# Indo-Bhutan Cyber Diplomacy and Regime Formation
*by Sreemoyee Sarkar*

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# Contents

# World News

*Ebru Birinci*

## Climate Changes

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Centers for Environmental Information recorded July 2021 in 142-year NOAA records as the hottest month ever. According to the global climate report July 2021 data, the seven warmest Julys have occurred since 2015, and upcoming years will likely continue to break the records. The wildfires, especially in the Mediterranean countries like Turkey, Greece, Italy, Spain, laid bare the critical situation the planet is facing and the unpreparedness of humanity. Beyond increased temperatures, rising sea levels, floods, heavy rains, biodiversity loss across the globe are threatening the lives of all creatures. According to the *"Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis"* published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), reductions in $CH_4$ emissions would limit the warming effect. However, "United in Science 2021," a report compiled by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), indicates that economies are far from growing back more environment-friendly, while carbon dioxide emissions have risen to the pre-pandemic levels.

## Coronavirus Update

Since the Coronavirus Pandemic burst out, over 200 million people have been infected, and more than 4,6 million people have lost their lives. At the end of the first year of the pandemic, vaccination against the Covid-19 had begun in many countries. So far, over 42% of the world population has received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine. However, only 1,9% of the population of low-income countries have received at least one dose. The vaccine inequality is deepening as the low-income nations mostly lack the chance to get one dose of vaccine, yet rich countries already offer their citizens the third dose of vaccine. Such a colossal gap displays the limits of the international community's ability to respond to crisis and the rising

individualism of governments as the Covid-19 pandemic turned into an existential problem for any government regardless of their power. However, some efforts should not be underestimated. The EU recently announced that a new donation of 250 million vaccines would be delivered to African and low-income nations by the middle of next year.

Furthermore, The Multilateral Leaders Task Force met with the CEOs of leading vaccine manufacturing companies to discuss strategies to improve access to Covid-19 vaccines, especially in low- and middle-income countries and Africa. The Task Force encouraged countries that have contracted high amounts of vaccine doses and vaccine manufacturers to support the acceleration of COVID-19 vaccine supplies to COVAX and AVAT. These multilateral mechanisms are crucial for the equitable distribution of vaccines. Another way to fight the vaccine inequity, which is suggested and growing stronger, is to enable these countries to manufacture their vaccines. To do this, companies and governments that developed efficient vaccines are asked to share their knowledge and technology with drug manufacturers that could deliver vaccines to low-income nations.

## Significant Government Changes across the World



The year 2021 will be marked as the first performance year of new governments worldwide, as the former governments leave plenty of problems for them to handle. The most significant one has been Joe Biden's election as the US president. The coronavirus pandemic and the inefficient management of the Trump administration have played a critical role in the Democratic Party's success in the 2020 elections. In Israel, as Benjamin Netanyahu could not form a government within the given period after the March 2021 elections, Israeli President Rivlin tasked Yesh Atid Party leader Yair Lapid to form a coalition, leading to a successful formation of Israel's 36th government under the cooperation between Lapid and Yamina chief Naftali Bennett with the participation of various parties. In Iran's 2021 presidential elections, Ebrahim Raisi, a hardliner, won the presidency, as turnout in the elections was record-low around 48%, with a significant amount of protest votes. On September 26, 2021, in Germany, parliamentary elections will be held, after which Angela Merkel will leave her 16-year service as Germany's chancellor. Currently, forecasts and polls are not suggesting that any party can win enough votes to replace Merkel. The number of floating voters hits a record high, supporting predictions that the next German government will be a coalition of three different parties.

### The US Longest War Ends



Following the withdrawal of US troops after 20 years from Afghanistan, where it invaded to fight its war on terror, it waged after the 9/11 attack of Al-Qaida to World Trade Center in the United States. Following the withdrawal, the Taliban has not encountered any serious opposition in its takeover of Afghan cities. The Afghan President fled the country in a rush to the United Arab Emirates. The international community does not fully support the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, especially those concerned over women's rights and the rush of immigrants fleeing from the Taliban's harsh policies and practices. The US now seems to fail to bring democracy to Afghanistan, which never seemed effortless, yet any terrorist attack inside the United States borders is less likely. In this regard, President Biden, in his speech on August 31, defended its pullout decision, stating, "I was not going to extend this forever war, and I was not extending a forever exit." His remark that "This decision about Afghanistan is not just about Afghanistan. It is about ending an era of major military operations to remake other countries." has underlined the foreign policy change from a nation-building process to great power competition with Russia and China.

### France calls its ambassadors to the US and Australia



On September 18, the French government recalled its ambassadors to the US and Australia in response to Australia's withdrawal from the €56 billion diesel-powered submarine deal with France and the recently announced strategic alliance-AUKUS between Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian called the situation a stab in the back. Assisting Australia in obtaining nuclear-powered submarines serves the US to counter China in the Indo-Pacific Ocean. However, France's total exclusion from such a critical alliance will possibly cause a significant loss for France as an actor who strives to be a significant player in the region mainly through its military power. The EU, on the other hand, does not seem to be satisfied with the AUKUS announced few hours before EU foreign policy chief Joseph Borrell was scheduled to outline the EU strategy in the Indo-Pacific, including military ties next to the economic and diplomatic ones. Furthermore, such a severe conflict of interests among important NATO allies would most likely affect

NATO policies of France's Emmanuel Macron, who has often questioned NATO's raison d'être.

## The Refugee Problem in Turkey Bitters



The rise of Afghan refugee flow to Turkey due to the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan provoked anti-refugee sentiment in the country, which has given shelter to refugees more than any other country since 2011 – more than 4 million. The worsened Turkish economy is only fuelling the Turkish citizens' anger towards the refugees. Through the migrants, smuggling organized in social media, thousands of Afghans have passed the Iranian-Turkish border illegally. The refugee problem in Turkey has become a mainstream subject, especially for the opposition in Turkey. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, too, acknowledged that he would not open the doors to more Afghans. Erdogan, expressing "Turkey has no responsibility or duty to be Europe's refugee warehouse," has shown his understanding that the Afghan refugee issue is not only Turkey's but also Europe's problem to solve. Recently Turkey began to build a security wall along the Turkish-Iranian border to prevent and control the refugee flow from Afghanistan.

## Ethiopian War Drags On



It has been almost a year since the Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who won Nobel Peace Prize for making peace with Eritrea in 2019, authorized the military offensive in Tigray against the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a once-dominant minority group that lost its position in the Ethiopian government and consequently challenged Abiy's Government both politically and militarily. The fighting spread into the neighbouring Amhara region while local Amhara militias mobilized and armed up against Tigray forces.

Conflict acidly escalated instability, bloodshed, food shortage, and displacement of people. According to Acting Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia, Grant Laity, the Tigray region remains under a de facto humanitarian aid blockade. Reports on systematic killings, concentration camps, and ethnic cleansing go against Abiy's efforts to portray the conflict between national forces and TPLF as an under-control just war.

Nevertheless, many accusations go against TPLF as well. Abiy's admission in March that Ethiopian soldiers are fighting alongside the Ethiopian army against TPLF tightened the noose for him. Donors suspended their financial support for the Ethiopian government due to its undeniable role in the humanitarian crisis. The Biden administration signed an order authorizing sanctions for those involved in the escalation of the Ethiopian conflict- the Ethiopian government, the Eritrean government, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, and the Amhara Regional Government.

