

INDIA FOUNDATION JOURNAL



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The India Foundation Journal is led by an Editorial Board of eminent scholars and leaders from various spheres of Indian public life. The bi-monthly journal covers a wide range of issues pertinent to the national interest, mainly focusing on international relations, national security, legal and constitutional issues and other issues of social, religious and political significance. The journal seeks articles from scholars with the intent of creating a significant body of knowledge with a nationalist perspective and establish a recognised forum for debates involving academicians and policymakers.

Agnipath: Transforming the Armed Forces

Dhruv C. Katoch*

The ongoing war in Ukraine has thrown up a humungous list of lessons for militaries across the world. Undoubtedly, these will be studied, analysed and debated in the coming years to determine how future militaries should be structured, trained and equipped. While various facets of the Ukraine war were being discussed in military and think tank circles in India, the Armed Forces announced the roll out of Agnipath—a new policy document wherein both the procedure for enrolment of personnel in the Armed Forces as well as the terms and conditions of such service stand radically altered. In its breadth and scope, the policy is both transformational and revolutionary. That is why a furious debate is raging in the country on the pros and cons of such a policy. This is not an alarming development, but a natural reaction to a change in the status quo.

No reform can be painless. The nation has to bite the bullet and implement such reforms, if the long-term impact is beneficial. In the economic sphere, the implementation of GST went through a difficult birth, but now the nation is reaping the benefits which will only grow in the years to come. The abrogation of the special status given to J&K by both houses of Parliament on 5 August 2019 was another revolutionary reform in the political sphere, which is still playing out but the dividends of which are clearly visible in the political, social, economic and security domains in the newly formed Union Territory of J&K. Agnipath too, can be a huge game changer, but certain modifications

may be required along the way. Fortunately, in the implementational phase, the policy will have very little impact on the Forces in the first four years after it is rolled out. So, enough time is available to look into course corrections to make this transformational and revolutionary concept beneficial to the Armed Forces, to the soldier and to the nation.

The scheme departs radically from past enrolment practises, as from now on, enrolment for the Armed Forces will only be through the Pan-India, merit based Agnipath scheme. Eligibility for enrolment is open to all Indian citizens in the age group of 17.5 to 21 years. A one-time age waiver has been given for the current year wherein individuals up to the age of 23 years can apply, as no enrolment has taken place in the last two years due to the pandemic. Selected individuals, called Agniveers, will be required to serve for four years, which includes a six-month training period. Thereafter, 25 percent will be retained in the military for permanent absorption, while the remaining 75 percent will be given a financial package which will assist them in either finding other means of employment or in becoming small scale entrepreneurs themselves. Through this, a vast pool of disciplined work force will be available to the nation. The Agniveers will be entitled to all the allowances of regular troops, to include risk and hardship allowance and death and disability pension. 30 percent of their monthly emoluments will go towards a lump sum gratuity that will be

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paid to them on completion of their contractual service. The government will contribute an equal portion, the net lump sum gratuity coming to Rs 11.7 lakh. This, combined with the individuals savings over four years, could be in the range of Rs 18- 22 lakh—an amount which is not unsubstantial for a 22-23 year old youth. The Commanding Officers will have a major role to play in the selection of Agniveers for retention in the military.

The Challenges

Fears have been expressed on the motivational levels of youth who have but a four-year tenure of service. There are also concerns about their standards of training. The war in Ukraine has shown limitations in the performance of Russian troops who, for the most part were conscripts with short service tenures. The Ukrainian military too, suffered from such infirmities. In the Indian context, individual training for Agniveers who are enrolled in the Armoured Corps, Mechanised Infantry, Artillery, Engineers, Signals and EME poses huge challenges which will need to be overcome. But the larger training challenge is group cohesion and functioning as part of a well-oiled sub unit. This is particularly applicable to the combat arms and combat support arms.

The Armed Forces are cognisant of these concerns and will look into measures to address them over the next few years. But more serious is the skewed impact on the age and service profile of soldiers over a 20-year period when the policy has totally matured. In this scenario, we are likely to have up to 60 percent of a unit in the below four-year service bracket and only 40 percent in

the bracket of 4-20 years' service. This will throw up serious operational challenges to the combat arms.

The yearly burgeoning pension bill of defence pensioners has been one of the major reasons necessitating reforms in the military. A soldier, unlike his civilian counterpart, retires at an early age. This is necessary to keep a youthful profile of the Armed Forces. Over the years, this has led to the number of veterans exceeding the number of serving personnel, the ratio presently being in the region of 1:1.8 or thereabout. This will keep increasing over the years and may eventually be to the order of 1:2.5. Obviously, this will impact on force modernisation as a major chunk of defence expenditure gets consumed in revenue expenditure, leaving that much less for capital acquisitions.

A Road Map for the Future

Can something be done to allay the concerns which have been expressed and at the same time, continue with the reform process? Certain actions have already been initiated, but the forces need to look outside the ambit of the personnel in uniform and integrate the reform process with a much wider set of reforms which would encompass the entire security architecture of the country. Three issues need consideration. One, the entire civilian work force needs to be included in the ambit of defence reforms. Two, the governance structure in the Ministry of Defence needs to be revamped and three, the security forces working under the ambit of the Ministry of Home Affairs needs to be co-opted into the military reform process. Let us look at the third aspect first.

The Sixth Central Pay Commission, in its

recommendations made a strong pitch for the lateral movement of Defence Forces personnel into the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF). The Commission was of the view that while a good compensation package is essential for the morale and quality of officers and men in the Defence Forces, the same will also, to a large extent, depend on those personnel being provided a life time career. The recommendations were not implemented, largely due to resistance by the CAPF in taking in personnel with different service profiles and seniority, which would impact the seniority and functioning of their existing cadre. These concerns cannot be easily brushed away, but a ready solution exists in the form of absorption of Agniveers.

Presently, a large number of personnel are recruited in the CAPFs who have to be trained before they can be employed in various security agencies of the Ministry of Home Affairs such as the BSF, CRPF and the ITBP. In addition, we have the paramilitary forces under the ministry—the Assam Rifles and the Coast Guard. What needs to be done is to make entry into these forces only through Agniveers. The twin problems of locating suitable trained manpower for induction into these forces and providing sufficiently long tenure for the Defence Forces personnel can be addressed in one stroke. The earlier hesitations which were expressed by the CAPF in taking in retired personnel from the defence forces into their organisations will no longer apply. These organisations will now get well trained and well-disciplined personnel, who are not only proficient in the use of weapons but also skilled in sub-unit level functioning which is required by these forces in combatting militancy, terrorism or other tasks.

And these personnel are, on an average, just 23 years old. The CAPF also get substantial financial savings as they now do not now have to budget for recruitment and training expenses. The Agniveers joining the CAPF get a life time career while the Armed Forces, get a more youthful profile. Such lateral absorption can take in about 30 percent Agniveers each year, which would be the average replacement requirement of the CAPFs retiring personnel.

In the Agnipath scheme, the civilian work force which numbers about 3.75 lakh personnel has been left out. This is the real tail of the military which needs serious reforms. A large part of this workforce is employed in the nine Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSU) and the 41 Ordnance factories which have now been reconstituted into seven fully government-owned corporate entities on the lines of DPSUs. Force effectiveness depends to some extent on the capability and ability of these production agencies in delivering cost effective quality products to the Armed Forces in a time bound manner. The entire civilian workforce should, therefore, have been assessed in a performance audit as they are paid out of defence estimates and also consume about a quarter of the pension budget. While the issue of privatising most of these entities will have to confront political hurdles, the same would have to be done at some stage. In any event, the step taken by the government in dissolving the Ordnance Factory Board and merging the 41 Ordnance Factories into seven corporate entities, was, by itself, a major first step. If privatisation cannot be immediately done, then at least these entities should function under the Ministry of Commerce and Industries

and not under the Ministry of Defence, where they have a captive market. This reform, if done, will ignite competition and make them more accountable to the user. A performance audit of the DRDO would also be beneficial in determining whether the country is getting its money's worth in investing huge sums in this organisation. In terms of manpower, it is evidently overstaffed as compared to similar organisations in the West. This needs to be looked into and the flab cut. Perhaps the model to be emulated could be a mix of India's ISRO and the US DARPA, to see that the nations limited resources are used in the most efficient manner.

We also need to look into the functioning of the Ministry of Defence itself, which has a very large civilian workforce. Agnipath is sought to be justified on the model of the militaries of the US, Israel and other Western democracies. In all these countries, there is no bureaucratic interface between the political authority and the military. Perhaps India should follow suit, as is the norm in all the countries of the world. This by itself, will save the exchequer a few thousand crore INR every year. The Railways has no bureaucratic interface and the military should follow suit.

Finally, a little tweaking of the Agnipath scheme will ensure its acceptability to all those who are currently opposing it. One, as mentioned earlier,

recruitment to the CAPF should be only through Agniveers who have completed four years' service. Roughly, they would be able to take in about 30 percent of Agniveers each year. These individuals could be selected on a random basis to ensure that the CAPF get a fair mix. Two, for the Military, increase the service limit to six years and retain 40 percent. That would give a more balanced service profile, which eliminates infirmities which are envisaged with a shorter service tenure. Thirdly, only 30 percent of the Agniveers will now be required to be released to the environment. This is a smaller number to deal with. Some of these personnel would be desirous of leaving the military after completing their time. The others could be helped to settle down, where needed.

Conclusion

Agnipath has received a mixed response from the military community. There have been a few bouquets and a lot of brickbats but the underlying fact remains is that it is reform which is needed. The implementation details are the only issues which need to be ironed out. We can get into a win-win situation by making the system more holistic and by following a whole of nation approach, rather than just confining the policy to the uniformed fraternity of the Armed Forces.



The War in Ukraine: Impact on the EU and on India-EU Relations

Bhaswati Mukherjee*

A dangerous great game is being played out in Ukraine. It has created new fault lines in the existing world order. Unilateral sanctions imposed by the US against Russia has severely impacted global economic recovery after the pandemic, raised oil and gas prices, created domestic inflationary pressures due to external factors and a looming food crisis. All these developments come in the background of a pandemic which is yet to become endemic and new health scares including a monkey pox breakout in several countries.

The meltdown in Ukraine was in the making since 2014. Emboldened by NATO membership for the Baltic States at a time when Putin was not in power, President Biden, under attack from the Republicans for the debacle in Afghanistan and facing a difficult election in the Senate by November, saw in Ukraine's candidature for NATO membership, an excellent election gambit for domestic purposes¹.

A Cold War warrior, President Biden ignored repeated Russian protests that this was a red line that could not be ignored. Russia would not accept NATO's nuclear weapons on Ukraine's border with Russia. Foreign office pundits, ignorant of European history, overlooked that large parts of Ukraine have been Russian for centuries. Ukrainians come from the same soil and are fellow

Slavs. Their religion is Orthodox and from the 18th century, fought invaders together with Russians. For the Russians, Ukraine was and will remain part of their history, culture and civilisation.

Buoyed by promises of support, President Zelensky was in no mood to back down. Ukraine was already in a partnership arrangement with NATO through the 'NATO Enhanced Opportunity Partnership'. Zelensky mistakenly calculated that NATO would provide military support in the unlikely event of a Russian incursion. Indeed, he repeatedly asserted that a Russian attack was neither imminent nor forthcoming.

It is really creditable that the outmatched Ukrainian forces showed great courage and did not back down. Kiev did not fall like Kabul. Zelensky did not abandon his people despite early American offers to airlift him. Unfortunately, not losing did not translate into a victory for Ukraine. It came with huge destruction of Ukraine's cities and infrastructure and massive displacement of her population. Russia now holds significantly more territory in Ukraine than before 24th February 2022. Not losing is looking uncomfortably a lot more like losing rather than winning. There is also the economic impact of the war on Ukraine which is facing collapse of its GDP by 45 to 50%.

From India's perspective, the inexorable loss of Ukraine's sovereignty in its Eastern flank,

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accompanied by a fatal weakening of Russia's economic and military might, raised the prospect of a severely weakened Russia, hitherto India's main arms supplier, becoming a junior partner of an aggressive and emboldened China. This is an alarming scenario given China's implacable hostility to India's rise. It has increased pressure on India to distance itself from Russia, ignoring her core national interests.

The Ukraine crisis has shifted attention of the West away from China and the threat China poses to the existing world order. These concerns have now been addressed to a certain extent by the USA as articulated by Lloyd Austin, US Defence Secretary at the latest Shangri-La Dialogue from 10th to 12th June 22 in Singapore. From informing the gathering that China was "becoming more coercive and aggressive" to publicly warning India of China's strengthening of its military infrastructure across the LAC, Austin was conveying a clear warning that the US regards the Indo-Pacific as the heart of America's grand strategy. This was necessary to reassure a nervous EU that US will not leave an increasingly divided EU to sort out the end game in Ukraine.²

The next NATO Summit in Madrid on 29th to 30th June 22 would possibly carry the same reassurance to a Continent increasingly facing the pressure of reduced oil and gas supplies from Russia along with the growing conviction that the war in Ukraine cannot be won. India's foreign policy and options had to address the puzzling ambivalence of the EU towards Russia including its place in Europe, its history and geography as a dominant European State and the necessity therefore to accommodate Russia within a broader

European economic and security framework. Without a pragmatic mid-course correction, EU's present policy of encouraging Ukraine to fight back and not accept peace negotiations risks escalating the war into a broader conflict. Finland and Sweden wish to join NATO, while Ukraine along with Moldova has just acquired 'candidate status' to join EU at a future date. Russia which started the conflict because of Zelensky's shrill calls to join NATO (a prospect which it turned out was not acceptable to NATO itself) now feels further encircled.

Where is India situated? The decline of 'Pax Americana' and the precipitous and disastrous retreat from Kabul on 15th August 2021, leaving ordinary Afghans who had welcomed the Western forces to their fate, was a rude reminder to India, a key strategic partner of the US and EU, that she stood alone in any military confrontation with China. At the same time, India's security interests are firmly anchored with the West, with the US, the EU and QUAD. But the unilateral Western sanctions and the astronomical rise in oil and gas prices have forced India to purchase discounted Russian oil even it is a fraction of what EU purchases from Russia. India's dependence on Russian arms and spare parts from Ukraine places her on the horns of a dilemma.

When the conflict commenced, India had to repeatedly clarify her principled position through detailed explanations of vote in the UN and through public statements. Prime Minister Narendra Modi repeatedly appealed for an immediate ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. Later, India welcomed the Secretary-General's engagement with the Russian and Ukraine leadership and the

humanitarian reprieve secured.

As India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar noted, India remains on the side of peace and diplomacy and is guided by her national interests. We have underlined that there is no winning side and a return to dialogue and diplomacy was the only way forward. We have in our statements at the UN highlighted: "It is in our collective interest to work constructively, both inside the United Nations and outside, towards seeking an early resolution to this conflict." India added: "the global order is anchored in international law, UN Charter and respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty of states".³

One can also note a gradual evolution of India's position. India has called for restraint, with immediate de-escalation of tensions, taking into account the legitimate security interests of all countries. The aim is to secure long-term peace and stability in the region and beyond, through constructive and interactive diplomacy.

The US and EU initially questioned India's publicly stated position on the conflict, demanding that India condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a violation of the UN Charter. Both now appreciate that India can distance herself from Russia only if we have an alternative and robust defence partnership with them. The military aid package that is being discussed bilaterally with the US is a step forward in that direction. Ned Price, State Department spokesman has expressed Washington's understanding of India's relationship with Moscow which is "distinct" from the one shared by the US with India.⁴

The EU, at least those Member States who are India's major strategic partners, especially

France, have a better understanding of India's dilemma, in a dangerous neighbourhood, with a large dependence on Russian arms and spares. India is being courted by the West for joint weapons production. India is buying much more from France and Israel. The share of weapons imported from Russia has fallen sharply, to around 50% between 2016 and 2021, down from 70% in the previous five-year period.

The West cannot compete with Russia on price strategy and remains reluctant to share their most cutting-edge technology. Joint arms production is the only reasonable option. Going forward will require resolve and flexibility on both sides. In the meantime, India will need to walk a careful path, based on her core interests.

Differences in perceptions remain and need to be narrowed down. From a Western and EU perspective, the conflict is a sharp and unpleasant reminder that wars need not always be fought out in distant lands. The West and NATO's desire to weaken Russia permanently through a long-drawn-out conflict is shortsighted and ignores reality. NATO accepts that this aim may come at the cost of Ukraine's partial destruction and permanent loss of territory. The Russians understand that the US and EU will drag the fight to the last standing Ukrainian.

In an article in the Washington Post soon after the conflict began, Henry Kissinger had invaluable advice to offer to the West. He said: "Far too often the Ukrainian issue is posed as a showdown: whether Ukraine joins the East or the West. But if Ukraine is to survive and thrive, it must not be either side's outpost against the other—it should function as a bridge between them". Kissinger

added: “Ukraine has been independent for only 23 years. Not surprisingly, its leaders have not learned the art of compromise, even less of historical perspective. Viktor Yanukovich and his principal political rival, Yulia Tymoshenko represent the two wings of Ukraine and have not been willing to share power... We should seek reconciliation, not the domination of a faction... For the West, the demonisation of Vladimir Putin is not a policy; it is an alibi for the absence of one”.⁵

The moot point is how to end the war? Can the West afford to ignore its past? A durable peace must accommodate the legitimate security interests of both sides. Henry Kissinger recently warned: “The question will now be how to end that war? At its end a place has to be found for Ukraine and a place has to be found for Russia — if we don’t want Russia to become an outpost of China in Europe.”⁶

In such a challenging international scenario, how can one explain India’s position on Ukraine vis-a-vis the EU? Taking part at ‘GLOBESEC’ on ‘Taking Friendship to the Next Level: Allies in the Indo-Pacific’, External Affairs Minister Dr. S Jaishankar on 3rd June 22 offered the best explanation, explaining that India’s foreign policy is not just transactional but realistic: “I am not sitting on the fence just because I don’t agree with you. It means I am sitting on my ground”. He noted: “Europe has to get out of the mindset that Europe’s problem is the world’s problem but the world’s problem is not Europe’s problem. Today linkages are being made between China and India and what’s happening in Ukraine. China and India happened way before Ukraine. I do not see this as a clever argument.....The world cannot be

that Eurocentric as it used to be in the past”.⁷

He concluded: “In terms of what is happening with the Ukraine conflict, our stand is very clear that we favour an immediate cessation of hostilities. I (India) am one-fifth of the world’s population. I am what today—the 5th or 6th largest economy in the world. Forget the history and civilisation bit; everybody knows that. I feel I am entitled to have my own side. I am entitled to weigh my own interests, and make my own choices. My choices will not be cynical and transactional. They will be a balance of my values and my interests. There is no country in the world which disregards its interests”.⁸

In such a complex situation, what is the way forward? On 21st May 22, for the first time, Zelensky publicly acknowledged the need for a diplomatic solution. The West should understand that just as India has to live with China and Pakistan, EU has to live with Russia. Nations cannot alter their history and geography. Russia is linked to Europe. Russia is large, European, Slav and Orthodox, White, with a long and shared history, culture and civilisation with the West. Russia also has a formidable nuclear arsenal, like its ally, China.

The West needs to decide what NATO’s aims are in the long run. Is it supporting a regime change in the Kremlin? Or is it hoping for the permanent weakening of Russia and the return to living standards of the former USSR? Would a peace agreement and new European security architecture be the answer? Whatever is the answer, the EU and US must acknowledge that Ukraine has become a pawn in great power relations and is not crucial to changing the world order. Whether Ukraine is fully sovereign or fully independent or not are

uncomfortable questions that the West must address.

EU Member States with memories of Soviet occupation, like Estonia and Lithuania take maximalist public positions which are irresponsible and should not be endorsed by the EU. This includes the young and charismatic Estonian Prime Minister, Kaja Kallas, who informed the New York Times that Russia “must be defeated at all costs, and without compromise.”⁹ Some members of the former Warsaw Pact endorse this position.

However, the road for traditional diplomacy has opened up. These include the efforts of France, Germany and Italy as well as Israel and Turkey to keep the diplomatic channels open and mediate a ceasefire, if not a formal peace agreement. Otherwise, as many commentators are warning, the future looks far from reassuring. One could envisage a frozen conflict like in the Korean Peninsula or a deal like to the Minsk Agreements. A compromise is required by Ukraine.

With Ukrainian military and territorial losses in the Battle of the Donbass increasing, it is essential to persuade Ukraine to accept negotiations. Otherwise, President Putin reportedly intends to formally annex the entire Donbass region and the Kherson oblast while keeping control of 70 percent of Ukraine’s Black Sea coastline. A follow-on offensive could then capture Odessa and cut Ukraine off from the Black Sea, making it a land-locked country forever.

India is uniquely positioned as an honest broker on both sides. PM Modi has spoken on several occasions to President Putin and President Zelensky. India is in continuous contact with American, French and EU leadership. India should use her influence to persuade both sides to reach

a mutual understanding. The crippling sanctions too, would need to be withdrawn. India should now forcefully use its considerable diplomatic clout and its deep friendships on all sides to end the conflict and stabilise the region.

The US should understand that there has to be some benefit for us from a strategic perspective to make it worthwhile for us to alienate China further through our continued membership of the Quad. After all, with or without Quad, we are alone in facing China. There is nevertheless growing space for India, despite these odds. The West today hears an Indian voice on the global stage that is capable of articulating a narrative of a responsible stakeholder that is firmly steeped in its own ethos. It cannot be business as usual. A substantive Western engagement with India is a natural consequence of this realisation, despite a different approach on Ukraine.

Kurt Campbell, who is in charge of US’s Indo-Pacific strategy, recently said: “One of the things that is clearly underway between the US and EU is a desire to engage more fundamentally with India. In this new strategic context, India in many ways is a swing State and...it is in all of our best interests to try to work overtime to bend its trajectory more to the West”.¹⁰

That will happen if the West can reassure India that she does not walk a lonely road in checkmating China. The weakening of the Western alliance has emboldened China. Gandhi had said: “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty”.

Nevertheless, India uneasily awaits the next Chinese misadventure on its borders. Unlike Zelensky, we know we are alone. We have always been alone. We need no support. We are India.

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Will Europe Die or be Reborn Out of Ukraine?

Come Carpentier de Gourdon*

Kampfe nicht mit Russen... (Don't fight the Russians)

Prince Otto von Bismarck Chancellor of the German Empire (1871-1890)

By late May, a tipping point had probably been reached in the ongoing Russian 'special operation' in Ukraine. The slow advance of the Red Army in the East leads to the rapid 're-Russification' of the larger Donbass region, as Ukrainian political personnel, currency, laws and institutions are being replaced with Russian ones as part of the reconstruction. The rabid reactions in Kyiv and in western capitals have manifested in unsupported claims about 'Putin's rout' which are increasingly untenable. The 'Muscovites' (as the Ukrainian media often label them) have not been defeated and are solidifying their advantage day by day despite massive deliveries of weapons to the other side from almost every major NATO member. The ultimate reintegration of much of the land to the East of the Dnieper into the Russian federation seems increasingly likely and in pure strategic terms it would lead to a few significant conclusions relevant to Europe, the USA and the world at large.

