asian countries and Western powers but without excluding the US

## Discussion

### Following major points emerged during the discussion:

- International or regional factors which bring about geopolitical changes may not be necessarily current factors. They could be factors in the past. 9/11 was an attack against globalisation of which the US was an engine. Similarly, the crisis in West Asia could be a consequence of what the US did 50 years back.
- Iranian revolution has been the most popular revolution in the region. Iran is the biggest gainer from the Arab Spring as some believe Iran got its autumn as a result of the brewing crisis in the region.
- The US is facing regional fatigue and therefore American influence is bound to diminish considerably in the times to come. Against the current situation, why is the US expected to come and fight in the region or intervene against ISIS? The US would probably intervene only after gauging fully whether it is really a threat to its broader security interests.
- Differences between Shia Sunni have been politicized and this has acted as a catalyst in the current turmoil.
- Similar to Iran, even Syria could be seen as a part of the solution and not the problem.

*Report prepared by Priyanka Singh.*

## Session III: Sectarianism, Extremism and Regional Security

Chairperson: Amb. S.K. Bhutani

Dr. Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar	Amb. Talmiz Ahmad	Dr. Abdulwahab Al-Qassab	Col. Rajeev Agarwal
----------------------------	-------------------	--------------------------	---------------------

Amb. Bhutani began his remarks by noting the importance of the year 1979 in the history of the region. He pointed out that in that year, the Islamic revolution took place in Iran, the Camp David agreements were concluded between Egypt and Israel, and, finally, Soviet troops entered Afghanistan. Each of these developments had profound impact on the subsequent history of the region. After the Camp David agreements, for instance, Egypt lost its leadership position in the Arab world and Saddam Hussein took over the Arab leadership. He highlighted that religion as an organising principle of political life was on ascendance since the 1980s and has acquired a sharper tone in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

Dr. Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar began his presentation by noting that states like the US, GCC and Iran represented the three sides of a strategic triangle in the region. Further, non-state actors were becoming increasingly relevant, as indeed social movements. He argued that the importance of socio-political movements will rise and such movements with nationalistic tendencies would counter regional sectarian propensities. He noted that there was rise in Iran's influence in the region, coupled with lack of trust between Arabian Gulf countries and Iran. He further stated that the US was playing a 'good' security role in the region.

Dr Ghaffar noted that the disintegration of Iraq as a nation-state was replaced by sectarian affiliations that reverberated through the region and catalysed sympathy for Non-State-Actors such as Hezbollah and Islamic State (IS). This has instigated an era of disorder that seeks to destroy old boundaries and reconstruct new ones based on Sectarian and ethnic lines. According to him after withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, the US did not have a comprehensive strategy for dealing with the aftermath. The vacuum created by US withdrawal led to the sectarian policies of Al-Maliki government and thus emergence of the IS. Articulating his views on the strategic landscape in the region he noted following points:

1. Religion will remain the main factor in current transformations; it will be used by various movements, leading to the erosion of the concept of a civil state.
2. The concept of a state has been receding, which works to the advantage of non-state actors.
3. There is a state of uncertainty regarding current regional transformations and what might come as a result of the expanding role of various countries in the region.
4. Strategic transformations in great power policies, such as the USA, and in international organizations, such as NATO, will have far-reaching repercussions for the current regional security equation.
5. The GCC countries face unprecedented threats in the wake of the current climate of regional and international polarization.

Amb. Talmiz Ahmad defined sectarianism as mobilisation of communal identity for sectarian purposes. He noted the significant presence of Shia populations in countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait and even some provinces of Saudi Arabia like Najran and Eastern province. He pointed out that there was no purely Shia-Sunni conflict and that the Ottoman-Persian rivalry was imperial in nature and not communal. He further highlighted that Shia was a limited concept as there was no central authority in Shiism and there was no

monolithic broad-based Shia community in any part of the world. He pointed out that Iran itself does not project Shia identity, specifically noting that Iran was not Shia till 1501 and that the 1979 revolution was termed an 'Islamic' revolution.

Amb. Ahmad traced the mobilisation of sectarian identity to Jordanian King Abdallah's 2004 statement about the rise of the 'Shiite Crescent' and the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. He stated that the rejection of Shia was an inherent part of the Wahhabi ideology and in the aftermath of the fall of Saddam Hussein, Riyadh was wary of the rise of Iran's influence. The Saudis became even more wary after the Arab Spring and the ouster of Hosni Mubarak. It was pointed out that state authority was under siege with the rise of groups like ISIS and the questioning of national borders. He stated that the way out was for Saudi-Iranian engagement and the establishment of a new regional security architecture.

