

RAPPORTEURS' REPORT



**3<sup>rd</sup> West Asia Conference**

**on**

**Changing Security Paradigm in  
West Asia: Regional and  
International Responses**

**September 05-06, 2018**



INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE  
STUDIES & ANALYSES

रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

**Organised by**

**Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses**

The IDSA organised the 3rd West Asia Conference (WAC) on the theme “Changing Security Paradigm in West Asia: Regional and International Responses” on September 5-6, 2018. The two-day conference witnessed participation of over 25 speakers from 15 countries and deliberations were held on various issues and conflicts afflicting the region. Rivalries among regional powers, geopolitical struggles and role international actors were the major themes highlighted during the conference. India’s growing relations with each countries in the region and its possible role in finding solutions to the problems facing the region were also discussed at length.

## Inaugural Session

Welcome Remarks	Maj Gen Alok Deb, SM, VSM (Retired), Deputy Director General
Keynote Address	Shri M. J. Akbar, Hon'ble Minister of State for External Affairs
Vote of Thanks	Dr. Meena Singh Roy, Research Fellow and Coordinator West Asia Centre and Convenor 3rd WAC

**Deputy Director General Maj. Gen. Alok Deb (Retd.)** welcomed the delegates and hoped that the deliberations over the course of the two days will open up avenues for dialogue.

**Minister of State for External Affairs M. J. Akbar** began his remarks by noting that he was happy that the conference was on ‘West Asia’ and not on the ‘Middle East’. He stated that if one does not get the nomenclature of the geography correct, we will never be able to get the geopolitics of the region right. He noted that 100 years ago, while the war to end all wars ended, the consequences of World War I were still with us. There was a direct transition from World War I to World War II — especially as it affected Europe. World War II in turn merged seamlessly into the Cold War, which can be termed as the Third World War. He noted that the politics of the Cold War gripped West Asia firmly. The Cold War did not end in Berlin but in Afghanistan, which became the scene of the Fourth World War, the Global War on Terror.

One of the first consequences of the World War I was the end of the ‘age of empires’, which gave rise to nation states, determined largely by the ‘will of the people’. In West Asia, however, there was no direct transfer from the ‘age of the empires’ to ‘age of the nation states’. Instead, the events were interrupted by neo-colonisation, after the failure of the British to control the region by military conquests, most notably signified by their defeat at Gallipoli. The British then resorted to gaining political control by promising security guarantees, which turned large parts of the region into family domains.

Shri Akbar noted that while the institution of the Caliphate collapsed, the idea of the Caliphate lingered in the collective consciousness and was waiting to be revived. The discontent within the region meanwhile was nurtured by powerful outside forces.

The rise of Iran meanwhile as a Shia state coupled with the strong sense of Iranian nationalism since 1979 has had consequences for the region. Shia radicalism has invited responses from Sunni radicalism. Saddam Hussein was the first reaction to the Iranian revolution.

Shri Akbar noted that the true danger of terrorism lay in the ideology espoused by terrorists. While the greatest question of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was ‘how do we get freedom’, the greatest question of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is ‘What shall we do with our freedom?’ Terrorism does not believe in a nation-state, seeks to poison plural societies, as pluralism is anathema to unilateralism/supremacy.

Finally, Shri Akbar noted the wide ranging diplomatic engagement of the Modi government to emphasize the point that India was capable of dealing with regional as well as international binaries. He pointed out that the year 2018 began with the highly successful visit of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and included visits by Shri Narendra Modi to Palestine, UAE and Oman, as well as to Davos. Iran’s Foreign Minister had a successful visit, subsequently followed by the King of Jordan. India

has strong relationships with Russia and the United States while there exists a mature relationship with China. The Minister noted that India does not have aggressive intent and that it does not get into regional disputes. He ended his remarks by hoping that the conflicts of the region will move towards resolution, not by the efforts of one or the other power but by the parties involved themselves. He stated that just as security be outsourced, peace also cannot be outsourced.

Dr. Meena Singh Roy, convenor of the conference gave the vote of thanks.

– Prepared by S. Samuel C. Rajiv is Associate Fellow, IDSA

## Session I - Changing Regional Dynamics in West Asia and North Africa

Chairperson: Ambassador Swashpawan Singh, Former Secretary to the Vice President of India and Member of the Executive Council, IDSA

Speakers:

1. Amb. Talmiz Ahmed, Former Ambassador of India to Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE, **Regional Geopolitical Dynamics**
2. H. E. Amine Gemayel, Former President of Lebanon, **Transnational Terrorism and its Future**
3. Dr. Seyed Kazem Sajjadpour, President, Institute for Political and International Studies, Tehran, **Iran and the Region**

The first session of the Third West Asia Conference held at IDSA was on the theme 'Changing Regional Dynamics in West Asia and North Africa'.

**The session was chaired by Swashpawan Singh**, former Secretary to the Vice President of India and former Ambassador of India to Kuwait. The chair set the tone for the session by discussing how West Asia is a region in crisis and highlighted the multiple narratives with respect to its causes. He provided a broad introduction to the key historical events pertaining to the region that have a bearing on current times, including the Sykes Picot Agreement, the creation of Israel, the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf War of 1990-91, and the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. He also spoke about narratives, the absence of credible political ideologies; and stressed on how mitigation of crises requires a consultative approach.

The first speaker of the session was **Talmiz Ahmad, former Indian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates**. In his presentation on 'Regional Geopolitical Dynamics', Amb. Ahmad took the Arab Spring as the starting point. He highlighted the state of affairs in West Asia and North Africa (WANA) seven years after the commencement of the Arab Spring that led to the overthrow of despots in Egypt, Yemen and Libya; stalled reform and change in Bahrain; the reversal of change in Egypt; Tunisia's success at reform; and on-going civil conflict with external intervention in Yemen, Syria and Libya. He then discussed the approach of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a regional leader that has seen itself as being at a strategic disadvantage vis-à-vis Iran since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and since that time it decided to confront Iran in various theatres. The Arab Spring that saw the fall of its ally Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and the calls for reform in Shia-majority Bahrain, a contiguous neighbour, indicated to Riyadh the possibility of an increased Iranian presence in the region.

Adding to the above were US President Barak Obama's interest in pushing for a nuclear agreement with Iran and the rise of the Houthis in Yemen which Saudi Arabia views as an instance of Iran's direct engagement in the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, Riyadh has based its mobilization in the region since 2003 on a sectarian identity, and targeted Iran. On the other hand, Iran has — since the election of Donald Trump as the US President — viewed itself as under pressure. There has been a reinstatement of US sanctions on it, and Tehran also faces domestic pressure on the issue. The speaker also touched

upon the rise of the Islamic State (IS), which he opined was linked to the American intervention in Iraq. While the IS has more or less ceased to exist as a political entity, its ideology remains.

Amb. Ahmad elaborated on his assessment of the changed security situation in the region. According to him, the GCC as an organisation has effectively ceased to exist, and many divides within it have come to the fore. The Iran-Saudi divide that has its origins in the countries' strategic concerns has consolidated with sectarian overtones and the Saudis are now speaking of a Sunni NATO. Turkey is a player and there are concerns about its neo-Ottoman ambitions. Russia has come back to the region and emerged as a key player in Syria. Moreover, most regional players, including Israel are engaging with Moscow. The ideology of the Islamic State continues to flourish and the Al Qaeda still has a formidable presence in the region. He also discussed the potentially disruptive impact of the Trump administration's policies in the region. He concluded by saying that West Asia appears to be on the edge of a catastrophe and that until there is visible reform in the region, there will not be a reduction in violence. India has a diplomatic opportunity to address/mediate the Iran-Saudi Arabia divide.