Ukraine ('the borderland') is not and has never been a stable homogenous entity with defined borders. It has no natural boundaries with Russia, as the Donbass is a vast plain claimed by both countries. Contemporary Ukraine is part of the legacy of the Stalinist USSR which is already

collapsing, like much of the Soviet heritage did in the last decades. While Southern Ukraine belonged to the Greek and Oriental Mediterranean world even when it was annexed by the Ottoman successors to the Eastern Roman Empire, its identity as 'Little Russia', south of 'White Russia' (modern Belarus) encompassed the lands between Kharkov, Crimea, Kiev and Odessa. The west was historically part of the Polish and Austro-Hungarian empires and is distinctly 'Mittel Europa' in character and geography. It is Lenin's decision to treat Ukraine as a separate socialist 'fraternal' republic and Stalin's inclusion of Galicia and Moldavia into greater Ukraine which are at the source of much of the current tragedy. Many Western and Central Ukrainians have been driven by this chequered history to build a romantic ethnic identity as 'real Aryans' who have no relation with Russian Slavs. Ukrainian identity in recent years has defined itself as 'anti-Russianism', sometimes to the point of absurdity as when historical monuments are destroyed, when the director of the Ukrainian Book Institute decrees a ban on all Russian literary classics as 'dangerous to Ukrainians' or when sausages labelled 'Death to Muscovites' are sold in stores¹. This attempt to eradicate and rewrite history betrays deep

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alienation and immaturity in that nationalist ideology when it tries to deny the country's origin and centuries of existence as, perhaps the most prosperous province of the Russian empire.²

The US-British endeavour, supported willy nilly by the major western European powers, to expand NATO to the borders of Russia by absorbing the old buffer made up of the nations between the 'three Seas',³ from the Baltic 'City-states' to Greece and the Balkans was bound to result in a clash with Russia and, by extension with its Eurasian hinterland, as far away as Central Asia and the Far East which are part of the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organisation). Ukraine is a particularly sensitive area, as it is the cradle of the 'Kievan Rus', the earliest Russian State in historical and religious terms as well as the outlet to the Black Sea and thence to the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal. As such, it connects the Slavic world with Greece and the Levant, the hallowed fountainheads of Orthodox Christianity. The Tzars fought great wars in the 17th and 18th centuries to conquer the Cossack and Tatar lands later called New Russia or Little Russia and no Russian government would be forgiven by its people for letting this heartland of their nation be turned into a forward base of the ancestral European rivals who briefly wrestled it away in the 1854-55 Crimean war.

For the Russian Federation, the Sea of Azov is an essential outlet for the Don River basin and its trade routes that come down from the rich agricultural and industrial central and northern regions. Sevastopol Crimea is a 'hero city' of the second World War, standing watch over the estuaries of the Don and Dnieper. Russia could

live with Ukraine as a politically neutral economic partner but not as the member of an inimical alliance led by historic challengers of Russian power.

To go back to the years following World War I here is a revealing insight about the US Government's assessment of the 'Ukrainian nation': In August 1948, the US National Security Council issued memorandum (NSC 20/1 1948), requested by then Defense Secretary James Forrestal. The document described American objectives with respect to the Soviet Union.

A significant part of the memorandum focused on Ukraine. American analysts were convinced that the territory was an integral part of greater Russia, and it was highly unlikely that Ukrainians could exist as an independent nation. Most importantly, it noted, any support given to separatists would be met with a strong negative reaction by Russians.

"The economy of the Ukraine is inextricably intertwined with that of Russia as a whole...To attempt to carve it out of the Russian economy and to set it up as something separate would be as artificial and as destructive as an attempt to separate the Corn Belt, including the Great Lakes industrial area, from the economy of the United States..."

Finally, we cannot be indifferent to the feelings of the Great Russians themselves... They will continue to be the strongest national element in that general area, under any status ... The Ukrainian territory is as much a part of their national heritage as the Middle West is of ours, and they are conscious of that fact. A solution which attempts to separate the Ukraine

entirely from the rest of Russia is bound to incur their resentment and opposition, and can be maintained, in the last analysis, only by force,” read the report⁴.

The European Union has shown more clearly than ever before its inner discord and divisions and its dysfunctional management which, in times of crises looks like it is only capable of issuing general, occasionally inapplicable statements and resolutions. The somewhat surrealistic nature of the EU two-headed bureaucracy is highlighted by the personalities of the Commission President Ursula von der Leyen⁵ and the Council President Charles Michel. Behaving almost as rivals they are often ignored by leaders of the member-states, beginning with French President Macron and German Chancellor Scholz. Mrs. Von der Leyen uses her position to issue decrees that exceed her legal powers and spells out unworkable policies such as the rapid transition to renewable energies for the EU (no more coal, gas and oil, unless they come from “her American friends’ as she puts it, and non-Russian origins) and the prompt inclusion of Ukraine into the Union. She still vouches for the ‘inevitable and necessary’ Ukrainian victory and swears that ‘Europe will never again go back to Russia for resources’.⁶

Meanwhile, the national governments of major member-states are trying to deal with the facts on the ground by making overtures to President Putin without paying attention to her declarations. They have to consider as imminent, if not a ‘fait accompli’ the absorption of Eastern Ukraine into Russia and the possible confederation or reunion of the western part with Poland.

Among historic analogies that come to mind,

the situation of the Greek city states of the 4th century BCE vis-à-vis the Macedonian kingdom is one. Those prosperous but weakened polities, including Athens were humbled by King Philip II and his son Alexander and had to accept Macedonia’s dominance. Is that a chronologically remote simile to what is happening now between the EU and Russia?

The United States demonstrates its inability and unwillingness to enter a new war outside its own continent and limits its intervention to selling weapons to its allies and ‘leading from behind’ as former President Obama had proposed. As a result of the American withdrawal, many frozen territorial disputes are beginning to heat up, since the status quo from the age of bipolar US-Soviet supremacy is being challenged by various actors.

Turkey has returned to its former age-old role as an Eastern independent power centre. It no longer is a bulwark of US and NATO facing the Russian, Iranian and Arab ‘outsiders’. Instead, now Turkey plays the US, Germany, France and Russia against each other to gain and maintain its leverage and, often acting as a spoiler for both the West and Russia it has restored its old strategic bond with Great Britain which predated its late 19th century alliance with Germany. The “Eastern Question,” like several other ancestral geopolitical quandaries, has risen again, all the more so because of the economic fragility and the political uncertainty about the country’s future under and after Erdogan.

Ukrainian nationalism has become a strange hybrid phenomenon typical of our age. It combines elements of Aryan racism, apparent in the anti-Russian Neo-Nazi symbology of its special and

paramilitary forces, with a strong Jewish ingredient which has been used by Israel for the past decades to acquire influence in the Black Sea region, between Russia and the West. Strange bedfellows as they may be, the Israeli and 'Far Right' elements in the Ukrainian power systems have so far coexisted and have apparently had unexpected effects, such as the exit of tens of thousands of Russian Jews who left for Israel in the days and weeks following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, codenamed Operation Z⁷. It is legitimate to wonder if this war and its ultimate outcome may change once again the rapport of Russia to the Jewish State with which relations has been excellent until recently, despite mutual suspicions and occasional face-offs during the Syrian civil war, but which may now be suspected by the Kremlin of having played a double game.

The return of a form of Nazism to Ukraine harks back to World War II when 'Banderist' Ukrainians flocked to the German flag, initially to free themselves from Polish rule, 'get rid of Jews' and eventually fight the Communist USSR but it is part of a wider phenomenon in Eastern Europe (called 'New Europe' by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld at the time of the second Gulf War). In the Baltic States, in Hungary, Romania and in the Catholic and Muslim Balkans (Croatia, Bosnia and Albania) which fell under the aegis of the Third Reich Hitlerian Germany is remembered more as a protector from Bolshevism than as a genocidal oppressor, also because of strong antisemitic feelings remaining in those regions. Hence, one effect of the EU's expansion and turn to the East and to NATO sponsored militarisation against Russia is that the visceral hostility to

Nazism and Germany's own deep guilt complex have been mitigated in recent years, unlike in Russia where the excoriation of Nazism is at the core of the national ethos, given the twenty-seven million Soviet citizens who fell in the great patriotic war. Instead, in the West and in North America in particular where, despite appearances, Nazism was never reviled as much as on the old continent and was even regarded as a useful opponent of Marxism, there is a tendency to gradually equate Hitler and Stalin as 'twin evils' to be played against each other if that helps to combat the geopolitical rise of Russia.

In an even wider, global perspective the rise of a parochial, ethnocentric and revanchist 'regional' nationalism is visible outside Ukraine and the Baltic States in areas such as the Basque Country and Catalonia in Spain, Flanders in Belgium and was quite strong in the Lombard provinces of Italy until recently, not to mention ex-Yugoslavia, speaking only of Europe. These centrifugal tendencies contradict and yet coexist with the reaffirmation of national powers in the wake of BREXIT and as a reaction to Davos-style liberal 'Soros-globalism'. Together, they are creating tensions and uncertainties about the political equilibrium of the continent and in some cases, call for revisiting old intra and parastatal cooperative structures such as the Hansa (or Hanseatic League) in Northern Europe which for centuries linked the Scandinavian, Prussian and Germanic port cities in a dynamic commercial network. A new maritime trading agreement would necessarily encompass the Russian, Finnish and Swedish Baltic outlets and ought to include a mutual security agreement guaranteed by all

member-nations. It would be the safest way to protect the autonomy of the small Baltic nations and of Poland which are on the frontline of the battlefield between Russia and NATO-led Europe and cannot be protected from an invasion.

Making those historically weaker states forward bases of NATO's deployment against the Eurasian bloc can only be against their long-term interest as they are not easily defensible and yet pose a threat to the nearby and Belarussian and Russian urban centres. Russia's and France's former proposals for a joint European-Eurasian architecture would provide room for stabler alternative transnational arrangements but they have been staunchly opposed by the flag-bearers of Atlanticism who include, apart from the inevitable British statesmen perpetually worried about prospects of continental unity, many of the top figures in the EU and several national leaders in Western and Central Europe.

We are witnessing a new phase of the age-old conflict between the Roman Catholic and Graeco-Slav Byzantine Empires despite the fact that the west of the continent is largely secularised and agnostic, as are many Russians although their State is closely tied to the national orthodox Church. Civilisational identities survive beneath ideological and political changes. I remember the reaction from the late Prince Nicholas Romanov, who had lived all his life in western Europe, to the plans for the European Union to bring the continent together: 'There is another Europe' he said 'Orthodox Europe and I don't see why we should annex it to the Brussels Confederation'⁸.

The 'gathering of Russian lands into the *Russky Mir*', the Russian World, is what all Tzars

were committed to and it is that task which Vladimir Putin believes has been entrusted to him by the nation.

In another article⁹ I evoked some geo-cultural and historical parallels between Russia and Germany, two neighbouring imperial nations whose territorial and ethno-linguistic borders overlap and have remained somewhat undefined to this day, partly because of extensive migrations and annexations of surrounding lands over the centuries. The rise or expansion of one of the two empires often took place at the expense of the other, as when Wilhelmine Germany in 1917 directly brought about the collapse of the Romanov Empire before herself incurring defeat, or when in 1944 the Soviet Union gained control over Eastern Germany and her Central European satellites. Before a resurgent Russia Germany is rearming in response¹⁰ and reclaiming her place as the leading military power of future Europe, a Europe that claims it will no longer rely on its vaunted 'normative soft power'¹¹. In this revived confrontation, nations caught in the middle like Poland and the Baltics may once again lose their autonomy or even perhaps their independence if and when borders are redrawn, as is happening in Ukraine.

The wider impact of Russia's 'reunification' will increasingly be felt across the Eurasian continent whose axis runs through Russia, from the Pacific shores and the Mongol highlands to the Danubian and Rhenish fluvial valleys. The original Russian medieval State occupied the North-South arc between the Baltic and the Black Sea and Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote that 'without Ukraine, Russia is no longer an empire'¹².

From the 15th Century, after the Mongol hordes withdrew into Central Asia the Grand Princes of Moscow gradually extended their rule eastwards and the annexation of Siberia gave Russia immense strategic depth to help defeat western invasions. The last Tzar, Nicholas II actively oversaw the development of Southern and Eastern Siberia whose great cities (Ekaterinburg, Perm, Tomsk, Omsk, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, Vladivostok) flourished along the Trans-Siberian route and provided a closer connection to China. The region was used as a fallback headquarters during the Bolshevik Revolution by the 'White' leader, Admiral Kolchak who unsuccessfully fought the Reds from 'Asian Russia' around the time when another reactionary, General Ungern von Starnberg set up an Aryan-Buddhist government in Mongolia to oppose the Communist regime in Moscow.

A lasting break between Russia and Europe, which Kissinger has warned against¹³ would lead to Russia increasing its effort to develop resources and perhaps even establish a new capital in Siberia, for which Omsk is a prime candidate. That 'pivot to the Orient' would signal closer economic

relations with China and other leading Asian nations which should also benefit India as well as Kazakhstan, Iran and the two Koreas. By shifting its centre of gravity towards the Orient and implementing its longstanding *Razvitie* (development) project across Central Asia, from China to the Mediterranean according to the strategy advocated by the 'Eurasianists', Russia may also be better able to control the feared Chinese penetration into Siberia and balance Beijing's influence on Mongolia, North Korea and the ex-Soviet 'Stans'¹⁴. Conversely the EU nations should experience major economic hardship if they remain cut off from Russian-Ukrainian food, raw materials and energy supplies.

Current events are paving the way for the creation of a rival bloc to the Atlantic West based on resource autonomy, strategic military equivalence and a separate international reserve currency and financial clearing system. This prospect was envisioned and promoted since the dawn of the century by policy-makers and economists in several countries, particularly in the Russian Federation, China and Iran. The time has perhaps come for this concept to come alive.

References:

- 1 *Reports of these developments have been published by various sources. Photographs of sausage packages carrying 'Death to Muscovite' labels have circulated on the Net. Oleksandra Koval, the Director of the Ukrainian Book Centre is reportedly implementing the nationwide removal of some hundred million books, including Russian literary classics from public libraries*
- 2 *For a fairly objective retrospective on the past of the greater area now occupied by Ukraine see the article by Egor Kholmogorov cf. <https://www.rt.com/russia/556073-russians-never-let-go-ukraine>*
- 3 *The Three 'inland' Seas (Baltic, Black and Adriatic) are at the origin of the 'Three Seas Initiative' <https://3seas.eu/> but the territory between the Baltic and the Black Sea has long been disputed between successive regional hegemony: United Poland-Lithuania, Sweden, Russia, the Austrian Empire and Germany. King*

Charles XII of Sweden in 1708-1709 came all the way to what is now Eastern Ukraine in his campaign to extend his sway across this North-South belt. Two centuries later Kaiser Wilhelm II and subsequently Hitler briefly took it over and then Stalin brought it under Soviet control. Since the fall of the USSR the US and Britain, together with defeated Germany forged a league of the countries sharing this region, primarily as a 'cordon sanitaire' between Russia and the West, extending from Estonia to Bulg

aria and Ukraine and further to Georgia and Azerbaijan (the latter has since taken its distance from this association as it needs good relations with Moscow). By including Finland and Sweden NATO intends to buttress this barrier to the East of the erstwhile Iron Curtain.

- 4 From <https://www.rt.com/russia/556073-russians-never-let-go-ukraine/> (ibid.)
- 5 *The background and career of Ursula von der Leyen have been discussed in several articles, many referring to her controversial role as German Defence Minister, a position which she left under a cloud as she was accused of conflicts of interest with international consulting firms. At the EU some arbitrary decisions in connection with the management of the COVID-19 epidemic have raised more questions about her relationship with McKinsey & Co. and to the American pharmaceutical giant Pfizer. She led negotiations which resulted in a multibillion Euro secretive contract between the EU and Pfizer before pressuring all EU member-states to make Pfizer vaccinations compulsory for all their citizens, an unconstitutional mandate. She does not hide her hostility to Russia and her personal connection with the USA, home of her maternal family. Her abrupt decision to ban Russian media in the EU was also irregular. There is a widespread realization in international political circles that Mrs. von der Leyen is not competent and should be investigated on suspicions of corruption.*
<https://www.politico.eu/article/ursula-von-der-leyen-biography-career-inconvenient-truth/>
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ursula-von-der-leyen-caught-in-scandal-of-payments-and-wiped-phones-38s8jg3c7>
- 6 *In an interview dated 23-5-2022 with Mika Brzezinski, Mrs Von Der Leyen, confronted with the fact that the EU has not been able to stop purchasing oil and gas from Russia, claimed that it was better to keep buying Putin's energy in order not to allow him to sell it elsewhere at a higher price (sic). Several economists and experts in the energy sector have qualified her statement as nonsensical. So was also her apparent acceptance of US oil and gas extracted through fracking as clean. (www.msnbc.com/morning-joe/watch/putin-pushing-europe-in-direction-of-renewable-clean-energy-says-european-commission-president-140631109686)*
- 7 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/over-15000-have-immigrated-to-israel-since-russia-invaded-ukraine-ministry/>
- 8 *Remarks made by HIH Prince Nicholas Romanovich Romanov (1922-2014) in a private conversation with the author in 1996.*
- 9 https://comecarpentier.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Outlines-of-Global-Transformations_4_2018-Internet.pdf
- 10 *According to a report from Reuters about Germany's 100 billion Euro plan for rearmament and military reorganization. 19 billion are to be spent for the Navy, on submarines, corvettes and missiles. 40 billion for the Air Force. Including the purchase of Eurofighter Aircraft; 16 billion on the land forces and 2 billion for uniforms and equipment.*

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- 11 Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the European Commission for Foreign Affairs recently stated that 'The Ukrainian conflict has proven to the EU that soft power is not enough. The Union must become a military power'. He also said that 'Europe needs to learn the language of power'. In parallel, former Italian Premier Berlusconi has noted that the West is isolated in its position on Ukraine.
- 12 Brzezinski https://www.cia.gov/library/abbottabad-compound/BD/BD4CE651B07CCB8CB069F9999F0EADDEE_Zbigniew_Brzezinski_-_The_Grand_ChessBoard.pdf
- 13 <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/05/kissinger-these-are-the-main-geopolitical-challenges-facing-the-world-right-now/>
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War in Ukraine: Impact on the Indo-Pacific

P R Shankar*

The issues currently dominating international geopolitics are the Ukraine Crisis, the Indo-Pacific security situation and the two-year depredation of the Wuhan virus. The complex Indo-Pacific situation came into focus during the pandemic. As nations were battling the pandemic, China became increasingly assertive. Reflexively, the QUAD and the Indo Pacific architecture started momentum and acquired substance. However, the ongoing long drawn violent Ukraine crisis has changed some ground realities which will affect the Indo-Pacific region in more ways than one. The first fundamental is that a trans-Atlantic US led consolidation and further expansion of NATO is clearly visible. The emergence of a China-Russia axis, in competition, though nebulous at present, is on the cards. Nuclearisation of South Korea and Japan is being discussed. The world is entering into an era of selective de-globalisation, decoupling and re-coupling. Energy and food security have come into the foreground for many nations. An extended period of inflationary economic turmoil has commenced. This is occurring as climate change and environmental degradation threatens to impact the globe adversely. In this contextual framework, it is pertinent to examine the complex dynamics which are going to impinge upon and dominate the Indo-Pacific environment as a result of the Ukrainian

War. However, the examination has to take into account the variable of the pandemic and its long-term effect which is simultaneously playing out and cannot be ignored.

Indo Pacific Region : An Overview

The Indo-Pacific Region extending from the East coast of Africa to the West coast of the American continent is a huge swathe. Its core is now the centre of gravity of international geopolitics and geoeconomics. Its major population centres are home to eight of the top twenty economies of the world. Major conflict areas and disaster zones lie in the Indo-Pacific region. As a corollary, most of the big defence spenders are also in this area. Global power is pivoting to the Indo-Pacific. This is hark back to the pre-colonial period and will remain so for a long time. As the power shift is taking place, global challenges have also increased manifold. The underpinning factor of the challenges is the rise of China and its ambitions in relation to other powers.¹ China's ambition to establish a Sino-Centric system is presaged on territorial and geopolitical assertion in its vicinity. The focus of this expansion is presently the South China Sea and Taiwan. It is also attempting to alter the status quo with India in its favour simultaneously on a constant basis. China has also spread its tentacles, outwardly through

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the BRI, to all parts of the globe with an aspiration to cement itself as a superpower second to none. In the process, one has seen repeated violation of the international rules-based order and an effort to supplant its own rules. The destabilising issue is that China's regional territorial ambitions, global geopolitical aspirations and the BRI are all moving parts with huge degrees of uncertainty. The response to the Chinese expansionist adventure is the evolution of the QUAD which is now acquiring discernible reality to take on China.

The crowded maritime routes and the vast expanses of the Indo-Pacific are home to more than a handful of security problems. At the very top of the list is Chinese assertion and aspirations to exert influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Chinese ambition to establish naval bases in the IOR and Eastern Pacific constantly threatens regional peace. At the western end of the Indo-Pacific are issues connected to terror and energy resources of West Asia. Iran, Afghanistan and the nuclear triangle of Pakistan, India and China also cast their shadow on the Indo-Pacific. At the centre is the crisis ridden Myanmar. The Indo-Pacific is also dotted with bases and territories of extra regional powers like USA, France and UK. Finally, the nuclearisation debate in South Korea and Japan has commenced to compound issues. Overall, the Indo-Pacific is a panorama of issues. Many of them have been compounded by the Ukrainian crisis.

Chinese Footprint

China continues being assertive and coercive to attain its superpower ambitions despite standing on the brink of economic stagnation. Problems in the Chinese economy stem partly due to structural

issues and partly due to the consequences of prolonged pandemic risk of its Zero Covid Policy². Further, its adverse demography of falling birth rates, ageing population and decreasing work force, aggravates economic stress in the long term³. Views abound that China has peaked. Despite this, it is heavily militarising in an attempt to achieve superpower status. China is in a race to get rich before it gets old. It is estimated that it has a ten-year time window to do so. This race to beat the time bar makes it more aggressive with each passing day. The markers of its ambitions in this time window will be its attempts to militarily annex Taiwan while keeping USA out of the way. It will also attempt to keep India down using all methods. China also seeks to solve the Malacca dilemma by establishing bases in the Indian Ocean Region. Very clearly, China will cause a lot of turbulence in the Indo-Pacific. As it stands, it has a wide footprint in the region which includes the Solomon Islands, South China Sea, Afghanistan, Iran, West Asia, Pakistan, BRI countries, Island nations in the IOR, and the LAC along India.

The Indo-Pacific Architecture

The Indo-Pacific security architecture consists of the QUAD and AUKUS. QUAD is the predominant structure which addresses the larger Indo-Pacific Issues⁴. The QUAD partners - USA, India, Australia and Japan comprise a superpower and three middle-level powers. All are vibrant democracies comprising three civilisations. USA and India have strong and experienced Armed Forces. QUAD has three of the top five economies in the world. It is a healthy mixture of raw material, manufacturing, and consumer power with

tremendous innovation capability. It has the economic potential of enforcing decoupling from China and creating alternative markets. QUAD has the heft to tackle China economically and diplomatically on wide-ranging issues. It can address wider issues like climate change, tackling the pandemic, and heralding new technologies. It is a larger platform that can also accommodate regional and extra-regional players like EU, ASEAN, South Korea and New Zealand. It has wider acceptability. It has global leadership potential⁵.

AUKUS is a security partnership of three rich countries – USA, UK and Australia, which are old-time allies. It is a tight grouping of stable democracies with similar systems, policies, national outlooks and values. At this point in time, the partnership is about building SSNs for Australia to enhance its capability so that containment of China is more effective. AUKUS has a narrow military focus on enhancing Australian military capability with SSNs. This will redress a regional strategic imbalance in the Western Pacific in which Chinese domination is outsized. AUKUS also caters for a future scenario. If and when the Taiwanese pivot of the first island chain is lost, there will be a need to ensure that China does not have a free run to expand into the Western Pacific. The rise of an Australian force in the coming decade with considerable air, sea and underwater capabilities will prevent exactly that. The point to note is that while AUKUS is in the future, QUAD is the present and more relevant one.

Ukrainian War: Impacting Issues Nuclearisation

The Ukrainian conflict is the first one where

the nuclear card was played out unambiguously by Russia. The nuclear threat was conflated with conventional and hypersonic weapons to deter USA/NATO from interfering in the war. It also prompted Ukraine to state that, had it not made the mistake in abandoning nuclear weapons it inherited from the Soviet Union, Russia would not have dared to invade it. Ukraine was of the opinion that nuclear weapons were the only way to guarantee its sovereignty. This nuclear paradigm has found multiple echoes in the Indo-Pacific. China might make a similar play to deter USA from interference, if and when it seeks a military reunification of Taiwan. Will USA just stand by supinely as it has done now and allow Taiwan to be gobbled up? The same play can occur if China seeks a forced foothold in Bhutan, Nepal or even Myanmar. What will India or USA or any other member of the QUAD do? On the other hand, South Korea and Japan live in the nuclear neighbourhood of China, North Korea and Russia. In both these countries, the nuclear debate got sharpened by the Ukraine situation. South Korea feels that while North Korea is the immediate short term nuclear threat, China is the long term one. The majority in South Korea favour acquisition of nuclear weapons indigenously as the way forward. The lesser alternate for South Korea is allowing deployment of US nuclear assets on its territory⁶. Many South Koreans feel that dependence on USA is fraught with danger in a nuclear situation. They could end up like Ukraine, where USA has been kept to the side lines. South Korea could, therefore, go nuclear on its own.