Dr. Abdulwahab Al-Qassab stated that the strategic balance in the region was disturbed after the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein in 1990, given that the GCC, Iran and Iraq were three sides of a strategic triangle. After the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, the US was responsible for imposing the doctrine of sectarianism. Iran behaved as a sectarian state by sponsoring Shiite militias and political parties inside Iraq. He charged former Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki of following a purely sectarian policy. He warned that in the aftermath of the growth of ISIS, aerial bombardment of targets by Americans inside Iraq would not change the situation drastically as the Americans have been following the same policy against Al Qaeda in Yemen for three to four years without much success. He stated that sectarianism was the 'godfather' of all problems in the region and that there would be negative consequences for each country, including Iran given that the ISIS has taken over some towns inside Iran in the recent past. He emphasised that the impact of the current crisis will also be on the energy supplies.

Col. Rajeev Agrawal stated that there was strategic imbalance in the region with attendant factors like the rise of non-state actors. He noted that the current security architecture was not able to deal with the varied challenges, given that organisations like the GCC were based on the twin principles of fear and exclusion. He stated that there was a need to look beyond the GCC and seek lessons from other models in operation like the OSCE and NATO. He urged that there was a need for inclusive security structures in the region, with better collective response mechanisms. He made a case for the inclusion of countries such as Yemen, Iran, Egypt, Syria, Jordan in the regional security architecture, which could be termed 'Regional Dialogue for Cooperative Security in the Persian Gulf'.

## Discussion

### **Following major points came up during the discussion:**

1. It was noted that non-state actors like the Hamas and ISIS were increasing in strength and fighting better than the states security forces.
2. The failure of intelligence agencies in predicting the rise of groups like the ISIS was highlighted. It was noted that in some countries, the clergy had more power than the state apparatus. Amb. Ahmad distinguished between establishment clergy and dissident clergy (*Sahwa*/Awakening movement) in Saudi Arabia.
3. Dr. Ghaffar stated that Saudi Arabia was not a sectarian state and that it wished to see stability in the region.
4. Amb. Ahmad asserted that sectarianism was not a viable political proposition and that the rise of ISIS had dramatically changed the situation, requiring cooperation between Riyadh, Washington and Tehran to stem the tide.

*Report prepared by S. Samuel C. Rajiv.*

## Session IV: External Interventions and its Long Term Consequences

Chairperson: Amb. Sanjay Singh

Dr. Veniamin Popov

Prof. Henner Fürtig

Prof. P. R.  
Kumaraswamy

Dr. Waiel Awwad

Dr. Meena Singh  
Roy

Dr Veniamin Popov pointed out that the Arab Spring is a response to corrupt authoritarian regimes, social injustice and unemployment. In his view, the West exploited it, especially in Libya and Syria, and to some extent in Bahrain and Yemen. Therefore, it is a continuation of the US invasion in Iraq, which has led to the ‘radical changes in the balance of forces in the region’ and increase in sectarian tensions. The aggressive policy of the US has led to the rise in Islamic extremism; the US promotion and support of Sunni organisations has created the ISIS. He argued that the creation of the caliphate can change the political map because of its attractiveness to the masses and youth. Moreover, due to their tactical success in gaining new territory, they have both material resources and capabilities. Their success and the Al-Qaeda’s response to it have led to the need for assessing the situation especially in view of the impending US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The situation further complicated by the Israel-Palestine conflict, religious elements has made the settlement difficult. He noted that the role of the Western countries in West Asia would decrease and the role of the local and regional powers is likely to increase. In such a scenario, he said that countries have no choice but to coordinate and unite their efforts against current challenges. He cited the example of Syria, where joint military actions have resulted in positive gains. He recommended the BRICS to play a more proactive role to combat these challenges.

Professor Henner Furtig, spoke on the topic “How to deal with West Asia? Commonalities and Differences in the European and German Approaches” asserted that after the end of the World War II, German policy followed strict dos and don’ts and looked towards the resolution of the issues in a peaceful manner. In his view, unlike the American system, where the Constitution is written to protect the population against a hostile world, the Basic Law of Germany defines the Federal Republic of Germany as a “part of a larger system of connected security to which national sovereignty will be subordinated”. He argued that Germany’s commitment to multilateralism has thus remained even after the reunification of Germany. However, in 1995, Germany participated in military mission outside Europe and in 2002 German soldiers went to Afghanistan. This has changed the policy of Germany against military missions outside its country. Professor Furtig concluded that Germany embraced the European policy later than coordinating its policy with the United States.

