

Strategic Report

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Preface

Since its establishment in 1984, the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) is launching its first strategic report; which is the 1st of a series of strategic reports to be published on an annual basis, where its significance lies in providing both intellectuals and decision makers with a broad understanding of the main drivers of regional and international politics. CSS has been conducting strategic analysis in regional and global: geo-politics, security, defence and foreign policy, rule of law, macro-economics, health, education, religion, gender, minorities, and refugee issues. Our findings are relevant not only to Jordan, but to the region as a whole.

CSS also produces a number of periodic reports and forecast analysis, including scenario building exercise on security, economy, geopolitical and geostrategic trends, the Arab Barometer, the Gender Barometer, and the Religiosity Barometer and the Pulse of the Jordanian Street. Only recently the CSS has published its first report on Jordan entitled, *“Jordan’s Path in 2021: Trends and Scenarios”*.

The CSS at the University of Jordan has been a leading institution in assessing and designing evidence-based policy interventions. It is a think tank that focuses on public policies, strategic and geostrategic analysis, intellectual and political issues; which continues to be recognized as MENA’s top Center for Excellence since 2016, according to the Global Go to Think Tank Index (last updated in June 2020) as part of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) program of the University of Pennsylvania.

Emphasizing the importance of rigorous, scientifically tested methodologies, CSS is one of the only research centres in the MENA region that conducts regular quantitative polls and surveys. These endeavours are complemented by the publication of research papers, international networking projects, and the hosting of conferences, seminars, and workshops of global significance. Each of these activities focus on generating new venues for dialogue, helping to contribute to the improvement of the quality of discourse in the country. As a result, CSS is a regular contributor in the media, with outlets often including the results of CSS’s polls, the featuring of our research publications, and the deliberations of our conferences.

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Note: This report was prepared before the events which took place in occupied Palestine and the Palestinians' confrontation with the Israeli attacks that began in Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa, and extended to the entire Palestinian land.

I. Introduction

This is not a historical nor chronological report. It is rather “a working paper”. The purpose of this rather brief report is to reflect on three major issues: first, what are the characteristics of the world we live in? How stable and predictable is it? Are those in power know what are they doing? Or is it the blind leading the blind? Is our sense of uncertainty and thus unpredictability a product of mental crisis related to one in a lifetime pandemic experience? or is it more structural with long historical span? The second question is how dangerous and out of control is the Middle east region? Or is it? The Abraham Accords promise a new dawn for the region? Paradise is just around the corner or the calm preceding the storm? The third question, where does Jordan fit in these wider circles of activities both global and regional? Deliberately we left out of the report any serious considerations of the economic aspect challenge facing Jordan which is both self-evident and widely recognized. Moreover, the emphasis is on the geostrategic aspects of security related to the global level, the regional level and that of Jordan. Let us first look at the world.

II. World of Uncertainty

Geopolitical realignment is power based. Any attempt to take seriously and literally value based alignment would place the US at disadvantage.

During month of March 2021, three things happened. President Biden accused Putin of Russia as being a murderer. Putin requested his ambassador in the US to return back to Moscow for consultation. A distant meeting took place between presidents and prime ministers of the US, India, Japan and Australia (the Quad) to conduct a strategy on how to contain China. And finally, the United Kingdom decided to double its nuclear arsenal.

One can paraphrase these individual cases into broader and rather disturbing questions: First, the enigma of Russia and how the issue of rising authoritarianism can be addressed? Second, the challenge of China and how best to address it? Equally important is the question of

NATO relevance in this context cannot be ignored. No EU country took part in the Quad meeting. Third, how upgrading and increasing of nuclear arsenal by nuclear weapon states could influence nuclear proliferation including the most obvious case of Iran.

There is a sense in which one view of Russia is becoming blurred as distant memory the result of self-isolation. Russians progressively perceive themselves as being disconnected from the world, particularly that of the west. Indeed, despite Russians occasional strategic adventurism in Syria and Ukraine, that sense of isolation remains evident.

Indeed, Putin's Russia could only survive in the spirit of inward retreat. Taking logic of openness to the limit, Russia's limitation would become evident a junior partner to china at best. Despite the close relations between China and Russia, the latter is hesitant to enter into formal security alignment with China because that amounts to its recognition of that junior status. One can also see the logic of Russia's lack of interest in becoming say an EU member under which Russia is not likely to lead. Russia is not acting as strategic planner, or one with a strategic vision, but rather as wounded predator who attack and retreat.

President Biden in rather undiplomatic language attacked Putin as a killer and threatened him of "he will pay" for his interference in the American presidential election of 2020 on the side of his opponent former president Trump. Leaving aside Biden's outburst, Russia's pursuit of world chaos is unmistakable. That is not to say that Russia is pursuing global anarchy or a world turns into itself in which case Russia itself would not be spared. Rather Russia is pursuing policy of identifying Achilles heel of potential areas of exploitation. This amounts to growing form of Russia's interventionism. In the case of Syria and Libya, the logic of intervention is self-evidently clear. It raises Russia's standing among regional states and beyond which with minimum cost to Russia is a plus. Russia is already trying to capitalize on that by offering itself as an alternative ally to that of the US (arms, trades and market). In the case of Ukraine, Russia' intervention led to annexation of Crimea to Mother Russia, and by creating chaos in the eastern Ukraine, Russia, is placing itself not as a threat to European security, but rather the indispensable partner to addressing that threat!

No solution to eastern Ukraine's crisis without Russia's involvement which is translated into Russia becoming stakeholder in such dispute.