Currently Japan is sheltered by the US nuclear umbrella. The Sino-Russian entente and the Russo-

Ukrainian situation has prompted Mr Abe, ex PM and an influential but respected voice, to suggest that Japan should consider a nuclear-sharing arrangement with the USA similar to NATO. Which means that US weapons could be on Japanese soil. Turn to Taiwan. It has three nuclear power reactors, which produce about 10% of the island's electricity. Taiwan apparently has the nuclear knowhow. If it ever comes to light that Taiwan has a bomb in its basement, the nuclear equations in the Eastern end of China will get complicated beyond belief. If South Korea, Japan or Taiwan acquire nuclear capability, China will in all probability change its own status and policy on use of nuclear weapons. That will trigger a domino effect on India which will result in a spiral in Pakistan. Overall, the Ukrainian war has already triggered a nuclear debate. The issue to see in future is whether it will spiral into an arms race.

India's Rise

As the Ukrainian war has unfolded, India's internal political strength, its balanced relations with all major powers, and its stability in the neighbourhood makes it stand apart⁷. Additionally, it is India alone, amongst the big economies, which shows promise of high growth rates and is being seen as the only alternative to China in scale. A large part of global growth in future is predicated on India's overall success. The fact that it has almost fully recovered from the aftershocks of the Wuhan virus is a huge plus. The Indian and US militaries are the only two militaries which can impose caution and rein in China. India's geographic location and its military strength gives it the ability to dominate the Indian Ocean and block the Strait

of Malacca. Hence, there is little doubt that there is no QUAD or Indo-Pacific strategy without India. The international realisation is that India can tip the scales, depending upon its stance on various issues. India's strong position in the unfolding global food crisis⁸ has reinforced the view that centrality of India in global affairs has multiplied manifold. China is accustomed to dealing with US alliances in Asia, but a realigned India changes the game⁹. India has the potential to put China in a two-front situation in perpetuity. It contributes significantly to containment of China. The way India plays its cards will have a huge impact on the Indo-Pacific region.

China's Changing Status

When the Ukrainian war broke out, the conventional wisdom pointed to only one country that stands to emerge victorious: China. Two months into the war and with the resurgence of the Wuhan virus, there is uncertainty¹⁰. China has not been able to temper either the Russian invasion or the Western response. China's inability to influence the course of events in Ukraine is stark. It has been left to stand on the side-lines with debate and decisions being taken in every other place but China. Its vulnerability specially in energy and food security has been exposed as it scrambles to secure its flanks¹¹. The Trans-Atlantic western consolidation views China as siding with Russia. This has triggered a 'bounced' isolation 'off' Russia¹². This is evident from the recent frosty EU-China summit which was termed as 'a dialogue of the deaf'¹³ where China wanted to talk about 'positive' things like 'trade' while Europe was 'at war'. The talks were also 'open'¹⁴ as per Ursula

Von Der Leyen; meaning that opposing views were very clearly exchanged. China's influence and long-time efforts to wean EU away from USA have gone southwards. The developed world does not want to see its technology end up in a Russian drone or ammunition. There is a feeling in Europe that China, far from being a partner, may be a future threat. The global inflation and food crisis triggered by the Ukrainian war has also changed the IOR landscape, especially in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives and Nepal where internal problems have been compounded. People in these countries are against China. That became most evident on the streets in Sri Lanka where the tottering Rajapaksa government is being seen as 'sold out'¹⁵ to China. Pakistan is on the verge of an economic collapse as the situation worsens by the day¹⁶. In this scenario, the dramatic suicide bombing which killed three Chinese has exposed the weaknesses of Sino-Pak links¹⁷. It raises huge question marks on its flagship CPEC and BRI. More importantly, it exposes limits of the Chinese capability to influence events in areas it considers critical for global power projection. This could spread to other third world countries where the BRI has entered, especially in Africa. It is clear that as the Chinese economy is stalling, its influence is reducing overseas. One gets a sense of weakness in the Chinese structure and posture. It is not without reason that USA has subtly changed its stance on 'One China'¹⁸.

Taiwan Factor

The Chinese are learning from the Ukrainian conflict. The Russian failure to blitzkrieg Ukraine for a quick victory has implications for China¹⁹.

The expected scenario for Taiwan—suppress defences, establish air superiority and achieve immediate capitulation before the United States intervenes needs a relook. If China is to be a superpower, it needs to have credible military capability. Despite China's outsized military expenditure, PLA's capability, including its men and material remain untested. The failure of similarly structured Russian forces to overcome Ukrainian forces raises questions on PLA ability to annex Taiwan militarily. An amphibious invasion of Taiwan is far more complex and even less predictable than the invasion of Ukraine. China's capability to mount a cross-strait operation successfully against a better prepared Taiwan, assisted by USA, Japan and others is even more risk prone. Chinese ability to overcome Western media and information operations, as unleashed in the ongoing Ukrainian war is bleak. The narrative will be firmly against a lonely China. On ground, ever since the Ukrainian war has commenced, Chinese air space violations over Taiwan have drastically reduced. The belligerent posturing of an impending invasion of Taiwan which was daily headline news till January has receded to be replaced by self-doubts. Suddenly, China seems to have realised that the political costs of failure in this adventure are too high. Annexation of Taiwan is an agenda in recession. This has major implications. China will be forced to continue to defend its coastline and be unable to deploy its Navy in blue waters beyond Taiwan. China will have to keep on protesting Freedom of Navigation Operations by USA in close proximity of its shores and always face a maritime threat. This has to be seen in conjunction with the 'felt' threat of India's

military presence along the LAC. Overall, PLA has to simultaneously ward off the continental and maritime threats as also keep the communist regime in power. Most importantly, comprehensive national power which China flaunts has no value on the battle field as seen in the Ukrainian war. Militaries have to fight to win. Its ambitions depend upon the doubtful quality of its military.

Russia-China Axis

At the time of the winter Olympics, Russia and China renewed their 20-year treaty on friendship and cooperation, held large-scale joint military exercises, and reached agreement to boost trade²⁰. A joint statement about a ‘new era’ of international relations was issued. In February, Xi and Putin declared there were ‘no limits’ or ‘forbidden areas’ of cooperation. Based on this, the common expectation is that the Russia-China axis will flourish. However, Russia’s aggression has disrupted global energy, food and raw material markets. Prices have increased enormously. This will hit the Chinese economy which depends on imports of a variety of raw materials to feed its export-oriented manufacturing ability. Further, the strength, unity and speed of the Western response, the severe impact of sweeping sanctions, and Russia’s resulting forced economic decoupling from much of the global economy will make China rethink²¹. The setbacks experienced by the Russian military in Ukraine, despite their on-paper superiority will also set China thinking. Russia as a partner might be a heavy millstone for China to carry. Overall, while the Russia-China axis is still on the cards, its efficacy on ground is still not visible. In case this axis does not roll out as

visualised by their leaders, China will be left with very weak allies namely Pakistan, North Korea and Iran.

EU Factor

Before the Ukrainian war, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK, as well as the EU, had published Indo-Pacific strategies or ‘guidelines’ and deployed naval resources to the region²². This was despite the fact that their capacities to deploy forces and get involved in Indo-Pacific security was limited. Europe and UK wanted to be seen as reliable partners and achieve a persistent presence in the region. The Ukraine war forced these countries to stay focused on NATO and European security. They are militarising to enhance collective deterrence and defence. Resultantly, it will certainly restrict the ability of EU states to be active in the Indo-Pacific. Even France and the UK, which have considerable interest in the region, will have to rethink. However, France, which has more than 1.5 million citizens and five permanent military bases, in the Indo-Pacific has no choice but to remain focused in the area despite the Ukraine war. Overall, the EU states will toe the NATO line. In essence they will be even more dependant on QUAD to deliver results for them in the Indo-Pacific.

Maritime Issues

A major incident of the Ukraine war which is going to influence behaviour of maritime forces and militaries is the sinking of the Russian Black Sea Fleet flagship, the *Slava*-class cruiser *Moskva*²³. It has forced the Russian Navy units to redeploy further out to sea, beyond the range of

the Ukrainian shore-based coastal defence cruise missiles. Indo-Pacific navies will have to shed their business-as-usual approach to naval capability development. Anti-ship attack systems, either sea based or land based have evolved to a point when lethal attacks on a naval task force will be increasingly difficult to defend against. As navies seem to be acquiring or building larger, more complex and more expensive naval vessels, their vulnerability also seems to be increasing. Hence their viability is under examination. To make the point, an aircraft carrier which needs to deliver long-range offensive firepower has to be defended more robustly. The use of lethal autonomous weapons and loitering munitions adds to the challenge. The combination of advanced drones and anti-ship missiles pose significant survival challenge for naval forces in highly contested environments. In the Indo-Pacific context, this has direct implications on Chinese ability to annex Taiwan in an amphibious operation or overcome the Malacca dilemma without a base. Conversely, it becomes more difficult for the QUAD navies to operate close to Chinese mainland. The recourse is that the crowded Indo-Pacific region will see enhanced competition to acquire and strengthen bases as also develop sub-surface combatants of long endurance. It is reasonable to appreciate that China will make an all-out effort to acquire a suitable island in the Spratlys to convert it into a base just as they did in the Paracels. It has already made its initial move to establish a base in the Solomon Island in the Pacific Ocean in close proximity to Australia. It will also redouble its efforts to convert Gwadar, Hambantota or Kyaukpyu into a naval base at the earliest to

threaten India. Conversely, it forces India and the QUAD to look afresh at Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan to deny a foothold through diplomatic and economic pressure.

QUAD Strategy

The Russo Ukrainian war is being fought at two levels. One between Russian and Ukrainian Forces directly on Ukrainian soil. The other larger conflict is between Russia and the USA/EU/NATO combine for geopolitical dominance. When the US Defense Secretary stated ‘We want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can’t do the kind of things that it has done in invading Ukraine,’ it signified the start of a long-drawn hybrid war being waged between USA and Russia in battlefield Ukraine. Hereafter, the hybrid war is the primary one in which the Russo-Ukraine conflict will get subsumed. The overall US aim appears to be threefold:

- Weaken Russia to the extent that it ceases to be a threat to the EU.
- Ensure that Russia can no more be an effective ally of China
- Continued consolidation and alignment of Europe with USA. This aim supports the larger aim of containment of China and re-establishment of US supremacy²⁴.

Transpose this to the Indo-Pacific region and the US strategy comes across very clearly. As much as China wants to win a local war under informatised conditions in quick time, the effort will be to deny that. The Ukraine War also tells us that diplomatic, economic and military consolidation of the QUAD members and those who feel threatened by China will be beneficial. China can

be drawn into a bruising long drawn war which it cannot win and will specifically attempt to avoid. Intelligence and information sharing will be a huge element of this strategy.

Terror

Terror as an instrument of state policy has been practiced by many nations in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Radicalism is a prevalent phenomenon amongst many people and societies in the IOR. An analysis indicates that either these nations are underdeveloped or the recruits for the terror enterprise are underprivileged/poor. In an environment of impending shortages of food and energy because of the Ukraine war, the sense of being deprived is bound to increase. Unrest due to political mismanagement and artificially created shortages is likely to be exacerbated due to the Ukraine crisis. How this unrest and sense of deprivation gets channelized into terrorism is a phenomenon of the future. It is yet to surface. It will in due course.

Summary

The impact of the Ukrainian War on the Indo-Pacific is a work in progress. While it is premature to haphazard a guess on the second order effects of an ongoing war, certain trend lines and pointers

are clear. The world is getting to be more nuclearised than before. Conventional war will continue even though hybrid war and gray-zone conflict will hog headlines. Proxy wars will be more attractive than before for great powers. Without doubt, the era of globalisation is over. A new form of restricted globalisation based on allies and partners is on the horizon²⁵. The Chinese are apprehensive about it. An indisputable fact is that countries battered by the pandemic, must now deal with rising prices for grain, energy, and fertilisers because of the Ukrainian War. It will impact the poorer of the Indo-Pacific nations more than any other region²⁶. A lingering doubt in many minds is that will USA live up to its promises or keep standing on the side-lines as it did in Ukraine²⁷. The elephant in the Indo-Pacific is undoubtedly China. The Chinese trajectory in future will be recalibrated by the Ukraine War as well as a host of other internal factors. The direction of this vector is uncertain. Lastly, there is no doubt that in the immediate wake of the Ukraine conflict, India has emerged as a critical player in the Indo-Pacific. India's rise and its role in global affairs will dictate the tenor of the Indo-Pacific architecture. While certain trend lines are visible, there are hidden impacts yet to emerge from the Ukrainian War. We are indeed living in interesting times.

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The Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Implications for Central Asia and Options for India

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The Central Asia Setting

The five Central Asian countries viz Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, been considered a sphere of Russian influence and a part of its so-called “near abroad.” This space became a part of the Russian and Soviet empires from the beginning of the 19th century. All the five countries developed and evolved their independent identities after they broke away from the Soviet Union and emerged as free nations in 1991. All of them however, keeping in view the compulsions of geography, history, economy and culture, maintained strong and vibrant relations with the Russian Federation. Russia looms large over the policy decisions of these countries in diverse ways. The Russian labor market is a vital source of employment for many Central Asian countries particularly Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan; Russia plays key roles in the energy, and energy export sectors of Central Asia; and Russia remains the guarantor of security in the region¹.

It is hence no surprise that these countries go out of their way to ensure friendly and cordial relations with Russia. They have however, to varying degrees, become increasingly conscious of their independence, individual identities and

sovereignty over the last thirty years since their independence.

Kazakhstan, which is the largest country in territorial area and comprises about 60% of the region’s GDP, FDI, trade etc., and Uzbekistan, which has the largest population in the region and is the only country to share borders with all other Central Asian countries, follow a multi-vector foreign policy and maintains warm and friendly relations with all major powers including Russia, China, USA and Europe. Turkmenistan is a neutral country and got the international community’s recognition of its legal status of permanent neutrality in accordance with the United Nations General Assembly Resolution in 1995. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are far too dependent on Russia for their security, remittances and economy to say or do anything to upset or displease Russia.

All the above aspects have played out fully to determine the positions of the Central Asian nations during the current Russia-Ukraine conflict. This is particularly evident in the manner in which these countries voted in the different Resolutions that were taken up in the UN over the last many weeks. Two examples in this regard are illustrative.

The Votes

The UN General Assembly (GA) Resolution

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titled “Humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine” on 02 March 2022 (United Nations; 2nd March, 2022; “General Assembly resolution demands end to Russian offensive in Ukraine”) strongly reprimanded Russia for invading Ukraine and demanded that it “immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.” The vote was overwhelmingly in favour of the Resolution with 141 countries supporting, 5 opposing and 35 abstentions. Amongst the Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan abstained while Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan did not vote.

In the UNGA Resolution to consider expulsion of Russia from the UN Human Rights Council on 7 April 2022, (United Nations; 7th April, 2022; “UN General Assembly votes to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council”) 93 countries voted in favour of the Resolution, 24 against it and 57 countries abstained. Just before this vote, Russia had issued a general warning that an abstention or absence during the vote would be taken to be an “unfriendly act” and would have grave adverse implications for bilateral relations of that country with Russia and their cooperation in the United Nations. Keeping the above in view, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan voted against the Resolution and in favour of Russia, while Turkmenistan, as before, did not exercise its right to vote.

It would be evident from the above that under normal circumstances, these countries would endeavour to safeguard their independence and sovereignty but when push comes to shove, they

would fall in line with Russia and would not do anything to annoy or rile Russia. In both the above votes, Turkmenistan did not exercise its franchise taking refuge behind its status of permanent neutrality recognised by the UN.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan enjoys the world’s longest land border with Russia of more than 7,000 kms. About 25% of the Kazakh population comprises of people of Russian origin. This number was considerably higher when the country became independent in 1991. Soon after Kazakhstan became free, rumours were rife that its Russian origin population, based in the north of the country along the Russia-Kazakhstan border, wanted to become a part of Russia as they felt they had little in common with the people and culture of Kazakhstan. It was to nip such chatter and tendencies in the bud, that the then President Nursultan Nazarbayev decided to shift the capital from the more salubrious climate of Almaty to the severe and freezing terrain of Astana (currently Nur-Sultan) in the north of the country, adjacent to the Russia-Kazakh border.

Kazakhstan could have been expected to be grateful to Russia for the support it provided under the aegis of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) when unforeseen violence gripped the country on 2 January 2022 because of a steep hike in the price of LPG. About 12,000 people were arrested and 240 were killed. CSTO under Russia responded with great alacrity to send troops to restore peace, stability and order in Kazakhstan.

Notwithstanding the above consideration, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of Kazakhstan, in an article in “The National Interest” on 4th April, 2022, (The National Interest; 4th April, 2022; Turbulence Across Eurasia Will Not Slow Kazakhstan’s Progress; Kassym-Jomart Tokayev) wrote: “As states that share the longest border in the world, Kazakhstan and Russia enjoy special relations of mutual cooperation. Meanwhile we also have deep traditions of friendly relations with Ukraine. We respect its territorial integrity—as the overwhelming majority of the world does. We hope for a swift and just resolution of the conflict in accordance with UN Charter.”

This comment by Kazakhstan’s President is indicative of an independent, autonomous stand that is far removed from that of Russia on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Kazakh Foreign Minister Mukhtar Tileuberdi said (The Conversation; 11th April, 2022; “Ukraine conflict: Kazakhstan’s difficult balancing act between need for Russian support and popular opposition to the war”; Bhavna Dave) that Kazakhstan does not recognise districts in Ukraine’s eastern regions of Luhansk and Donetsk controlled by Russia-backed separatists as independent. He added that “it is important that our territory (Kazakhstan) is not used to evade sanctions.”²²

Timur Suleimenov, the first deputy chief of staff to President Tokayev said during his visit to Brussels (Ukrinform; 1st April, 2022; “Kazakhstan won’t be tool to circumvent sanctions against Russia, top Kazakh official says”) that Kazakhstan is keen to expand cooperation with the EU and the West despite the Western sanctions on Russia. Suleimenov said that Kazakhstan will continue to

invest in Russia and attract investment from Russia, because “there is no way for our economy to do it differently. However, he added “Kazakhstan will not be a tool for circumventing US and EU sanctions against Russia. We will comply with the sanctions. Although we are part of the Economic Union with Russia, Belarus and other countries, we are also part of the international community. Therefore, the last thing we want is for Kazakhstan to be subject to secondary sanctions by the US and the EU...Kazakhstan respects the territorial integrity of Ukraine. We have not recognised and do not recognise either the situation with Crimea or the situation with Donbass, because the UN does not recognise them. We will only respect decisions made at the level of the United Nations.”

Kazakhstan’s Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Roman Vassilenko, in a meeting with the EU, emphasised the importance of minimising or preventing the negative effects of EU’s sanctions against Russia on trade and economic relations between Kazakhstan and EU. He added: “European companies are leaving Russia either due to sanctions or due to pressure from the public, from shareholders and ethical reasons. They want to be somewhere in the neighbourhood, and we would like to be that neighbour.” He said in an interview that Kazakhstan did not want to become a collateral victim of politically motivated economic warfare and if “there is a new iron curtain, we do not want to be behind it.”

In addition to performing a diplomatic tightrope walk, Kazakh authorities are also keen to balance opposing local passions surrounding the war. The exchanges on social media have been vicious. An anti-war gathering in Almaty on March 6 was

attended by around 2-3000 people who sang Ukrainian songs and hurled invective at Putin. (Eurasianet; 4th April, 2022; ‘‘Kazakhstan seeks to thread diplomatic needle over Russia’s Ukraine war’’; Chris Rickleton) These are big numbers by Kazakh standards, where permission for rallies is granted on an arbitrary basis, despite official claims to the contrary.

In March, Kazakhstan denied a request from Moscow to provide troops for the offensive in Ukraine. (Euractiv; 2nd March, 2022, Georgi Gotev; ‘‘Kazakhstan takes distance from Russia’s Ukraine war.’’) The import of several of the above comments/actions was however sought to be attenuated by the telephone call from President Putin to Tokayev on 2nd April. (Kazinform; 3rd April, 2022; ‘‘President Tokayev had telephone conversation with Vladimir Putin’’) According to a readout by Kazakhstan on this conversation, the two men expressed ‘‘a common understanding on the exceptional importance of reaching agreements on a neutral, non-bloc, non-nuclear status of Ukraine.’’ These are among the demands made by Moscow in the ongoing talks to bring closure to the war in Ukraine.

It would appear that Putin has realised the limits up to which he can pressurise Kazakhstan and some other Central Asian states to support his position. As the Western sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine start to bite, more than 300 U.S. companies are pulling out of Russia to relocate their regional headquarters. Kazakhstan could be the ideal choice, both from the economic and geo-strategic perspective (The Hill; 30th March, 2022; ‘‘Washington’s potential hidden ace in rift with Russia: Kazakhstan’’; Sasha Toperich and Debra

Cagan). Kazakh oil production fell in March amid export problems from the Black Sea Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) terminal. (Nasdaq; 4th April, 2022; ‘‘Kazakhstan oil output down in March, Chevron leads the fall -sources Reuters). This fall was because of lower intake in the CPC system owing to storm damage to loading facilities at its terminal near Russian port of Novorossiysk.

Kazakhstan reduced its oil output forecast for 2022 and dramatically trimmed its projection for economic growth in fresh evidence of the damage being wrought by the impact of Russia’s war on Ukraine. The country now expects to pump 85.7 million tons of crude in 2022, which is 1.8 million tons less than had been projected earlier. (Eurasianet; 5th April, 2022; Almaz Kumenov; ‘‘Kazakhstan sees economy slowed down by Russia’s war.’’) The government downgraded its economic growth forecast for this year from 3.9% to 2.1%. Kazakhstan will utilise its National Fund for a further 1.63 trillion tenge (USD 3.5 billion) this year to finance additional spending. Kazakhstan was looking forward to a sustained period of buoyancy following the 2.6% contraction in GDP experienced in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic growth bounced back to 4% in 2021 – a rate the authorities would not be able to maintain in the current year.

Uzbekistan

The response by Uzbekistan, as in the case of Kazakhstan, has been a carefully guarded policy of neutrality. This was laid out in March 2022 by the then-Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov in remarks to the Uzbek Senate. He said that while Tashkent wanted to maintain good relations with

both Moscow and Kyiv, it opposed the war. Kamilov said that Uzbekistan does not recognise the pro-Russian separatist-controlled districts in Ukraine's Donbas, known as the Donetsk and Luhansk "people's republics." He called for a "peaceful solution" to resolve the conflict "by diplomatic means" and that violence must be stopped right away. He said that Uzbekistan recognised Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Kamilov echoed Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's position that Uzbekistan will not join any military bloc or deploy its forces abroad. Mirziyoyev's administration maintains that Tashkent's "stand on the war is firm" and that neutrality is its mantra.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has driven an exodus of IT specialists to former regions of the Soviet Union. Uzbekistan wants to capitalise on this opportunity to speed up plans to modernise its economy best known for its vast production of cotton. It took only one day after Russia's February 24 invasion of Ukraine for Uzbekistan to launch a one-stop government relocation programme for IT specialists and companies. Offering visas, housing and child care support to individuals, and registration assistance and tax exemptions to companies, the programme has already attracted several thousand foreign IT specialists. The Russian Association of Electronic Communications, a lobby group, said on March 22 that 50,000 to 70,000 specialists had left Russia and up to 100,000 more may follow³.