According to him, Germany was reluctant to define its own political interests in West Asia. There were debates about particular countries but not as a region. German interests and policies are not well defined or conceptualised. He noted that after the Arab Spring, efforts must be channelised for institution building, rule of law, and economic reforms. For these issues, the European Union (EU) emerges as a prominent actor tied to the region both by economic and security relations. As the immediate neighbour of the region, the EU has strong political interests in the region. As far as the economic development, democratic initiatives and social stabilisation are concerned, Professor Furtig recommended that the political, social and economic issues that started the Arab Spring can be useful starting point for policy initiatives for the EU. The challenges within the EU make it a reluctant player to engage in the region. He noted that if Europe wants to remain a pole in a multi-polar international system, it must prove that it can pursue a common foreign and security policy, particularly in times of crisis and conflict and is able to formulate a long-term strategy that takes the growing international role and standing of emerging powers into account.



Professor P.R. Kumaraswamy, addressed the nature and role of the external actors. He contended that even though the United States is an external player in the region and retains considerable influence, Russia and China play an equally important role in the region. Therefore, in his view, any political settlement in the region has to take into account the consent of China and Russia. For instance, he cited the example of Syria, where Russia and China have prevented the US from taking military action but not influential enough to bring a political settlement. In his analysis, Turkey, Iran and Qatar are also external players in the region. For India to be an external player, the region should view it as one. Hence, for India the question is whether it is an external player or a player in an extended neighbourhood. He argued that not all external players were always detrimental to the region. In the post-Ottoman history, the speaker asserted that all states in West Asia including Israel do not have an inclusive national identity and has led to the various challenges in the region. He noted that only after Westernisation in region, states had developed a territorial identity in addition to being an Arab and Islam. Professor Kumaraswamy argued that the security dilemmas of the small state have led to the presence of an external player to guarantee the existence of the state, as one's immediate neighbour is also an immediate threat. Unlike the African states, the West Asian states did not accept the independence of the states after colonial borders. As a result, external players were needed to recognise the existence of the state and guarantee its survival. Additionally, the decreasing economic presence of the US would lead to diminishing political influence and decreasing interest in the region. Addressing the dichotomy, he concluded that as the challenges in West Asia are rising, states are increasingly looking at the leadership of the United States to counter these threats.

Articulating views on the subject, Dr Waiel Awwad stated that in the Arab world, there was a transition from a feudal society to a modern society after WW II. Moreover, the increase in the employable force in the region without effective means to find employment has led to unrest in the region. Furthermore, the promotion of Political Islam by the Western powers has failed and instead has created radicalism. He argued that the Arab Spring started as a social uprising and later used as an indigenous movement which subsequently became radicalised. The West had two interests: oil and Israeli interests. According to Dr Awwad, the current situation and turmoil in the region is nothing but manifestation of Western policy and its thirst of controlling the natural resources of the Arab World. The creation of Caliph and Al Qaeda in West Asia came after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Dr Awwad argued that the ISIS is a creation of the US because of the occupation of Iraq. The US oil interests in West Asia ensured that it encourages both state and non-state actors. With respect to Syria, the US played spoilsport often supporting non-state actors, which has affected the region as a whole.

Dr Meena Singh Roy looked at the dangers of the external intervention and highlighted the ramifications for India. She noted that there is a widespread view that the entire West Asian region is in turmoil, but that it is equally important to notice that there are some stable factors present in the region. Speaking on the external intervention in the region she noted that there seems to be a general perception that erroneous policy of the US and West are a major cause of instability in the region. However, local and regional factors are equally important factors for unrest and conflict in the region. These regional and local factors include: authoritarian nature of the regimes; the existence of substantial social and economic inequality and injustices in the exercise of political power by the Arab states; rampant corruption; absence of strong alternative power structure for people of the region; absence of democratic systems of governance; continuation of military rule in some countries; regional rivalries and sectarian fault lines. Therefore, while external interventions has pushed the region into civil wars, regional conflicts and turmoil but the local and regional factors have provided a perfect recipe for these external actors to intervene. In such a scenario, Dr Roy argued that these local and regional factors will in future are likely to limit the success of intervening powers, who have tried to justify their intervention on humanitarian ground to bring about any kind of peace and stability through the means of military intervention. What can possibly be achieved by these military intervention are only short-term gains resulting in some kind of symptomatic treatment of the problem and not long-term political solutions. According to her, the following factors can be attributed for

nations to intervene: balance of power; regime change; controlling energy resources; protecting interests of allies; and humanitarian reasons.