Russia's intervention in various elections in many western countries including Britain and the United States deserves some attention. Brexit and Russia's intervention in this respect is a text book scenario in which Russia would benefit from weakening both Britain and the EU which are perceived as actual or potential threat to Russia. Weakening thy opponent! This is also true in the case of intervention in various East European elections, supporting "pro-Russian" parties and weakening cohesion of the EU depriving the latter from the ability to mount any serious cost to Russia for its behavior. As for Russia's intervention in the American elections both in 2016 and that of 2020 is a matter of speculation but the logic is also clear. Russia stands to benefit from undermining the integrity of American democratic project. This is no small achievement for political authority which sees the immediate threat to its survivability free and fair election, and that of prevailing rule of law. Undermining US democratic project is in a way undermining the value and meaning of democracy in practice. It deprives the US from its soft power. The second advantage to Russia from such intervention is that of weakening American unity which is under threat from growing a form of ultra nationalist sentiment which former president seemed to embrace and represent. Considering the ethnic aspect of that nationalism, Russia might be perceived as an ally rather than threat, after all, Russia is white, Christian country. Finally, by intervening on behalf of certain candidate would by logic create sentiment of dependency on behalf of the side intervention was launched, it is called being grateful.

The irony of growing and supporting American ultra-form of nationalism may provide Russia with a breathing space, yet make confrontation with Russia's ally China more likely. Indeed, it was one of the issues which the Chinese side raised with the American Secretary of State Blinken during his first visit to China (the Guardian 19/3/2021). Pushing the ultra-nationalist agenda to its logic, it would make cooperation with major and traditional allies as Japan and South Korea also impossible. India would also feel the heat at American white nationalism as well. Thus, Russia's support to white nationalism in the US carries a lot of ironies, but also is perhaps the surest way to American ruin (internal strife). This may indeed explain Russia's determination to use cyber war in relation to the American context, and

why China despite the risk never attempted to discourage Russia from such intervention.

Russia's authoritarian form of government is in direct conflict with the rule of law and democratic values the Biden administration trying to promote or at least upheld. Russia in this context is a direct challenge to that orientation and the seriousness of that challenge cannot be underestimated. China's overreaction to the US reference to issues of human rights offers a rare public rebuke to American officials before the whole world to see. And it was meant to be known.

How the US would proceed in such agenda is already showing the pressure of solid and orchestrated responses by various authoritarian states led by Russia and China.

The EU in this context with investment agreement signed this year with China and during the Biden administration taking office, offers how far the EU would be willing to go in adopting such agenda. Indeed, even the Quad meeting is itself full of ironies. India under Modi is heading towards an authoritarian form of government, and it was brought to counter China's abuse of human rights?! India of course had a different priority to the US, and the latter was aware of it. How far Japan can embrace a human rights, promotion of democratic values as a core of its foreign policy even in dealing with China. Not very far. Japan's record on issues of human rights and that of promotion of democracy is well known, clear and consistent. Japan takes the issue of non-intervention in this context literally as seriously. South Korea is not different to that of Japan. None of the Asian major powers would follow seriously any human rights or promotion of democracy agenda. China knows that. Pushed too far by Americans such agenda may prove counterproductive and God sent an opportunity to various authoritarian regimes who would cherish turning human rights agenda into nationalist counter attack agenda. Clearly this is a world of rising nationalism not human rights age. For various authoritarian, and we may add some democratic regimes, regimes nationalism and exclusivity is the only *raison d'être* for their survivability and existence.

The Covid pandemic of 2020 and 2021, although global and universal in its reach and devastation, the response to it and particularly that of vaccination program was for understandable reasons essentially nationalist. Others were receiving leftover of the rich. An irony and a reality which would only encourage and support nationalist sentiment.

No one can doubt that nationalist sentiment, exclusivity and anti-others is also gaining ground in various countries at the receiving end of immigration. No matter how global we may sound in terms of expressing our worry and concern of the deteriorating status of the environment, the shadow of nationalist agenda is unlikely to go under.

The Biden administration would learn very fast, that the transition from Trump administration to the new is not as dramatic as it sounds. Perhaps, the US would grow to speak in softer tone, carrying a big stick and leading by the power of example but no more!

The real challenge then facing the United States is geostrategic, namely how to address the rise of China and nature and scale of global alignments as a way of addressing that challenge. In that sense, Quad was very useful starting point in thinking a loud and exploring such response. The emphasis on democratic credentials and human rights issue can only obscure the clarity and purpose of such actual and potential global alignments. Overemphasizing countering authoritarian states would only entrap the US and diminish its flexibility in response. In the heat of war, we tend to forget history. The cold war was not ideological but geostrategic war. The famous Kissinger phrase about the “China card” is still relevant today. China adopted anti Soviet posture and practically was part of Western alliance. China was as now authoritarian and non-democratic.

The cold war was anti-communist war, but not anti-authoritarian war. Many of these allied themselves with the west were authoritarian if not tyrannical regimes. The moral justification for the war is not ideological but rather self-preservation. There was shared view of communist menace threatening states and regimes.

China by many accounts pose more sophisticated and complex challenge to the US than that of the Soviet Union was ever be. Economically, it is global power and highly integrated into the world economic system. It plays by international rules, member of the world Trade Organizations. Even in case of violation of these rules, it is still willing to abide by the WTO rulings, and to take its case to WTO in its dispute with the US. It placed itself as champion of global free trade filling the rhetorical gap left by the Trump administration.

It advocates non-interventionist Foreign Policy. China also is a nationalist state. Communism with Chinese characteristics is really placing more emphasis on its nationalist character rather than

communist attribute even China cannot define. The Chinese communist party is nationalist party but in name. Indeed, many of its domestic and foreign policy agenda are a reflection of that nationalist sentiment including that of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, North Korea divide, India and Xinjiang. Despite the rhetoric, China is more than willing to play along with nationalist, global agenda. President Xi is no less nationalist than president of Brazil, PM of India and indeed former president Trump of the US.

Thus the US is facing nationalist China and growing and expanding Chinese nationalism. Taiwan is most likely to be the next flash point after Hong Kong. The US no matter how it defines itself is surrounded by major powers in which nationalism is the defining feature of their character. This is true of friends and foes. The question then from practical point of view is how to counter, accommodate, confront the rise of nationalist China and global setting characterized by nationalist orientation?

Thus the world as we know it, if one to cut through the cloud of moral sentiment, is a reflection of realist and utilitarian underpinnings. International alignments should reflect clear sighted calculation and difference to both schools of thought. The best we can hope for is an enlightened self-interest in which one can look ahead rather than tumble as a result of looking down at one feet.