## Chinese Evergrande Hits Global Markets

The possible failure of Chinese giant real estate developer Evergrande to pay off interest payments of $84m in due time because of a cash crush gave an alert to global markets. Evergrande, China's second-largest real estate company, employs more than 200 thousand people in the real estate sector and many other sectors. It is also the most indebted developer in China. Chief Asia economist Mark Williams stated that "Evergrande's collapse would be the biggest test China's financial system has faced in years." Many resembled Evergrande's position to the Lehman Brothers during the 2008 financial crisis, while Brian Levitt, global market strategist at Invesco, told that China's economy has too much at stake to let a Lehman-type situation happen for Evergrande. However, Jim Chanos, a New York-based investment manager, argues that the last developments in Evergrande indicate China's need for new growth drivers rather than real estate. Evergrande deems to be the most significant challenge China's financial system has faced for years.

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# Ecofeminism and Gandhi: Thinking in Harmony

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*Dr. Rubel Mittal is a researcher, focussing on sexualities and masculinities in society. She has obtained her master's in chemistry and political science. Her doctoral thesis is about colonial practices and their impact on the people. She has published papers and articles on inter-disciplinary areas and on ideologies that affect the people. Currently, she is working on Gandhi and sexuality.*

It is surely not accidental that Gandhi's thoughts are vividly exemplified as a prototype of truth and non-violence, without mentioning his pursuance of conserving the ecology as per the solicitude of contemporary concerns. Operating in a land of impoverished and exploited, the Mahatma's role was to deconditioning the sexual attitude of oneself ousting the dichotomy of public versus private. This certainly has the reinforcement of the theory of feminist foundations, speaking about the hermeneutics of self-abolition of a cognitive methodological masculine assertion. This paper attempts to understand Gandhi's critique of man's relationship with nature, drawn heavily on his formidable socio-biology. It finds that Gandhi revalued the primordial relation, renewing the spirit of attainment of womanhood. It points to the fact that Gandhi had done his moral experiments which progressed with his belief that women have an intense vocabulary of resistance and inclination towards nature. This paper uses the concept of Gandhi's restoration affinities towards the universe, as a practice of living and thinking. Non-violence was fundamental in his conceptualization of feminine attributes, which adopts the critique of industrial civilization. This insistence on non-violence strengthens the Gandhian ideology to prescribe the women's role in a given society. Attempting to ascertain whether the practical struggle and spiritual aspirations have led Mahatma Gandhi to see himself more closely to the female existence. He reflected the holistic and pragmatic consciousness, derived from nature not enslaved by industrialization and exploitation. This is a study of that consciousness that has been marginalized over the past many decades. It then focuses on the zeal of Gandhi to emulate the ideal of suffering, even made him able to think more of demasculinized characteristics. It has to be seen whether all of Gandhi's philosophies and outlooks affect environmental consciousness as a human ecologist or more precisely as an ecofeminist.

## Introduction

The consciousness of surroundings is one's physical needs, necessarily restricted to the time of living. That is to say, the purpose of living pushed many of us towards the pursuit of moral conquests over the body, mind, as well as space, inhabited. One of the first men who applied the process of asking difficult questions around the surrounding of his thereby begun to feel the growing presence of evil in the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity was Mahatma Gandhi. Others were very few.

And so we get, the ideologue whose moral captivity turned the national, regional, and specific form to emerge as a weapon for the revolution.

For years, Gandhi has been read as the author of the text which prescribes a command over the self and the physical world. The science of rejecting domination provided for the first time in the Indian nationalist scene within moral bargaining. Thus, while the search was for the truthfulness to unite the whole of the exploited against the exploiters. But the quest for discovering the exploiter was within the soul besides the external foe as taught by Gandhi.

Gandhi's thinking could not be located within the only political, moral versions of understanding the meaning of life, the holistic view of Gandhi needs to be understood to get his narrative of life.

Ramchandra Guha once asked the question in his essay on the position of Gandhi as an early environmentalist. He was not certain about the particular role that Gandhi played in the conservativism of ecology, but Guha made a fine balance toward the overall purpose of Gandhi for nature.

> *"Nature lovers and those with a focus on the urban environment would, therefore, find little direct help from Mahatma Gandhi. But between the wilderness and the city lies a vast terrain, home to the seven hundred thousand villages Gandhi spoke of so often, and so eloquently. It is here that his life and message admit of more direct application, in the resistance to environmentally destructive projects or in the restoration of the relationship between the agrarian economy and its natural environment"* (Guha, 2006).

From this piece, it is tempting to question the direct involvement of Mahatma Gandhi in the restorative nature's order, but one could without no doubt share the belief of Gandhi for the moral upliftment of people, to made them believe in their works that affected nature and surrounding. In the nationalist form, where the idea of freedom and political control was of supreme significance in the interest of the entire community, Gandhi's political ideal did not dissociate from the moral, social, and ethical values.

The power to control the minds of people by logic and ethics has a compulsive strength carried by Gandhi. He led the nationalist struggle with the same vigour as analysed the moral, ethical conduct of people fought in the movement.

The direct physical form in which Gandhi laid the harmonious principle of nature was with his economist, Joseph Chelladurai Cornelius 'Kumarappa'. Gandhi visioned the ideal of India as a village economy where large masses of people could make independence in every principle of economy and politics. Kumarappa seemed to give a definite design to the principle by "advocating a burgeoning utilization of the renewable resources like water, solar power, etc., with the exploration of scarce mineral ores of iron, which can be used for next generation (Unnithan & Sivakumar, 2017).

## Gandhi and ecology

Within the agrarian principle envisioned by Gandhi, the human environment relation required a reconstruction where nature would not treat as the slave of man's need.

> "*The eco-centric Gandhian economics underlined the need for bio-industrial development the balance between resources and exploitation, man and nature. "The earth, the air, the land, and the water are not an inheritance from our forefathers but on loan from our children. So we have to hand over to them at least as it was handed over to us*" (Unnithan & Sivakumar, 2017).

To Gandhi, the responsibility towards nature has not been separated from the morality towards oneself. It is true that Gandhi had not discussed the ecological concern as an authorized discipline like his other political ideas, but the concern for food, water, air, and non-violence towards the creatures had always been affirmed in his lifestyle parameters. When we look at the knowledge he has about man's greediness, the unjust exploration from nature, we may discover that Gandhi probably is not a modern environmentalist, but his discursive thoughts about nature are ahead of his time. In the philosophical essence of criticizing the modern industrial civilization, Gandhi called for the cooperative ways of life where the central metaphor would be the village and the deurbanized ways of living. The moral supplement by Gandhi raised awareness regarding the consumerist stand of the capitalist economy, where nature seemed to be its reservoir of fulfilling unlimited desires. He said,

> "*I suggest that we are thieves in a way. If I take anything that I do not need for my own immediate use and keep it. I thieve it from somebody else. I venture to suggest that it is the fundamental law of nature, without exception, that nature produces enough for our wants from day to day, and if only everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism in this world, there would be no more dying of starvation in this world. But so long as we have got this inequality, so long we are thieving*" (Gandhi, 1960).

> *The Gandhian philosophy, if non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with women "sums up her inspiration (*Unnithan & Sivakumar, 2017).

*When* the conventional employment of ecofeminism is understood in terms of Gandhi's way of seeing nature, I do not see the exact armed solution or the statements propounded by Gandhi. The same problem appeared when the problem of conserving nature and its resources required the elicit explication from Gandhi's encyclopaedia of ideas.

The emergence of ecofeminism as an ideology and a movement born with the resistance against the power and exploitation that flowed directly into the women and nature's locus. Technically, the term ecofeminism was coined by the French writer Francoise d 'Eaubonne in 1974 (Rao, 2012).

