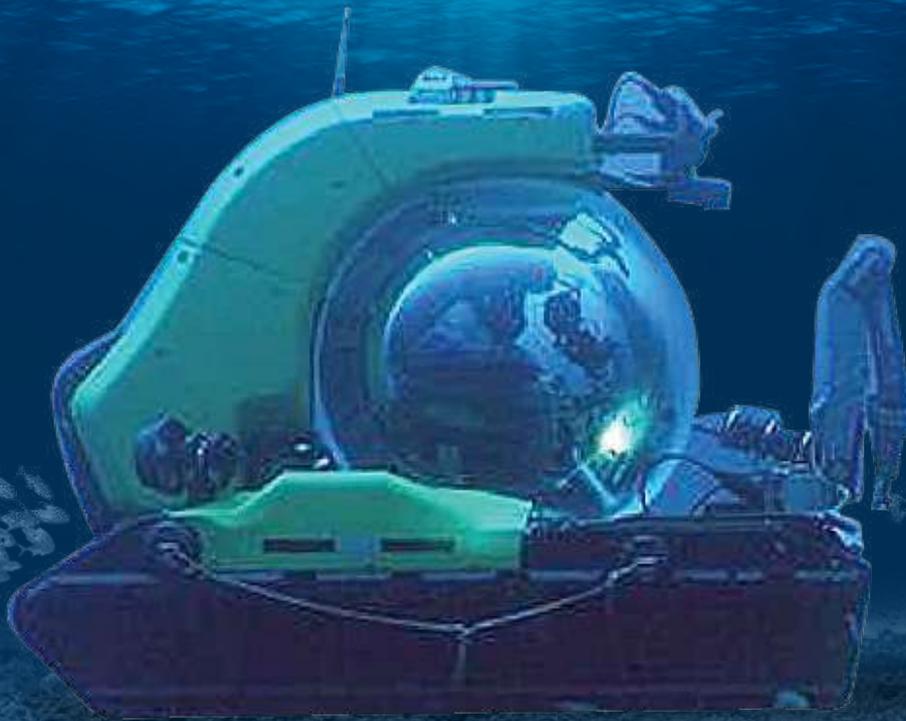


INSIGHTS



SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

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DEEP SEA RACE



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AR. NO. 01

THE DEEP-SEA RACE

As India seeks to fulfil its geo-economic ambitions through the Deep Ocean Mission, it will have to be mindful of adverse ecological consequences



At long last, India is poised to leverage its unique maritime position for tapping strategic and economic benefits. The decision comes at an opportune time as 2020-30 is the UN’s ‘Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development’. Marking a significant milestone in the exploration and exploitation of deep-sea resources, the Indian government has given its nod to the long-pending ‘Deep Ocean Mission’. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs recently approved its implementation over the next five years, at an estimated cost of Rs 4,077 crore. Apart from developing deep-sea technologies for the sustainable use of ocean resources, the proposal supports the government’s ‘blue economy’ initiatives by studying the impact of climate change and biodiversity.

It also seeks to establish an offshore marine station for the exploration of thermal energy sources. With the Ministry of Earth Sciences acting as the nodal agency, this inter-ministerial and inter-departmental mission aims to bring together researchers and experts from the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Indian Space Research Organisation, Department of Atomic Energy, the Defence Development and Research Organisation, the Department of Biotechnology as well as the Indian Navy.

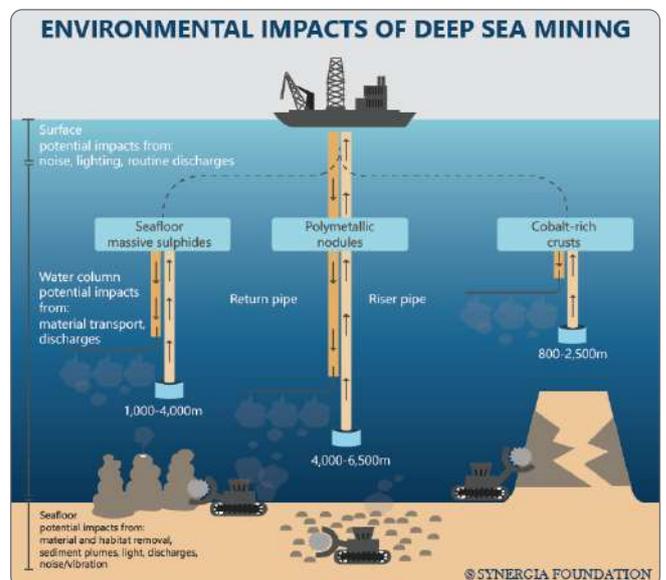
PIONEERING EFFORT

India has long been acknowledged as one of the pioneers in the study of oceanic resources. The research vessel ‘Gaveshani’ had carried out pathbreaking work in 1981 in the exploitation of polymetallic nodules (PMN) from the

ocean depth of the Arabian Sea, earning the recognition as a ‘Pioneer Investor’ by the International Seabed Authority (ISA). This gave India the right to over 1.5 lakh sq km in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB) for the exploration of nodules like nickel, copper, manganese, and cobalt. However, after a thorough resource analysis of the allocated area by 2002, India decided to retain only 75,000 sq km for exploratory mining. In September 2016, the ISA and India sealed a formal agreement for exclusive PMN exploration rights in the allotted area for the next 15 years. Five years later, the Deep Ocean Mission is finally on the cusp of becoming a reality, with around 18,000 sq km already identified as the ‘First Generation Mine-site’.

KEY COMPONENTS

The mission objective of Deep Ocean Mission can be broken into six distinct components. Firstly, the ISRO,



in consultation with the Indian Navy, is developing a manned, long-endurance (over 72 hours) submersible (named Samudrayaan) capable of exploration of deep-sea minerals at depths over 6000 m. This will be coupled to an Integrated Mining System to exploit PMNs for which India is collaborating with a UN linked organisation with the requisite expertise. The second component involves the development of an Ocean Climate Change Advisory Services. This will enable a real-time monitoring of weather conditions and climatic variables like cyclones, storm surges, fishery, stocks, sea-level rise etc., on seasonal to decadal time scales.

Thirdly, the Mission provides for the bio-prospecting of deep-sea flora and fauna, including microbes, in a sustainably efficient manner. Fisheries and allied services stand to benefit from this component.

The fourth component looks at potential sources of hydrothermal minerals. Found along the mid-oceanic ridges of the Indian Ocean, these multi-metal hydrothermal sulphides are accumulations of valuable minerals formed by hot waters circulating in the Earth's crust. The fifth component pertains to the study and preparation of detailed engineering designs for the construction of offshore Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC)-powered desalination plants. This can play a vital role in harnessing offshore energy. Finally, the Deep Ocean Mission seeks to groom experts and develop human capacity in the field of ocean biology and engineering. By translating research into the industrial application and product development through on-site business incubator facilities, this component can promote 'blue manufacturing' in marine biology.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

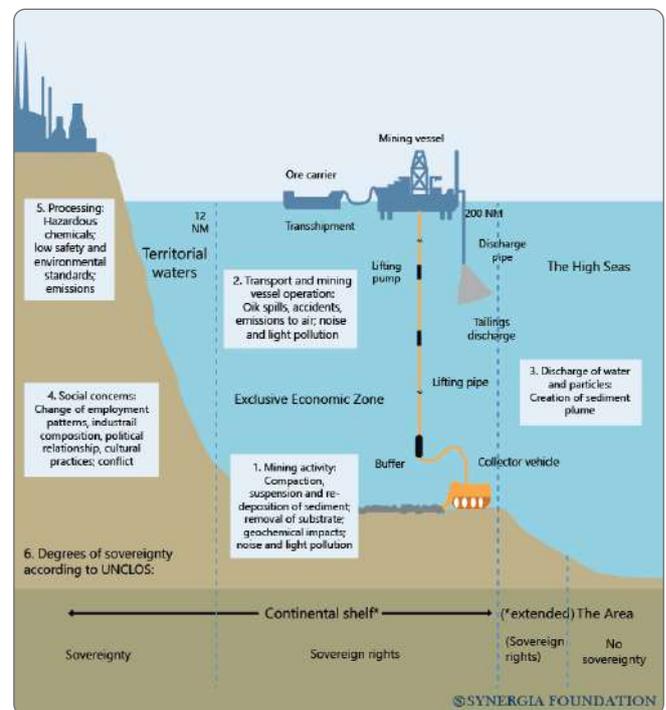
The allocated CIOB site is estimated to have a potential of around 100 million tons of strategic metals. Even a fraction of this reserve can meet India's energy requirements for a long time. China has already initiated its military assertions in oceans like the South China Sea that are expected to be rich in rare earth elements, which are critical to such high-tech industries as aviation, electronics, and defence. In the long run, for strategic reasons, India must develop its own source of rare earth metals.