China is a real challenge to the US and many other major powers. China itself is not shying away from self-image of exceptionalism as a result of that rise. Both its military buildup and expansion into South China sea are only reflection of that rise. Even when the world is suffering from its worst economic down turn China is increasing its military expenditure for the year 2021 by six percent (appendix). Its ability to expand that military spending is feasible considering it is still below that of the US relevant to GDP. The simple and rather the naïve question is so what? What if China were to turn the world global leader both economically and militarily?

However, the consequence of rising China unchecked could have serious implications for specific countries and in dealing with specific issues, to more general and grand. Specifically, China would make certain demands on countries which China has say territorial disputes including that of Japan, India, South Korea, Taiwan and many other Asian countries bordering say South China Sea. The settlement of these disputes would reflect the asymmetry of power. The expansion and construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea would more likely develop into controlling sea lanes with clear consequences for global trade and comparative advantage (i.e., bargaining chip for allowing or denying access). Third, China would pursue global agenda which is essentially Chinese agenda dressed in universal reference. China's global rise would demand recognition in a form of paying homage and allegiance to the rising global power. This is particularly would be painful prospect for countries such as Japan whose self-image and self-confidence would be shattered. And to draw on the wisdom of Thucydides in his Penopensian war, that the threat which Athens posed was nothing to do with the Athenians as race but rather product of their rising power.

The threat or the challenge the rise of China may unleash would likely have immediate consequences. For its vicinity (Japan, India, South Korea...etc.) these are the countries which would experience the Chinese heat first hand. The US and the EU may afford to be philosophical about that challenge. Clearly, however, they all have common interest to ensure that China's energy be source of good rather than fear and destruction. China therefore has to be contained.

III. Nuclear Agenda

Nuclear weapons are becoming integral part of defense strategy of many nuclear weapons members of the NPT and outside the NPT regime, Nuclear disarmament though desirable but not achievable or feasible in the short and medium terms. The threat of proliferation of nuclear weapons is therefore increasing.

The United Kingdom decision (March 2021) to abandon its self-imposed limit on its nuclear arsenal of 225 warheads as well as previous target of reducing its nuclear warheads to 180 by the mid 2020's (rusi.org) serves

as a reminder of the volatility and unpredictability of global strategic environment including status of nuclear weapons in military strategy.

The most obvious reason behind re-emphasizing the nuclear dimension of Britain overall military strategy is growing uncertainty with intentions and purposes of both China and Russia. Post Brexit view of the world seems also to underline self-reliance rather than being dependent on the goodwill or otherwise of its Western partners including France and the United States.

This, however, can only complicate what is already difficult and confusing international nuclear regime.

Britain's nuclear capability is small compared to say that of US and Russia. However, it is major nuclear weapon state compared with the rest of nuclear weapon countries both signatory to the Non-proliferation treaty (NPT) and outside that frame namely France, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel.

Country	Nuclear warheads
United States of America	5,800-6,185
Russia	6,372-6,490
United Kingdom	200-215
France	290
China	300-320
India	150
Pakistan	16 – 198
North Korea	30 – 40
Israel	90

(Source: Wikipedia .org)

Both Russia and the United States agreed to renew the New Start Treaty, which came into force on February 5th 2011, through to Feb. 2026 is certainly a welcome development. The treaty limit the number of nuclear warheads deployed by each to 1,550 nuclear heads. (US state Department). This is certainly an improvement compared with nuclear deployment by each side exceeding 8,000 nuclear warheads at some point during the cold war. And more so if the nuclear arsenal of the two countries compared with the cold war reaching 30,000 nuclear warheads owned by the former Soviet Union. Still in pure number Russia and the

US are still in a league of their own when it comes to nuclear weapons stored by the two countries.

The European nuclear threat is also increasingly unstable following the United States decision to decline renewing the intermediate range nuclear forces treaty which expired August 2019. This opens up different possibilities and scenarios thus increasing state of uncertainty in the European theatre.

More fundamentally, development, related to nuclear weapons can only increase the threat of the spread of the nuclear weapons undermining the credibility of the Non-Proliferation Treaty as the major instrument of nuclear disarmament. In 1995 when the (NPT) was under review which led to the treaty becoming permanent, a debate was taking place between what is known nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states concerning the seriousness and commitment of (NWS) to achieve nuclear disarmament as stipulated by the treaty itself. The NPT was initially made temporary (25 years) to emphasize the point that possession of nuclear weapons was temporary as well, Thus, the treaty was made permanent but the intention remained the same namely global nuclear disarmament. To address that concern nuclear weapon states agreed to limit their nuclear activities by banning nuclear testing hence the comprehensive test ban treaty (CTBT) (1996). However, as of today eight states needed to ratify the treaty to enter into force declined to do so including China, Egypt, Iran and the United States. India, North Korea and Pakistan refused to sign it (Wikipedia.org)

As it stands, the international nuclear regime is self-contradicting and of little use to curb nuclear proliferation or achieve nuclear disarmament. The NPT regime dividing states into nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states is neither logical nor sustainable. Nuclear weapon states commitment to the NPT regime are also doubtful and repeatedly undermined by their behavior. As of existence of nuclear states outside the NPT regime also add to undermining the credibility and the sustainability of the NPT regime itself. Different nuclear weapon states outside the NPT regime are treated differently say compare India and North Korea. The weakening of the moral basis of the nuclear regime as a result of contradicting and inconsistent legal regime would only ensure that nuclear weapons are not only have to stay but rather spread of nuclear weapons is likely to increase. This is a bad omen for the Middle East region in particular as discussed in the next section.

The US choices in addressing the challenge of rising and assertive China are complicated by competing if not incompatible global sets of agenda. As this section demonstrates an American led geostrategic realignment which is essentially military power based would be hard pressed to accommodate value based system in which issues as democracy and human rights are central. Pushed too hard and dogmatically even mainly pursued would undermine the rational, meaning and justification of the former. It would open the US to accusation of inconsistency which would undermine the credibility and seriousness of what the US is pursuing. Its damage would not be confined to the moral agenda.