The idea behind the feminist integration with the ecology has to raise the consciousness about the feminine linkage with nature directly. In a word, the aim is to change the thinking of the mind where the woman has been considered a passive object with no trouble adjusting to the outer world. A certain degree of harmony and balance is necessary to satisfy everyone's needs. Nothing short of this will work. For Gandhi, people, in general, follow the idea of being strong and powerful. But this has inherent negative consciousness about the degree of behavioural question. The domination and exploitation became a general guide for a man in the course of evolution, but for Gandhi, this domination and muscular obedience solely accommodate the limitless range of fear, cowardice, and compromises. Gandhi knew the phenomenal poverty, scarcity, and nonuniform dispersal of resources in the Indian context. The threat, according to Gandhi, was not the limited resources of the universe, but the real problem was the social hierarchies where the one seemed to lost in his interest, without thinking for others. For Gandhi, to intervene in the matter of nationalist discourse undoubtedly required an understanding of India, where people have been subjected to inequality, oppression, and sickening.

Gandhi's idea of identification of Indian realities seems to be the most important advent of his political-social philosophy. Nothing which has not gained any significance for the people was most criticized by his philosophy. There ought to be the importance of every little bit which makes the life of people nonalienated. The importance of every object remains which makes the distinct relation with men.

Also, essentially Gandhi is a pragmatist. He understands equal rights for all people. The prejudice against modern science and the technology to harness nature's resources was no doubt very much understood by Gandhi. He insisted on the same progressive idea of utilizing natural resources but with logic and precision with originated in Gandhi's acquaintances with the need of the people of India. Gandhi's argument was to meet all the demands of the last men in India. He admitted the pace of modern science and its ability to carve civilization, but he also admitted the foundations of India, which rest on the non –violence and the balance between nature and man. This pragmatic attitude related to nature and daily problems provides the people of India a far wider guide for solving the practical problems embedded within nature and human relations. For Gandhi, the political battle against colonial rule could not be solved without the restructuring of the society. His every principle and idea suggesting the transformation in viable terms into the concrete and balanced idea of the application. For him, the inadequacy of modern science in the Indian Perspective lies in its non-application at a ground level. If the people would not benefit from it, it would be the futility of the theory and principle no matter how modern it would be. Gandhian way of thinking has all by means a radical and instrumental thought system that aims to decondition the mentality of society by making them free from the slavery of thinking and balancing the harmony between men and nature.

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# Civil Society in the Information Age

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This article explores the place of civil society in the digital age and the role of technology in civil society. It explains that research and commentary on the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in generating or reflecting on social, cultural, economic and political change has a very long history and analyzes the rigidity that prevents Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have a truly transformative impact. Society has society or even society as a whole. It highlights the extent to which civil society deliberations and actions are found in the twenty-first century. Finally, the article argues that civil society and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are interrelated because politics and communication go hand in hand.

The new century promises to be a roller-coaster ride fueled by rapidly changing Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). With the capacity for the almost instant transfer of digital information across the planet, commonly held notions of distance and speed, as well as our understanding of the nature and meaning of interpersonal contact, are being challenged and possibly redefined. With redefinition, some believe that the very structural underpinnings of society will be transformed. Good or bad, it is hard to predict just what will be the eventual political, social and cultural impact of the global interconnectedness made possible by new.

There has been a shift in the understanding of information and its position in civil society in the last forty years. Earlier scholars were sought to find a quantitative measure to demonstrate that the developed world has become an information society which can be found in the writings of Daniel Bell, Machlup, and so, while twenty-first-century writers like the manual castle, Loytard aimed to gain a qualitative understanding of how emergent Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have transformed the political, social, and economic landscape of the civil society. Basically, the objectives of this paper are based on this shifted qualitative understanding of this information and its position in civil society.

There is no hesitation in accepting that we are living in an informative society where oceans of communication surround us. Their contemporary electronic online form enables millions of people worldwide to produce, distribute, exhibit, and exchange information, images, music video, texts, talk, and data. At least since the 1950s with the initiation of computing, scholarly, journalistic, business, and other forms have detailed the many ways in which technology affect the workplace, personal interaction, and government process. In the article "Civil Society in the Digital Age" by Roberta g. lentz, two schools of thought are advanced to understand these

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discursive flows in terms of civil society and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The first is the utopian sensibility, which argues that the evolution of computers, information, knowledge, networks, and more recently, powerful mobile communication technology have changed just about everything for the better. The second one is sceptics who counter utopian and argues that it has not changed society in a fundamental way. According to them, power relations remain embedded in historically dominant patterns, institutions and inequalities persist despite increased opportunities for access to new electronic consumers and products and services. To sceptics, this rigidity prevents Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) from having any truly transformative role on civil society or society at large.

In brief, utopia holds this above view by arguing the enticing concept. For example, include the notion of "cyberspace", the space which depicts a vast landscape of potential for social transformation. This sphere is very similar to Habermas notions of the public sphere. Clay Shirky is also one of the most recent prophets of the utopian focus on the internet's transformative power. He argues how important things like open-source software, wave economic, and social computing are transforming social relationships and, therefore, the nature of institutions and society. His enthusiasm about social media is that it has civic and political effects, especially in reducing the transactions cost and increasing speed and reach of information exchange that is extremely useful to civil society groups in their fundraising and campaigns. For example, technology certainly facilitates convenience voting during the 2008 presidential election in the US. Another example of just item electronic communication permits practically every aspect of contemporary culture at least many higher-income societies: Entertainment, Healthcare, Banking, Transport etc. as it has the participatory potential, it is celebrated through works of online seminars, symposia. Another compelling contemporary example comes from Benkler. He analyses the production network system like Wikipedia, creative commons and the blogosphere, and other freely available or low-cost tools that provide the largest-scale economic and social benefit. Then he does a close system of copyrights and other forms of intellectual property.

On the other hand, sceptics hold their views by arguing the major weakness of the enthusiast. First is technological determinism: though the technology is an instrument of the building order for betterment in the world, the technology itself does not matter but the social or economic system in which it is embedded, which continues inequality? The second weakness is that they ignore the authoritarian tendencies and other problems of what Mumford calls the information revolution's dark side. The third one is its imposing character on the rest of society. Finally, they overestimate the power of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to dislocate and democratize states and markets. The decline of the state rhetoric renders the government as merely an untrustworthy actor that is out of touch and out of technological developments. Yet, it will be the government—intervention in many cases that will address concerns about the digital divide.

In conclusion, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have transformed the civil society's political, social, and economic landscape that empowers its member.

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# Interview with Jonathan Fulton
## on
## The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Chinese Foreign Policy

**Rukiye Patan**
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Before asking my questions, I would like to thank you for accepting our interview invitation. It is my pleasure to conduct this interview with you for the Political Reflection Magazine. I would like to ask you a general question first.

