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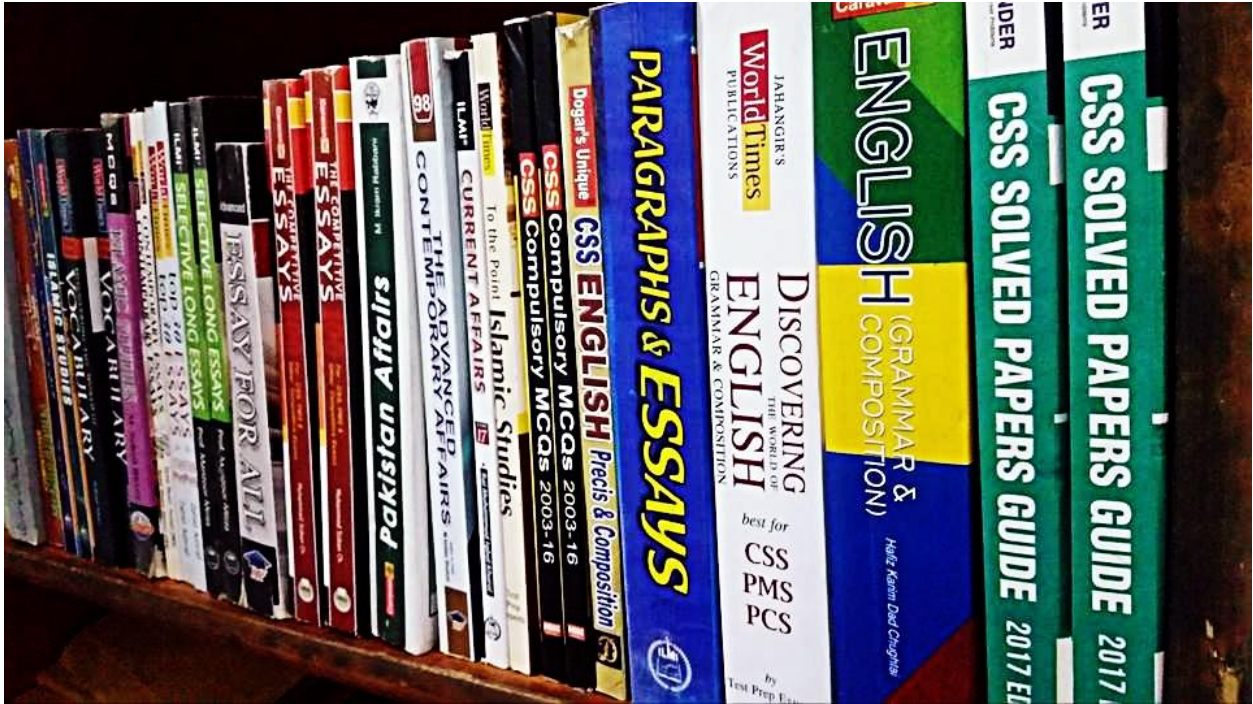
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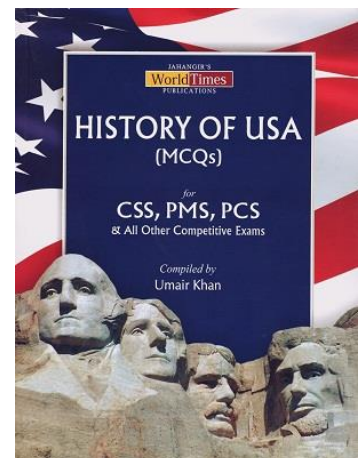
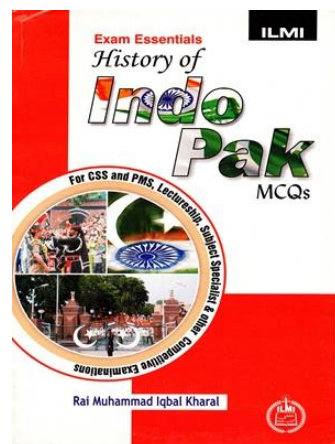
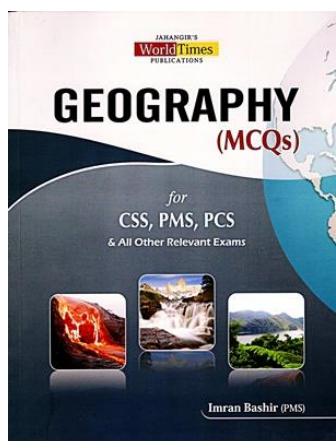
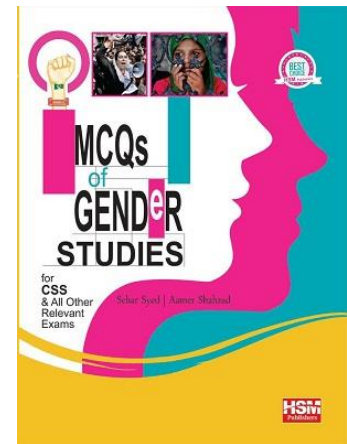
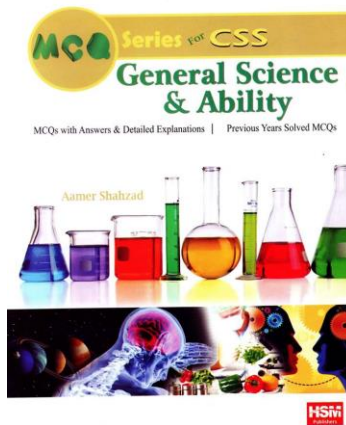
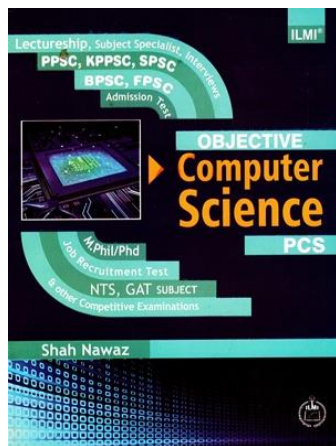
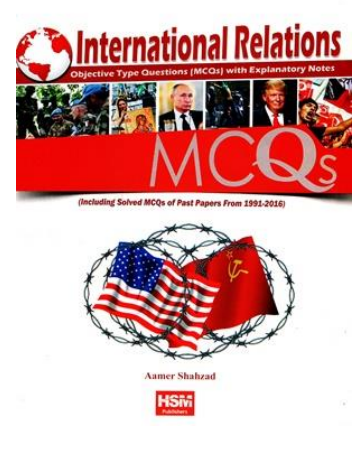
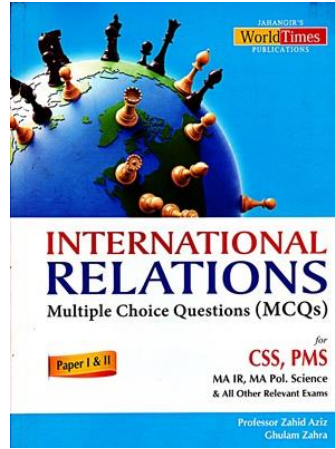
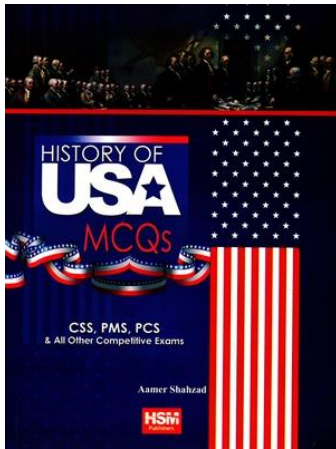
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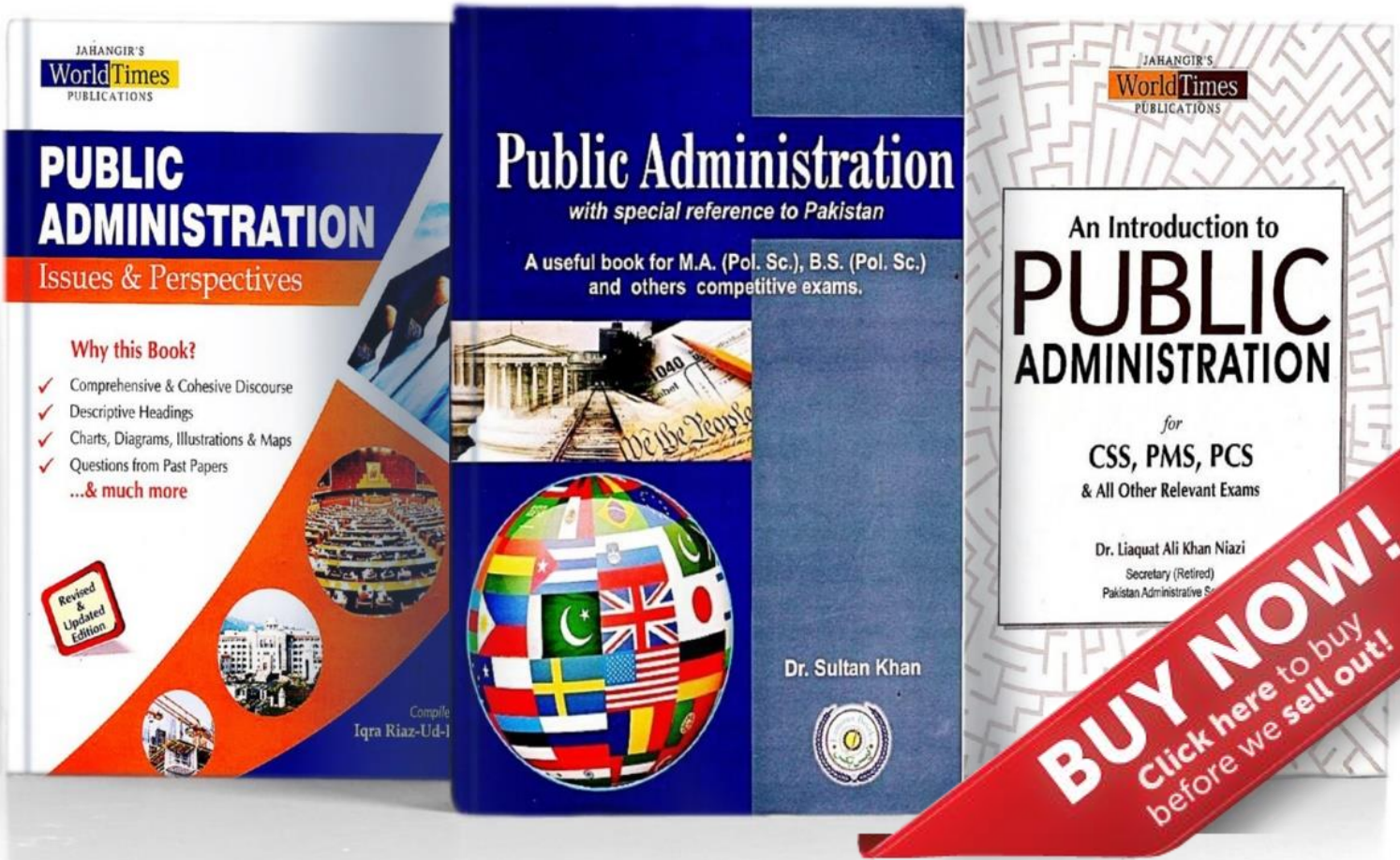


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# PAKISTAN

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## **National Security Policy: A Fresh Outlook By Prof Dr Azhar Ahmad**

THE National Security Policy of Pakistan 2022-2026 (NSP) was finally launched by the Prime Minister of Pakistan on January 14, 2022.

National Security Policy is a framework or a set of guiding principles which provides vision and direction to subordinate sectors of the government.

It is definitely a step in the right direction and the initiative needs to be appreciated. The document opens up with the message of the Prime Minister which is very apt and succinctly puts forth the intention and direction of the government. However, the message by the National Security Advisor (NSA) does not seem in harmony with the PM's vision.

Since the actual document is a secret and not releasable to the public, a comprehensive rational analysis is not possible. Without sounding too critical, some major areas are highlighted for clarity.

Strangely, the NSP has been given an "expiry date" in its title, suggesting that the policy is only for four years. Inclusion of this deadline defies the very essence of the policy. National vision and principles do not come with expiry dates.

Such policies or documents are live documents which continue to evolve. It is not advisable to have a national policy just for four years which will become irrelevant on a given date. A quick glance on similar national policies will reveal the fact.

The policies, to be effective, must be long term and provide broad directions and guiding principles so that subordinate departments can formulate their vision and policies in the light of the same.

It should not give an impression that the document was launched more as a publicity stunt than the intending purpose.

The more glaring area in my opinion that needs immediate and serious attention is priority attributed to economic security in the document vis-a-vis human security.

The message of the NSA states, "Our national security thinking seeks to identify means of expanding economic resources, the most prudent approach is to keep economic security at the core."

While the idea of economic security sounds brilliant to the unsuspecting layman, it needs deeper understanding. This idea comes straight from the text books of the capitalist elite and institutions like the IMF and the World Bank.

This thinking only facilitates the job of the "economic hit men" already very actively pursuing the capitalist agenda in Pakistan. Development of a country is dependent on Good Governance which is a product of political stability and good leadership, besides other factors.

Good governance will almost automatically result in economic or any other security. Good leadership, as well as political stability is dependent on the quality of human resource and that is the area which should be at the core of our policy making.

Money cannot guarantee leadership skills and political stability but good governance will certainly result in long-term economic development and stability.

Talking of economic security without striving for good governance and political stability is like putting the cart before the horse and thus, confusing the cause and effect. It has been our dilemma for decades that we have not understood this phenomenon and have kept our priorities wrong.

Perhaps because it suited national as well as international rulers and helps keeping us shackled to imperialist money lending institutions, which, in turn, influence our political decision making and governance as well.

Talking of human development, the most important single factor that can influence all types of security is education.

One could only hope that such an important document would underscore the significance of education in nation building and security, and devote some space to this important element.

However, education could not earn a single paragraph at its own and only finds a space of a small paragraph titled, “education, technology and innovation” that too under the section “security of our economic future”.

This implies that even education is a subset of economy and not otherwise. This is a clear example of misplaced obsession with economy without addressing the core issues.

The PM’s message states, “the National Security Policy centres on my government’s vision, which believes that the security of Pakistan rests in the security of its citizens.

This citizen centric approach to national security prioritizes national cohesion and the prosperity of people, while guaranteeing fundamental rights and social justice without discrimination.” The NSP does not seem to follow this balanced advice.

During one of the earlier sessions while debating on the NSP draft, with the team of the NSA, I pointed out to this fact to which the chair responded by telling me, “We are following the Chinese model”. After having taught to China university students for over a decade, I realize that there is a serious misunderstanding among the people about China’s economic rise.

The sequence of China’s rise is clear good leadership reforms within the government as well as in the ruling communist party, leading to good governance and economic reforms.

Reversing the order has not achieved the results in the past and will not achieve the desired results in the future.

—The writer teaches international relations at Bahria University.

# **Rising up to the Multiple Challenges By**

## **Talat Masood**

Nations that suffered from chronic political instability, economic dependence and a highly disturbed or inimical neighbourhood have corrected course when their leaders had the vision, far-sight and the ability to implement prudent measures. South Korea, Vietnam and China are shining examples of this transformation that we witnessed and admire them for. In the last seventy-five years, Pakistan has made progress in relative terms from what we inherited at the partition but clearly, the progress has been slow and unable to keep pace even by South Asian standards. So, when our leaders talk big, give examples of the past glory of Islam it sounds evasive and sidetracking and no substitute for delivery and performance. Similarly, when the opposition derides the government, it fails to inspire us for the nation has experienced their quality of governance. At best it could be rated marginally better in certain areas but below our minimum expectations. The role of the army in influencing governance and exercising power beyond the ambit of the constitution is another factor that cannot be brushed aside, as besides distorting democracy it does affect good governance and hampers political and economic control by the civilian government.

These facts are well known and repeated ad nauseam and it seems we have accepted them as fait accompli. From this what should one conclude of our state of despondency and national pride and more importantly how do we come out of it. The irony is that as people and as a nation we are as good as any, but suffer because our leadership in self-interest or lack of commitment to democratic values with a feudal mindset is more interested in promoting its narrow interests than the well-being of the broad masses and standing of the country. This reaffirms common experience that only those developing countries have progressed who were fortunate to have a sincere leadership that practised and promoted the right values and good governance. But ability, professional competence and honest leadership are virtues not easily found and not the preferred choice of political parties and vested groups. This has to change and it can only be brought about by people's pressure, civil society movements and reformation within the political parties. There is hardly any drive or undertaking in this direction as a result the level of discourse and quality of legislation remains far below generally accepted standards.



The effect of Covid-19 has pushed Pakistan like many other countries to function in an unfamiliar environment creating confusion and stagnation. Whereas, the government did control the spread of it comparatively better than neighbouring countries but its managing of consequences in workplaces and societal impact was not as good. The hope that the worst is over was probably an over-optimistic assessment as a fresh outbreak of a new variant is spreading fast. Nonetheless, this is one area in which the government's handling the crisis deserves to be recognised.

Most disturbing feature of the political and economic crisis is that there are no solutions in sight or being discussed seriously in parliament or media to give confidence to the public. The hopes of change that were built up through the speeches and statements of the PM and the ministers have come crashing down as inflation hits a record high and politics takes a turn for the worst. Even the receipt of a few billion dollars from Saudi Arabia, China or IMF in the form of loans is considered a boon for supposedly a country that justifiably prides itself in niche areas of security and information technologies.

We have repeatedly heard from practically every government, including the present one, of dealing effectively with the bleeding public sector enterprises but this endeavour in most cases only ends up with some facelift instead of seeking a long-term and financially-viable solution. The hold of the Unions or the policy of maintaining the vote bank at the cost of bleeding state enterprises is a sad reflection of the inability of successive governments in failing to take hard decisions in the larger interest of the state. The government's package that provides a suitable compensation to those who have lost their jobs should serve the interest of the workers and open up avenues for reviving the industries through modernisation and technology upgrade. Private sector is doing relatively better but has limitations when it has to compete for exports in quality and price. This would require improving the industrial and technological infrastructure, and enhancing the national educational and technological expertise to compete. These require long-term planning and implementation as there is no shortcut to achieving these goals.

These are issues that can be successfully dealt with provided the leadership is focused on seriously addressing them instead of delving on peripheral matters, chasing opponents or shadows.

It is important to break despondency that has set in due to the conditions that the people are facing and they know the political leadership instead of addressing their problems is more interested in personalised battles. The power of positivity — confidence in oneself and the people — is missing. Our diversities — cultural, social and ethnic — should be our strength and not a source of friction and division.

A serious approach toward changing the conditions of the people of erstwhile FATA is a must, without which our border would be no different from that of the western neighbour. We are dealing most of the security-related problems kinetically which is an important element of showing the power and resolve of the state in maintaining its territorial integrity. But simultaneously political, economic and social measures are necessary to address the root cause of discontent and emergence of militant and anti-state elements. More significantly, the burden of policy formulation and fighting terrorism primarily rests with the military and the drummed-up national action plan has been largely ignored.

The involvement of people and making them an interested party is a must for change and we are only partially taking this approach.

Source: Published in Express tribune

# **India-Pakistan Relations, Past, Present and Future By Tariq Aqil**

RELATIONS between India and Pakistan continue to be the most antagonistic rivalries in the sphere of international relations during the twenty first century.

Since the dawn of independence in 1947 both countries have been in a constant state of sabre-rattling leading to major military conflicts in 1965 and 1971 plus numerous border skirmishes including the very explosive Kargil conflict.

The show of hatred and enmity has continued and both states have tried their best to diplomatically outmanoeuvre each other in the UN and other diplomatic forums.

Since the last two decades, both countries have been armed with nuclear weapons and some very lethal delivery systems and this capability has turned the Indian sub-continent into the most probable nuclear flash point in the world.

The India-Pakistan rivalry has even impacted the politics of the super powers and the USA, Russia and China have been deeply involved in the political tussle between the two nuclear armed nations in the sub-continent.

This bitter rivalry between the two Asian countries has the potential to have a very adverse effect on peace in Asia or for that matter the entire world.

Causes of the long and bitter rivalry between the two countries can be said to be ideology, territory, geopolitics and domestic politics.

Ideology or religion is the root cause and the other causes have been added with the passage of time and the love-hate relationship has sometimes dampened and sometimes accentuated the bitterness between the two countries.

The very basic differences between the two countries lie in the ideology based theory called the two-nation theory that believed in religion as the basis of statehood and that Hindus and Muslims were two different nations living in the same territory.

Differences of ethnicity or language were considered as secondary issues, this was the political stance of the All India Muslim League led By Mohammad Ali Jinnah whereas the All India Congress led by the likes of Nehru and Gandhi believed in a united India as a secular state governed by parliamentary democracy.

Many eminent Muslims like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and others also supported the Congress Party and they were called the nationalist Muslims.

The Pakistan demand was finally accepted by the British Government and what followed was the bloodiest period in the history of the sub-continent.

During the partition millions of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs moved across the borders of the two independent states in 1947.

This phase gave rise to extreme religious violence, bloodshed and killings on a monumental scale.

Indian leaders had rejected the two-nation theory and the Pakistani leaders had embraced it resulting in further discord, bitterness and enmity between the two countries.

More bitterness and hatred was created after the emergence of the territorial dispute when the Maharaja of Kashmir signed the Instrument of Accession and joined his state to India.

This act of the Maharaja of Kashmir led to the first India-Pakistan conflict but the fighting was confined to the Kashmir region and the international boundary was not crossed by any of the combatants in Kashmir.

Today the India-Pakistan conflict is classified as enduring rivalry which can be defined as a conflict lasting more than two decades.

Religious ideology and territorial conflict are the two major causes of the rivalry and conflict between the two countries, and other causes can be the geo-political situations immediately after gaining independence from the British.

In the post-WW-II period at the beginning of the Cold War Pakistan was quick to become an ally of the USA and by 1954 had joined two military pacts led by the



USA namely SEATO and CENTO, not only that the USA was also given the use of an air base in Peshawar from where to fly their U-2 aircraft for spying on the Soviet Union.

India on the other hand decided to remain non-aligned in the Cold War and Nehru with Nasser and Marshal Tito laid the foundations of the Non-Aligned Movement or NAM.

Hostility and aggression reached a boiling point in 1971 over the East Pakistan crisis and the subsequent war and emergence of Bangladesh.

In this conflict the USA and China both showed a definite tilt towards Pakistan and in reply India concluded a treaty of defence and friendship with the Soviet Union.

The Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s drove Pakistan further into the American camp and deepened the US reliance on Pakistan in its bid to defeat Soviet designs in Afghanistan.

After the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan once again became a frontline state in the global war on terrorism led by the USA while India very adroitly managed to stay on the sidelines avoiding any displeasure of their Russian ally.

The potential for peace between the two countries is really immense.

They share a common culture, many languages, cuisine, dress and many festivals, they have more in common than many European countries who now live in peace and harmony after centuries of conflict under the umbrella of a political pact called the European Union.

To eliminate the horrors of a nuclear holocaust and for the sake of future generations both countries need to eliminate all causes of conflict and come together in a political and economic pact.

—The writer is Professor of History, based in Islamabad.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

# **National Security Policy: The Public Version**

## **By Dr Tehmina Aslam Ranjha**

On 14 January 2022, Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan finally unveiled the public version of the country's first-ever National Security Policy (NSP). The policy is meant for five years (2022-26) and it will be reviewed at the end of every year.

At the occasion, the PM said that the country was in a dire need of a multi-pronged strategy for the future to ensure the protection of its citizens and guard economic interests. The policy is meant for defining the country's future direction which would be citizen-centric to national security. Further, the policy placed a special emphasis on economic security. At the occasion, the PM said that the policy was reflective of a new mindset barring the previous one which was centred essentially on military security – and not beyond that.

Pakistan had been obsessed with and driven by the security mindset in the past is a big admission thereby indicating that Pakistan remained constrained from offering its citizens the due socio-economic leeway and the country the due economic prosperity. In other words, security-driven policies impinged upon not only the citizens' rights but also their economic wellness. Apparently, Pakistan has decided to desensitize its security sensibility – one interpretation could be that Pakistan may reduce its defence budget. The reduction could be justified as face-saving dictated by the policy only. At least, there is a realization that security-driven policies remained short of serving the national or citizenry purpose.

Pakistan had been obsessed with and driven by the security mindset in the past is a big admission.

As announced, the policy document has been finalized after obtaining a full civil-military consensus, besides seeking a limited and selected public participation. This point itself indicates that the policy is a product of the unanimity settled between the bureaucracy and the military excluding the public representatives. No discussion or debate on the policy has taken place in the parliament and this is the major flaw stalking the policy. Unfortunately, the best documents made with the best of intentions fail to yield the desired results just because these are enforced and not evolved.

Pakistan is a federation driven by a parliamentary form of government. Though the National Security Committee had given a nod on 27 December 2021 and a day after the federal cabinet had approved the policy, any policy not debated in the parliament is bound to fight for its legitimacy and struggle for its survival. In politically diverse countries such as Pakistan, the procedure precedes the intent.