Highlighting the dangers of external interventions, Dr Roy stated that so far external intervention has resulted in creating failed states, in complete lawlessness and instability (cases in point being Iraq, Libya and Syria); provided fertile grounds for emergence of extremist forces like ISIS; and has inflicted heavy damage to human life, economy and infrastructure of the countries involved in conflict and civil wars; and resulted in increased number of refugees and displaced people in the region, taxing the economy of the neighbouring countries. Finally, it has not helped the countries in creating representative democracy, rather have resulted in strengthening non-democratic regimes.

Dr Roy pointed out that India has huge stakes in the region and any turmoil in the region will have serious implications for the country. India's stakes in the region would limit its choices and, therefore, it would continue to follow its traditional policy. Under the current government, West Asia occupies third place in terms of its foreign policy priority after South and East Asia. Articulating on India's options in the region it was suggested that there is a need to re-articulate India's "New West Asia Policy" with a road map for next 10 years. New Delhi needs to adopt a new strategy of engagement with the West Asian region to draw on maximum advantages and avoid problematic and negative situations inimical to its interests. Simultaneously, India needs to take the existing cooperation with more stable countries in the region to higher levels to secure its interests in the region.

## Discussion

### **Following important points were articulated during the discussion:**

- It was noted that there was inclusive national identity in instances of history of West Asia. However, it was argued that the constitution of countries in West Asia do not support an inclusive national identity. Moreover, there were phases in Arab history when there were inclusive national identity, but in the post-World War II period there was no state building. There was a lack of democratic institutions due to the insufficiencies in the leadership in the Arab states.
- The character of external player is contextual and depends on the state in the region. Therefore, the point raised was that there are always states in the region, which support external players.
- There are lot of global challenges countered only through cooperation between different states, especially in the West Asian region.
- It was put forward that India has to develop an indigenous strategy and presence in the Arab world.

*Report prepared by M.S. Prathiba.*

## Session V: Impact of Regional Instability on Energy Security

Chairperson: Amb Ranjit Gupta			
Dr. Jon B. Alterman	Dr. Niu Xinchun	Prof. Toshitaka Takeuchi	Prof. Jeongmin Seo

Jon B. Alterman spoke on perspectives from “The Other Side of the World”. According to him, the international community needs an alternate framework for the region between the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca. West Asian energy has been driving the economies of the Asian countries. Although Asia’s experts now talk of diversifying their energy sources in West Asia, they cannot do it.

The United States (US), in the future, is also going to prioritise its expenditure in the context of the current conditions. Responding to every issue in the world will be unsustainable for the US. The US Military’s Central Command is preoccupied with fighting against asymmetric actors while the Pacific Command thinks in terms of fighting against a single state actor. Still, there are a number of important questions to be dealt with. Should US coordinate with China? Should US seek for balancing China? Can China become a global stakeholder? Does the US have a stake in increasing the India-China rivalry?

There has been growth in both Maritime India as well as Maritime Asia. It is also definite that India is trying to play a role in the region. The differences on the issue of the role of Iran in the region and the role of Pakistan’s behaviour are also important, and should be studied regarding the instability in West Asia. It is to be noted that India is not the fulcrum in Asia as the US thinks of it. Before comparing China and the US, it is to be noted that the greater power of the US lies in the realm of ideas. For any US-India cooperation in future, India should be clear about the role it wants to be played by the US and by itself in Asia. Dr Niu Xinchun’s paper was on “Strategic Transformation in the West Asia and China’s Policy Choices”. He suggested that China should avoid repeating the failures of the twentieth century. The contemporary age is different and the competition is about who can attract best talent at the least cost. China is incapable of creating a global power network. It cannot influence the Middle East substantially, and, therefore, it needs US cooperation in the region. Unless the situation comes to a zero-sum game, the US will not contain China. The US is more important for China than West Asia; therefore, China should also avoid conflict with the US strategy in the region. West Asia is looking for feasible options as a power vacuum is emerging with the US’s retreat from the region. In such a situation, China should stick to non-alignment. It should also utilise its economic, market and infrastructure strength to develop good relations with the West Asian countries. Together with these, it should not rely on one country for its oil. China should adopt a foothold strategy instead of a base strategy in the region.