**Question: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is generally regarded as a long-term intercontinental initiative aimed at accelerating the economic integration of countries via eradicating infrastructure along the ancient Silk Road route. One could argue that it is one of the most significant commercial initiatives of the 21st century. What is your opinion regarding the role of BRI in global trade?**

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**Jonathan Fulton:** China's economic influence is the most well-developed aspect of its global power. It has used trade, investment and contracting as a set of tools to make it a more consequential country politically. The Lowy Institute had China as the top trading partner of 128 countries in 2018, a remarkable shift since joining the World Trade Organization in 2001. Of course, this commercial prominence spills over into every other aspect of other countries' relations with the PRC, and the BRI is undoubtedly a significant part of this strategy. When it was announced in 2013, China was

sitting on approximately $3.2 trillion in foreign reserves. With tremendous development needs across Eurasia – the Asian Development Bank estimated that Asia needed $8 trillion in infrastructure investment between 2010 and 2020 – the BRI put forward a valuable solution to addressing some of these concerns while putting good use to Chinese capital and, importantly, putting a positive spin on its international profile. The implementation of these BRI projects creates opportunities for Chinese SOEs and private companies and links supply chains across countries and regions, so it has the potential to facilitate trade throughout Eurasia and the Indian Ocean region in a way that will obviously benefit China, as well as those countries and companies that take advantage of it. At the same time, this is not apolitical. There will be natural spillover effects in the political, cultural, and strategic realms as a result.

**Question: BRI is a significant initiative to establish multi-dimensional partnerships and sustainable development between countries on the historical Silk Road. Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasized that the primary purpose of the Belt and Road Initiative is "to create mutual benefit and cooperation". Similarly, in previous years, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that the Belt and Road is not a "geostrategic concept" but is part of efforts to build "a community with a common future for humanity with countries around the world". The fact remains, however, that both political and economic motivation drives this Initiative.**

**So, what is the Chinese political and economic motivation behind this Initiative? In order to achieve its political and economic goals, what kind of foreign policy approach does China adopt?**

**Jonathan Fulton:** In considering any country's foreign policy, you need to start by looking at the domestic political and economic situation, and
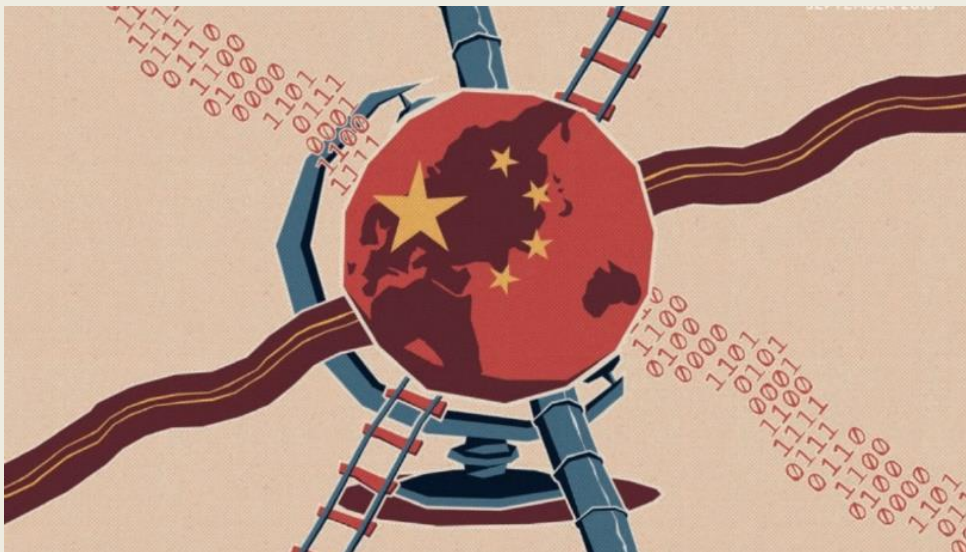


*Photograph: Trade Finance Global*

China is no exception. The nature of its political system means that everything needs to be considered through the lens of how it affects the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The need for economic growth and stability drives most of its leaders' decisions because economic performance has become the central pillar of its legitimacy. The BRI creates economic opportunities at a time when China's economy has entered 'the new normal' of reduced growth, largely the result of having exhausted most of the low-hanging fruit in domestic economic reform. This makes it an essential aspect of China's domestic political stability, explaining partly why it was enshrined in the CCP's constitution in 2017.

Beyond domestic considerations, the BRI has been necessary to articulate a Chinese vision of a less US-centered global order. China has benefited tremendously from the relative stability of the post-Cold War era in East Asia. However, it is clear that we are well into a transition away from that period. With Chinese-established institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Beijing has demonstrated a willingness to take on a more prominent role in global affairs. It is consistent with President Xi's assertion for China to 'be proactive in seeking achievements', a catchphrase he delivered in 2013 that has been interpreted as a pivot away from Deng Xiaoping's more modest approach to foreign policy.

**Question: Although the Belt and Road is a global initiative, it especially focuses on emerging markets such as Asia, East Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. Indeed, according to the Belt and Road Portal, currently, 71 countries are taking part in the Initiative. Since China was established in 1949, it has made efforts to develop relations with third-world countries. How might this Initiative affect the relations between a developed China and developing countries?**

**Jonathan Fulton:** China's dramatic economic and development achievements since the Reform Era began in 1978 are tremendously attractive to leaders in many developing countries. Of course, China had several unique advantages that allowed it to achieve what it did when it did. However, it still is vital in promoting China's approach as an attractive alternative to Washington Consensus prescriptions. For years Chinese leaders shied away from talk of a 'China model', using the metaphor of 'crossing the river by feeling for stones' – the idea being that it was more minor a clearly developed program than a pragmatic series of attempts to find whatever worked. Under Xi, that has changed, with Chinese officials promoting their approach to development. While its political model is not especially attractive to many, its development accomplishments are. As a result, the PRC is often perceived more favourably in the global South than in Western democratic countries.

**Question: When we talk about BRI and Chinese foreign policy, I think we should refer to the perspective of the USA, which is China's biggest rival in global supply and trade. In the Trump era, the USA and China imposed tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars worth of one another's goods. While China has accused**

**the USA of starting the biggest economic war in history, the USA has claimed that China was engaged in unfair trade practices. It is possible to say that BRI is an initiative that undermines the interests of the USA in terms of appealing to third-world countries. In light of this, what strategies should the United States employ in opposition to BRI to exert pressure on China's foreign policy toward BRI? Or does the US have to make counter policies against it?**

**Jonathan Fulton:** Over the past few years, Washington has tried a couple of alternatives to the BRI, the Blue Dot Network and now the Build Back Better World (B3W). The first did not get much attention and is rarely discussed anymore, and B3W is unlikely to have much of an impact given the US's inward focus. I do not think the US can really out-China China; competing against the BRI plays to China's strengths, which is a bad strategy. The US has to play to its own strengths. However, it is facing several substantial challenges on this front.



*Photograph: Belt and Road News*

First and foremost is its domestic political problems, which make it hard for its policy-makers to do much in terms of a consistent foreign policy and make it less likely that other countries will put much stock in US commitments in the short term. The debacle in Afghanistan is a case in point, as is the whiplash on Iran from the Obama to Trump to Biden administrations. The rest of the world is all too aware that elections cycles in the US will continue to result in significant policy swings. A related challenge is US fatigue in many parts of the world. An inconsistent foreign policy from one administration to the next makes it hard for the US to continue being accepted as a global leader on a lot of important issues, and when Washington tries to make the case that countries should be wary of cooperating too closely with Beijing the message is often ineffective. Rather than thinking about countering the BRI, the US needs to come to some kind of consensus on what kind of role it will play in a multipolar world.