Reportedly, the full document unfolding the NSP is 110 pages long, of which only 50 pages have been made public. Hence, more than fifty per cent of documents would remain confidential. This brings to the fore the next challenge: the Pakistanis are being subjected to a policy not known to them fully. The exposed 50 pages may not be representative of the classified rest. At least, a parliamentary debate was required to decide if any portion were worth classifying. Again, in ethnically heterogeneous countries such as Pakistan, where provinces harbour suspicions against the Center, keeping part of the policy secret – not to say the substantial part – exacerbates the fear of the unknown.

That the policy is meant for five years (2022-26) is an interesting point, especially in the background that the incumbent government itself is left with almost two years to govern Pakistan. That is, the policy would outlive the current government, thereby leaving it up to the next government to decide whether or not to continue with the policy. Any policy which gives an impression of fashioning a parallel constitution is bound to founder on the question of legitimacy or validity, no matter what pious intentions engendering the policy are.

The exposed part of the policy contains chapters on national cohesion, economy, defence, internal security, foreign policy and human security. On paper, a high-sounding and jargon-loaded policy document can be prepared, but to implement the policy is an arduous task. For instance, the idea of national cohesion as “unity in diversity” is impressive, but it demands forbearance, which is in short supply in Pakistan’s administrative circles. The country has recently witnessed a political campaign to undo the 18th Constitutional Amendment, which had revitalized the 1973 Constitution by introducing into it the promised provincial autonomy in April 2010. Over the years, the Center had expanded its role, size and reach to overwhelm the provinces, which are still apprehensive of the Center. The trepidation is a major challenge to the idea of unity in diversity. The issues like managing islands in Sindh, protecting the fishing rights of the locals in Baluchistan and securing freedom of expression of the Pashtuns in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa are all reflections of an ongoing and underlying confrontation between the Center and the provinces.

Certainly, Pakistan has experienced different attempts meant for its cohesion, be it devising a common language, a common religion, a common political party, or even a common sport like Cricket. What Pakistan has overlooked is the respect for the constitution and what the constitution promises to the provinces and the citizens. If the provinces still have the rudimentary infrastructure to realize provincial autonomy, it does not mean that the autonomy is withdrawn. Similarly, if the citizens are unaware of their fundamental rights, it does not mean that the State can bypass them. One of the ways to appease the provinces and mollify the citizens was to prompt a parliamentary debate on it. A commentary through the media does not substitute the need for the legislative discussion.

Generally speaking, the 50-paged NSP document is a commentary on the existing social, political, economic and diplomatic subjects. Suggestive sentences can also be found as the way forward – an expression of a research paper – but the ideas expressed in them are already known.

The next step is also gruelling. That is, the NSP would be implemented by the National Security Division (NSD), which is housed in the PM's office, Constitution Avenue, Islamabad, and headed by a Secretary of the Office Management Group of Pakistan's civil service. Interestingly, the task has been assigned to the NSD but the mechanism to achieve the end is still speculative.

The writer is an analyst on national security and counter-terrorism. She tweets @TA\_Ranjha.

Source: Published in Daily Times



# Quiet Diplomacy | Editorial

PAKISTAN has emphatically rejected the statement of the Indian army chief in which he claimed that the ceasefire announced last year between the two countries was holding because India had negotiated from a position of strength.

In a tweet, military spokesman Major General Babar Iftikhar said the Indian army chief's statement was "clearly misleading", and that the ceasefire "was agreed only due to Pak's concern for the safety of the people of Kashmir living on both sides of the LoC [and that] ... No side should misconstrue it as their strength or other's weakness". The spokesman of the Foreign Office has also said the Indian army chief's comments made no sense and were made for domestic political reasons only.

It is obvious that the ceasefire is holding because of the success of the backchannel process that took place between the two countries over a period of many months. The fact that the ceasefire is still intact and survived many hiccups shows that it is an effective confidence-building measure which proves that even under the most trying of conditions, positive engagement can produce tangible outcomes. Irresponsible statements like the one made by the Indian army chief create an unnecessary controversy.

Backchannel diplomacy has always delivered encouraging results and should therefore remain a viable option to defuse tensions. Pakistan has expressed its serious concern that India is supporting militancy inside Balochistan and this has further vitiated the already tense atmosphere. India too may have some grievances which it can share with Pakistan if such an opportunity arises through quiet diplomacy.

In order to give such a process a chance, the Indian leadership must desist from making wild accusations and irresponsible statements against Pakistan. The past provides a good context. It was not too long ago that the two countries engaged in active conflict and Pakistan shot down two intruding Indian aircraft a day after Indian planes had violated Pakistani airspace.

A quiet and deep engagement can produce headway on issues that can constitute important steps in rebuilding confidence. At some point, both countries should also consider the return of high commissioners to the respective capitals.

The resumption of trade ties is also an issue that needs to be addressed. Leading businessman Mian Mansha recently advocated such a resumption saying the two countries should resolve their disputes and start trade in order to strengthen the economy. What he has said makes eminent sense but cannot happen under the existing state of relations.

Pakistan has to ensure that it firmly retains its principled position on Kashmir while engaging with India on all these issues. All this can only happen if Indian officials including their army chief desist from making statements that are far removed from reality and that only exacerbate the situation, and New Delhi stops stoking the embers of militancy in Balochistan.

Published in Dawn, February 7th, 2022

# **Pakistan's Bureaucratic Callousness By Ali Hassan Bangwar**

The concept of a welfare state enshrines public welfare and well-being as central to the governance and administrative mechanisms of a country. Under this, the government is responsible to and accountable for the socio-economic welfare of individuals and citizens. However, the objective of a welfare state is immaterial without a compassionate, disciplined and accountable bureaucracy. Being the ultimate executive authority mandated with implementing legislations, the bureaucracy is central towards establishing a welfare state. Since they are the ones meant to ensure service delivery to the masses at the grassroots level, a compassionate, pragmatic, unfettered and humane bureaucracy and public service system is essential for a welfare system to operate effectively.

Regrettably, Pakistan's bureaucracy is ineffective and non-empathetic. Colonial mentalities and power-hungry tendencies are inextricably woven within the system. Historical and socio-economic constraints notwithstanding, Pakistan's bureaucracy lacks the capacity, the compassion, the freedom and the willpower to maintain collective social good. There is a great interpersonal dichotomy and trust deficit between the national bureaucracy and the public. This divide hampers service delivery to all and sundry. Recruitment lacunas, political appointments, superiority complex, lack of training and influenced postings and transfers are some of the reasons behind the bureaucracy dwarfed performance.

Their training is where they are almost taught to be arrogant and superhuman. They are brainwashed into thinking that the more they are beyond access, the more they are revered and the more their powers multiply. 'Elite' is the term they like to be identified with. This superiority complex is manifested in the fact that a large section of the bureaucracy behaves no differently than autocracies in their respective realms. Indifference, apathy and incapacity are the defining features of most of the bureaucratic strata when it comes to the hapless poor and the destitute section of society. The large segment of the country's bureaucracy is partial to the favours of the rich and powerful who wish to enjoy impunity and an unbridled power grasp. In this backdrop, the term 'public servant' appears to be a misnomer as officials barely behave like one. On the first days of being posted, most officials particularly in Sindh pay homage to the influentials of the area in order to please and appease them.

Furthermore, hunger for power reigns supreme in the hearts and minds of most public servants and bureaucrats. Most of those that have made it into the bureaucratic sphere through fair or foul means have only two objectives in minds: to hold as much power and to amass as many riches as they possibly can. Serving the masses, particularly the underprivileged, exists nowhere in their agenda. It is a commonly observed norm in Pakistan, particularly in Sindh, that most of the bureaucrats are beyond access to the poor and the destitute. Commoners are left waiting for weeks if not months just to voice out their genuine grievances. However, for feudals, media persons or local influentials, the doors of the offices are wide open regardless of the office hours. From the peon to the higher authorities of public and semi-government organisations, no official is ready to carry out any work without a bribe.

Pakistan's slide in the Corruption Perceptions Index and the recent seizure of millions worth of gold, cash and kind by NAB in Karachi are but the few instances of unbridled practices of corruption unleashed by large sections of the bureaucracy.

Pakistan's colonial and power hunger bureaucracy has been a great contributor to this degenerative national plight. Sindh's bureaucracy feels that their duty to the feudal lords and patrons are more important and meaningful than their relationship with the common man. In many instances, personal whims, wishes and interests of the patrons in chief reign supreme and supersede official provisions and rulings. The country needs a humane, compassionate and generous bureaucracy that sincerely believes that public good must be above all else. Otherwise, a welfare state would continue to remain a distant dream.

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# **Choosing Between China and America By**

## **Najm us Saqib**

In an apparent attempt to look judicious, Washington has put all at ease particularly smaller countries like Pakistan by consoling that 'it is not a requirement for any country around the world to choose between the United States and China.' The unbelievable part came next when the State Department Spokesperson Ned Price last week surprised all those who are closely observing the ice-cold Pak-US relations particularly under the new Biden administration. 'Pakistan is a strategic partner of the United States. We have an important relationship with the government in Islamabad, and it's a relationship that we value across a number of fronts. 'In recent times, the only strategic angle in Pak-US relationship has been in the realm of counter-terrorism.

Recent gestures expressed to China in the garb of solidarity indicate that perhaps Islamabad has already decided on which side the balance would tilt as and when the two giants needed moral support of smaller states.

In early December last year, the world witnessed Pakistan abstaining from the first Summit for Democracy hosted by President Biden to strengthen and renew the most sought after way of running a government. This was perhaps the very first time in the checkered history of Pakistan that an invitation from the US President was turned down. Not that anyone participating in the Summit missed Pakistan's presence, the fact remains that Islamabad was able to convey a couple of strong messages to its 'strategic partner'. China came first and Pakistan was still disconcerted with the way it was being treated by the US. It was at a time when after waiting for quite some time to receive a telephonic call from Washington, Islamabad had already said 'absolutely not' to a request from Washington that would have been acceptable as routine in the hay days of Pak-US relations.

Was PM Imran Khan's arrival in China on the eve of the Beijing Winter Olympics' opening ceremony a coincidence or were the visit dates carefully anticipated to avail of yet another opportunity to show solidarity with China? It goes without saying that the slow-paced CPEC and removal of obvious 'misgivings' attached to the \$62 billion project was at the top of the agenda. Perhaps the IMF-imposed stringent conditions on Pakistan had necessitated a face-to-face meeting with

President Xi Jinping hoping for some additional adjustments in debt servicing. Nonetheless, the visit timings are being seen in the context of yet another obvious tilt towards China vis-à-vis the United States. We are aware that following the US announcement of a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics, a number of countries followed suit including Canada, Australia and India.

120,000 Saudi riyals seized from flyer at Peshawar airport

The nation had been told that Pakistan would not desire to be a part of any political bloc but instead wanted to play its role in bridging gaps between China and the US. However, the recent signaling from Islamabad clearly indicates an obvious tilt towards China. Or, is one looking too deep into it unnecessarily? The 'bridging the gap' part is also missing from the scene.

The recently released National Security Policy (NSP), inter alia, aims at seeking 'areas of convergence with the United States in trade, investment, connectivity, counterterrorism, security, and intelligence cooperation.' By tilting the foreign policy balance in favour of China, a time-tested friend, isn't Pakistan inadvertently seeking an area of divergence insofar as its bilateral relationship with the US is concerned? Another obvious paradox could be found in the beginning of the chapter on Foreign Policy. Explaining the 'External Context', the NSP reveals that 'Pakistan also maintains mutually beneficial relationship with all major powers and will further these based on commonality of interest.' Fortunately, the NSP is subject to an annual revision. Hopefully, someone will remove the obvious anomalies contained in this important policy document.

Does China need Pakistan's support to safeguard its interests in a global Summit or against the US in any move geared towards the imminent Cold War between the two giants? Would attending the inaugural session of Beijing Winter Olympics help in mending ways with the US in any possible manner? The age-old saying 'a friend's enemy is an enemy' still holds water if one's vital interests are not attached to the friend's enemy. Is it inevitable to please China at the cost of Pakistan's relations with the US? The answer to all these questions is no.

There is no denying the fact that Pakistan and China are joined together in a broad-based, long term 'All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership'. It is a fact that China is Pakistan's closest friend, staunch partner and iron brother. Certainly, Pakistan values Chinese support in not only upholding its territorial

integrity and national development but also in matters of its national vital interests.

However, the nature of the bilateral equation needs to be understood in its true perspective. To begin with, it is not on equal footings. Being a world power, China might be able to confine India's nefarious designs against Pakistan at various multi-lateral forums including the United Nations but its trade and economic relations with India keep on flourishing. On the other hand, Pakistan can perhaps ill-afford to take any pro-China stance particularly against the US. Agreed, the gestures such as not attending the Summit for Democracy are but essential to keep the Sino-Pak trajectory on the right path. Nevertheless, the costs involved must also be kept in mind. One has not seen any report on China restricting Pakistan from creating goodwill towards the US. It would be highly antithetical for China.

There is a need to find a way in which China remains a steadfast friend but in the process the US is not annoyed. As today's friends could be tomorrow's enemies and vice versa, Pakistan must take every step with great caution. Pending a decision on choosing between China and America, Pakistan may grab the opportunity of still being a 'strategic partner' of the US and try achieving a 'broad-based' bilateral trajectory rather than staying in the narrow street of counterterrorism.

Source: Published in The Nation

# **Kashmir at the Tipping Point By**

## **Muhammad Ragheeb**

The conflict in Kashmir is one of the oldest running “frozen conflicts” in the world that has now been ongoing since 1947. It has led to two major wars, played a major role in a third, and been involved in constant clashes and near conflicts between two nuclear armed countries of India and Pakistan.

The tensions were at their highest in the 1950s, 1960s and 1990s but have cooled down in the 21st century after the Musharraf regime’s overtures for peace and reconciliation with India. However, since the arrival of the Modi regime in India, tensions over the issue escalated again and reached a dangerous level after the Indian government abrogated the special status of Kashmir and made it a part of the union of India as a federally administered territory.

It seems as if the BJP leadership has realized that the international community has given up on the Kashmir cause and that the Pakistani government is unable to do much, hence it can continue to act with complete impunity with no external or internal pressure. As another 5th of February has passed, marking the Kashmir solidarity day, it can only be hoped that a miracle happens and the situation reverts at the very least back to what it was before the abrogation of Article 370

The current BJP administration fosters a desire to turn India away from its secular republic roots into a Hindu nationalist one, and Kashmir being the only Muslim majority state in the union, was always a target for the Modi government. The 2014 and 2019 election manifesto of his party included the abrogation of special status for Kashmir, and that promise was fulfilled on 5 August 2019. The move abolished Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution, which granted Kashmir autonomy and special rights, and also split the region into two federally administered territories called Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir. Unlike states which have their own assemblies union territories are federally governed meaning what little autonomy Kashmiris had was also taken away altogether.

Pakistan has strongly protested against this blatant violation of UNSC resolutions. The Foreign Minister has written around 27 letters to the UN Secretary General, President UNGA, OHCHR and High Representative of

European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy regarding the alarming human rights situation in Indian-occupied Kashmir which warrant investigation by a UN Commission of Inquiry as recommended by the OHCHR in its reports of 2018 and 2019. Since 2019, the Indian government has proceeded to take several steps to strengthen its grip on the region.

It has followed a strategy of land occupation in two steps in order to dilute the ethnic mix of the region. Firstly it has allowed the Indian army to declare any region as of strategic value and acquire it from the government in the Kashmir region for utilization against Kashmiri rebels. Secondly it has allowed nonresidents to purchase land in the region which they could not earlier as well, as issuing 4.2 million domiciles to non-Kashmiri residents in a bid to change the demography of the region. The justification given for these changes is to increase industrial productivity of the region by encouraging Indian companies to buy land and open factories in the region as well as benefit landowners by increasing property prices but the large- scale shifting of people shows that the real intentions are political rather than economic.

The Modi administration has also deployed hundreds of thousands of troops and declared emergency in the region. The initial crackdown by the government led to 519 people killed at the hands of security forces, mostly in extra judicial operations and fake encounters as well as during detention and interrogation. More than 210 people were killed during “cordon and search” operations carried out by the military on the pretext of anti-terrorism operations. Over 1400 people were illegally detained, tortured and forced to confess as reported by international and local media. The use of pellet guns against protesters has been especially well documented.

Journalists, especially those from Kashmir, were also targeted and suffered detentions and torture. The entire Kashmiri leadership as well was imprisoned and the death of Syed Ali Shah Gillani in prison highlights the brutal repression carried out by the Indian government to achieve its goals. The lockdown also had devastating effects on the region’s economy leading to losses of \$9.5 billion due to restrictions on movement, businesses and the closure of the internet.

With the freedom movement brutally suppressed and the Indian government now seemingly in control of the region, it seems as if the future of Kashmir and its people depends on internal politics of India rather than on any external factors. The reinstatement of Kashmir’s special status requires the BJP to lose its

government in India and for Congress to regain power in the 2024 elections since the latter has always been more accommodating of the Kashmiris' right to autonomy and of Muslims in general in India, compared to the Hindu extremists that dominate the BJP. The existing setup has no intention of stopping its drive to change the ethnic and political makeup of the region.

By 2024 it may be too late to reverse the changes even if the government in the centre changes since those who have bought lands and received domiciles will remain in the region and ensure that any future assembly formed through elections in Kashmir is more representative of the BJP's desires. The reopening of economy and tourism has allowed some sense of normalcy to return and for people to earn a livelihood. Massive increase in economic investment has also been witnessed after the end of the state of emergency.

The people of Kashmir have shown great valour in continuing to resist despite the brutal repression of the state and have refused to give up their struggle be it unarmed or armed, but at the moment there appears little space in an increasingly aggressive Indian regime for any note of dissent from the region.

It seems as if the BJP leadership has realized that the international community has given up on the Kashmir cause and that the Pakistani government is unable to do much, hence it can continue to act with complete impunity with no external or internal pressure. As another 5th of February has passed, marking the Kashmir solidarity day, it can only be hoped that a miracle happens and the situation reverts at the very least back to what it was before the abrogation of Article 370.

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Source: Published in Pak Observer



# **PM China Visit: A Big Diplomatic Victory**

**By Rashid A Mughal**

BRAVO Imran Khan did it. Amidst opposition and boycott of USA, you showed the world and particularly the sole superpower that we will take our foreign policy decisions ourselves and will not take any dictation and will pursue a policy, best suited to our regional and international interests.

Prime Minister Imran Khan paid a three-day visit to China last week to attend the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics in Beijing.

The United States and several Western nations have boycotted the Games. Imran Khan's participation in the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics was an important step towards further strengthening ties between Islamabad and Beijing.

This visit was important from Pakistan's point of view as during this visit various important regional issues were not only discussed directly with the Chinese leadership but Pakistan received unequivocal support from a trusted friend on Kashmir and other issues.

Though Pakistan and China have very close relations but at the same time Pakistan wants to maintain better diplomatic and economic relations with the United States also, despite the fact that Pakistan does not agree with the US policy towards China and ongoing tension between the two countries.

Pakistan does not see China as an alternate to the United States but because of Pakistan's internal economic needs and the changing situation in the region, Pakistan needs China.

They have made big investment of over \$60 billion in CPEC under their BRI initiative and CPEC is their flagship project.

There is an impression that some projects under CPEC are slowing down and this issue was discussed during the visit of Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Many analysts say that though some of the proposed important and urgent projects under CPEC, including the Karachi-Peshawar railway line project, have yet to make practical progress, the infrastructure and many energy projects have been completed.

Pakistan is seeking Chinese investment in the industries of textiles, footwear, pharmaceuticals, furniture, agriculture, automobile and information technology.

PM told major Chinese companies that it could provide access to trade routes to the Middle East, Africa and the rest of the world to them and offering greater incentives in the shape of reduction in freight costs.

Prime Minister's visit to China came at a time when the relations between US and Pakistan are rather cold and lack the traditional warmth between once — friendly countries.

Pakistan's ties with the United States were somewhat strained during the 1990s, but the country again became Washington's ally in the "war on terror" after the September 11, 2001, attacks.

However, following the US pullout from Afghanistan, Pakistan is now looking to the East for strategic alliances.

China, which now enjoys the status of a major economic power in Asia, has found a reliable and trust-worthy friend in Pakistan and invested billions of dollars to help stabilize Pakistan's shaky economy.

Pakistan is heavily dependent on China because the West did not turn out to be a reliable ally, abandoning Islamabad and instead cozying up to New Delhi, a common foe of both Pakistan and China.

While loans from the International Monetary Fund came with strings attached, China didn't put conditions on its loans.

It has already pumped billions of dollars into the CPEC but did not attach strings.

Pakistan has reciprocated by granting China access to the Indian Ocean and supporting the country at international forums.

The US has no interest in the region after pulling out from Afghanistan. As a result, Pakistan will need China's assistance to bolster its economy, stabilize Afghanistan, promote trade in the region and consolidate its defenses.

President Xi assured Prime Minister Imran Khan that "China upholds fairness and justice in international affairs and is willing to strengthen the coordination and cooperation with Pakistan in multilateral venues such as the UN and promote justice and world and regional peace,".

In an interview with China Global Television Network, PM Imran Khan said "Pakistan and China enjoy a "very special relationship" spanning over 70 years and nothing could change these time-tested ties.

Talking about the evolving regional rivalry between the US and China, Khan said that "Pakistan thinks it is very unfair for the US or other powers — western powers" to pressurise "countries like us to take sides" in a conflict with China.

"Why should we take sides? We should have good relations with everyone. It is not going to happen if pressure is put on Pakistan to change its relationship or downgrade its relationship with China, it wouldn't happen," Khan said.

This is a very bold statement and reflects the nature and level of friendship between Pakistan and China and also at the same time a rebuff to the imperialistic and colonial thinking and set of mind, the western powers have.

He went on to say that, "In good times, everyone stands with you but in your difficult, tough times, bad times, you remember those who stood by you.

That's why you will find that in Pakistan, people always have a special fondness for people in China," he said.

Imran Khan also referred to the QUAD or Quadrilateral alliance consisting of the US, India, Japan and Australia which has been formed against China.

After Imran Khan and Xi Jinping meeting in the backdrop of Beijing Winter Olympic games, China declared that it opposes any "unilateral actions" in Kashmir and pledged to go ahead with CPEC, which cuts through Kashmir.

In a joint statement issued after Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan held talks with the top Chinese leadership, including President Xi Jinping, in Beijing, China said the Kashmir issue was a historic dispute and should be resolved properly and peacefully.

This is a big diplomatic win for Pakistan. China has once again demonstrated that it stands with Pakistan in all situations — good or bad as mentioned by PM Imran Khan while on visit to that great country. No doubt China has proved to be an all-weather friend.

— The writer is former DG (Emigration) and consultant ILO, IOM.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

# **Pakistan-India Détente Any Time Soon? By**

## **Rustam Shah Mohmand**

Prime Minister Imran Khan convened a meeting of the country's leading industrialists and businessmen in order to solicit their advice on how to expand and deepen Pakistan's economic ties with China. Imran Khan's visit to China began on 3 February. The visit focused on accelerating the work on CPEC — the flagship Chinese project that would ensure more connectivity, more trade and more infrastructure development leading to socio-economic emancipation of the masses. Moreover, it also focused on the development of the Gwadar port, expansion of trade, Afghanistan, and the Islamist movements in Western China's Xinjiang province.

Before the visit, one of our leading industrialists, Mohammad Mansha, struck a somewhat discordant note by raising the issue of normalisation of relations with India. He was of the view that differences on Kashmir should not come in the way of establishing durable trade and commercial ties with our neighbour. Mansha's timely advice may have fallen on deaf ears as "strategic" security imperatives have taken precedence over any rationale for normalisation of relations with India. Mansha raised the issue in a forum that included the country's top security officials. Firstly, the civilian government has little to contribute to the formulation of a policy on issues with countries such as India, Afghanistan, China and the US. And secondly, the current rulers are too passionately fixated on how to criminalise their political opponents and how to use the resources of the state to defame and malign their rivals. This single-point agenda has driven the policy and conduct of our rulers since 2018 and has left them with no time or energy to tend to issues of governance, climate change, impending water scarcity, deteriorating healthcare and education, growing poverty, and unemployment.

Regrettably, Pakistan's policy towards India is designed to prolong the status quo. This would mean an eternal confrontation at the cost of socio-economic development. The status quo delivers power and resources to some but results in an agonising and bitter rivalry that has increased poverty and led to repeated military interventions in Pakistan. The stand-off on Kashmir has resulted in incalculable damage for the two nations both in terms of human lives and huge economic losses. It has caused an unquantifiable loss to the treasury and has been the principal cause of the menace of poverty on both sides. According to

the World Bank, the potential for bilateral trade between India and Pakistan would be more than \$45 billion a year. Imagine the tremendous impact of trade to the tune of \$50 billion a year on reducing poverty and unemployment in both countries.

To link the resumption of trade with the “resolution” of Kashmir is a non-starter. Pakistan has waited for more than 70 years for any substantive change in the status of Kashmir in the context of the aspirations of the people of the disputed region. That has not worked. And yes, it has had the opposite impact. Kashmir’s status and identity have been destroyed. It is now a union territory and will no longer have an independently elected government. This alone should be an eye-opener.