The second speaker was **His Excellency Amine Gemayel, former President of Lebanon** who spoke on 'Transnational Terrorism and its Future'. President Gemayel opined how India, like West Asia, has been affected by religious terrorism. India's participation in diplomatic and other ties is an imperative for the WANA region. India and Lebanon are examples of non-western democracies in action and have the connect with both the east and the west.

According to President Gemayel, the most important strategic contest in the WANA region is the Iran-Saudi divide, and also the involvement of extra-regional powers. He opined that religion is more an *instrument* rather than a *driver* of the conflict in the region. While the Islamic State is in retreat, we must guard against the fact that it can metastasise into a global jihadi movement. Internal wars and state failures are another characteristic of the region, prominent examples being Iraq and Syria today. Failing and failed states have created internally displaced refugees as well as extra-territorial refugees. Geopolitical tremors in WANA have been magnified by American policies towards the region, especially since the time of the Obama presidency. Russia and Turkish military interventions in Syria have laid the foundations for a new strategic era in the region, with Turkey harking back to an idealised Ottoman past.

President Gemayel then listed out some prescriptions for approaching the region:

1. The solution to the Iran-Saudi Arabian divide can be found in having sustainable balance of power. There has to be construction of a power dynamic where no actor or group(s) of actors can impose their version of order by force.
2. There is a need to work towards launching a series of dialogues between Iran and Saudi Arabia and addressing the key regional issues that impact all.
3. India enjoys an opportunity to launch a new development initiative for countries in the region, especially on issues such as good governance practices.

H.E. President Gemayel concluded by referring to Lebanon as an example in the region, where bridges have been built across sectarian and religious divides. He also reiterated that India is well-positioned for a leadership position in the WANA region.

The third speaker was **Dr. Syed Kazem Sajjadpour**, whose presentation focused on 'Iran and the Region'. He began by highlighting some assumptions regarding Iran that tend to undergird the approach and policies of the United States and its allies towards Tehran: Iran is hegemonic power; seeks ideological domination; it is at the heart of the sectarian conflict; and a danger to the region. Dr. Sajjadpour opined that such assumptions are reductionist and simplistic, selective and only serve to add to complications, rather than mitigate them. He felt that fear-mongering about Iran persists and that the securitization of Iran continues in strategic circles.

The building blocks of Iran's approach are based on geopolitics. Iran is the connector for many regions and external events such as the collapse of the former Soviet Union was a significant change for Tehran because before 1991, it meant having an asymmetrically large neighbour to the north. The current conflict in Syria was aimed at pushing Iran away from the Levant. Further to geopolitics, the speaker also referred to Iran's decision-making which is based on debate and consensus, and opined that the reactions to Iran's approach in the region and beyond tend to be confrontational. He also referred to the act that over the past four decades, Iran has managed and provided for its own security [unlike its Arab neighbours] both domestically and regionally. Dr. Sajjadpour stressed on the fact that Iran is a regional power.

'Connectivity' is an idea that Iran believes in and favours; it is a strategy for Tehran and a practice. According to the speaker, Iran is against hegemony as hegemony and connectivity cannot go together. For Iran, Chabahar symbolises connectivity between Iran, India and Afghanistan, and the Subcontinent to Central Asia. Iran also doesn't want to be in conflict with the Arab world – what it is looking for is a win-win rather than a zero sum approach. The speaker ended by saying that connectivity and cooperation is the way forward. The speakers' presentation was followed by the Q&A session.

– Prepared by Neha Kohli, Associate Editor, *Journal of Defence Studies*, IDSA.

## Session II - Challenges of Transnational Terrorism: Origin, Developments and Prognosis

Chairperson: Ambassador Rajiv Sikri, Former Secretary (East), MEA, India

1. Prof. Mohammed Benhammou, President, Moroccan Centre for Strategic Studies (CMES), Rabat, ***New Security Challenges in North Africa and Sahel Region: A Moroccan Approach***
2. Dr. Abdelhamid Abdeljaber, Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Rutgers University, US, ***United Nations and the Question of Palestine: The Sustained Conflict and Security in the Middle East***
3. Dr. Nada M. Ibrahim Al-Jubouri, Former Member of Parliament, Iraq, ***Iraq after ISIS***

The second session titled 'Challenges of Transnational Terrorism: Origin, Developments and Prognosis' was **chaired by Ambassador Rajiv Sikri, Former Secretary (East), MEA, India**. The focus of this session was to highlight the challenges and the consequences of transnational terrorism in West Asia. The panellists talked about the root causes of the problem, its origin and also warned of future chaos in the absence of a collective response and strategy for countering transnational terrorism.

**Prof. Mohammed Benhammou** spoke on 'New Security Challenges in North Africa and Sahel Region: A Moroccan Approach'. He stressed that the Arab uprising was not a spring but the beginning of turmoil in the region. He said that the Sahel (Sahara region) has weak and failed states and is riddled with intra state conflicts and porous borders. These complex issues make the region more vulnerable when it comes to the issue of security and defence. The main reasons for instability in the region are political instability and bad governance in the region. After the decline and defeat of ISIS in Syria and Iraq many terrorist fighters entered the Sahel and their proliferation and fragmentation continues.

He underlined that transnational terrorism includes transnational organized crime, illegal immigration and drug trafficking. He opined that when it comes to drug trafficking, cocaine coming from the Latin America is a big concern for the region which needs to be dealt with tactfully. He informed that 21% of the cocaine in the market originates from Western Africa and Sahel-Sahara region.

A complex situation is emerging in North Africa which makes it vulnerable to instability. For example, Libya faces economic uncertainty and the proliferation of militia and tribes further complicate issues of the region. Its leaders act more as peace breakers than peace makers.

He added that other weak states in the region include Tunisia and Algeria. Although Morocco wants to have stability and peace in its neighbouring region, but the closed border between Algeria and Morocco adds to the complexity of the situation. Morocco is the most peaceful state and can play a pivotal role in bringing peace in the Sahel (Sahara region) and North Africa, and therefore working to find a way to work with the neighbours.

He then talked about a Moroccan approach to resolve the issues of the region which according to him are based on three pillars: first is the response towards terrorism and terrorist attacks. We have developed a set of security governance as a unique set of response, especially after the Casablanca attack. Second is the Human Development which started with the programme, national initiative for human development for the backward regions. The third pillar is the rebuilding the religious space of prayer that started before two decades. Through this space there is training of the imams and rebuilding of speeches. The success of this programme can be gauged by the fact that African, Arab and European countries having started sending their imams for this training to bring positive change in their society. And the last one is the regional and international cooperation which starts by building confidence between countries, especially when the issue is sharing intelligence to fight terrorism. He added that the defeat of ISIS is not the end of the story but there are so many other transnational groups that needs to be tackled.

Speaking on 'United Nations and the Question of Palestine: The Sustained Conflict and Security in the Middle East', **Dr. Abdelhamid Abdeljaber** acknowledged India's stand and unwavering support to the Palestine issue as according to him they are entering a phase of existential challenge and crisis like never before. In this challenge, the United Nations is, was and continues to be a major player in the conflict both for its efforts to resolve the issue and for the reasons it has failed to address the conflict. He argued that the failure of the UN to implement its own resolutions on Palestinian issue has been due to its selective approach that has deepened the frustration, despair and rage within the international community. Despite the fact that the Palestine issue is the most debated and highlighted issue in the UN, with many resolutions passed starting with Resolution 181, 29 November 1947 to resolution 2334 on settlements passed on 23 December 2017 and the latest on the protection of Palestine people passed on 13 June 2018, yet the status of Palestine still remains unclear and unresolved.

