



July 2017

Policy Briefs

- ❖ Afghan Peace Talks: An Assessment
Saman Choudary
- ❖ India-Israel Missile Defense Deal: Troubling Regional Stability
Sadaf Sultana
- ❖ Book Review



An Institute of International and Cultural Affairs



Policy Briefs

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Afghan Peace Talks: An Assessment

By: Saman Choudary

The fifth Afghanistan Peace Conference has been held on 14 April 2017. This time Russia decided to host the peace talks which was attended by 11 countries. The meeting involved senior diplomats from Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Russia also invited United States to be a part of consultations, but it refused to join. While explaining the US absence, State Department spokesperson said that although Washington supports the regional peace initiatives but the Russian consultations seemed to be its unilateral attempt to assert influence in the region that is not considered beneficial at this stage.

This was the third meeting Russia has hosted in this year to emphasize for political discourses. Ways and means to coordinate regional efforts for facilitating the process of national reconciliation in Afghanistan and bringing peace there topped the agenda of peace talks. Attendees confirmed their willingness to provide complete support to Afghanistan as well as urged the international community to continue supporting the crisis-torn country to ensure stability and national reconciliation. The participant countries stressed that there was no military solution to the Afghan crisis and the only way to resolve it was by ensuring a national reconciliation using political methods in accordance with the United Nations Security Council resolutions. The states reaffirmed their support for efforts being made by the Afghan government and the country's social and political circles which are aimed at bringing peace to

Afghanistan. Furthermore, the participants also called upon Taliban leaders to abandon their activities aimed at using military force to resolve the conflict and turn to building direct dialogue on the national reconciliation with the Afghan government. All the countries welcomed Russia's proposal to provide a platform for the intra-Afghan talks and agreed to continue consultations in the Moscow format.

This Initiative could contribute very productively towards resolving the Afghan issue and inducing stability in the region. However, the situation has changed rapidly owing to the terror attacks in Afghanistan and shelling on Chaman border. Ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan have been deteriorated further in the past few months as both countries accuse each other of providing jihadists with safe zones to launch attacks across the border. The clashes and border closing will not provide solutions to the issues the neighboring countries have with one another; rather, they will only embolden extremists in the area. The only way out of the current problem is for the countries to pursue diplomacy and bilateral dialogue. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan should resolve these issues before the upcoming SAARC session as this conflict would serve as a hurdle in establishing peace in the region. The supportive role of other regional players and US under the initiative of Afghanistan Peace Conference could help immensely in revival of peace and stability within South Asian region. Rather than denying the Russian's invitation, US should think about its stakes in the region and should change its policy towards Afghan Peace talks.

India-Israel Missile Defense Deal: Troubling Regional Stability

By: Sadaf Sultana

India and Israel finalized a groundbreaking missile defence system deal worth over 2 billion US dollars on 6 April 2017. This agreement emanates three months before the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Israel and supposed to be biggest security deal ever between both countries. Through this deal, Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) will supply long range and advanced medium range surface-to-air missile systems to India. With the completion of 25 years of diplomatic relations, the arms trade

between India and Israel is uninterruptedly growing with Modi's strategy of moving forward to streamline the country's aging military equipment. It is one of the largest deal in which Israeli defense industry has participated in, therefore, this agreement represents an enormous expression of confidence by Indian government on capabilities and advance technologies of IAI.

According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI Fact Sheet, February 2017) India has emerged as the world's largest arms importer, while Israel has become a major arms supplier to India. Israel is also transferring technology and arranging joint ventures with Indian companies to develop and manufacture high-tech military equipment. Under the current deal, the advanced Medium Range Surface-to-Air Missile systems (MRSAM) provides protection against a variety of aerial threats. This technology was developed jointly by IAI and Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) of India in collaboration with Rafael and IAI's Elta division for the Barak-8 MRSAM to initially include one regiment of 16 launchers and 560 missiles for the Indian Army. These Barak-8 systems with their multi-function surveillance and alert radars as well as weapon control systems with data links, can detect and track hostile aerial threats at a range of 100km and can destroy them at 70km. Currently, MRSAM is operational with Indian Air Force, Indian Navy and Israel Defense Forces. The system includes an advanced phased array radar, command and control, mobile launchers and missiles with advance RF seekers. Israel will also provide India with the naval version systems, operated on India's first aircraft carrier.

India had already made number of defense deals and agreements with Israel over the last 15-20 years while in the last two years seven major arms deals were signed between both countries and more deals are in the pipeline. Modi's upcoming visit to Israel could result into more arms deals which include two Israeli Phalcon Airborne Warning and Control system (AWACS) and Aerostat radars. India is also ready to acquire Heron-TP armed drones, whereas, Indian armed forces have inducted over 100 Israeli unmanned aerial vehicles which include surveillance Searcher, Heron and Harop drones. This is the first-

time India is getting missile armed drones that are capable of undertaking bombing missions like fighter jets.

India's continuous arms deal with different countries is part of Modi's "Make in India" initiative. Although, the purpose of this initiative was to create employment opportunities to youth and making India a global manufacturing hub. But, instead, India is rushing to produce armaments, update its obsolete and aging fleet of fighters, sea vessels and war machinery, and to further increase import of arms to cope with its regional rivals, China and Pakistan. Constantly impacting the regional peace and stability, India also concluded two major defence deals with Bangladesh and blaming Pakistan for sponsoring terrorism. These gestures by Indian government clearly indicate that it is not taking into consideration the peace and stability of South Asian region, as its prime focus is to become a regional hegemon at any cost.

Book Review

Energy Security in Asia and Eurasia

Edited by Mike M. Mochizuki, Deepa M. Ollapally

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Many states appear to have strong sentiment on energy security and energy transit vulnerability. Some analysts see the rapidly increasing demand for energy and competition for energy resources leading to nationalistic energy policies. Others argue that global trends with efficient energy markets and growing options on renewables suggest more relaxed energy outlooks.

This book focuses on Asia, where global demand for energy is now concentrated in the aspiring and rising powers of the region: China, India, Japan and South Korea, and also recognizes the importance of Russia as a growing energy supplier. Contributions by experts in the field provide detailed and parallel case studies. Shedding light on the ongoing debate in the literature regarding energy outlooks of major Asian states, they analyze whether energy policies are expected to evolve along market oriented cooperative lines or more competitive and even destructive mercantile, nationalist lines. The book argues that states are not unitary actors even in the key energy security arena and there are competing and contrasting viewpoints in Asian states on energy security. It suggests that domestic debates structure thinking on energy security, making energy policy more contingent than assumed by purely market or geopolitical logics.

Providing a strong contribution to comparative energy security studies, the book fills an important gap in the literature on energy and national security and offers a basis for conducting further inter-state, interactive analysis. It will be of interest to researchers on Asian Studies, energy politics and international relations.