The policy of an eternal confrontation has had the opposite impact for sure and now it is time to reappraise that policy. This does not mean the abandonment of the idea of a plebiscite for the people of Kashmir and their right to participate in free elections for constituting their own government. Instead, the new approach should emphasise on deepening cultural and economic ties, which would not only boost economic progress but also help create an environment for a resolution. The two countries must understand that the dispute over Kashmir cannot be resolved by war or conflict. Wars can have no winners. An all-out war between two nuclear armed neighbours would lead to unimaginable destruction. The only option is to work closely to design systems that would be more compatible with the aspirations of the people of the region. Something along the lines of what was suggested by Pakistan many years ago such as envisaging the gradual irrelevance of the disputed border and allowing free trade and movement of the people across the LoC. This could help bring about a profound change in outlook and could have a huge impact on the lives of people on both sides of the border.

It is time the confrontational approach was abandoned. Too much is at stake — the teeming millions living in abject poverty in both countries; the future of one-fifth of humanity; and issues such as climate change, depleting water resources, rapidly expanding population, disappearing glaciers, and the high rate of poverty that afflicts millions in each country. These challenges could only be overcome with joint endeavours, close consultations, data and experience sharing, and joint strategies to combat crises. Confrontations would only make the task even more difficult to accomplish. It is time that public opinion exerted pressure on both countries in order to design a new contract of close bilateral relations that



incorporates not only the aspirations of the people but also lays down a rational, far-sighted strategy to deal with the enormous challenge of climate change, water scarcity and poverty. But that may not happen soon considering the ground realities of partisan or selfish agendas that dominate policy formulation on both sides of the divide.

The death of the legendary singer, Lata Mangeshkar, produced a spontaneous outpouring of grief all across India and Pakistan. Lata was loved, admired and respected in every village, town and city across Pakistan as much as she was adored in India. This shows the deep cultural affinity between the two countries. There are multiple such cultural bonds that are common between the people of South Asia. Should we build upon this or should we embrace the agenda of confrontation? This is a choice that those in authority have to make.

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# **Mantra of Civil Service Reforms: Empty Promises By Dr Syed Akhtar Ali Shah**

All political parties have the same mantra which is 'reforms, reforms and reforms' whether it is in the civil service, agriculture, industrial, education, revenue or any other sphere of life. We have often heard the slogan 'change the thana culture and patwar culture'. In this connection, PTI had been most vociferous in its election campaign by according the highest priority to the change of system through introducing massive reforms in the civil service to make it people-centric.

In his manifesto, Imran Khan proclaimed that his party's movement was envisaged to fight for a just, equitable, egalitarian society, with rule of law, meritocracy, transparency and responsiveness as the guiding principles.

De-politicisation and strengthening of police, reformation of the criminal justice system, provision of speedy justice, civil service reforms, institutionalisation of e-governance practices in public administration, improved delivery services through legislative reforms (Right to Information, Right to Services), reformation of government procurement, and ensuring equal employment opportunity have been the lofty ideas.

The other guiding principles were the provision of necessary support to civil servants to perform and live a life of dignity and respect with checks and balances, the undertaking of appropriate career planning, the introduction of minimum tenures for senior civil servant posts such as federal and provincial secretaries, chief secretaries, inspector general (IG), and director inspector general (DIGs), etc; giving constitutional protection to public servants to perform their official functions and protect them against political interference; re-training the bureaucracy to meet new challenges; and setting up permanent public safety commissions at the federal and provincial level to reform the police system.

In this context, the Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Shafqat Mahmood, as the head of the Cabinet committee on institutional reforms, outlined reforms in major areas: Civil Servants Promotion (BS-18 to BS-21) Rules, 2019; Civil Servants (Directory Retirement from Service) Rules, 2020; Efficiency and Discipline Rules, 2020; Revised Management Position Scales

Policy, 2020; Rotation Policy, 2020; Rationalisation of cadre strength — induction in Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS).

An impassioned item-wise analysis of the ideals of the reforms revealed that we were still at square one. Neither the traditional inertia and status quo nor the hold of the elite cadre could be broken. Instead of bringing functional specialisation, and upward movement of experts at the policy level, a hybrid system consisting of the PAS and officers of the army, both serving and retired, has further been strengthened.

No space at the top posts exists for experts. Even posts of a purely technical nature are being occupied by officers of the administrative cadre, be it PAS or Provincial Management Service (PMS).

Posts such as Chairman Capital Development Authority, Lahore Development Authority, Peshawar Development Authority, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission, Science and Technology, Education, Health, National Disaster Management Authority, Pakistan Housing Authority and most of the public corporate authorities, textbook boards, boards of intermediate and secondary education, director-general prosecution to quote a few, are not only being occupied either by civil servants or army officers but also have been reserved for the administrative cadres of the federation and the provinces in appointment and promotion rules. Without a change in appointment and promotion rules and schedules and rules of businesses, neither can space be created for experts and professionals nor can dreams of change be realised. Thus, the professionals, despite having all the talent and expertise, remain deprived of promotions at the top. Resultantly, their initiative is restrained and their legitimate expectations of moving upward are being frustrated at the altar of the administrative cadres at both the federal and provincial levels.

Bureaucracy has different streams of officers. One of those is the Civil Superior Service (CSS) officers in Basic Pay Scale (BPS) 17 such as Customs, Inland Revenue Service, Audit and Accounts, Railways, postal, trade, and commerce, while others are recruited at BPS 14 and 16. This has created a permanent schism in the structure. It is one of the major causes, why civil service is not delivering. The same goes for the police.

The realisation of the set goals, whether in revenue or police, depends upon the efficiency of the inspectors, appraising officers, auditors, and police inspectors.

But most reforms fall flat at that level. Even the best of the best from Harvard, Princeton, MIT, Yale, Oxford, and Cambridge or any other institution cannot bring a meaningful change within the present scheme of things. Mere tinkering here and there is not the solution to the problem.

Massive restructuring of the civil service (including the police) is required. The present system of induction of officers in BPS 17 through CSS should be done away with. The induction should be at the level of inspectors, auditors in revenue services, and assistant sub-inspector in the police. However, the examination for recruitment should be as tough as CSS. This will provide a chance to all and sundry within the organisation to grow and reach the top. Such an environment will induce motivation and eliminate the chances of corruption.

Apart from this, the tenure policy has been ruthlessly floating. Frequent changes of the Chief Secretaries, Inspector General of Police, secretaries, and other officers have remained the order of the day. The policy of serving in the hard and soft areas is nowhere to be seen. Officers having clout get postings of their choice, without serving in hard areas, which has alienated other officers. Officers of non-cadre posts having the blessings of the powerful are serving against cadre posts. Under the deputation policy, no officer can remain on deputation for more than three years, but who cares.

Despite tall claims of devolution of power, micromanagement is being done through the Prime Minister's Portal, even at the police station and patwar level.

The upshot of the discussion is that amendments must be brought in rules of business and appointment and promotions per the ideals as enumerated in the manifesto and other proclamation of the PTI. Otherwise, they will remain empty promises.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 16th, 2022.

# **Pakistan's Strategic Shift From Geo-Politics to Geo-Economics By Arshad Mahmood**

“With the recent intensification of strategic competition between global powers, making the world peace fragile and the direction of diplomacy, unpredictable, Pakistan has made a strategic pivot from geo-politics to geo-economics,” said Shah Mahmood Qureshi while announcing major policy shift in the country's foreign policy.

Pakistan's foreign policy has traditionally been driven by regional and systemic development especially the global powers' fluctuating interests in the South Asian region alongside the political and security dynamics of neighbouring India and Afghanistan. Though for the past couple of years, the country has shown visible metamorphosis, the country's first National Security Policy has, nonetheless, officially demonstrated a paradigm shift in the state's foreign policy with centrality on geo-economics.

What are the factors that forced Pakistan for the strategic shift? And, what will be its implications and challenges that Islamabad is likely to face while implementing its new normal? These are a few queries agitating every Pakistani's mind!

Whereas geopolitics is related to the effects of geography on international politics; geoeconomics is linked with spatial, historical, and political aspects of economies and resources. States being central to both as unitary actors in formulating domestic and foreign policies, both the disciplines are also closely linked to strategy in defining optimal plans and states long term goals. However, geopolitics and geoeconomics bear a few fundamental differences. First, geopolitics as a discipline is associated with the neo-realist paradigm of international relations; whereas, geoeconomics is the normative heart of neoliberalism. The former is primarily concerned with political and military activities, and the latter with economic activities. With respect to variables, geopolitics is traditionally linked to slowly-changing variables– like ethnicity, country, religion, and language– and, geoeconomics is more linked to rapidly-changing variables– particularly technological change and developments in commerce.

One can also find numerous models in the contemporary and past world orders towing either of the two as the theoretical framework of their domestic and foreign policies. The USA in the contemporary world, the USA and the USSR during the Cold War, and Imperial and Nazi Germany in the pre- and post-world war eras, are all regarded as practitioners of geopolitics. Their elites' perception was based on a combination of their political, geographical, historical, racial and economic factors which substantiated their perceived right to expand their states' borders and sphere of influence to control other states' land masses and natural resources.

Contrarily, China and Japan can conveniently be regarded as champions of geoeconomics of the current and the post-war eras respectively, where they applied economic tools to advance their national goals.

Ever since 1947, Pakistan's behaviour has only been reactionary to systemic anarchy. The strategic tug-of-war between the two superpowers, the ever-looming Indian threat on its Eastern border, security and domestic dynamics of neighbouring Afghanistan and the fallout of 9/11 have been the chief drivers of our national security and foreign policy. Bartering its geostrategic value, Pakistan's involvement as a front-line state has, nevertheless, resulted in huge losses, both of human lives and to the economy.

Would Pakistan's geoeconomic vision help in flipping the script?

Whether or not the answer is affirmative, no one can, at least, question the rationality of the decision. This seems even logical after considering following three factors: (1) the net effect of Pakistan's history of responding to its geopolitical compulsions; (2) the shifting of the global centre of gravity from the Atlantic to the Asia Pacific; and, (3) the success stories of EU and ASEAN contributing to internationalizing the philosophy of geoeconomics.

But rationality aside, Pakistan's pivot toward geo-economics is likely to face many challenges! Geopolitics being a hard reality, Pakistan would not be able to remain aloof to systemic compulsions. The continuation of Indian aggressive foreign policy especially the vacillation of the Kashmir dispute; developing stories in Afghanistan, and, the emerging Sino-US neo-Cold War are amongst a few things Pakistan cannot escape. While switching over to the new priorities, the policymakers in Pakistan need to handle the following factors with extreme care.



In the years to follow, the country's decision making machinery would be required to tackle the following hurdles in meeting its new vision.

First and foremost, our relations with India. The fundamental policy shift cannot be akin to an end to war(s) with India, nor does it mean that Pakistan's Eastern border has ceased emanating threat. This may, however, be taken as strategic signalling in the following terms. ONE, over the past few decades— especially after 1971, Pakistan has acquired sufficient capability to maintain the regional balance of power. TWO, on a number of occasions, Islamabad has rendered New Delhi's numeric military ascendancy null and void e.g. Operation Brasstacks of 1987, the Kargil War of 1998, the military stand-off of 2001 and the Pulwama confrontation of 2019. And, THREE, Pakistan now requires no more band-wagging or alliance with any global players to safeguard its territorial integrity against India.

Though, inter alia, economy is essentially the state's top priority, the troubled relations with India, particularly the lingering Kashmir dispute, shall remain a challenge for Pakistan in accomplishment of geoeconomic goals.

Second, the Afghan factor. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan mean a lot to each other – not just in terms of their security needs, but for the economic uplift of the region as well. Pakistan is also an integral part of two energy corridors, the Iran-Pakistan (IP) and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline projects. Though both projects are linked with Pakistan's geo-economic ambitions, they cannot be successfully accomplished without ensuring durable peace in Afghanistan and regional security

Pakistan has always played a positive role towards formation of an inclusive Afghan government in Kabul. Furthermore, Pakistan has already paid a heavy toll in GWOT and, after experiencing a bloody terrorism, is now facing a new wave of terror from the TTP based inside Afghanistan. Pakistan's adversaries— especially archrival India— are well aware of the fact that without settling issues with TTP, Pakistan cannot ensure internal stability which is paramount to achieving its economic goal. The TTP's links with India and opposition factions in Afghanistan are real source of concern for Imran Khan's government.

Maintenance of perpetual peace inside and on the Afghan border shall remain the cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy objectives.

Third, there is the China factor with specific reference to CPEC and Sino-US rivalry for global supremacy. Pakistan's CPEC initiated with China has now become a lifeline for the country's economy and its geostrategic vision. As a matter of fact, as long as CPEC is not functional, Pakistan can neither accomplish its goals nor avoid dependency on the IMF.

Furthermore, in order to fetch maximum dividends, Pakistan also needs to look at CPEC beyond just being a transit trade facility. The development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), upgradation of Gwadar port and enhancement of trade with China, needs to be accorded top priority for success of CPEC.

There are also no signs of abating in the neo-Cold War between the US and China. The Sino-US tussle bears strategic implications for Pakistan. The leadership at Islamabad needs to play its cards quite intelligently so as to remain out of the great powers' tug-of-war. The US administration too, cannot afford to lose interest in Pakistan as they fear that it might sway towards China. Historically, Islamabad has played a bridging role between Washington and Beijing in managing their bilateral ties. In 1972, Pakistan was instrumental in arranging President Nixon's strategic visit to China that contributed towards systemic stability and international peace. Pakistan has no other role to play in the ongoing Sino-US tensions. It is even linked with Pakistan's desire of turning its geo-economic vision into reality.

The formulation of National Security Policy with renowned vision, is undeniably a milestone for Pakistan, nonetheless, the first step in the right direction.

Source: Published in Pakistan Today

# **The New US Realisation | Editorial**

The realisation in Washington that Islamabad is an indispensable partner in Afghan affairs is encouraging. It is, moreover, a whiff of fresh air as both the countries foment a new way out in their bilateralism by setting aside the prism of security conundrum through which they acted and interacted over Afghanistan. The utterance from a senior US official that the United States has no choice but to work with Pakistan on the way ahead in Afghanistan simply underscores realism at work under the Biden administration. This policy approach will go a long way in buoying a multilateral mechanism wherein the exigencies faced by the war-torn country can be addressed in a more cohesive manner. The difference of opinion that they nursed on the premise of specifics are in need of being shunned, and this is exactly what the US Special Representative for Afghanistan, Tom West, meant as he appreciated the role of Pakistan in bailing out the Americans in the wake of the fall of Kabul.

The discussion at the US Institute of Peace in Washington had brought to the fore many aspects of interaction. It was good to learn that the US formally acknowledges Pakistan's role in arranging a peace deal with the Taliban. This is where the discord had thrived for years, as Pakistan had advocated a tête-à-tête with the militia as they held the key to a comprehensive settlement in Afghanistan. Decades of war-mongering and the US obsession to exterminate Taliban had only cost it trillions of dollars and a face-off in Southwest Asia. Tom's narrative that the US and Pakistan often agreed to disagree, and had their own respective ways, is a sign of maturity in their given diverse engagement.

It is heartening that President Biden believes in working for a stable Afghanistan. The partial release of frozen Afghan assets is, in a way, a welcome step. What is needed is a robust trilateral cooperation to not only beef up confidence but also ensure reconstruction and humanitarian assistance. The bottom line is that the Doha deal would not have been possible had Washington not listened to Islamabad, and brushed shoulders with the Taliban. The United States bloodless exit from Afghanistan is, indeed, a tribute to diplomacy and Pakistan truly deserves a pat.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 19th, 2022.

# **New Chapter in Pak-Russia Ties By Munir Ahmed**

Prime Minister Imran Khan is all set to start his visit to Moscow from Wednesday, February 23 which is marked as the Defenders of Fatherland Day. It is celebrated as the armed forces and founding day of the Red Army in Russia, Turkmenistan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. We shall wish a great day to all the natives of the countries celebrating the day world over. Best of luck to Prime Minister Khan too for his very ambitious visit that Pakistan's foreign office has termed as 'landmark' last Friday without disclosing its itinerary and agenda.

Starting on February 23, this would be the first official visit to Moscow by an elected prime minister of Pakistan after 23 years. Russian President Vladimir Putin has invited Pakistan's Prime Minister who had been anxiously waiting for the US President's phone call. Ice had melted between the countries, two poles apart, in early 1999 when Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had a very cordial visit to Russia. But, bilateral terms could not go beyond aspirations. The time proved the disapproval of the visit by pro-US elements in Pakistan that led to the undemocratic move on October 12, 1999. Later, the army revolt proved to be a prelude to the bow down to the US phone call in 2011. The four decades in a row were the worst for the entire world, especially for Pakistan and the region too.

The melting ice between Russia and Pakistan may be a fresh beginning at a time when the situation is rapidly changing in the region. Seems like a better restart between the two cold war rivals. Given all the countries at the table have learnt from past mistakes, the new beginning may turn around the destiny of the countries at an individual level, and the region altogether. Standing up together against the economic meltdown, strategic and health pandemics is a must at the moment.

Regional peace and security, gas pipeline projects and bilateral trade and economic initiatives are said to be among the priority agenda for Russo-Pak ties. Recently, Russia has taken many vigorous measures for stronger ties with the countries in the region. However, the US, Nato and EU fiddling in Ukraine against the pro-Russian elements have escalated the conflict between the Washington-leaning government in Ukraine and neighbouring Russia. The objective seems to

be blocking Russia from reaching the Black Sea. Russia can find another trade route if Pakistan and Russia could come to terms.

Afghanistan is another spring point in the region. No country is getting on to help the Taliban government with the challenges being faced by the natives. The abrupt withdrawal has left the country in lurch for the funds to pay off the bills. Early this month, the US allowed the international banks to transfer money to Afghanistan for humanitarian purposes. The aid groups were allowed to pay teachers and healthcare workers at state-run institutions without fear of breaching sanctions on the Taliban. Recently, the US has announced to use \$7bn in frozen Afghan assets to compensate victims of the 9/11 attacks and for the relief efforts. Might is right. Anxiety looms over the resource-starved country. Hunger and health crisis is hitting millions of children and infants in Afghanistan. Starving the poor could not attract justice. Will Pakistan, Russia and other neighbouring countries be able to challenge the injustice of the mighty power? A Taliban spokesman has condemned the move, calling it “theft” and a sign of “moral decay”.

Internal and external, all eyes are on the visit. Political pundits in Pakistan are terming the visit a sign of the country’s major strategic shift. The Russo-Pak stronger ties may turn around the geopolitical situation in the region. Will Pakistan be able to handle the rowdy Taliban to get them for regional peace negotiations with the ones that created the chaos? The change on this route much depends on the Taliban factor.

The US and its aides, Nato, and EU will be keenly observing the visit in the context of Ukraine and Afghanistan. Being the US proxy in the new cold war against China, India will be closely monitoring the visit of China’s best buddy. Having New Delhi in a long-term strategic partnership with Moscow will be more anxious and conscious about the Russo-Pak dealings on the cards. India will certainly be anxious to see the result of inching closer to the US in recent years. Meanwhile, Russia has also made moves to improve ties with Pakistan. Undoubtedly, the strategic landscape is about to change for Pakistan – one of the key players on this side of the map.

The process of rapprochement began in early 1999 by the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and was strengthened during the later years of Musharraf. The process picked up pace in 2011 when Pakistan’s relationship with the US went haywire. At that time, Pakistan decided to diversify its foreign policy options and

reach out to Russia. All hope the visit will wipe off the bitter past and lead to a cordial and friendly future on bilateral win-win, collective efforts and collaboration for the region. Both countries along with others have seen the brunt of cold wars and hot pursuits in the region. So, they would be more than willing to stay away from any new one, and strongly support stopping such sorts.

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Source: Published in Daily Times



# **PM Imran-Putin Rendezvous: Key Takeaways By Kamran Yousaf**

Red carpet welcome, handshake despite the Covid pandemic, no long bizarre table in between them and over three-hour long meeting, all these were great optics for the Pakistani prime minister visiting one of the most powerful countries in the world.

Naturally, Prime Minister Imran Khan's supporters would drive home the point that their leader is respected by the outside world. This was of course the first bilateral visit by a Pakistani prime minister to Moscow in 23 years.

But the timing of Prime Minister Imran Khan's meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin could put Pakistan in trouble. The explanation from the Foreign Office was that the visit was planned before the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

At one point there was a thought to postpone the visit, citing the domestic political situation as opposition parties were gearing up for a no-confidence move against the prime minister. But after in-house deliberations, it was decided not to put off the trip.

Nevertheless, Pakistan hoped that during the prime minister's stay in Moscow there won't be any unforeseen event such as the start of the military conflict.

When Prime Minister Imran Khan landed in Moscow and was given a red carpet welcome, the Pakistani delegation did not expect the next morning they would wake up with the news of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Could the Russian president have delayed the military operation against Ukraine for a day or two to allow the visiting Pakistani prime minister complete his visit without much trouble? Critics – both inside and outside Pakistan – started suggesting that the prime minister should immediately cancel the trip and return home after the launch of the invasion.

Some Western media outlets did initially run stories of Pakistan's move to call off the trip but Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry, who was with the prime minister, was quick to rebut all such rumours.

The trip went ahead as planned and the Putin-Imran meeting's schedule was extended from 1 hour to 3 hours. This, observers believe, could be an attempt by President Vladimir Putin to show to the world that for him it was business as usual despite ordering a full scale invasion of Ukraine.

The visit of the prime minister was not the beginning of rapprochement between Pakistan and Russia, as some of his supporters tend to believe but was part of the several years of efforts by the two sides to bury their bitter past and adjust to the new realities.

Also read: Pakistan keen to forge 'long-term, multidimensional' ties with Russia: Imran tells Putin

Had there been no Ukrainian conflict, the outcome of the visit would have certainly been different but given the new scenario Pakistan now will have to walk a tightrope.

For decades Pakistan's economic and strategic interests were tied to the West, particularly the US. And this dependence often left Pakistan at the mercy of US-led global financial institutions.

That was the reason that Pakistan felt it necessary in recent years to diversify its foreign policy options, something that pushed Islamabad to deepen ties with China and reach out to Russia.

Pakistan has also been laying a greater emphasis on geo-economics and the main purpose of the prime minister's visit to Russia was to seek greater engagement on the economic front.

The two sides have been discussing a \$2.5 billion Pakistan Steam Gas Pipeline project since 2015. Because of the possible US sanctions on the Russian companies the project made no or little progress until both sides sorted out such details.

The 1,100 kilometres long pipeline from Karachi to Kasur will be laid with the cooperation of Russia.

But will the project go ahead or at least reach its fruition in the foreseeable future? The new sanctions imposed by the US and other Western countries would make that extremely difficult if not impossible. The Russian gas pipeline may face the same fate as happened in the case of Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline.

Nevertheless, the visit of Prime Minister Imran would go down in the history books with his supporters and critics having their own interpretations. What Pakistan gets out of this visit and what are the long-term ramifications only time will tell.

Source: Published in Express Tribune

# ECONOMY

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## **CPEC After the Sino-Iranian Strategic Partnership By Ayaz Ahmed**

THE US drawdown from the Pak-Afghan region has brought forth considerable geo-economic space for China in the region. Beijing has recently forged a long-term strategic partnership with Iran. This partnership bodes well for the security and timely completion of CPEC.

After considering the long-term feasibility and effectiveness of CPEC, Iran has repeatedly displayed its inclination to join the grand economic corridor. If CPEC is converted into the China-Pakistan-Iran Economic Corridor (CPIEC), it will make the corridor a greater and safer game-changer in terms of regional trade and connectivity.

After the Sino-Iranian strategic partnership, both Pakistan and China should give serious consideration to the Iranian request of joining CPEC to make the grand project a prodigious success by minimising its security threats. As the Biden Administration is making efforts to rejoin the Iran-P5+1 nuclear deal, energy-rich Iran is once again set to become a major regional economic and military power in the foreseeable future.

Iran's exceptional geostrategic and geo-economic location, potential energy resources and developing economy will presumably make CPIEC more effective, less perilous and more efficient for Pakistan and China to reap richer dividends.

CPIEC will greatly help Pakistan and Iran make the Gwadar and Chabahar ports supplementary rather than disruptively competitive. Iran will likely provide China with a greater role in completing the remaining construction works of the strategically important Chabahar Port, thus lessening Indian engagement with the port. After making both the ports fully operational, Pakistan and Iran may formally determine their shares of Central Asian exports and imports, thereby dispelling the impression of projected competition and a zero-sum game.

Second, Iran's partnership in the grand economic corridor will immensely assist in the better security of CPEC. Having a stake in the corridor, Iran will not permit regional powers – India—to use its soil for fomenting militancy and insurgency in Balochistan. The clandestine networks of RAW reportedly based in southern and eastern Iran could be easily dismantled.