Another complicated factor is that of nuclear weapons. Threat of nuclear war and the challenge of nuclear proliferation pose a serious threat to survivability of the planet earth. Pursuing the goal of nuclear disarmament as a structural way of addressing issue of nuclear proliferation is both sensible and logical. This, however is unlikely to be achieved in the foreseeable future nor to be seriously pursued by nuclear weapon states. It is in fact safe to say that all nuclear weapon states, those party to the NPT treaty or outside that regime are considering the nuclear option as integral part of their defense strategy. Russia and China are on the path of nuclear re-modernization program, Britain is revisiting its nuclear option and the US is not behind in such endeavor. Thus geostrategic realignment is partly but significantly nuclear weapon based. The Quad which includes India as nuclear weapon state outside the NPT regime is a point of illustration. Bad to the world. Good luck for nuclear weapon states. This irony and paradox is not going to be resolved anytime soon.

Global geostrategic realignment would take place against other competing global agenda including intensifying economic interdependence if not integration, environmental global concern and as the current Corona pandemic demonstrates a global health hazard. These would complicate the nature and scope of geostrategic realignment.

Already trade with China and Russia is creating possible tension between the US and many geostrategic allies including EU countries. At the time of increasing sanction unilaterally by the United States against China, the latter and the EU signed framework of investment agreement. Gas export by Russia to Germany and many EU countries is a point of tension with the United States. Considering the complex web of economic relations, that even the United states might decouple geostrategic realignment from economic relations. Pushing the agenda of economic sanction too far might prove counterproductive. There are many other countries small and

medium power states, who may prove to be valuable in terms of global geostrategic realignment, which cannot afford “economic war” with China. Thus what is likely to emerge in addressing the necessity of geostrategic realignment on the one hand, and the avoidable economic cooperation and the need for global response to global challenges, are the following options: individual responses, in which each state or group of states act according to necessity and circumstances without any clear linkage with that of geostrategic realignment. This implies also the possibility of limited cooperation and coordination between states but which can be cross divide of geostrategic realignment.

Finally, it is possible, though far from being clear, that economic cooperation in areas which may have military or security consequences would be suspended or prohibited with that conceived the strategic challenges namely China and Russia. Turkish acquisition of the Russian S.400. More broadly, the contention about admitting the Chinese G5 technology as well as its involvement in certain infrastructure project. Israeli-Chinese relations and US response to that illustrates the later point.

Navigating the world geostrategic realignment map is far from clear nor easy.

IV. The Middle East: North by Northwest.

Major threat to the Middle Eastern security is the growing personification of politics. Politics is personal makes the prospect of stable Middle East unattainable inflaming already volatile region.

Understanding the Middle East is similar to our attempt to understand a chaotic mind, unpredictable but somehow functioning. A region has so many crisis happening, at the same time, war in Yemen, civic war in Syria, crisis in Libya, tension in Iraq, and at a time the Gulf crisis, instability in Sudan, Algeria, Tunisia and of course the age long Israeli -Palestinian conflict, and yet presents itself as normal. If one adds the open-ended issue of political legitimacy of various regional states, the sense of suspension and cloud of unpredictability are always there. As things happening, an indication or harbinger of future prospect, one cannot be but continuously guarded. The

region is involved in horse racing, but the race is never ending and there is no winning horse.

The chaotic aspect of the Middle East region is the product of tension within and between states which never allowed to evolve into natural end nor for method of self-correction to function. Thus instead of having Hegelian long term optimistic evolution, the Middle East is trapped in a form of history in which past events and accumulative awareness are scraped for the fun of starting “afresh”. As a result, the Middle East is therefore not governed by purpose, self-reflection or accumulative wisdom of any kind, but rather directed by impulse and self – indulgent posturing of all types. This shows the difficulty of reforming the region or starting new historical direction. It shows the limit of external intervention in pursuing new historical purpose.

Henry Kissinger famously remarked that Israel had no foreign policy but merely domestic politics. In fact, it is even worse than that, politics in the region is personal. In that sense, Israel was domesticated to become normal Middle Eastern state. In 1967 when Egypt under Jamal Abdil Nassir suffered its worst defeat in modern history, took the calculated decision of taking moral and political responsibility for the defeat offering his resignation. Protests and demonstrations followed. Nassir withdrew his resignation. Egypt lived happy hereafter, confident its leader was in the helm. Hardly, Egypt’s history and politics can be separated from the personal. In 1988 Ayatollah Khomaini contemplating to accept the end of the Iraq-Iran remarked of the decision as worse than drinking poison. Ayatollah Khamenei and likely successor would cultivate personal image which leaves its mark on the idea of the political. Political history of Iraq could never be understood independent of person and personality of Saddam Hussein. Bashar Al-Assad’s image is larger than the State of Syria. Reducing politics to the personal, multiplied with personality contest over the region makes the idea of politics impossible and moving into the realm of reasoning unachievable. Hardly, the most recent Gulf crisis could be understood independent of personality clash.

Thus one reason for the difficulty of reordering regional priorities and creating meaningful stable realignment in the region is that of prevailing notion of politics as personal.

Pursuing hegemonic status in the region makes no rational sense except a form of vanity and posturing. No Middle Eastern state has the power or prestige to come near hegemonic status. Irrational as it is, pursuing regional

hegemony is a major security risk facing the region undermining prospect of stability.

It is customary to look at regional politics as struggle or conflict for regional hegemony in which list of competitors is under constant revision. However, as things stand, four countries stand out as potential members on the list including: Iran, Turkey, Israel and Saudi Arabia. Egypt itself is not so sure whether it would like to be included or not. It acts occasionally as if it is contender for the East Mediterranean extended presence, yet on the other hand its occupation with the challenge the Ethiopian Grand Renaissance Dam posing the survivability of its Nile river and the enormous and mounting domestic economic, social and political pressures, pushing back Egypt to self-reflection if not self-doubt.

