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Balochistan and the Interests of Extra Regional Powers



Serious Political Crisis



How China sees the World: Insights from China's International Relations Scholars



Indian court orders life in jail for top Kashmiri separatist Yasin Malik



Govt. jacks up prices of petrol, diesel by Rs.30 per litre



Lt. Gen. (R) Khalid Ahmed Kidwai - AD NCA

BALUCHISTAN'S GEOSTRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE, THE POLITICS OF MAJOR POWERS - MANAGING IT'S IMPACT



Memorandum of Understanding signed between RFI and CISSS Think Tanks



Launching Ceremony of MILGEM Class Corvette PNS BADR held at (KS&EW)



Quadistan

- How can China's unmanned drone carrier strengthen Pakistan's defense?
- Palestinian lives at risk if EU continues to withhold aid: NRC

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EDITORIAL

Serious Political Crisis

Pakistan is going through a serious political crisis fueled by the ousting of the PTI regime and the placement of the PML (N) government supported by PPP and JUI (F) among others. Although this change was brought about democratically by way of a vote of no confidence through the National Assembly but has become controversial due to several factors. Firstly, the ousted Prime Minister insists that his removal was due to pressure from America. He conveyed to all the relevant stakeholders, including the people of Pakistan that an American diplomat had threatened the Ambassador of Pakistan to America that if the vote of no-confidence against Mr. Imran Khan (which hadn't materialized by that time) was not successful that Pakistan may face problems and all will be forgiven if it is successful. The details of this meeting were shared by way of a cipher with the Foreign Office and the reality of this cipher had been endorsed by the National Security Committee of Pakistan. Despite that Mr. Imran Khan was removed from office and a new regime was put in its place. Secondly, the majority of the new regime comprises members who are on bail from the court including the Prime Minister and his son. Both the majority holding parties PPP and PML (N) have serious allegations of corruption against them and lost the confidence of the people due to their corruption and failure to deliver on promises. Another reason is Mr. Imran Khan's decisions, in Pakistan's national interest, not allowing the US to have bases on Pakistani soil, not taking a stance against Russia in the matter of the Ukraine war, not recognizing Israel, and trying to make a deal with Russia for cheaper oil in local currency. All these matters were in line with public sentiment and interest and therefore the growing belief that Mr. Imran Khan was ousted due to American pressure has considerably hurt the public sentiment. It is also believed that this government is put in place to accept all American demands including accepting Israel as a country. After his ouster, Mr. Imran Khan launched a campaign for early elections and held public protests (Jalsas) in all the major cities of Pakistan and succeeded in gaining a large amount of public support. Mr. Imran Khan's long march on May 25, 2022, was attended by a large number of protesters who were dealt with in the most horrible way possible, and obstacles were placed, tear gas and rubber bullets were used to stop them from reaching Islamabad but this strategy failed miserably. In Islamabad, the long march protesters were to stage a sit-in, but Mr. Imran Khan called it off to avoid bloodshed and a conflict between the public and institutions. It is rumored that a deal was struck between the government representatives and Mr. Imran Khan and it was promised in this deal elections would be held in October 2022 while assemblies will be dissolved in six days. This regime has infuriated the public considerably and a biased view by the government will not work in their favor. The institutions are being criticized significantly by the general public. The current situation is grim in Pakistan as it seems that the American agenda under the Col. Ralph Peter plan has been put into motion. This plan seeks to formulate greater Israel in this region and break other regional powers like Turkey, Pakistan Iran, into smaller countries. Pakistan needs to realize the grim situation that the country is in, and should ensure that it is on the right side of the game to avoid being harmed. The establishment should give heed to public sentiment and must call for re-elections as a priority because the American plan of creating a

strong rift between the civilians and the institutions is underway. Right now, Imran Khan has succeeded in securing significant public support and the civilians are fast losing hope in its institutions. To curtail this boiling situation, elections should be announced and all reservations should be addressed to avoid the implementation of the American agenda.