He informed that the Palestinians had placed their trust in the UN early during the conflict as the UN first formed the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), established on 29 May 1948 and adopted three important resolutions — the partition Plan 181 adopted on 29 November 1947, the right of return resolution 194, 11 December 1948 and resolution 302, 08 December 1949 thus giving birth to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA). But he underlined that the UN failed to implement the partition plan and therefore the people of Palestine rejected it as an 'international conspiracy' conducted by Western powers. In the first half of the 1960's, Palestine challenged the status quo that prevailed throughout by launching their first organized guerrilla group called 'The Palestine National Liberation Movement' (Fateh) in 1965.

Shedding light on the start of the armed revolution in Palestine he informed that the Palestinians resorted to armed struggle in a quest to liberate Palestine only after the failure of the UN resolution 242, adopted on 22 November 1967.

According to him, it talked about a just settlement but Palestine was not mentioned in the resolution. The Arab regimes were also discredited and therefore thousands of Arab joined the Palestine guerrilla groups after the face-to-face battle with the Israeli forces on 21 March 1968.

He highlighted that the question of Palestine re-emerged strongly on the agenda of the UN after the 1973 war. The influence of Arab started to increase and Arabic was added as the official language. Many countries also recognized the Palestine Liberation organization (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians. And therefore numerous resolutions were passed in favour of Palestine. In conclusion, he underlined that the UN has failed to address the issue of Palestine from the very beginning and continues to fail them, despite the many resolutions it has passed.

Speaking on the subject of 'Iraq after ISIS', **Dr. Nada M. Ibrahim Al-Jubouri** said that although ISIS is not a threat for Iraq now, it has not been completely defeated. After suffering many defeats, ISIS may have weakened and is financially much poorer than it once was, particularly after it defeating the Iraqi army and stormed Mosul. After capturing the city, ISIS's fighting force increased dramatically to about 30,000, she informed.

The result was the loss of highly sophisticated Iraqi technology and weaponry to ISIS. In addition, close to nine million Sunni Arabs in the area came under ISIS's control and were forced to follow its diktat. The success in Mosul increased ISIS' capability to occupy more cities in the region and other parts of Iraq in June 2014. In fact, ISIS's victory gave it control over about a third of Iraq's territory within a couple of weeks. In Mosul, the number of people executed by ISIS kept increasing, "what is worse for civilians and security personnel alike is that the city appears to be booby-trapped by ISIS fighters, with the aim of inflicting as much damage as possible."

She said that if the Iraqi government and the international coalition led by the United States' aim is to ensure integrity and inter-communal reconciliation in Iraq then it needs a political process that guarantees equality, justice, and human rights based on liberal-secular principles. She cited Article 7 of the Iraqi Constitution, which prohibits establishing or associating with organizations that justify racism or terrorism and act against political pluralism. The sectarian parties in Iraq control the political process and political life practices what Article 7 prohibits. The Iraqi government and parliament need to address the shortcomings and drawbacks of the current political process and the constitution which according to her are the reasons for current instability and inequality in the country.

Shifting the focus on the US, the speaker highlighted that the United States can help fulfil expectations of Iraq by moving beyond traditional military and political relations and by helping social services, which in turn could strengthen the new central government. She emphasized that the US-Iraq relationship need to be reassessed and strengthened.

Washington and the Arab allies to Iraq should also provide more assistance on financial, anti-corruption efforts training and protection program for judges as well as counterintelligence and counterterrorism support against ISIS.

In modern Iraq, the most decisive factors to ensure stability are mutual acceptance, coexistence, and justice. All these will lead to a cohesive society no matter how multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multi-denominational it may be, provided that there is no foreign meddling. Nationalism rather than ethno-sectarianism will facilitate the process of reconciliation in the country after the defeat of ISIS. All parties should take feasible steps to ensure the protection of affected civilians, including children, women and members of religious and ethnic minority groups, and should create conditions conducive for voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons or local integration of internally displaced persons, particularly in areas newly-liberated from ISIS.

– *Prepared by Zainab Akhter, Research Assistant at the IDSA*

## **Session III - Confrontation and Conflicts in West Asia: Role of Regional Powers (Part A)**

Chairperson: Dr. Arvind Gupta, Director General, Vivekananda International Foundation, India

1. Amb. Seyed Hossein Mousavian, Former Diplomat and Visiting Research Scholar, Princeton University, ***Conflict between Iran and Saudi and the Way Forward***
2. Dr. Awadh Al-Badi, King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies, Riyadh, ***Troubled West Asia: A Saudi Perspective***
3. Dr. Badra Gaaloul, President International Center for Strategic, Security and Military Studies, Tunisia, ***Immigration of Da'aesh Elements/Fighters after their Defeat in Iraq and Syria***

Chaired by **Dr. Arvind Gupta**, the third session of the Conference reflected on the topic: 'Confrontation and Conflicts in West Asia: Role of Regional Powers'. Dr. Gupta underscored the increasing importance of regional actors amidst a fragmented regional order, which at present lacks a mechanism to resolve the contentious issues. Competing national interests of regional actors and influence of extra-regional powers are redefining the geopolitical landscape of West Asia.

**Ambassador Seyed Hossein Mousavian** shared his perspectives on 'Conflict between Iran and Saudi and the Way Forward'. Amb. Mousavian articulated that West Asia is in the midst of historic turmoil. Identifying some of the factors contributing to regional instability as: the Israeli occupation of Palestine, Saddam's invasion of Iran and Kuwait, US-led invasion of Afghanistan, US invasion of Iraq, outbreak of Arab Spring, NATO-GCC war on Libya, recruiting terrorists to bring regime change in Syria and Saudi-US war on Yemen.

These developments have led to civil wars in the Arab world, collapse of some of the US regional allies like Egypt and rise of terrorism in the region. He argued that Saudi Arabia's foreign policy has evolved to become more hostile towards Iran. The reason behind the discord in the Arab world and regional instability is owing to dysfunctionality of Arab state, decades of dictatorship and corruption in the Arab nations, spread of Wahhabism and intra-Arab wars. Situating Iran's strategy amongst the two competing regional power blocks in West Asia, Amb. Mousavian outlined several priorities, including resisting US hegemony on Persian Gulf, improving relations with other global powers, resisting Israeli occupation and supporting Palestinians including Hamas; combating terrorist groups like ISIS; counter balancing Saudi hegemony over smaller states who have no appetite for Saudi hegemony; and confronting Israeli strategy to disintegrate four Islamic countries Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran.

Despite contending national interests, he argued that Saudi Arabia and Iran have two options as they chart the future course: first, continue the status quo of confrontation which will deteriorate any prospects of eliminating terrorist groups and sectarianism that will increase with risk of war and second, pursue avenues of cooperation by gaining some sincere understanding of each other's security threats and concerns and then explore mutually acceptable paths to pursue peace.

For this cooperation, Amb. Mousavian suggested that Iranian and Saudi leaders need to enter into bilateral dialogue without any preconditions and all contentious issues should be put on the table. The Iran-Arab dialogue should be convened with figures from technocratic background including scientist and diplomats. Sunni-Shia dialogue should take place including religious leaders from Saudi Arabia and other Sunni countries as well as Shia clerics. Dialogue between the GCC states, Iran and Iraq should take place without any precondition at the level of foreign ministers with the aim of creating an institutionalised security and cooperation system in the Persian Gulf.

Any sustainable partnership must respect sovereignty, non-use of force, territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference in internal affairs of other countries and respecting each other's political system and commitment to UN charter and its principles. Holding regular meetings where all stakeholders can communicate and address their security grievances can result in more institutionalised cooperative relationship.