The Deep Ocean Mission can go a long way in accomplishing these goals. Indeed, if implemented successfully, India will join an elite club of powerful nations that have dedicated ocean studies and missions, including the U.S., Russia, Japan, France, and China. Furthermore, India's enhanced scientific and commercial footprint in the oceans around its landmass will come as a boost for its growing maritime power.

PRINCIPLED OBJECTIONS

Despite being a strategically and economically significant activity, deep-sea mining can have adverse ecological consequences. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, large scale mining of PMN can alter or destroy delicate marine habitats of organisms residing in

the nodules. Since most deep-sea organisms are endemic, such physical disturbances can possibly wipe out entire species. Possible bioaccumulation of toxic metals like copper or mercury can also not be ruled out. Moreover, studies suggest that deep-sea mining may stir up fine sediments on the seabed, such as silt or clay. This dispersion can create plumes of suspended particles in the ocean, which may have an adverse impact on marine ecosystems. Critics apprehend that the 'Deep Ocean Mission' may commercialise an ecologically sensitive area without putting proper safeguards in place. There are also concerns that the intrusion of private corporate players in coastal ecologies may impede the livelihood of fishing communities. Therefore, since the Deep Ocean Mission is at a very preliminary stage, it would be possible to imbed environmentally sustainable mechanisms into its design and structure. The commercial greed of powerful corporations should not be allowed to undermine the legitimate objections of environmental experts, local communities, and other stakeholders.



Assessment

The Deep Ocean Mission is a long-awaited move that has the potential to spur India's Blue Economy and create beneficial opportunities for coastal states. It will also incentivise the indigenisation of deep-sea technologies by collaborating with leading institutes and private industries.

Of course, the ISA would first have to develop a governance regime or regulatory code before any commercial exploitation can be undertaken to minimise the adverse fallout to the delicate marine biosphere.

Any commercial proposal to undertake deep-sea mining should be accompanied by impact studies that assess the extent and duration of environmental damage. Precautionary controls should also be devised beforehand to protect biodiversity.

02

The UNCLOS Framework

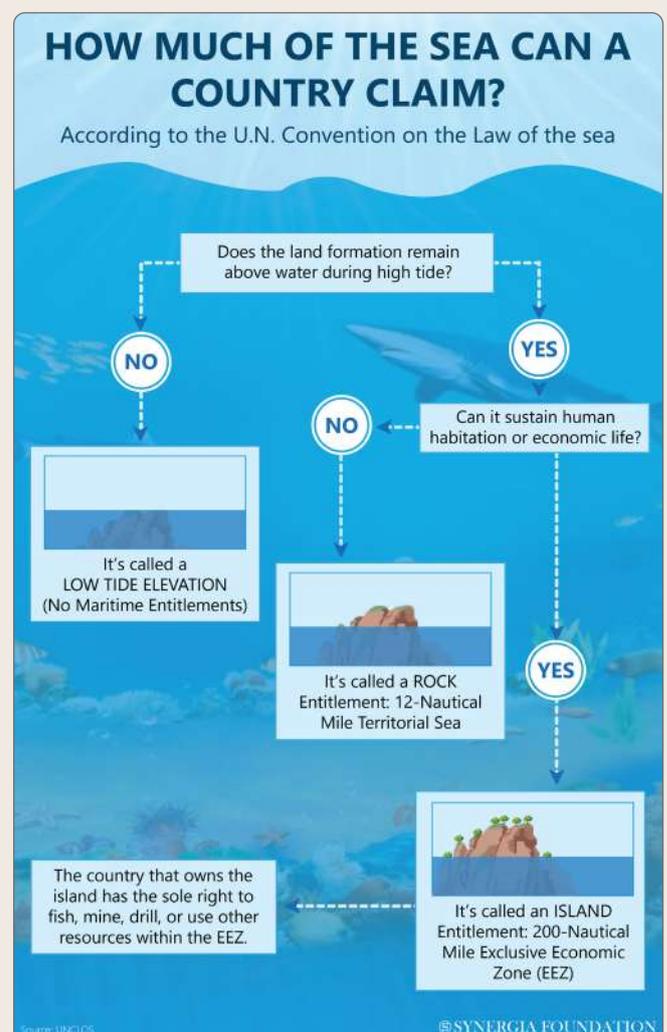


The adoption of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is considered to be one of the greatest achievements in the field of ocean governance. By designating the international seabed area as the ‘common heritage of mankind’, the Convention has laid down a comprehensive regime for the sustainable exploration and exploitation of mineral resources. Under the UNCLOS framework, the deep-sea area is defined as the seabed and subsoil beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, comprising a little more than fifty per cent of the entire seabed on Earth. An autonomous institution called the International Seabed Authority (ISA) has been constituted to regulate the exploration and exploitation of minerals in this area. All state parties to the Convention are members of this Authority, including India and China.

As clarified in Part XI of the UNCLOS, together with the 1994 Implementation Agreement, state parties can undertake exploration and exploitation activities in the deep seabed only under a contract with the ISA. Such contracts may be issued to both public and private enterprises, provided they are sponsored by a State party to the UNCLOS. The companies also have to meet certain standards of technological and financial capacity. Ultimately, any economic advantages that are derived from deep seabed mining are required to be shared for the ‘benefit of mankind as a whole’. This may take the form of royalties that are paid to the ISA, which will then share it with developing countries that lack the technology or capital to carry out such seabed activities.

Currently, the ISA has developed regulations that apply to exploration activities. It has issued 29 exploration contracts for the development of resources from polymetallic nodule fields, seafloor massive sulphides, and cobalt-rich crusts in the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic Oceans. However, it is still devising a regulatory regime that will

govern the exploitation and mining of mineral resources. The primary concern for the Authority, as a regulator, will be to balance the societal benefits of deep seabed mining with environmental concerns.



AR.
NO. 05EMERGING FROM
THE SHADOWS

By mediating the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, Egypt has somewhat regained its strategic leverage in a volatile region



SYNERGIA FOUNDATION
RESEARCH TEAM

After eleven days of incessant fighting that pitted Israel's air force against the Hamas' rocket barrage, Egypt has successfully brokered a ceasefire. The May 21st truce has ended a largely asymmetric conflict that culminated in the deaths of 243 Palestinians and 12 Israelis. In the aftermath of this humanitarian crisis, observers have been quick to note Cairo's outsized role in mediating the cessation of hostilities. Its diplomatic efforts have come as a surprise to many, given that it maintains a tense equation with Hamas.

COMPLEX DYNAMICS

Perceived as a proxy for the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas is viewed with extreme suspicion by the Egyptian President AbdelFattah al-Sisi, who had spearheaded the military ouster of former Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in 2013. Sisi is known to accuse the Palestinian group of smuggling weapons to the Brotherhood in Egypt and orchestrating attacks in the Sinai region.