More importantly, certain quarters within the Iranian security establishment have been secretly funnelling substantial money and sophisticated arms to some sectarian, militant and insurgent groups based in the bordering and central areas of Balochistan. After becoming a member of the project, Iran could be persuaded to sternly rein in these disruptive elements to safeguard Balochistan from insurgency and sectarianism.

Furthermore, Pakistan can seek all-out Iranian assistance to block the burgeoning cross-border smuggling of cheap Iranian oil and drugs to Balochistan. Narcotics and oil smuggling have made non-state actors financially sound to continue their troublesome shenanigans in the province. Proper regulation of oil black-marketing will help both countries earn substantial revenue.

Third, after connecting Iran to China via Pakistan through CPEC, bilateral trade between Iran and Pakistan and Iran and China will increase manifold. Both Pakistan and Iran have already decided to increase annual trade volume between the two countries to \$5bn. Closer economic ties will also help Pakistan import a great amount of cheap Iranian electricity to industrialise the city of Gwadar and decrease hours of outages plaguing other parts of the country.

Closer economic ties with Iran will facilitate Pakistan and China to import more and more Iranian oil and gas. The Iran-Pakistan (IP) pipeline could be expanded to include China as a member. With financial and technical support from China, Pakistan will be able to construct its portion of 785 km of IP pipeline in the shortest period. Therefore, Iran will gain the much-needed revenue to revive its sanctions-hit economy, while Pakistan and China will import enough Iranian gas to meet their ever-increasing requirements of natural gas.

Lastly, greater cooperation between Pakistan and Iran will be instrumental in bringing political stability to Afghanistan. With all-out Pak-Iranian support, the Afghan Taliban will be in a stronger position to dismantle the organizational

structure of Daesh in Afghanistan. Moreover, for the security of CPEC, Pakistan and Iran can also crank up the pressure on Afghanistan into taking stringent actions against TTP fugitives hiding in eastern Afghanistan.

However, Pakistan and China should not forget that a longer corridor entails more risks and threats to be tackled. After finding Iran on this regional bandwagon, the new American president could think of tightening economic sanctions around the nose of Iran. Moreover, the Indo-American bloc could expedite hectic efforts to foment terrorism and militancy in Pakistan's tribal areas and shepherd ragtag insurgents in Balochistan. In this regard, any broad-brush and blinkered approach to the security of CPEC is unlikely to dampen the obstructive effects of geo-politics on the corridor.

Therefore, it is imperative to warily craft some needed counterterrorism, counter-militancy and counter-sectarianism measures to protect CPEC from regional terrorism and hegemonic designs of the US and India. Both Pakistan and China should stand with Iran diplomatically – especially during the process of negotiations on the Iranian nuclear deal – with the intent to make CPEC fall through amid the disruptive geopolitics of the region.

Source: Published in Pakobserver

# **A Closer Look at the Economy By Dr Kamal Monnoo**

One has been writing about the economic policy choices of this government and how some rank bad human resource selections have led to both, micro and macro management failures in its economic governance of the country. However, to be fair, the recent economic surveys and reports on the state of Pakistan's economy by global financial lenders, the IMF and the World Bank and even the one released by our own central bank seem a bit confusing, as they tell a different story on employment generation between corporates and households; normally one expects the two to paint a similar picture.

The employer or the corporate surveys largely coming from the business and trade associations and chambers of commerce and industry, point to a significant number of jobs being added over the last 12 months (some putting the number anywhere around the half million mark), whereas, when you refer to the average household survey—the employment rate among prime-age adults, a key measure of labour market and the economy's health—the story is that of lack of well-paying jobs and a struggling family kitchen.

Now this is the anomaly that the government is most interested in, arguing that we shouldn't make too much of the apparent inconsistencies in the two narratives or the reports, since noisy data happens, and the overall economic picture looks pretty good—or according to the economic managers, in many ways this looks like the best economic recovery in many decades or at least for any post-pandemic economy.

Yet the reality is that consumers appear to be feeling very downbeat, the poverty line has increased and businesses seem to be running low on confidence, and this perception of a bad economy is clearly weighing on Prime Minister Imran Khan's approval ratings. Which for the government raises a pertinent question: Are consumers, the working class and the investors right? Is this indeed a bad economy despite the government propaganda stating otherwise? And if it really isn't such a bad economy, then why does the public say it is?

One would genuinely like to know the answer to these questions. Don't think, much as some government functionaries would like us to believe, that it is simply



a crude case of “people being lied to by the corporate media,” although the flip side is also a bit silly when people in the media get all worked up over even a remote suggestion that how media reports national economy has an influence on public perceptions! Because if it doesn't, then why do they even bother?

So what really is going on? Let's start with the obvious culprit, inflation, which is surely running hotter than it has been for decades. Rising prices have certainly eroded many workers' wage gains, although surprisingly, the real personal income per capita is still above the pre-pandemic level even though the government's announced hand outs are not particularly showing in the incremental calculations.

The problem however is that inflation always has a corrosive effect on confidence even when incomes may be rising, since it creates the perception that things are just out of control. To be fair to the government, it could also be that when consumers or average persons on the street are surveyed, they are perhaps being asked the kind of questions that do not accurately relate to the fundamental answers that we seek. For example, it may sound funny but it is a fact that despite such advanced modern day information technology, in our basket of 'expected inflation', the resultant number actually quite simply correlates to the prevailing and expected price of the petrol.

Karachi ranked third in world's most polluted cities' list

Another aspect is that one gets very different answers when one asks people “How are you doing?” rather than “How is the economy doing? For example, in the US, the Langer Consumer Confidence Index asks people separately about the national economy—where their assessment could be dismal—and about their personal financial situation, where their ratings could be high by historical standards or vice versa.

Likewise, the Michigan Surveys pose their questions more or less using the same principle, albeit using a slightly different technique by asking people how their current financial situation compares with say five years earlier. And this is where the government should be worried, because according to the mainstream media channels more than 65 percent people when surveyed today are saying that they were better off under the PML(N) tenure, almost the same number before Nawaz Sharif won his infamous two-thirds landslide majority in the late 90s.

Again, from the government's perspective, aside from just looking at what people say, it definitely makes more sense to look at what they do. According to its economic managers, if the people are really as depressed as the sentiment numbers say, then why are retail sales running so high? Also, when looking at businesses, what we see is a record increase in turnover and profits and consequently the balancing, modernisation and expansion of manufacturing facilities by the entrepreneurs—the turf was quite quickly picked up by the corporates.

They opine that the only likely answer here is that businesses in effect see a booming economy and expect the boom to continue. Their main argument being that surely the public's negative assessment of the economy seems at odds with every other tangible indicator that is used to measure the state of the economy. As already mentioned, though these State's propagators may have a point, the thing is that it is inflation that more than anything unnerves people even when their incomes are going up and discourages the investors with interest rate hikes even when the economy is seemingly booming.

And especially in our case, the problem stands compounded by rapid and frequent currency devaluations. A recent Yale study highlights how high borrowing costs, mistrust in the country's currency strength and excessive regulatory conditions are almost always the main triggers behind every market crash. The solution therefore is that—despite some noteworthy pockets of success—unless we quickly create a happier, more inclusive and prosperous society, things will disintegrate very quickly leading to a situation that may render itself uncontrollable.

The focus therefore should be to bring out the new possibilities of high-quality growth that augments incomes in terms of global buying parity in order to ensure that the gap between the rich and the poor narrows over time instead of widening.

Source: Published in The Nation

## Meeting IMF Demands | Editorial

IF we thought Pakistan had already met the IMF demands for the resumption of its \$6bn funding by implementing 'prior actions' involving absolute autonomy for the State Bank, an increase in electricity prices as well as the development levy on petroleum products, and withdrawal of tax exemptions of nearly Rs350bn, we were hugely mistaken. More conditions directly affecting the low- to middle-income segments of the population have yet to be implemented.

The details of the agreement with the IMF disclose that the government is still required to slap additional taxes of Rs430bn through the next budget in June. Overall, the FBR has been given a tax target of Rs7.25tr for the next fiscal, up by Rs1.15tr from the revised target of Rs6.10tr for the ongoing year. Almost two-thirds of the additional tax revenues are expected to come from 4pc growth and 8pc inflation.

The rest has to be raised through new measures, including a reduction in personal income slabs from the existing 12 to six and enhanced rates. This is in spite of the finance minister's repeated claims that he had turned down the IMF demand to jack up personal income tax rates since that would further distress the salaried class. That is not all. Electricity tariffs will also go up as the government desperately wants disbursement of the remaining loan amount of \$3bn from the IMF before the end of the programme in September to pursue its growth agenda before the 2023 elections.

While Pakistan's re-entry into the IMF programme was crucial for shoring up its foreign exchange reserves, the Fund's harsh conditions will decelerate growth, fuel inflation, increase unemployment and erode purchasing power of the struggling low- to middle-income households. But it is too simplistic to blame the Fund for our travails, even if it seems to have gone overboard with its demands.

Pakistan, as is underscored by the IMF in its review, with a long history of "stop-and-go economic policies and weak implementation of structural reforms", should blame itself for its troubles. Successive governments (including the present one) have knocked at the IMF's doors 23 times to seek help in tackling the repeated crises. But they have delayed the necessary governance and fiscal reforms and abandoned the programme midway to again spend their way to re-election once the external sector stabilised. It isn't surprising that this time around the Fund has

put its foot down, forcing Islamabad to execute some of its conditions before approving the programme's resumption.

The PTI government believes it can ditch actions agreed with the IMF if it is able to convince China to help. But it must understand that even bilateral assistance largely depends on the IMF's approval of Pakistan's actions to restructure its economy. Further delay in the implementation of reforms will create more complications, and constrain economic recovery and investment at the expense of the people.

Published in Dawn, February 8th, 2022

# **The Digital Economy By Dr Hasnain Javed**

The economy and society are undergoing profound changes as a result of digitalisation. It fuels entrepreneurial innovation, regional economic growth, and productivity. Additionally, it has consequences for economic growth, the labour market, and political engagement. And it imposes new educational and training requirements – not just in the realm of information and communication technologies.

Today, as the world prepares for 5G technology, the IT think tanks in Pakistan must seriously consider efficient ways to catch up with the world and maximise economic benefits.

Despite considerable expansions of ICT access prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the ICT availability and use remained far from universal. The COVID-19 crisis expedited advanced economies' digitalisation and made catching up more difficult for nations or areas trailing before. We must explore the current state of digitisation in Pakistan, its economic impact, and how should we pave the way for future technologies.

Digitisation is regarded as the fourth industrial revolution. However, in Pakistan's case, we may not be at par with the world. The biggest challenge that the country faces is the overall readiness to completely make use of digitisation. According to the World Bank 5G readiness plan, the Government of Pakistan (aligned with the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority) must devise a strategy to attract multinational organizations to invest in a digital transformation infrastructure. There remain multifaceted challenges to Pakistan's adaption of 5G technology. Despite a huge growth potential, we see that the Foreign Direct Investment in the telecommunication sector has dropped from a staggering US\$763 million in the FY 2019-20 to a meagre US\$202 in the FY 2020-1. The primary reason for this drastic drop in investment is the poor adaptability of technology amongst the population.

The economic contribution of the mobile industry in Pakistan might reach \$24 billion by 2023, accounting for 6.6 per cent of the country's gross domestic product.

5G technology offers endless economic and industrial benefits. Up to \$3.5 trillion in revenue is expected to be generated by the 5G value chain by 2035, with up to 22 million employment being supported.

The Global GDP growth will increase by \$3 trillion cumulatively between 2020 and 2035, according to projections based on 5G deployment. By 2035, 5G-related services, such as mission-critical services, increased mobile broadband, and enormous IoT improvements, would be worth over \$12 trillion, according to estimates. Retail, healthcare, education, transportation, and entertainment are among the areas projected to benefit from 5G technology.

According to the Pakistan Telecom Authority (PTA), the country has over 98 million 3G/4G subscribers or 43.51 per cent penetration. Despite network advancements such as the addition of new 4G towers, over 90 per cent of mobile devices constructed or manufactured in the country are only compatible with 2G technology. At the moment, roughly 53 per cent of all SIM subscribers utilize 2G devices. The experts believe that for a successful transition to the 5G technology, at least 60 per cent of the population must be connected to the 4G technology.

The broadband penetration is only about 46.4 per cent in Pakistan, which must be expanded drastically to ensure economic benefits. Amongst many challenges that hinder the technology adaption in Pakistan are, “the lack of large contiguous blocks of the affordable spectrum”, “broader access to fibre backhaul” and “widespread availability of affordable 5G smartphones and other devices.”

Pakistan’s IMT spectrum management policy has been identified as the primary impediment to the sector investing fully in 4G development and sector competitiveness.

The current government does seem to have a good plan of action to boost the 5G technology in the country – some of which include:

- o Tax rebate, tax rationalization, and elimination of duty tariff on import of all components of high end 4G and 5G devices;
- o Duty-free IMT/5G network-ready equipment imports to facilitate 5G readiness and mobile broadband to support wider mobile broadband and 5G networks deployment;

o Special incentives for global Telecom equipment vendors to establish assembly and production lines in Pakistan to promote local assembly of IMT/5G and IoT ecosystem devices including chipsets, and

o Licensee shall establish at least one 5G Innovation and test centre/lab to scale up 5G ecosystem for start-ups and entrepreneurship activities at their own cost for citizens.

All these are indeed solid items on the action list but the Mobile Economy Asia Pacific Report 2021 projected, “Pakistan will be at the lowest end in terms of smartphone users as well the 5G coverage among the selected countries of Asia Pacific region by 2025.” According to the GSMA estimate, the economic contribution of the mobile industry in Pakistan might reach \$24 billion by 2023, accounting for 6.6 per cent of the country’s gross domestic product. The same report estimates, smartphones will account for over 80 per cent of all connections in the Asia Pacific by 2025, up from 68 per cent in 2020. However, Pakistan was near the tail-end of the list of 12 major countries, just above Bangladesh, and it is expected that neither of these two countries will meet the 80 per cent target in the near future.

The 5G technology will be a game-changer for Pakistan. The Small and Medium Industries could benefit greatly by adopting online selling techniques, reaching global markets, and learning from international best practices, supply chain, and business operation strategies. Pakistan’s education and medicine industry is expected to be the biggest beneficiary of the 5G technology with its low latency and widespread applications, which can help overcome the poor student-teacher ratio that currently stands at 29 to one.

The truth is that it is not as easy as it may seem to the officials, from 2017 through 2035, the world will need to invest \$3.7 trillion, or 4.1 per cent of global annual GDP per year, on infrastructure to overcome existing gaps. Of this amount, 54 per cent will go towards meeting the needs of Asian countries. Therefore, experts in Pakistan must carefully consider their approach to resolving the challenges in 5G technology and adopting a single national strategy.

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Source: Published in Daily times



# Economic Stability By Dr Niaz Murtaza

FOLLOWING the recent GDP rebasing, the PTI and PML-N are going on about their resulting higher GDP growth rates. Yet sceptical citizens are unimpressed, being too familiar with our boom-bust growth cycles, resembling not a development ladder but a game of snakes and ladders.

Economists know regimes can manipulate fiscal, monetary and external stimuli to achieve short-term growth that soon busts. Thus, they review macroeconomic stability too: a mix of low external/fiscal deficits, high employment and GDP growth, low inflation, a stable market-based exchange rate and high foreign reserves. If GDP growth is high but some of these economic indicators weak, such growth is usually artificial and unsustainable. Also, GDP growth must be high enough to absorb population growth, around seven per cent for us given the high levels of the latter.

Political economists go beyond macroeconomists to smartly argue that regimes can even contrive macroeconomic stability, eg via short-term aid with toxic political conditions or elitist growth. However, these unleash conflict that busts growth. Thus, I propose the more useful, concept of macro-politico-economic stability, which adds equitable growth and sustainable investment source as drivers of growth (beyond toxic aid) to the indicators above. So let us dive into reviewing how Pakistan has done since 1947.

Data for most economic indicators is only available after 1971, after we lost half the country due to macro-politico-economic instability. The few indicators for Gen Ayub's era show high growth but also high trade deficits and unstable foreign reserves. Growth ran on unreliable US aid and high inequity, so much so that the poverty rate went up from 40pc to 50pc. US aid cuts after the 1965 war lowered growth which given the inequity led to conflict. So Ayub gave high growth but not macroeconomic stability let alone macro-politico-economic stability.

Rarely have we achieved even the most basic goal.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto cut aid reliance and inequity, but gave slow growth, high inflation and external deficits and 50pc devaluation though growing reserves. Gen Zia gave higher growth via toxic US aid, lower but still elevated inflation,

high fiscal deficits, major devaluation yet unstable reserves. So neither capitalist nor socialist nor religious zeal across three eras gave us stability.

The 1990s, with the US aid ended, had weak indicators. With toxic US aid resuming, they all improved under Gen Musharraf, to give some macroeconomic but not politico-economic stability from 2002 to 2006. High US aid reliance and autocracy fuelled conflict. Soon the external deficit went up and growth busted again, with its after-effects spilling into the PPP era to make most economic indicators weak. The initial PML-N years saw some macroeconomic stability but with growth only around 4pc. The quest for higher growth via external deficits led to a bust. Finally, the less said about the gung-ho captain's famed tabdeeli sarkar's era the better, for his and its own sake.

Rarely have we achieved even the basic goal, a growth rate of 7pc to meet population growth, let alone the two types of economic stability. Bangladesh and India have recently had high growth and more economic stability of both types. Most Saarc states have also done well globally on some major economic aspect without toxic aid via high productivity and with better social indicators. Here the government huffs and puffs much but knows only how to achieve short-term growth via unsustainable monetary, fiscal and external stimuli, toxic aid and economic inequity.

All this is linked to four toxic legacies of our autocratic eras. Firstly, they gave reliance on toxic aid, which the state in turn gave to businesses to make them dependent too on subsidies instead of productivity for growth. Secondly, they gave an idolisation of the real estate sector to attract investment away from industry, with a powerful state entity's housing society spread nationally towering above others as a disturbing role model.

Thirdly, they gave big businesses owned by it. Regular state enterprises bleed money but are often in monopoly sectors where private capital hesitates to go. But the former are in sectors where private capital can easily operate and grab their market share via state muscle. Most have low productivity shown by their low share in our exports as they can't compete globally, much like batters called flat-track home bullies in cricket. So expectedly when bullies do business, they remain bullies. Finally, the entity's retired top honchos are given plush top jobs everywhere to produce societal unproductivity given their lack of expertise and top-down styles.

These factors combine to give a national economic psyche and culture of unproductivity, incompetence, tax evasion, amnesties, short-termism and rent-seeking which nix economic dynamism.

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# EDUCATION

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## **Dilapidated System of Education By** **Muhammad Kashif**

A nation can only thrive and prosper if it upholds education as its top priority. Failing to do so makes it destined to confront downfall and catastrophes in the shape of economical woes, social injustices, colossal ignorance, and so on.

Education instils a sense to distinguish and discern between what is ethical and by extension what is not. In essence, it enables humans to identify and embrace their responsibilities with sheer honesty. The indispensable need of having an education can be seen from seeing how whichever country has so far touched peaks in the world has first managed to strengthen and bolster its education system. Education empowers nations and individuals. And just as prominent have been all those places where education is not considered a top priority because they suffer from all repercussions. The nations that are deprived of education are deprived of appealing living standards.

No need to look for an example of this beyond Pakistan as we have the most justifying example in Balochistan. Unfortunately, Pakistan is one of those countries where the education system is in a pathetic and heart-wrenching condition. Although it has been in such a condition ever since the day country garnered its freedom but over time, instead of progressing and becoming strong, it's gone down to the dumps. Pakistan's current literacy rate is 62.2 per cent just slightly above half. It portrays unequivocally where the country stands. If the literacy rate is compared with the neighbouring countries, then it is really low as China's literacy rate is 80 per cent, India's is 74 per cent and Iran's is 85 per cent. It wouldn't be wrong to say that the roadblock in our path to progress and prosperity is unarguably the dilapidated system of our education. There's a commendable quote by Don Richardson "Education; the single most important investment that we as a country will ever make".

The debate over what has contributed to these worsening standards of our educational system ceases to end but among the most prominent ones are the following:

\* less attention from the government. This can easily be seen in the recent budget where the dismal allocation of funds to education itself reflects our priorities. Pakistan just allocated 83.3 billion for education (which is just 1.1 per cent of the total budget) whereas 1289 billion was allocated to defence (i.e. 18 per cent of the total budget).

\* incapable people holding the responsibilities of looking after and managing the education system. The involvement of politics in key decision-making remains a major stumbling block. Students should also be blamed as their commitments have changed over time. From devoting all time to books and study to hardly getting time for study due to useless activities, there is only a small number that stands out. Overuse of mobile phones, that too in a meaningless manner, is undermining the pursuit of education.

In order to come out of this egregious woe, the country needs to take substantive steps like inflating the allocation of budget to education as it is not up to the mark. It must also work on making the recruitment process transparent and meritorious so that only the candidates with a requisite stature can be inducted into the teaching arena. More importantly, the system of nepotism should be uprooted on an immediate basis, which is regrettably a prevailing reality in the country. Other than these, all the fundamental necessities and needs should be fulfilled and provided such as good and sophisticated infrastructure in schools and other educational institutions as well as financial assistance to destitute students.

The indispensable need for an education can be seen from seeing how whichever country has so far touched peaks in the world has first managed to strengthen and bolster its education system.

If the education system continues to be overlooked, without any argument, Pakistan will keep lagging behind and struggling to become a formidable country on all fronts, especially its economic state. In a nutshell, Pakistan must bolster its ramshackle education system and it must leave no stone unturned in this pursuit.

The writer is a student

Source: Published in daily times

# **Whither Higher Education? | Editorial**

Concerned citizens have long been worried about the state of education, particularly in the sphere of higher education, in the country. A miasma of despair surrounds higher education. Optimists are, however, hopeful. Among the small tribe of crusaders struggling to reform higher education in Pakistan is Dr Tariq Banuri. A PhD in economics from Harvard, with experience in teaching in Western universities of repute, Banuri has been attempting to reform the higher education sector in the country. He has been pointing out how our universities have become factories for producing paper degrees even at the doctorate level. Degrees are worthless paper unless those who earn them possess the knowledge, and have proper grasp, of their subjects.

Our universities appoint teachers by simply conducting short interviews of candidates. This is in sharp contrast to the teacher-induction process applied in countries whose degrees are valued. There prospective educators are taken around all departments of the university, they interact with students, and deliver lectures in their subject/s of specialisation. The results are obvious. Another drawback to teacher appointment in Pakistan is that prospective candidates have to produce their research papers in world-renowned journals. This, however, does not give a proper idea of competence and ability of teachers. What makes matters worse is that teachers are not evaluated for their performance. There are continuous developments in all disciplines of knowledge, but most Pakistani university lecturers continue to impart outdated knowledge as they do not keep themselves abreast of latest developments.

Research departments in our universities are directionless. Research is done to benefit humanity. Coming generations build further on research carried out by their predecessors. Unfortunately, this is not happening here. Like other spheres of society, the bane of favouritism is affecting our institutions of higher learning too. One-third of public universities are reportedly getting more funding than the rest. All in all, universities allegedly ignore merit. Knowledge is power, though some people may go on insisting that power is power.

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# WORLD

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## **Biden Administration's Flawed Stance On Russia – OpEd By Michael Averko**

As quoted from the longtime Democratic Party politico Leon Panetta:

“But I think this comes down still to a military issue because I think what will persuade Putin is whether or not, if he engages in war, he could get a black eye. And one thing bullies don't like to do is to get a black eye,” Panetta explained. “And I think that's where our strongest leverage is.”

When it comes Russia and some other topics, projection is something American political elites like Panetta typically exhibit. While personally preferring a civil approach, I'm reminded of my view (at the 17 minute mark) that referring to Vladimir Putin as a bully, is on par with calling Joe Biden the same. Likewise with saying Volodymyr Zelensky is a twerp and the former president of Estonia (Toomas Hendrik Ilves) is a bigoted scumbag. (Stressing my preference against making these type of characterizations and simultaneous objection to the hypocrisy some exhibit on what is and isn't ad hominem.)

Recall how Biden treated some Americans during the 2016 US presidential campaign. Specifically, his treatment of a senior citizen and a young woman in verbally confrontational instances. Note Biden confidently bragging about how he threatened to cut off aid from Ukraine, if it didn't fire the attorney investigating the Ukrainian firm Biden's son was working for.

Biden has supported US wars abroad. His Russia-Ukraine takes bring to mind that bullies are inclined to exaggerate a given circumstance to seek confrontation. Such people are known for making insulting threats beforehand, in an effort which serves to further provoke a confrontational situation. With inaccurate innuendo, bullies are prone to attacking those they disagree with.



This last point touches on Biden calling Putin a killer, when prodded by ABC's George Stephanopoulos. In a not too distant CSPAN aired discussion, former CIA analyst Joseph Weisberg, delves into the projection that some American elites make towards their Russian counterparts. (Weisberg is the creator of the FX TV aired series "The Americans").