Speaking on “the Impact of the Regional Instability in West Asia (Middle East) on Energy Security: The Cases of Japan and Asia”, Professor Takeuchi Toshitaka said that shale oil is a wild card and the US is expected to be world’s largest oil producer in 2015. No nuclear reactor is in operation in Japan currently. Therefore, the Japanese will have to depend more on oil. There is no alternative solution for Japan and the practical solution for the country may be to go back to using nuclear reactors. In present conditions, the protection of the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) is a major issue for Japan. Since Japan has amended its constitutional provisions that prevented it to cooperate with the military of other countries earlier, it can now participate in joint military operations and activities against piracy. According to him, the idea of

declaring the SLOCs as global commons should be undertaken for discussion seriously so that they could be protected jointly by the international community. The Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) for the Malacca strait can be seen as a seed for larger cooperation on the protection of the SLOCs. The international community needs to change its current mindset against the idea of global commons; as it is good for all.

Professor Jeongmin Seo from South Korea spoke on the Korean perspective on the impact of the West Asian instability on energy security. He delineated the implications of West Asian instability in terms of energy security in South Korea. South Korea is eighth largest energy consumer in the world. It is the fifth largest importer of crude oil worldwide and the second largest importer of both coal and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). Forty-five per cent of energy in the country comes from petroleum and 86 per cent of the country's total energy consumption comes from fossil fuels only. South Korea has no oil-gas reserves as well as any pipelines. Although the country has started contemplating renewable energy and nuclear power, 74 per cent of its oil comes from West Asia; and Saudi Arabia supplies 27 per cent of the total consumption of oil. The "Arab Spring" has adversely affected South Korea's trade relationship with Egypt, Libya, Syria and Iran. All South Korean companies and workers withdrew from Libya. However, many South Korean workers and citizens are still present in Iraq and there is no change in the South Korean energy policy even after the Arab Spring. South Korean diplomatic efforts play a complementary role to its energy policies in the Middle East and they are focused on securing its energy supplies. Hence, South Korea, certainly, is not the power intending to intervene or act larger in the West Asian region. Non-assertiveness prevails in the South Korean energy policies in the region as its oil companies are focused on retail oil sale than overseas oil production for lack of interest as well as capital due to the huge defence budget of the country.

Professor Girijesh Pant spoke on "Energy and Geopolitics of West Asia: Changing Dynamics". He explained how oil is vital for the growth and progression of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The ISIS gives an opportunity for the change in the mindsets of the Asian countries. He pointed out towards some important global trends. It is interesting to note that at a time of crisis in the West Asian region, the oil prices are falling. From 2013 onwards, he pointed out, the world supplies of oil are higher than the demand. The market space for the Oil Producing and Exporting Countries (OPEC) is currently shrinking. The global oil flows are moving from the Atlantic towards Asia-Pacific. The oil scarcity syndrome, in his assessment, will be absent for the next five to seven years at least. Hence, the current problems in the region are political in nature. Professor Pant also pointed towards the importance of the linkage of oil prices and the fiscal breakeven points in the countries of the region. He also said that while companies in the US are lobbying for acquiring oil export permission after the shale revolution, Asia is yet to have a strategic vision. A shared Asian vision cannot be in terms of rivalries; therefore, the countries will have to come out of the rivalry mindset. Asians, in more dire conditions in West Asia, will have to work there together.

Dr Shebonti Ray Dadwal presented her paper on "West Asian Turmoil and the Future of the Regional Gas Sector: Implications for India". International agencies say that the current century is going to be the gas-century. Renewable energy sources are going to take a long-time to make any significant impact on the energy scenario. Gas is the fastest growing fuel among the fossil fuels. Out of the 10 top gas producing countries, five are from the Gulf Region in West Asia. She said that gas should be given more importance than it is being currently given in the region. Although gas production is associated with oil, its market is not a global market. Its prices are also linked with oil prices.

With the shale gas revolution in the United States, the energy equations in the current world are going to change entirely. It is because of its gas resources that Qatar has been able to punch above its weight in the region. Iran faces severe constraints regarding gas production due to the sanctions regarding building of pipelines. India imports 25 per cent of its gas from the West Asian region. India is trying to get gas from other regions also. Therefore, it is tying up with some of the gas rich East African countries; and also expects

to receive the US shale gas from 2015. Meanwhile, this is to note that China has the largest reserves of shale gas but it does not have the technology to harness. The West Asian region too has a large amount of shale gas, but not the technology. Among all these, this is to note that India is still not looking at its energy market strategically. The major challenge for future is to delink the gas price from the price of oil. The Asian gas market is nascent and countries can look for creating a consortium of gas buyers for their benefit.