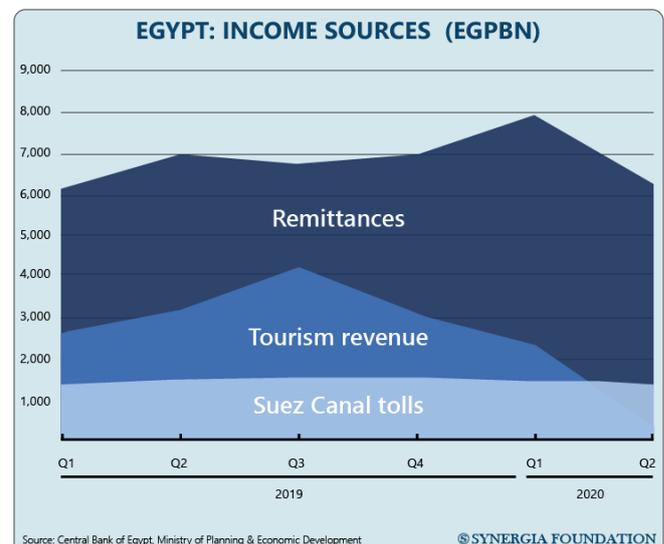
Meanwhile, Cairo has cultivated closer ties with Tel Aviv over the last eight years. In fact, it had risked Islamic ostracism in 1979 by becoming the first Islamic and Arab nation to sign a peace treaty with its Jewish neighbour. The country has since encouraged other states like the UAE and Bahrain to normalise their diplomatic relations with Jerusalem.

It has also effectively supported Israel's ongoing air, land and sea blockade of Gaza, by restricting the supply of

basic necessities across a pedestrian crossing that connects Egypt to the Palestinian strip. Against this backdrop, Sisi's attempts to engage with Hamas and deescalate the recent crisis has captured strategic interest. Despite a complex relationship with the militant group, he has played a central part in securing an armistice, thereby overshadowing similar efforts by other Arab states. He has also won the appreciation of the Biden Administration. It remains to be seen whether this opens a pathway for Egypt to stage a comeback in its historic role as 'regional powerbroker' in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

ASPIRING REGIONAL PLAYER

As the most populous Arab state in the world, Egypt has traditionally been the fulcrum of geopolitics in MENA. Post the momentous events of the Arab Spring, however, its polity had grown inward-looking, preoccupied with domestic strife, falling living standards and the political rise



of the Muslim Brotherhood. As the fighting intensified in Iraq, Syria and later on in Yemen, the balance of power in the region had shifted in favour of Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar.

Since coming to power in 2013, Sisi has gradually strengthened his political power base domestically. Now, as a more confident President, he has turned his attention towards regaining Egypt's regional clout. While the country has wisely kept itself out of the morass of Yemen, it has been more proactive in war-torn Libya, where it was a staunch backer of Khalifa Haftar, especially when the warlord's fortunes were on the rise. President Sisi has also been reaching out to North and East Africa, building relations with important countries like Kenya and Djibouti through defence cooperation deals and humanitarian aid. With the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam fast progressing towards its full operationalisation, Egypt is perceiving an existential threat to its unchallenged control of the life-giving waters of the Nile. As a result, it has gathered like-minded countries on a common platform called the "Nile River Security Organisation" to be built on the theme of "security, life and development," thereby creating a 'web' around Ethiopia to slow down its GERD project before it becomes a fait accompli.

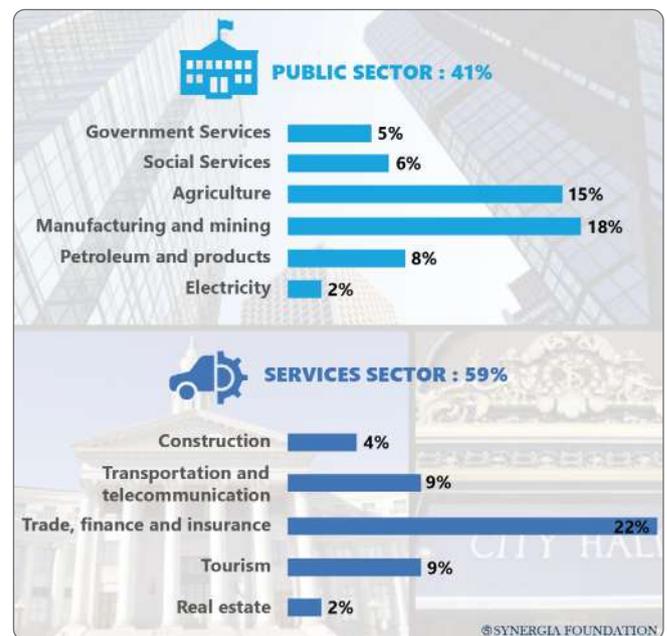
Although Egypt's military initiatives in Libya has brought it into competition with Turkey, both sides are now engaging in diplomatic exchanges to cool down tempers. The new transitional government could not have been established without the approval of both regional powers, who hope to economically benefit from the reconstruction and infrastructure projects planned in the country. As regards Iran, while Egypt continues to assess it as a strategic adversary, it has refrained from joining initiatives like the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA), an anti-Tehran security grouping. Therefore, by exercising strategic autonomy and carefully striking a balance between its security interests and regional alliances, Cairo has demonstrated its capability for skilled diplomacy.

OPPORTUNITY IN ADVERSITY

Recently, the level of anti-Sisi protests had been increasing in intensity, with the security forces trying to quell them with brute force. This has put Egypt under the glare of global media and attracted the unwanted attention of influential human rights organisations. This threatens to jeopardise President Sisi's ambitious economic plans that are greatly dependent on foreign aid and investment. In this context, the successful Palestine intervention has not only provided the embattled Cairo government with some breathing space but also given a window for gathering international approbation, a fact clearly demonstrated by the Biden administration.

It was no coincidence that Egypt could act as a peace broker. While years of intelligence and counter-terrorism cooperation had built trust with Tel Aviv, cold pragmatism prevailed in the Hamas' decision to acquiesce to the ceasefire. With Egypt's geographical stranglehold over crossings into Gaza, the militants had little option but to stay in Cairo's good graces. Sisi reciprocated by ordering the border channels

open for injured Gazans to be treated in Egyptian hospitals. He also pledged \$500 million toward reconstruction efforts and permitted the flow of humanitarian aid in the opposite direction. No other state in the Middle East enjoys this unique advantage. The biggest fallout for President Sisi has been to get back into the good books of President Biden. Severely called out for human rights violations by the current Administration, the Palestine truce promises to create the right optics for a strategic re-engagement between the two sides. President Biden's message "thanking Egypt for its successful diplomacy" and recognising it as a "real and effective partner" would have been music to Sisi's ears. Finally, these events have extracted a domestic dividend as well. By proactively brokering the ceasefire, which halted the ceaseless hammering of Palestinian territories, President Sisi has appeased his domestic constituencies.



Assessment

Egypt, although plagued by economic problems and religious extremism, has demonstrated a renewed commitment to engage with regional affairs. This is good news as this ancient civilisation, with its large demography and control over the Suez Canal, can potentially play a pivotal role in stabilising the MENA.

In recent years, the U.S. and its western allies appear to have ceded diplomatic space to local powers in the MENA region. For instance, Iraq has played a critical part in fostering rapprochement between the Saudis and Iranians. Similarly, Eritrea has undertaken increasing responsibility to ease tensions between Sudan and Ethiopia. In this context, Egypt's role as a mediator in the Israel-Palestine conflict comes as no surprise.

Today, American foreign policy is guided by a school of realism that allows regional powers to take the lead on conflict resolution. From abandoning Kurdish allies in Syria to the advantage of Turkey to the reduction in its military presence in Iraq, U.S. is diminishing its footprint in the debilitating 'forever wars' of the Middle East and West Asia.