Summarized News & Articles

Double whammy for consumers as fuel, power prices jacked up

(2 June, 2022) The federal government has decided to raise the prices of all petroleum products with the exception of one by another Rs30, just a week after making a similar increase hours after the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) approved a massive increase of Rs. 7.91 per unit in the power tariff. The new fuel prices will come into effect from midnight petrol will be available at Rs. 209.86 per litre, high-speed diesel (HSD) at Rs204.15, kerosene oil at Rs181.94 and light diesel oil at Rs. 178.31. Only the price of kerosene oil was increased by less than Rs30. With the new hike in the power tariff, the price of a unit is expected to move upwards from Rs16.91 to Rs24.82. Despite an inevitable increase in the prices that will unleash a strong wave of inflation, the coalition government remains short of clinching a deal with the International Monetary Fund that still requires an agreement on the budget for fiscal year 2022-23. But Finance Minister Miftah Ismail did not give a surety to withdraw gas and electricity subsidies accorded to the richest people and fuel allowances of cabinet , judges, generals and bureaucrats. Addressing a news conference in Islamabad, Finance Minister Miftah Ismail said the government was still facing a loss of around Rs9 in petrol despite a hike of Rs30 as it was “not collecting any tax” on the fuel. The minister added that the government was holding talks with the IMF every day. “We cannot accept all their demands but there are certain points that we have to agree to.” He maintained that the subsidy on petroleum products announced by ex-premier Imran Khan had to be withdrawn to avert financial losses. "Irrespective of what the IMF says, the government cannot sell petrol and diesel by bearing losses."However, Miftah said the government would ensure stability in prices of sugar and wheat at Rs70 per kg and Rs40 per kg respectively at utility stores across the country. The minister added that the government was willing to import oil from Russia, provided it did not come with sanctions.

How can China's unmanned drone carrier strengthen Pakistan's defence?

On 18th May 2022, China launched the world's first drone carrier, Zhu Hai Yun, which can operate on its own

By:News Desk | 20 May 2022

CSSC Huangpu Wenchong has launched a research ship intended to help China's oceanographers to expand their research through the use of unmanned and autonomous tools. This unmanned ship can be controlled remotely and navigated freely in water, making it a powerful tool for the country to carry out its marine scientific research. Moreover, this automatic drone carrier incorporates an artificial intelligence technology significant for maintaining maritime security and monitoring the sea lanes. Likely, this 88-meter vessel helps China to intercept, besiege, and expel invasive targets within a very short time and this would largely contribute to expanding maritime influence in the Indian Ocean Region. The construction of the carrier ship was started last year in July by Huangpu Wenchong, a subsidiary of China's largest shipbuilding companies the China State Shipbuilding Corporation. Similarly, the ship is expected to be delivered by the end of this year after successful sea trials. Additionally, the wide deck of the ship can carry many unmanned vehicles, including drones, unmanned ships, and submersibles, making it a network to observe targets in the marine capacity. Moreover, this drone

carrier is 88.5 meters long, 14 meters wide, and 6.1 meters deep, designed to carry 2,000 tonnes, with a sailing speed of up to 18 knots. This unmanned drone carrier can strengthen Pakistan's Defence system. This technology would prove to be beneficial for Pakistan's marine safety and defense in the Arabian Sea as it incorporates one of the advanced radar and AI technology. In addition to defense and security, this ship is also effective for marine disaster prevention and monitoring of the marine environment. Likewise, this unmanned carrier is also capable of providing accurate marine information. Furthermore, if Pakistan is able to get this unmanned drone carrier from china it will automatically strengthen its defense system against its neighboring countries India and Afghanistan. Similarly, this would help to cater to the threat perception from the west as well. Conclusively, this unmanned drone carrier with AI technology is one of the modern defense strategies helping China to accomplish its strategic goals of maritime influence as an emerging global power.

Launching ceremony of PNS BADR held at Karachi

By Web Desk | May 21, 2022 | Karachi

Launching Ceremony of MILGEM Class Corvette PNS BADR held at Karachi Shipyard & Engineering Works (KS&EW). Prime Minister of Islamic Republic of Pakistan Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif graced the occasion as Chief Guest. The newly launched corvette is equipped with state of the art weapons & sensors including surface to surface, surface to air missiles and anti-submarine weapons, which would significantly boost Pakistan Navy's defensive and offensive capabilities. Contract for construction of four MILGEM Corvettes for PN was signed between DGMP and M/s ASFAT in 2018; wherein, two ships will be constructed at Istanbul Naval Shipyard (INSY), Turkey and other two ships at KS&EW, Pakistan. In this regard, 1st Ship of the Project, PNS BABUR was launched at Turkey in August 2021. On the occasion, the honorable Chief Guest expressed it a historic occasion as Ministry of Defence Production, Pakistan Navy, Karachi Shipyard and M/s ASFAT of Turkey had jointly supported construction of this state of the art platform. The Prime Minister appreciated the performance of KS&EW and reiterated that indigenization is at the forefront of our national policy and it is very encouraging to see modern warships being built in Pakistan. The Chief Guest also highlighted that MILGEM Project will enable acquisition of much needed design and construction capability for future needs and export potential. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in his message on the occasion extended felicitation on timely completion of ongoing Pakistan-Turkey MILGEM project despite COVID pandemic. He highlighted that MILGEM project is manifestation of deep rooted historical ties and willingness to share of expertise in the Defence industry between the two brotherly countries. Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi, in his address underscored that Pakistan's geographical position and current geo strategic environment demands building of a strong Navy to defend maritime interests. Our sea trade routes and vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) needs to be effectively safeguarded. The Naval Chief underlined that PN MILGEM Ships will play an important role in catering operational needs of Pakistan Navy. The ceremony was also attended by Minister of National Defence Turkey and other high ranking government officials of Pakistan & Turkey, Pakistan Navy and KS&EW.