Some Uzbek policymakers have stated on condition of anonymity that it is their fear of Russia that makes them adopt the position that they do. They are afraid that they will be left alone to fend

for themselves if Russia were to take any hostile action against them. That fear has led the government to maintain a tight rein on public reporting about the war. State media do not attempt independent coverage but simply repeat official positions. Private outlets in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan⁴, appear to have faced strict official scrutiny when they attempted to analyse the conflict objectively or question the war. In Uzbekistan, it was reported that several reporters, editors and bloggers were called in by the State Security Service because of their coverage of Ukraine. Government officials say such measures are necessary to combat misinformation and disinformation but deny that independent media are being silenced.

Uzbekistan ceased export of Chevrolet vehicles to Russia since 9 March 2022. It makes vehicles under GM's Chevrolet brand. These cars contain semiconductors and microchips manufactured in South Korea, which has joined Western sanctions to punish Russia for its invasion of Ukraine⁵.

Remittance from Russia to Central Asia

One of the most significant factors that some Central Asian countries have to contend with is their reliance on remittances from several million of their nationals working in Russia. Remittances sent by labor migrants have an overwhelming significance for families in these countries that are supported by these funds. These accounted for 11.6% of Uzbekistan's gross domestic product in 2020. The figures for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were even higher, at 31% and 27% respectively. Due to the damage to the Russian economy as a

result of the western sanctions, the income of the Central Asian labourers has been severely impacted⁶. This would mean lesser chances of sending home remittances and greater possibility of reverse migration in search of livelihood. The World Bank estimates that the value of remittances from Russia would drop in the case of Uzbekistan by 21%, in Tajikistan by 22%, and by 33% in Kyrgyzstan.

According to latest estimates, remittances to Kyrgyzstan are the most dependent on Russia. Last year (January-September 2021), the share of remittances from Russia constituted 83% of all remittances to Kyrgyzstan. The same statistics for Tajikistan and Uzbekistan indicate less dependence on Russia: 58% of all remittances to Tajikistan and 55% of all remittances to Uzbekistan came from Russia. In absolute dollar amounts, remittances from Russia to Uzbekistan are the highest compared to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, given the greater number of Uzbeks travelling abroad for work, a product of the country's vastly larger population. In 2020, Uzbekistan migrants remitted USD 7 billion, Kyrgyz migrants USD 2.4 billion, and Tajik migrants USD 2.2 billion.

Migrants who lost jobs in Russia and whose earnings have been devalued have started returning to Central Asia. Tashkent reported 133,000 returned migrants from Russia in the first quarter of the year. Dushanbe reported 60,337 returned migrants from Russia in the same period, which was 2.6 times more compared to the same period in 2021. Polls conducted among Central Asian migrants a month after Russia's invasion to Ukraine indicated that around 40% of migrants from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan were ready to return

home after losing jobs or income. That share is probably similar for Tajik migrants as well.

Trade

Another area where Central Asian countries are affected by Russia's economic troubles is trade. For Uzbekistan (using 2020 data) Russia is the second largest export partner, accounting for 12.5% of exports and 21% of imports. Inevitably, Russia's economic difficulties will push Uzbekistan to seek other markets to sell and buy, but these adjustments will take time. For Tajikistan, Russia is not a big export market but it is Tajikistan's second largest import partner. For Kyrgyzstan, 21.8% of imports come from Russia.

The ongoing crisis in Ukraine can adversely impact on the region's food security. On 10 March 2022, Russia temporarily banned the export of white sugar and grain crops to the Eurasian Economic Union countries. This spelt gloom for Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries. Post the ban on export on Russian grains, Kazakh authorities decided to ban wheat exports. This step was designed to protect the domestic production and supply and to ensure that there was no shortage and no protests.

Kazakhstan's decision to ban wheat exports was bad news for its Central Asian neighbours, which get about 90% of their wheat imports from Kazakhstan. One of the world's major wheat growers, Kazakhstan also imports relatively inexpensive wheat from Russia to use domestically and to resell its own more expensive wheat to other countries. The Kazakh Agriculture Ministry decided to limit wheat and flour exports to 1 million tons and 300,000 tons, respectively, for three

months starting April 15. Russia said it was suspending wheat, rye, barley, and maize exports until June 30 to “protect the domestic food market in the face of external constraints.” Tajikistan annually buys nearly 1 million tons of wheat from Kazakhstan, which accounts for up to 94 percent of Dushanbe’s grain imports. Kyrgyzstan gets about 40% of its imported wheat from Kazakhstan. Bishkek’s main grain supplier is Russia.

IMF has stated that rising prices for food, energy and other goods could trigger social unrest, particularly in vulnerable developing countries. Reduced supplies of oil, gas and metals produced by Russia, and wheat and corn – produced by both Russia and Ukraine – have driven up prices sharply *inter alia* in Central Asia and were particularly hurting lower-income households. Russia’s political and economic isolation is a chance for other interested players and stake-holders to enhance their forays in Central Asia. Among others, USA, Europe, China, Turkey, India, Iran etc. have a high possibility of increasing their presence and influence in the region.

Options for India

With every passing day, the Central Asian countries are feeling increasingly disillusioned and disenchanted with Russia’s actions and continuation of the war. In many countries of Central Asia, there is also growing unhappiness amongst the common people with policies of China in the political, economic and social sphere. Central Asia is looking for new reliable, trustworthy and supportive partners in political, strategic, economic, connectivity, counter-terrorism etc. spheres. India eminently fits the bill. It will be mutually beneficial

to significantly enhance our engagement with Central Asian nations by embarking on a regular series of visits at political, official, media, business etc. level to all these countries, particularly to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

It needs to be remembered that in the ongoing controversy regarding Nupur Sharma, not one of the Central Asian countries have made any comment against India. This statesmanlike behaviour of Central Asia needs to be recognised and applauded and all efforts made to further expand and strengthen our partnership with them. The next Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will take place in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on 15-16 September, 2022. It will be eminently useful if PM Modi could attend this Summit. He has attended all the earlier SCO Summits, the last being in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in 2019, before the pandemic started. PM Modi enjoys a close rapport with the Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. This visit will further cement the strong bonds of partnership with Uzbekistan as well as with other Central Asian countries.

The next Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), a Grouping launched by former Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev at the UNGA in 1992, will be held in Nur-Sultan (formerly Astana) in Oct, 2022. It will be eminently desirable for bilateral ties with Kazakhstan as well as with the Region if PM Modi or some senior Indian leader were to participate actively in the forthcoming Summit. 2022 represents the 30th anniversary of the establishment of CICA. PM Atal Behari Vajpayee had attended the first CICA Summit in Almaty in 2002.

The last India-Central Asia Dialogue was organised by EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar in December 2021 in New Delhi. It would send out the correct message about India's continued interest in and engagement with the region if the next Summit

could be hold during 2022 in either Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan is ruled out because the first meeting was held in Samarkand in 2019. This initiative will go a long way in advancing India's interests in this part of our extended neighbourhood.

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The War in Ukraine: Impact on South Asia

Anil Trigunayat*

The Russia-Ukraine war erupted on 24 February 2022 when the world was still struggling with severe adverse impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic. The twin impact has convoluted the already feeble and transitional world order marked by several hotspots, unstable and failed regimes, climate change, terrorism and radicalisation, protectionism and ultra-nationalism, failed aspirations of the masses and geo-political, geo-economic and geo-religious contestations across the global spectrum. Sino-US and US-Russian rivalries are taking the international order to the bottom of the pit thereby creating havoc in the value and supply chains as well as inducing existential threats to peace, development and the sheer viability of the international liberal economic system which has been repeatedly knocked adversely, at least since the 2008 financial crisis later compounded by several wars and the pandemic. South Asia, with its huge developmental challenges and ongoing politico-economic challenges is no exception. Ukraine War has deepened that crisis even more.

Speaking at the Davos Economic Forum, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned of famine and a hunger “catastrophe,” as he accused Russia of blocking grain exports from his war-torn country — which the U.S. has described

as an effort “to break the spirit of the Ukrainian people.” Accusing Russian forces of blocking his country from exporting 22 million tonnes of food products and cereals including wheat, barley, sunflower and more. Russia, on the other hand, has blockaded the Black Sea ports of Crimea and Odessa, which has provided it with a negotiating leverage as it demands a quid pro quo through the lifting of crippling sanctions against Moscow when Putin even claimed that world oil prices could go up to USD 300 a barrel. Nearly every part of the world has been impacted by the **3F crisis i.e. food, fuel and fertilisers.**

As the 4th month of this devastating war continues, its end does not appear to be on the horizon but collateral damage is far too visible on a daily basis for the developing countries which have nothing to do with it. The unique features of this war in the 21st century have clearly been weaponisation of financial instruments by the West through unprecedented sanctions against Russia; weaponisation of food and fuel by Russia especially against the Europeans as it tries to salvage and blunt the severe economic impact of its geo-political contestation with USA. Surge in fuel and food prices are impinging on the daily lives of the people from the most developed countries to the least developed ones. US has the highest inflation in

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decades, with Europe following suit. UK is struggling with the lowest standards of living after the post second World War times. Russian economy will have long term impact. Public disquiet and discontent are on the rise and may have damaging repercussions not only for the economy but also on domestic politics, especially of democracies. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations said in April that “Russia’s war on Ukraine was mostly responsible for the 17.1% rise in the price of wheat, barley, corn and other grains”.

USA and the Biden Administration which is being accused of precipitating this war and crisis continues with its policies of pumping in arms and propping up the Ukrainian government despite the ensuing destruction and displacement of more than seven million Ukrainian refugees. At a U.N. Security Council meeting on May 19, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, accused Russia of weaponising food and holding grain hostage “to break the spirit of the Ukrainian people.” Blinken accused Russia of seeking to control Ukraine’s ports and access to the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov since launching its invasion in February, calling it a “deliberate effort” to shut down shipping and block any safe passage.¹

The devastating impact of this avoidable war is being felt all across the developing world. The impact in South Asia is visible in terms of economic turmoil as also in the political domain. Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Maldives and Afghanistan have particularly suffered while India, Bhutan and Bangladesh have fared better. But the adverse impact is there for all to see, since most regional economies are dependent on the 3F

imports. Combined with devastating impact of the pandemic, the current situation continues to worsen especially in countries of South Asia which are heavily dependent on imports of costly energy. Several economies like Maldives and Sri Lanka, which were dependent on tourism, have their own tales of woes to tell.

Observers estimate that the impact of the Ukraine war on South Asia will be far more and be felt longer than the adverse impact of the Covid 19 pandemic as it is directly affecting the logistics and standard and essential supplies from the same very sources. Trade linkages will be affected and that is being witnessed nearly on a daily basis as Russia squeezes the Ukrainian exports through the ports and otherwise while its own exports have come under severest sanctions. This is causing a major problem for many smaller countries in South Asia in continuing with business as usual for fear of provoking the American ire and secondary sanctions. But, as the sanctions are impacting in equal or greater measure the imposers themselves let alone the developing world, the stress in adopting more of the same approach would be difficult to sustain in the long run. Russia is claiming that the sanctions have not affected it. On the contrary, Russia has profited from its oil and gas sector due to increased prices and sales both to China, Europe, India and elsewhere. Efforts by the Europeans to wean away from the Russian oil and gas will take a while but their increasingly hostile stance could create greater opportunity for the Russians to deal with countries in South Asia and elsewhere on a bilateral basis and enable them to enhance and expand their trade basket. It is already visible with India which had refused to condemn the Russian

aggression and even is looking to enhance its trade ties and imports of oil at discounted prices as the Russians continue to offer the same at competitive prices. Michael Kugelman avers that ‘Russia doesn’t currently have a deep footprint in the smaller South Asian states, but it has explored some trade and investment, especially in the energy sectors in Nepal and Bangladesh and in Sri Lanka tea, of which it is a major importer.’²

There has been umpteen instance where the impact of sanctions has been mixed and often dubious as countries find alternative means of survival. Gaddafi’s Libya was under huge sanctions but their access through Malta and Tunisia not only helped them wade through but also helped the economies of those countries. Similar trade diversion was observed when the United States imposed sanctions against Iran. Iran shifted to trading with some European and Middle Eastern countries, while India and China conducted barter trade with Iran, exchanging crude oil for food. But such benefits may not be sufficient to offset the cost of higher commodity prices and lower external demand for South Asian countries claims Nandalal Weerasinghe, former Senior Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka³. He further argues that the direct impact on South Asia will mainly occur through trade linkages, particularly through rising commodity prices as the region is a net importer of commodities. Even before the invasion, inflation in South Asian economies was rising relative to competitors in global markets. The additional shock in commodity prices will further widen the gap, increasing the relative cost of production in the region and eroding the competitiveness of cheap labour and energy-

intensive industries. Moreover, lower global demand for goods and services from the region and increased volatility and uncertainty in financial markets leading to capital flight to safety will indirectly impact the region. **The solution therefore is to resolve the crisis at the earliest.**

Another major problem facing the world including South Asia, has been that of irreversible climate change. Summits after summits and COP26 targets may all go into a spin as the energy security at any cost becomes a major challenge for all the countries. Constrained supplies due to sanctions at a high cost will have unprecedented impact on economies and political approaches. Ordinarily, the countries would seek to diversify their sources of energy through renewables, such as nuclear energy, hydro power, wind and tidal energy and green hydrogen. But now countries are resorting to greater use of coal and hydrocarbons, which will impact on global warming and may decelerate the desired objectives set out with much fanfare. On the other hand, the developed world might speed up its quest for alternate sources including renewables but for the resource restrained developing world the options will become further limited. One could, in the short term, witness ‘energy hegemonism’ acquiring greater salience leading to further carbonisation of the climate.

The Russia–Ukraine war is a wake-up call, not only for Europe but for all countries needing secure energy and food sources. Sky-high energy costs have led countries to realise that they can no longer depend on imported fossil fuels, which may drive a shift away from fossil fuels altogether.

Writing on the issue, Han Phoumin, a senior

energy economist at ERIA (Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia) stated that the International Energy Agency issued 10 measures to reduce the European Union's reliance on Russian natural gas imports⁴. These included jumpstarting renewable wind and solar projects and maximising energy generation from existing low-emissions sources such as bioenergy and nuclear power.⁵ It would be useful to see how the adverse economic impact is being handled by some countries in South Asia.

India

India is the largest and fastest growing economy in the region and has perhaps the greatest resilience with strong democratic foundations. It has handled the pandemic very effectively not only producing its own vaccine in record time but also provided the vaccine to the world, starting with her neighbours in the spirit of 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam'. In addition, India swiftly addressed the economic downturn, caused due to pandemic, through ongoing economic and structural reforms as well as pro-business policies and financial incentives embedded in the Production Linked Schemes (PLI). At the same time, the country remained focussed on the "Atmanirbhar (Self-reliance with a global outlook) campaign underwritten by 'Make in India for the world' and 'Local for Global' approaches to develop and secure regional and global value supply chains. Little wonder then, that India is being projected as the fastest growing major economy in the world with both the IMF and World Bank predicting India's GDP growth to be between 7.5 to 8%. The Ukraine war has no doubt impacted cyclically on

the pace to a great extent as the fuel prices have hit the roof, leading to inflation and higher cost of living. But happily, India has been following the energy diversification policies for quite some time now and has acquitted itself creditably, especially in the renewable and solar energy sectors aiming to reach 500GW by 2030. But given the fact that India has 1/6th of the world's population, her demands are equally gigantic and challenges immense. Despite her own compulsions, India has emerged as a first responder in the region in any crisis.

India supplies oil and gas to Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Maldives, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and others and has extended substantial lines of credit, grants and finance facilities to these countries to import food, fuel and fertilisers to cope with their economic challenges. Smaller economies, whose capacities and market size are not so developed, are bearing to a far greater extent the brunt of both the pandemic and the Ukraine war and do need urgent help as the politico-economic crisis threatens their social fabric.

In the Russia-Ukraine conflict, India has maintained a principled position and has abstained on an unprecedented dozen resolutions in the UN. It continues to work for early cessation of hostilities and professes peace, dialogue and diplomacy within the ambit of UN Charter as it continues to provide humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. While enjoying the Global Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with USA and Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership with Russia, India has still maintained a principled stance in the quest for global peace and in her enlightened national interest.

On the other hand, India has called out the hypocrisy and unilateralism of sanctions by the US

and Europe when they expressed their displeasure against India for importing even a little bit of oil from Russia. But India has not budged from its position and gave a fitting response when External Affairs Minister Dr Jaishankar retorted at a press conference on the side-lines of 2+2 dialogue (April 13, 22) in the US: “If you are looking at energy purchases from Russia, I would suggest that your attention should be focused on Europe... We do buy some energy which is necessary for our energy security. But I suspect, looking at the figures, probably our total purchases for the month would be less than what Europe does in an afternoon. So, you might want to think about that.” Again, while in Europe (June 5 Slovakia) he reiterated that if Europe manages to procure oil and gas from Russia in a way to ensure that the impact on its economy is not traumatic, that freedom should exist for others as well. India’s decisions will be guided by her energy security needs and not by the opinion of others.

Sri Lanka

Situation in Sri Lanka cannot be uniquely attributed to the Russia-Ukraine war, as the crisis in Sri Lanka is the result of a cumulative impact of bad policy decisions, accrual of non-performing assets, crippling and unproductive Chinese debt, political corruption, pandemic and extremist events. A further stimulus by the Eurasian situation can create havoc. In March 2022, the inflation rate in Sri Lanka stood at over twenty percent, with the island nation also experiencing power cuts of over 12-15 hours due to non-availability of fuel. In addition, there were crippling shortages of food and medicine. Civil war in such situations is

assumes high probability. Wrath of the masses and continued demonstrations often turned violent against the Rajapaksa Government, further accentuating the political and economic crisis. Sri Lanka, which used to get large numbers of Russian and Ukrainian tourists felt the immediate brunt of the war and its hopes of reviving the tourist inflows fell prey to the queer combination of external war and internal strife. Foreign cash inflows from tourism, which were in the region of USD four to seven billion dwindled considerably, causing further economic stress, unemployment and popular discontent.

India has tried its best to rescue the Sri Lankan situation by providing lines of credit and deferring debt repayments to the tune of over USD 4 billion, while urgently supplying relief materials including food, fuel, fertilisers and medicines to help the people of Sri Lanka and stabilise the situation there. However, the extent and intensity of the impact is far too insidious to be turned around in a short term. The intervention of IMF, World Bank and the international community as well as improvement in external environment are a prerequisite over which the Sri Lankans have little control.

Afghanistan

Since the 2020 departure of US military forces from Afghanistan, leaving the Afghan people high and dry to the mercy of Taliban, the country has remained unstable economically and politically. The world was slow to respond to their urgent needs while the pandemic raged. Even worse, the impact of the Ukraine war was that Afghanistan fell from the global radar and remained a pariah state leading to greater isolation, which has caused further deterioration in the lives of the Afghan people. India,

despite the initial set back, has come forward to help the people of Afghanistan through providing food supplies and critical medicines and has been requested by the Taliban government to restart various projects. A team visited Afghanistan in early June 2022, to assess the ground situation. In this connection a MEA Press Release recounted “it may be recalled that in response to the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people, India decided to extend humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people. In this endeavour, we have already dispatched several shipments of humanitarian assistance consisting of 20,000 MTs of wheat, 13 tons of medicines, 500,000 doses of COVID vaccine and winter clothing. These consignments were handed over to the Indira Gandhi Children Hospital, Kabul and UN specialised agencies including WHO and WFP. Furthermore, India is in the process of shipping more medical assistance and food grains to Afghanistan.”⁶ In continuation of India’s developmental partnership with Afghanistan, India has gifted one million doses of India-made COVAXIN to Iran to administer to Afghan refugees in Iran. India has also assisted UNICEF by supplying almost 60 million doses of polio vaccine and two tons of essential medicines.⁷ The Taliban has highly appreciated India’s goodwill gestures and humanitarian assistance⁸.

Pakistan

Pakistan’s polity and economy have also been under tremendous stress with debt levels rising and poverty levels and cost of living increasing which have caused tremendous political discontent in the country. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan, in a rush to endear Russia, was at odds when he visited

Moscow as soon as the invasion of Ukraine began. Pakistan depends a great deal on food and fuel imports hence the war had a direct impact due to high costs and limiting availability. It had maintained good relations with Ukraine in defence sector and was getting wheat and other supplies from there which were impacted immediately. As the Pakistani premier failed to manage the economy, the pandemic as also Pakistan’s foreign policy, he was forced out of office by the opposition, nudged by the deep state and military, which had decided that it was time for him to go. But the situation continues to worsen as structural issues combined with denial of the doles from Gulf monarchies are yet to be addressed. Even China, which had often paid up with increasing debt portfolio of Pakistan has also begun to understand the limitations of backing the wrong horse. Islamabad has this uncanny ability to encash its nuisance value to the fullest, especially with regard to major powers like the US, Russia and China by playing the Kabul card. But for how long is the moot question.

Pakistan’s all-weather ally China along with nations like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are cautious towards disbursing loans to the crisis-hit nation, Bloomberg reported.⁹ It quoted Pakistan finance minister Miftah Ismail that China, Saudi and the UAE urged Pakistan to speak first with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). “We went to Saudi Arabia, Dubai and spoke to other countries—they are ready to give money, but all of them say we need to go to the IMF first”¹⁰. It will be recalled that to tide over its fuel and financing issues, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif rushed to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi immediately after taking over. His foreign Minister

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari went to China and Turkey. Islamabad is mulling over buying wheat from Moscow, defying the US and western sanctions.

After fuel & power crisis, debt-laden Pakistan is grappling with major wheat supply disruption. Prime Minister Sharif slammed the chief minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province over the cost of 10 kg. wheat flour bag. Sharif said, 10 kg wheat flour bag cost shouldn't exceed PKR 400, else "I'd sell clothes to ensure cheap grain". Pakistan's wheat stocks will further slide due to mid-march heatwave, unavailability & high cost of fertilisers & water scarcity.¹¹ A lot of it is directly attributable to the Russia-Ukraine war, as imports become more burdensome.

Nepal

Nepal has been facing a political crisis that has economic moorings worsened by the pandemic. At the UNGA, Nepal supported the US resolution against Russia stating that it believed in territorial integrity to be 'sacrosanct'. Of late, US has become far more interested and influential in South Asian region especially Nepal, as its Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC with a \$500 million grant for infra projects) finally was able to make a head start. Soon after the UN vote on the Ukraine war, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on the phone and thanked him for his government's decisions to endorse the MCC and the UN resolution¹². But Kathmandu fears that huge developmental aid may get reduced due to war apart from the direct impact of the rising prices of commodities and fuel. Nepal imports more than 40% of its consumer requirements and 100% of

its fuel needs. Its foreign exchange reserves are declining as the remittances have also reduced from the 3-4 million expat Nepalis. Like other countries, the Nepali students in Ukraine also had an adverse impact. Its tourism sector has been impacted due to pandemic and now war impinging on foreign exchange situation. Nepal would find it difficult to overcome the domino effect.

A divisive geo-political context:

Although adverse economic impact of the Ukraine war is clearly evident in a real time manner, what was of no less significant importance was the reactions and approaches of the South Asian governments at the UNGA and other international organisations where western countries went in a missionary mode to force and persuade countries to condemn the Russian aggression. The resolution also demanded that Russia immediately, completely, and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders¹³. South Asian reaction was instructive and was nearly evenly divided. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka abstained on the UNGA resolution while Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan and Maldives went along with the US led resolution. Like Myanmar, the Afghan UN Representative was of the previous government but Taliban advised both sides to exercise restraint. It does reflect the underlying concerns of the Asian countries who are badly impacted domestically and would rather not get embroiled in the geopolitical contestation between USA and Russia. Despite consistent western pressure, India, exercising her strategic autonomy, singularly held on to her principled position and

abstained 12 times at the UN on various resolutions while decrying the invasion and humanitarian catastrophe caused by the war.