AR. NO. 06

POLITICS OF THE DAMMED NILE

Ethiopia's GERD project challenges the status quo, giving rise to new strategic alignments and instability among the riparian states



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RESEARCH TEAM

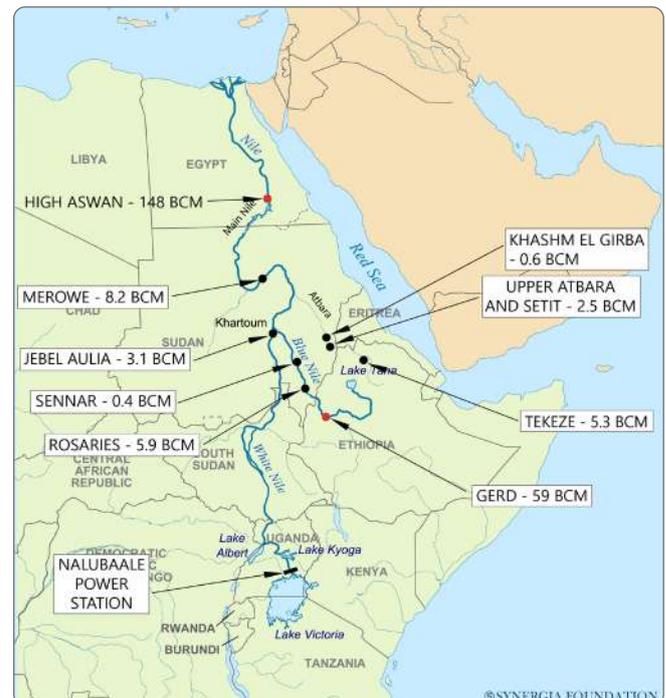
Egypt has been in the news headlines recently, but all for good reasons. Its success in mediating a successful ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has won the approval of the Biden Administration. More importantly, it has taken the lead in forging a security bloc of countries along the Nile River. The proposed “Nile River Security Organisation” will ensure fair and equitable use of the life-giving Nile waters by incorporating all the downstream countries. Apparently, the urgency on the part of Cairo is prompted by Ethiopia's determination, in defiance of the vehement objections by downstream countries like Egypt and Sudan, to operationalise the second phase of GERD reservoir filling. Egypt's foreign ministry has bluntly called the decision of the Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy a ‘continuation of a regrettable approach that disregards international law’. It has also warned of potential instability in East Africa and the Horn of Africa. Sudan, which is equally impacted, fears that in ‘the absence of a legally binding agreement’, the plight of its citizens is at stake, as the reduced flow would turn the fertile fields of Northern Sudan into a desert. By gathering like-minded countries on a common platform with the theme of “security, life and development,” Egypt wants to create a ‘web’ around Ethiopia to slow down its GERD project before it becomes a fait accompli.

HISTORICAL LEGACY

The ancient Egyptian civilisation is often referred to as the “Gift of the Nile”, as the great empires that flourished along its bank owed much to this river. Very little has changed with time, and even today, Egypt is heavily dependent on the

Nile for over 95 per cent of its freshwater and for ensuring the livelihood of its 40 million fellahin.

However, Cairo is not the sole benefactor. From its origin in Burundi, the Nile flows northward through northeastern Africa, bringing life and prosperity to over 490 million inhabitants of eleven countries (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Egypt, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo or DRC). As Africa's most complex cross-border river basin, it has had a major impact on the geopolitics of the region. Egypt, the regional hegemon, has for centuries benefited from the uninterrupted flow of Nile waters through its entire length. In the absence of any significant challenges to the status quo, politics at the Nile have mostly remained low-key,



despite inadequate consensus on the sharing of its waters. However, Ethiopia's GERD project has totally changed the dynamics of the region's water security.

HYDRO-POLITICS

The 1959 Nile Waters Agreement, hammered together under the British, is one of the earliest pacts about sharing the river's waters, allocating 55.5 cubic km to Egypt, 18.5 cubic km to Sudan, and none to other nations. As the region's hydro-hegemon, Cairo has frequently cited this agreement to stake exclusive rights to the Nile waters, claiming it is relatively more dependent on the river body than other basin-nations.

Ethiopia, burdened with domestic political instability and lack of access to financial and knowledge resources until the mid-1990s, was incapable of directly challenging Egypt's hegemonic position. Instead, it chose the route of global diplomacy, raising the issue at international and regional conferences. It also attempted to seek an agreement with other riparian states. The Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) of 1999, which was initially signed by nine countries – Rwanda, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, DRC, Sudan, and Tanzania – tried to enforce a framework for multilateral cooperation.

The Nile Basin Trust Fund (NBTF) was established in 2001 with the support of the World Bank to finance this initiative. This was followed by a string of agreements: the 2010 Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) to establish principles for ensuring sustainability in the consumption of waters; 2010 Entebbe agreement between Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Tanzania (Burundi joined later) that challenged Egypt and Sudan's monopoly over the water's resources and finally, the Nile River Cooperative Framework (NRCF). In 2013, a Tripartite Technical Committee (TTC) was constituted with the respective water ministers of riparian states to evaluate the dam's impact in Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan but was eventually dissolved in the face of rising disputes.

RESOLVING AMICABLY

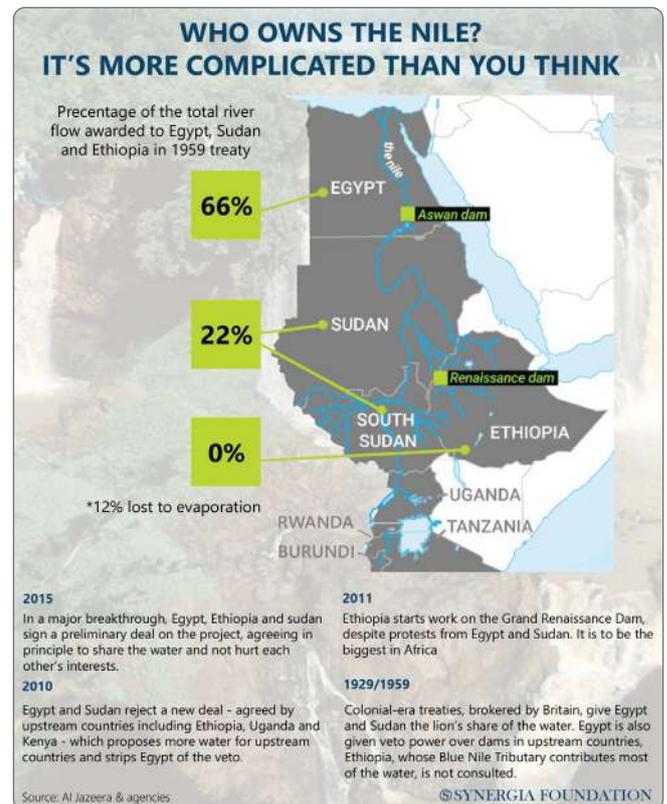
Historical mistrust hinders any progress in negotiations, provoking interventions from the United Nations. Meanwhile, Ethiopia prefers 'regional mediation through the African Union'. Both Egypt and Ethiopia have publicly threatened military action. The talks of a 'Nile River Security Organization' breathes fresh life into the fading hopes of a peaceful solution. While talking of peace, Egypt's arc-like defence agreements with countries encircling Ethiopia is indicative of the underlying threat of coercive force. Egypt has defence pacts with Sudan, Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, and Eritrea and is negotiating one with Djibouti. The Tigray conflict could also be used to increase pressure on Ethiopia.

GLOBAL LESSONS

Comprehensive river basin cooperation and management treaties are an aspiration for all transboundary rivers and riparian nations. The efficacy or inefficacy of cooperation in

the context of the African riparian countries at the Nile, will act as a prelude for other such transboundary river treaties. For example, the Indus River that shares borders with India, China, and Pakistan has larger political connotations, raising scepticism about possible cooperation in the event of a dispute over its shared waters.