The question is how seriously can the pursue of hegemony in the region as policy directed aim can be taken? Not very seriously. Any regional state which sees the goal of regional hegemony as a guide of policy is pursuing an illusion and inhabiting the world of fantasy. The noise, posturing and flag waving would do nothing to achieve that goal or make it more sensible. Such aim if inhabits the mind of any is product of exaggerating one's own power, yet underestimating the magnitude of challenges. More importantly, no regional hegemonic order is sustainable in the Middle East, and the mobilizing power of its existence would be the seeds of its destruction. It is a self-defeating aim and would deliver nothing of material gains.

One indication that Egypt is not pursuing regional hegemony is that of its low military expenditure (1.2%) of its GDP (Data.worldbank.org) as of 2019. Countries as that of Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman fall into category of high military expenditure states:

Country	Military Expenditure
Saudi Arabia	8.0%
Israel	5.3%
UAE	5-6%
Oman	8.8%

Military expenditures as percentage of GDP for 2019 (Source Sipri-fs-2020-4-milex, data.worldbank.org)

Both Iran and Turkey fall into “average” military expenditure countries. Iran military expenditure for 2019 was 2.3% of its GDP and that of Turkey 2.7% of its GDP. The question is how such figures can be stipulated into achieving hegemonic status in the region?

In the case of Israel and Saudi Arabia the question of sustainability arises. Can Israel and Saudi Arabia afford to continue such high level of military expenditure. In case of Israel such high military spending is partly subsidized by American military assistance (3 billion US\$ a year) which by itself shows the limitation of Israeli military capabilities. Saudi Arabia would have no choice but to reduce its military expenditure. Even by ignoring the question of sustainability, can either state achieve regional hegemony? Saudi Arabia is already distracted by what seems to be intractable conflict in Yemen, costing Saudi Arabia financial and loss of prestige. Saudi Arabia capability to create regional alignment in which Saudi Arabia can use as launching pad for leaderships role looks non-existent. Israel is also distracted and its power projection is curtailed by very volatile and menacing border instability (i.e. Lebanon, Syria and potentially Iraq).

Iran by design or default is becoming sectarian state. Sunni population as well as states would prefer to go to stone age rather than accept Shia domination. The ideological and political basis of the Iranian state serve as major obstacle to any Iranian attempt to dominate the region. It can only call on its harsh power since it lacks any trace of soft power or leadership by example. Iran relations with many regional states, particularly that of the Gulf, are defined by hard power (drones, missiles, sabotage...). This led many Gulf states to rethink the unthinkable namely open alignment with Israel. The Abraham Accords is an example of that emerging realignment in the region. However, this is not new dawn but rather a sign of increasing chance of future confrontation and instability in the region. Gulf states are driven mainly by fear, and Iran increasingly enjoying the role of spoiler and creating havoc could only lead to more disasters.

This growing Iranian threat led to speculation about normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. This is not unlikely. However, this is not to stipulate that a stable alliance between these two countries is feasible or sustainable. Although Saudi Arabia may not have what it takes to be hegemon itself, it will certainly resist being perceived a junior partner to that of Israel. Thus, although the Iranian threat may have encouraged the creation or possibility of a counter alliance to contain that threat, this is unlikely to lead to regional stability nor the cohesion of that counter alliance is self – evident. Before turning to discussing the role of nuclear weapons in the

region, few words on the Turkish pursuit of regional hegemony or at least competition with others for that possible status.

Turkey is major regional power. Its economy although nominally comparable to that of Saudi Arabia (649 billion US\$) compared to Saudi Arabia 680 billion US\$ /GDP 2020) by far however is the largest regional economy in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) which reflects reality of the economy than its nominal GDP figure might reveal

Country	GDP (US\$)	PPP (US\$)
Turkey	649 Billion	2.38 Trillion
Saudi Arabia	680 Billion	1.6 Trillion
Iran	610 Billion	1.007 Trillion
Israel	387.712 Billion	334.675 Trillion
Egypt	362 Billion	1.5 Trillion

(GDP/PPP 2020)

Source: Wikipedia .org

Turkey is European, Central Asian, Middle Eastern country. It is also NATO member with formidable and well-disciplined army. Despite all these impressive attributes of Turkey, it is distracted power. It has historical long lasting territorial dispute with Greece in the Aegean Sea as well as the Mediterranean Sea (the issue of Cyprus). Iraq's northern border is considered by Turkey as war zone in its long fight against the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party) and its affiliate now operating in Syria the YPG (people's Protection Unit) which is an issue of contention with the United states. When Justice and Development Party of president Recep Tayyib Erdogan came to power in 2003, the party seemed to recognize that Turkey had enough on its plate to pursue aggressive diplomatic posturing nor any expansionist policy. Indeed, that seemed to bear fruits and its friendly neighborly relations with Iraq and Syria were flourishing. That was also true of other Arab countries including Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The popularity of Erdogan and Turkey was at the verge of achieving status of leaderships in the region through example. That, however, was soon to end and Turkey was caught wrong footed in relation and response to what is known as the Arab spring of 2011.

This led to Turkish policy torn between taking advantage of what seemed open-ended opportunities and mitigating against is enormous challenges, and refugees were the easy part. Wounded and insecure, many Arab states lashed

out at Turkey of Erdogan, and the battle became personal and test of will. There was no place of forgiveness and no mood for compromise. Turkey's relation with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were as if caught in storm only bitterness and anger remained.

In retrospect, however, Turkey seemed to recognize, the experience of Turkey with the region demonstrate, the illusion of any hegemonies intention and the cost of pursuing it out weight any potential benefit. As of this writing, Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia seem to be on the path of mending their relations beyond a harvest of discontent.

The Middle East and the Nuclear Factor

Iran nuclear weapon ambition would unleash nuclear weapon proliferation in the region which would make the whole region as sitting on volcano. Preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear option is regional and global necessity.