Sindh, Chinese officials agree to evolve foolproof security mechanism

Tahir Siddiqui Saturday May 21, 2022

KARACHI: The Sindh government and Chinese security authorities have agreed to work together to evolve a foolproof security mechanism for the Chinese working in CPEC and non-CPEC projects in the province. This emerged in a meeting between Chief Secretary Sohail Rajput and External Security Commissioner in China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Cheng Gouping along with their respective teams. The chief secretary was assisted by Acting IGP Kamran Fazal, Home Secretary Dr Saeed Ahmed Magnejo, AIG Karachi Ghulam Nabi Memon, AIG Special Branch Javed Odho, AIG CTD Imran Yakoob Minhas, Rangers Colonel Nasrum Minullah, Special Secretary to the CM Rahim Shaikh and others. The Chinese

delegation members included Defence Attaché Yang Yang, Deputy DG CTD State Security of China Zhou Shanwu, Consular Ministry of Foreign Affairs Wang Daxue, Deputy DG International Cooperation (Public Security) Li Yuhong, Director Administration Chinese Embassy Sun Mingji, Deputy Director Asian Affairs Wei Guo and others. The meeting, in the backdrop of the Karachi University incidents, agreed to work out a comprehensive plan to provide security to the Chinese nationals working in non-CPEC projects, on the pattern of CPEC-related projects security system. The meeting was told that Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah had already directed provincial police to conduct a security audit of the institutions/organisation where Chinese were working under private arrangements. It was informed that the home department was collecting the data of all the Chinese working in the province so that they could be brought under the security cover. For the purpose, the visiting delegation was also urged to help the provincial government in developing a comprehensive database, for which the delegation assured their full cooperation to Sindh government. The Chinese delegation thanked CM Syed Murad Ali Shah for visiting the Chinese consulate just after the KU incident and offering his condolences for the departed souls. The CM had also attended the last rites and memorial services held at the consulate. (Courtesy: Dawn News)

UN lists Pakistan among 'drought-hit' countries

By: Amin Ahmed | May 15, 2022

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is among 23 countries which are facing drought emergencies over the past two years (2020-2022), according to the 'Global Land Outlook' report released by the United Nations. The report released by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) ahead of the UN Desertification and Drought Day (June 17) says over the past century, the highest total number of humans affected by drought was in Asia. The 23 countries listed by the report include Afghanistan, Angola, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritania, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Pakistan, the United States and Zambia. About future scenarios, the report predicts the outcomes by 2050 and risks involved, and says by 2050, an additional 4 million square kilometers of natural areas, equivalent to the size of India and Pakistan, would require restoration measures, augmented with protection measures of areas important for biodiversity, water regulation, conservation of soil and carbon stocks, and provision of critical ecosystem functions. Up to 40 per cent of the planet's land is degraded, directly affects half of humanity, threaten roughly half of global GDP worth \$44 trillion. If business as usual continued through 2050, the report projects additional degradation of an area almost the size of South America. The report says nations' current pledge to restore one billion degraded hectares by 2030 requires \$1.6 trillion this decade a fraction of today's annual \$700 billion in fossil fuel and agricultural subsidies. The report warns that at no other point in modern history has humanity faced such an array of familiar and unfamiliar risks and hazards, interacting in a hyper-connected and rapidly changing world. (Courtesy: Dawn News)

Six Pakistani peacekeepers honored posthumously at UN ceremony

(UNITED NATIONS) Six Pakistani peacekeepers honoured posthumously at United Nations Ceremony during a ceremony of International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers which was observed at the UN Headquarters in New York on Thursday 26 May. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres addressed the ceremony and conferred the Dag Hammarskjöld Medal posthumously on 117 military, police and civilian peacekeepers who lost their lives while serving under the UN flag last year. Among the peacekeepers honoured, six are from Pakistan: Police Tahir Ikram, Police Adil Jan, and SGT Muhammad Naeem [who served with UN-AU Mission in Darfur; Tahir Mehmood deployed with the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Muhammad Shafeeq served in the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, and Abrar Sayed served in civilian capacity with. As one of the top troop-contributing countries, Pakistan deeply values

the vital role played by the "blue helmets" in maintaining security and stability in many conflict-ridden areas around the world. Pakistan is proud of its long-standing and consistent contribution to UN peacekeeping spanning over six decades. (Courtesy Dunya News)