With climate change factors suggesting an increased streamflow above current levels for the next several decades and China's construction of dams on the Indus River, as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, the strategic implications remain to be seen. Historically, Beijing has resorted to opaqueness when it comes to hydropower projects on transboundary rivers, as was previously witnessed in the Mekong River basin.



Assessment

It is a foregone conclusion that Ethiopia will fill the reservoir, with or without an agreement with Egypt and Sudan, as the dam is key to its economic future. Ethiopia claims that GERD will spur growth in the entire region, with clean power being made available to its neighbours through a planned East Africa power grid. Therefore, some compromise by all parties is needed to ensure peace and stability. Egypt could fund the transmission lines for the proposed grid, and on its part, Ethiopia should reduce the dam filling rate to cool tempers.

Politics at the Nile does not pertain to issues over water-sharing alone. Rather, it demonstrates the need for 'managing growth' and being accommodative of different economic plans and political aspirations. Although chances of a war are unlikely due to factors like Egypt's deteriorating fiscal position, a larger political will is necessary to avoid conflict. The Senegal River Basin Development Organization (SRBDO) is a prime example of effectively managing and sharing water resources within the region.

AR.
NO.

07

FERRETING THEM OUT!

Offensive and defensive tunnels have survived modern detection technologies to find a lethal niche in asymmetric conflicts



SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

RESEARCH TEAM

For a long time, one of the most modern militaries in the Middle East, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have been stumped by a labyrinth of interconnected subterranean complexes in the Gaza Strip. Apart from being used to launch rockets and stores arms and ammunition, these tunnels have provided a safe route for Fedayeens to orchestrate suicide attacks against Israel. As a result, when hostilities broke out between Israel and Hamas earlier this year, the IDF had launched Operation 'Hamas Metro' under the cover of precision bombing on urban targets within the West Bank. The operation had witnessed the participation of 160 combat aircraft and dozens of artillery batteries, which fired salvos into the northern Gaza Strip. As a prelude to this operation, the IDF had unravelled an elaborate deception plan, whereby messages were put out on the public domain, insinuating an imminent ground offensive into the Gaza Strip. This was nothing more than an attempt to lure Hamas operatives into their tunnel complexes, turning them into underground crypts. While the success or failure of Operation 'Hamas Metro' is still being debated, the fact remains that these tunnels posed a threat deadly enough for the IDF to launch an offensive of this magnitude. In fact, this was not the first tactic of its kind. A similar effort was made in the 2014 'Operation Protective Edge', with mixed results.

THE WEAK DIG DOWN

In any asymmetric conflict, where the superior force controls urban and rural spaces, the weaker side is hard-pressed to secure a firm base for anchoring its operations.

In most situations, it has no choice but to go underground; the deeper, the better! Throughout the recorded history of human conflicts, there are several references to such clandestine subterranean structures. Assyrian carvings dating back to the Akkadian Empire indicate that the construction of underground passages had been a common strategy for ancient besieging powers to breach fortified walls.

Over time, however, it was believed that manoeuvre warfare, in all its form, would render fixed fortifications and underground defences redundant. This proved to be true in a certain sense, as extensive underground trench systems, spread across hundreds of miles during World War I, had ceased to be of any consequence in the Second World War or the conflicts fought thereafter. During the Cold War, however, a flurry of insurgencies sprang up in Asia and Africa, with the relatively weaker combatants returning to the bowels of the earth to seek protection and bide their time. From the Viet Cong in the Vietnam war (the renowned Cu Chi Tunnels, now a popular tourist destination) to Islamist groups in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, underground networks were deployed by non-state armed groups to gain a tactical advantage over conventionally superior forces. In fact, tunnels and other subterranean facilities were used to store weapons, launch rockets, infiltrate enemy lines, and facilitate border crossings.

They also served as effective 'war rooms' where leaders could convene in relative safety. Most recently, in the era of the Global Positioning System (GPS) and airborne surveillance techniques equipped with thermal imagery, subterranean structures have proven to be beneficial in avoiding detection.

In other words, the informational advantage enjoyed by dominant military powers through their aerial surveillance systems has been counteracted through tunnelling

activities. For example, in 2014 and 2015, the Islamic State had used tunnels to maintain its hold over captured cities in the Levant, in the face of overwhelming U.S. and Iraqi air superiority. In war-torn Syria, rebel forces had been able to keep the Assad regime at bay in their stronghold of Aleppo through a complex tunnel system infested with sniper nests.

The Kurdish PKK has also used underground structures to wage a successful insurgency against the much superior Turkish military. Besides enhancing operational capabilities, tunnels can also exert psychological pressure, as they pose an underlying threat with no real deterrent- a determined terrorist can crawl out at any time to kill and maim soldiers and civilians alike. However, when constructed under civilian habitations, like in the case of the Gaza Strip, they can also cause collateral damage when the enemy retaliates with force. India has seen its own share of subterranean troubles along the borders it shares with Pakistan. A network of well-constructed underground passages, complete with electricity and ventilation, have allowed the infiltration of suicide terrorist squads as well as the smuggling of arms, ammunition, and drugs, by bypassing the extensive Indian border fence.

TAKING DOWN THE TUNNELS

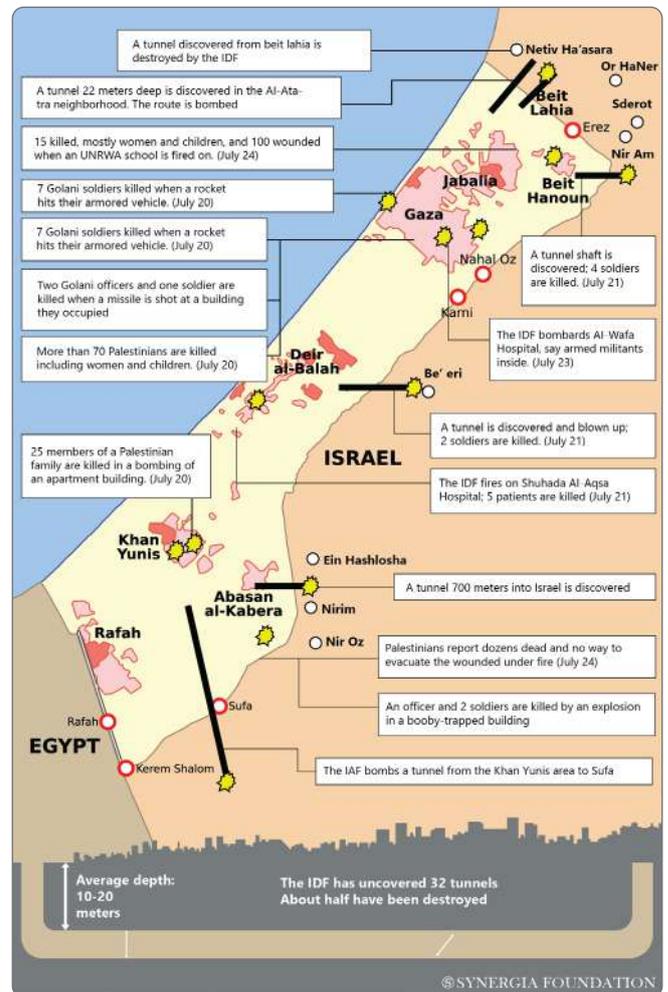
Obviously, there is no ‘silver bullet’ for tackling this underground menace. Explosives have very little impact and that too, only on a small stretch when used in huge quantities. Moreover, bombing is expensive and prone to collateral damage. The only feasible countermeasure is to detect the presence and alignment of tunnels through technology and intelligence-gathering mechanisms. During the Vietnam war, special squads of U.S. and Australian soldiers, all whom were volunteers, had taken the battle underground by entering these tunnels complexes themselves. Nicknamed the “Tunnel Rats”, these intrepid warriors had been a highly motivated and decorated lot, with one of the highest casualty rates. Today, nation-states are exploring innovative technologies to detect, map and neutralise subterranean structures. This includes seismic sensors, magnetic-field regulators, acoustic surveillance, unmanned aerial vehicles as well as buried fibre-optic cables. For example, Israel has constructed a unique sensory barrier underground to detect tunnelling by Hamas. In fact, its military-technological complex has an underground warfare section, which seeks to implement similar state-of-the-art techniques.