**Dr. Awadh Al-Badi** shared his perspective on 'Troubled West Asia: A Saudi Perspective'. Considering the centrality of Saudi Arabia in the region and its strategic importance, he reflected on what is Saudi national interests in the region? Dr. Al-Badi stressed that while it is early to predict the outcome of the unfolding regional uncertainty, assessing its impact on the security and stability of Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest challenges for Riyadh.

Following its proactive role in the region, Dr. Al-Badi outlined the key tenants of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy. He argued that survivability is the key motive behind Saudi Arabia's proactive role in preserving regional stability. He argued that Saudi Arabia is a status quo country and any radical change that threaten the existing regional order are not acceptable. Its foreign policy purpose is to preserve its security, stability and maintain political order.

As newly established nation states came into existence in the Arab world, the League of Arab states was founded in 1945. This regional order reflected a desire to strengthen the status quo in the Arab world. The regional balance of power was preserved by the dominant international actors first under Pax-Britannica and later under Pax-Americana. Preserving such an order was imperative for Saudi foreign policy. But this order has been threatened over the decades by transnational ideologies, even as Saudi Arabia served as a centre for diplomatic dynamism. It mobilised material resources, political capital and soft power to maintain the regional status quo to secure its own stability. Dr. Al-Badi defended Saudi position in Yemen and Syria to guarantee sustainability of the regional order. He argued that Saudi foreign policy succeeded in preserving the regional status quo and in turn preserved its own stability. But the Arab uprising indicates a crumbling status quo, rise of civil wars and foreign interference in internal affairs of states by a revisionist state like Iran. Hence, Saudi leadership's pro-activism is a natural response aimed at maintaining the status quo and not pursuing regional hegemony or dominance.

**Dr. Badra Gaaloul**, in her presentation on 'Immigration of ISIS Elements/Fighters after their Defeat in Iraq and Syria' addressed the question: Is ISIS really defeated? Is North Africa the new field for ISIS after its defeat in Syria and Iraq? She argued that ISIS is defeated only on the ground, but not its ideology. ISIS has moved to the desert and sea shores of North Africa. Self-styled Caliph al-Baghdadi has given a call to go to North Africa to his cadres, especially Libya. While the international community's focus is on West Asia when talking about ISIS, the incubator for ISIS now is in Libya, Chad, Mali, Philippine, Pakistan and Afghanistan. She reflected on the exodus of ISIS out of Syria through Turkish border towards Libya. Nigeria and Boko Haram, Chad, Sudan and Mali also facilitate such movements. The same group operates as ISIS in Syria and Iraq, Ansar al-Sharia in Libya, Bait al-Maqdis in Egypt and Boko Haram in Niger and Chad and so on. Dr. Gaaloul said that the most important relations for ISIS are with Turkey, Qatar, international mafia, international Muslim Brotherhood, the Conference of Friends of the Syrian People in Tunis. The opening of the Turkish-Syrian border facilitated the ISIS, she claimed.

Key points emerging from discussions:

- West Asia should be cautious while dealing with the notions of Pax-Britannica and Pax-Americana since Pax-Britannica is founded on divide and rule and Pax-Americana is founded on off-shore balancing.
- US role in maintaining status quo in the regional order is increasingly becoming uncertain under Trump Presidency following developments with regard to JCPOA. President Trump is undoing the order which will impact the peace and stability of this region.
- Iranian and Saudi narratives on the West Asian geopolitics are bound to be different. But any regional security architecture has to be built by both Iran and Saudi Arabia together in cooperation with every regional stakeholder.

– Prepared by Dr. Titli Basu, Associate Fellow, IDSA

## Session IV - Confrontation and Conflict in West Asia: The Role of Regional Powers (Part B)

Chairperson: Ambassador Sanjay Singh, Former Secretary (East), MEA, India

1. Prof. Dan Schueftan, Chairman, National Security Studies Center and Professor, School of Political Science, University of Haifa, *Hopelessness in the Middle East*
2. Prof. Mustafa Aydin, Professor, Kadir Has University, Department of International Relations, Istanbul, Turkey, *Turkey's Middle East Policies: Challenges and Opportunities*
3. Dr. Jin Liangxiang, Shanghai Institute for International Studies, China, *The Rising of Regional Powers and the Future Middle East Order*

The session was **chaired by Ambassador Sanjay Singh**. It started with a discussion on the notion of stability and instability in the Middle East. Speaking on the topic 'Hopelessness in the Middle East', **Prof. Dan Schueftan** said that one of the reasons for instability within the Arab world was the hopelessness among the people.

While Arabs did not always feel this pessimistic, their perceptions about themselves has taken a serious blow. When the 'Arab Spring' happened, they believed that if they could replace the political leadership with something better, then challenges in the Middle East could be mitigated. However, after the Arab Spring, there has been a collapse in the regional order. The sources of such hopelessness could be traced to the inability of Arab countries to progress in nation-building even though they have become more independent since the World War II. This problem of not being able to adapt to the modern world, that is, to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, despite the wealth of resources available to the Middle East compared to Asian countries are one of the main reasons for these problems.

The feeling of hopelessness has led to Arabs migrating to other regions such as Europe or the United States. In recent times, they are also facing stricter immigration policies or being stopped at the borders. This immigration has led to more skilled Arabs leaving to work in Europe, which means that they are not able to contribute to the workforce. This hopelessness has other intangible effects such as its impact on capable people who could further social changes. These impressive individuals, who generally in any society might have led to more productivity, have never felt more discouraged in the Arab world. Beyond the political arena, the economic situation in the Arab countries is grim. For instance, the entire water system in the Middle East is dysfunctional and in turn affects the lives of the farmers. However, the movement of population from rural areas to urban centres is also unhelpful because of the lack of industrialisation. This leads to massive unemployment.

In the Arab world, this hopelessness is widespread because of the challenges in four major countries – Egypt, Turkey, Iran and Israel. Egypt, a country that is considered an anchor for regional stability and is known for having a long history of resilience is unable to do the necessary reforms to regain its position, that is, by bringing about Cultural Revolution. Dramatic Cultural Revolution in Turkey is, however, leading towards a more destabilizing future. The other two countries such as Iran and Israel are on a collision course. Iran, which has strong hegemonic ambitions in the Middle East, is pursuing policies accordingly and has evoked a strong response from Israel, which seeks to contain such actions. These are possible only because Arab countries have been weakened due to internal strife that has led to the growth of Iranian power. This confrontation has led to more instability in the region and also brings other external powers, such as US and Russia in internal political scene, such as in Syria and Libya.

Speaking on 'Turkey's Middle East Policies: Challenges and Opportunities', **Prof. Mustafa Aydin** brought forth the Turkish perspective in enunciating the policies of his country. According to him, Turkey in the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not consider itself as part of Middle East. It looked westward towards Europe, intent on

establishing its participation in the European Union and NATO. When Turkey looked towards the Middle East, it saw conflicts and instability compared to its perception of Europe as an area of progress.

However, after the Cold War and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, new realities brought Turkey's attention to the Middle East. The shift in Turkish thinking did not materialize until 2002 when the Justice Party came to power. In addition, the continuous wars and instability brought security apprehensions to Turkey as it became concerned about the spill-over effects of these wars on the country.