News In Brief International

Indian court orders life in jail for top Kashmiri separatist Yasin Malik

By Suchitra Mohanty and Fayaz Bukhari

NEW DELHI: An Indian court on Wednesday (May 25) ordered life in jail for Kashmiri separatist leader Yasin Malik for funding "terrorist" activities and other charges, a judge said, prompting street protests outside the politician's residence. Special Judge (NIA) court Parveen Singh noted, "The crime becomes more serious as it was committed with the assistance of foreign powers and designated terrorists. The seriousness is further increased by the fact that it was committed behind the smokescreen of an alleged peaceful political movement." The court pronounced separate sentences, besides a fine of over Rs 10 lakh, for various offences under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Indian Penal Code. All the sentences were ordered to be run concurrently. The court said it is high time that it is recognised that terror funding is one of the gravest offences and has to be punished more severely. The court had earlier on May 19 convicted him in the case after he had on May 10 pleaded guilty of the charges. The court had twice given him the opportunity to re-think his decision to admit the grave charges. Malik would now have an option to challenge his sentence only in appeal before the Delhi High Court. The case has triggered strong reactions from neighbouring Pakistan. Malik's Pakistan origin wife, Mushaal Hussein Mullick tweeted, "BJP wants to punish my husband to increase Modi's Hindutva fascist vote bank...India must end these war crimes and politics and hatred and intolerance." During the arguments on the quantum of the sentence, the National Investigation Agency sought the death penalty against Malik. For his part, Malik claimed he has followed the principles of Mahatma Gandhi since 1994 since he laid down the arms. With regard to demand for the death penalty, he said he would not beg for anything and the case is before the court to decide. "I have worked with seven Prime Ministers of the country and I have a legacy," he said.

Palestinian lives at risk if EU continues to withhold aid: NRC

By Al Jazeera Staff | 24 May 2022

A humanitarian organisation has warned that the European Union's continued delay in distributing aid to vital sectors in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip is putting Palestinian lives at risk, with dire consequences for patients needing treatment at occupied East Jerusalem hospitals. Since 2021, the EU has withheld a large proportion of its funding to the Palestinians nearly \$230m under the pretext that Palestinian school textbooks need to undergo revisions and changes. But, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the suspension of aid is paralysing critical sectors and impeding services, including healthcare in occupied East Jerusalem, where hospitals provide life-saving treatments to Palestinians from across the

territories. "These restrictions punish terminally ill patients who cannot get life-saving medicine and force children to go hungry when parents cannot afford to buy food. Palestinians are paying the cruellest price for political decisions made in Brussels," said Jan Egeland, the NRC's secretary-general. The rights group, which helps displaced people, said that at least 500 cancer patients, diagnosed since September 2021, have been unable to access adequate, life-saving treatments at Augusta Victoria Hospital in occupied East Jerusalem. This has led to avoidable deaths, according to the Lutheran World Federation, a global communion of churches, which operates the hospital. Patients already under the care of the hospital have endured significant delays in critical treatment, the group said in a statement. The EU's decision to withhold the badly needed aid has also had dire consequences on the cash support needed for Palestinian livelihoods. Since November 2021, the group said, as many as 120,000 people, most of them in Gaza, have not received financial support, while Palestinian Authority (PA) employees have had their salaries cut by 20 percent. "We do not ask to live like the rest of humanity, just a quarter of the life they live would suffice, no more," said Muhammad, a 74-year-old man from Gaza whose sole source of income is assistance from the Ministry of Social Development, which in turn relies on EU aid. For close to two years, he has not received any cash aid, which is badly needed to support his disabled wife and to be able to afford adequate housing. Al Jazeera has reached out to the EU for comment. The Gaza Strip has been battered by years of Israeli siege and bombardment, which has pushed much of the population below the poverty line and rendered 63 percent of its population in need of some form of humanitarian assistance. Some 2.1 million Palestinians, out of 5.3 million, need humanitarian assistance, according to ECHO, the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. The EU is the largest donor to the PA with some \$1.4bn spent under the European Union Joint Strategy 2017-2020, and some \$886m in humanitarian assistance since 2000. Fifteen EU member states have signed a letter to the European Commission criticising the delay in providing the funds, and have called for their immediate release.(SOURCE: AL JAZEERA)

Mass Shootings in the United States May-2022

By: Christine Hauser

May 13: Milwaukee

At least 16 people were wounded by gunfire in a shooting in downtown Milwaukee, in a popular nightlife area blocks from the arena where an N.B.A. playoff game ended hours earlier, the authorities said.