Other countries like the U.S. are also undertaking substantial investments in sensor detection technologies and ground-penetrating radar. Most recently, the Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico had undertaken a project called the ‘Real-time Subsurface Event Assessment and Detection’, which makes use of novel sensors to map underground structures. As reported in the Economist, this will have considerable military applications. Even New Delhi is investigating options to curb the infiltration of terrorists through underground tunnels along the Indo-Pakistan border.

Not long ago, the Border Security Force had been provided with seismic sensors and modified tractors to detect tunnels. The Ministry of Home Affairs has also

piloted a project that seeks to install an integrated border guarding system for the detection of cross-border tunnels, in association with the Tata Power Strategic Engineering Division and Dat Con.

Overall, disruptive technologies like robots and autonomous drones promise to usher in ground-breaking changes in the field of mapping and navigating subterranean areas. This in turn, can enhance the situational awareness of an average soldier, resulting in new tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) on the battlefield.



Assessment

At present, it appears that tunnel warfare is here to stay. Militants and other non-state groups continue to derive tactical advantages by bridging their informational asymmetry with traditional military powers. However, this raises significant concerns under international humanitarian law. The very act of digging tunnels under cities and residential neighbourhoods can obliterate the distinction between civilian and military objects.

As far as disruptive technologies are concerned, even the most cutting-edge systems have their own limitations. For example, Hamas has continued to extract gains from its extensive tunnel networks, despite the technological edge maintained by the IDF. Ultimately, therefore, ‘technological quick fixes’ will have to be supplemented by human intelligence and traditional surveillance techniques. Perhaps, the ‘Tunnel Rats’ may have to go into battle once again.

AR.
NO. 08

THE LONG ARM OF THE LAW

A supranational anti-corruption court is indeed a laudable initiative, but is it practical?



SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

RESEARCH TEAM

As governments around the world face a rising tide of allegations about bribery, kickbacks, and illicit financial flows, the proposed International Anti-Corruption Court (IACC) has come as a breath of fresh air. Most recently, around a hundred legislators, cabinet ministers, jurists, intergovernmental officials, business leaders and eminent members of civil society have signed a declaration calling for its creation, giving due credence to this global initiative.

With the objective of curbing ‘grand corruption’, the IACC would be authorised to prosecute kleptocrats in cases where their national governments are unwilling or unable to do so. To track the illicit wealth hidden around the world, the court would have access to a wide portfolio of investigators, international prosecutors and judges, with a demonstrated ability to pursue transnational financial networks. Inspired by the limited successes of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the expectation is that such a supranational mechanism will establish accountability and incentivise the improvement of domestic justice systems across member-states.

A FESTERING SORE

Over the past few months, the suspected plundering of national resources by public officials have dominated global headlines. Perhaps the most high-profile case is that of the Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who is faced with the prospect of impeachment over alleged irregularities in vaccine procurement from India. Meanwhile, in South Africa,

former President Jacob Zuma has been implicated in several financial crimes. Even India has been caught in the eye of a political storm, with a recent French publication claiming anomalies in the acquisition of the much-hyped Rafale fighter jets, by way of an intergovernmental agreement. Whether or not these charges are proven, the abuse of public office for private gain remains an endemic problem. Studies suggest that the amount of money lost to corruption in developing countries is more than what is received through foreign aid. Even more staggeringly, corrupt officials are estimated to have soaked up more than the \$3 trillion in bribes and stolen money alone. Such practices threaten to erode public trust, violate human rights, undermine the rule of law, and destabilise institutions. They also deprive law-abiding corporations of the opportunity to compete for public contracts, as tenders are siphoned off to crony capitalists through illegal backchannel deals.

INTERNATIONAL MOMENTUM

Against this backdrop, multilateral forums like the International Monetary Fund and the G-7 group of countries have reinvigorated their commitments to combat corrupt practices. Even the UN General Assembly has adopted a political declaration at its first-ever Special Session against Corruption in June 2021. Although the impunity of kleptocrats was not explicitly referred to, emphasis was placed on implementing preventive measures, enhancing law enforcement, and strengthening asset recovery. More crucially, a global network was launched to connect anti-corruption practitioners across the world.

Known as the ‘Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities (GlobE Network)’, this mechanism seeks to provide channels for secure and informal exchange of information, in order to track and prosecute cross-border corruption offences. Even at the

national level, governments have sharpened their scrutiny on kleptocrats. For example, there is a new bipartisan caucus against Foreign Corruption and Kleptocracy in the U.S., which is seeking to plug the gaps in anti-corruption efforts.

NEED FOR TRANSNATIONAL JURISPRUDENCE

Despite this political resolve to resist grand corruption, activists remain sceptical. According to them, the plethora of existing international conventions and national criminal statutes have failed to address the impunity of kleptocrats. In many jurisdictions, corrupt leaders have secured control over the very aspects of law enforcement and justice administration that hold them accountable. As articulated by Prof. Matthew Stephens, an expert in anti-corruption law, “the corruption-impunity nexus is self-perpetuating: the wealth and power procured through corruption can be used to buy impunity, and that impunity allows the further corrupt accumulation of wealth and power”. Due to the absence of strict compliance measures and good-faith enforcement of existing laws, therefore, most of the accused have gone unpunished. As a result, it is argued that a supranational, neutral institution needs to be created, which can serve as the ‘venue of last resort’ for holding officials accountable. In this context, the IACC has been touted as a ground-breaking judicial body that can prosecute offences defined under the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC).

Operating on the principle of complementarity, it would only exercise jurisdiction in cases where national governments are unwilling or unable to engage in fair trials and investigations. If a kleptocrat is indeed prosecuted, the court is expected to not only order incarceration but also ensure the restitution or disgorgement of illicit assets for the benefit of the impacted victim.

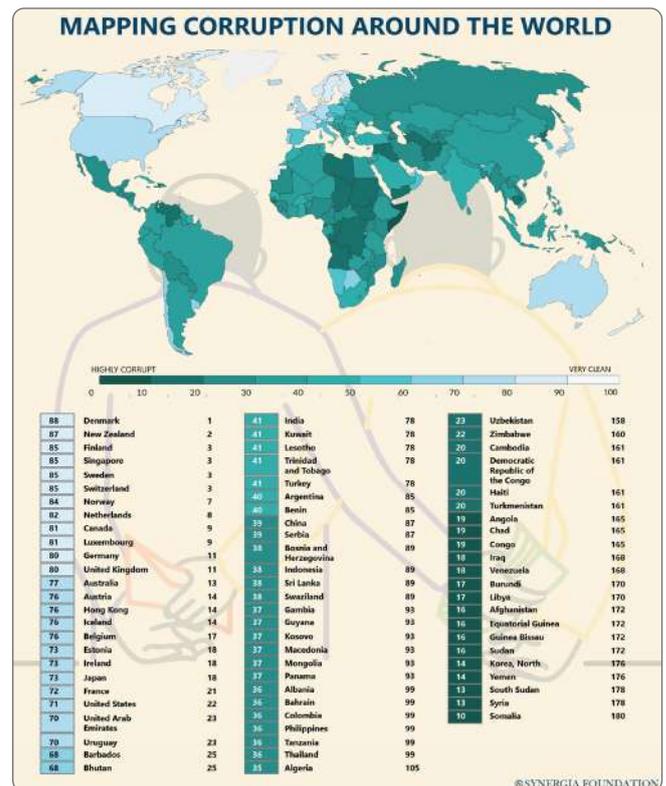
WILL IT SUCCEED?