**Question: Russia, one of the countries that have been significantly affected by the US sanctions, has stated that they are not entirely a part of the BRI but only a supporter of China's global reach as long as it is in Russia's interest. At the Belt&Road forum in 2019, President Putin emphasized that the Belt and Road initiative is in line with the goals of the Eurasian Economic Union led by Russia. Do you think that possible Russian-Chinese cooperation for BRI can create a robust stand before the global initiatives of the USA?**

**Jonathan Fulton:** No, I think any alignment of Russia and China is rather superficial. Despite Moscow's more muscular foreign policy over the past decade, the fact remains that this is a fundamentally asymmetrical bilateral relationship; Russia has been playing a bad hand well while China has a lot of great cards to play. Both sides consistently articulate a preference for a less US-centered global order and seem willing to cooperate at that level. However, in the long term, their interests are not going to line up. They are likely to bump up against each other on significant issues. China's growing influence in Central Asia is a case in point. Russia continues to see this as within its natural sphere of influence. However, it cannot offer the same kind of economic opportunities that China has in recent years. I suspect Russia would be reluctant to bandwagon with China, but given the unequal distribution of power between them, it may have to accept a second-tier status or otherwise balance against China. In any case, I think talk of a deeper alignment between the two is unrealistic in the near term.

**Question: From a theoretical point of view, BRI is seen as an initiative with a positive potential in contributing to the regional & global economy, encouraging cooperation, creating cultural interaction, or building infrastructure. Do you have any thoughts about some possible obstacles that may arise in proceeding with the process?**

**Jonathan Fulton:** One of the more significant challenges facing China is the fact that despite its growing profile around the world, it remains pretty mysterious to most people. Many countries have strong ties at the elite level, where political officials or business communities engage with each other frequently, but few people in the general public learn anything meaningful about the history, culture, or language. Countries like the US, South Korea, or Japan complement deep economic ties with attractive popular cultures that make them more appealing or familiar beyond their shores. That has not been the case with China. It has been trying to project more soft power. However, a lot of its contemporary cultural products are shaped by domestic political pressures. As a result, they do not travel very well outside of China. Hip hop songs about the BRI are a ham-fisted way of getting foreign teenagers interested in China. Other countries will be happy to do business with the PRC, but at the popular level, it has to find a way of presenting itself in a way that people find attractive. It is facing an uphill battle on this front.

**Question: Among the criticisms of the BRI is that it is a "debt trap". BRI is believed to undermine global macroeconomic stability by lending to unsustainable projects, thereby increasing countries' debt burdens. Indeed, Sri Lanka had to cede control of a port to China in 2017 to help repay foreign loans. At present, the COVID-19 pandemic has seriously damaged the economies of many developing countries. How likely is it that the Initiative will be financially successful in the future? Do you really give a chance to the idea that the BRI is a debt trap for developing and underdeveloped countries that have participated in the Project?**

**Jonathan Fulton:** I think the 'debt trap' narrative is a very inelegant way of looking at what are justifiable concerns about BRI financing in some countries.  The 'debt trap' is shorthand for predatory lending so that Chinese institutions can acquire other countries' assets.  Seen this way, the BRI is neocolonialism with Chinese characteristics.  For example, Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka is consistently used as a warning for other countries dealing with the PRC comes with unexpected costs.  Nevertheless, this narrative assumes partnering countries do not have any agency in dealing with China. They take bad deals because they do not know any better or because they are motivated by short term concerns.  The case of Malaysia is interesting; its BRI deals with China were a major factor in its 2018 election, with the opposition coalition campaigning on concerns of an overreliance on Chinese Money.  After winning, the new government successfully renegotiated the terms of its predecessors' agreements with China.  The 'debt trap' appears to be as deep as a partnering country's willingness to be trapped. Local corruption is often more of a factor than a master plan in Beijing.  Rather than framing BRI investments as a 'debt trap', it makes more sense to look at it on a country-by-country basis to get a better sense of the conditions upon which it can contribute to a country's development needs or where it is likely to worsen them.

As for the sustainability of the BRI in the time of COVID-19, the fact that BRI is quite indistinct is a critical consideration.  In the media, it is often reduced to infrastructure projects. However, the BRI white paper emphasizes five cooperation priorities: policy coordination, infrastructure development, financial integration, trade, and people-to-people connectivity.  Since that document was released, the Digital Silk Road Initiative and the Health Silk Road were both announced as part of the BRI. Taken together, it is clear that nearly any type of bilateral cooperation with China becomes a BRI project, so if infrastructure construction dries up as a result of COVID-affected economies, then vaccine diplomacy or digital projects or educational initiatives will be used as evidence of BRI cooperation.

**Question: The Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI), an extension of the BRI, has a route through the Indian Ocean to Europe. The commercial initiatives of China are met with opposition from India, one of its major rivals in Southeast Asia. In recent years, armament activities in the Indian Ocean have**

**increased considerably. Is it possible that the implementation of BRI may lead to a security crisis in the region?**

**Jonathan Fulton:** China-India competition is often underlooked. This is natural since the China-US relationship draws most of the bandwidth. However, India is a primary strategic concern for the PRC, which is evident when looking at how so much of its BRI projects have been shaping up in South Asia. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Maldives have all been quite actively involved in various BRI projects. A lot of this seems to respond to their own concerns about Indian preeminence in the region. From Beijing's perspective, India's growing cooperation with the US and Japan looks like an attempt to balance China. From New Delhi's perspective, China's emergence as a significant factor in South Asia and across the Indian Ocean region appears to be an attempt to prevent India from becoming a great power in Asia. The two countries are on a dangerous trajectory. Implementing BRI projects along India's periphery will only exacerbate this.

**Question: Several aspects of the Belt and Road Initiative need to be discussed, but I would like to conclude the interview by asking a final question. In light of the positive and negative aspects discussed above, do you believe that the BRI is a larger-scale and more influential initiative than the Marshall Plan proposed by the United States in 1947? If you do not mind, could you comment on BRI's future role in the global economy?**

**Jonathan Fulton:** I am not fond of the comparison between the BRI and the Marshall Plan. They are from different eras and have different motivations, and China in the 2010s is different from the US in the 1940s. My bigger concern is that there is a prominent view in policy circles and the media that we are in the early stages of a China-US cold war, and this is leading to much sloppy thinking and reliance on cold war strategies that were used against the Soviet Union. Likening the BRI to the Marshall Plan feeds into this, as does the frequent use of Kennan-esque analysis. The deep economic interdependence between the US and China shows us that we need different ways of thinking about the bilateral relationship.

As for the future role of the BRI in the global economy, I think many countries enjoy having alternative sources of funding options, and this has made China attractive. Since global politics is becoming less centred, we can expect other countries to start playing a more prominent role in this space as well. The EU will undoubtedly find ways to compete with China on this front, and Japan, which many seem to overlook, has long been a prominent development actor across Asia. It will not be a case of China taking over, but rather China continuing to increase in status and influence while other countries do the same.

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# 2021 Ukraine-Russia Conflict: Why Does the Prospect of Ukraine's NATO Membership Seem Remote?

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## Introduction

The beginning of 2021 started as the scene of a new Ukraine-Russia conflict in the Black Sea. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the ceasefire between the two states continued to deteriorate steadily. In the spring of this year, Russia deployed large numbers of Russian troops to Donbas, on the Ukrainian border. Russia's aggressive stance in the region and its hybrid war strategy against Ukraine continued to occupy an important place in NATO's agenda. Indeed, Ukraine's significant experience in deterring Russian aggression, both on the traditional battlefield and the hybrid battlefield extending to disinformation and cyberspace, has strengthened Ukraine's NATO membership prospects.