May 14: Buffalo

A memorial to the victims of the mass shooting at a Tops grocery store in Buffalo.Credit...Kenny Holston for The New York Times A gunman armed with an assault-style weapon killed 10 people and wounded three others at a Tops supermarket in a predominantly Black section of Buffalo, the authorities said. The suspect, Payton S. Gendron, 18, is white, and the 10 people who died were all Black. Before the attack, Mr. Gendron had posted a nearly 200-page racist screed online. He has pleaded not guilty. He faces life in prison if convicted.

May 15: Laguna Woods, Calif.

A gunman killed one person and critically wounded four other members of the Irvine Taiwanese Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, Calif. The congregation, which holds services at the Geneva Presbyterian Church, overpowered the gunman and hogtied him, preventing further

bloodshed, the authorities said. The suspect, David Chou, 68, is a Las Vegas man with a wife and child in Taiwan who had traveled to Orange County with a grievance against Taiwanese people, the authorities said. He was charged with murder and five counts of attempted murder in what the Orange County sheriff, Don Barnes, called a “politically motivated hate incident.”

May 24: Uvalde, Texas

A gunman killed 19 children and two teachers at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, about 80 miles west of San Antonio. Law enforcement officers fatally shot the gunman, identified as Salvador Ramos, 18, but not until well over an hour after he walked into the school, raising questions about whether lives could have been saved if they had acted sooner. The U.S. Justice Department has said that it would review the law enforcement response.

June 1: Tulsa, Okla.

Several people were shot and five were killed at a medical building next to Saint Francis Hospital in Tulsa, Okla., the Tulsa police said. The police said the gunman was believed to have killed himself. The group recorded 693 mass shootings last year, with 28 involving four or more fatalities.

Canada protests after aircraft ‘buzzed’ by Chinese jets

Chinese Fighter Jets are frequently Buzzing Royal Canadian Air Force CP-140 Aurora taking part in Operation NEON

By RFA Staff | 02 June 2022

China’s People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) fighter jets have repeatedly “buzzed” a Canadian reconnaissance aircraft on a U.N. mission in East Asia, with over two dozen intercepts deemed dangerous, a media outlet in Canada reported. “Buzzing” means flying extremely close and fast. On these occasions the Chinese jets came as close as 20 to 100 feet (six to 30 meters) to the Canadian plane, according to a report Wednesday in Canada’s Global News. The network quoted anonymous sources in the Canadian government and military as saying the government lodged “multiple” diplomatic complaints with Beijing for what they called the “unsafe and unprofessional conduct” of the Chinese pilots. The Canadian maritime patrol aircraft CP-140 Aurora, manned by rotating crews, is currently taking part in U.N. Operation NEON to monitor sanctions against North Korea. A spokesperson for the Canadian Department of National Defence was quoted as saying that the incidents are “of concern and of increasing frequency.” There have been around 60 such incidents since December with the planes sometimes coming so close the pilots could make eye contact with each other, risking a mid-air collision, the report said. The Chinese government is believed not to have responded to Canada’s complaints, the report said. The Aurora is “Canada’s primary airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance aircraft,” according to the Canadian government website. It “provides a full range of maritime, littoral and overland surveillance capabilities for domestic and deployed missions.” It is unclear which type of Chinese aircraft were involved in the “buzzing” incidents.

Someone in cockpit' behind China Eastern plane crash: Report

Boeing 737-800 plunged inexplicably from its cruising altitude into the ground in March, killing all 132 people on board.

(18 May 2022) US investigators believe someone in the cockpit deliberately crashed a China Eastern flight that suddenly plunged to the ground in southern China in March, the Wall Street Journal has reported. The Boeing 737-800 was on its way from Kunming to Guangzhou on March 21 when it dropped from its cruising altitude of 29,000 feet into a mountainside, killing all 132 people on board. It was mainland China's worst aviation disaster in nearly 30 years. The flight data recorders recovered from the crash site were sent to the United States for analysis and show that someone possibly a pilot or someone who had forced their way into the cockpit input orders to send the aircraft into a nosedive. "The plane did what it was told to do by someone in the cockpit," a person familiar with the preliminary assessment by experts on the US National Transportation Safety Board told the Journal. The pilots did not respond to repeated calls from air traffic controllers and nearby planes during the rapid descent, authorities have said. One source told the Reuters news agency that investigators were looking at whether the crash was a "voluntary" act. Screenshots of the Wall Street Journal story appeared to have been censored on Weibo, China's Twitter-like platform, and messaging app Wechat on Wednesday morning. Rescue workers stand in a silent tribute to the passengers and crew who died when China Eastern flight MU5735 suddenly plunged to the ground in March [File: cnsphoto via Reuters] The Civil Aviation Administration of China said on April 11, in response to internet rumours of a deliberate crash, that the speculation had "gravely misled the public" and "interfered with the accident investigation work". Boeing and the NTSB declined to comment to news agencies and referred queries to Chinese regulators. China Eastern did not immediately respond to requests for comment. According to a report from Boeing, investigators found no evidence of "anything abnormal," China's Civil Aviation Administration (CAAC) said in April. In a statement, the CAAC said staff had met safety requirements before takeoff, the plane was not carrying dangerous goods and did not appear to have run into bad weather, although the agency said a full investigation could take two or more years.