Acquiring nuclear weapons by Iran would most likely make Iran militarily seemed invincible. Nuclear weapon states would be deterred fear of retaliation from attacking Iran, and non-nuclear weapon states would be too scared to show any military resilience. Iran would then be free to expand its influence and extend its reach. Dawn of Persian empire / sectarian state would then be round the corner. This is of course too neat to be realistic but too frightening to be unsettling for many regional states to contemplate. This shows, however, the uncompromising response by other regional powers to such possibility including Israel, Saudi Arabia and UAE. It is of course an open question of whether re-joining the nuclear deal known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (2015) by the Biden administration offers a solution to Iran nuclear ambition or not? Israel and Saudi Arabia both believed it would not. The American administration might have a different view.

However, one needs to approach the Iranian nuclear option from rather a different angle. How serious is the threat of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East? The answer is a serious concern: First, the weakness and growing irrelevance of the nuclear non-proliferation regime due to behaviour, policies and attitudes of both nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states. Of relevance as well the de facto creation of nuclear weapon states outside the nuclear regime itself undermining further the credibility of the regime. Second, nuclear weapon is seen by certain states, say North Korea as the only military option addressing a clear asymmetry in conventional military

capability to that of actual, potential or imagined enemies. That logic seemed to be at work in the Iranian thinking as well. The problem of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons is that it would not be the last in the region. Chain of constraining nuclear proliferation would no longer hold.

For a long-term solution to the threat of nuclear weapon proliferation is simply two folds: First, revival and implementation of the Middle East region as nuclear weapons free zone. Regional states and external powers should aim at achieving that. And the other is for the creation of global consensus to pursue consistently the purpose of non-proliferation nuclear regime namely nuclear disarmament.

The Palestinian Issue: Relevant No More?

The temptation to undervalue or to dismiss the Palestinian issue is self-delusional. Addressing the Palestinian issue would prove to be the only meaningful foundation for regional stability.

The Abraham Accords (2020) which led to normalization of relations between UAE, Bahrain and that of Israel raised a fundamental question about the relevance of the Palestinian issue to regional security and stability. The accord followed by both Sudan and Morocco proclaiming new page in relations with Israel. Palestinian initial outrage was outwardly very evident ranging from expression of “stab in the back”, betrayal and selling out and other expressions. The shock and the outrage were on display which led to the Palestinian authority to refuse receiving UAE dispatched corona vaccine sent as aid to the Palestinians mounting to self-harm but justified as an expression of anger and deep disappointment with Emirates. Suddenly there was an eerie silence. Quietly but consistently any dispatch of assistance was accepted and welcomed, Palestinians were asked to lower their temper and to mind their expressions. Palestinians recognized they could not afford protracted war of attrition with what seemed to be an endless list of countries willing to join the Abraham accords. At the moment Palestinians are wondering what to do next and the road to statehood seemed endless and without signs or directions. In normal circumstances, peace agreements should be accompanied with genuine display of pleasure and happiness. The true sentiment is more likely tamed resignation. The chapter of the Palestinian issue is yet to be closed.

Does the Abraham Accords help or hinder a meaningful solution to the Palestinian issue? Clearly and as Palestinians suspected and believed, the Accord was signed not for purpose of finding a solution to the Palestinian issue but rather in spite of the Palestinian issue. Many Israeli commentators rightly pointed out the Palestinians (i.e. Palestinian authority) were no longer holding right of veto on normalization between Israel and Arab countries. Abraham accord was the evident. However, and to be fair to the Palestinians holding out the prospect of normalization between Israel and many Arab countries was self-imposed restriction (i.e. veto) by Arab States themselves as clearly the Arab Peace Initiative (2002) stipulated. No Arab country was forced or intimidated to join the Arab peace initiative. Leaving aside the issue of semantics the Abraham accord was the logical consequence of changing regional dynamics and the rise of the Iranian threat in which waiting for meaningful solution to the Palestinian issue was a luxury many Arab countries felt they could not afford.

The key to a solution to the Palestinian issue remains in the hand of the Israeli electoral map. Will there be enough coalition of the willing to find amicable and decent solution to the Palestinian issue? This is the billion-dollar question.

There are moral, legal and political grounds to insist on finding a solution to the Palestinian issue. These are the very basis in which any sustainable and regional order can and should be constructed.

Reducing politics to the personal is a serious impediment to any meaningful pursuit of regional order and stability. Personal politics is by definition inward looking, exclusive and partial. It distorts the notion of state interest with vanity and posturing. Regional hegemony by any reasonable account is neither achievable nor meaningful. A simple cost-benefit analysis would dismiss the pursuit of regional hegemony as a form of distorted mind edging at the border of madness. So is the pursuit of nuclear weapons in Middle Eastern context. The region faces very serious challenges including environmental degradation, economic difficulties to use Japanese expression describing a decade of economic stagnation a living in the ice age. Add to that depleting infrastructure, education of irrelevance to the need of market, unemployment, poverty and inequality. To reduce addressing these very serious regional threats to that of personal vanity and state of mind is truly frightening prospect. To put the dilemma facing the region in a form of proposition there is a serious gap between challenges, some of which can be existential threat, facing the region and the tools and means to address these

challenges. There is no credible, meaningful, sustainable institutional frame to address challenges at the regional level as well as at the level of many national states. Personification of politics not only distort our understanding of these challenges and how serious they are; it inflames already a volatile situation.

V. Jordan: Time to Reflect

V.I Jordanian-Israeli Relations

Jordan and Israel share many common interests. However, bilateral relations are prone to crisis as a result of asymmetry in power which tempts Israeli policy makers to devalue Jordan strategic asset and importance creating suspicion on the side of Jordan that Israeli might attempt to address its strategic vulnerability of Jordan's expense.

The Jordanian-Israeli relations are difficult to describe and a real intellectual challenge to understand. It is therefore can easily fall into misunderstanding leading every now and then to eruption of crisis the last of which was the cancelled visit by the Jordanian crown prince Hussein ibn Abdullah II to Jerusalem and subsequent Jordanian response declining to give the plane of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu the right to fly over Jordan en route to the UAE, leading to a cancelation of scheduled visit to Abu Dhabi. The attempted assassination of Hamas leader Mashal in 1997 was another case in point. In July 2017 Jordanian citizen was also killed by an Israeli security guard working at the Israeli embassy in Amman which led to the replacement of the Israeli ambassador to Jordan. Yet the relations survived. However, ambiguity and lack of clarity concerning nature of relations and legitimate expectations on the Jordanian side could lead to more serious and lasting harm to that relations. Jordan should not be taken for granted.