Hyping a Russia-Kiev regime conflict draws some attention away from Biden's low poll numbers, having to do with US domestic issues. Increased Russia-Kiev regime tension benefits the US military industrial complex, as well as the flat out anti-Russian advocates, who've influenced the US body politic.

One of numerous examples is New Jersey's longtime Democratic Senator Robert Menendez. He spoke of Russians coming home in body bags in a Russia-Kiev regime war. On Fox News, Victor Davis Hanson observed an obscene approach in the manner of Menendez's remark.

Menendez has been honored by the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, known for strident anti-Russian activism. In the unfortunate event of a Russia-Kiev regime war, Menendez should be aware it'll not be Russia needing the most body bags.

In stark contrast to Panetta and a good portion of the Western political establishment, German Vice Admiral Kai-Achim Schönbach felt compelled to resign after he said that Putin should be respected, Crimea will remain part of Russia and there should be a greater critical concentration on China.

Some might say it's not for an armed forces officer to express their opinion on such issues. In the US, Schönbach's peer, Mark Milley, has been noticeably critical of Russia, while exhibiting a comparatively gentler prose towards China. Free expression has apparent limits.

Schönbach's comment runs counter to a discussion on Fareed Zakaria's CNN aired GPS show of January 30. In this segment, The New York Times' Katrin Bennhold appears to favor Germany having a harder line towards Russia. The same is more evident of Ukraine's ambassador to Germany Andrey Melnyk.

Within US establishment circles, Fox News host Tucker Carlson, continues to get flack for being critical of the overly confrontational stance towards Russia and softer position accorded to the Kiev regime. Ukrainian-American activist

Alexandra Chalupa tweeted that Carlson should be prosecuted for not being a registered foreign agent.

Coming from Chalupa, this is pretty rich, seeing her involvement with some Ukrainian government connected folks for the purpose of doing “opposition research” (finding dirt) on Donald Trump during the 2016 US presidential campaign. Is Chalupa a registered foreign agent?

Carlson’s Russia-Ukraine observation refers to the Kiev regime not being threatened with sanctions for its military buildup near the Donbass rebel area, while evading the UN approved Minsk Protocol, advocating a negotiated autonomy settlement between the two conflicting sides in the former Ukrainian SSR. Similarly, no sanctions were put in place against those who violated the internationally brokered power sharing arrangement between Ukraine’s democratically elected president Viktor Yanukovich and his main opposition.

Yanukovich’s overthrow put in place a non-democratically selected regime, which was top heavy with anti-Russian advocates. In turn, the more pro-Russian elements in the former Ukrainian SSR (notably in Crimea and Donbass) expressed their opposition to the coup.

The increased Russian troop buildup in European Russia is in line with the existential threat NATO poses to that country. In addition to having been militarily active in some non-NATO countries, NATO exhibits an anti-Russian bias.

Prior to the aforementioned Russian military buildup, the Russian government stated its opposition to NATO expanding near Russia for a period running over twenty years. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has referenced the 1999 Istanbul and 2010 Astana declarations, stipulating that an expanded military bloc shouldn’t threaten another country.

When noting this particular, Lavrov said his US counterpart Antony Blinken gave a shrugged shoulders reply.

Michael Averko is a New York based independent foreign policy analyst and media critic.

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Source: Published in Euro Asia Review

# **UN Report on Taliban | Editorial**

The Taliban have rejected the findings of a leaked UN report which includes allegations that since taking over the country, the group has killed over 100 former Afghan government members, security personnel, and people that worked or cooperated with foreign forces. Taliban leadership say the group was strictly adhering to its “forgiveness decree and that no one will be allowed to carry out such atrocities in violation of the order”. The report, however, claims that the UN has received “credible allegations of killings, enforced disappearances, and other violations”.

Since the full report is not publically available yet, we must look at its reported contents with caution. It also does not help that the allegations appear to be second-hand, or that the same report also suggests that the Taliban have killed at least 50 Daesh fighters “extrajudicially” in recent weeks. Afghanistan has been unable to pay police and other government officials since western sanctions locked up all of the country’s funds and aid. In this context, it is interesting that the UN appears to believe that capturing members of the world’s most dangerous terrorist group is somehow a viable option.

The report also appears to be conflating many ‘lesser’ problems in the lawless and famine-stricken country, including restrictions on the right to protest and reductions in women’s sociopolitical freedoms. The report also makes the odd claim that the Taliban are to blame for the economy collapsing, ignoring the fact that the only thing keeping it alive for two decades was foreign funding. The reality is that, however legitimate critique of the Taliban’s social policies may be, responsibility for the economic collapse and famine conditions lie entirely with the US and EU, which cut off all funding and support.

Despite a UN Security Council resolution to allow some aid through, action on the ground has been almost invisible, as Washington continues its long-running policy of ravaging countries and then refusing to pay for the cleanup. You break it, you buy it — unless you are the US military.

Source: Published in Express Tribune

# Is a World War Coming? By Farrukh Khan

## Pitafi

If war between the US and Russia does not materialise then perhaps Iran or North Korea will spark something similar

As the post-election crisis simmered in the US, a nameless, faceless French programmer (identity withheld by the authorities) decided that the decline of the Western civilisation was inevitable and with his health deteriorating so before ending his life he would send his bitcoin savings to far-right pundits like one white-supremacist and holocaust denier Nick Fuentes and several creeps of the same order before ending his life. He posted his death note on his blog which had been dormant since (wait for it) 2014 and killed himself after sending out this money. Fuentes received 13.5 bitcoins (values at a time at approximately USD 250,000). Most of the rest of the 28.15 bitcoins went to 21 other bitcoin wallets owned by other far-right elements. One month later Fuentes would be seen taking an active part in the January 6 insurrection.

The most remarkable thing about this story is that it stinks to the high heavens. For instance one, why is it that authorities are withholding the identity of the far-right donor who is already dead? How many other terror financiers are extended this courtesy. Two, the nature of the original reporting. Research by Chainalysis, a cryptocurrency compliance startup, is referenced in the original Yahoo News story, and the said Yahoo News story is referenced in Chainalysis research. This ouroboros would suggest that certain law enforcement or intelligence agencies are on the trail and revealing this information to the journalist writing the story who in turn takes it to Chainalysis. But why not do it yourself instead of exposing a journalist to potential political consequences. And finally, since this report surfaced in the aftermath of 1/6 the trail seems to have gone cold. Either the intelligence agencies on the trail were too satisfied with the answer or then were too distracted (yeah right) by some factors to follow this through. But wait a minute. You don't need to read too many spy history books or conspiracy thrillers to know that the whole story seems to be too contrived. A month before 1/6, an ailing computer programmer who incidentally has forgotten to update his blog since 2014 decides to take his life, is overwhelmed by his concerns about the allegedly declining western civilisation, looks into his bitcoin wallet flushed with cryptocurrency, and decides to send money to Nick Fuentes who has never

received a donation bigger than two thousand dollars? Okay. The 1/6 commission since then has summoned Fuentes. We haven't heard if either of the above-mentioned startup or reporter was summoned. The reporter later also filed a story questioning the bona fides of one staff member of the commission from the intelligence community.

The same report also mentioned two other names, malcontents of the same stock. Richard Spencer, the neo-Nazi who will live in infamy for his Heil Trump slogan and salute after the latter's shock victory. The other name is of Andrew Anglin, the editor of Daily Stormer, an out-and-out neo-Nazi website. Anglin received USD 60,000 worth of bitcoins in 2017 according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. Both these names are important.

Richard Spencer launched Alt-Right Corporation and the website AltRight.com with the Swedish far-right figure Daniel Friberg. Before joining Spencer, Friberg and his business partner John Morgan established a publishing company called Arktos Media and took their business to India. In India Morgan would convert to Hinduism, live in Hare Krishna Ashram, and help Friberg in making the far-right publishing business successful. All these details have been expunged from their Wikipedia pages but Benjamin Tietelbaum's book War for Eternity would preserve all of this for posterity. Their four-year stay in India ended in (wait for it) 2014. These names are also linked to other far-right elements like Steve Bannon, Jason Jorjani (a white nationalist of Iranian origin) and Aleksander Dugin.

The Daily Stormer is important because despite being a neo-Nazi website in 2017 it placed Yair Netanyahu, son of the former Israeli PM, in its banner, calling itself his number one fansite. What? A neo-Nazi website/paper a fan of a Jewish premier's son? Makes no sense, does it? But go back up and look at the year when its editor got \$60k. Also 2017. When it comes to neo-Nazis Bibi and his son are a gift that keeps giving. They took steps down this slippery slope in opposition to the billionaire George Soros. But then it morphed into something else. Benjamin Netanyahu's blaming of the Palestinian grand mufti for the holocaust, his alliance with various Christian Zionists, who want Israel to be fattened as a sacrificial animal to be slaughtered during the rapture and otherwise can't stand Jews, all speak to what a great gift he was to the racist far right. His policies towards the African Jewish immigrants to Israel also speak of a colour bias. Meanwhile, some of the white nationalists like Jared Taylor, President of the New Century Foundation, now claim to treat the Ashkenazi Jews

(European Jewry that looks and sounds white) as whites. Not all neo-Nazis agree though and you can tell it will end in tears.

I do not know to this day whether by the western civilisation Samuel Huntington actually meant only the whites or other colours too because his last book *Who are we* undermines the idea of a pluralistic western identity and the title of this book sounds eerily similar to William Luther Pierce's *Who we are*. Yeah, the author of the *Turner Diaries*. Pierce's website is incidentally where I first encountered Savitri Devi's works, the European Nazi who went to India in search of a caste-based society. What she thinks of all Abrahamic religions will become clear when you read *A Warning to the Hindus*. She married a Brahmin during her stay in India. Another convert to Hinduism, who jumped on the Huntington train is one Vamadeva Shastri née David Frawley. Read his book *Hinduism and the Clash of Civilizations* to know how this bug got to this lot. Remember a caste-based world order is what the neo-Nazis now want. It requires a major disruption like another world war to bring about these changes.

Castes are important to them. Nothing else can give them an advantage in a fiercely competitive world. Isabel Wilkerson in her brilliant book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* shows how racism is also a form of casteism. She explains how the eight pillars of casteism preserve this linkage. These eight pillars are: 1) divine will and laws of nature, 2) heritability, 3) endogamy, 4) concept of racial pollution, 5) occupational hierarchy, 6) dehumanization & stigma, 7) terror as enforcement and cruelty as means of control, 8) inherent superiority versus Inherent Inferiority.

If all of this doesn't make it clear to you what awaits you, just read three books. *Interrogating My Chandal Life: An Autobiography of a Dalit* by Manoranjan Byapari and *Caste Matters* by Suraj Yengde. And of course *Turner Diaries*. You will be disabused of any delusions.

I highlight 2014 again and again because the invasion of Crimea wasn't the only thing that happened that year. Modi rose to power in India. And a few months before that Ajit Doval went to Shastra university to pitch for a ten-year rule for the RSS-BJP. And also presented what he called the idea of defensive offence. I have written too much on this. Just look it up and connect all dots.

In my view, if a war between the US and Russia does not materialise then perhaps Iran or North Korea will spark something similar. Constant vigilance is needed.

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# **Ukraine Crisis — and Russia, China and the US** **By Inam Ul Haque**

The post-Cold War humiliation of disintegration of the Soviet Union would not be lost on many influential and powerful nationalist circles within present day Russia. Nor would the actors behind this epic saga remain unchallenged if Russia could ever challenge them, geo-economics permitting. The route to that disintegration went from the US/West to the Middle East to South Asia and ended in Afghanistan. Reduction from an impressive Warsaw Pact system of alliance to Russia proper only, was phenomenal fall from grace. After Warsaw Pact went to the dustbin of history, the surviving legacy state (Russia) was expected to resuscitate 'some' residual influence. Hence the battle for Eastern Europe... Georgia, Crimea and Ukraine; and in Central Asian soft underbelly Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, etc. The polar bear is harmless in hibernation; otherwise, it is a deadly predator... tough, enduring and adaptable. And it remembers friends and foes.

People's Republic of China (PRC) emerged badly bruised from colonial occupation by the UK, US, France, Portugal, Germany and the Japan combined, after the fall of Ming Dynasty (1644) till its independence in 1949. The communist consolidation against Kuomintang led by Chaing-Kai-shek was opposed by the rich and powerful in the US/West. The Communists won the country without Tiawan, Hong Kong and Macau. Korean War (1950-1953) was the first clash where PRC resolutely and successfully defended its alliance and sphere of influence. Ever since rising China is the centre of mostly 'hostile' attention by the US/NATO; most recently under the 'pivot to Asia' policy of competition. The Western Grand Strategy in essence endeavours to contain and undermine the Chinese system, especially its economic outreach under the 'One-Belt One-Road Initiative (OBOR or simply Belt and Road Initiative — BRI), for which CPEC is the pilot project.

Conceptual differences drove the communist PRC from its ideological mentor the Soviet Union, with the West buttressing the divide. However, both China and Russia today have widely interdependent relations. Both remain committed — without any formal alliance — to coordinate diplomatically and economically to keeping the US in check. PRC has been a major partner in reducing the pain of the US/Western sanctions against Russia after the war in Georgia (2008) and

Crimea (2014). Russia remains engaged with the PRC in advanced technology, in addition to computers and broadcasting equipment in return for gas.

And in the cited collaboration, Russia and China bring to bear their alliance power against the US. India's recent 31st January abstention in the UNSC for the US-sponsored resolution on Ukraine is a case in point. Despite the much-touted Indo-US bonhomie, this is the second time India has supported its ally and former mentor Russia. India had voted in 2020 against a Ukraine-sponsored resolution condemning human rights violations in Crimea at the UN General Assembly.

Last week, I outlined the military situation along the Ukrainian border with Russia and Belarus. The military situation remains graver with Russian build-up surpassing 130,000 troops now; its maneuvers in Belarus in full swing; the US deploying some 8,000 troops to Poland, besides arming the Ukrainian forces; and the diplomatic flurry in top gear with President Emanuel Macron of France visiting Moscow and Kyiv.

Ukrainian forces, as reported, comprise older and mostly recalled troops, poorly trained, ill equipped; deployed in archaic 20th century positional defences, reminiscent of the trench warfare; and not too motivated to fight the Russian juggernaut, they were recently allied with (1945-1991); and with whom they share historic, commercial, cultural and linguistic ties.

The view from critical reporting of the crisis indicates that while the US/Western media builds the war hysteria; the Ukrainian government and public, besides some European powers like Germany, downplay the threat of an 'imminent' Russian invasion. An invasion would ostensibly solidify a fractured NATO; whereas the 'threat of invasion' keeps the US/NATO guessing and somewhat divided in response. President Putin's strategy of 'coercive deployment' dominating full-spectrum invasion down to limited incursions, once combined with economic intimidation like weaponising gas supply to Europe particularly during the cold winter (35% of European gas needs are met by Russia), make a potent threat. This threat is augmented by Russian diplomatic/alliance clout especially with China, Russian cyber capability and the ongoing Low-Intensity Conflict by Russian-backed separatists in Ukraine's eastern Donbas Region since 2014.

Russian maneuver hence is dubbed as President Putin's notice to the US/NATO outlining Russian security concerns i.e. its encirclement by NATO, reminiscent of

the Cold War 1.0 Policy of Containment. Ukrainian inclusion in NATO brings Russia's 2,300 km land and sea borders in direct contact with NATO. From a US/Western standpoint, non-inclusion of Ukraine in NATO is negotiable, as the US has hinted.

However, forcing a retreat over the US — asking for removal of US nuclear missiles from Eastern Europe especially the erstwhile Warsaw Pact nations — is difficult, if not impossible to negotiate.

At this point, the possibility of a shooting war between the US/NATO and Russia over Ukraine (not yet a NATO member) seems remote. The US official view is not favourable, and the US public is staunchly opposed to war in distant Ukraine after the Afghan war fatigue.

In crystal gazing the crisis, President Putin may acquire ironclad guarantees from the US/NATO never admitting any state from the erstwhile USSR era of influence. However, the level of Russian investment in the crisis indicates that Russia would not be contented with just that; and would like to see some retreat forced upon the US in Europe, besides restoring greater clout to Russia and its recognition by the US/Europe.

Without resorting to full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Putin may walk away with Russian speaking Donbas Region under its tested strategy of territorial attainment with or without annexation. Barring miscalculations and mistakes, the window for a full-scale war over Ukraine is closing, as Russia still does not have the estimated 175,000 troops required in the theatre; and full-fledged invasion may change the US/European security calculus drastically, engulfing Europe; as appeasement would appear fatal.

End of Beijing Winter Olympics on 20th February seems critical for initiation of limited hostilities by Russia, if any; as Putin would not like to spoil President Xi Jinping's party, besides allowing consideration time to the US/NATO.

Whatever the situation, the existing world order is under tremendous stress at the moorings. More next week.

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# **How to Make a Deal With Putin (Only a Comprehensive Pact Can Avoid War) By Michael McFaul**

Vladimir Putin has the world on edge. The Russian president has deployed more than 100,000 troops on Ukraine's borders and threatened "military-technical" measures if NATO continues to cooperate with Kyiv. He unilaterally drafted two extraordinarily aggressive treaties in December designed to constrain the organization and its members. They contain demands that are such nonstarters—most centrally, closing NATO's open door to Ukraine and prohibiting organizational forces and weapons in nations that joined after May 1997—that they read more like predicates for war rather than sincere overtures for negotiations.

Nonetheless, U.S. President Joe Biden and NATO provided detailed written replies in January, attempting to start a dialogue with the Russian leader. If Putin spurns these offers, war is likely. But Moscow has not yet wholly rejected negotiations. Conquering Ukraine would be no cakewalk, and Putin understands that killing thousands of people from a nation he describes as "part of Russia" would be hard to explain to his citizens, especially if the Russian military also suffers major casualties. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said the United States' response to the initial proposal contained "a kernel of rationality," and Putin is still speaking and meeting with Western leaders, including Biden, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

If Putin does agree to negotiate, then Biden and his team should not just offer defensively minimal concessions to freeze the crisis. Instead, in concert with allies and partners, Biden should seize the diplomatic offensive and counter with a comprehensive, grand bargain for enhancing European security. Call it "Helsinki 2.0." This agreement could refresh and modernize the Helsinki Accords signed during the Cold War, which stabilized the continent even as U.S.-Soviet competition grew in other parts of the world. It could resuscitate and amend defunct arms control agreements and provide a bigger framework for European security, and in the process help solve the issues surrounding Ukraine.

Convening a major summit to renegotiate European security will give Russia an international platform that Putin does not deserve. But that symbolism shouldn't stop Biden, NATO leaders, and other European democracies. The Helsinki Accords recognized the Soviet Union as a superpower, and that affirmation helped persuade Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev to make concessions. Putin also likes attention, and the West should be prepared to offer cheap pageantry not only to prevent a new Russian invasion into Ukraine but also to repair Europe's broken security architecture. The United States and Europe must have the courage to move beyond defensive patchwork fixes and instead pivot to bold, aggressive initiatives to make the continent safer.

### BIT BY BIT

On the surface, the 1970s were not an auspicious time for Soviet-U.S. compromise. Many observers believed the Kremlin's power was rising and Washington's was falling. Communists were taking power in parts of southeast Asia and southern Africa. Tension between the world's main blocs was running high.

But in the middle of the decade, Canadian, Soviet, U.S., and European diplomats set aside their broad and fundamental disagreements to discuss an issue of shared concern: European security. After several years of negotiations, they produced and signed the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, which codified ambiguous issues left over from World War II. At the heart of the accords was a central compromise: Western states de facto recognized the borders that resulted from Soviet conquests after World War II, and in return, the Soviet Union agreed to "respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or beliefs, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, and joined the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) tasked with implementing these obligations. The Soviet Union and the West also tacitly agreed to disagree on the precise definitions of government accountability, human rights, economic rights, and non-intervention in internal affairs. Ambiguity, they showed, is sometimes necessary for effective diplomacy.

In the first two decades after the accords were signed, Europe saw an explosion of new security agreements and treaties, particularly after Soviet reformer Mikhail Gorbachev came to power. In 1987, he joined U.S. President Ronald Reagan to sign the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, eliminating a whole class of highly destabilizing weapons. In 1990, the Conventional Armed Forces in

Europe (CFE) Treaty came online, substantially reducing the size of conventional forces deployed on the continent. The 1990 Vienna Document, signed by Canada, the Soviet Union, the United States, and most of Europe and Central Asia, expanded transparency about weapons and military training exercises.

Putin has violated virtually every security agreement his predecessors signed. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia and the West continued to make deals that helped keep Europe secure. The 1992 Open Skies Treaty, which followed the Vienna Document, allowed signatories to fly reconnaissance missions through one another's territories to collect information on military activities. The ambitious 1990 Charter of Paris trumpeted that all European signatories would "build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government of our nations." It declared prematurely that "the era of confrontation and division of Europe has ended." The 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances for Ukraine sent Kyiv's nuclear weapons to Russia in exchange for promises that Moscow, the United Kingdom, and the United States would respect Ukraine's territorial integrity. The 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act established mechanisms for the two parties to collaborate, marking a high point in cooperation.

But during the following decade, ties between the two sides deteriorated. Putin came to power in 2000, and he grew progressively more disappointed with the West as NATO further expanded in 2004; as Washington started a war in Iraq; and after the so-called color revolutions in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004. The West, meanwhile, grew disenchanted with Moscow after Russia launched the second Chechen war; grew more autocratic; invaded Georgia and recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent countries in 2008; annexed Crimea in 2014; and then supported separatists in eastern Ukraine, leading to ongoing war and thousands of deaths.

European security agreements from the previous two decades began to break down. Russia stopped implementing the CFE Treaty in 2007. Putin then violated virtually every European and international security agreement his Kremlin predecessors signed. The United States stopped meeting its CFE obligations in 2011, and under former President Donald Trump, pulled out of the INF and Open Skies treaties, as well. The Vienna Documents today do little to enhance transparency, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)—the successor to the CSCE—has become feckless in large measure



because Moscow objects to its efforts to monitor elections and protect human rights.

## GETTING TO YES

After decades of division, it will be difficult—and maybe impossible—for Russia and the West to strike any security deals on Europe. They have little faith in each other and plenty of reasons for suspicion. But given the stakes, the world must try. If Putin signals a commitment to negotiate, Biden and his European partners should go big. After all, Europe's security architecture needs genuine repair and creative renewal.

They should start with steps toward revamping transparency, which will allow each country to keep tabs on the other's activities and better predict each other's actions. Right now, Russia, the United States, and Europe have less information about the deployment of rival soldiers and weapons than at any time since the end of the Cold War. A new grand bargain on European security could commit all signatories to more frequent monitoring of troop deployments, weapons deployments, and military exercises. The United States and Russia have learned how to successfully implement an obtrusive inspections regime from the New START Treaty, which limits the number of nuclear warheads and delivery vehicles each country can deploy. New START is one of the few U.S.-Russian deals that still operates, and a broader agreement could share the treaty's obligations to short-notice inspections and close probing of weapon systems. Helsinki 2.0 could allow Russian inspectors to visit the sites of U.S. missile defenses in Poland and Romania, and NATO monitors could have similar access to Russia's Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad.

Moscow and Washington could further bolster transparency by rejoining, amending, and modernizing previously effective agreements, such as the Open Skies Treaty and CFE. To avoid dangerous miscalculations, both states must also work to revive the Vienna Documents. That means Russia and every NATO country should offer specified notifications about training and impose new limits on the scale and locations of exercises, especially because exercise preparations can appear very similar to planning for an actual attack.

Diplomats should also dust off, modernize, and implement old ideas that never came to fruition. Russia and the United States failed to implement a 2000 memorandum of agreement on sharing data about missile launches, known as the Joint Data Exchange Center (JDEC), because of technicalities and mounting



hostilities in U.S.-Russian relations. But an initiative of its kind between Moscow and NATO or among all OSCE members would enhance all of Europe's security (including Russia's) and could have better odds of succeeding.

Transparency, of course, is just one aspect of arms control. After Russia and the West agree to open their systems for inspections, diplomats will need to turn to the issue of control itself. They should begin by addressing the most destabilizing forces: the troops and weapons stationed on or near the Russian border. On a reciprocal and verifiable basis, all sides should pull these back, beginning with the massive Russian army mobilized around Ukraine today. They should also pull back their rockets. This may seem like a hard ask of Moscow, but Putin has already proposed that signatories not deploy land-based intermediate- and short-range missiles in areas where they can reach other signatories. Russian commentary has emphasized keeping all such weapons out of Ukraine. Their demand is reasonable as long as Moscow places similar restraints on short-range rockets that can hit Kyiv, Riga, Tallinn, Vilnius, or Warsaw.

Transparency is just one part of arms control.

The Biden Administration could also propose some limits on missile defenses in Europe. Washington could agree to refrain from deploying defense systems on the continent with capabilities against Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles in return for limits on Russian missile defenses in the European theater. This may sound like a big U.S. concession, but it's not. The U.S. interceptors that are currently deployed (SM3s) have no capability against Russian strategic weapons. The smartest place for interceptors that can defend the U.S. homeland against Russian or North Korean weapons (the Ground-Based Interceptor, or GBI) is Alaska, which is where they are mostly already located.