Exercising her strategic autonomy in the War and otherwise, India will take a lead and regain its relationships with the neighbours as a substantial first responder. While In Slovakia (June 22) FM Dr S Jaishankar reiterated that India would not accept any “construct” based on choosing between a Western camp and a Russia-China camp, adding that India was entitled to make its choices after examining the issues “This is the construct that you are trying to impose on me and I don’t accept it... My choices will not be cynical or transactional. There will be a balance of my values and my interests. There is no country in the world that disregards its interests. I am not sitting on the

fence. I am sitting on my ground. The world cannot be that Eurocentric as it used to be in the past.”¹⁴

No doubt, the impact of the Eurasian crisis is causing higher inflation, high input costs with economic deprivation resulting in lower economic growth which might lead to stagflation and recession at a later stage if the War continues for few more months. Excessive sanctions on Russia and the policy choices it will make will have a direct impact on the South Asian economies among others, but the extent will be relative to their economic linkages with Russia and Ukraine. The negative political fallout of the worsening economic situation will have to be carefully watched. Perhaps is time for the most disconnected South Asia to work on regional connectivity and mutually beneficial dependencies.

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The Politics of Oil: Changing Geopolitical Alliances in West Asia

CA Krishnan*

West Asia has been a cradle of civilisation as well as birthplace of the Abrahamic religions and oldest known empires. Its strategic location at the junction of Asia, Africa and Europe combined with the world's largest oil deposits gives it a dominant position in global geopolitics. Over 92% of the population in the region follow Islam. Maritime choke points of Suez Canal, Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Turkish Strait lie within the region. A third of the global oil and about 16% of world's natural gas today comes from West Asia. Notwithstanding its huge oil assets, West Asia has remained a cauldron of turmoil arising out of the deep Shia-Sunni rift, terrorism, incessant sectarian conflicts, tussle for Islamic world's leadership and global power-play.

During first half of the twentieth century, a cartel of seven integrated Western oil companies, the 'seven sisters', controlled the oil fields and oil markets across the world. They, in turn, also exercised control over the oil producing countries and their politics¹. Very little of the wealth generated was shared with the host countries. These oil companies exercising immense power, often acted as instruments of their parent countries. After decades of being exploited, in 1960, governments of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq

and Venezuela came together and formed the OPEC (Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) seeking a say in issues related to the oil being extracted from their countries. OPEC, today, influences global oil prices by controlling its volume in the market. Although OPEC member countries hold 81% of the world's proven oil reserves, as of now, they account for only about 40% of world's oil production². US, Russia, Canada, Mexico, Brazil and Norway are major non-OPEC oil producers. In 1974, the advanced oil consuming economies formed IEA (International Energy Agency) to represent their interests. IEA member nations are required to store the equivalent of at least 90 days' worth of oil, based on their previous year's net oil imports so as to retain a collective capacity to respond to major unforeseen supply disruptions³.

Politics of oil encapsulates many dimensions such as control of production and cost, supply chains, security of the oil fields, regional security and the global geopolitical scenario. 'Oil for Security' is a common arrangement in the region. It is an arrangement where oil producing countries are provided protection in exchange for oil related benefits. Security cover provided to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE and Qatar are examples.

US is the biggest oil producer in the world today. 65% of its oil production in 2021 came from

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shale oil extraction. The average break-even cost of oil extracted from new US shale oil wells is believed to be between USD 46 to USD 58 per barrel, with the lowest being about USD 30 and the highest going up to USD 90 in some cases⁴. In comparison, the cheapest oil from Saudi Arabia's 'conventional' deposits cost under USD 10 and the average production cost of oil from onshore fields in West Asia is about USD 31 per barrel. As a consequence, shale oil firms operate under very little price margins and often slip into unprofitable zone. This factor plays a lesser known, but important role in the politics of oil.

Another important dimension of the global oil market is the petrodollar system. Petrodollar system requires countries which need to buy oil to trade in USD only. This keeps the dollar in high demand. It also ensures demand for US treasury bills, provides a steady stream of credit for US government and gives certain degree of protection to the USD from inflation⁵. Although baby steps to move away or at least diversify from using dollar as the sole currency for foreign trade are visible, creating an alternative would be no easy task. As of now, USD accounts for about 80% of all global foreign exchange transactions, which is a whopping USD 6.6 trillion a day⁶. In comparison, Saudi Arabia's oil sales to China and India in 2021 amounted to USD 8.2 billion and 3.1 billion respectively.⁷ At an average price of USD 100 per barrel, the pre-Covid level global oil exports of about 70 million barrels per day would generate an annual global petrodollar supply of about USD 2.5 trillion⁸. To pose any significant challenge to USD, there has to be a major shift away from using dollars by a much larger number of countries. EU's aspiration for

non-dollar trade was evident from its attempt to establish INSTEX (Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges) for trade with Iran⁹. Limited non-dollar oil trade is being carried out between Saudi-China, Russia-China, India-Iran, India-Russia etc. Considering the US dollar's extensive use, well established credentials and deep roots, the petrodollar system is unlikely to face any major threat in the near future¹⁰.

Oil accounts for 33% of global energy demand followed by coal at about 27%. Oil's dominant position combined with limited sources, problems of storage and the petrodollar dynamics gives oil a dictating status in geopolitics. Energy security and energy independence are also issues which cast shadows on the politics of oil. Energy security implies secure supplies at stable prices regardless of the source. Energy independence, on the other hand implies either self-sufficiency or restricting energy dependency only on certain preferred suppliers by carefully excluding 'unfavourable' regions, avoiding certain vulnerable modes of transportation, routes etc. For example, China would prefer a source like Russia whose supply cannot be interdicted at sea. Energy independence may imply paying a higher price¹¹.

Natural gas with its close linkages to oil, accounts for about 23% of global energy mix¹². While oil markets are global in nature, markets for natural gas are generally regional. This is because transportation by pipelines is the preferred option for natural gas to avoid the need to first liquify it and reconvert into gas later. EU's heavy dependency on Russia for natural gas is a consequence of this. This phenomenon also restricts the supplier's flexibility to switch

customers because gas contracts typically lock-in longterm price, factoring in amortisation of the cost of pipeline and its maintenance.

Ukraine crisis has further increased the global dependency on West Asia for oil. Coming so close on the heels of the pandemic, it has wrecked the global economy. The crisis has cast its complex shadow on West Asia also. Oil exporting countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait and Oman are reaping windfall of the energy price hike and are well placed to meet the impact of Ukraine war. But Supply chain disruptions in oil, gas, food grains, edible oil and fertilisers are causing havoc in terms of price hike, inflation and food security on the “fragile and conflict-affected” countries like Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya and Lebanon. They confront very negative consequences and are staring at runaway inflation, severe food insecurity and worsening humanitarian crisis¹³.

The Saudi-Iran struggle for dominance, exacerbated by the Shia-Sunni divide, lies at the centre of West Asia’s problems. Saudi and its supporters apprehend Iran trying to establish a land corridor extending from Iran to the Mediterranean¹⁴. Foot prints of the two rivals are clearly visible in conflicts raging across the region. External forces led by US are also in the fray in the Saudi-Iran rivalry. The latest US State Department briefings indicate that while there is a general belief that Iran has enough enriched material for making nuclear weapons, US and its partners are working hard to get Iran to agree to a “mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA”¹⁵. Iran seems closer than ever to becoming a nuclear power. Ukraine’s plight in the ongoing crisis would only have strengthened Iran’s resolve to go nuclear.

If it indeed happens that way, Saudi, Israel and UAE may feel compelled to follow suit, making it difficult to visualise how events will pan out in such a scenario. Saudi Arabia is subjected to constant threat by Iran backed Houthi rebels. Saudi blames Iran for cyber-attacks and subversion of its Shia population. They also feel threatened by pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and radical Sunni elements of ISIS. Iran’s missile and unmanned aerial vehicle capability covers the whole of Saudi Arabia. Saudi is also frequently subjected to strikes from Iraq and Yemen-based rebel groups. The Aramco strike clearly demonstrated Saudi Arabia’s vulnerability. Situation in Yemen is another major security concern for Saudi Arabia. According to a SIPRI report, during 2017-2021, Saudi Arabia and India were the largest arms importers in the world¹⁶. 80% of Saudi military hardware is sourced from US. Despite its significantly higher defence budget, except for a slight edge in airpower, Saudi Arabia lacks a seasoned, battle tested armed force and appropriate combat infrastructure to challenge a military threat from Iran¹⁷. In terms of maritime security, Saudi Arabia is ill equipped to guard its oil producing coastal areas, it’s ports and the vulnerable choke points of Bab el-Mandep and Hormuz. Even in hybrid and proxy capability, Iran enjoys a clear advantage over Saudi. This leaves Saudi Arabia totally dependent on US for its security. Realisation of the larger implications of this vulnerability and the subtle shift seen in the US West Asia policy may have caused the recent Saudi overtures for rapprochement with Iran and even Israel. Amidst all this, Saudi Arabia also seems to be weighing its options in case Iran goes nuclear¹⁸.

Yemen has been in severe turmoil since 2011¹⁹. Iran backed Houthi rebels challenge attempts by Saudi-US for dominance in Yemen. Factions backed by US, Saudi, Russia, UAE and Iran as well as elements of ISIS and al Qaeda are active in the country. With over 75% of its population living in poverty, Yemen is passing through one of the worst humanitarian crisis ever. Close to 400,000 people are estimated to have died and over 4 million people displaced. The UN brokered ceasefire has just been extended by another two months till 2 August 2022. But no lasting solution is in sight.

Syria is another victim of domestic fissures and intense global power rivalry. Pro and anti-regime forces have been at war since 2011. While the Assad regime is dependent on Russia and Iran for its survival, Saudi, Qatar and Turkey are aligned with the US against the regime. Hezbollah, ISIS, Al Qaeda and the Kurds are also active in Syria. Suspected locations of Iran backed groups are frequently subjected to Israeli bombings. Of the 22 million pre-war Syrian population, an estimated 6 million have been internally displaced with another 6 million fleeing abroad. More than 80% of the population live in poverty²⁰. Turkey has over 3 million Syrian refugees while Lebanon, a country of just 4.5 million population, is struggling with one million Syrian refugees. Turkey has threatened to launch military operation into Syria to establish a 30 km security zone in Northern Syria to counter Kurdish rebels and to relocate the Syrian refugees in Turkey.

Lebanon, with 27% Shias, 27% Sunnis and 21% Roman Catholics has always been captive to sectarian conflicts and witnessed a civil war

from 1975 to 1990. The post-war respite ended with commencement of the Syrian crisis in 2011. Huge refugee influx, rampant corruption and an unprecedented financial crisis has made the situation worse. Israel perceives constant threat from Lebanon and regularly resorts to military strikes. Hezbollah and militias supported by Syria and Iran are active in Lebanon. The country has dived deeper into crisis after the massive Beirut Port explosion in August 2020 that killed more than 200 people and destroyed parts of the city²¹. As per World Bank, between 2019 and 2021 Lebanon's GDP has contracted by over 58%²². Prolonged turmoil has inflicted long lasting scars on Lebanese society.

War ravaged Iraq's political system remains deadlocked after the October 2021 parliamentary elections with no consensus between political parties owing allegiance to different Shia, Sunni and Kurd factions. ISIL and Daesh are also active. March 2022 witnessed Iranian missile strikes on suspected 'Israeli strategic centres' within Iraq. Turkey launches regular attacks against Kurdish groups in Northern Iraq. The simmering Kurdish movement spanning border areas of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran defies a solution, adding yet another dimension to the West Asian turmoil. Iraq has been facing successive intense droughts combined with soil degradation and frequent sand storms. To make things worse, Turkey is planning to build 22 dams along Tigris and Euphrates rivers near their border with Syria and Iraq²³. This would cause severe water crisis in the already water starved region and is a potential flash point. It is also a pointer to the unimaginable consequences of climate change and water crisis, looming large over the entire region.

Amidst all this, during second half of 2020, US facilitated signing of the Abraham Accord between Israel, Egypt, Jordan, UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco. The accord is expected to pave the way for Saudi Arabia and Oman also establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. While it holds out potential for ushering in peace and stability in the region, it further complicates the Iran issue.

Less than a year after the Abraham Accord, another new grouping emerged, referred to as the 'Western Indian-Ocean QUAD', comprising Israel, India, UAE and the US. It signals recognition of the Western Indian-Ocean as a strategic maritime theatre and also preempts any possible Chinese initiatives to forge maritime alliances in the region.

China presents a basket of irresistible economic benefits to West Asia through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In January 2022, Syria became the 20th Arab country to join BRI²⁴. 1/3 rd of China's energy comes from GCC countries. China is already the largest investor and trading partner with the West Asian region. Islamic countries have displayed great prudence by putting aside their religious sensitivities to keep Uighur suppression a non-issue. Beijing has invested USD 10.5 billion in 2021 in BRI related projects in Iraq²⁵. Syria's BRI dream includes the ambitious 'Five Seas Vision' integrating Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq and linking the Mediterranean, Black Sea, Red Sea, Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. For Iran, the USD 400 billion 25-year Sino-Iranian Comprehensive Cooperation Plan was followed by grant of full membership of SCO. Egypt, Saudi, Qatar and Turkey are already SCO dialogue partners. West Asia is not just an energy provider for China but

also an important export market²⁶. China was Turkey's second biggest trade partner in 2021. However, despite all this, involvement of Saudi, UAE and Oman in BRI has been minimal so far. A huge share of China's ambitious plans for West Asia span countries in turmoil which makes a near normal and stable environment in these areas an imperative for its success. Who will provide this comfort to China? US and allies are unlikely to oblige. Despite its increasing economic and diplomatic footprints, China, on its part has not shown any inclination to be a security provider in the region or to play a bigger role in the regional politics. She has also not shown much interest even in assuming a leadership role in extending humanitarian assistance and financial aid in the region. It is as if China wants US to continue playing the security provider role while China pursues its economic agenda undisturbed.

In the West Asian milieu, a security provider will be required to become part of the regional security equation and will be called upon to take clear position on many complex regional issues and even intervene militarily, when required. So far, US has been willingly shouldering this role. It is paradoxical that even China's energy flow from West Asia had been enjoying protection of the US 6th and 7th fleet²⁷. US is now clearly signalling its intention to step back from being the primary security provider in the region and is nudging regional alliances to fill the void²⁸. Abraham Accord, Western Indian Ocean QUAD, Turkey reaching out to Saudi, Iran reaching out to Saudi and UAE, ceasefire efforts in Yemen etc appear to be in consonance with the new US approach. With this subtle toning down of its role, US is forcing

China to step in and assume a security providers role in West Asia. This has created a dilemma for China. After all, China has to weigh many issues. It is still only an upper middle-income country striving to become rich before it gets 'old'. Today, she stands without a single strategic ally. Also, China still lacks adequate skills and experience to effectively project military power far away from its own coast through globally dispersed, multinational and battle tested combat and logistics elements and the requisite command and control structures. There is a clear danger of China overstretching itself if it takes on the security providers role in West Asia now. It is also possible that there are other actions of higher precedence, closer to its own shores in China's bucket list now.

It is evident that while the global power-play in West Asia is set to continue, the regional fault-lines only seem to be widening. Excerpts from a recent book by former diplomat, Talmiz Ahmad states, "After a hundred years, not a single Arab state provides for any modicum of popular participation in state decision-making. National financial accounts remain non-transparent and without accountability. Though oil wealth is depleting, its revenues are still used to back state efforts at co-option and coercion—the latter now becoming more open, more crude, more vicious... and more frequent"²⁹. Similar views were voiced by a former International Affairs Editor of Financial Times, stating "Arab despotism, far from being an effective barrier to Islamism, is an assembly line for manufacturing jihadi extremists. That is unlikely to change"³⁰. Conflicts rage unabated across the region in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Lebanon. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, UAE, and Israel are

all active participants through proxy factions. Iran seems determined to go nuclear. West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza strip remain contentious with simmering tension, making the Palestine problem seem unresolvable. Russia has more or less steered clear of any intervention or military support in the region except for its support to the Assad Regime in Syria³¹. After its bitter experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, US seem to be stepping back from its role as the prime security provider in West Asia. However, it retains military bases and significant capability in the region and continues to play an active role through proxies in almost every conflict in West Asia. Saudi Arabia remains a major US ally, especially against Iran. Iran remains isolated. Afghanistan and Pakistan reflect mirror image of the West Asian turmoil on the region's Eastern periphery. Across its Western periphery, the situation in Libya is no different. West Asia remains a fertile ground for islamist terrorist groups like ISIS, ISIL, al Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah etc. Hidden under the affluence of the oil exporting West Asian countries is the discomfoting fact that about 2/3rd of West Asia's 325 million people lives in conflict ridden, dangerous and poverty-stricken areas straddling Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Palestine. West Asia has very little to offer in terms of human resource, infrastructure, technology, manufacturing or agriculture. As the world moves away from fossil fuel to clean energy, this void could increase West Asia's woes. A Reuters report of 2015 quotes Mahmoud Solh of the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) stating "The Middle East currently imports about USD 35 billion of food annually, and this looks set to rise to USD 70 billion

in two decades as climate change impacts crop yields and the population rises”³². With large parts of the region reeling under severe humanitarian crisis and widespread poverty, millions have been internally displaced. Europe is struggling to cope with the prospects of huge refugee influx from West Asia. Much of Europe’s Eastern and Southern border has been turned into one “huge arc of crisis”³³. As far as United States is concerned, its remoteness from the region keeps it insulated from the fallouts, much like the position it enjoys in the ongoing Ukraine crisis in Europe.

West Asia is a significant source of remittance for countries like India. India’s ties with the region are long-standing. However, India is only beginning to explore West Asia’s huge ‘beyond oil’ bilateral trade potential, spread across IT products and services, pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, automobiles, footwear, tea, leather, agriculture & horticulture products, medicare, tourism and participation in infra projects by Indian companies³⁴. To exploit this potential, India will need to tide over constant turbulence caused by regional rivalries and global power-play in the region. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed in Feb 2022 with UAE is a good beginning in this regard. India is also

beginning to attract significant investments from West Asia³⁵.

Geopolitically, world’s focus has shifted to Ukraine and Europe. Even the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, Libya and Sri Lanka have fallen off the radar. While the oil exporting countries of West Asia are reaping benefits, Ukraine war has pushed the other countries in the region deeper into crisis. Poverty, food shortages and humanitarian crisis will only get worse for them in the days ahead. Rest of the world seems to have reconciled with a West Asia mired in perpetual conflict, as long as it does not exceed the low-grade threshold. Geopolitics may undergo major changes if China decides to assume a security provider’s role in the region. But China does not appear ready for it as yet. Iran may soon get pushed deeper into the eye of the storm. Having herded the hesitant and drifting NATO back into the stable and whipped it into a strengthened, cohesive military alliance, US may be tempted to turn NATO’s attention on Iran after cessation of Ukraine hostilities or after it ‘successfully’ degenerates into a simmering self-sustaining conflict. Whichever way, for West Asia, it is going to be business as usual with ‘conflicts and turmoil’.

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China's Response to the Ukraine Conflict

Srikanth Kondapalli*

The on-going Ukrainian conflict since late February this year has major implications for China as with many countries in the world today. At stake for China are its assiduously built narratives on its “peaceful rise”, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), “community of common destiny”, “multipolarity” but also to its regional dominance efforts and relations with the United States, European Union and others. Already affected by the debilitating novel Coronavirus that spread from Wuhan in late 2019 to the rest of China and the world, the Ukrainian conflict exposed China’s vulnerabilities. China’s short-term positions and long-term goals seems to be at complete variance.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24 came in the immediate aftermath of the conclusion of the Beijing Winter Olympics, attended by President Vladimir Putin and others, but also to the joint statement between China and Russia a day earlier to the sports event that stated to “no limits” to their strategic partnership and cooperation.¹ Further, recently on June 16, President Xi had a telephonic conversation with President Putin, where the former stated that both “continue supporting each other on their respective core interests concerning sovereignty and security, as well as on their major concerns, deepening their strategic coordination”.² This has led to speculations about China’s prior knowledge and compliance in the Russian war efforts, although denied by Beijing.

Since then, China is at pains to explain its

position as “neutral” and “independent”³ and as the war began to take a heavy toll, China appears to have been increasingly isolated at the regional and global level – a prospect not in tune with Deng Xiaoping’s injunctions a few decades ago. Beijing abstained from the United Nations and its bodies, the Security Council, General Assembly and Human Rights Council discussions and criticism of the Russian actions in Ukraine. China stated it is for dialogue among the warring parties, ceasefire and humanitarian relief measures, even though it took an anti-US position all along. However, none of Beijing’s painstaking efforts seems to be working in its favour.

China’s position is stated to be neutral but in fact closer to that of Russia in the “united front” evolved with Moscow since 2001 against the United States in the “multipolarity” domain. Even while China is dependent on the US and its military allies on economic and technological assistance for China rise, Beijing had crafted a policy of opposing politically the US in conjunction with Russia since 2001. Following Russian Premier Primakov’s suggestion in the late 1990s for “multipolarity”, China jumped into forming an “united front” with Moscow. Both have opposed the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), were critical of the “coloured revolutions” as an imposition of one-set of political values on other countries, criticised the US formulation of “pre-emptive strike” strategy as unilateral in nature, and military action in Iraq

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and Afghanistan as violation of the UN Charter. China also expressed concerns on the US “pivot” and then “strategic rebalance” towards the Indo-Pacific region and strengthening of alliances as major challenge.

China had aligned with Russia⁴ on the NATO expansion theme since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Beijing had questioned recently the very existence of the NATO after the Soviet disintegration. It had expressed concern on the NATO declaration at its 50th anniversary in 1999 on intervention in the internal affairs of other countries based on ethnic and religious issues and drew inferences to possibilities of such actions on Xinjiang and Tibet. It also expressed concern on NATO’s 70th anniversary declaration in London in December 2019 that China is an opportunity but also a challenge. Even though this “London Declaration” of the NATO mentioned its primary challenges emanating from Russia, terrorism, migration and cyber domains, for the first time it also stated: “We recognise that China’s growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an alliance”. NATO chief General Jens Stoltenberg said that “we must find ways to encourage China to participate in arms control arrangements”. He also said the alliance needed to start taking “into account that China is coming closer to us.” He observed: “We see them in the Arctic, we see them in Africa, we see them investing heavily in European infrastructure and of course investing in cyberspace.” The NATO declaration also suggested to building “secure and resilient” telecommunications infrastructure in the light of China’s Huawei bidding for the 5G

communications in Europe. Certain NATO members like Italy and Greece joining China’s BRI and the establishment of EU-17+1 or “Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries” posed concerns for the unity of the European Union members. China’s challenges were seen mainly in financial investments and technology, securing telecommunications infrastructure security including in the 5G; differences on some European countries joining China led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the BRI.

In June 2022, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea were invited to the NATO-G7 meetings. In this context, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg stated that “China poses some challenges to our values, our interests, and our security”.⁵ Several Chinese analysts viewed this as posing challenge to China in the coming years. China’s foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said that “NATO has already disrupted stability in Europe. It should not try to do the same to the Asia-Pacific and the whole world.”⁶

However, on the other hand, during the Russian war on Ukraine, China’s discourse mainly touched upon how the NATO is divided by the US and on how it will be dissipated soon. Such rhetoric came from China without assuaging the feeling in the EU on China’s own actions in the European region. Despite the telephonic or virtual conversations that China’s President Xi Jinping conducted with Germany, France and other countries, EU members unity and solidarity in the NATO surprised China.

China’s stance on the war in Ukraine is undergoing a slow but definitive change. This is in the background of a number of domestic and

external developments of China that it is concerned with. The war in Ukraine had threatened to unleash political factional struggles in the communist party as it is heading for its 20th national congress this November. For President Xi, who is seeking a third term at the party congress, Ukraine crisis poses challenges.

Secondly, Ukraine crisis is threatening to upset energy prices across the world, and with China as the largest energy guzzler in the world, the costs are exorbitantly high. Even though China had increased its energy imports from Russia, the overall “sustainability and affordability” of the energy conundrum pose concerns for China’s economy.

Thirdly, Russia-Ukraine spat is threatening to disrupt the food supply chains on which China is also heavily dependent. China did create food reserves at Dalian but the future is uncertain as inflation is increasing. Already China’s staple food – pork – is off the shelf for millions of Chinese and the discontent is spreading.