## Discussion

### Following important points came up during the discussion:

- The issue of declaring the SLOCs as global commons is a non-starter.
- Simply policing and patrolling the SLOCs will not help. There should be something better to nab those who are helping and aiding sea piracy.
- Can the India-China-Japan trilateral help with regards to the protection of the SLOCs?
- Analyses of energy resources only in the short-term will not help. We need to look at the long-term perspectives. OPEC will be the major oil supplier 2025 onwards.
- There will be big changes in the energy market if Iran is freed of the sanctions.
- The projections of oil production in Brazil by the International Energy Agency (IEA) are deviating.
- Although the US has to be present in the West Asian region, it has to be different in nature.
- What will be the goal of India's cooperation with countries in West Asia and with countries from outside the region?
- The international community needs to take care of the interests of the smaller countries as they are very important for the stability of the region.
- India has lost several opportunities in past, it should learn to capture them in future.
- The recent gas discovery in the Mediterranean Sea may prove a game changer.
- The role of the suppliers of the technology for oil exploration and extraction is important.
- Iran will lose its superiority in the region by going nuclear; as other countries in the region will also follow. This is the strategic reason why Iran does not need a nuclear bomb.
- Iran is the strongest power in the region and it is a complicated issue where this power comes from. Perhaps soft power!!
- Sanctions on Iran directly hurt people, increase corruption and radicalise politics.
- The role of Russia is important in the global energy scenario.
- Arctic oil is going to be very expensive. It will be the last option to be exploited.
- Elements of uncertainties are high in the West Asian region.

*Report prepared by Saurabh Mishra.*

## Session VI: Panel Discussion: India and the West Asian Region

Chairperson: Brig. Rumel Dahiya (Retd.)			
Dr. Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar	Dr. Mostafa Torkzahrani	Amb. Ahmed Salem Saleh Al-Wahishi	Shri Sandeep Kumar
Prof. A. K. Pasha		Prof. Gulshan Dietl	

The first Annual West Asia Conference concluded with the Panel Discussion. The thrust of the panel discussion was to bring forth ideas and suggestions to help deepen India's engagement with the West Asian region. Brig. Rumel Dahiya initiated the discussion by saying that there is demand for more proactiveness from India in the region (as indeed the two day proceedings of the conference had shown) but the specifics were not available. India's involvement in West Asia remains dependent on intensity of its interests there and the leverage it enjoys. It also depends on factors such as capability, political will, the distance from one's shores, and international opinion. India has interests in the region but no stated missions, and no clear cut strategies for exit either. He also mentioned that India does not take sides in regional conflict issues, taking the example of its consistent position on the Israel-Palestine issue and recent Gaza crisis.

Amb. Ahmed Salem Saleh Al-Wahishi reflected on the long history of relations between India and countries of West Asia. He mentioned that India can be an example of a "democracy" for West Asian countries that are now undertaking the democratic experience. While the change in government in New Delhi has raised concerns of how India will approach the region, he took a positive view, saying that India had seen a change of power in the 1980s (and government formation with a thumping majority), and that it maintained its position/relations with the Arab countries. He felt that things would be the same now and that we should look forward to the future.

Amb. Al-Wahishi also referred to the deep cooperation between India and the region in the 1950s, especially that between the statesmen Nehru and Nasser who worked together in the UN and established the NAM. However, he cautioned that in current times, we cannot rely on good political relations alone, and stressed on the need to have mutual interests.

In 2008, the idea of establishing the Arab-India Forum of Cooperation was generated and an MoU signed by the Arab League head and then EAM, Pranab Mukherjee. The Forum, he mentioned, has had meetings of officials, non-state actors, and the private sector. The last meeting was in the UAE and the next will be in New Delhi. Industry bodies such as FICCI, CII, ASSOCHAM have been push behind this. India's trade relations with the region currently stand at around \$200 bn. Moreover, there are 7 million Indian expats in region and India receives huge annual remittances— all these factors point to the mutually beneficial relations.