There are three reasons which may explain this Israeli ambivalent towards Jordan which lead to occasional risk taking and "Jordan for granted" syndrome. First and most importantly is that of power asymmetry between the two states. Economically speaking Israeli economy (387 billion US\$) is almost 9 times the size of the Jordanian economy (44 billion US\$) Israel spends on defense (20 billion US\$) 10 times that of Jordan (1.9 billion US\$). Handling power asymmetry is not always easy and some politicians may in fact fail to do so. There is no doubt that Israel brings this disparity of

capability in its relations with Jordan. Another factor which distorts nature of relations between the two states is that of Israeli regular reassessment of the relative value of Jordan. Thus, using such assessment Jordan value can swing in a pendulum. Finally, some Israeli politicians speak of Jordan as if it is the latter which benefited from the bilateral relations rather than as it is mutual beneficial even the blind can see.

Jordan, on the other hand, has a symmetrical perception of the relations leading to disappointment and frustration. Jordan views its contribution to the bilateral relations as being significant but not dually recognized by the Israeli side. These include military and security contribution (border and terrorism) economic contribution actual and potential considering the strategic value of Jordanian territory for any future plan of linking Israel with the Gulf region. And finally, Jordan political contribution to the process of normalizing Israel into the region. The relative success of the Jordanian – Israeli model, despite the pitfalls, were no doubt of residual influence on other Arab States. Although officially Jordan declined to encourage or discourage people to people contact and cooperation, Jordan never placed any constrain on those who were willing and by choice to do.

The real test of relations however is and will be that of the Palestinian issue. In theory there is a majority of Israelis who support the two state solutions. However, there is no coalition of the willing to pursue politically that option and in terms of impact on Israeli electoral behaviour the Palestinian issue is pushed low in terms of priority. This allowed for the shift to the right and even on the extreme right to consolidate its position and even flourish. The deciding factor in terms of electoral behaviour, considering the low value placed on the conflict with the Palestinians, became provincial and localized not in terms of geography but rather in terms of ideological exclusivity. If this trend were to continue the implications for the Palestinian issue could be very negative. In order to create a winning coalition major party as that of Likud is pushed to the extreme right and showed willingness to enter into coalition with more extreme parties.

This precisely what worries Jordan. Extreme right-wing government in Israel naturally pursues expansion of settlement making the prospect of establishing a viable Palestinian entity a distant possibility. Jordan genuinely believes that neither Jordan nor Israel can meaningfully address the identity of their states, and thus their political structures, without addressing and finding a meaningful solution to that of the Palestinian issue. It would also curtail a meaningful trilateral cooperation between the three parties. Which brings us to the issue of identity and political reform in Jordan.

V.2 Identity and Political Reform

Jordan political reform can be fully implemented and sustained only when Palestinians have secured identity. Both Jordanian and Palestinian identities are evolving. Both prone to threat perception of marginalization. Identity challenge facing Jordan can only be addressed meaningfully in the context of Jordanian, Palestinian and Jewish identities are secured and self-assured.

Jordan is not blank slate in which grand theoretical scheme of reform can automatically apply. In fact, pursuing such scheme mechanically and without imagination could lead to destabilizing Jordan with no guarantee of success to reform itself. We have to start with the assumption that both Jordanian and Palestinian identities need to be secured and self-assuring, without which would make any meaningful reform self-delusional.

Neither Israel nor Jordan can ignore the Palestinian component of their national identities. As a result, unless the three identities somehow are satisfied the issue of identity would remain an open issue and potentially a source of contention. For Jordan accommodating the two major components of its identity namely the Jordanian and that of the Palestinian is a balancing act. In 1996 the late king Hussein defined the Jordanian identity as being inclusive to cover all Jordanians regardless of “backgrounds and origins”, a phrase king Abdullah kept using till 2014 in all his public speeches. That phrase has subsequently been supplemented with other expressions such as “Jordan First” (2002). Loyally, rights and duties are related to and can be defined in reference to the Jordanian state. Clearly king Abdullah was moving towards equating identity with the notion of citizenship (equal rights-equal duties) which expressed itself through “according to will” and efforts so would be the return (2007). And “We are all Jordan 2007). More importantly King Abdullah through his working papers 2017 was articulating a vision of “civil state” in which identity and citizenship are inseparable.

This vision can only be futuristic. Jordan is not an isolated island and cannot turn a blind eye to reality. The reality is that the notion of identity is not purely legal, although legality and law are foundation of any entity deserves the name, but psychological and evolving. The truth of the matter is this there are three identities inhabiting Jordan and Israel namely, Jewish identity, Jordanian identity and Palestinian identity. For any sustainable and enduring stability such identities have to be fulfilled and secured. Israel by declaring itself Jewish state will not make the Palestinians invisible. Jordan cannot ignore Palestinian aspirations and desire for belonging. Unless these three identities are comfortable with themselves, they cannot outreach to the others.

And this can only be achieved by establishing Palestinian entity, comfortable and secure with itself.

V.3 Jordan: Regional Setting

One cannot choose its region. Challenges and contradictions in the Middle Eastern region will test Jordan's diplomatic skill to the limit.

Before assessing Jordan's options in the region, it is worth capturing the essentials of the region or its defining characteristics. As things stand the prospect seems unsettling. The Middle East is characterized by the following: first, politics is personal. This means that policies are conducted based on personal impulse and sense of vanity rather than rational necessity accessible and can be communicated clearly. Unpredictability is very high and shift of attitudes can be swift and unsettling. This personal dimension of politics flourishes in environment of exclusivity and dogma (ideological-sectarian-tribal-ultranationalist) Second, the illusion of regional hegemony. Although no major regional power can achieve or sustain hegemonic status, this has not prevented these states from exploring that possibility leading to tension, instability, alignment and counter alignment characteristic of the current state of the region. This is not likely to end soon. And finally, the region is facing the threat of nuclear arms race, highlighted by Iran's pursuit of nuclear option. Taken together it illustrates the instability of the region, and that the threat of escalation cannot be ruled out.