US withdrawal prompted collapse of Afghan army: Report

(18 May 2022) The withdrawal of US forces and military contractors last year has been touted as "the single most important factor" in triggering the collapse of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), according to an interim report by the United States government's leading oversight authority on Afghanistan reconstruction. Washington has spent nearly \$90bn on the Afghan army since 2002 in its efforts to fight the Taliban armed rebellion. The Taliban regime was toppled from power in a US-led invasion in 2001 in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. The new report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) points to decisions made by former US President Donald Trump and his successor Joe Biden as having precipitated the collapse of the Afghan army in August 2021 and the subsequent Taliban takeover. The US-Taliban agreement signed by the Trump administration in February 2020, by which Washington agreed to withdraw military forces and contractors from Afghanistan, "set in motion a series of events crucial to understanding the ANDSF's collapse", the report said. "Many Afghans thought the US-Taliban agreement was an act of bad faith and a signal that the US was handing over Afghanistan to the enemy as it rushed to exit the country," SIGAR concluded. By August 15, 2021, when the Taliban reached the gates of the capital Kabul, six of the seven corps of the Afghan army had surrendered or dissolved. "These US decisions had the

additional impact of providing fuel for the Taliban propaganda machine. For ANDSF forces already physically isolated, facing supply shortages, and weathering aggressive Taliban propaganda efforts aimed at demoralising them, paranoia ... exacerbated an already challenging environment," SIGAR found.(SOURCE: AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES)

Indian officials meet Taliban in Kabul in first visit since US exit

(Thu. 02 June, 2022) A team of Indian officials met the acting Taliban foreign minister of Afghanistan on Thursday to discuss bilateral ties and humanitarian aid, the Taliban said, in what was the first such visit to Kabul since the chaotic US withdrawal last year. The Taliban administration's acting foreign minister, Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, met with an Indian foreign ministry delegation led by senior official J.P. Singh. "The meeting focused on India-Afghan diplomatic relations, bilateral trade and humanitarian aid," Taliban foreign ministry spokesman, Abdul Qahar Balkhi, said on Twitter. Balkhi said the minister called the visit a "good beginning in ties between the two countries". Asked if New Delhi now officially recognized the Taliban administration, Indian foreign ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi told reporters they were "reading far too much into the visit". India has donated about 20,000 tonnes of wheat, 13 tonnes of medicines, 500,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccine, and items of winter clothing, with more medicine and food grains on the way, it said. India pulled its officials out of Afghanistan last August and closed its embassy, although it is keen to retain ties with the country. Bagchi declined to say when the embassy might be reopened, except to say that local staff had continued to function and ensure proper maintenance and upkeep of its premises there. (Source: Reuters)

Iraq balks at greater Chinese control of its oilfields

By Sarah Mcfarlane and Aref Mohammed

LONDON/BASRA, May 17 (Reuters) - Iraq's oil ministry thwarted three prospective deals last year that would have handed Chinese firms more control over its oilfields and led to an exodus of international oil majors that Baghdad wants to invest in its creaking economy. Since the start of 2021, plans by Russia's Lukoil (LKOH.MM) and U.S. oil major Exxon Mobil (XOM.N) to sell stakes in major fields to Chinese state-backed firms have hit the buffers after interventions from Iraq's oil ministry, according to Iraqi oil officials and industry executives. Selling a stake to a state-run Chinese company was also one of several options being considered by Britain's BP (BP.L), but officials persuaded it to stay in Iraq for now, people familiar with the matter said. China is Iraq's top investor and Baghdad was the biggest beneficiary last year of Beijing's Belt and Road initiative, receiving \$10.5 billion in financing for infrastructure projects including a power plant and an airport. But when it comes to further Chinese investment in major oilfields, Baghdad has drawn a line in the sand. Iraq's government and officials at state-run firms are concerned that further consolidation of fields in the hands of Chinese companies could accelerate an exodus of Western oil companies, a total of seven Iraqi oil officials and executives with companies operating in Iraq told Reuters in interviews. Supported by state-run oil company officials, Iraq's Oil Minister Ihsan Abdul Jabbar dissuaded Lukoil last year from selling a stake in one of the country's largest fields, West Qurna 2, to Chinese state firm Sinopec, three people familiar with the matter said. China's strengthening relationship with Iran has helped its

position in Iraq due to Tehran's political and military influence there, but the oil ministry is wary of ceding more control over the country's key resources, some officials said.