Amb. Al-Wahishi also touched upon India's good relations with all parties concerned in the region. He felt that it can play a bigger role in the region, mainly in achieving just and lasting peace. In particular, he suggested recommencing with the practice of sending Special Envoys from India to the region—India's continuation of this practice would strengthen its presence in the region and enhance its involvement. He also touched upon the influence of Indian music, culture and movies, highlighting the scope for enhanced

Indian soft power. He commended the good job done by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations in encouraging educational exchanges between India and countries of West Asia. India's significant expertise in IT and technology, he felt, would be useful for the region/Arab countries: developing countries are in a position to break the West's monopoly on technology and know-how, and move forward. He felt that the combination of oil revenue surplus in West Asia and India's advanced technological know-how would be a fantastic, mutually beneficial combination. Terrorism is a scourge that affects everyone, and all are part of the coalition to combat terrorism. He felt that there is much scope for cooperation on combating terrorism.

Dr Mostafa Torkzahrani from Iran began by saying that we must keep a clear theoretical picture in mind in order to make accurate predictions. He also stressed the importance of involving scholarly expertise in policymaking. Referring to the power politics underway in Asia, he felt that energy is not just a commodity for trade but, along with war, has become instrument of geopolitics. With particular reference to India-Iran relations, he pondered on the scope for strategic cooperation. Especially, he questioned whether Iran and India move beyond the conventional balancing/bandwagoning strategic concepts.

Dr Torkzahrani said that there is a need to redefine the notion of who/what should be secure—human security should not be limited to just a western concern, but should also be applied to the people of the West Asian region. There should be a new approach to a critical study of the security in the region.

He further commented on the fact that the region is witnessing reshaping and reshuffling. The presence of superpowers is also being questioned, or, at least, viewed differently from earlier. Israel is the only one who seems to have a clear idea of what the region should look like, unlike the West and even actors in the region. He reflected on the fact that Iran-West relations have been strained since revolution. Problems have been imposed on Iran. According to him sanctions are punishment for the sake of punishment. Going with the new winds of change in Asia, he said that India and China will have to decide their policy towards Iran.

Sandeep Kumar, JS (WANA), MEA began by saying that policy analysis and formulation with respect to West Asia is challenging when region is in such major flux. The Government of India thus is reaching out to scholars, think tanks in order to make comprehensive policy formulation. He further said that India would have to see how to maintain relationships with regional players as their roles shift and change. At the same time, the US would continue to be a major player in the region. Russia is eyeing re-engagement with region and China is making strong economic thrust there. While India too has considerable interests in the region, we must, at the same time, be conscious of surge of ISIS and how extremists affect us and our core interests there. Mr Kumar said that India has to assess its short to medium term options in strengthening countries core interests in the region. The question thus is: how can India devise sustainable institutional mechanisms to strengthen these. It is equally important that to keep in mind the impact of growing societal and institutional relations. He reiterated that there was no change in India's traditional strong support to Arab States—the External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj had clearly stated the Government's policy in this regard. At the recent Arab League Symposium, the Minister had confirmed that India's commitments to cooperation with Arab Countries remain unchanged.

Despite rising challenges in the region, Mr Kumar mentioned that India has managed to insulate its interests in the region and salvage bilateral relations with individual countries with delicate manoeuvring. At the same time, there is larger consciousness that we may have to respond to changes in the status quo in Arab states in the future, especially keeping in mind the large numbers of Indian expats there. Mr Kumar clearly stated that India does not control processes in these countries and has no wish to control such processes. He referred to the keynote address by Gen. V.K. Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs on the previous day at IDSA, where the Minister had clearly stated that India is “not in the business of exporting democracy”. But, Mr Kumar said, given India's experience of democracy, it is willing to share experiences in parliamentary democracy. He also mentioned that regional problems require regional solutions and based

on this, India will be offering experience and expertise in institution building. He further stated that India has no desire to create parallel mechanisms to existing mechanisms for conflict/dispute resolution in the region, for example, Egypt's mediation in recent Gaza crisis or US Secretary of State John Kerry's Arab-Israeli Peace process. India does not wish to undertake anything that will impact bilateral ties negatively.

He then referred to the continuing crisis in Syria, where India's credibility lay in its balanced position. India supported Syria in terms of humanitarian crisis and chemical weapons, supported neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees. In Libya, India has large investments as well as expatriates; the country continues to be a supplier of energy to India, which imported \$1.3 billion dollars worth of oil in 2013. On the Israel-Palestine issue, India favours a more comprehensive political solution. Iraq remains a vital concern for India: it is India's second largest oil provider; there are 15,000 Indians still in Kurdistan while 5,000 have been evacuated and 41 remain captives.