While frequently expressing its commitment to the "open door" policy for countries seeking NATO membership, NATO has followed a stance of supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity from the very beginning of the Ukraine-Russia conflict. In the joint statement issued by the heads of state at the NATO summit in Brussels in June 2021, it was mentioned that Russia's aggressive actions pose a threat to Euro-Atlantic security. Pointing out that Russia violated the values and trust in agreements supporting NATO-Russia relations, the document referred to the Ukraine-Russia conflict as follows: "Russia's recent massive military build-up and destabilizing activities in and around Ukraine have further escalated tensions and undermined security. We call on Russia to reverse its military build-up and stop restricting navigation in parts of the Black Sea. We also call on Russia to stop impeding access to the Sea of Azov and Ukrainian ports. We commend Ukraine's posture of restraint and diplomatic approach in this context. We seek to contribute to de-escalation. We are also stepping up our support to Ukraine" (NATO, 2021). NATO clearly opposes the illegitimate annexation of Crimea and Russian support for the separatists. Therefore, the official statement by NATO allies condemning Russia's destabilizing activities in Eastern Ukraine strengthens the Russian perception that NATO will pursue policies aimed at increasing capacity and cooperation in the region.

## Ukraine's prospects for NATO membership

Russia's increase in its military capacity in the region has also increased the membership interaction between Ukraine and NATO. President of Ukraine

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Volodymyr Zelensky called on NATO member states to increase their military presence in the Black Sea, emphasizing that obtaining the NATO membership action plan, seen as a pathway to future membership is the most urgent issue (Sabbagh, 2021). Russia's decision to withdraw its troops from Donbas and NATO's declaration at the Brussels summit that it supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity raised questions about whether Ukraine's membership would be realized. Although President Zelensky's social media statement that NATO leaders confirmed Ukraine's membership after US President Joe Biden's refusal to give a yes or no answer to Ukraine's membership at the Brussels summit strengthens these possibilities, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has made it clear that such an action is not imminent (Gould, 2021). Even though NATO has, in theory, expressed its response to the destabilization of Ukraine by Russia and the threat to its territorial integrity, in practice, Ukraine's NATO membership appears to be a remote prospect. There are several reasons why Ukraine's NATO membership is a remote prospect:

First, the real strength of the NATO alliance stems from the common interest and perception of the common threat. NATO, which has been rapidly adapting to the changing security environment in the Soviet and the post-Soviet period since its establishment, has expanded its sphere of influence with its "open-door" policy. Following its open-door policy, NATO followed a collaborative security strategy understanding based on improving relations with non-member states. In this sense, although collective defence was defined as one of the main strategic objectives at the 2014 Wales and 2016 Warsaw Summits held after the annexation of Crimea, it seems difficult for NATO member states to follow a policy that will increase Russia's aggression (Bağbaşlıoğlu, 2016: 653). If Ukraine becomes a NATO member, it will have the opportunity to benefit from the collective defence provided by Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. The members will consider an attack against one or more of them as an attack on all of them. Thus, as an ally, Ukraine will share its risks and responsibilities with the members due to its strategic partner status against possible Russian aggression (Kriendler, 2007: 7). Nevertheless, it is obvious that the former Soviet states -which are current NATO members like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania- would not want to take responsibility for Ukraine and provoke Russia. It should be taken into account that these Baltic states, which are geopolitically close to Russia and struggling with Russia's disinformation and cyber attacks, may not want to implement Article 5.

Second, given Russia and Ukraine's common geography and history, Ukraine's NATO membership could result in a deep eastern and western divide, both in the region and on Ukraine's internal borders. Currently, the western part of Ukraine supports pro-European policies, while the eastern part follows a pro - Russian policy. The political polarization and ethnic division of Ukraine, whose history, geography, and culture are intertwined with Russia, creates instability. Even if Ukraine finds a balance as to whether its direction should lie east or west, Ukraine will not act completely independently in domestic and foreign policy decisions. In this sense, the

membership of a state intertwined with Russia will not be compatible with NATO's collaborative security strategy (O'Hanlon, 2021). As a matter of fact, the presence of NATO warships has been decreasing in the Black Sea, despite NATO's plans to increase its presence and ensure security in the Black Sea after the Ukraine-Russia conflicts since 2014. While NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg promised an increase in warships going to the Black Sea in 2017, no progress has been made four years later (Coffey and Kochis, 2021).

Third, Ukraine's becoming a NATO member without carrying out its economic, military, and democratic reforms is seen as a remote prospect. According to the Freedom House Report (2021), which calculates citizens' right to vote, freedom of expression and equality in law, Ukraine is a "partially free" country with a total score of 60 out of 100. In addition, Ukraine is in the hybrid regime category with 39 democracy scores, which includes ratings on independent media, civil society, national and local governance, and corruption (Freedom House, 2021). According to the 2020 Corruption Perception Index, Ukraine ranks 117th out of 180 countries with a score of 33 out of 100 (Transparency International, 2020). Ukraine is making slow progress in the fields of democracy and corruption in meeting the criteria required by NATO. Also, the inability of Ukraine to meet its defence needs in terms of military capacity necessitates military modernization and training. Ukraine must align its national security policy more closely with NATO's global strategic policy to become a NATO member. Since 2016, NATO has been implementing a Comprehensive Aid Package (CAP) for Ukraine and has been taking steps to accelerate Ukraine-NATO cooperation by helping Ukraine achieve defence reform (Hvozd, 2019). The aim of implementing the Comprehensive Aid Package is to improve Ukraine's defence capacity and ensure that the Ukrainian military army and NATO Allied forces work in harmony. Expanding training missions in Ukraine, providing support for the modernization of its military infrastructure, and holding joint military exercises can effectively transform Ukraine - NATO cooperation into membership. In this sense, Ukraine should prioritize its defence capacity and pursue reforms to strengthen its national security.

As a matter of fact, after the NATO summit in Brussels, Stoltenberg stated that "Ukraine is an aspirant country", but this would not be possible without modernizing the defence-security centres, establishing civil-political control, and completing the fight against corruption reinforces the claim that Ukraine's NATO membership is a remote prospect (Gould, 2021). Ensuring Ukraine's membership could be a counterproductive strategic decision for NATO. Indeed, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov's statement that Ukraine's NATO membership would be a red line for Russia shows that if any membership decision is made, peace in the region will not be achieved for a long time (Balmforth, 2021). Apart from that, Ukraine still has a long way to go to meet the criteria for NATO membership. The fulfilment of economic, political, and democratic reforms is seen as an important step for functioning the Membership Action Plan. Ukraine should ensure its military modernization by furthering its military

cooperation with NATO while laying the foundations for its democratic development.

## Conclusion

Since the uprising of the Russian-backed separatists and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the ceasefire in Ukraine-Russia relations has repeatedly broken down and tended to conflict. The ethnic and cultural division within the country, as well as the eastern and western separation, oblige Ukraine to consider the Russian factor while making its national decisions. In this sense, ensuring the NATO membership of a Ukraine, which is intertwined with Russian culture and history, can be a difficult strategic decision for both Ukraine and NATO to manage. The statement made by the NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, who bases Ukraine's NATO membership on certain criteria, even after Russia has amassed its largest military troops in Donbas after a long time, confirms the above-mentioned reasons. The prospect of Ukraine's NATO membership seems remote.

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# Indo-Bhutan Cyber Diplomacy and Regime Formation

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**T**his article is in continuation of my previous article on Indo-Nepal Cyber Diplomacy and Regime Formation, published by Political Reflection Magazine (Sarkar, 2021: 23). The previous article dealt with how and why the notion of Indo-Nepal Cyber Diplomacy is important and recognised the scope of a regime formation, befitting the call of the time. The present article will focus on the development of Indo-Bhutan Cyber Diplomacy and the scope of a coherent cyberspace regime formation between India and Bhutan. It would also try to concentrate on why a cyber regime formation among the SAARC countries are relevant to both legal discourse and International Relations, which has been enduring incredible advances due to the revolution in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), fundamentally reshaping the conduct of the existing world order.