There are also other factors that led to the change in Turkish thinking. First, the Justice Party stressed on political Islam thus giving more importance to the country's Middle East moorings. Secondly, there was a substantial sociological change in Turkey with the rise of the middle classes that was more conservative. The urbanization pattern was also slowly changing, with cities bulging. The liberal economic policies in addition led to the rise of modern bourgeoisie, who were more interested in Islam and all these developments brought changes in the system. Turkish foreign policy changed to reflect these new trends and ideas and included collaboration and cooperation with its Muslim neighbours. Turkey envisioned a world with it playing a central role to revive its cultural and historic past, where it is understood and redefined itself. This led Turkey into making efforts for engaging with neighbours in free trade, and becoming a mediator in regional disputes. These policy changes became very successful and so Turkey was seen as a model for the Middle East to emulate.

However, the success of these policies led Turkish leaders seeking to further their influence and shape the region. It abandoned its soft power approach and overestimated its influence in the region. Its relation with Israel deteriorated and during the Arab Spring, Turkey took a pro-people position. While it was successful in Egypt, it miscalculated the ability of President Assad of Syria to stay in power and Russia's stakes in Syria. Turkey's support for regime change in Syria was its first change in foreign policy and brought security challenges on its borders as terror groups made its presence felt in the country. Also, the involvement of Russia and the US made Turkey having no choice to engage multiple powers in the region with regard to Syria. However, Russian involvement in Syria slowly changed Turkish thinking about its policy in the Middle East and now its focus is not on removing President Assad's regime in Syria but stabilizing the region.

**Dr. Jin Liangxiang** spoke on "The Rising of Regional Powers and the Future Middle East. He analysed Chinese perceptions about Middle East and its policy towards it. In Chinese view, the collapse or crisis in the global order, the crisis in the regional order and crisis of domestic policies have led to instability in the Middle East. After the Gulf War, the unipolar movement has dominated the regional order. The US was a decisive power in the Middle East with the ability to broker peace between Palestine and Israel. However, the American dominance is reducing as the US decided to reduce its strategic resources and shift it to Asia. The regional order has collapsed because the US has withdrawn from the region and reduced its resources. During President Barack Obama administration, the US was reluctant to militarily intervene in Syria and with the Trump Presidency, the US is intent on withdrawing its involvement further. As a result, there is steady growth of rising powers in the region to fill the vacuum left by the US. These rising powers meant the growth of influence in the region and not necessarily increase of strength. It meant that whereas the external powers influenced events in the Middle East, but now, regional powers are influencing these changes.

Some of the changes in the Middle East are also defined by the rise of Iran and Saudi Arabian response to it. The rise of Iranian power is not due to growth in its strength and power but the removal of other strong powers in its neighbourhood due to regime change in Iraq, Libya etc. Thus, the response of Saudi Arabia to Iranian expansionism is also influenced by the withdrawal of US umbrella and security protection. These rising regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel are all of historic logic as they had established great empires in the past. In addition, the rising national security requirement due to withdrawal of US presence gives them another rationale to change their policies. However, unlike the US, regional powers do not have sufficient strategic resources to invest in order to provide regional stability and the new power combinations in the region, such as Iran, Turkey and

Russia or Saudi Arabia-led security arrangement in the region could likely make the regional instability worse in the future.

Chinese policy in this complex time has focused on three factors: China will follow the policy of non-interference in the region; will support political solutions to the challenges in the region; and would have mutual respect among civilisations based on the respect for religion and promoting development.

During the question and answer sessions, the speakers clarified few points. In a question to changes in Turkish policy, the speaker clarified that since 2016, Turkey has modified its policy and begun to engage President Assad through Russia. Now that the threat of ISIS has emerged, it is not interested in viewing regime change as an immediate policy preference anymore. To questions regarding President Erdogan's changes in the Presidential system, the speaker highlighted that in fact President Erdogan is in a more powerful Presidential office, he is in a weaker position than before. In addition, contrary to media reports, Turkey will not abandon its participation to NATO.

In response to Chinese view of terrorism and alleged military presence in Syria, the speaker commented that China views development as a response to reducing the root causes of terrorism and has taken sufficient border control measures to prevent terror groups from making its presence in China. In addition, China has no military presence in Syria.

– Prepared by Dr. M. S. Prathibha, Associate Fellow, IDSA

## Session V - Role of Big Powers: United States, Russia and Europe

Chairperson: Commodore (retd.) C Uday Bhaskar, Director, Society for Policy Studies, New Delhi and Chair, Academic Council, Middle East Institute, New Delhi

1. Jeffrey S. Payne, Manager of Academic Affairs, Near East South Asia (NESA) Center for Strategic Studies, Department of Defense, Washington, ***Changing Dynamics of Maritime Security in the Middle East: an Evaluation of the United States Approach*** (Skype)
2. Dr. Elena Suponina, Advisor, Institute for Strategic Studies, Moscow, ***Russia and the Middle East***
3. Dr. Gidon Windecker, Former Regional Representative to the Gulf States, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Germany, ***The EU and the Middle East***
4. Prof. P. R. Kumaraswamy, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, ***Great Powers Challenge Modi's Middle East Strategy***

The session was chaired by **Commodore (Retd) C. Uday Bhaskar**. He initiated the discussion by suggesting the need to look at the region through the lens of a more inclusive approach – a Southern Asia that subsumes both West and South Asia. He observed that, historically, the region has been blighted by the initiatives of big powers. This includes the early to mid-1970s that witnessed the first oil shock and the introduction of petro-dollars, with each big power looking at the region through its own strategic prism. The big powers existing interests, he argued, continue to be normative. This is aptly reflected in the Syrian conundrum which highlights the lack of clarity of the interests of big powers.

**Dr. Jeffrey Payne** initiated his presentation, on the theme 'changing dynamics of maritime security in the Middle East: an evaluation of the United States approach', by providing an insight into the American debate about the strategic importance of the Middle East. The conflict in the region, he argued, is the foremost factor shaping the United States strategic calculus towards the region. This involves the conflicts in Yemen, Syria, and the existing legacy of Daesh in Iraq. Expanding on this premise, Dr. Payne highlighted the following questions that drive the US policy in Middle East:

- How will the ongoing conflicts influence the Middle East's security dynamics?
- Will the conflicts be a flashpoint for a larger region-wide competition?
- What will be the future geo-economic burden of these conflicts on the region?
- What will be the humanitarian legacy of these conflicts? – How will the refugee issues be addressed?; and
- How will the conflicts affect the cross-border regional security?

Dr. Payne observed that since 9/11, the United States' focus has been on tackling violent organisations. The ISIS, he pointed out, is a threat and will continue to be so in the future. He dwelt on the growing trans-regional terror linkages in North Africa, South East Asia, and South Asia - a 'puzzle that the US is trying to solve'. Elaborating on the regional rivalry, Dr. Payne highlighted the American concern on the unravelling of proxy battles. He also referred to the latent economic competition in the Middle East, particularly during a period of rising instability in the GCC countries.

Dr. Payne noted that the issue of regional maritime security is often overlooked in America's strategic calculus. The region, he observed, represents vital sea lanes of communication, is a transit point for trans-continental movement of cargo, and a source of tapped and untapped natural resources that have a direct bearing on the prices of key global commodities. In this light, the US has sought to tackle piracy, smuggling, and drug trafficking emanating from the region. He referred to the complications arising from the overcrowding of waters in the region, particularly the Red Sea, through the naval presence of both regional and extra-regional actors. The strategic positioning of these actors in the choke points of Strait of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb, he observed, reflects the growing threat to the stability of the region and global commons. Dr. Payne argued that the US naval forces are overstretched and, therefore, burden sharing becomes vital.