A growing legion of advocates have endorsed the creation of the IACC, as it promises to bolster deterrence. The sanctioning, defunding and potential imprisonment of kleptocrats is believed to be a credible threat that minimises instances of corruption. It can also function as a powerful statement about the international community’s intolerance for grand corruption. Moreover, it is hoped that the creation of this tribunal can catalyse domestic reforms, which would render prosecutions for grand corruption more feasible within national contexts.

Even if countries ruled by corrupt officials refuse to become parties to the IACC framework, proponents assert that the court can still exercise jurisdiction over financial centres where illicit assets are laundered. Of course, this would imply that the countries hosting such financial intermediaries like Switzerland or the Cayman Islands are themselves signatories to the IACC.

Towards this end, a variety of methods have been suggested to induce a country into joining the court. For example, membership in the IACC could serve as a necessary pre-condition for joining the World Trade

Organization or receiving bilateral foreign aid and assistance from international development banks. However, coercive measures like cutting off aid may lead to the undue suffering of innocent citizens, while their leaders continue to rule with impunity. In any case, global powers like the U.S., China, and Russia, and even India as a regional power, may be loath to ‘surrender their sovereignty’ to a supranational institution. Assuming that these challenges are somehow addressed, prosecutors will still be dependent on state authorities to subpoena documents, carry out a wiretap or execute search warrants. It is doubtful whether senior-level functionaries, who are themselves threatened by these investigations, will permit such intrusive enquiries.



Assessment

Although the clarion call for an IACC has mostly come from civil society members and smaller states like Colombia, Peru, and Nigeria, its prospects should not be underestimated. It is worth remembering that similar campaigns had inspired the convening of the Rome conference in 1998, which eventually culminated in the creation of a permanent International Criminal Court at Hague.

Till the IACC becomes a reality, the international community will have to work within existing structures like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to break the corruption-impunity nexus. This could be supplemented by the strengthening of stolen asset recovery mechanisms as well as anti-money laundering networks.

In some quarters, there will be calls for branding the IACC as a ‘neo-imperialistic’ institution that disproportionately targets the Global South. These criticisms will have to be meaningfully addressed if the world is to have better governance that precludes economic migrants from abandoning their home countries for greener pastures.

AR.
NO. 09

THE ATLANTIC CHARTER 2.0



With the UK no longer a credible global power, the relevance of a new Atlantic Charter will always remain doubtful



SYNERGIA FOUNDATION
RESEARCH TEAM

A new Atlantic Charter has been signed by U.S. President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson on June 10th, 2021, invoking their former counterparts Roosevelt and Churchill who had signed the first Atlantic Charter back in 1941. The re-signing of the Charter seeks to emphasise the special transatlantic relationship between the two countries. It is also a symbolic gesture wherein both powers consider the pandemic a turning point in history through which they can re-affirm the values of democracy, free markets, and a peaceful global order.

As summed up by Prime Minister Boris Johnson “While Churchill and Roosevelt faced the question of how to help the world recover following a devastating war, today we have to reckon with a very different but no less intimidating challenge – how to build back better from the coronavirus pandemic.”

THE ORIGINAL CHARTER

As the world was caught in the midst of an expanding global conflagration, with Nazi Germany, Japan, and Fascist Italy entwined in a death struggle with the Allies, the two principal western protagonists, the U.S. and UK, had sat down in Newfoundland, Canada to frame common war principles for victory.

The Atlantic Charter had tried to create the vision of a post-war world where both the Washington and London would seek no territorial gains for themselves. Rather,

they would fight to ensure the right to self-determination, promote barrier-free trade for global economic cooperation and facilitate disarmament of aggressor nations. Following this, all the adherents of the Atlantic Charter had signed the United Nations charter in 1942.

Thus, the Atlantic Charter became the founding document of not only the United Nations, but also the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), which would then evolve into the World Trade Organisation. Its influence can also be seen in the development of the NATO alliance. In other words, the Atlantic Charter has emerged as the foundation of a new global world order which has lasted well into this century.

THE NEW REALITY

During his recent European tour, President Biden had vehemently announced that “the U.S. is back!” This indicates a decisiveness on his part to take control after the devastating effects of the pandemic, assuming a leadership



position in the face of a rising China and an aggressive Russia. In fact, at the recent the G-7 summit, he has sought to rally other Western powers to check Beijing. Yet, the EU powers are not willing to go 'all-out' against the Dragon as they still have common strategic interests at play. In such a setting, the UK is U.S.'s best bet for a cooperative strategic alliance against China. Whether transatlantic differences between the two states can be cleared up through a new Atlantic Charter remains to be seen. However, Britain's position is a little more complicated. The UK seems to be desperately clinging to its status as a credible global power, in the wake of Brexit and a dwindling economy. Kenneth Waltz once laid out five criteria for a country to be known as a great power. It needed to have population and territory, the endowment of resources, economic capability, military strength, and political stability. Over time, with the progression of the international order, factors such as diplomacy, soft power and leadership in global forums also became important factors. The UK seems to be falling behind on most counts. Ever since the 2008 financial crisis, it has witnessed a massive economic slump.

Productivity growth has been mostly stagnant. There is still a deep inequality between the Northern industrial regions and the Southern urban areas. Over the last decade, India, China, Brazil, and Indonesia have overtaken the country in economic terms. With respect to spending power, Britain is the 9th largest in the world as of 2020 and is soon to be overtaken by France. The underperformance of the economy since leaving the EU, the effects of the pandemic, along with the key commitment to cut down on carbon emissions are real-time challenges faced by the British economy. Exports/ imports have slowed down as the country has still not worked out trade deals with the rest of the EU nations. It is also frustrated with the U.S. in this regard.

A DECLINING POWER

As far as military spending is concerned, Britain's defence budget has been mostly static. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the UK used to rank 3rd in military spending. It has now dropped to the 8th position. The military prowess it once boasted of has also been compromised. According to the Chilcot report, post the 9/11 invasion of Iraq and subsequently Afghanistan, Britain has proved to be wholly inadequate in preparing and planning armed attacks. Their troops have often found themselves short of supplies and arms, which put them in extremely precarious situations. The country cannot afford at this point to enter into any military operations independently. With respect to political stability and competence, the Charter comes at a time where the UK and Northern Ireland are still embroiled in a political tussle.

The U.S. itself has criticised UK's stubbornness to come to an amicable conclusion with respect to this issue. Domestically the government has been accused of grossly mishandling the pandemic, to the point that it is being sued by different parties (the Union workers, survivors, and relatives of Covid victims) for different reasons. On the international platform, while it is a member of the Security

Council, Britain has not used its veto power independently since 1972. It has also contributed the least number of personnel to the UN Peacekeeping operations, a mere 256 when compared to top-ranking Ethiopia which contributed more than 6,500 personnel. While it has hosted the G-7 summit at Carbis Bay, the actual lead is being taken by the U.S. Irrespective of its international power projection, Britain can now only be called as an effective middle-sized power.

The Atlantic Charter

The President of the United States of America and the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, representing His Majesty's Government in The United Kingdom, being met together, deem it right to make known certain common principles in the national policies of their respective countries on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world.

1. Their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other.
 2. They desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned.
 3. They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.
 4. They will endeavor, with due respect for their existing obligations, to further the enjoyment by all States, great or small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity.
 5. They desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing, for all, improved labor standards, economic advancement and social security.
 6. After the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny, they hope to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and
- which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want.
7. Such a peace should enable all men to traverse the high seas and oceans without hindrance.
 8. They believe that all of the nations of the world, for realistic as well as spiritual reasons, must come to the abandonment of the use of force. Since no future peace can be maintained if land, sea or air armaments continue to be employed by nations which threaten, or may threaten, aggression outside of their frontiers, they believe, pending the establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security, that the disarmament of such nations is essential. They will likewise aid and encourage all other practicable measures which will lighten for peace-loving people the crushing burden of armaments.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Winston S. Churchill

August 14, 1941

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Assessment

Through the optics of the new Atlantic Charter, the U.S. is trying to regain its position as the leading world power, after the considerable battering it received during the Trump presidency. It is also trying to rally its European allies to the cause of presenting a common front against a rising China and a belligerent Russia. A new Atlantic Charter with the UK provides an ideal platform in this regard.