Fourthly, China is in the forefront of critiquing the debilitating western sanctions on Russia in the aftermath of the war on Ukraine. In the backdrop of the Trump Administration’s tariff-wars and restrictions on China’s telecommunications companies in the US market, the ominous signals are clear for Beijing. If China is the next candidate for attracting western sanctions, then the country’s economy, that already took a beating with Covid-19 supply chain disruptions and domestic policies of “common prosperity” restrictions on businesses, is expected to suffer lower than estimated growth rates. With unemployment rising in China, this is expected to create further challenges to the party-state.

These concerns are reflected in President Xi addressing the Bo’Ao Forum on April 25 when he said that as the Ukraine crisis escalates “geopolitical factors are encumbering global economic recovery and further disrupting the global development cause; developing countries are bearing the brunt of the effects”.⁷ Further, President Xi addressing the 14th BRICS business forum stated that the “Ukraine crisis has again sounded the alarm for humanity”.⁸ However, the BRICS joint statement the next day was mild in its tone, underlining the common minimum understanding between the five countries that form the grouping. For instance, on June 23, the 14th BRICS virtual summit meeting joint statement pointed out that “We support talks between Russia and Ukraine. We have also discussed our concerns over the humanitarian situation in and around Ukraine and expressed our support to efforts of the UN Secretary-General, UN Agencies and ICRC to provide humanitarian assistance.”⁹

China’s Narrative

China had tried to communicate to the world its position on Ukraine in vain. On May 16, Yang Jiechi, the Politburo member and former foreign minister said – “We have stepped up our holistic approach to the Ukraine crisis, explained our clear policy stance based on the merits of the matter, played an independent and constructive role, proposed ways to resolve the crisis, put forward China’s initiative on preventing a humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, and debunked and rebutted the various wrongful rhetoric and unfounded accusations against China.”¹⁰ Further, commenting on the US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy

Sherman's statement, China's foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said on April 22 that "China's position on the Ukraine issue is above board, just, objective and beyond reproach".¹¹ No clarifications, however, were provided in this regard.

So far, China's dominant narrative in the Ukraine crisis has revolved around two inter-related aspects—a critique of the US policies and that of the NATO expansion,¹² with the latter seen as impacting on the Asian region in the near future. China's position in this regard is contradictory and clumsy in nature. On the one hand, Beijing is dependent on the US and its allies for its own rise as discussed since Deng Xiaoping-Jimmy Carter interactions in 1979. On the other hand, China sees the US as a threat to its ambitions to dominate Asia. That is, China is involved in a major critique of the US despite enjoying warm relations under the G-2 format for long. By critiquing the US, China is also indirectly pursuing the "united front" with Russia, even though primarily Beijing's efforts are to stave off any western sanctions on China.

The ire of China is directed against the US in the Ukraine crisis. In fact, Zhong Sheng, a pen name used by People's Daily, criticised the US as the "initiator"¹³ of the Ukraine conflict but has not provided refuge to the Ukrainian refugees. For another commentator Ye Zhu, it is the US "instigation" of Ukraine that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine are to be traced.¹⁴ Chen Zi's observations are similar – that the US "added further fuel for fire" by supplying arms to Ukraine.¹⁵ A commentator Gao Ge, writing in the People's Daily on April 26, 2022 stated that Ukraine war is a result of the NATO expansion under the US "planning" and reflects to its creating

"controllable chaos" and "the U.S. hegemony is the fuse for global instability and the U.S. is the largest perpetrator of turmoil in the world."¹⁶ In another commentary on April 24, Gao castigated the US for profiting from the Ukraine war.¹⁷

China's analysts' critique is also about the NATO/EU. According to Zhang Jian, Russia-Ukraine war had exposed the fragile security system of Europe.¹⁸ With innumerable problems surfacing since February this year, it would be hard for Europe to cope up with the situation, leading to its polarisation. Responding to British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss's criticism of China's role in the Ukraine crisis, China's foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin questioned "NATO has messed up Europe. Is it now trying to mess up the Asia-Pacific and even the world?"¹⁹ Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the UN stated "Clinging to the anachronistic doctrine of security and keen to provoke bloc confrontations and create tensions in Europe and even the Asia Pacific region and the wider world, such practices as harmful to others as they are deleterious to the perpetrators themselves, and deserve nothing less than China's firm opposition".²⁰ With Finland and Sweden approaching the NATO for membership, Chinese scholars termed this move as further threatening "the sustainable security of Europe".²¹

China's criticism of the US/NATO is also rooted in recent history, specifically the Chinese remind the NATO of the Chinese Embassy bombing incident at Belgrade in 1999.²² However, this is a complex issue with reports of Chinese defence attaché's office providing vital intelligence to the Yugoslavians in lieu of securing downed stealth bomber parts. China could have been more

transparent on this issue to remove the cobwebs.

Opportunities & Challenges

Despite the overall negative and fragmented approaches of China on the Ukraine crisis, it also sees the situation providing an opportunity. China's assessment, after the inability of Russia to clinch the matter quickly in Ukraine, is that it needs to strengthen its "narrative power" and provide something concrete to the global and regional communities. One of the major exercises that China conducted is to showcase its new "Global Security Initiative". President Xi unveiled "Global Security Initiative" at Bo' Ao Forum on April 21 that possibly includes all that China has been dishing out on the security issues, viz., "common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security; respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, uphold non-interference in internal affairs, and respect the independent choices of development paths and social systems made by people in different countries; abiding by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, reject the Cold War mentality, oppose unilateralism, and say no to group politics and bloc confrontation; committed to taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously; committed to peacefully resolving differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation" and others.²³

Laudable these may be, Xi did not mention whether the principles of the UN Charter were violated in Ukraine or whether even after 15 rounds of Corps Commanders meeting to resolve "all friction points" in Aksai Chin-Ladakh region the post-Galwan situation is resolved peacefully and

the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India is respected.

Despite these contradictions in statement and practice, China's leaders have called their counterparts across the world – especially European leaders – to convince them of China's "peaceful" intentions. China also expressed its willingness to mediate between warring states. President Xi spoke to the German Chancellor on May 11 to underline the close partnership between them and remind them of the business partnerships and inter-dependence.²⁴ He also spoke to French President Macron on May 11 stressing both countries "independence" posture in foreign policies.²⁵ As the French have been critical of some American policies, Xi possibly is extending the time-tested "united front" tactics. On May 13, foreign minister Wang Yi spoke to his Danish counterpart on the Ukrainian conflict underlining commercial links.²⁶

On the other hand, several challenges are posed for China in the wake of the Ukraine crisis. In addition to those enumerated above, China is seriously considering the negative fallout of the war on its image. Already due to Covid-19, a majority of the public opinion polls have expressed their negative perceptions of China where the virus originated. However, the most critical factor is that of the spillover effect of the sanctions on China. Liu Kun, China's finance minister, speaking at the G-20 meeting stated that "China is against politicizing and weaponizing the global economy".²⁷ Another commentator Zhao Wenzai wrote in the People's Daily that the US, by imposing sanctions on Russia, is practicing "financial terrorism" in Ukraine.²⁸

Finally, it is speculated that one of the major casualties of the Ukraine crisis domestically is possibly the demotion of Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng, a former ambassador to India. Le, who was tipped to replace foreign minister Wang Yi next March, was sent as a deputy overseeing radio and TV broadcasting agencies.²⁹ It was reported

that he was instrumental in ushering the “no limits” partnership with Russia in February. Earlier, Le Yucheng, addressing a think-tank forum meeting on May 7, criticised those who castigate China for the developments in Ukraine. Le said that the “no limits” statement in Sino-Russian joint statement is for the current and future scenarios.³⁰

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Indo-Pacific, The Quad and India: An Interview with Walter Russell Mead*

Gaurie Dwivedi*

Gaurie Dwivedi

In India, there is a great deal of focus on the Indo-Pacific and more specifically on the Quad. How does the US view the Indo-Pacific and the role that India should play, both in the region and in the Quad?

Walter Russell Mead

What we have had now, I think every president from Barack Obama to Joe Biden has said in public that the Indo-Pacific is the centre of American foreign policy and national security concern. And that's true, both from an economics perspective and from a security perspective. So, I don't think there's any doubt that when different politicians from such different parties, agree on this basic thing, I think we can say, for America, the Indo-Pacific really does matter. Within the Indo-Pacific, there is simply no doubt that because of its population, because of its technological accomplishments, because of its economy, because of its standing in the region, there's really no one like India. I personally spend a lot of time working on American foreign policy talking to people in the US. I don't know anybody who really disagrees with the idea that the relationship with India is central to the future of American foreign policy.

Gaurie Dwivedi

Irrespective of the multiple noises that come

from Washington, some going two steps forward, some going three steps backward, do you think that hurts the common objective, which is to have this region being free and fair?

Walter Russell Mead

The United States and India are both democracies, and cacophony and democracy are closely related. And certainly, I could read the Indian press and see lots of comments about the United States and the difficulties of working with the United States. And I know very well there could be an election in India and a different party with a different attitude might form a government. So, this is just the way it is, when democracies work together. India has, in some ways, a problem with some of the Human Rights communities in the United States. There is a sort of a unique Indian dimension to this, which is that there are some countries where the political right and the human rights groups on the right in the US are very upset, and then others on the left, they're very upset too. In the US, the Democrats look at some of the communal questions in India; they feel a link with the Muslim community in India and so you get a lot of human rights agitation around that from the Democratic side. On the Republican side, we get voices which are supportive of the Christian communities in India. The politician, when with

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such groups, will voice their support as they do not lose anything by taking the stand. This is a factor in Congress. Even with Israel, we can sometimes see the opposition to things that happen with the Palestinians or whatever. The US and the Congress will take a stand or the President will take a stand. But it doesn't change the fact that US has a relationship with Israel and Israel is a very important ally. But yes, sometimes the Human Rights types issues, whether they are right or wrong, do get into the mix. But then, again, I think it's true that in India too, you have political groups that have a very strong opinion about something and it can affect Indian foreign policy because it affects Indian politics.

Gaurie Dwivedi

You talk of how central identity politics is becoming a part of national discourse and hence impacting foreign policy. How do you see that shaping the foreign policy of India and the region as well, because, you know, there's a lot of churns that is going on in the region itself? There have been elections that are trade regime changes that are happening. How do you see that?

Walter Russell Mead

If you think about India's region, we see Pakistan where, who knows what's going to be happening there? I think the only thing safe to say that at the end the army will be in charge the army and ISI will be in charge. Fortunately, in Bangladesh we see a fairly good situation, but in Myanmar, there is a civil war going on. There are also issues with respect to both Sri Lanka and Nepal. So, we can see that there is instability in the region. India, in that sense, I think because it has a flourishing democracy and for that matter-

Bangladesh too, has some insurance against these problems because they can be vented in the political system and people can have an election. In other places, that's more difficult.

India, in particular, I think is going through a profound historical stage, where for the most of the early decades of India's history, the Congress Party was in charge and it had a certain vision of India. And it projected that vision to the rest of the world as being what India was. But clearly, not everybody in India has shared that vision of what India should be. And now with the BJP rising over many years, India has changed or at least Indian politics have changed. That creates a change and anytime there's change, it affects international relationships, too, because everyone got used to one kind of India. Now we have another kind of India and we're all curious. What does it mean? Where's it going? This was a big change. Are there more big changes ahead? What will they be? What will be the good consequences and the bad consequences? So, that inevitably comes into Indian Foreign Policy too. It comes into the way the press covers India, I think because many American correspondents, people and diplomats, all knew the old India. They had trusted friends and sources, all of whom were connected to the Congress dominated era. So, when these people are politically unhappy with the current state of affairs, their journalist friends in America hear that from these well-informed people who have been in charge of many things and who they've known for many years and who, on a personal level they trust. So, we can see that the impact this change in Indian politics creates. As a result, all kinds of adjustments are happening across the world around it.

Gaurie Dwivedi

But you know, this assertive national identity comes at a time when you have a very aggressive China. As we speak, there have been reports about growing Chinese influence in the Solomon Islands. China is also now going to probably utilize the flux in Sri Lanka to its advantage. So, at a time like this when China is the predominant threat in the region, do you think it's important now, for the Quad member nations to be having a more assertive policy and roadmap to dealing with China?

Walter Russell Mead

I absolutely do. I thought the last Summit meeting of the Quad in Tokyo was a really positive thing. It felt to me as if all four of those leaders were making strong commitments. Everyone seemed to be aware of the danger; everyone seemed to be concerned. It was nice to see that even though Australia had just had an election and a new government had been formed, there was continuity in Australian foreign policy on this issue, despite, historically, the Labor Party being less hawkish in some ways, on China.

Gaurie Dwivedi

How would you visualise or see this region, maybe a few years down the line? I ask you this because we are talking just months ahead of Xi Jinping's possible coronation, as President for life, which, at this stage, looks set. There's no way to know what's going to happen. But if that were to happen, then this region is probably going to see more intense geopolitical tensions.

Walter Russell Mead

I think that's right. I think the big question is really Taiwan. And strategically, if China were to succeed in conquering Taiwan—invading and

conquering it—not only would that be a terrible thing for the Taiwanese people, but it would mean that China has the capability to be able to cut Japan's sea communications with the rest of the world. This would be a terrible danger for Japan. I think Japan would have to move toward China, would have to accommodate China in some way, sooner or later, if this happened. So, what happens in Taiwan is central to the future of the Quad and to this whole region. An Indian might say, well, Taiwan is really very far away. But you think about it.

Gaurie Dwivedi

For India, China has been assertive in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh? You know, a lot of people in India would say, that Taiwan matters, but so does Arunachal and Ladakh.

Walter Russell Mead

It does. And we have to think about Taiwan everywhere. Again, here's something that I think India needs to think through and come to the United States with a very clear message. How does India want support from the United States on its frontier issues with China? Does India want American troops on the bay or on the frontier? Does it want a treaty so that America is legally obliged to come to India if it's attacked; what is it that India wants? And that's a question only India can answer. So far, I think the American understanding is that India prefers a friendship to a marriage—that, non-alignment is deep in Indian culture. There's a concern about how a treaty relationship would bind India.

Gaurie Dwivedi

You are raising the questions which in fact are being raised in India as well, that if we are to be completely nonaligned, then how do we count our friends and enemies? How do we count our

supporters? And if we want to be aligned, then how do we want our position to be in the world because you know, we are, if not a global pivot, a regional pivot on our own. This gets compromised if we become an alliance partner or a treaty partner. So these are tough questions.

Walter Russell Mead

It is tough, but an alliance with the United States is not the same as an alliance with China or Russia. Look at some of the European countries. Germany and France are in NATO, but Germany and France have a lot of freedom of action. I'm not trying to sell the treaty of alliance; I don't have a view and a lot of people in America would question the deployment of American troops in the Himalayas. So, it would be controversial in the US as well. But it's clear that both India and the United States need to think hard about where we stand with China, and what each of us needs from the other and what each of us can offer to the other. I think in both countries, people are looking at this much more deeply. I think probably the war in Ukraine is having an impact too, because Ukraine is a country that didn't have treaty allies.

Gaurie Dwivedi

In fact, I was going to come to that. Just how much is Ukraine impacting the world equations right now? Many analysts have been saying that Ukraine has been given everything except for troops on ground and it has been able to fend against the Russian troops. That could be some sort of a lesson for China. Taiwan may not be the simple scoot in and invade model that China was hoping for. Do you see the similarities there? Or do you think we're just trying to do a copy paste of a completely different model?

Walter Russell Mead

Well, they are different you know, there are different situations. Firstly, Russia currently has occupied 20% of Ukraine's territory with huge consequences for people impacted by food shortages. In the last few days, Russia seems to have the momentum, which is why Finland and Sweden seem to have decided that they would like to join NATO having seen what happens if you're not in NATO. So, it really depends on the nature of the threat and where you stand with regard to it. In the India-China border, the territories that China lays claims are remote and hard to access. Russia was able to attack Kyiv in the first few hours of the war. China couldn't quite attack Delhi in that way. So, the cases are not exactly comparable also.

Gaurie Dwivedi

Ukraine and India are not comparable but on the issue of Ukraine I want to ask you this: in the initial weeks, even now in fact, until a few weeks back, many people in DC as well as analysts in Europe were deeply 'disappointed' by India's position on Russia which is nuanced for many reasons, some historical, some military and off course, for following an independent foreign policy. Do you think that position has now been accepted, has been embraced and well understood?

Walter Russell Mead

I think well understood. I'm not sure of embrace. Embraced would be too strong a word.

Gaurie Dwivedi

The reason why I said embraced, is because then you can keep that in mind for future discussions. And because this is an evolving situation.

Walter Russell Mead

You see, I think, in the American context

anyway, there was a sense during the Cold War that India tended to be more forgiving of Soviet behaviour than of American behaviour. So, in the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, India did not seem to feel a problem. This was viewed by Americans as being more non-aligned against America than being non aligned equally with both. I, however have not studied the period and so I'm not going to come to any judgment there. But that is a perception—a pre-existing perception in American foreign policy, that this is the sort of thing India does. On the one hand, you're less surprised when they do it. But on the other, people do wish India would somehow find a way to take a stronger stance.

Gaurie Dwivedi

And just on the side, the perception has also been built, because of-maybe as a consequence, or due to some other factors, such as the US-Pakistan relations have also been during the 60s, 70s, 80s. They were very, very good. And that also had an impact on how India had looked towards the US.

Walter Russell Mead

Of course, it did but I don't think there are many people in India who think now that US-Pakistan relations are particularly good.

Gaurie Dwivedi

I think that that is behind us. I'm going to ask you two last questions on trade, a subject that's close to my heart as well. There has not been enough discussion about just how much China has been given a free ride. There are still many people in the business community who feel that you cannot take back some of those concessions because it impacts everybody. We are part of this one big

global interconnected economy. And we all stand to benefit from a cheaper destination. Do you share that view? And how optimistic are you that the ruptures that have been made in the global supply chain will benefit countries like India and America permanently?

Walter Russell Mead

Well, it's clear that the situation, among other things, both the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, have taught a lot of people the lesson that you need to think about your supply chain. You can't just take it for granted that at the moment you need something it's going to be right there. And if you need two of them, they'll be right there. But this is not about statecraft or, you know, security policy. It's just simply, if you want to run a company and you want to be able to sell cars, you need to make sure that politics is not going to interfere with your ability to do that. Well, so what do you do? You look for places to invest where you don't see political problems, and you also want to have more than one place one factory in one country. You want to diversify. So, in that sense, I do think that lots of people now understand that they need to diversify their supply chain. And this would not just be America. I think Japan has about 90% exposure to China. So, for Japan, when it looks to diversify, Vietnam is the most obvious close destination, followed by Philippines and maybe Indonesia. And India too is a very natural destination. So this is not simply about the bilateral US-India relationship. And it's also not simply about governments telling people what to do and what not to do. This is common sense business. And I do think it's interesting to me, the India seems to be working on it and has already done great work

on beginning to improve its infrastructure to make it easier for manufacturers to be here.

On labor law reforms, there has been a lot of discussion in India on how to allow different states to develop their labor codes so that they can take advantage of opportunities. And this strikes me as opening the door to India having more manufacturing. I also believe that building up the manufacturing economy is really important for India, for poverty reduction and social justice. While technology is wonderful, it tends to favour people who are extremely well educated and often fluent in English, to be ready for that global market. And not everybody in India has those advantages. Manufacturing is something you can do with a basic education. From a village you can do this. And so technology is the avenue for so many Indians to reach a global level of freedom and affluence and all these wonderful things. For a lot of Indians manufacturing really matters.

Gaurie Dwivedi

Yes, India needs both manufacturing as well as technology. On that note, last question I have to ask you this is news that comes out of the world's second largest economy impacts everybody. And the economic parameters right now are not positive for China. There are about 340 million people in lock downs in 45 odd cities. Do you see that as a blip because of the multiple lock downs? Or do you see the slowing down as a slightly long-term trend that the world needs to adjust to?

Walter Russell Mead

Well, I do think you know, trees don't grow to the sky, even in China. And China is not going to

grow at 8% to 10% a year forever, especially if its economy depends on exports. Because, if you're growing at 10%, and your market is growing at 3%, this cannot last. So, there is a built in obsolescence to the Chinese model. Also, clearly, China has the most massive economic bubbles we've seen in the history of the world—a real estate bubble. You drive through a city in China, and you'll see these 17 storey apartment buildings, almost to the horizon and no one is living in any of them. And the country's population is not growing, the country's population is actually beginning to decline. So, when you think about all the banks that made the loans to those buildings, all the cities that have borrowed money to create the infrastructure that supports those buildings, it appears that a lot of China's wealth is paper wealth. And we do know that the Chinese Communist Party is going to do everything in its power to keep those bubbles inflated. And they know they cannot do this forever. So, every now and then they come back and say that they must reform, they are going to tighten up the housing market, stop wasting money on infrastructure projects and rein in local government. But when they start doing all those things, the stock market goes down and the growth rate goes with it. So they go back to pumping everything up. And they've been trapped in that cycle for a long time. I don't know how this ends. What is happening in China has never happened before on this scale. The person who tells you that they know what's going to happen next in China is either a prophet or an idiot. And there are more idiots than there are prophets.



India's Lanka Odyssey: Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka

AS Kalkat*

Dedicated to the fallen IPKF Heroes and the IPKF Veterans

The Indo - Sri Lanka Accord

In 1987 the Indian political scene was in turbulence. There were vague accusations against the Government on defence purchases. In Tamil Nadu, a hue and cry was being raised against the atrocities being committed by the Sri Lankan military on the hapless Tamil population in Sri Lanka, and the Tamil Nadu government was demanding Indian intervention to ensure the safety and security of Sri Lanka's Tamil population.

At that time, Sri Lanka's population of approximately 21 million, consisted of 75% Sinhalese, 18% Tamils (12% Sri Lankan Tamils and 6% Plantation Tamils) & 7% Tamil speaking Muslims. The Tamils were mainly located in the Northern and Eastern provinces except for the plantation Tamils who were concentrated in the highlands in the Central Provinces. The Northern Province consisted of 80% Tamil population, mainly concentrated around Jaffna City which was the Provincial Capital. Tamils constituted one-third of the population of Eastern Province along with one-third Sinhala & one-third Muslims (Moors).

With General Elections due in India in 1988, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was concerned about

his party's election prospects in Tamil Nadu. There was also concern that the movement for an independent Tamil homeland could spread to Tamil Nadu. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi hence decided to use India's military force to coerce the President of Sri Lanka into signing the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in July 1987.¹ The Accord envisaged cease-fire between the belligerent parties, surrender of weapons by the armed Tamil militant parties, amendment of the Constitution of the Unitary State to create a federal structure thereby ensuring provincial autonomy for the Tamil majority Northern & Eastern Provinces. The Accord also envisaged India providing a peace keeping force if asked by Sri Lanka Government for accepting the surrender of weapons by the Tamil militants and for ensuring security in the two Provinces. The Sri Lanka Army was to be confined to barracks in the Northern & Eastern Provinces. The Accord also required the Indian Military Force to assist in the conduct of elections in the two Provinces after which the two Provinces would be merged into a single North-Eastern Province (NEP) resulting in a Tamil majority province. Thereafter, the Constitution of Sri Lanka would be amended by

**A veteran of the 1965 and 1971 India-Pakistan wars, Lt Gen Amarjeet Singh Kalkat, SYSM, AVSM, VSM, was chosen to lead the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka as the Overall Force Commander for which he was awarded the Sarvottam Yudh Seva Medal (SYSM); the Country's highest award for Leadership in War & Conflict, the first ever to be so awarded. Only two more have been awarded since then, both in the Kargil Operations. The IPKF Operations is a Prescribed Case Study Subject at the US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, USA.*

the 13th Amendment to create Sri Lanka as a federal political state which would give the Provincial Governments greater autonomy in governance; it was currently based on the British Westminster System which gave very little authority to the provinces.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi discussed this matter with the Indian Army Chief, Gen K. Sunderji who was himself a Tamil. Gen Sunderji belonged to a princely family of Travancore State and had been made an officer in the State Army at a very young age. On Travancore's merger with India, its Army was merged with the Indian Army. Sunderji thereafter joined the Mahar Regiment and retained his original seniority, which put him in line to become Indian Army Chief at a later stage. When the Prime Minister asked his advice, Gen Sunderji assured him that the LTTE would be rounded up in a matter of weeks. But that assessment proved to be hopelessly off the mark. It took the Indian Army three years with over 1,200 killed and almost 7,000 wounded to restore order.