Dr. Payne highlighted the evolution of the following two strategic concepts:

- The Indo-Pacific reflects a new stage of competition in maritime domain, highlighted by the rivalries between the US and China on one hand and New Delhi and Beijing on the other. The Indo-Pacific construct is, thus, the US methodology by 'which it sees the strategic point of view from the oceans'.
- Development of a new cooperative architecture - as reflected in the evolution of the Quadrilateral.

Dr. Payne emphasised on the American comparative advantages in leveraging its position as the key regional security, military and strategic partner. Its broad contours involve military education, and joint operations and training.

**Dr. Elena Suponina** initiated her presentation, on the theme 'Russia and the Middle East,' by highlighting the 'deep crisis' confronting the region. She elaborated on the fragile regional order wherein several states are close to fragmentation. Russia, she argued, is aiming to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states like Syria and Iraq. She pointed out that the conflict in Syria and Yemen can be viewed through the lens of 'war of all against all'.

Dr. Suponina dwelt on the long shadow of the future by pointing out Russia's intervention in the region could be the curtain raiser for the rise of a new regional order that can then act as a catalyst for the emergence of a multi-polar world order – a cherished Russian goal.

Dr. Suponina observed that a key objective of Russian military intervention in Syria was to tackle the threat of international terrorism emanating from the region. The fact that more than six thousand

Russian speaking personnel had joined the Daesh was a compelling narrative in itself. While the threat of Daesh has been neutralised to a large extent yet the continued presence of more than 40,000 extremists in Syria, with close to 14,000 being radical Jabhat al-Nusra supporters, reflect the clear and present danger.

One of Russia's aims, Dr. Suponina emphasised, is to find a diplomatic solution to the Syrian conundrum. By keeping channels of communication open with all stakeholders, even if they are on the opposite side of the regional divide, Moscow is in a unique position to initiate regional dialogue. The Astana and Sochi processes reflect this Russian endeavour, with dialogue and not military intervention being the only way forward. She argued that coordination between regional and extra-regional powers should acquire a sense of urgency in order to resolve the ongoing conflict. The focus should be on economic reconstruction and resumption of political dialogue. She cautioned against the attempt of any singular country to monopolise the regional dialogue.

**Dr. Gidon Windecker** initiated his presentation, on the theme 'The EU and the Middle East' by arguing that in Europe, both domestic security and foreign policies have become intertwined to shape the continent's policy towards the Middle East. He elaborated on three major trends at the national, European and international levels.

- National level – there is a major split between Europeans on refugee crisis, and the impact of globalisation and liberalisation. Many people feel excluded and scared by political developments that they do not understand. This has led to the popularity of right wing movements across Europe.
- European Union (EU) level – foreign and security policies of the EU are still determined at the national and not the European level.
- International level – increasing global instability and fraying of traditional alliances, marked by hard Brexit and an unreliable trans-Atlantic relationship. This has compelled the EU to explore new congruence with well-established players like Russia and Turkey, notwithstanding the existing disagreements.

Dr. Windecker observed that the crisis in Middle East has shaken the foundational values of the EU that include its emphasis on liberal democracy and rule of law. Having burnt its fingers during the Arab Spring, with the Muslim Brotherhood failing to promote liberal democracy, the European value based approach towards the region has shifted to promoting its security and economic interests. Ensuring stability and security is now a priority, shaped primarily by the massive influx of refugees. This has often resulted in the absence of a clear strategy to end existing conflicts. Dr. Windecker, nevertheless, dwelt on the EU's comparative soft power advantage that include economic reconstruction, disaster management, and humanitarian assistance.

Dr. Windecker outlined a case study of EU's position in Syria. He conceded that the EU is now forced to engage Syrian President Assad, who is about to win the war, despite his war crimes in order to deal with the humanitarian crisis and the migration issue. Notably, the EU had indirectly supported regime change though it was not part of the war itself. He argued that the EU is likely to assist in the Syrian reconstruction efforts provided inclusive elections are held in the country. He called on the EU to participate in regional forums like the Astana process, and leverage its strength of post-war reconstruction to find a common ground on issues that have a direct bearing on its security and economic interests.

Dr. Windecker argued that prevailing crisis presents both challenges and opportunities for European involvement. The EU should step up its engagement with both regional and extra-regional powers to address migration, terrorism, and maritime security. It could also, perhaps, explore the role of being a mediator in the Saudi and Iranian conflict.

**Prof. P.R. Kumaraswamy** initiated his presentation, on the theme 'Great Powers Challenge Modi's Middle East Strategy', by highlighting India's unprecedented political engagement, under Prime Minister Modi, with West Asia. He elaborated on the following challenges that India faces in the context of the geo-political strategies of China, Russia and the US:

- Iran – the American sanctions will result in a substantial reduction in import of oil from Iran. New Delhi and Tehran will, however, need to devise a payment mechanism in order to circumvent the sanctions if India seeks to continue importing oil from Iran.
- Neither of the three major players are in a position to mediate in any conflict. On the contrary, every big power has tried to intensify the conflict at their own level, thereby putting India in a difficult position. Moreover, a number of events are being shaped despite the absence of the US and India does not foresee a major power or a coalition of powers that can replace the United States.
- India will compete with China in oil imports from the region. Nevertheless, the share of Persian Gulf in India's oil matrix has come down while that of the US has gone up.
- Engagement with extra-regional powers – the US is not a good role model for India given its increasing propensity to turn friends into foes. Russia, on the other hand, is the only country that has channels of communication open with all stakeholders. The problem, however, is that Russian influence is visible only in Syria, and there are no other visible results elsewhere.
- India, therefore, should follow the Chinese model of economic engagement and the Russian model of political engagement.
- Islam – India can leverage its strength of moderate Islam to intensify its engagement with the region. Prime Minister Modi's foreign policy inculcates a liberal, inclusive and accommodative approach. It is likely that if regional reforms are initiated, the conservatives will lose out.
- Regional conflicts – the Arab-Israeli conflict is progressively getting worse, exemplified by the divisions over making Jerusalem the capital. India's position has also evolved and is now more nuanced, favouring a Palestine State with the contentious issue of determining the capital to be decided between Israel and Palestine.

Prof. Kumaraswamy argued that India should continue to robustly engage with the region. There is, however, a need to implement the decisions taken between the top leaderships of India and the West Asian countries. This will, he argued, bring tangible benefits to the 1.2 billion Indians.

Ending on a note of caution, Prof. Kumaraswamy observed that the Chinese modus operandi of employing its own labour could, in the long run, pose a risk to the employment opportunities for eight million Indian expatriates living in the region.

#### Key Issues Raised During the Q&A Session

- The Iran question is a key issue for the US, and factors heavily in the spectrum of regional rivalries. EU, China and Russia continue to support the Iranian nuclear deal.
- A NATO like alliance for the Arab states is unlikely in the offing, though the meeting scheduled for October will be a pointer to how things shape in the future.
- The eco-system of West Asia for nurturing the culture of peace has been degraded. It will be a challenge to restore it. The big powers will have to introspect as to what is their larger policy objective.

- An inclusive humanitarian and reconstruction effort can lay the groundwork for greater political dialogue between Syrian stakeholders.
- EU does not always view democracy only through the prism of elections. There are other factors as well - rule of law, protection of minorities etc.
- There is a need to revisit the regional discourse since a lot of dominant themes, including that of extremism, muddy the waters. The forgotten discourse, however, is the pedigree of the region. If one looks at the extended West Asian region, civilizational DNAs are embedded in the long cycle of history. These need to be tapped.