However, on its own, the U.K can no longer bring to the new Atlantic Charter the sinews of the original one, when it was a world power to reckon with, still in possession of its vast colonial empire. Since then, the geopolitical equations have greatly changed, making the UK a relatively smaller global player. Only time will tell whether Britain can bounce back as a formidable power without the EU and in the face of a growing China. Under present circumstances, it appears highly unlikely, even with a new Atlantic Charter.

AR. NO. 10 TO INFINITY AND BEYOND?

The dragon has taken to space with great alacrity, and this worries its rivals



Two significant events recently marked China’s growing significance in space. On June 19th, three Chinese astronauts were blasted off into space aboard Shenzhou 12 to dock with the under-construction space station module “Tianhe”. The astronauts stay in the space module will be for three months, finishing its construction. This was followed by an official release of a video shot by the Mars probe Tainwen-1 launched in May. An obviously rattled NASA took the opportunity to remind the Biden Administration of the risk of losing the space race to Chinese innovation. Bill Nelson, the NASA Administrator,

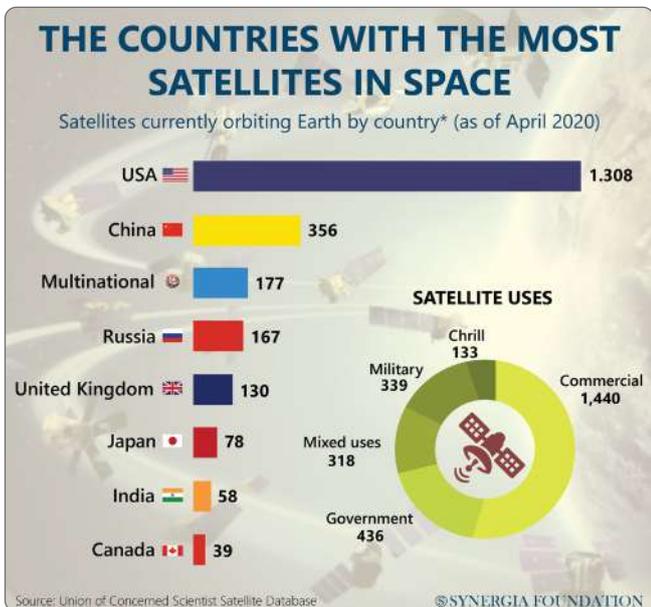
did not mince words when he called Beijing ‘an aggressive competitor who is looking to seize control and assert its dominance in aerospace’. He was only reiterating the official American line, articulated by then-Vice President Mike Pence in 2019 when he compared China as a space rival akin to the USSR in the 1960s. China, while moving ahead in the space industry with indigenously produced systems, rockets and technologies, still has a lot of distance to cover to catch up to the U.S. As a late starter, it obviously cannot match American experience, expertise, and immense resources.

A MATTER OF NATIONAL PRIDE

China was a later entrant into the space club, with its space programme being launched only in 1970. The five-yearly white papers released by the Chinese National Reform and Defence Commission (NRDC) show how the Chinese objective is to industrialise its space industry to promote economic growth and regional development before attempting to militarise it.

In its first two decades of space development, the focus was on developing geosynchronous communication satellites vital for civilian projects like the BeiDou Navigation satellite constellation, which has paid for its cost in regional urban planning for roads, dams, bridges etc. The next major objective was to get a foothold in space during the period 2020-22 by deploying its own space station, developing it into a full-fledged space-based solar power (SBSP) generator by 2050. In 2011, the first module, christened Tiangong 1 (Heavenly Harmony), was launched.

This was an experimental space lab to try out Chinese docking technology and to learn the art and science of space survival. Over the years, various manned and unmanned rockets (the Shenzhou series) have been launched to construct a basic module of a permanent space station.



The recent launch is significant in that when the American International Space Station (ISS) is finally decommissioned in 2025, the Tiangong might be the only human manned space station. Incidentally, China is banned from the ISS as per a 2011 U.S. Congressional Legislation giving even greater motivation for China to build one of its own.

COMMERCIAL GAINS

China entered the space market in the 1990s by offering its Long March rockets for commercial launches. The Long March rockets were the workhorse of SOE (Standard Operating Environments) and their subsidiaries for both national as well as commercial interests. Since 2016, Beijing has been encouraging private participation in space programmes. This saw a mushrooming of space start-ups like Spacety, GalaxySpace, iSpace etc. In 2019, China invited foreign investment into the industry, specifically in commercial satellite manufacturing, satellite communication equipment etc. Since then, various European space firms have invested and collaborated with their Chinese counterparts, both government and private.

China has also partnered with African and South-East Asian countries in several space-related investments under the ambit of the BRI (Belt and Road initiative) projects. While there is no clarity on the breadth and scope of these projects, these countries have reportedly purchased satellites and associated technologies from China for earth observation, weather forecasting and urban development.

China has always demonstrated that it plans for decades in the future and not in the short term. The SBSP station is a forerunner for renewable energy sources to fulfil Chinese ever-increasing energy needs. With the realities of climate change hitting hard, the SBSP is posited as an orbital technology concept that traps sun rays to deliver clean, renewable power back to earth. As it is mining the sun's rays above the earth at the height of almost 36,000 km, the power source would be constant. It would be the ultimate breakthrough in solving the present energy crisis.

A MILITARY ANGLE

Officially, Beijing calls for declaring the realm of outer space as 'global commons'. China defends its investments in the space industry, claiming that its regional interest in maintaining its sovereignty and territorial integrity for national advancement cannot be equated to its space programme. They only wish to use and exploit spatial resources and knowledge along with other international players. It holds itself as a 'responsible stakeholder' within space. Despite its assertions that it is against the weaponisation of space, China is aware of the potential of space technology to gain mastery in the military and strategic arena.

The 1991 Gulf War showcased the American use of satellites and drones to take out military targets with pinpoint accuracy, making PLA painfully aware of the scope, potential, and absolute necessity of developing space-based military technology. The BeiDou system thus came to be used

for military space strategies such as its command, control, communication, computer, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities. It aims to use its C4ISR operations for precision strikes and for enhancing its power projection possibilities. While there is a lack of transparency in the defence spending of the PRC, especially with respect to space, variously reported test runs indicate that China has invested considerably in counter-space strategy. It has developed kinetic space weapons such as anti-satellite missiles (ASATs), non-kinetic space weapons like laser beams, high powered microwaves, electronic weapons which can jam electromagnetic impulses in a particular system or digital environment and cyber-space armoury.



Assessment

China is well entitled to develop its own high tech space industry without prejudice to American interests or concerns in order to become a prosperous nation. NASA's claims of China being a close rival appear exaggerated with an eye on Congress's budget pie. With an annual budget of almost \$18.5 billion dollars as compared to China's \$ 6 billion, NASA is appearing to be invoking the Chinese bogey to garner even more funds from Congress.

However, there is a note of caution. With the Chinese proclivity for indulging in resource nationalism by following anti-competitive behaviours to restrict international resources, international space watchers need to be vigilant. The absence of proper regulatory mechanisms in space further deepens this anxiety.

Recent Chinese and Russian agreements in space technology can forge a powerful space alliance with strong military undertones. This is bound to be America's greatest concern.



Stay Vigilant, Just like us.

UPCOMING FORUMS:

THE FUTURE OF
COMBAT AND
DRONE WARFARE

PANDEMIC RESPONSE
AND DATA
ANONYMISATION

THE FUTURE OF
CYBERTHREATS
AND RANSOMWARE