To better safeguard the United States and Europe from quick, devastating attacks, negotiators also must try to reduce the overall number of missiles—especially nuclear missiles. Ideally, both Russia and the United States would rejoin and credibly implement the INF treaty. To do so, Russia would have to agree to include its 9M729 missile in the agreement. If a complete ban on intermediate-range ground-based ballistic and cruise missiles in Europe proves impossible, negotiators could at least prohibit these kinds of rockets from being armed with nuclear warheads. Although this would be difficult to verify, negotiators should also try to restrict or ban the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe (including Russian territory west of the Ural Mountains).

Diplomats also must attempt to reduce the amount of conventional weaponry on the continent, going beyond either the original or adapted CFE treaties. If new limits on conventional weapons prove impossible, negotiators could consider more modest regional limits, such as in the Baltic or Black Sea regions. They should try to place limits in Europe on cluster bombs and cyberweapons, which can target civilians and critical infrastructure.

Finally, Western diplomats must insist again that Putin obtain permission before placing troops in other countries, which would keep Russia in line with agreements signed by its previous leaders. Putin will dispute who the legitimate host nation is in Crimea, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. But he might be persuaded to relinquish Russian claims of consent in certain breakaway regions, such as Transnistria in Moldova and Donetsk and Luhansk in Ukraine, if in return, NATO allies could drop a demand from the CFE treaty that placed constraints on Russian troop movements between different regions—or “flanks”—of Russia. (Of course, this new provision would not mean greenlighting buildups on the borders of other countries.) Such a deal is unlikely, but Western diplomats must affirm the principle of host nation consent.

#### AGREE TO DISAGREE

Throughout the current crisis, Moscow has argued that every state’s security is connected to the security of others. In interviews and meetings with his Western counterparts, Lavrov has repeatedly cited Istanbul and Astana OSCE declarations, which proclaimed that “the security of each participating State is inseparably linked to that of all others” and that “each participating State has an equal right to security.” As part of his draft treaties, Putin proposed that no signatory “strengthen their security individually, within international organizations, military alliances or coalitions at the expense of the security of other Parties.”

The Kremlin is correct that every state has an equal right to security. But Russia’s behavior belies Lavrov and Putin’s rhetoric. Moscow has taken many actions “at the expense of the security of other Parties,” including cyberattacks against Estonia in 2007; military interventions in Georgia and Ukraine; annexing Crimea; and supporting a separatist war in Donbas. Putin cites Russian security concerns as a reason to bar Ukraine from joining NATO, but NATO soldiers and operatives have never killed anyone in Russia. By contrast, Moscow’s troops and intelligence officers have carried out assassinations in Berlin, London, and Salisbury. They also attempted to kill one of the most famous European opposition leaders, Russia’s own Alexei Navalny, in the Russian city of Tomsk.

A fixation on nonstarters—such as Putin’s demands for a NATO expansion moratorium, or the West’s insistence that Russia withdraw from Crimea—will make reaching a new security agreement impossible. But negotiators could make progress by focusing on other issues and then embedding intractable problems into a larger deal. Widening the aperture of the negotiations could create opportunities for deals that are currently not available. For instance, if Russia withdraws support for the so-called separatists in Donbas, then the United States could commit to not installing offensive missiles in Ukraine and not deploying missile defenses in Europe that can intercept Russian weapons. That kind of a trade is not available through the Normandy Format assigned to negotiate a Moscow-Kyiv peace settlement, which is limited to France, Germany, Russia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

The Kremlin is correct that every state has an equal right to security. Helsinki 2.0 must also include new provisions on individual security, human rights, and noninterference. Most obviously, signatories need to pledge not to assassinate other European citizens within or outside of their borders. The deal should also ban kidnapping; Belarus cannot down jets to arrest opposition figures. The signatories must all commit to improve their treatment of refugees. A new deal could also prohibit states from meddling in one another’s elections. That means Moscow would stop funding or supporting indirectly political parties and candidates in other countries. Biden could commit to doing the same, since the United States does not do so now.

Individual countries, however, should not have the right to unilaterally declare that other countries are threatening their security or meddling in their internal affairs. Russia cannot claim that a pro-European government in Ukraine is by itself a menace to Moscow, or that U.S. statements defending human rights in Russia are tactics of regime change against the Kremlin. To sort through the legitimacy of complaints, the architects of Helsinki 2.0 should try to create an independent arbitration tribunal that can adjudicate security claims, akin to the World Trade Organization’s mechanism for trade disputes. In today’s polarized environment, such a tribunal would not be effective. But it would create an institution that could establish precedents, build momentum, and perhaps find value in the future.

Diplomats will not be able to solve every issue bedeviling relations between Russia and the West in Helsinki 2.0, just as they purposely did not try to resolve

all U.S.-Soviet or European problems in the original Helsinki Accords. The negotiators must be ready to agree to disagree. To make sure that unresolved disputes do not derail the broader agreement, diplomats could note them in nonbinding, unilateral side letters. Writing down disputes may seem counterintuitive, but these letters can signal a state's future plans should major conditions outlined in the agreement change. They can also communicate principles to domestic constituencies that diplomats may need to win ratification. Side letters, for example, helped the United States and Russia agree on the New START Treaty in 2010. They gave Washington space to outline its objections to missile defense constraints and provided a way for Russia to spell out responses to U.S. missile defense expansions. In Helsinki 2.0, NATO and other European partners could make clear in a side letter that they refuse to recognize the annexation of Crimea or the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. Russia could lay out its objections to NATO expansion.

## MAKING TIME

To launch these ambitious negotiations, all OSCE leaders—Biden and Putin included—could meet in Helsinki this year. The countries would then station special envoys there dedicated to hashing out a new agreement. Their work could be complemented by negotiations at the OSCE headquarters in Vienna, the NATO-Russia Council in Brussels, and in bilateral U.S.-Russian channels. Diplomats could aim to complete their final product by 2025, the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act.

These negotiations will invite criticism, so participating governments must be ready to explain why the exercise is worthwhile. For Biden and some European leaders, it will not be easy. Launching comprehensive discussions with Russia over European security rewards Putin's illegal, belligerent behavior. That is a fact. Some critics will dismiss such an initiative as appeasement. They will be echoing observers from the 1970s who charged that the West was forgetting about the Soviet Union's illegitimate military interventions in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, tacitly recognizing the Kremlin's World War II annexations and neglecting the Soviet bloc's totalitarian repression. Those complaints were valid then, just as today's concerns are valid now.

But as U.S. policymakers must explain, the alternative is worse. In the absence of a new security deal, Putin will continue to stoke divisions, tensions, and conflicts both between and within countries in Europe and North America—even if he does not launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. That doesn't mean

Washington needs to compromise on core normative and security principles or offer unilateral concessions. In fact, it absolutely shouldn't—every paragraph of the agreement must be based on reciprocity and mutual interests. And by offering to negotiate a new grand deal, Biden would gain the moral high ground and make Putin's invasion of Ukraine look even more irrational and immoral.

The negotiations could also succeed even if they fail to yield a major agreement. Putin may hold off on invading Ukraine while diplomats confer, if only to see what he can get out of a deal. This delay may not comprehensively solve the issues surrounding Ukraine or Europe as a whole, but with thousands of lives at stake, kicking the can down the road would still be a tremendous service. Three years of peace is, after all, far better than three years of war.

Source: Published in Foreign Affairs

# **Blinken Foreign Policy – OpEd By Binoy**

## **Kampmark**

It must be a sure handicap to be saddled with such a name when piloting a large government department, but US Secretary of State Antony Blinken shows no sign of that bothering him. It has, however, become a hallmark of a policy that is markedly devoid of foresight and heavily marked by stammering confusion.

On his trip to Australia, Blinken showed us, again, how morality and forced ethics in the international scene can be the stuff of particularly bad pantomime. He sounded, all too often, as an individual sighing about the threats to US power while inflating those of its adversaries. Russia and China were, as they tend to be these days, at the front of the queue of paranoid agitation.

In an interview with The Australian, Blinken was adamant that “there’s little doubt that China’s ambition over time is to be the leading military, economic, diplomatic and political power not just in the region, but in the world.” He admitted that the US had its own version of an “international order” – but that vision was “liberal”. Beijing’s was profoundly inappropriate. “China wants an (international) order, but the difference is its world order would be profoundly illiberal.”

Blinken was also pleased at what he saw on his visit to the University of Melbourne. “My stepfather is an alumnus, so that was wonderful to reconnect, also just to talk to some remarkable young Australians who are really the future of the relationship, the partnership between us – incredibly engaged, incredibly smart, incredibly thoughtful about the present and the future.” And, no doubt, handpicked for the occasion.

Russia’s behaviour was also the subject of the Blinken treatment. Australians, warned the secretary, faced a solemn choice before Moscow’s stratagems. “Russia, right now,” he told an Australian news program on the ABC, “poses an immediate challenge, not just to Ukraine ... but to some very basic principles that are relevant to the security not just to people in Europe, but throughout the world, including Australia.” That’s considerable reach for a power with an economy that is only marginally larger than Australia’s.



Blinken's babble about international liberal orders and territorial integrity echoes the Truman Doctrine in the early stages of the Cold War, one that ended up bloodied and sodden in the rice fields and jungles of Indochina. In time, variations of this same, pathetic overreading of imminent crises and threats would propel US forces into Iraq and Afghanistan, and what a supreme mess those engagements turned out to be. All that mattered were the substitutes: in the case of Afghanistan, Islamic fundamentalism twinned with terrorism; in the case of Iraq, Weapons of Mass Destruction never found and forced links with al-Qaeda never proved.

Blinken's visit had also inspired the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison to wax lyrical about the sanctity of borders, something that proved somewhat irrelevant when Australia's defence personnel found themselves serving as auxiliaries of US military efforts. He wanted "to send a very clear message on behalf of Australia, a liberal democracy who believes in freedom and the sovereignty of states, not just in Europe, but in our region as well – that the autocratic, unilateral actions of Russia [are considered] to be threatening, and bullying Ukraine is something that is completely and utterly unacceptable."

Despite such statements, little is being done to stop the trains heading towards the precipice of conflict. Everything is being said about getting citizens of other countries out of Ukraine before the bloody resolution. In late January, of the 129 diplomatic missions based in Ukraine, four had announced the departure of family members of personnel: the US, UK, Australia and Germany.

US President Joe Biden has been the leading voice on this move, adding kindling in urging that, "American citizens should leave, and should leave now." In an interview with NBC News, he did nothing to quell concerns. "We're dealing with one of the largest armies in the world. This is a very different situation and things could go crazy quickly."

The Australians, unimaginatively obedient, have also issued similar calls of evacuation, suggesting imminent conflict. Canberra has become rather adept at evacuating embassy staff and shutting down operations in the face of a crisis. "Given the deteriorating security situation caused by the build up of Russian troops on Ukraine's border," Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne stated, "the Government has directed the departure of staff at the Australian embassy at Kyiv."



Ukrainian officials have not been too impressed by these very public sentiments of jumping ship. Volodymyr Shalkivskyi, based at the Ukrainian embassy in Canberra, wished to “avoid panic and different kind of rumours that the invasion is inevitable.” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky also told reporters in southern Ukraine that, “The best friend of enemies is panic in our country.”

The Ukrainian premier even went so far as to invite Biden to visit Kyiv to ease tensions, something he is unlikely to do, given the calls to evacuate US citizens. “I am convinced that your arrival in Kyiv in the coming days, which are crucial for stabilising the situation, will be a powerful signal,” Zelensky is supposed to have said in a call to the US president. He hoped that this would “help prevent the spread of panic.”

While Zelensky’s role seems increasingly marginal, one blown sideways by the winds of events increasingly beyond his control, Blinken’s focus, and that of the Biden administration, remains affixed to the Indo-Pacific. Last year’s AUKUS agreement, negotiated in secret and in defiance of other alliances, including that with France, suggests that whatever Moscow’s intentions, China remains the primary, nerve racking concern.

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Source: Published in Eur Asiareview

# **Return of Great Powers Rivalry By Dr**

## **Shoaib Baloch**

GREAT powers relations are deteriorating. The US, China and Russia are at loggerheads over a myriad of issues which may escalate tension and bring them eyeball to eyeball over regional and global flashpoints.

The twin crises—Taiwan and Ukraine — are potential war zones between the East and the West.

The US interference in Taiwan's internal affairs will furiously antagonize China; both global giants may lock their strategic horns over Taiwan quagmire.

China's zero-tolerance Taiwan policy will bring its rivalry with the US at the point of no return provided that Washington continues to meddle in Taiwan's affairs.

Similarly, the expansion of NATO to encircle Russia at its western region will stoke tension between the US and Russia.

Military deployment by Russia at its western border and the US' quest to make Ukraine a NATO member country aggravate the relations of both former traditional rivals.

The more US tries to strategically squeeze Russia, the greater chances of Russia-China alliance.

When Russia and China forge an alliance against the US, it will terribly shatter global balance of power.

It increases the possibility of the creation of alliances and counter-alliances among world powers, compelling smaller countries to bandwagon.

The world will be divided into two major blocs between the US and China. Both powers contest to maintain their influence by expanding their geopolitical footprints across the world.

Realpolitik gains currency in the face of growing great powers rivalry. Escalating great powers tension cause conflicts. Competition slides into confrontation.

Nevertheless, realistic foreign policy may ensure stability of deterrence that repels big powers from direct confrontation as mutually assured destruction (MAD) becomes imminent.

Both deterrence and crisis stability are paramount for global strategic stability as emerging new powers may change global power structure.

Eroding world order and waning US influence have enabled other countries to grow.

China's economic boom and technological advancement have created problems for the US as Beijing tries to lead the world at the time Washington's role is declining on world affairs.

The US has abjectly failed to live in the paradise of power and enjoy the luxury of international system which it has constructed after the demise of (former) Soviet Union.

There are two main factors which have emaciated the US' muscles. One is the internal political and social polarization accompanied with growing inequality and intolerance.

The other is its engagement in 'unwinnable' wars across the world. Afghanistan war has trapped the US in a deadly conflict for two decades while the rest of the world continues to grow without any impediment.

China has built an economic pyramid that enables it to compete with the US to be the next hegemonic power.

It is obvious that the US will attempt to retain its status as global superpower while China tries to replace it gradually.

It is hard for the US to be the status quo power since China strives to be the potential economic and technological master of the world.

With a view to countering China, the US has forged alliances, the QUAD and the AUKUS, at the Indo-Pacific region.

The US policy shift from fighting terrorism to managing great powers has returned the great powers rivalry.

The QUAD and AUKUS at the Indo-Pacific against China and NATO's expansion to Ukraine against Russia will increase great powers tension.

It makes confrontation inevitable. The US-India-NATO nexus versus China-Russia alliance will shift global balance of power, creating security dilemma for various countries.

It again increases arms race which can affect deterrence and crisis stability. A new cold war between the East and the West (not simply between two great powers) is transcontinental that can become hot if there is any strategic miscalculation.

However, the US and China are two major players in this possible Cold War II. The flashpoints of conflict will be maritime routes and space.

Both the US and China will endeavour to play greater role over world affairs by occupying major strategic points at ocean regions to have influence on the sea lines of communication.

Space is another domain of great powers contest; it allows them to spy over the world. The new Cold War will be over crafting world's technological order and restructuring the rules of the game.

Crumbling existing world order provides space for establishing new international norms. It holds that the United States has an obligation to spread its values to every part of the world.

China's exceptionalism is cultural. China does not proselytize; it does not claim that its contemporary institutions are relevant outside China.

" If China tries to replicate the previous master's rules and norms of global system as it becomes the next global superpower, it will have to restructure its internal political system to earn legitimacy.

Source: Published in Pak Observer

# **World at the Nib of a New Global Order By**

## **Inam Ul Haque**

In the modern construct of International Relations (IR), the Peace of Westphalia — the treaty (1648) signed to end the ‘Thirty (1618-48) and Eighty Years Wars (1568-1648)’ in Europe — is considered a precursor. However, IR has been turning corners ever since the evolution of governance and interstate interaction. Each ‘butterfly event’ has changed IR in unfathomable ways. Collapse of the Roman Empire (476 AD), advent of Islam (6th century), beginning of Ottoman Empire (1299), occupation of continental US by white settlers (16th century onwards), industrial revolutions (1760-1840), World Wars (1914-18 and 1939-45), fall of the USSR (1989), wars in the Gulf (1990, 2003), the Afghanistan War (2001-21) and the IT/Social Media Revolutions are just a random list of ‘some’ cases in point.

Renaissance (14-17th centuries) and Enlightenment (1715-89) provided Europe the edge that continues to this day. Empowered by scientific development, the European colonisers usurped the riches of their colonies with abandon to bankroll their development and territorial acquisitions. Westphalia introduced the concepts of state sovereignty, diplomacy and interstate mediation. The French Revolution (1789-99) provided Liberty, Equality and Fraternity (Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité) as its enduring legacy, under the Third Republic (1870-1940).

League of Nations (1920-46) offered to build a modern IR construct and develop consensus to avoid interstate conflict after World War-I, but peace on victors’ terms did not last. Defeat of Germany/Axis Powers at the end of World War-II steered IR towards the United Nations (1945) — again barreling down peace on victors’ terms; but the vanquished, this time around, were sufficiently weakened to rise, like Germany did after the World War-I.

In the emerging World Order, the UN was buttressed by a commensurate economic system using prevalent and predatory tools like the World Bank (estb 1944) and the IMF (1944). ‘Democracy’ wedded to the ‘capitalist economy’ was further reinforced by regional compacts like the European Union (1993); trade alliance like the World Trade Organization (1995); and policing apparatus like Financial Action Task Force (1989) etc.

The all-encompassing and effective use of media (including social media) and narrative-building under this 'Order' remained so strong that humanity by and large today subscribes to the Western notions of democracy, capital economy, human rights and a rule-based global order...where the rules are made by the powerful West. So far, challenges to this international order have not been strong enough as the dissolution of Soviet Union in 1989 just strengthened its chokehold, replacing bipolarity with unipolarity.

However, 'change' being the only permanent and unaltered fact of IR may be in the offing. The US, the unchallenged leader of the unipolar world, stands fatigued after its own 'Twenty Years' war in Afghanistan, overshadowing its other recent conflicts. It is bereft of a moral authority after a chaotic exit from Kabul; and for usurping half of over \$7 billion, belonging to the poor and starving Afghans, giving it to affectees of 9/11 under its 'own' rules. This money ironically was left for 'safe-keeping' by previous Afghan government in the US banking system, like most nations do. This one avaricious overreach and the evaporation of the US moral authority will redefine the future financial system, eroding the present structures and practices.

The US also is grappling with a resurgent China and a hard-nosed Sino-Russia combine internationally. At home, it is beset by worsening race relations, the pandemic, decaying infrastructure, faltering education system and bipartisan acrimony. Consequently, it has been in retreat from its global overreach. Russia invaded Georgia in 2008, gulped down Crimea in 2014 and recently sent troops to Kyrgyzstan right under its nose. And in the backdrop of ominous (and irreversible) military build-up around Ukraine on land and in sea, the US has sensibly declared not to send America troops to defend its non-NATO ally.

Elsewhere, the US has waning interest in the Middle East with regional rulers flocking to the Beijing Winter Olympics, having sensed the winds of change. Even Israel has been on a mission to mend fences in its erstwhile hostile neighborhood. And India, the US's 'would be' South Asian policeman does not tow the American line on Ukraine, siding instead with its mentor, benefactor and ally...Russia.

The Sino-Russian combine, meanwhile, marches forward. China's 2013 ambitious signature foreign policy initiative, BRI, plans global connectivity with and among some 126 countries and 29 international organisations through a network of roads, highways, railways, pipelines, power plants, grids and fiber-

optic, besides social welfare and poverty alleviation projects. BRI is a staggering investment of over \$1.3 trillion in six international corridors. The initiative would ultimately cover over 60% of the world population and 40% of the global GDP. The trade volume between China and the participating countries (already over \$6 trillion) was to add \$117 billion in 2021.

BRI will reduce global trade costs and transportation time. With CPEC as its pilot project, it dwarfs any international developmental initiative thus far. More countries are eager to sign on, casting politics aside.

China's resolute response to the pandemic and its global aid (even to the US) of PPE/vaccines has greatly validated its system of governance and economy...providing a viable alternative to the Western mix of 'uncontrolled' democracy and 'predatory' capitalism, where 'lending' benefits the US/West the most. China, hence, holds comparative moral authority.

Both Russia and China are de-dollarising their economies to insulate themselves from the sanctions of 'economic hitmen'. And Chinese leaders must, therefore, be mulling over substituting the WB and IMF to consolidate their ultimate IR dominance that shifts from geopolitics to geoeconomics.

Europe, meanwhile, festoons in squabbles. Crisis in Ukraine (read Eastern Europe) does not ring a bell as loud as Ukrainian government feels it should, in Western Europe. German ambivalence is due to Russian economic clout and weaponising its 35% gas supply to Europe. French President Emmanuel Macron basically undertook a PR mission for domestic brownie points. So, President Vladimir Putin knows what he is doing and why.

Africa, South/Central Asia and Americas, meanwhile, are marginal players on the contemporary IR chessboard, with most taking the geoeconomics route for survival and salvation. And that is where greater displacement is taking place...towards China, the Middle Kingdom.

Pakistan, meanwhile, is poised correctly, allied correctly except for 'block neutrality in theory'.

The politics of Nord Storm 2 next time.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 17th, 2022.



# **What If Russia Wins? By Liana Fix and Michael Kimmage**

When Russia joined the ongoing civil war in Syria, in the summer of 2015, it shocked the United States and its partners. Out of frustration, then President Barack Obama claimed that Syria would become a “quagmire” for Russia and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Syria would be Russia’s Vietnam or Putin’s Afghanistan, a grievous mistake that would eventually rebound against Russian interests.

Syria did not end up as a quagmire for Putin. Russia changed the course of the war, saving Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from impending defeat, and then translated military force into diplomatic leverage. It kept costs and casualties sustainable. Now Russia cannot be ignored in Syria. There has been no diplomatic settlement. Instead, Moscow has amassed greater regional clout, from Israel to Libya, and retained a loyal partner in Assad for Russia’s power projection. In Syria, what the Obama administration failed to anticipate was the possibility that Russia’s intervention would succeed.

In the surreal winter of 2021–22, the United States and Europe are once again contemplating a major Russian military intervention, this time in Europe itself. And once again, many analysts are warning of dire consequences for the aggressor. On February 11, British Minister of State for Europe James Cleverly predicted that a wider war in Ukraine “would be a quagmire” for Russia. In a rational cost-benefit analysis, the thinking goes, the price of a full-scale war in Ukraine would be punishingly high for the Kremlin and would entail significant bloodshed. The United States has estimated as many as 50,000 civilian casualties. Along with undermining Putin’s support among the Russian elite, who would suffer personally from the ensuing tensions with Europe, a war could endanger Russia’s economy and alienate the public. At the same time, it could bring NATO troops closer to Russia’s borders, leaving Russia to fight a Ukrainian resistance for years to come. According to this view, Russia would be trapped in a disaster of its own making.

Nevertheless, Putin’s cost-benefit analysis seems to favor upending the European status quo. The Russian leadership is taking on more risks, and above the fray of day-to-day politics, Putin is on a historic mission to solidify Russia’s

leverage in Ukraine (as he has recently in Belarus and Kazakhstan). And as Moscow sees it, a victory in Ukraine might well be within reach. Of course, Russia might simply prolong the current crisis without invading or find some palatable way to disengage. But if the Kremlin's calculus is right, as in the end it was in Syria, then the United States and Europe should also be prepared for an eventuality other than quagmire. What if Russia wins in Ukraine?

If Russia gains control of Ukraine or manages to destabilize it on a major scale, a new era for the United States and for Europe will begin. U.S. and European leaders would face the dual challenge of rethinking European security and of not being drawn into a larger war with Russia. All sides would have to consider the potential of nuclear-armed adversaries in direct confrontation. These two responsibilities—robustly defending European peace and prudently avoiding military escalation with Russia—will not necessarily be compatible. The United States and its allies could find themselves deeply unprepared for the task of having to create a new European security order as a result of Russia's military actions in Ukraine.

#### MANY WAYS TO WIN

For Russia, victory in Ukraine could take various forms. As in Syria, victory does not have to result in a sustainable settlement. It could involve the installation of a compliant government in Kyiv or the partition of the country. Alternatively, the defeat of the Ukrainian military and the negotiation of a Ukrainian surrender could effectively transform Ukraine into a failed state. Russia could also employ devastating cyberattacks and disinformation tools, backed by the threat of force, to cripple the country and induce regime change. With any of these outcomes, Ukraine will have been effectively detached from the West.

If Russia achieves its political aims in Ukraine by military means, Europe will not be what it was before the war. Not only will U.S. primacy in Europe have been qualified; any sense that the European Union or NATO can ensure peace on the continent will be the artifact of a lost age. Instead, security in Europe will have to be reduced to defending the core members of the EU and NATO. Everyone outside the clubs will stand alone, with the exception of Finland and Sweden. This may not necessarily be a conscious decision to end enlargement or association policies; but it will be de facto policy. Under a perceived siege by Russia, the EU and NATO will no longer have the capacity for ambitious policies beyond their own borders.