Mr Kumar stressed that old order neutrality should not be viewed as political will and leadership and the absence of decision-making. India will calibrate its policy keeping all issues in mind. India also looks to strengthening its relationship with regional players, even if it means delicate balancing on its part. The GCC continues to be important in the region. The US too will continue to remain important, but India needs to watch out for how Russia-China engage with region as that will impact India's approach as we go ahead.

The effect of extremist forces in the region on the population back home is a matter of concern. India will have to look for more opportunities for intelligence and defence sharing with regional countries. There is a need to study Islam and its impact on countries of the region as that will help India formulate its approach. There is also the need for a more integrated business approach. Mr Kumar mentioned that there had been many calls for a "Look West Policy" on the lines of the "Look East", and that it was being considered. India was also working on diversification of energy sources in order to lessen dependence on Gulf oil. Finally, he flagged some areas of opportunity: large numbers of expats; defence and security cooperation, including intelligence sharing and money laundering; institutional mechanism building, for example on piracy, maritime trade, etc.

Professor Gulshan Dietl, revisited the Indian policy towards region using the recent conflict in Gaza as the prism. She made a detailed presentation of the statements of the External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, to the Indian Parliament as well as parliamentary debates on Gaza in both houses of Parliament. The official statement, she mentioned, was that India was deeply concerned at air strikes in Gaza and alarmed at rocket attacks on some parts of Israel. She also referred to the position taken by India at the UN. Professor Dietl was concerned with the different approaches to the issue when discussed inside India and outside. She questioned whether strong debates in the Indian Parliament were an aberration or was the Government of India's stated position in the UN an aberration.

Professor A.K. Pasha began by saying that the ground reality in West Asia must be kept in mind before coming up with realistic policy options. He enumerated some of the elements of continuity in India's approach to region:

1. **Hydrocarbon dependence:** India remains energy dependent on the region despite the fact that it is an unstable area prone to unlimited problems, perennial conflict, and recurring oil shocks. Diversification is the answer, but India has have tended to increase dependence on the region (especially in terms of oil). This will not change and will continue to remain a major concern for policy towards the region.
2. **Equidistance:** Support to Palestinians has been major feature of India's policy despite establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel. People in the region still see India as someone taking a moral stand on the issue. India support to Nasser in 1956 Suez crisis this still has



resonance today. There is expectation in the region of support to the people from a great democracy like India. India is a shining example for people in the region as a country which overthrew the yoke of imperialism and moving ahead as a democratic state. While India's stand seems unclear on various issues, in the long run, Professor Pasha felt, we have to stand with the people in the region and this will endure. Establishments will come and go but our commitment to people's aspirations to equal treatment, etc., will remain.

3. **Rising extremism:** Extremism is not a new phenomenon that has appeared suddenly even though today it is most apparent in the shape of the IS caliphate. It has been in the making for a long time. The behaviour of the ruling families at home and abroad have led to disillusionment. Western/US policy towards extremist groups have also been part of the problem.

Professor Pasha reiterated that there were innumerable old problems from which new challenges are emerging. So far these problems were manipulated and sustained by western countries, but these have created challenges for India as well. There is a need for India's engagement with the region to be multiplied: India can no longer afford to remain a bystander.

He also referred to the fact that West Asia today is a highly polarized region. Extremist groups are emerging and this will continue till there is foreign intervention. The 7 million Indian expatriates in the region are a means of leverage for India but, Professor Pasha felt, that this was not being recognized. In the event a larger conflict in the Gulf occurs, this would call for evacuation of these expatriates. To be prepared for such a situation, India should partner with regional countries. India should also encourage peace and security in these countries. Professor Pasha stressed on the need for more specialists on the region in India. He also made a mention of Indo-Israeli intelligence and security cooperation, saying that we do not need to adopt Israel's methods and techniques alone.

In the course of summing up the discussion and the ensuing Question & Answer session, the following issues were flagged:

1. India should not undertake any policy decision towards West Asia on ideological grounds.
2. India stands with every country which suffers from terrorism.
3. India has no desire to associate with any group of countries to 'manage the region'. However, it would assist on a request from a legitimate government.
4. There should be a comprehensive Track II engagement with West Asia.
5. West Asia has to be considered as the most important area for India after its immediate neighbourhood. This must be recognized at the highest policy levels.
6. There should be engagement with moderate political Islamists from the region and extremists should be dealt with firmly.
7. When looking at non-state outfits such as ISIS, be prepared to deal with functionaries at state/sub-state levels.

*Report prepared by Neha Kohli.*