G7 warns Russia-Ukraine war stoking global food crisis

(14 May 2022) The Group of Seven leading economies have warned that the war in Ukraine is stoking a global food and energy crisis that threatens poor countries, and urgent measures are needed to unblock stores of grain that Russia is preventing from leaving Ukraine. German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock, who hosted a meeting of top G7 diplomats, said on Saturday the war had become a “global crisis”. Baerbock said up to 50 million people, particularly in Africa and the Middle East, would face hunger in the coming months unless ways are found to release Ukrainian grain, which accounts for a sizeable share of the worldwide supply. In statements released at the end of the three-day meeting on Germany's Baltic Sea coast, the G7 pledged to provide further humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable. (SOURCE: AP)

Saudi oil giant Aramco's first-quarter profits surge 80 percent

(15 May 2022) Oil giant Saudi Aramco said its profits soared more than 80 percent in the first three months of the year as the state-backed company cashes in on the volatility in global energy markets and soaring oil prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The bumper first-quarter earnings by the firm formally known as the Saudi Arabian Oil Co show a record net income of \$39.5bn, up from \$21.7bn during the same period last year. The surge was “primarily driven by higher crude oil prices and volumes sold, and improved downstream margins”, Saudi Aramco said in a press release. “Energy security is vital and we are investing for the long term, expanding our oil and gas production capacity to meet anticipated demand growth,” said Aramco Chief Executive Amin Nasser.

ARTICLES

PAKISTAN

Conspiracy or Bust

By Lt Gen (R) Asad Durrani

The US is indeed in the business of changing regimes. It can do so by directly invading a country as it did in Iraq and Afghanistan; with the help of allies, like in Libya; supporting insurgencies the Syrian example; or through clandestine maneuvers that target a country's fault lines. Since the environment is not always conducive to the use of overt means, a covert approach is the preferred option. Of course, they take a long time and need to be delicately steered, but spare the cost of a military operation and afford plausible deniability and escape embarrassment in case the project turned out to be a dud. Obviously, the US could not go around toppling every government and there're a whole lot of them that survives or thrives on anti-Americanism. But then it's equally obvious that some unpopular regimes or those in trouble would blame the “Great Satan” for their disconcertment. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto famously used this card in 1977 when after a rigged electoral exercise, the opposition mobilized against him. The ploy backfired. Then there are others who believe that the immense American power was best exploited by

getting on its right side and if and when in trouble, for whatever reason, by sending an SOS to Washington. Faced with a no-confidence-motion in 1989, the daughter Bhutto appealed to the then American President, the elder Bush, to save democracy in Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif in 1999 sent his brother to seek Clinton's help against a likely military coup. And Musharraf in September 2008 was counting on the Amis to pull his chestnuts out of the fire. None of them worked. Now that Imran Khan has decided to give the senior Bhutto's model another shot, let's see if his claim that the Americans were after his blood had any merit. One may start with any casus belli that was serious enough for the US to try and get rid of his government! It couldn't be the fiasco in Afghanistan. Pakistan's policy to ensure that the Taliban retained the ability to frustrate American designs in Afghanistan, goes back nearly two decades well before Imran was anywhere close to the corridors of power. And till he called on Putin on the eve of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, one does not recall if the PTI led government caused any discomfiture to the Big Boss. Over the last six weeks too, the only acts of ours that did not exactly please Biden's heart, were some odd abstentions when the UN called us to line up against Moscow. But there too we had the company of some American blue-eyed countries like India and Israel. Let's nevertheless posit that it was our stand on the Ukrainian crisis that provoked the US to come gunning for Imran. The problem with this assumption is that the opposition to his government, allegedly sponsored by the sole superpower, predates the present war in Europe by months if not years. However, it was still possible that Imran's political rivals got the US support at some opportune time and on some mysterious grounds. In that case, this act of the US establishment in which the threat of a regime change in Pakistan was allegedly dispensed, came at a very silly time. By the beginning of March, the Opposition's move to bring down the PTI's government was not only well on its way but in fact looked in pretty good shape. If at that stage a US Assistant Secretary of State were to warn our Ambassador in Washington that POTUS had decided to show Imran the door, it served only one purpose: subvert the credentials of the no-confidence-move. Wasn't it wiser to keep quite and let the "American supported movement" come to its "desirable" end? Now that IK and his team have thwarted the move in the National Assembly on grounds that look highly suspect, I may have no idea what the next steps in the Supreme Court or the national elections three months down the line would bring about, but strongly suggest that some of us look at the significance of a rather unusual statement made by the incumbent Army Chief. When Bajwa took a position on the Ukraine crisis, not quite in line with the government's policy; was it to make some reconciliatory noises to placate the Yanks; express his disagreement with the IK's conspiracy thesis; or was it a precursor to bad tidings for his once favourite prime minister. And while we are at it, we might as well think about what the US was next likely to do both if it was sponsoring the efforts to topple IK's regime, or has been wrongly blamed for it. Since IK has taken a page out of the ZAB's book, he would do well to recall that his hanged predecessor had once labelled their common nemesis as elephants. The species is known for its remarkable memory.