The United States and Europe will also be in a state of permanent economic war with Russia. The West will seek to enforce sweeping sanctions, which Russia is likely to parry with cyber-measures and energy blackmailing, given the economic asymmetries. China might well stand on Russia's side in this economic tit for tat. Meanwhile, domestic politics in European countries will resemble a twenty-first-century great game, in which Russia will be studying Europe for any breakdown in the commitment to NATO and to the transatlantic relationship. Through methods fair and foul, Russia will take whatever opportunity comes its way to influence public opinion and elections in European countries. Russia will be an anarchic presence—sometimes real, sometimes imagined—in every instance of European political instability.

Eastern member states would have NATO troops permanently on their soil.

Cold War analogies will not be helpful in a world with a Russianized Ukraine. The Cold War border in Europe had its flash points, but it was stabilized in a mutually acceptable fashion in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. By contrast, Russian suzerainty over Ukraine would open a vast zone of destabilization and insecurity from Estonia to Poland to Romania to Turkey. For as long as it lasts, Russia's presence in Ukraine will be perceived by Ukraine's neighbors as provocative and unacceptable and, for some, as a threat to their own security. Amid this shifting dynamic, order in Europe will have to be conceived of in primarily military terms—which, since Russia has a stronger hand in the military than in the economic realm, will be in the Kremlin's interest—sidelining nonmilitary institutions such as the European Union.

Russia has Europe's largest conventional military, which it is more than ready to use. The EU's defense policy—in contrast to NATO's—is far from being able to provide security for its members. Thus will military reassurance, especially of the EU's eastern members, be key. Responding to a revanchist Russia with sanctions and with the rhetorical proclamation of a rules-based international order will not be sufficient.

## IMPERILING EUROPE'S EAST

In the event of a Russian victory in Ukraine, Germany's position in Europe will be severely challenged. Germany is a marginal military power that has based its postwar political identity on the rejection of war. The ring of friends it has surrounded itself with, especially in the east with Poland and the Baltic states, risks being destabilized by Russia. France and the United Kingdom will assume

leading roles in European affairs by virtue of their comparatively strong militaries and long tradition of military interventions. The key factor in Europe, however, will remain the United States. NATO will depend on U.S. support as will the anxious and imperiled countries of Europe's east, the frontline nations arrayed along a now very large, expanded, and uncertain line of contact with Russia, including Belarus and the Russian-controlled parts of Ukraine.

Eastern member states, including Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania, will likely have substantial numbers of NATO troops permanently stationed on their soil. A request from Finland and Sweden to gain an Article 5 commitment and to join NATO would be impossible to reject. In Ukraine, EU and NATO countries will never recognize a new Russian-backed regime created by Moscow. But they will face the same challenge they do with Belarus: wielding sanctions without punishing the population and supporting those in need without having access to them. Some NATO members will bolster a Ukrainian insurgency, to which Russia will respond by threatening NATO members.

Ukraine's predicament will be very great. Refugees will flee in multiple directions, quite possibly in the millions. And those parts of the Ukrainian military that are not directly defeated will continue fighting, echoing the partisan warfare that tore apart this whole region of Europe during and after World War II.

The permanent state of escalation between Russia and Europe may stay cold from a military perspective. It is likely, though, to be economically hot. The sanctions put on Russia in 2014, which were connected to formal diplomacy (often referred to as the "Minsk" process, after the city in which the negotiations were held), were not draconian. They were reversible as well as conditional. Following a Russian invasion of Ukraine, new sanctions on banking and on technology transfer would be significant and permanent. They would come in the wake of failed diplomacy and would start at "the top of the ladder," according to the U.S. administration. In response, Russia will retaliate, quite possibly in the cyber-domain as well as in the energy sector. Moscow will limit access to critical goods such as titanium, of which Russia has been the world's second-largest exporter. This war of attrition will test both sides. Russia will be ruthless in trying to get one or several European states to back away from economic conflict by linking a relaxation in tension to these countries' self-interest, thus undermining consensus in the EU and NATO.

Europe's strong suit is its economic leverage. Russia's asset will be any source of domestic division or disruption in Europe or in Europe's transatlantic partners. Here Russia will be proactive and opportunistic. If a pro-Russian movement or candidate shows up, that candidate can be encouraged directly or indirectly. If an economic or political sore point diminishes the foreign policy efficacy of the United States and its allies, it will be a weapon for Russian propaganda efforts and for Russian espionage.

Much of this is already happening. But a war in Ukraine will up the ante. Russia will use more resources and be unchained in its choice of instruments. The massive refugee flows arriving in Europe will exacerbate the EU's unresolved refugee policy and provide fertile ground for populists. The holy grail of these informational, political, and cyberbattles will be the 2024 presidential election in the United States. Europe's future will depend on this election. The election of Donald Trump or of a Trumpian candidate might destroy the transatlantic relationship at Europe's hour of maximum peril, putting into question NATO's position and its security guarantees for Europe.

#### TURNING NATO INWARD

For the United States, a Russian victory would have profound effects on its grand strategy in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. First, Russian success in Ukraine would require Washington to pivot to Europe. No ambiguity about NATO's Article 5 (of the kind experienced under Trump) will be permissible. Only a strong U.S. commitment to European security will prevent Russia from dividing European countries from one another. This will be difficult in light of competing priorities, especially those that confront the United States in a deteriorating relationship with China. But the interests at stake are fundamental. The United States has very large commercial equities in Europe. The European Union and the United States are each other's largest trade and investment partners, with trade in goods and services totaling \$1.1 trillion in 2019. A well-functioning, peaceful Europe augments American foreign policy—on climate change, on nonproliferation, on global public health, and on the management of tensions with China or Russia. If Europe is destabilized, then the United States will be much more alone in the world.

NATO is the logical means by which the United States can provide security reassurance to Europe and deter Russia. A war in Ukraine would revive NATO

not as a democracy-building enterprise or as a tool for out-of-area expeditions like the war in Afghanistan but as the unsurpassed defensive military alliance that it was designed to be. Although Europeans will be demanding a greater military commitment to Europe from the United States, a broader Russian invasion of Ukraine should drive every NATO member to increase its defense spending. For Europeans, this would be the final call to improve Europe's defensive capabilities—in tandem with the United States—in order to help the United States manage the Russian-Chinese dilemma.

The nuclear superpowers would have to keep their outrage in check. For a Moscow now in permanent confrontation with the West, Beijing could serve as an economic backstop and a partner in opposing U.S. hegemony. In the worst case for U.S. grand strategy, China might be emboldened by Russia's assertiveness and threaten confrontation over Taiwan. But there is no guarantee that an escalation in Ukraine will benefit the Sino-Russian relationship. China's ambition to become the central node of the Eurasian economy will be damaged by war in Europe, because of the brutal uncertainties war brings. Chinese irritation with a Russia on the march will not enable a rapprochement between Washington and Beijing, but it may initiate new conversations.

The shock of a big military move by Russia will likewise raise questions in Ankara. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey has been enjoying the venerable Cold War game of playing off the superpowers. Yet Turkey has a substantial relationship with Ukraine. As a NATO member, it will not benefit from the militarization of the Black Sea and the eastern Mediterranean. Russian actions that destabilize the wider region could push Turkey back toward the United States, which could in turn drive a wedge between Ankara and Moscow. This would be good for NATO, and it would also open up greater possibilities for a U.S.-Turkish partnership in the Middle East. Rather than a nuisance, Turkey could turn into the ally it is supposed to be.

A bitter consequence of a wider war in Ukraine is that Russia and the United States would now encounter each other as enemies in Europe. Yet they will be enemies who cannot afford to take hostilities beyond a certain threshold. However far apart their worldviews, however ideologically opposed, the world's two most significant nuclear powers will have to keep their outrage in check. This will amount to a fantastically tricky juggling act: a state of economic warfare and geopolitical struggle across the European continent, yet a state of affairs that does not allow escalation to tip into outright war. At the same time, U.S.-Russian



confrontation can in the worst case extend to proxy wars in the Middle East or Africa if the United States decides to reestablish its presence after the catastrophic Afghanistan withdrawal.

Maintaining communication, especially on strategic stability and cybersecurity, will be crucial. It is notable that U.S.-Russian cooperation on malicious cyber-activities continues even during the current tensions. The necessity of maintaining rigorous arms control agreements will be even greater after a Ukraine war and the sanctions regime that follows it.

#### NO VICTORY IS PERMANENT

As the crisis in Ukraine unfolds, the West must not underestimate Russia. It must not bank on narratives inspired by wishful thinking. Russian victory in Ukraine is not science fiction.

But if there may be little that the West can do to prevent a Russian military conquest, it will be able to influence what happens afterward. Very often the seeds of trouble lie beneath the veneer of military victory. Russia can eviscerate Ukraine on the battlefield. It can make Ukraine a failed state. But it can do so only by prosecuting a criminal war and by devastating the life of a nation-state that has never invaded Russia. The United States and Europe and their allies and other parts of the world will draw conclusions and be critical of Russian actions. Through their alliances and in their support for the people of Ukraine, the United States and Europe can embody the alternative to wars of aggression and to a might-makes-right ethos. Russian efforts at sowing disorder can be contrasted to Western efforts at restoring order.

Much as the United States retained the diplomatic properties of the three Baltic states in Washington, D.C., after they had been annexed by the Soviet Union during World War II, the West can put itself on the side of decency and dignity in this conflict. Wars that are won are never won forever. All too often countries defeat themselves over time by launching and then winning the wrong wars.

Source: Published in Foreign Affairs



# **US Stagflation Overshadows China's**

## **Recovery And Global Prospects – Analysis**

### **By Dan Steinbock**

Recently, the IMF downgraded global growth prospects, due to projected slowdowns in the US and China. Negative prospects could be overcome with right policies, such as trade cooperation.

Recently, the International Monetary Fund projected that global growth rate will slow to 4.4% in 2022. In the dire international landscape, global recovery has remained elusive dream since 2017, when US trade wars derailed the impending expansion. Today, unwarranted geopolitics escalate tensions.

Worse, the failure to roll out vaccines could knock another \$1.5 trillion from incomes across the South, according to UNCTAD report last fall.

420 million cases, 6 million deaths, new variants

The WHO vaccination target is to achieve 70% coverage in all countries by the mid-2022. Thanks to vaccine hoarding by rich countries and inadequate international cooperation, only 59 countries, most of them rich economies and some upper-middle income countries such as China, have achieved that target – as opposed to only half of lower-middle income economies and only a tenth of the low-income nations.

When China contained its pandemic in February 2020, the number of total cases worldwide was still less than 90,000. Of these, 85,000 were in the insulated mainland. In other words, some 99.97% of present-day COVID-19 cases worldwide are the result of the West's ineffective containment measures after February 2020.

While cases in China remain below 110,000, in the West the failure to contain the pandemic has already caused 420 million confirmed cases and nearly 6 million deaths, after four to five pandemic waves and multiple variants

Nonetheless, when the Biden administration arrived in the White House in January 2021, the expectation was that the U.S. economy would surge, the

Chinese economy would slow down, and the rapidly-rising inflation was just “transitory.”

All assumptions were misguided.

United States: fast GDP growth, faster inflation

In 2021, U.S. economy expanded faster than expected – real GDP grew 5.5%, fastest since 1984 – as the economy continued to recover from the adverse pandemic effects. Wages grew at fastest pace in decades, but since prices increased even more, the net effect was actually negative.

Before the COVID-19, US economy was expected to exhibit some slowing. In 2021, most of the GDP expansion was accounted for by increased inventory investment and service spending. In the past two years the pandemic itself has lowered the economic output potential. During the ongoing year, GDP growth will slow because the level of fiscal support is smaller, the economy is closer to maximum employment, and the strong inventory and service gains are not likely to recur.

Worse, inflation has proved stickier than initially anticipated. In effect, since the early days of the pandemic, the Federal Reserve has made two mistakes. First, it began to cut rates belatedly only in March 2020 ignoring the WHO’s early warnings. The Trump administration amplified the mistake by seeking to protect US equity market at the expense of American people.

The second mistake ensued after mid-year 2021, when inflation began to climb rapidly and the Fed characterized rising prices as transitory. Despite accelerating inflation, the ultra-low rates were left intact

The galloping inflation worsened in December when it rose 7% from a year ago; the fastest since June 1982. Like then, America is not coping with ordinary inflation, but stagflation: the combination of low interest rates and high inflation.

US stagflation as a global risk

Worse, in addition to rate hikes, the Fed also opted for quantitative tightening (shrinking its balance sheet), as opposed to the past years of quantitative easing (expansion of its balance sheet). The double-whammy caught the market by surprise and will have challenging consequences.

Since the Fed awoke belatedly, it may have to hike rates faster and tighten monetary conditions more than it did after the 2008 crisis. That could penalize the nascent recovery in America.

A sustained rejuvenation of global economic prospects is predicated on growth, trade and investment. The Fed's disruptive measures will weaken growth prospects, while the misguided US trade wars will add to uncertainty, which will further undermine investment prospects.

Rate hikes and protectionism will contribute to global uncertainty, which will penalize foreign investment, while boosting "hot money"; speculative capital flows that caused havoc in the developing world in the early 2010s.

The combined effect could foster the return of the Republicans in the 2022 mid-term election and Trump's comeback in 2024. Neither is good news in view of the hoped-for global recovery.

China: secular performance on track

Despite gloomy expectations in the West over China's 4th quarter data, China topped its 2021 growth (8.1% over the target of "above 6%"), despite expected deceleration in the 4th quarter. Exports and imports exceeded \$6 trillion for the first time. The economy continued its recovery, despite slowing export growth on the back of a stronger yuan. China's trade surplus with the US was \$397 billion; 25% higher than in 2020.

Actualized foreign investment into China reached a new record in 2021 (20.2% year-on-year in US dollar terms). Countries and regions along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) booked a 29.4% rise in their investment in China, while investment flows from Southeast Asia soared 29%. The performance was reinforced by the opening of capital markets. By December 2021, overseas investors had raised their holdings of mainland stocks and bonds by over 11% since year-end of 2020.

Nonetheless, the 2021 Economic Work Conference in December zoomed on stabilization. Power shortage is now in control. Regulatory drive has been softened. Credit tightness will be alleviated by fiscal and monetary easing. While real estate continues to worry investors, major developers should be able to cope with liquidity pressures in the short term.

As export momentum is expected to soften, revitalizing domestic demand is now an economic priority, as evidenced by Spring Festival consumption, boosted by targeted support by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), ice and snow tourism and the Winter Olympics.

### Opposing grand strategies

Since the global financial crisis, a whopping \$25 trillion has been pumped into advanced economies. Additionally, the rich economies' central banks will seek to maintain ultra-low rates, even after rounds of quantitative easing (QE). To sustain their unsustainable living standards, rich economies are taking massive volumes of debt that could set the stage for the next global depression.

After the pandemic depression, U.S. sovereign debt is 131% of its GDP. The Biden administration calculated that debt-taking is fine since rates will remain low and interest payments manageable. Now the White House must take still more debt and pay higher than anticipated interest.

As rising inflation and lingering pandemic spikes continue to subdue growth prospects, China's immediate goal is to stimulate household expenditure and boost consumer spending while extending tax cuts for small business to stabilize the labor market.

In the near-term, Washington has exhausted its post-pandemic economic capital and is engaged in diversionary foreign policy. It is relying on geopolitics to divert public attention away from domestic economy, which faces huge secular pressures, and domestic politics, which is extremely polarized.

In the short-term, China has engaged in tough regulatory measures and significant social transfers, while keeping focus on economic development, which will support its secular objectives.

Two major economies, two opposite grand strategies.

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Source: Published in Eur Asia Review

# **Is NATO A Dead Man Walking? – OpEd By**

## **José Niñov**

While geopolitical commentators are fixated on Russia's border with Ukraine, a more interesting development is slowly boiling underneath the surface of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict that could potentially reorder international relations—namely, the death of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Founded in 1949, NATO began with only twelve member nations. Presently, NATO counts on thirty member nations, with national security elites in the Anglo-American sphere wanting to bring Georgia and Ukraine into the fold. In both countries' cases, NATO membership is in limbo.

Despite calls for expanding NATO, the military alliances undergirding the organization could be in for an unexpected shake-up. Ever since French president Emmanuel Macron declared in 2019 that NATO was experiencing “brain death,” a new reality has gradually dawned upon the European continent.

Additionally, the Russo-Ukrainian conflict is currently exposing contradictions within Europe regarding security and economic priorities. Countries such as Italy have taken more balanced stances toward Russia, stressing the importance of dialogue while maintaining robust trade ties. Croatian president Zoran Milanović recently announced that Croatia will withdraw all its NATO forces from eastern Europe if a hot conflict between Ukraine and Russia breaks out. Germany itself has refused to send arms to Ukraine amid alleged threats of an imminent Russian invasion. Other NATO members like Hungary believe that Russia's security concerns are reasonable and are aiming to boost natural gas commerce with the nation.

In France, populist presidential candidates like Eric Zemmour have explicitly called for a rapprochement between Russia and France. This includes lifting sanctions on Russia and moving away from American-dominated institutions such as NATO.

Zemmour is no fan of American hegemony. He has previously suggested that the American and British 1944 landing in Normandy opened the door for France to be turned into a client state. Zemmour's skepticism toward American influence in

France has continued well into his presidential campaign, during which he has called on France to stop “being a tool of the United States.”

Zemmour maintains that Washington tries to play European countries off against Russia, proclaiming, “The US is trying to divide Russia from France and Germany, and every time they get closer to each other, the Americans find a way to divide them.” In many respects, the United States is the geopolitical successor to the United Kingdom when it comes to the divide-and-rule tactics it pursues to ensure that a Berlin-Paris-Moscow rapprochement never occurs on the European continent.

Macron himself is not the most enthusiastic supporter of a US-led order but he couches his opposition in centrist terms. Instead, Macron wants to copy and paste the American-dominated rules-based international order but give it a Eurocrat flavor.

In fairness, Macron acknowledges the need for dialogue between Russia and France, a kind of dialogue that other Western powers are not keen on having. Most “liberal democracies” are thoroughly consumed by moral righteousness and believe that any countries who deviate from their political norms are not worthy of dialogue and must be internationally isolated.

French concerns about the US’s influence reflect a vestigial legacy of former president Charles de Gaulle’s foreign policy outlook. During the former French military officer’s time in office, de Gaulle made it a point to maintain French equidistance from the Cold War behemoths—the Soviet Union and the United States—so that France could chart its own path. De Gaulle’s decision to remove France from NATO’s integrated military command was among the boldest moves he made to distance the country from American influence.

One of the drawbacks of the universalist foreign policy dogma the Washington blob follows is its failure to realize that countries have their own unique national interests. Members of the blob always assume that countries will always move in lockstep with Washington’s agenda, completely ignoring the diverse priorities and grand strategies that different countries hold. These interests often conflict with Washington’s strategic vision.

In addition to the problems created by the Russia question, NATO faces internal problems among its member states. For example, Turkey and Greece—both

members of NATO—got into a tiff over disputed energy claims in the eastern Mediterranean in 2020. France considered sending warships and imposing sanctions on Turkey if it continued escalating with Greece at the time. Cooler heads eventually prevailed.

Even with regard to China, which many in the DC blob are beginning to regard as America's primary strategic challenge, NATO members are not on the same page. For example, in the summer of 2021, Hungary blocked the European Union's statement criticizing China's national security law in Hong Kong and has opened itself up to Chinese investment. Poland, a key ally in DC's saber-rattling against Russia, did not participate in the diplomatic boycott of the Winter Olympics and had President Andrzej Duda meet with Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

Changing realities on both the domestic and international fronts could make a substantial change in European foreign policy a not-so-farfetched possibility. After all, the US's descent into woke insanity, coupled with its unsustainable economic policies, will put it on the path to socioeconomic instability, making it a less attractive partner to align with. With so many problems at home, the US will have trouble dedicating resources toward its international mischief.

The potential unraveling of NATO could mark the beginning of the end of American geopolitical supremacy and usher in a new era of heightened competition across the globe, with countries holding distinct visions for trade, foreign policy, and broader statecraft, something long overdue. The US's vast military footprint has done scant little to uphold middle American interests, but it has fattened the pockets of the defense industry and kept many self-proclaimed foreign policy "experts" employed at DC think tanks.

Moreover, NATO's disintegration would incentivize countries to pursue more independent foreign policies and start taking defense matters into their own hands, like any self-respecting nation that believes in sovereignty should.

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Source: Published in Eur Asia Review



# **Was This the Last Wave of Covid-19? By Dr Rana Jawad Asghar**

Omicron waves are subsiding across the world. It infected the highest number of people in the shortest time. These record-breaking spikes were surprising as a huge number of people were already vaccinated or previously infected in the last two years. This immunity evading capacity of Omicron dashed all the hopes of those who were waiting for herd immunity to kick in since the start of this pandemic. The only good thing was that in most countries the Omicron wave did not cause so much serious disease or deaths, raising hopes of a milder coronavirus disease in future waves. Some countries were exceptions including the USA which saw record breaking death numbers including hospital systems under stress due to an increased number of serious patients and also due to infection of healthcare staff themselves.

But now both new cases and deaths are decreasing in the USA too, raising hopes of a few months respite until we are faced with another wave. Some are hoping that there will be no wave in future as majority of the world population is either vaccinated or infected so could face the next variant a little better. That is why most countries are releasing nearly all restrictions in moving toward a “normal” world. Vaccine makers are expected to bring updated booster injections which may deal with new variants better. We are still struggling for a “cure” but there are some effective medicines available, and hope is to have a better arsenal of antivirals in the coming days.

But how sure are we that this will be the last wave? At least I am not so sure as Omicron has taken that myth apart that herd immunity could save us from new variants infections. Immunity evading variants were expected but no one expected that after two years of natural infection and vaccinations, the new daily infection numbers will break records of the last two years. Though the accessibility of tests has increased significantly, the number of unreported cases has also increased significantly. Many are using home based quick tests which are hardly reported into national figures. Many are now less afraid and are more familiar with the disease and are dealing with it at home without opting for any tests. As Omicron was less deadly, the world fared a bit better with some exceptions. That may be the reason that some countries now want to forgo daily infection numbers all together and just focus on hospitalisation. They are hoping

that in milder coronavirus waves in future it will be less damaging politically to report hospitalisation rates as compared to daily infection rates.

When at national level you focus on hospitalisation or death numbers instead of new infections, you are actually surrendering against the virus. You are admitting your defeat in public health measures which could control the spread of disease. Once the hospitalisation and death number start to rise, that means any public health intervention will be two to four weeks late and actually miss the critical time for intervention.

Unfortunately, these types of decisions are being made by those who never controlled a single disease outbreak in their lives, but were assigned this role due to their stature or for just political expediency. We need to stay vigilant by focusing on how SARS-COV-2 (virus which causes Covid-19) is evolving and spreading, to control future waves. We can't unilaterally declare victory and shut our health intelligence system while the virus is fast evolving into immunity evading variants. Last Omicron wave was caused by B.A.1 lineage. Another lineage of Omicron B.A.2 is already now replacing the earlier one and is in more than 50% isolated in countries like Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and many others. B.A.2 is 30% more infectious than the original omicron and some earlier studies are showing it is even severer. It may not be the case, but it reminds us to keep our eyes open. Identifying outbreaks early and controlling them locally and effectively is a time-tested public health measure. Cat will not disappear by pigeon shutting its eyes. We need a more robust health intelligence system now than any time previously.

Published in The Express Tribune, February 22nd, 2022.

# **Reinvigorating the OIC By Zaheer Bhatti**

LEADERSHIP throughout Pakistan's checkered history be it civil or military, soon after the premature departure of its founding father; has prospered at the cost of the people, and the State instrument which it has mercilessly weakened in the process being the main casualty with its mission of justice and equity obscured, its economy in tatters and at the mercy of international money-lenders calling the tune, and its institutions meant to deliver the same, in total disarray.

The story is not much different in rest of the Islamic world. As Muslim nations regrouped and assembled under the banner of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation established in 1969 at the initiative of Saudi Arabia and Morocco with its Secretariat in Jeddah, following the criminal arson of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Occupied Jerusalem, the OIC was designed to protect the vital interests of Islamic nations and safeguard the true values of Islam.

Sadly, over 51 years since, barring a couple of animated congregations of nations; 24 to start with which attended its first Summit in Rabat, Morocco, whereas its membership stands at 57 today, the Organization which is the second largest after the United Nations, has failed to live up to its stated ideals in practical terms.

Pakistan which happens to be among its founding members and has an Islamic Summit of the Body in 1974 to its credit with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto hosting towering personalities of the Islamic world under the spiritual leadership of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, has only recently brought 30 odd member nations of the OIC together in an extraordinary session of its Foreign Ministers with a single item focus on Afghanistan.

Once again the recent meeting in Pakistan on Saudi initiative rallied financial support for the Afghan nation facing an economic meltdown in the aftermath of the second US abandonment of the country, which it used as a war theatre for four decades.