In such regional setting what are Jordan's options? One of course cannot choose its region. Jordan however would need to call on its patience, endurance and imagination to the full. As for the personal dimension of politics, there is little Jordan can do except to endure and advice.

There is no guarantee that it will work and others are willing to listen. As for the struggle for regional hegemony Jordan will continue to draw on its long historical associations with other states including Gulf states, Egypt, Israel, and also because of Iran immediate threat to the region and its destabilizing activities. However, Jordan should not abandon its vision for the region, in which Iran also can be a positive force. Turkey poses a different dilemma to Jordan. Jordan does not share the perception of immediate Turkish threat, and there are growing signs that Turkey is revisiting its past policies and attitudes. This may explain Jordan's hesitancy to enter into any anti-Turkish alliance, and also capitalizing on and encouraging shift of behaviour by Turkey. After all Turkey in principle should be a force for good and stability in the region. As for the nuclear dimension is concerned, Jordan can follow two tracks

approach: first, working and in coordination with other regional and non-regional states to prevent Iran acquiring nuclear weapon. The consequences of Iran acquiring nuclear weapon could be a reaching for the region and the world. Immediately, it would encourage Iran to intensify its destabilizing activities and increasing the chance of Iran taking higher risk in its policies. In the long run Iran acquiring nuclear weapons would be the surest way to promote nuclear proliferation in the region and thus nuclear arms race.

However, and this is the second track approach Jordan can pursue, addressing the threat of nuclear proliferation can only be achieved in the long term by declaring the Middle East as nuclear free zone region. In this regard, Israel has at some point to declare its intention and willingness to be part of that zone. Equally valid, the global non- proliferation regime should regain credibility, which unfortunately is not happening at the time being as explained before, may in fact been seriously undermined by policies and attitudes of nuclear weapon states.

V.4 Jordan in the World

Jordan is strategically a friend to the US and the West. Despite global strategic realignment, Jordan's status is unlikely to be seriously questioned or undermined. In fact, Jordan's alignment with the west might be the anchor Jordan needs to address what essentially a chaotic region.

In the section of world of uncertainty we raised two issues. First, the nature and emerging of global power realignments and the other is that of nuclear proliferation. The latter point has already been covered in the previous section; therefore, our focus is on Jordan and global realignment.

Jordan is integral part of western security order. A simple but important glance at certain numbers and joint agreements leave one with no doubt about the truthfulness of such assertion.

The United States, on its state department page is Jordan's single largest provider of bilateral assistance, providing more than 1.5 billion US\$ in 2020 including 425 million in state department foreign military financing funds (www.state.gov/USrelations with Jordan). In March 2021 Jordan signed defense agreement with the United States. Jordan is also non-NATO member as well. Between 2011-2020 the EU provided Jordan with 3.2 Billion Euros in assistance, not including general bilateral assistance by various EU countries including most notably Germany. Jordan is also attached to the

European neighbourhood policy. Jordan relations with the United Kingdom is historical and enduring.

Jordan is a natural ally to the west regarding issues of common concern including fighting terrorism, prevention of spread of nuclear weapons in the region, addressing issue of refugees, serving force for good in relation to the Israeli – Palestinian conflict. Jordan is also open-minded and willing to engage the west in relations to human rights and rule of law. Despite the growing tendency for self-help among many states, Jordan status and value are unlikely to go through dramatic or drastic reassessment anytime soon. Even under the likely global realignment led by the United States against China and Russia, Jordan will not be called upon to make stand. Jordan's value is not to join the rhetoric of anti-others but rather is derived from strategic asset for good.

Summary and Conclusion

The report is divided into three sections. First, world of uncertainty addressing global realignment as a result of the rise of China and the challenge Russia is still posing to the west. This section covers the issue of nuclear proliferation in which the Iranian nuclear program only highlights. The main argument put forward in this section is that global realignment is geostrategic necessity accompany the rise of global powers. The rise of China is geostrategic challenge to the US and many Asian countries including Japan, India, South Korea and Australia. Shifting the basis of such realignment to value driven regrouping could prove to be counterproductive, inconsistent and unsustainable. Taking value-based alliance will undermine US efforts to contain China and may leave the US isolated. The threat of nuclear weapons and proliferation of nuclear weapons cannot be emphasized enough. Iran nuclear program should certainly be contained and Iran must be prevented from developing nuclear option. However, for a meaningful and sustainable nuclear non-proliferation regime would require genuine and credible pursue of nuclear disarmament by nuclear weapon states members of the NPT regime. As for the Middle East pursuing nuclear free zone is also unavoidable.

The second section identifies the major attributes and the defining feature of the Middle East region. The region is defined by the three attributes none of which provides a comfort. First, politics is personal which naturally links with exclusivity, dogma and sectarianism creating dangerous, lethal and unpredictable consequences. It makes normal politics and rational pursuit of

meaningful goals impossible. The second, is that of illusion of regional hegemony. Although, no major regional power can or has what it takes to be regional hegemon, this has not prevented some from trying creating and deepening instability in the region and making an open, inclusive regional order impossible.

Third, regional nuclear proliferation which the Iranian nuclear ambition helps to illustrate. Nuclear Iran would make nuclear proliferation in the region unavoidable. Nuclear Iran would only make it more adventurous and destabilizing.

Finally, the report addresses four issues which may assist for a better understanding of Jordan's geostrategic situation. First, the Jordanian – Israeli relations. In theory Jordan and Israel should be natural allies, however, based on the history and reality of relations between the two countries, such relations are prone to crisis and threat of Israel pursuing policies incompatible with Jordan's interests particularly in relation to the Palestinian issue. The report attempts to explain that paradox and what is the best option to pursue mutually beneficial relations. The second part examines the issue of identity and political reform, the third deals with Jordan in the region and finally, Jordan in the world.

This report is an initial attempt to pursue what is hoped to be regular, more detailed series of strategic reports.