– Prepared by Rajorshi Roy, Researcher, IDSA

## Session VI – Emerging Socioeconomic Challenges

Chairperson: Professor Girijesh Pant, Former Dean, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

1. H. E. Dr. Shaikh Abdulla bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Chairman, Bahrain Center for Strategic, International & Energy Studies, Bahrain, ***Instability in Iraq and Yemen: Common Roots, and Potential Remedies***
2. Dr. Elsayed Abofarha, Assistant Professor, Banisuef University, Cairo, Egypt, ***The Qualitative Transformation of the Terrorism Phenomenon in the Arab Region & the Expiration of Nation State: Egypt's Role in the Confrontation***
3. Dr. P. K. Pradhan, Associate Fellow, IDSA, ***Protracted Transition in West Asia***

**Prof. Girijesh Pant** chaired the sixth session of the conference titled: 'Emerging Socio-Economic Challenges'. Introducing the theme he said that unless the socioeconomic issues are, the situation is unlikely to improve and stabilize in the region. Prof. Pant said that the region has become highly securitized which has created security issues. The issue needs to be negotiated. Though off late there has been some reports showing that economic growth in general is increasing, whether the growth will bring stability and peace in the region will depend on how the regimes will engage the youth of their respective countries. About 30 per cent of the population in the region is of the youth. An economic model is required that would engage that section of the population. One way is to initiate service sector which can create jobs. Because the governments in the region appear to be unable to do so, they can outsource it to private sector. However, since the region is highly securitized, that is not likely to happen.

**H. E. Dr. Shaikh Abdulla Bin Ahmed Al Khalifa's** paper titled 'Instability in Iraq and Yemen: Common Roots and Potential Remedies' was read by **Mr. Muhammad Ismail**. Mr. Ismail started by arguing that Gulf countries want stability and peace in the region. The Kingdom of Bahrain has always sought to maintain stability, peace and security in the region. Mr. Ismail said that the conflicts in Iraq and Yemen have affected Bahrain. The crisis is severe and the Gulf countries are blamed for perpetrating terrorism which does affect us. Mr. Ismail blamed Iran for violating sovereignty of the countries in the region and supporting fundamentalism. He said that it is doing so to expand its influence. It has funded Al Qaeda and the Taliban to act as its proxies. According to Mr. Ismail, "To Iran, terrorism is a tool". By its policies, it has created enemies for itself. By establishing its roots in Iraq, Iran has threatened the Iraqi people. Though there has been increase in trade between Iran and Iraq, but it is highly in favour of the former. The state of Iraq is beholden to Iran.

Iran has been supplying Houthis with missiles, war ships and other weapons which are used in attacks against ships moving in the Gulf of Aden and to attack cities in Saudi Arabia. Houthis in Yemen have



failed to reach any agreement to restore peace in the country. Mr. Ismail said that Saudi Arabia is determined to restore stability and peace in Iraq. In Yemen, the Houthi militia should stop getting support and handover their controlled areas. They should be disarmed. Iran must stop playing negative role in the region and instead ensure welfare of its own people.

**Dr. Elsayed Abofarha** spoke on 'The Qualitative Transformation of the Terrorism Phenomenon in the Arab Region and the Expiration of Nation State: Egypt's Role in the Confrontation'. Dr. Abofarha started by arguing that the strategic shifts in the West Asian region are happening because of three factors: terrorism, nation state and regional powers which include Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and Iran. He proposed three main assumptions. First, the timing of nation state. According to Dr. Elsayed, nation states in the region will end soon, given the changes happening in the context in which nation state were formed. Second, the terrorism phenomenon especially the 9/11 attack has undermined the nation state through different means, like political and economic institutions of terrorist groups and use of social media.

Third, the current nation state has to choose between two scenarios in the changing environment in West Asia: one, the changing and transforming nature of nation state into new forms of political entity after the resurgence of terrorism, may be smaller states like in Libya. Second scenario is fighting for survival and stability by targeting terrorism. In this context, Egypt is oriented towards fighting out terrorism to secure itself. This can be explained through four indicators. First, the Egyptian doctrine is to protect the nation state by all means. Second, to protect nation state, Egypt aims to fight all forms of terrorism, within and outside. Third, to maintain its current status, Egypt keeps shifting its alliances. It has been with the US camp in which it still continues to be. But it has also joined or gotten close to other countries like China, Russia and others. Fourth, Egypt is ready to play role of regional power in coming years, disregarding the internal problem that the country faces as its role is likely going to increase in future in the region.

**Dr. P. K. Pradhan** spoke on 'Protracted Transition in West Asia'. He argued that the West Asian region is going through a process of transition which is rarely peaceful. In last eight years, the region has seen conflicts, crises and few prominent leaders were killed. There is emergence of new terrorist groups along with the old ones being operational. The environment has been favourable for these groups and many areas remain ungoverned. One factor that needs to be paid attention to is that role of regional powers which has been disappointing.

Either they have been unavailable, or they were concerned about their security or they furthered their national interests. Dr. Pradhan presented the emerging humanitarian crises in the region due to the protracting conflicts. In Yemen for instances, 22 million people need humanitarian assistance. According to the United Nations, 'Yemen is the world's worst humanitarian crises' of the times. Similarly, in Syria over 13 million need humanitarian assistance.

Dr. Pradhan said that the horrible situation has emerged because of the failure to reach a consensus on any agreement between the conflicting parties. Now the situation is like that the states have become fragile which complicates the problems.

**Amb. Syed Hossein Mousavian** in his comment on **H. E. Dr. Shaikh Abdulla Bin Ahmed Al Khalifa's** presentation said that it is wrong to blame Iran for the regional problems. Where were the Gulf countries when ISIS was taking over cities after cities in Iraq and Iraqis were unable to fight them? They sought help and thanked Iran for helping them to defeat the ISIS. Ambassador Mousavian said that the image of Iran that was portrayed in the presentation was so powerful even he was surprised to know that Tehran is so strong.

– *Prepared by Nazir Ahmad Mir, Researcher, IDSA*

## Session VII - India and WANA: Building Partnerships and Managing Challenges

Chairperson: Dr. B. Bala Bhaskar, JS (WANA), Ministry of External Affairs, India

1. Ambassador Seyed Hossein Mousavian, Former Diplomat and Visiting Research Scholar, Princeton University
2. Amb. Michael Ronen, Head of India and South East Asia Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israel, *India-Israel Relations*
3. Dr. Meena Singh Roy, Research Fellow, Coordinator West Asia Centre, IDSA, *Securing India's Strategic Interests in the Changing Regional Order in West Asia*

The session began with the remarks of the **Chair, Dr. B. Bala Bhaskar** on the significance high-level bilateral visits and economic interaction between India and WANA countries. He stated that the last few years had witnessed a surge in such meetings and engagements that have contributed a lot in strengthening the relationship between the two significantly.

The first speaker, **Amb. Seyed Hossein Mousavian** proposed four fundamental principles; diplomacy, refrain from the use of force, dialogue and a regional security system owned by countries within the WANA, to build peace and stability in the region. He emphasized the need for developing a regional security system by building trust between players within the region and maintaining regional security by themselves, instead of relying on external powers.

According to Mousavian the European model of economic and security cooperation can be experimented and practised in WANA. Like Europe, WANA region also requires cooperation in every domain from cultural to commercial, and that will eventually bring collaboration in the realm of peace and security, he added.

**Ambassador Michael Ronen**, the second panellist mentioned in the centuries-old ties between India and the WANA countries to highlight the relevance of former in the region. Emphasizing on India's de-hyphenated policy towards Israel and Palestine, he said that India should look after its interest in the region. The high-level visits in the recent past, according to Ronen, is an example of how India and Israel are moving together in a line of shared interests. He discussed India's ties with Israel in various sectors including defence, trade and commerce, water management and technology sharing. He advised that enhanced cooperation in areas such as water management and related technologies will benefit India significantly.