The meeting created a 'Humanitarian Trust Fund' under the aegis of the Islamic Development Bank, which prompted the UN Security Council to adopt a Resolution calling upon the global community for urgent financial support to the people of Afghanistan.

Barring these few moments of some awakening and concern shown by the Muslim Polity, the rest of their term has been a dismal lack of concern and apathy leave alone initiative towards resolution of any problems of the Islamic World by making its collective voice heard and attended to, while the United Nations has kept rubber-stamping economic sanctions and military action against one Muslim Nation after another at the call of its imperial caretakers; illegal occupation of Arab territories, declaration of disputed Jerusalem as its Capital and creation of Jew settlements in areas occupied by Israel in 1967, non-recognition of a Palestinian State and division of Sudan, Indonesia and Pakistan; in contemptuous disregard of the UN Security Council Resolutions mandating a plebiscite in Kashmir under its auspices to determine the future of Kashmiris, and establishment of a Palestinian State comprising the West Bank and the Gaza Strip occupied by Israel.

Illegal annexation of occupied territories by India and Israel instead; blatantly effecting demographic changes, carrying out arson, torture, killings, rape and abductions in those territories, and religious cleansing not just within Kashmir but also openly demanding elimination of Muslims from India and harassing Muslim women wearing Hijab by the ruling party BJP's RSS goons, are some of the scores of degraded ploys being resorted to by these fascist regimes, to which world conscience is asleep.

The Muslim world under the flagship of the OIC has not just looked on haplessly but some of its important entities surrendering their sovereignty and security have invariably called the tune of their Imperial Masters in global affairs; largely to the detriment of the Islamic world.

They have chosen to follow their demi-gods on earth in preference to the faith passed on to them by Providence; and hence meeting their nemesis.

All divinely revealed testaments; the Holy Quran being the last of them having clearly pointed to this adversity and the horrific end awaiting such entities, but the Muslim world appears to be totally unmindful.

Pakistan has traversed ungainly territory all along its existence except for the 1965 War effort against India, an Islamic Summit in 1974 and attaining nuclear deterrence in 1998.

Its journey by and large barring these events, has been downhill; making compromises and abandoning its reason for being and becoming hostage to infiltrated alien 'isms' and social orders, and paying heavily as a consequence.

With all the riches of the universe bestowed upon Islamic territories, it is a pity that their leadership has failed to grasp the opportunity provided by Providence, and allowed their oil discoveries to be controlled and siphoned off by imperial powers which are out to divest Pakistan and Iran of their nuclear potential by crippling their economies.

Had the Muslim world realized their inherent strength and pooled their resources, instead of getting to each other's throat at the instigation of alien powers, they would today have been a formidable block which no evil eye could harm.

Pakistan's recent initiative under the OIC banner calling for humanitarian aid to the war-torn Afghan brethren has evoked a response which indicates that all is not lost, and that if the OIC can be brought back to life to further the righteous causes around the globe regardless of their location, they could collectively defeat all evil forces and serve as the beacon of light for peace and prosperity for the entire mankind.

With Pakistan hosting the next session of the OIC Foreign Ministers on 22-23rd March coinciding with the Pakistan Day Parade which coincidentally, will be graced by all the Foreign Ministers attending, an impassioned plea principally to Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey and to the rest of the Islamic world in general, would be to shun differences, engage in a sincere and accommodating embrace and free themselves from the clutches of those alien forces which exploit their differences and dictate them.

Mahatir Mohammad of late, in the context of Kashmir; calling for compliance with the UNSC Resolution of a plebiscite in Kashmir and ignoring Indian reaction boycotting its Palm oil, is an example to emulate, as your provider is none else but the one and only.

One sincerely hopes that the Ummah would not miss this opportunity to hammer home its lingering righteous causes to the rest of the world.

This appeal is also meant to reach those misguided religious entities such as Al-Qaeda, Daesh, ISIS, TTP etc, to beware of being used and funded by alien

powers against the Islamic world, providing them hardware for death and destruction to cause instability and strife in the guise of enforcing Shariah in Islamic countries.

—The writer is a media professional, member of Pioneering team of PTV and a veteran ex Director Programmes.

Source: Published in pak observer

# **UN and Its Ideals — A Look Over the Shoulder ! By Khalid Saleem**

THE Charter of the United Nations begins with the words “We, the peoples of the United Nations...’.

Six decades and more down the road we are today left with the contemplation of whether or not the United Nations has actually lived up to the high ideals it was set up for.

What to talk of the United Nations (Nobel Peace Prize and all!), several piddling outfits have taken it upon themselves the task of the establishment of World Peace that the founding fathers had envisaged as the exclusive preserve of the United Nations Organization.

The era of the Cold War, when the Warsaw Pact and NATO arrogated unto themselves the powers that should best have been vested in the United Nations, is a case in point.

Then it came to pass that all of a sudden the Cold War came to an end. While the Warsaw Pact died a natural death, NATO was left in a wilderness of sorts.

When the European Union had taken the decision to set up the EU Rapid Reaction Force, it had raised several eyebrows among the International Affairs buffs.

Having officiated at the birth of NATO and being one of its recognized godfathers, the Americans too looked askance at this decision of the EU.

The decision went against the America’s long held assumption that they (USA that is) should have the decisive say in matters concerned with – among other things – the defence of Europe.

The end of the Cold War was bound to have repercussions of some sort. The European Union had been squirming for quite some time to acquire some freedom of manoeuvre for itself.



After some notable successes in the economic field, defence was but the logical next step.

The Americans were worried, and justifiably so, that the decision to set up the EU Rapid Reaction Force would pose a threat to NATO primacy in the field of collective defence.

On the other hand it was generally recognized at the time as to how long would the European Union be content to confine its foreign policy instruments to an America-dominated alliance.

It is a bit late to delve into the merits or demerits of the EU decision. What did interest one, though, was what role, if any, might have been envisaged for the Force in international peacekeeping operations.

By hindsight, such operations have at best been a mixed blessing. In some instances they have failed miserably to prevent the worst.

In others they came into operation so late that the world was left wondering as to their efficacy.

The NATO operations and, subsequently, the EU Rapid Reaction Force gave rise to other question marks too.

For one thing, they put the United Nations' role in peacekeeping into a gray area. After all, peacekeeping was, and should be, one of the principal concerns of the United Nations.

This is not to say that the United Nations has exactly covered itself with glory in this particular field.

The events of nine/eleven turned every known paradigm on its head. All Western-oriented Defence Organizations – and NATO in particular – were roped in to do America's bidding.

The United Nations provided the umbrella for the stationing of NATO forces in Afghanistan in an operation that, by no stretch of imagination, can be seen as a peacekeeping venture.

And all under the notional command of the United States Armed Forces. The NATO authorities must surely have wondered sometime as to what made them enter into this rather murky situation.

On the subject of peacekeeping, one is also tempted to venture the remark that this process should also encompass the 'establishment of durable peace'.

In other words, mere papering over of the cracks can hardly do the trick. Cessation of hostilities should be viewed merely as a first step towards the ultimate goal of an equitable and durable settlement of the dispute.

Too often, regrettably, the United Nations has arranged for a ceasefire and then rested on its laurels.

Jammu and Kashmir issue is a case in point. In so doing, the International Organization has helped to nurture festering flashpoints the world over.

In order to ensure a peaceful World Order, the United Nations should also have striven to ensure a fair and equitable World Economic Regime.

Here too the world body has failed "the peoples of the United Nations". It needs to be counted among the failures of the United Nations that the international economic assistance regime, instead of assuming the role of healer of the economic ills of the poor, has been given free rein to degenerate into a re-incarnation of the money-lending system of medieval ages, with its built-in inequities.

Rather than working towards the general uplift of the living standard of the deprived millions of this planet, the 'system' has become a millstone around their collective necks.

Instead of freeing them from economic blackmail, it has laid them open to shameless manipulation.

One would risk the charge of over-simplification in suggesting that to make the United Nations effective what is sorely needed is some kind of an 'enforcement mechanism'.

Mere 'informed debate' – in which our multilateral diplomatists revel – or even high-sounding 'resolutions' can hardly deliver, unless they are backed up by a self-executing mechanism to ensure the timely implementation of the decisions of the World Body.

The United States, as the sole superpower, is in a unique position to guide the United Nations to fulfil its noble mission by upholding the human and humane values that all right-thinking peoples of the world still cling on to.

Let the leaders of the influential countries take a conscious decision to use their collective weight on the side of good and justice and not to allow their vision to be clouded by extraneous and biased considerations.

For a change, let ethics rather than expediency take over as the controlling force behind the actions of the powers that be. "The peoples of the United Nations" deserve no less.

— The writer is a former Ambassador and former Assistant Secretary General of OIC.

Source: Published in pakobserver

# Ukraine Conflict & Its Dynamics | By Nazim Uddin

THE world has already entered the New Cold War milieu with a much more complex, disturbing and chaotic system.

Unlike the previous cold war, which was carried out on one front—military—the prevailing war has at least three dimensions—economic, cultural and military.

Today, China—the leading player in this conflict—is deeply immersed in the global system on predominantly economic fronts with almost every country, no less with the US.

As regards culture, in 2019, no less than 155 million Chinese travel abroad, mostly for business and education.

The military capability of China as realists would say has augmented by leaps and bounds, thanks to the Chinese position as the second global economic power.

Considering all these factors, it seems the new Cold War can be anything but simple.

The US has been declining since the end of the (former) Soviet Union due to its military adventurism and political miscalculations.

From President Bush to President Obama, foreign policy went through utter trials and tribulations.

However, the rise of President Trump made it easy for China to increase its sphere of influence.

Donald Trump put his personality cult before everything and engaged friends and foes alike, putting hefty tariffs on goods, walking back on international accords, insulting allies, considering democratic norms unnecessary which culminated in the Jan 6 riot.

As a result, the US kept on losing the trust of its allies both in Europe and Asia.

His hasty withdrawal agreement with the Taliban seems to be the last nail in the coffin of US-led global dominance.

While President Joe Biden has been trying to cobble together the last remnants of US hegemony, it has become too late to reverse the gear.

Against this backdrop, Russian President Vladimir Putin has shot the arrow out of blue at the border of Ukraine to test the nerves of the West.

Those who know Putin may not say that he's foolhardy. If his past is any guide, all his adventurisms in the past had turned into a success—be it the annexations of Georgia, Crimea and Donetsk.

But nevertheless, Ukraine may not be as simple as he considers it to be. Russia is pretty much a poor country whose dependence on arms sales and exports of energy speaks volumes.

Its economy faces multiple challenges, most recently due to the pandemic. One percent of Russians own almost 75 percent of the whole national wealth, rendering the rest extremely poor.

Even politically Russia has been a non-entity, Putin might think otherwise. Since he rose to power, his romance with the past has found no end and he seems unapologetic to blame the world as well as his predecessors for the truncated, mutilated and weakened Russia.

To some extent, Putin's claims that NATO's dominance poses threats to Russia bear water.

In the past, Russia had been attacked multiple times from Ukraine, so to protect Russia, Ukraine has to be neutral.

His concentration of almost 120,000 troops in Belarus, Crimea and other parts bordering with Ukraine partially seems to cow the rest to accept Russian demands.

While most of the European countries are with Ukraine, Germany's reluctance to provide defensive facilities depicts the growing division among the EU countries.

For the Germans, the economic situation trumps all other concerns.

The US is in a strange position. On the one hand, China shows its tentacles both in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, on the other, Russia knows no limitation to trash the post-Soviet World Order.

Add to these the relative decline of the US coupled with its reluctance to get indulged in global politics.

Peter Zeihan calls it "deglobalization of the US" which indicates growing unrest, more conflicts and cataclysm.

Although the US hinted to impose hefty sanctions on Russia, this threat doesn't seem to intimidate Kremlin too much considering such sanctions have been placed against Russia to no avail.

Despite its strong position, Moscow has two options only: one, invade Kyiv—either a chunk of it or all of it — and face the music; two, accept what the West has to offer i.e. some assurance on the Ukrainian neutrality.

Of course, the latter doesn't seem viable now, but if this doesn't get materialized, there will be no way to stop Mr Putin who seems profoundly cautious about his manoeuvres.

He may go for a false flag operation to legitimize attacks on Ukraine, however, there is no conclusive understanding of the future.

For almost 23 years, Vladimir Putin has been in power and his political image has withstood many vicissitudes and misfortunes.

He tried to shape the world in a way that would be favourable to his ideals in spite of inheriting a weak country.

There is no denying even today Russia seems weak, but its relevance has been there on a daily basis.

The fact is that to begin a war is easy but to end it takes an ocean of resources and human lives.

What war does need no history? One has to look at Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria or Yemen, where life has become more difficult than, say, 5000 years ago.

Another war—that too in Ukraine—can wreak havoc not only on the region but the whole world at large.

There are existential issues such as climate change and the prevailing pandemic, and going into another issue will be a great disaster for humanity.

The international community should play its role to avert this catastrophe.

—The writer is contributing columnist.

Source: Published in Pak Observer



# **Implications of Emerging World Order By**

## **Abdul Rahman Malik**

The world is changing with the passage of time and this change has been so rapid and significant after the pandemic hit the global economy by dragging businesses worldwide to a halt.

As the vaccine shots are being administered around the world the covid-19 cases have started coming down. But still the various variants such as Delta and Omicron are ringing the alarm bells for the world. Health concerns are on the rise engulfing the entire world. The experts do predict that this pandemic may stay for a long time in this world and all nations must take preventive measures to tackle the possible infections.

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In the meantime, the country from where Covid-19 sprung has been on a greater mission, followed by Russia. This is because of the failure of the US invasion of Afghanistan after the passage of two decades and despite investing millions of dollars in infrastructure and regime change tactics.

The superpower has started experiencing isolation in the world due to its autocratic offensives and egoism as harboured and shown by the Trump Administration.

The Trump Administration almost messed up the diplomatic affairs and completely polarized the political landscape, which had sparked the Capitol Hill Mayhem. The dirty game changed the attitude of Republican supporters from patience to violence. That was the reason people voted for Joe Biden to become their new president: to start mending the foreign policy blunders committed by the insensible media celeb-turned-politician Donald Trump.

Though President Joe Biden has shown restraint from further aggravating the situation due to the shameful withdrawal from Afghanistan as the Taliban took over Kabul without any resistance from Afghan or American forces and got full control there.

The hatred, anger and opposition generated by the devilish role of the USA in Afghanistan, its hybrid war with Iran and support of Israel against Palestinians have further added to the mess. Though Ukraine is a close ally of the USA, it has completely failed to build pressure over Russia for the possible conquering of Ukraine.

So far, the separatist movement in two parts of Ukraine have been recognized as Independent states and Russia sent its forces to make peace. Russia shocked the USA and other NATO allies, and an emergency session of the UN has been called to impose sanctions on Russia and the parts of Ukraine that Russia has recognized as independent states.

The increasing power of Eastern players, China and Russia, have created concerns for the West, especially the USA, to contain and curtail the powers of both Russia and China so that the former may not occupy Ukraine and the latter may not use force against Taiwan. The isolated USA under Joe Biden is trying hard to use all resources, allies and even NATO to put pressure on both to secure its relevance in the ever-changing world order since the covid-19 pandemic took the world by storm, impacting the world's biggest economies and imposing lockdowns.

The world is becoming one based on shared goals, peace and equality without the comparison of wealth, economy, development or structure. The vacuum left by the USA has been filled by China by helping the developing nations through the Belt and Road Initiative.

With the Taliban signing various agreements with China, it is evident that the mess left by the so-called superpower is being cleaned to reset the relations with global and regional powers.

Within the ever-changing world order, China has positioned itself tactfully leaving the USA stranded to the extent that a close ally as mentioned by the USA has turned his back and joined the party with Russia and China for a global reset of diplomatic relations.

It will be hard to digest that Pakistan has realigned its foreign policy towards regional power and has distanced itself from the USA, divorcing itself based on insincerity and double standards.

The USA is seen in political circles and the leadership as an opportunist. The experts and political pundits do contend that the USA always got something in return from Pakistan for Aid.

Though Pakistan has always delivered and facilitated the USA, it has paid a heavy price for this because Pakistan has sacrificed thousands of civilians and soldiers fighting for the cause against terrorism. When it comes time for payback in the same coin, the USA withdraws support on all the key matters, especially the Kashmir dispute, the FATF grey list and the IMF tough conditions for loaning.

Inflation is exploding and the prices of daily use items are skyrocketing with the levy of taxes and price hikes in petroleum prices. In such circumstances, US support on the above matters might have been vital to maintaining the ever depleting foreign exchange reserves.

Thanks to Saudi Arabia, the UAE and China coming forward and offering help in the shape of fixed deposits, foreign exchange reserves have been protected, and may not drop further and the country's trade may not be impacted.

Russia has been trying to regain its past glory, especially the position it had in the days of the USSR, since it has clear plans in place to regain and re-annex Ukraine or the parts where separatist movements are in place. Formerly, it was the part of the USSR, which also included all the independent central Asian states such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan,, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan to resurrect the East bloc or even the USSR itself, taking the fullest advantage of an inactive USA due to a flawed, autocratic and Jewish-centric foreign policy that has impacted its global status and causing resistance to its anti-Muslim policies, especially towards Iran, Palestine and Afghanistan.

The tremors of change are echoing and the countries have started sorting ways to engage, align or realign their diplomatic policies given the circumstances of changing world order.

Security and foreign policy experts are of the view that ever-increasing interventions in the region in socio-economic projects by visionary Chinese President Xi Jinping have made the USA have sleepless nights, followed by the Russian military manoeuvring and build-up along the Ukraine border to take control of the close US ally, Ukraine, or at least its pro-Russian areas. This will have far repercussions that might create chances of a world war. Though the

Russian move has sent a clear message to the USA and NATO to stay away from the issue, the USA is finding it very hard to swallow this bitter pill.

But peace lovers need to expect restraint from mighty Russia against any possible use of force to occupy Ukraine and annex it. Afghan soil was used to disintegrate the USSR and the same is being used against the USA due to the power game.

It is pivotal for the leadership of Muslim countries including Pakistan to watch out and realign sensibly as they may face some issues. China enjoys great power and it has displayed it during skirmishes with Indian forces in Laddakh. India has been a diehard ally of the USA, being grilled on all sides by global power parleys.

The recent statement from the Taliban foreign Minister heralds that the Kashmir dispute may be resolved very soon as fascism and radicalism rule the roost in Modi's India making the lives of minorities, especially Muslims, miserable. The recent incident of the Muslim girl Muskan Khan's hijab controversy has gone viral and the BJP came in for serious criticism across the world.

It is imperative for world powers to understand the dimensions and position themselves in the new world order, or as some call it, the China order, due to its giant economy keeping flourishing even in the pandemic situation.

Wars and battles bring miseries in the world, so it is imperative that instead of heading towards misery and destruction, the world must adhere to peace and make joint efforts to prevent wars to secure the world.

Moreover, as PM Khan and the members of the cabinet are visiting Russia on Invitation of President Vladimir Putin of Russia, Pakistan should avoid becoming part of any bloc at the moment, given the complex and serious circumstances that may create problems if bigwigs like the USA, Russia and NATO forces started fighting. It would be sensible to stay non-aligned with any bloc or group so that Pakistan may not pay the price as happened in Afghanistan.

New fronts do open for superpower as happened in the Cold War or during the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan by both the USA and the then Soviet Union as both sustained heavy set back afterwards politically and Economically .

Though PM Imran Khan during his interview with the Russian Media have made it clear that Pakistan was not going to be part of any bloc given the myriad outlook of issues grilling various nations .

The increasing power of Eastern players, China and Russia, have created concerns for the West, especially the USA, to contain and curtail the powers of both Russia and China so that the former may not occupy Ukraine and the latter may not use force against Taiwan. The isolated USA under Joe Biden is trying hard to use all resources, allies and even NATO to put pressure on both to secure its relevance in the ever-changing world Order since the covid-19 pandemic took the world by storm, impacting the world's biggest economies and imposing lockdowns .

Source: Published in Pakistan Today

# **Putin's Ukraine Gambit By Maleeha Lodhi**

THE unfolding crisis over Ukraine has heightened the danger of prolonged turmoil and instability in Europe. After weeks of failed diplomacy to avert this crisis, the situation took a fateful turn when President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian troops to two rebel-held areas of eastern Ukraine and recognised them as independent regions. He then launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in violation of international law. This has created a perilous situation with global ramifications.

The response from the US-led Western community was swift. Russia's action was roundly condemned by the US and its allies. Ukraine's president urged the world to stop the war and vowed to resist the Russian attack. President Joe Biden called Putin an aggressor and said he would have to bear the consequences of war. Calls from across the world urged restraint and de-escalation of the crisis. Putin's justification for his military action went beyond protecting the Russian-speaking people of Donbas and involved 'defending Russia from Ukraine', which he accused the West of using as an instrument to threaten Russia.

The crisis had built up over months with Russia amassing tens of thousands of troops on the Ukrainian border. Despite the diplomatic dash to Moscow by French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Russia's core security demands were not met. They included a commitment to bar Ukraine from joining Nato, no deployment of strategic weapons in Ukraine and Nato's return to its pre-1997 borders. All were rejected by the US and Nato.

The question now is whether the West's response to the Russian invasion, of censure and sanctions, will pressure Putin to step back. Before considering this, it is instructive to recall what happened eight years ago, as Putin's latest move marks a continuation of developments that unfolded in 2014 and led Russia to prise Crimea from Ukraine. The dramatic chain of events was triggered by the ouster of pro-Moscow Ukraine president Viktor Yanukovich, who rejected closer association with the EU, and was forced from office by a popular uprising backed by the West. American officials and politicians had showed up in Ukraine to openly express solidarity with anti-Russian demonstrators.

The unfolding crisis has created a perilous situation with global ramifications.

Moscow reacted furiously, and weeks later, invaded Ukraine, annexed Crimea and backed pro-Russia separatists in eastern Ukraine. Putin later accused the US of orchestrating Ukraine's 2014 'coup'. A ceasefire agreement — Minsk I — was forged in 2014 to end fighting in Donbas but failed to stick. It was followed by Minsk II mediated by France and Germany in 2015. This involved constitutional changes by Ukraine to accord full autonomy and 'special status' to the Russian-speaking regions of Donbas. As Henry Kissinger noted in 2014 "the root of the problem" lay in "efforts by Ukrainian politicians to impose their will on recalcitrant parts of the country first by one faction and then by the other" in a nation with a "polyglot composition". Minsk II was never fully implemented and marked a lost opportunity. But it remained a touchstone for a peaceful solution.

Western sanctions now imposed on Russia aim at crippling its economy. They include limiting its access to international capital markets and freezing its overseas assets. Russian officials dismissed the sanctions and recalled that their country has long faced Western restrictions. Putin has in any case sought to make his economy immune to sanctions by building foreign exchange reserves (over \$630 billion) and taking other measures. He can also inflict economic pain on Europe as Russia is the continent's largest source of oil and natural gas as well as important raw materials.

Against this backdrop, is there space for diplomatic efforts to defuse the crisis and find a peaceful resolution? For now, diplomacy seems to be off the table. With Russian forces poised to seize Kyiv and more sanctions imposed by Western countries, the diplomatic window has closed. Moscow has offered talks to Ukraine but only if its forces surrender. The beleaguered Ukrainian government has said it is ready for talks with Russia including on a neutral status regarding Nato. But it is now too late for this. Meanwhile, Europe is bracing for the economic fallout of the crisis which will also be consequential for the global economy. Markets are in turmoil, grain shortages loom while the crude oil price has surpassed \$100 a barrel. This will intensify inflationary pressures and involve economic pain for the West as for much of the world.

It is a moot point now whether this crisis could have been averted if America and its allies had been responsive to Russian security concerns in US-Russia talks in January and earlier. Would an offer of a moratorium on Ukraine's Nato membership have satisfied Moscow? Several Western analysts have also suggested that Washington erred in encouraging the eastward enlargement of



Nato in the late 1990s after the end of the Cold War. Others have pointed out that the US had given Moscow assurances in 1990 at the time of German reunification that Nato would not expand eastwards. This is apparently reflected in declassified American and German documents. Many analysts argue that this unkept promise fuelled Russian grievances over decades.

However, what matters now is how this crisis plays out. A firm assessment is difficult in the midst of an ongoing conflict. It appears that Putin's goal is to first militarily subdue Ukraine and then bring about regime change. When — and if — military coercion achieves this to then negotiate with the West to reconfigure Europe's security architecture including Nato deployments in eastern Europe. This plan seems to rest on Moscow's calculation that beyond sanctions and bluster the West can do little as it is unwilling to commit boots on the ground. Ukraine's president has already said it has been left alone to fight Russia. With the UN paralysed there is little to deter Putin from the path he has taken. Whether this gambit works or backfires only time will tell. It may turn out to be overreach and a strategic mistake if Russia gets bogged down and faces Ukrainian resistance in the long run as well as anti-war protests at home. But for now, the East-West confrontation is taking a bloody toll on Europe where the post-Cold War order has broken down.

The writer is a former ambassador to the US, UK & UN.

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