Growth of Tamil Militancy

LTTE in Sri Lanka is an example of a civil unrest and militancy transiting to insurgency and ultimately morphing into a terrorist organisation. The genesis of the movement lay in the grievances of the minority Tamils of deprivation and discrimination by the majority Sinhals in Sri Lanka. The Tamils were seeking protection of their identity, language and areas of their habitation from the spread of massive Sinhala influx since 1956. The Tamil movement, starting with civil unrest, gradually escalated to open confrontation with the civil administration. The Sri Lanka response to this was

to seek a military solution by launching military operation designated War of Liberation against the militant Tamil groups. The Tamil parties upped their demand to independence (Tamil Eelam) and a separate Tamil State. The main militant Tamil groups were LTTE, Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF) and Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF). Amongst the militant groups, the LTTE led by Prabhakaran achieved dominance. The ruthless action by the Sri Lankan military to isolate and starve out the Tamil areas in the Northern & Eastern Provinces led to large scale uprooting of Tamils. Over a hundred thousand fled to India in fishing boats and were housed in refugee camps in Tamil Nadu.

LTTE leader Prabhakaran was highly ambitious and ruthless and dreamt of becoming the sole arbiter of Tamil destiny. He wanted to settle for nothing less than an independent Tamil State in Sri Lanka. He systematically eliminated leaders of other insurgency groups and used this to strengthen his cult and the LTTE. The large influx and presence of Tamil refugees in Tamil Nadu which had a population of 45 million Tamils had serious implications for India. India decided to engage with Sri Lanka for a political resolution of the issue which culminated in the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord (ISLA). At the time of signing of the Accord, LTTE, PLOTE, TELO, ENDLF and EPRLF were the prominent insurgency groups. PLOTE, TELO, ENDLF and EPRLF accepted the Accord and surrendered their weapons. However, the LTTE refused to do so, which led to

open conflict with the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF).

LTTE Organisational Structure

The LTTE group leaders were under Area Commanders and it was also effective in harnessing the seafaring traditions to form what was to become Women Sea Tigers. Women cadres came up formally in ground operations around 1988 onwards.

Prabhakaran was the Supreme leader. He was assisted by Anton Balasingham, political commissar, and a military council comprising of Mahendra Raja a.k.a. Mahathiya the second in command, Sathasivam Krishnakumar a.k.a. Kittu, Kumarappa in Jaffna, Pulendran (later Karuna) in the East and Pottu Amman (intelligence wing). The military council was assisted by Yogaratnam Yogi (political wing), Sornalingam a.k.a. Shankar (Air Wing), Sivanesan a.k.a. Soosai (Sea Tigers). The LTTE strength was assessed as 7,000 hard core fighters, 3,000 helpers (Pandiyan) and an indeterminate number of sympathisers. The group resorted to summary executions, burning people alive, and awarding death sentence for ordinary offences to keep both the civilian population and their rivals in check. Inability of other groups to challenge the LTTE was largely due to an absence of a charismatic leader and also due to internal power struggles within their organisations. The use of military force by the Sri Lankan government without a matching political strategy increased support for LTTE and its methods.

The LTTE financed their organisation through a variety of methods Chief among them were extortion of the shopkeepers, taxation of the Tamil

population, looting banks and government treasuries and smuggling and trafficking of arms, people and drugs. They also resorted to hijacking of maritime traffic and received funds from the overseas Tamil diaspora sympathetic to their cause. Beginning from 1983 to 1897 almost all major extremist groups including LTTE had established overseas cells among Sri Lanka Tamil Diaspora particularly in London. They became a major source of support. The LTTE used the expertise among the diaspora for media management and providing real time information. It cultivated many other media persons for propaganda. It also cultivated low level government officials and political leaders overseas sympathetic to them by spending money.

Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF)

On the request of the Sri Lanka Government, India sent an infantry division to Sri Lanka in last week of July for overseeing the arms surrender process by the militants. While most militant groups complied with handing over their weapons, the LTTE refused to do so. The Division Commander was ordered by Delhi to use force to disarm them. The LTTE resorted to attacking the peace keepers. Taken by surprise the IPKF suffered large casualties and open fighting broke out between the IPKF and LTTE.

By the time India got involved, terrorist attacks by LTTE had been on the rise. Initially these attacks had been against the Sinhala population. However, early in 1987, LTTE leader Prabhakaran resorted to attacks on the other Tamil parties to wrest leadership of all Tamils in Sri Lanka. The ruthless methods of LTTE also instilled fear amongst the civilian Tamil population for obedience

to the dictates of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran. After assessing the situation, the Indian Government, in consultation with the Sri Lanka Government decided that the LTTE would have to be forcibly disarmed and while doing so, the safety of the vast innocent civilians would also need to be protected against the murderous attacks on them by LTTE. Consequently, a force of five divisions (15 brigades & three para commando battalions (Special Forces) was built up in North & East Sri Lanka under a head quarter designated as HQ IPKF. In addition, para-military forces comprising one Assam Rifles battalion, two CRPF battalions, one CRPF Mahila (women) company and one TA battalion were also included. Ad-hoc complements of Indian Air Force & Indian Navy were also part of IPKF. I was appointed the Overall Force Commander of IPKF. This entailed a politico-military task. IPKF was involved in joint forces operations and in essence was a joint forces command without being designated so. This anomaly did create some problems in its operations which fortunately were overcome by personal interaction with the concerned Air Force and Naval Commands.

Prior to induction of IPKF, a civil war had been raging in Northern & Eastern Provinces. Many Tamil insurgent parties had sprung up, LTTE, EPRLF, TELO, EROS, NDLF etc. Of these the leader of LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran was the most cunning and ruthless. He proposed to the other Tamil party leaders to meet at Batticaloa in the Eastern Province to discuss their future plans. Most leaders complied; others sent their senior representative. Once they had assembled, Prabhakaran had all of them killed in cold blood by

his LTTE cadres. From this time onwards Prabhakaran became the undisputed leader of the Tamil insurgency movement.

The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was inducted into Sri Lanka on 30 July 1987 initially in Jaffna which had almost 90% Tamils and was the strong-hold of the LTTE. They reacted violently and soon fighting broke out between the IPKF & LTTE. Initially, an infantry division had been inducted and the GOC (General Officer Commanding) of the division planned a surgical strike against LTTE leadership, who were reported to be meeting at their tactical headquarters in Jaffna University. The area around Jaffna University was crowded and there were only two open fields where heliborne troops could be landed in a night operation, a football field and a smaller playground; both surrounded by residential buildings. The GOC planned to land 120 para commandos of 10 Para Commando Battalion and 360 soldiers of 13 Sikh LI. On the night of 11 October, the first flight of two helicopters landed 40 para commandos on the football field. Almost immediately, they came under fire from surrounding buildings and even from tree tops. The LTTE had sophisticated radio equipment and they had broken into the IPKF frequencies and knew the attack was coming. That night, the helicopters could not land the entire assault force and only a total of 80 para commandos and 30 personnel of 13 Sikh LI managed to land. The troops on all sides were surrounded by the enemy and had to wait for morning before reinforcements could come in. The Sikh LI radio operator was killed immediately on landing and the platoon lost contact with the Division HQ. In the fog of battle the Sikh LI platoon

got separated from the para commandos. Throughout the night they fought with depleting manpower and ammunition. By morning of 12 October, there were three soldiers left and had completely run out of ammunition. They fixed their bayonets and decided on one last charge against the enemy; only one man, Sepoy Gora Singh survived. He was wounded and was taken prisoner by the LTTE.

The men of 10 Para Commando had spread-out and gone after their original target – the LTTE leadership. Unable to locate the LTTE HQ and outnumbered they took up defensive positions in two single-storey buildings and for 18 hours they kept the numerically stronger LTTE at bay by preserving their ammunition and picking their targets judiciously. On the morning of 12 October, the CO of 10 Para Commando, Lt Col Dalbir Singh himself led the rescue mission with his remaining men and three T72 tanks. However, all the roads leading to the university had been mined and boobytrapped by the LTTE and the tanks found it difficult to advance. The tank commander, Maj Anil Kaul did something that the LTTE were least expecting; he took his tanks to the railway line that ran behind the university and drove on the rail track right up to the scene of battle. A little later, the rest of 13 Sikh LI along with 4/5 Gorkha Rifles broke through and took control of the area. The LTTE leader Prabhakaran was injured in the leg but fled moments before the IPKF troops entered. In this battle, 13 Sikh LI lost 29 brave soldiers. Maj Kaul was wounded in the battle and lost an eye. He was awarded the Vir Chakra for his gallant action.

There were rumblings of this debacle in the Parliament, and they were informed that an Overall

Force Commander, Lt General Kalkat (I was promoted to Lt Gen) had been appointed to command the operations. The Indian PM was away at Vancouver to attend the CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meet) and thereafter he was proceeding to Washington to address the US Congress. I was told that it would be a shame if Jaffna was not captured by the time the Indian Prime Minister was to address the US Congress. After all, India was a major Asian power with the third largest army in the world. Thus, my priority became capture of Jaffna.

After the Jaffna University debacle, Army HQ did a re-check and realised that the IPKF was undermanned, under equipped and over stretched. It needed more Infantry, T-72 tanks and amphibious armoured fighting vehicles (BMPs). Therefore, another airlift began with IL 76 & AN 12 aircraft; so heavy was the air traffic at Thambaram Airbase in Madras (Chennai) that the runway cracked. By end October, the IAF had flown 2200 transport and 800 helicopter sorties to ferry material and men for IPKF.

For the Indian soldiers, trying to bring peace in a foreign country was challenging. It was impossible to distinguish between LTTE cadres and Tamil civilians as the LTTE would often hide their weapon under the lungi (dhoti) and fire at the IPKF soldiers in crowded areas, then hide their rifle and melt away among the people. Anyone over the age of 10, male or female, could be an armed and deadly adversary.

I observed that all previous attempts to capture Jaffna had been by frontal attacks which involved fighting in highly built-up areas, involving house to house clearance, which resulted in heavy casualties

to our troops. I therefore decided to launch only a feint frontal attack employing tanks and carryout a double envelopment with the infantry and attack Jaffna from the rear. The western force of the envelopment faced fierce opposition but ably led by Brig Manjit Singh they succeeded. In this action Maj Ramasamy Parameshwaran bravely fought his way and was killed in action. He was awarded the Param Vir Chakra posthumously, India's highest award for conspicuous bravery above & beyond the call of duty. Brig Manjit Singh was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra. We captured Jaffna incurring much lesser casualties than would have resulted by the frontal approach. Mr Ronen Sen, who was the PM's advisor on political affairs in the PMO was informed of the same on 26 October.

After capture of Jaffna Town the IPKF was assigned a new mission of conducting operations in the Northern & Eastern Provinces to bring them under IPKF control and to bring about normalcy so that elections could be conducted. For purpose of my operations, I divided the area into four sectors, each under an infantry division. The sectors were designated Northern (Jaffna Peninsula) Sector, Eastern Sector (Trincomalee District), Southern Sector (Batticaloa District), Central Sector (Vavuniya District). The sectors, conforming with the Sri Lanka administrative districts, helped coordination with the Sri Lankan Government. Language was a barrier between my soldiers and the civil population, so men from the Madras Regiment battalions were inducted and distributed to the other battalions.

At this stage the IPKF strength was about 80,000 personnel as under: -

Army

Divisional HQs: 4 (54, 4, 36 & 57)
Infantry Brigade: 15 (45 infantry battalions)
Para Commando battalions: 3
Mechanised Infantry battalions: 2
Armoured Regiment: 1

Navy

Naval Liaison Officer: 1 (Captain Rank)
Troops & Tanks Landing Ship 1; rest on as required basis
Civil shipping chartered by Indian Navy

Air Force

MI 8 Helicopter Squadron: 1
HIND Attack Helicopter detachment
AN 32 sqn: 1 (Medium carriage capacity)
IL76 det: Heavy Lift capacity

Para Military

Assam Rifles battalion: 1
TA battalion: 1)
CRPF battalions: 2
Mahila (women) company, CRPF: 1

Others

DRDO: Communication Team
MEA: Political Advisor (1)
MHA: Political Advisors (2)
I & B Ministry: Doordarshan and AIR Team
P & T Dept: Telecom Detachment.
Indian Railways Team
Tamil Nadu State Electricity Board Team
Indian Red Cross Team
Maintenance of such a large force overseas was a gigantic problem; however, it was handled by the IPKF Brigadier in Charge Logistics, Brig N. K. Bahri, outstandingly. The two Provinces

consisted of nearly 30% (18,000 sq km) of the total area of Sri Lanka (65,000 sq km). It became clear to me that due to the difficulty of identifying LTTE fighters from ordinary Tamils we would have to clear the area in a manner that the LTTE did not filter back. I was fighting with the caveat that innocent civilians, women and children must not be harmed. For this, the cleared areas would have to be kept sterile by sealing it with cordons. I therefore decided to operate from both flanks of each Province inwards clearing and sealing cleared areas step by step. By following this method, we were able to drive the LTTE into the centre of each Province. The LTTE, finding themselves hedged in broke south-west into a dense jungle (forest) called Wani Jungles. It was a huge primary forest with tall trees and lot of foliage. The IPKF surrounded the Wani Jungle and isolated the LTTE from the rest of the population in the Northern & Eastern Province.

After hard fighting, the IPKF was able to wrest control of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. I found myself in the unenviable position of having to administer these Provinces comprising one-third of Sri Lanka. This meant catering for the daily life of the population. I appointed Town Commandants of Brigadier rank for Jaffna and Trincomalee. Police Service was non-existent to look after criminal activity and I asked the Indian Government for assistance. Two Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) battalions and much later a Mahila (women's) company on my request were sent from India. To cater for electricity, staff from Tamil Nadu State Electricity Board was provided. For running the railway Tamil Nadu Railway TA company was sent. For the medical service the Indian Red Cross

sent a detachment. I found myself involved in the political affairs in the two states for which the Indian Army is neither trained nor expected to do so. I asked for Indian Administrative Service (IAS) & Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officers. The IAS officers (2) were placed with the two Town Commandants, and I located the IFS officer with me as political advisor. The IFS officer fell ill due to the difficult environment and had to be evacuated to India; the IFS officers were not accustomed to living in harsh conditions and there were no takers for the job. On my persistence I was intimated that the First Secretary of the Indian High Commission in Colombo Mr Jai Shankar would act as my political advisor.

When the situation was under control, I informed both the Government of India and the Government of Sri Lanka that the conditions for conduct of election have been created and the elections may be ordered. A problem arose; there had been no census conducted for many years due to the prevailing insurgency situation prior to the arrival of IPKF and the electoral rolls had to be prepared for the election. I undertook to get it done along with the Sri Lankan Chief Election Commissioner and their Attorney General. With the help of the Sri Lanka Election Staff and my officers, we were able get the electoral rolls prepared. I had to visit Colombo often for this where I also met Mr Lalith Athulathmudali the Sri Lanka Foreign Minister. A brilliant person, he was also a Privy Counsellor of UK. He was a great help and guide.

The IPKF assisted the Government of Sri Lanka in the conduct of elections in the two Provinces without the LTTE being able to disrupt

them. In many cases, IPKF secured the routes for voters from their home areas to the polling booths. The polling booths were guarded and the transportation of ballot boxes and polling staff by air and road transport was catered for. The elections were held successfully with 60% voting and consequently the Northern and Eastern Provinces were merged as one North Eastern Province (NEP) by the enactment of the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lanka Constitution. A Tamilian Chief Minister Vardaraj Perumal of the EPRLF Party was sworn-in by President J. Jayawardene of Sri Lanka. I signalled to Delhi “Mission Accomplished; await further orders”. The response from Delhi was ‘IPKF to continue to assist the Provincial Government to establish firm roots.’ Indian Prime Minister wanted to meet the newly elected Chief Minister, so I had him flown to Delhi in IPKF aircraft. The Sri Lanka Government was not happy with this as they felt that India would control the North-Eastern Province by proxy. I feel this was a mistake on our part.

At this stage a high-level Sri Lanka delegation led by Gamini Dissanayake, a senior Cabinet Minister came to India and met Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. I had also been called to attend it. Dissanayake conveyed satisfaction with the IPKF operations. He wanted the Sri Lankan Army to also participate with IPKF in the Eastern Province. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi asked my view on this request; I opposed it as it could end up in IPKF & Sri Lankan soldiers shooting at each other in the confusion of battle and the Prime Minister upheld my view. It later transpired that the Lankan interest in the Eastern Sector was that Trincomalee Coast sands

had precious stones including their famous emeralds and they wanted to harvest them through their Army.

The elections had also enabled Sri Lanka to conduct its General Election and the result was that Mr Premadasa was elected the President of Sri Lanka, President Jayawardene having opted out. Sri Lanka has an Executive Presidency with the President having all the powers. At this stage, India’s High Commissioner, M. N. Dixit had a problem. He had been a very effective High Commissioner and had played a major role in drafting of the Indo - Sri Lanka Accord; he was jokingly referred to by his colleagues in the Foreign Ministry as India’s Pro-Consul in Colombo. The new President would not give time to present his credentials. Till the credentials are accepted, the envoy remains just an ambassador or High Commissioner in waiting. It was a polite message to India that President Premadasa did not want Mr Dixit as India’s High Commissioner. Delhi got the message and Dixit was replaced by L. N. Mehrotra whose credentials were promptly accepted by the Sri Lankan President. Mehrotra was a recognised linguist and well versed in Oriya language which is the grammar for Sinhala language.

At the Brink of War

Mr Premadasa had always been antagonistic to the Indo Sri Lanka Accord and as Prime Minister, he absented himself from Sri Lanka when the Accord was being signed, by planning a visit to Japan. In his election manifesto, he had stated that if elected President, he would expel the IPKF from Sri Lanka. Immediately after the election I got a

call at my HQ in Trincomalee from the President's office that the President was sending a letter for me by a special messenger. Meanwhile HC Mehrotra had been told of the contents of the letter by the President. He called me and said that the letter in essence was ordering IPKF out of Sri Lanka. If I did not vacate all my forces from the territory of Sri Lanka within 48 hours, he would declare IPKF an army of occupation and order his military to attack the IPKF. Mehrotra could not offer me any advice and I called Ronen Sen at the PMO which was my 'ordered communication channel with Delhi on political matters' and apprised him of the situation. He told me that 'Boss-man is away campaigning', and that he couldn't offer any advice in this matter. I told him "In that case I will do what I have to do".

I went to the airport to receive the President's representative and as the plane from Colombo landed, out stepped the Sri Lanka Army Commander, Lt Gen Hamilton Wanasinghe. The SL Army Chief had the rank of Lt General as the rank of full General was held by the Chairman Joint Chiefs, Gen Cecil Ranatunga. Gen Wanasinghe was a good friend since we had been operating together and I had been to his house for dinner. He said 'Amar, can we take a walk on the tarmac,' so we walked together on the airfield. He said he was in a quandary; 'his President had ordered him to serve me an ultimatum for IPKF to leave the shores of Sri Lanka within 72 hours and if we did not do so he will declare IPKF an army of occupation and order his forces to attack it.' He asked me what should he do?

"You should obey the orders of your President," I told him.

"If I do so, what will you do?" he asked.

"I will do what I must do; fight to defend my mandate, my soldiers and equipment. It could have unpredictable consequences," I told him.

He said nothing more and left for Colombo without handing me the letter from the President. Mark Tully, the BBC Correspondent for South Asia had got a whiff of what was happening from his contacts in Colombo. He chartered a special plane and flew into Trincomalee. When I got back to my HQ I saw Mark Tully there, inquisitive as ever. I called my Chief of Staff, Lt Gen N. K. Kapoor and told him in the hearing of all what had transpired and asked him to take down my orders. I dictated; in case we are attacked by the Sri Lankan Forces, we will not only fight them but will also target the source of their origin. I ordered 57 Division in the North to be prepared to attack southwards and to capture Anuradhapura which was close to Colombo; 36 Division in Trincomalee to attack Westwards across the Provincial boundary and join up with 57 Division at Anuradhapura. Further objective and orders will be given later. The inference was obvious; Colombo would be the next objective. The Sri Lanka Army Liaison Officer who was attached with my HQ as per protocol was also present and soon after I finished, he quietly slipped out of my HQ and ran to the nearest telephone. As a precautionary measure I had ordered a Combat Command to take positions at the entry of the road leading to the Eastern Province from Sri Lankan controlled territory. Our T 72 tanks make a frightening sight. Sri Lanka responding likewise lining up their armoured cars which of course were no match for the T 72 tanks.

Consequently, President Premadasa changed

his strategy for getting rid of the IPKF. He secretly contacted the LTTE leadership and asked Prabhakaran to send his representative to Colombo to meet him. Prabhakaran sent his ideologue Anton Balasingham who was based in London and Mahatya his military commander. President Premadasa made-up with the LTTE leaders and commenced giving them arms and ammunition to fight the IPKF. The LTTE happily joined up. President Premadasa thought that after the IPKF left his Army could then take on a considerably weakened LTTE as a result of IPKF operations, while Prabhakaran was sanguine that he could defeat the Sri Lankan military if the IPKF was not around. I came to know of these goings on as a result of an IPKF patrol intercepting a LTTE cadre. The LTTE had the practice of getting everything on record and they had secretly videotaped the meeting with President Premadasa; this LTTE cadre was carrying the video tape towards the coastline for conveying it to Prabhakaran hiding in the Wani Jungle. I immediately sent the video tape to Delhi. I also had reports of Sri Lankan helicopter landings in the Vavuniya Area in Central Sri Lanka where arms & ammunition had been delivered to the LTTE. In fact, a Sri Lanka officer, Brigadier Kobe Koduwa had been seen present. He appears to have been appointed the liaison officer for the LTTE.

At this stage, India's Prime Minister intervened and sent his Principal Advisor Mr Deshmukh to meet the Sri Lankan President. I was also present at this meeting. It was decided that India would withdraw the IPKF from Sri Lanka. President Premadasa made full use of this meeting by leaking to the media that this meeting

was regarding the withdrawal of the IPKF from Sri Lanka. He ensured that all newspapers and its sole TV Channel carried it in headlines. In fact, he got the newspapers in Colombo carry the headline "Gen Kalkat in Colombo to finalise IPKF withdrawal". At least I made the headlines in some country! Mindful of the US and Russian withdrawals from Vietnam and Afghanistan respectively, I insisted that with a force of nearly 80,000 I will do so on my time frame and in phases. This was agreed to by all parties. I set 30 September 1990 as the date by which the withdrawal of IPKF was to be completed. In the event, we completed the withdrawal on 23 September, a full week ahead of schedule. I was the last IPKF person to leave the shores of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government gave me a ceremonial send-off, replete with a 'guard of honour'. The Sri Lanka Defence Secretary was present to see me off. Many quipped that he had been sent by President Premadasa to confirm that I had really left! During the last phase of my withdrawal, as a precautionary measure, I had our Aircraft Carrier Forces standing by, in case Sri Lanka reneged on its agreement.

Lessons

Some important lessons of India's military intervention in Sri Lanka are as under:

- In securing the Accord, the MEA overlooked the first principle of Intervention; In Civil unrests most conflicts have a political dynamic and ultimately require a political resolution. It is only the government of a country that can give political dispensation to its citizens, not an outside power.
- Before intervening in such conflicts, the

intervening country must ensure that the political commitments are guaranteed by the host government. If the host government thereafter reneges on its commitments the only alternative left would be resort to 'regime change,' which seldom works. US learnt this in Afghanistan and Iraq.

- Managing domestic public opinion is critical. This was very well managed by the Indian Government and it ensured that there was no spillover of the separatist tendencies amongst India's Tamils to follow the LTTE example.
- The Exit Plan must be in place before you intervene in another country.