The Treaty of Westphalia, signed in 1648, helped in creating the modern system of state sovereignty. It effectively cemented the territorial integrity and legal equality of all nation-states and prohibited the interference of one state into the internal affairs of another. However, as Internet technology spread around the globe, it has offered incredible access to information around the world (Rosenzweig, 2018). Katherine Maher (2013) has noted "the internet's laissez-faire culture of privacy, anonymity, and free expression inevitably come into conflict with military priorities of security and protocol." Hence the "non-state actors in cyberspace have begun a challenge to the hegemony of nation-states that have been the foundation for international relations since the Peace of Westphalia." (Rosenzweig, 2018). Furthermore, decolonisation, the cold war and globalisation have also redefined the idea of sovereignty, reshaping the existing World Order and transnationalism *vis-à-vis* gross 'internet penetration'. The 'Internet' devalues territory and, in doing so, also undermines state actors, which were instrumental in the formation of the territorial state, culminating in the Peace of Westphalia (Mansbach, EOLSS). The 'worldwide web' has remained a crucial factor in understanding the erosion of the state today, as it has contributed to deterritorialisation. Barlow (1996) stated "Governments of the Industrial World ... "You have no sovereignty where we gather. ... Cyberspace does not lie within your borders." The normative implications of this process are the growing impediments to the functional democracies, contributing to the newer ways of defining political space and organising for political ends of the stake-holding managements, manifested through different bilateral, trilateral and various multi-layered diplomatic response strategies.

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Ever since ICT has become the key for the government organisation, business houses and individuals of both developed and developing countries facilitating e-Government services, e.g., online filing of tax returns, and visa applications; online businesses, e.g., buying online goods and e-commerce products and services; banking and finance services, e.g., paying utility bills and checking account details; e-learning, e.g., online courses and distance learning, and effective and efficient management of critical infrastructure, e.g., energy and telecom. The increase in the adoption of personal computers, laptops, smartphones, tabs, and various forms of ICT devices made cybersecurity one of the key concerns of the state and non-state actors. Cybercrimes and other virtual offences *vis-à-vis* the politico-economic and commercial developments owing to globalisation required deterrence calls from national, regional and international levels. United Nations, state and non-state players have formulated several treaties, implemented several policies, to achieve a legal regime to ensure cyberspace protection and virtual safety (Neupane, 2016: 2) as the security initiatives to protect against personal and national data infringement and violation of individual privacy and civil liberty.

India – Bhutan bilateralism and the diplomatic liaison have evolved over the years. These two developing nations are compelled to mainstream their respective Cyberspace to be in tune with globalisation and its effects on internal and external affairs, international relations, governance, public administration, trade and commerce, national deterrence, regional security, etc. Hitherto, the Indo-Bhutan Cyber Diplomacy imperatives are centred around the individual, domestic, interdependent national safety, regional, commercial and security interests. The present work would try to reflect upon cyber diplomacy, how a *technologie d'avant-garde* paradigm shift having long term consequences on political organisation, affect these two-neighbouring state-actors; focusing on the development of ICT in the sovereign territorial states of India and Bhutan; through the bilateral plane in terms of national interest, to develop a cybersecurity policy regime amidst the technological and political change in the context of global politics.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries are yet to set up a resilient cyber regime, like the European Union (EU) or Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The socio-economic inequality, digital divide, technical constraints and self-contradictory national security priorities existing among the SAARC states led to the development of the inversely proportional ICT goals among the regional stakeholders. Hitherto, India and Bhutan have enjoyed long-existing politico-cultural, geostrategic and politico-economic exchanges. These two concerned countries of the Global South have thus accelerated enormous geopolitical, politico-economic, socio-cultural and economic-geographic opportunities for e-commerce, digital marketing and cyberspace risk management think-tank to thriving. – Therefore, it would be pertinent to gauge the scope of Indo-Bhutan cyberspace bilateralism in this era of digital activism.

Information Technology (IT) Acts 2000 heralded an era of India's digital activism. An amendment to the IT act in 2018 not only boosted the national cyber policy regime but also empowered the Indian netizens. The 'Cyber-Crime, Cyber Security and Right to Privacy' report of 2014 by the Parliamentary Standing Committee clearly defined the jurisdiction of the IT Acts. The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) data shows sharp growth of Internet Subscribers in India – from 27% in 2012 to 58.51% in 2020. The NCRB data also states that 4,4546 cases of cybercrimes were registered in 2019 as compared to 28248 in 2018. Digital India records a 63.5% increase in cybercrimes in 2020.

Meanwhile, Indian cyberspace has bloomed legal establishments, military instruments, administrative-technical infrastructure, civic enforcement mechanism, educational devices and health care (Rajagopalan, 2015). Since 2013, National Cyber Security Policy has articulated a holistic vision of public-private engagements. India recognised the position of the National Cybersecurity Coordinator in 2013 and established the National Cyber Coordination Centre in 2016. Department of Telecommunication, Ministry of Communications has also emphasised on acceptance of public opinion, civil society participation and a pro-stakeholder approach. It preserves that every Indian individual netizen is involved both as a victim and as a cybersecurity provider (Anas, 2015). National Cybersecurity Coordinator disseminates a revised National Cybersecurity Strategy, in 2020. Henceforth, Indian cyber legislation has so far set ambitious goals. It offers an inclusive capacity building cyber mechanism. – However, the existing Indian cyber regime is only partially adequate. The gap between cyberspace legislation, digitalisation and cyber policy implementation persists. The recent Covid Pandemic witnessed gross misinformation circulation and disinformation campaigns over WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media, multiplying phishing and other cybercrimes. The Pandemic induced concurrent Lockdowns have observed an acute Digital Divide within the society, more specifically between the core and the periphery, which affected the education and future of the students. The situation juxtaposes "the urgent need to enhance cyber resilience in critical infrastructures and across society" (Ebert et al. 2020)

Bhutan being a small landlocked Himalayan country, surrounded by China and India, broke its isolation in 1960. The computerisation and automation of the government offices started in 1984, aided by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The engagement with the Internet happened in 1999 as a part of the celebration of the Formula year reign of His Majesty, the Fourth King. However, the actual use of the Internet remained minimal. They were modestly used for basic word processing, database applications and personal communication. Very low computer literacy, lack of accessibility, maintenance cost etc. remained the obstacles to the effective proliferation of ICT and cyberspace in Bhutan for a long time (Gruys, 2000). However, the Royal Government of Bhutan recognised the need to be prepared to prevent and act against transnational terrorism quite early. In 2006, Bhutan came up with the Bhutan Information, Communication and Media Act (BICMA 2006), a legislative provision on

counter-terrorism. Since BICMA has undergone few amendments to include provisions on cyber-offences, cyber-bullying, cyber-terrorism etc. (BICMA Report 2020).