**Dr. Meena Singh Roy** began by listing the key features of changing regional order and discussed how India is responding to these new developments in the region. She said that the region is undergoing internal and external transformation; for instance, the US has unveiled its new policy to the region while Russia is emerging as an assertive actor. The US withdrawal from JCPOA, Qatar crisis, softening Saudi stand towards Israel, emerging Saudi-UAE security cooperation and increasing engagement of Asian players such as India and China in the region are some of the defining key features. She mentioned that inclusive regional security dialogue focussed on politico-economic cooperation and constructive engagement among regional and extra regional actors can be a viable option for the region.

After discussing India's policy approach she mentioned the options/opportunities and challenges faced by India and suggested that in this new situation, India needs to secure its energy, trade, economic and security interests while fighting extremism and terrorism. India's key 'Mantra' has been to balance, cooperate, connect and build strong economic and security partnerships (BCC&BESP). Dr. Roy said that India has moved from Look West, to Think West to Link West and a now to 'Act West' dynamism.

She added that based on its strengths and limitations, New Delhi will have to craft an independent and realistic policy keeping in view the regional sensitivities. She offered recommendations for Indian policy makers to further develop relations with the WANA countries, including:

1. Develop a Regional Centre of Excellence for countering extremism and terrorism based in any city in India;
2. Organise an annual West Asia Summit bringing experts, policy makers, officials and academics from the region, which could be a platform for dialogue on how to address the threat of extremism and terrorism including strategic and economic issues;
3. Build a West Asia University similar to the existing South Asia University;
4. Water and food security are extremely significant issues in the West Asian region. To meet this challenge; India should constitute a working group on food and water security to share India's experience with the regional countries; and
5. Initiate an annual regional energy dialogue, which will bring all energy producing West Asian countries and India together.

She pointed that the aforementioned initiatives will provide a platform for all regional countries for dialogue on both economic and strategic issues. She further noted that these will help India and the regional countries in co-management and co-development of a stable and secure region through economic diplomacy. She also highlighted that there are major opportunities opening in the economic sector – agriculture, information technology, infrastructure, maritime security, health sector, tourism, service sector and education which are mutually beneficial for India and the countries of the West Asian side.

Dr. Roy concluded by saying that in an era of globalization and economic integration, zero-sum games will only push the region to greater instability and conflicts and India could be a partner in bringing greater harmony in the region through its realistic economic diplomacy without getting sucked into regional conflicts.

The Q & A session mainly deliberated on the differences among the regional powers in WANA including their different approach toward regional problems. The pros and cons of the presence of external powers in the region, as well as the necessity of a balanced model of policy or approach by the regional actors.

– *Prepared by Rajeesh Kumar, Associate Fellow, IDSA*

## **Session VIII - Panel Discussion: Security and Stability in WANA: The Way Forward**

**Chairperson:** Maj Gen Alok Deb, SM, VSM (Retd), Deputy Director General, IDSA

**Panellists:** Dr. Awadh Al-Badi, King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies, Riyadh

Dr. Haythem Mouzahem, Director, Beirut Centre for Middle East Studies

Dr. Wael Batterkhi, Minister Counsellor, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of the State of Palestine, New Delhi

Ms. Ruchita Beri, Senior Research Associate, IDSA, New Delhi

The conference concluded with a panel discussion Chaired by **Major General Alok Deb**, Deputy Director General of IDSA, commenced the discussion by acknowledging the inherent fault lines that have remained extant in West Asia since World War I, and that have gradually metamorphosed into turbulent geo-political instabilities and security challenges in the region. Given that the region has also become a playing ground for geo-political competitions between big powers and regional states, Gen. Deb exhorted the panellists to explore on the realistic approaches for ushering sustainable peace and security in WANA.

**Dr Awadh Al-Badi** affirmed that the “mistrust” among the regional powers is the main impediment for conflict resolution and crisis mitigation in West Asia/Middle East. Another factor that has significantly contributed to the existing turmoil is the lack of efficient visionary leadership which could usher the region towards peace and prosperity. For overcoming the existing geo-political and strategic uncertainties in WANA, Dr. Al-Badi noted that the historical experiences in Europe (East Europe and West Europe) in the aftermath of WW II, present an ideal model for the region. He advocated the validity and usefulness of ten principles laid out in the Helsinki Accords of 1974 that governed the strained relations of divided Europe. Dr. Al-Badi also emphasised on the constructive role of outside powers like US, India and China in bridging the current trust-deficit among the regional powers in WANA.

**Dr. Haythem Mouzahem** underscored that the persisting sectarian (Shia-Sunni) divide, lack of tolerance and mutual recognition within the Arab Muslim world have plagued the region with mutual distrust leading to sectarian conflicts and rise of extremism. Foreign interventions played a role in exacerbating the sectarian conflicts/problems. He asserted that religion should not be blamed for the rise of extremism in WANA. Deliberating on the way forward in WANA, Dr. Mouzahem stressed on the importance of having a principled dialogue among the states in the atmosphere of mutual respect, equality and Justice. Dr. Mouzahem also endorsed the need to implement, enforce and guarantee human rights, minorities’ rights and gender equality in the WANA region.

**Dr. Wael Batterkhi** noted that the solution to the Palestinian issue is a prerequisite to ensure peace and stability in the Middle East. He underscored the importance of mutual respect and reconciliation as a mechanism for conflict management and crisis mitigation in WANA. Batterkhi also stressed on the need to find a solution to curtail the social decline in the region by focussing on humanitarian grievances.

**Ms. Ruchita Beri** delved on the transcending impact of sectarian conflicts from West Asia to North Africa and Horn of Africa. She maintained that the spill-over impact of sectarian conflicts from West Asia has blurred the lines between Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and West Asia. As a consequence, security paradigm in North Africa and horn of Africa is largely vitiated and the countries are forced to take sides with the regional powers (either Saudi Arabia or Iran). Ms. Beri argued that the transcendence impact in North Africa and Horn of Africa has gradually resulted in the great/regional powers’ scramble for bases and port facilities in North Africa. Delving on the way forward in WANA, Ms. Beri advocated for bilateral dialogue between the two regional powers (Saudi Arabia and Iran) to settle their bilateral, regional and sectarian issues/differences. She also gave due primacy to reconstruction, rehabilitation and infrastructure development in the conflict zones of WANA.

#### **Major takeaways from the discussions:**

- There is an urgent need to change the existing discourse in the Arab-Muslim World. In this respect, economic diplomacy can play an instrumental role in bringing all the actors (both regional and outside) on board. Seeking one’s national interests via economic cooperation with the regional/outside powers should score due primacy over all other bilateral or multilateral conflicts. The Nations should be guided by the principles of peaceful coexistence and national interests.

- “Self-Assessment” by the regional powers and the “all-inclusive reconciliation” are the keys to solve the turbulent geo-political and security problems in the WANA region.
- The solutions to the geo-political and security problems in WANA prerequisite foremost tackling with the grappling political, social, cultural and economic issues in the region. Ensuring fundamental human rights and dignified lives to the citizens ought to be the main aim of all the states in the region.
- The regional actors need to contemplate on efficient crisis management techniques to overcome mutual differences based on the principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all the stakeholders in the region.
- Despite all the persisting challenges in WANA, the nations ought to be hopeful and shall strive for bringing peace and stability in the region.

**Dr. Md. Muddassir Quamar**, Associate Fellow and Co-Convener of the Conference, gave the vote of thanks.

– *Prepared by Rajbala Rana, Researcher, IDSA*