Epilogue

Some years later, after Prabhakaran and the LTTE leadership had been eliminated by Sri Lankan Forces, a Sri Lanka delegation led by the Sri Lankan President Mr Mahinda Rajapaksa came to India. In a reception hosted in his honour by the Sri Lanka High Commission, the Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh was also invited. I

too was invited to the event. During the Reception the Sri Lankan President took me aside and told me that Sri Lanka was in grave economic situation, and he had requested the Indian government for a joint venture in development of the Hambantota Port in South Sri Lanka. I apprised Dr Manmohan Singh of the same and he said it appeared to be a good idea and he would look into it. I accordingly conveyed this to the Sri Lankan President. However, nothing happened on this issue. A few years later, when I had an opportunity to meet Dr Manmohan Singh, I asked him about the proposal. He said that due to compulsions of a coalition government, he could not get it through the Coordination Committee, chaired by the Congress President, as their Southern party allies were against it. This of course, brings home another lesson—the need for a strong centre to push through certain proposals in the national interest. As India did not take the offer, China promptly accepted it. Today, 70 percent stake in the port has been leased to China Merchants Port Holdings Company Limited (CM Port) for 99 years for USD 1.12 billion.

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The Dharma-Dhamma Paradigms in the Indic Traditions and the New World Order: A Cross-Cultural Interface with China

Priyadarsi Mukherji*

The geopolitical and geostrategic dynamics at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century — have transformed the world in the light of the pandemic-stricken scenario. It would be inappropriate to call the current scenario as post-Covid. With widespread destruction of human life — accentuated by a covert biological warfare unleashed by the wildly ambitious Chinese hegemony — has put before mankind the basic question of Dharma.

Dharma is a key concept with multiple meanings in the Indic system of beliefs, as in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism etc. With no equivalence in the Western languages, the word Dharma is commonly translated as righteousness, merit, or moral duties governing individual conduct. Its most inappropriate rendition has been in the sense of religion or religious faith.

The word Dharma has roots in the Sanskrit धृ which means to hold, to maintain or to preserve, and is related to the Latin word *firmus* (firm, stable). From this it takes the meaning of 'what is established or firm', and hence 'law'. The Sanskrit word Dharma is rendered as Dhamma in Prakrit and Pali. The word Dhamma refers to the Buddhist doctrine and is often interpreted to mean the 'teachings of the Buddha'. This doctrine, according to King Aśoka, was based on religious

tolerance, respect for elders, and care for the old ones, kindness towards the needy; purity and truthfulness; and compassion for all sentient beings.

The word धर्म or धम्म carries a wide range of connotations: (1) Faith, creed, piety, virtue, e.g., अहिंसा परम धर्म ; (2) Scriptural laws or directions, e.g., धर्मसम्मत ; (3) A form of worship, e.g., तान्त्रिक धर्म ; (4) Theology, e.g., धर्मग्रन्थ ; (5) Natural quality, or behavior, or disposition, property or function, e.g., मानवधर्म, कालधर्म, पावकधर्म ; (6) Virtuousness, righteousness, morality, e.g., धर्महीन आचरण ; (7) Law, e.g., धर्मपत्नी (8) Justice, e.g., धर्माधिकरण (9) Yama, धर्मराज यम ; and (10) Chastity, e.g., धर्मनाश ।

Out of the varied connotations of the word, we find Dharma or Dhamma as natural quality, or behavior, or disposition, property or function — when we deal with the Pañcabhūta (पञ्चभूत) or the Five Elements, the basis of all cosmic creation, according to Hinduism. These are क्षिति, अप्, तेज, मरुत, व्योम ; in other words, Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Ether. In Mahābhārata, the five Pāndavas represented the Pañcabhūta. The hundred Kauravas who represented the malevolent human desire — were vanquished by the five elements of Nature. Thus, through the ultimate victory of the Pāndavas, Nature has been depicted as invincible. But when we explain Dharma in terms of human

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conduct, we invariably emphasize the moral obligation of treading the path of righteousness. This path of Dharma is often termed as Tao (道) in Chinese philosophy of Confucius and Taoism. Tao has been explained as the highest state of spiritual enlightenment — imbued with a just cause. However, Dharma and Tao are not the same — though some scholars have vaguely sought to paint them both with the same brush. Tao can be translated as मार्ग, though it is quite unclear whether that मार्ग or path is of Dharma (morality) or Adharma (immorality). In this context, धर्म निरपेक्ष often becomes equivalent to अधर्म सापेक्ष ।

For imparting a value-oriented education, stories from the Mahābhārata, Kathāsaritsāgar, and Pañcatantra ought to be incorporated in the curriculum so as to imbibe ethical values among children — as *Thirukkural* of Thiruvalluvar is taught in schools in southern India. The lessons in Dharma are essential in fostering social harmony, imparting righteousness and providing an urge to attain the collective objective for an anthropocentric development.

In the book *Demystifying Leadership: Unveiling the Mahabharata Code*¹, the authors reiterate that Dharma has been used to denote a normative action or an abstract quality of compassion, righteousness, justice and truth in the Mahābhārata. It is linked with norms, law, ethics as well as righteous execution of obligations, responsibilities and duties. The underlying expectation is that the person following Dharma will operate within the boundaries of justice, and will in word and deed, act with honor and propriety. Alternatively, the word Adharma can be understood as an action that violates the norms.

While entering into a discourse on what is Dharma, we would find how Kautilya had visualized it. In the monograph titled *Understanding Dharma and Artha in Statecraft through Kautilya's Arthashastra*², the ancient author has been attributed for defining Artha as wealth or power, and Dharma as political virtue or ethical and moral issues in statecraft. Kautilya realized that Dharma regulates Artha in the Indian tradition. Kautilya wanted the policymakers and leaders to be well-versed in the epics. The epics bring clear lessons on morals, both at a personal level and also while relating to statecraft. In Indian traditions, social and political conditions must exist for the pursuit of the four great ends of life — the Purushārthas — ethical virtue (Dharma), wealth and power (Artha), pleasure (Kāma), and spiritual transcendence (Moksha).

By continuing with our national subservience to the alien powers of the West, the leaders in India around 1947 — committed a series of Adharma — that jeopardized our national interests. In the post-1947 India, there has only been petty politics (राजनीति), and no statecraft, and the least of national or state policy (देशनीति or राष्ट्रनीति). The performing of Dharma can be shown from the lost pages of our contemporary history. Netaji Subhas Bose's deeds embodied statecraft, and formulation of a robust nation-building policy, combined with astounding foresight and an uncompromising selfless dedication and planning for national reconstruction. Parochialism, and vested interests detrimental to the cause of national rejuvenation, with least focus attached to national security — both internal and external — deprived India of Netaji's leadership and thus

divided the country —both geographically and politically. This partition resulted in weakening India as a nation and created a regional environment with perpetual animosity all around the territorial limits of the country. Netaji's admonition and foretelling thus turned out to be true.

In the ancient Chinese philosophy, the five elements have been different from those of the Indic philosophy. They are Earth, Water, Fire, Tree and Metal. The Chinese do not believe in anything intangible. They are highly materialistic. And therefore, instead of Air and Ether, they got Wood and Metal. These five elements are said to originate from each other, and also said to subdue each other. The principle of the five elements as progenitors goes as follows: Tree begets Fire, Fire begets Earth, Earth begets Metal, Metal begets Water, and Water begets Tree. Similarly, the principle of five elements subduing each other is reflected thus — Water subdues Fire, Fire subdues Metal, Metal subdues Tree, Tree subdues Earth, and Earth subdues Water. All these formulations are based on the Dharma or the natural qualities or functions of the elements.

The ancient philosophers of China had attached due importance to the spiritual welfare of human beings. This was reflected in the Chinese character 體 meaning body. A human body requires a spinal cord or backbone (骨). Along with it, on the top, there is music (曲)—representing spiritual attainment; and below is bean, pea, or plant seeds (豆)—representing food. The human body needs spiritual culture and material culture for its healthy existence. But music being placed above

food, is indicative of the fact that mind ruled supreme over matter—at least till the period when China was a pluralistic society. That is, till 221 BC. The authoritarian trends in terms of governance brought along an atmosphere, wherein lay the seeds of relegating mind beyond the limits of matter. Thus, the totalitarian inclinations witnessed an early rise through material aggrandizement in China.

The autocratic despotism and the nouveau-riche styled arrogance with which Communist China seeks to dictate the world what is 'just' and what it expects the rest of the countries to follow, so as to take care of its sensitivities, fully contravenes its own actions and behavior vis-à-vis other countries. China's position is misplaced since China itself never honors sensitivities of other nations. Moreover, they adhere the least to any international law with any sense of parity. While issuing joint communiqués, China invariably makes it mandatory for other countries to recognize the PRC as the sole entity representing the Chinese people. Hence, the mention of 'One-China Policy' in multifarious documents. Nonetheless, China itself never agreed on adhering to One-India Policy, or honoring the territorial integrity of India. The biggest question remains—did China ever bother about India's sensitivities, did China ever attach importance to India's territorial integrity! The time today mandates that India must pursue a hard-power policy and must play by the stratagem, advocated by Kautilya or Machiavelli, that China has been good at playing.

China has consistently nibbled away territories of other countries, including India's.

China seeks to harm India's interests through myriads of means. Now is the time for India to strengthen its own inherent power to counter China by means of becoming a manufacturing nation and by becoming fully self-reliant even in manufacturing the minutest component to produce everything that used to come as indispensable commodities from China. This undoubtedly has to be India's Yugadharma. The expansionist acts of China along India's borders and the separatist activities with direct connivance of the Chinese state deep inside India; illegally building the CPEC through a disputed territory— are all examples of China's flexing muscles. Now it has become quite apparent that China actively seeks to restrict the growth of India by embroiling India in hundreds of problems involving national security, economic engagements, infrastructural development, etc.

India must realize that communist China has never been a friend to India. Therefore, India must play the game of jeopardizing China's geopolitical and geostrategic interests that underscore creating debt-trap and many other sinister designs that are detrimental to India's national interests. The essential part of the Yugadharma that India must play so as to usher a new world order— is to actively counter such ominous ventures pursued by the Chinese.

The diabolic act that China embarked upon by spreading the Wuhan virus across the world — has been an act of Adharma which the United States of America had funded so as to capitalize from the pandemic. Now with the connivance of the WHO, the various initiatives for global vaccination by India and also some other countries are being

undermined through monopoly, protectionism and racism. The New World Order has been imposed through series of deadly competition for hegemony over the maximum resources of the world. It has not been through the conventional methods of war, but by the covert diffusion of lethal virus and its successive variants. What we are witnessing today has been resultant of the intense trade war between China and the USA.

The top secret biological weapon plan of China, codenamed as 13579, could not be revealed in the USA in 2017 due to some unexpected turn of events. This was China's mega plan “to weaken America, to create disorder in America, and to bring massive destruction of human lives in America.” A Chinese billionaire businessman turned political activist Kuo Wen-Kwei, living in exile in the USA, claimed having exclusive knowledge but unable to make an exposé about the Chinese bio-war blueprint, later lamented in 2020 that “the biochemical weapons came from the Beijing Institute of Chemical Defence and this was the core project of the Chinese Communist Party's 13579 plan at the time.”³

Initially the complicity between the USA pharmaceutical syndicates— scheming to incur profits by maximizing sufferings, and the Chinese virology institute at Wuhan— turned out to be a miscalculation on the part of the American funding agencies. The world witnessed in dismay how the USA unpredictably got checkmated by China in the Machiavellian game of chess. The exiled Chinese billionaire bemoaned the tragedy behind the plot thus— “The evil acts of the CCP has brought great disaster to the United States. But on the other hand, behind the CCP, there are US

dollars from the United States, American technology, the United States facilitated the CCP join the WTO, the funds of Wall Street in the US, and the technology of the US to nourish the CCP.”⁴

Irrespective of their proclaimed ideological differences, the conspirators from both these countries actively connived in the proliferation of the disease and thus continued contending with each other, or perhaps kept on with their shadow-boxing in the public at the dreadful cost of others. And thus, both these contending hegemon committed a colossal Adharma— that the world would never be able to forget.

In the face of ecological imbalance induced by environmental destruction, causing climate change with unprecedented scale of calamity — we can well conclude that these are all results of human greed, insensitivity, vested interest and selfishness — that come under the purview of Adharma. Here, in this context, the plight of Tibet needs to be highlighted. Peace and tranquility between India and China could be preserved for centuries because of Tibet's independent entity. India never shared a common border with China. India had been having a common border with Tibet. Once Tibet was occupied by China, the regional and sub-continental harmony evaporated into the thin air. China committed Adharma by enslaving a fellow Asian populace by their sheer proclivity to expansionism but ostentatiously by their proclaimed 'mission of liberating' them. Taking full control of the water resources of entire Asia has been the reason behind China's full-scale invasion of Tibet. Besides the fountainhead of water located in the Tibetan Plateau, the rich mineral resources, and the diverse flora and fauna

of Tibet came under the control of the Chinese communists. Historically, China advanced its territorial aggrandizement through blatant campaigns towards expansionism under the garb of resistance and security. The non-Han Chinese territories were deliberately occupied and annexed to create a massive buffer zone around the central plains (中原) of the Han Chinese.

The true essence of the Chinese Dream needs to be understood clearly in the current scenario of the fast-changing world order that has been evolving following the advent of the hazardous effects of the Corona virus pandemic. The Chinese under the communist rule since 1949 played the card of being a 'victim' of the Western and Japanese colonialism since 1840, and thus sought justification to avenge the 'historic injustice' by copying and devising the devious methods of domination. China under Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and now Xi Jinping conceived an elaborate strategy to gain economic and military power with the sole objective of achieving the position of Super Cop of the world, replacing the USA. The American Dream of global domination has actually been the quintessence of the Chinese Dream. It is China's dream of becoming the sole superpower in a unipolar world. The Tao or the path adopted by China in the process has been the path of Adharma. Touting its soft power across the world with its so-called Belt and Road Initiative, China has made a mega plan to capture all the main global assets, as well as monopolize the outer space, and create an environment of fear in the minds of the global community by emphasizing China's primacy in every aspect of life and in

every international forum. None of the countries, that had visualized China as a civilized nation with thousands of years of history, could imagine that China's Dharma could be to usher destruction to the mankind in a fashion quite incongruous with an Asian civilization. That China could not cease to be on the collision path with the liberal world even after taking full advantage of all that others could offer, has generated a wave of mistrust across the world that had long reposed faith in the Middle Kingdom.

Buddhism originated in India and spread all over the Asian continent. Yet today, China deliberately seeks to obliterate that fact. The books they publish, quite consciously attempt to project China as the sacred land of Buddha and Buddhism and provide an incorrect interpretation that Buddhism is dead in India. The way the Chinese have sought to portray themselves as the followers of Buddhism and yet carried out mass persecution of Buddhist monks and nuns in Tibet and in the Tibetan cultural spheres along the Himalayas, along with extensive destruction of shrines and monasteries that had taken place in the Maoist era and also being executed during the current era of terror under Xi Jinping, should be a matter of great concern for India. Here India needs to denounce such misdeeds of China and also to highlight that India has been the birthplace of Buddhism and the *karmabhumi* of Buddha. And that the Tibetan culture has been the most honest and truest repository of the original Buddhist traditions that originated from the Indic civilization.

Despite China's outright rejection of religion, and adherence to atheism, its ostentatious display

of 'liberal acceptance' of global religious beliefs — has now fallen flat with its imposition of authority in selecting the next Dalai Lama. Sinicization of every religious faith entails that all religions in China must first blindly follow the dogma of the Chinese Communist Party. Xi Jinping wants all religious believers to follow the CCP over all else. Sinicizing Tibetan Buddhism, and Islam in Xinjiang (East Turkestan) and even Catholicism in China remains a significant priority for Beijing. Attempting to actively guide religions to adapt to a “socialist society with Chinese characteristics”— is obviously indicative that the CCP dogma must be considered to be supreme over and above all religions.

Following our Swadharma (inherent nature) — based on Dharma which connotes social responsibility, moral law or ethical values based on truth — we need to move swiftly towards performing our Yugadharma (the Dharma in each epoch). So, Dharma has to be followed with Karma.

During our freedom struggle, a large number of youth sacrificed their life while seeking to break the bondage of our motherland. That was considered their rightful Dharma. But theirs were acts of individual heroism. When Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose galvanized individual forces into a formidable army — the Indian National Army, he performed a greater Dharma — due to which the British left India. Those who vowed to remain subjects of a British Dominion by adhering to non-violence and by enforcing pacifism to curb popular upsurge, had been selfishly adhering to personal gain, vested interests — detrimental to national emancipation. That was clearly Adharma.

Śrī Krishna initially professed of attaining Dharma through peace. But when peace failed to achieve the goal, he advocated for war. And war is himsā (violence), not ahimsā (non-violence). We got freedom because of the armed struggle by the INA under the command of Subhas Bose. The achievement of Netaji for the country came through his performance of Yugadharmā. That is why the British had identified Netaji as their sole enemy, and considered the advocates of non-violence as inconsequential. Hence, adhering to non-violence was not the ultimate Dharma of the era for achieving national emancipation. In this light, non-violence amounted to escapism and treachery that was practically translated into collaborationism. The dichotomy between Dharma and Adharma was quite obvious.

The conflict between Dharma and Adharma keeps permeating our human existence in every epoch. The discourse of Dharma and Adharma takes the centre stage in our great epic Mahābhārata. Śrī Krishna's sermons at the

Kurukshetra battlefield can be depicted as a reflection of the dialectics and the sufferings in human life in which we exist amidst the constant tussle between Dharma and Adharma. We might continue professing वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् (The world is but one family), and also यत्र विश्वम् भवत्येक नीडम् (Where the world is but one abode). This has been our Swadharmā. But now is the time to refashion our existence in the new era, in the new world order by adhering to Yugadharmā. This world order is the one where the Chinese deceit and expansionism, and the American arrogance, mindlessness and hypocrisy have created perilous effects on the entire world. India must seize the time to embolden her gross national strength index through revitalizing the economy by means of enormous political will. That would amount to our fulfilling of Yugadharmā. This Dharma would certainly require a paradigm shift so as to make India truly self-reliant, striving wholeheartedly to create grassroots wealth so that we could become a strong nation in all respect.

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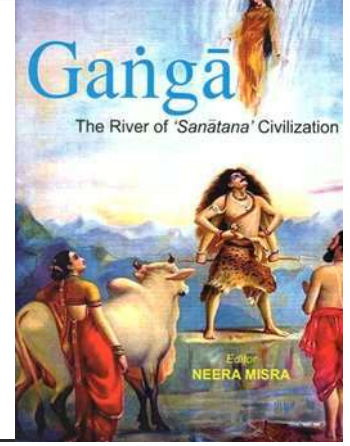


Ganga, The River of “Sanatana’ Civilization

Author: Neera Misra

Publisher: Research India Press, New Delhi, 2021

Book Reviewed by: Bibek Debroy*



Entire books can be written on Ganga. Indeed, entire books have been written on Ganga. Eric Newby floated “slowly down the Ganges”. Steven Darian has a book on the Ganges in myth and history, domain traversed by Sudipta Sen too. Ganga features prominently in Diana Eck's book on India's sacred geography. There are books by Giulio Di Sturco and Victor Mallet and lovely photographs in a book by Raghbir Singh. Ganga is that kind of river. We have yet another book on Ganga, the river of “sanatana” civilization and “sanskriti”. For years and years, people have written about Ganga. There is a beautiful description of Ganga in Valmiki Ramayana, where Valmiki refers to Ganga as divine (दिव्या) and the one with three courses (त्रिपथगा). She has three courses because she flows in heaven, on earth and in the nether regions. Adi Shankaracharya composed a wonderful *stotram* to Ganga. This is the one that begins, देवि सुरेश्वरि भगवति गङ्गे and most people will have heard it. At the time of taking a bath,

many Indians recite a shloka गङ्गे च यमुने चैव गोदावरि सरस्वति । नर्मदे सिन्धु कावेरि जलेऽस्मिन् संनिधिं कुरु ॥ “O Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu, Kaveri! Please be present in this water.” In this list of seven rivers, Ganga is the first.

Ganga is important for our civilization, culture and history and it is understandable that Ganga should be written about. Yet, this book is different and it is probably the only book of its kind, since it includes papers presented at a conference that brought a multi-dimensional lens to bear on Ganga. Therefore, there are papers on what can be called a textual tradition, with stories about Bhagiratha, Kapila, Jahnu and Bhishma.

Cutting across India and Bangladesh, from the Himalayas to the confluence with the ocean in Bay of Bengal, Ganga is a long river. Depending on how the river (and its tributaries) are defined, it is around 2,600 km long. Bhagirathi originates in Gomukh (literally shaped like a cow's mouth), from the Gangotri glacier. In a way, this is the

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source of Ganga. Alakananda originates in some other glaciers. In a way, this too is the source of Ganga. Both Bhagirathi and Alakananda are joined by their own respective tributaries, before they merge in Devprayag. One could say that this is when the river becomes Ganga. From the mountains, Ganga starts to enter the plains in Rishikesh/Hrishikesh and completely enters the plains in Haridwar (earlier known as Gangadvara). As Ganga flows through the plains, there are many rivers that join it along its course, some of which are proper tributaries – Ramganga, Yamuna (there is a separate Jamuna in Bangladesh), Tamasa (Tamas or Tons), Gomati, Ghaghara (Karnali), Son, Gandaki and Koshi. As Ganga approaches the ocean, distributaries like Hooghly branch off. (Hooghly has a tributary in Damodar.) The Hooghly part enters the ocean in Sagar island in Sundarbans, known as Gangasagar. Human civilization, or at least settled human civilization, always sought out rivers. It is no different for Ganga and Ganga's tributaries and distributaries. Badrinath, Haridwar, New Delhi, Agra, Prayagraj, Kanpur, Jaunpur, Varanasi, Mathura, Mirzapur, Auraiya, Etawah, Farrukhabad, Fatehgarh, Kannauj, Gorakhpur, Lucknow, Bhagalpur, Patna, Gaya, Munger, Baranagar, Kolkata, Murshidabad and many more. Some of these are very old cities. Varanasi is believed to be the oldest inhabited city in the world. The area of Ganga's basin is 860,000 sq. km and it is spread across 11 States and 600 million people live in this basin and 40% of India's GDP (gross domestic product).

These are staggering numbers from today. But the numbers were no less staggering in the

past, which is why Ganga has been part and parcel of our civilization. In iconography, Ganga holds a water-pot. Iconography is based on symbolism. For our purposes, the water in the water-pot represents life. As I said, there are papers in this book on stories and the textual tradition. But there are also papers in this book documenting that history of urbanisation, such as *janapadas*, through archaeological excavations and even inscriptions. That's where this book scores. It also has a rich section on Ganga's iconography, in paintings and in sculpture. Indeed, beyond the papers, there is an entire Section 2 on Ganga's depictions in texts and visual forms. That multi-disciplinary approach makes this a unique book.

Ganga may give life to 600 million Indians, but Ganga is in bad shape. In 2013, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) had a devastating assessment of pollution in the river. There is actually a hierarchy of pollution, based on levels of BOD (biochemical oxygen demand). One can legitimately argue BOD is at best a partial indicator. There are other measures of a river's well-being. Lists float around of most polluted rivers in the world. Ganga and Yamuna will invariably figure in these lists. Ill-being of rivers is primarily due to raw sewage and industrial waste. Neither problem is new. Many people may not have heard of Kashi Ganga Prasadini Sabha, established by concerned citizens of Varanasi in 1886. The Sabha's objective was to introduce drainage and clean up the river, improvements we are still struggling with today. Rivers now have legal rights. In March 2017, Uttarakhand High Court have Ganga and Yamuna legal rights, as minors. They needed guardians. Granting legal

rights to rivers (and water-bodies) opens up a new area of environmental jurisprudence. But that is best left to lawyers. As guardians, what do we plan for Ganga? In that conference and in bringing in that multi-dimensional perspective that has led to this book, I detect only one weakness. There is only one brief paper that lists out steps for rejuvenating Ganga. A lot has been done through

Ganga Action Plan, Namami Gange and National Mission for Clean Ganga. The intention is not to suggest that everything is perfect. But, shouldn't there have been more discussion on this issue? It would have made the book more complete. Despite that minor carping, this is a wonderful book. It is expensive. Once you get it, you will realise why.







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