Bhutan moved toward a robust ICT between 2004 to 2013. In a very short time, the number of subscribers using the Internet and mobile services grew phenomenally. In 2014, the annual InfoComm and Transport Statistical Bulletin stated that the Internet and mobile services are accessible in all 20 *dzongkhag*s, i.e., the districts and 205 *geogs,* i.e., the village blocks (Choejey et al. 2015). In 2015 United Nations Office of Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) organised a national capacity building workshop titled "The Universal Legal Framework against Terrorism and Countering the Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes" in Thimpu. It addressed issues related to the use of the internet for terrorist purposes and strengthened Bhutan's capacity of national criminal justice officials to implement the universal legal framework against terrorism quite successfully (UNODC 2015). According to the National Statistics Bureau (NSB) data, there are approximately 557,154 mobile subscribers, which translate into 76 mobiles per 100 inhabitants; and there were more than 80,000 Facebook and Social Networking sites users by the end of 2020. Furthermore, Bhutan has developed its ICT infrastructure with extensive fibre-optic networks connecting all the regional and local headquarters to the central ministries and constructed community centres in every *geog* to serve as one-stop-service windows for e-government services. Bhutan has also established two international gateways of high-speed fibre optic cables, to provide reliable and redundant connectivity to the outside world (Choejey et al., 2015). Own domestic local-area-network systems are also established to associate applications of company websites, webmail, file transfer servers and government-to-citizen (G2C) services for police clearance certificates and business licenses, and submission of income and personal tax returns etc. reducing cost and time and improving transparency of government services (Cheki 2017).

In the meantime, Bhutan's rapid ICT growth also prompted potential cyber threats to information systems, computer networks and data privacy. Recognising the importance of cyber-security, in 2016, the Department of Information Technology and Telecom, Ministry of Information and Communications has initiated a project to establish the Bhutan Computer Incidence Response Team (BtCIRT) to serve as the national agency to

    i. collect, analyse and disseminate information on cyber incidents,
    ii.     establish emergency measures for handling cyber security incidents and
    iii.     prepare disaster management, contingency plans and business continuity plans for critical information infrastructure.

~ Since, BtCIRT operates under the Department of IT & Telecom (DITT) of the Ministry of Information & Communications, it provides both reactive and proactive cybersecurity services to the entire nation, including guiding the development of a national strategy. Bhutan's National Cybersecurity Strategy (NCS) was also initiated towards the end of 2018 by the

International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (Sheldon 2018). However, ITU's report on "Readiness assessment of Bhutan's Computer Incident Response Team (CIRT)" observes that before 2019, cyber incidents like phishing, online banking theft, hacking etc. were dealt with ad-hoc manners by computer-related departments and there is an absolute dearth of documentation on how these incidents were investigated, analysed, remediated and reported. Thereafter, in October 2020 the first version of the NCS was finalised and submitted to the Cabinet of Bhutan for approval (BtCIRT, 2020). Moreover, the Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) was found to be quite cautious and continuously cautioned the public on cyber-threats with the global surge of digital crimes and work-from-home culture around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic situation (Zangpo 2020).

It is to be noted that there is no universal cyber regime to date. Cyberspace is a rapidly growing technology. Its user base in India and Bhutan comes from all walks of life. Hence, it is vulnerable to numerous security threats pertinent to this domain. As cyberspace operates without boundaries, it challenges the very nature of the operating procedures of the real world in terms of governance, maintenance, ownership and legal jurisdictions. - In the next essay of this series therefore, digital diplomatic possibilities between India and Bhutan will be further enumerated.

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# A Bone of Contention

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Worl'd's two most densely-populated nation's armies are locked in an overwrought stand-off in the Himalayas. The ongoing armed tension is not only restricted to Ladakh; defense forces of both states are eyeball-to-eyeball at Nathu La; a border area between Sikkim north-eastern state of India and China. China and India share a border approximately 3,440km long and have overlapping territorial claims. (Siddique, 2020). In 2020 the confrontation was reported on two occasions in Ladakh at three locations: Hot Spring, the Galwan valley, and to the south Pangong Lake, and one time in 2021 at Nathu La in Sikkim. Their border forces frequently smack on each other, resulting in sporadic scuffles, but both countries agreed on a ceasefire for the last four decades.

Since the 1962 Sino-Indian War, China and India have had frequent stand-offs along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). After this bruising border war, decades passed and concluded three diplomatic agreements were signed between 1993 and 2013 to manage the unresolved border. Those agreements were operationally helpful because they offered a strategy for preserving "peace and serenity" on the borders and politically important as well because they allowed both growing powers to place their disputes on the table, whether it is based on territorial issues or other and ensue with building and broadening political and economic relationship. But after the recent military confrontation, any diplomatic engagements will probably be complicated in the near future as India is highly under distrust, and if both nations find enough options through both can engage themselves in an agreement; Indian's will probably require additional promises.

Indian's claimed that in early May 2020, Chinese forces dug trenches, placed tents, and moved heavy apparatus inside several miles in proclaimed Indian Territory, and thousands of Chinese troops have deployed into the Galwan valley in Ladakh, which is not a routine incursion. (Ethirajan, & Pandey, 2020). Ajai Shukla, an Indian military expert, said that; "the situation is grave; Chinese have come into terrain which they already accepted as a part of India. This has entirely changed the status-quo". (Ethirajan & Pandey, 2020). The move came after when India built several hundred-mile-long roads connecting to a sophisticated airbase that was reactivated in 2008. Differences are not limited to only one factor; they have been growing in the past years over other policy domains, when India redrew the region's map and controversially decided to limit the self-sufficiency of Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019. On the other side, the Indian encroachment of Nepal's territory is not hidden by

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building a road connecting with China, that Nepalese claims are their territory by presenting their map in parliament. India has forced encroachment into the Galwan valley through they are changing the whole picture along the LAC that has annoyed the Chinese. Chinese media outlet Global Times categorically said; "The Galwan Valley region is Chinese territory, and the local border control situations were very clear. The actions by the Indian side have seriously violated China and India's agreements on border issues, violated China's territorial sovereignty and harmed military relations between the two countries" (Global times, 2020).

The stand-off is held at strategic areas, which is considered as the heart of both states. Strategically; India cannot defend Ladakh if Pangong Lake is taken. If the Chinese military is allowed to inhabit the strategic 'Shyok valley', then they can easily encroach Nubra Valley and Siachin. Whereas Aksai Chin area touches the eastern belt of the Ladakh region is already under the control of China which India claimed its part, is important for china from a strategic perspective because it connects Xinjiang Province with western Tibet. Sikkim is next to the highest plateau Donglang in China and Doklam in India, Chinese road access to this area would threaten India strategically because 20km wide Siligauri Corridor that connects India to its seven north-eastern states, including Assam, to the rest of the country and this is the only area through which they could make an offensive strike to a Chinese foray, and the only stretch of the Himalayan frontier where Indian troops have a terrain and tactical advantage. Since 2017, China has increased its campaign of improving infrastructures, such as roads and homes, as well as establishing whole new communities in Tibet. Chinese are trying to promote border security, economic development, political allegiance, and strengthen the Communist Party of China to hold in such restive and disputed areas. In disputed territory near the LAC, the growing Chinese presence in terms of dual-use infrastructure (military/civilian) includes new buildings and designed roads, which adds credibility to Chinese territorial claims.

Traditionally in this tense situation, around 40000-50000 Indian soldiers are deployed to eastern Ladakh with "most advanced main battle tanks, self-propelled howitzers, surface-to-air missiles, and brand new rafale multirole fighters". (The Eurasian Times, 2020). Whereas being the second-largest military (India Today, 2020). Chinese Infrastructure is very advanced as compared to India, and financially, both countries had mutual trade volume in the first quarter of 2021 was USD 27.7billion, though during stand-off India boycotted Chinese product still they have interdependency thus countries can't afford military confrontation. If China wants to achieve its strategic goals, it can divert its resources. In contrast, the huge decline in the Indian economy in recent years due to coronavirus has worsened the Indian situation in the context of achieving its strategic goal.

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