The "Absolutely not" patriots vs the "Absolutely Yes" in Pakistan

By Shaban Syed

Today those attending the mass protests with shouts of “no imported government” are not only protesting America's hand in removing Khan but also at placing in the power a Prime Minister charged with corruption and money laundering and a cabinet with more than half of its members facing criminal charges.

In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.

George Orwell

Following the ouster of American forces from Afghanistan the importance of Pakistan for the US's hybrid war against Russia and China was highlighted by a joint letter from heads of twenty-two diplomatic missions urging Pakistan to support a UN resolution to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Pakistan's then Prime Minister Imran Khan's rebuttal “are we your slaves...that whatever you say, we will do?” was applauded by the Global South and countries suffering from a system of continued neo-colonialism. His remarks were also a reflection of the emerging forms of multi-polar alliances led by China and Russia as opposed to the US's failing hegemonic Uni-polar agenda.

Understanding the matter better

Khan's independent foreign policy was going against US advice and set an unprecedented example to South Asian countries usually subordinate to US dictates. Against US disapproval he attended the Beijing Olympics and discussed closer bilateral economic cooperation. He worked with Russia on the Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline Project and negotiated discounted Russian wheat and gas supplies. The last thing America wanted was a popular 'patriot following an independent policy, especially at a time when it needed allies against its long-term hybrid war instigated through Ukraine against Russia with the same scenario planned against China using Taiwan. Therefore, a CIA regime-change operation was vital against Khan's government, plus the US was aware that it will be an easy task with willing partners in the form of opposition parties and a corrupt judicial and bureaucratic system. However, US exceptionalism did not include in the bargain that Khan's independent “we are not slaves” stance had resonated with the general public who have come out in the millions against the newly installed government. Many are aware that Pakistan is standing on a dangerous precipice of either reverting back to an era where corrupt elites subordinate to western dictates ensured their enslavement in a cycle of poverty and degradation or going forward to a better future for its children under Khan's leadership.

The country has never seen such massive protest movements in its history

As Malcolm X once stated, “becoming conscience is linked to mobilization and organisation.” This “becoming conscience” should be partly attributed to Khan and his decade-old campaign against corruption by the dynastic elite two party system the PPP and PML whose leaders have siphoned billions of public wealth into foreign properties and accounts. Whatever opinion one may have of Khan one fact is clear it was his incessant campaign against corruption that woke up the Pakistani public, who were already aware that the system was corrupt. But it was Khan who meticulously detailed through which personal and state mechanisms the country's coffers were “looted” and set a new precedent of going after the culprits. The task of convicting them had always been difficult since their money had bought them 'supporters' in every sphere from the justice system, media, government bodies and the army. Today those attending the mass protests with shouts of “no imported government” are not only protesting America's hand in removing Khan but also at placing in power of a Prime Minister charged with corruption and

money laundering and a cabinet with more than half of its members facing criminal charges. According to reports from Pakistan most media have been side-lined and 'paid' to give positive reports and not mention the convicted members past records. It is perfectly legitimate for the nation to be worried that Pakistan will regress back to the old days where corruption led to further poverty. Where twenty-five million children did not go to school and according to a National Education Management Information System (NEMIS) 2013-14 report 11, 096 government schools did not have building structures with students sitting on floors. It is natural that this outburst of anger is seething in the streets, where Pakistani children were paying a price of a better future while the rich elites enjoyed a luxurious decadent lifestyle. In the intense summer heat mothers interviewed at these Jalsas spoke about the reason why they came out, nearly all stating "Khan Saab is not corrupt and will offer our children a chance for a better future." What is also more baffling for international observers well acquainted with the US's long history of CIA regime-change operations around the world, is that opposition parties and the pro-US lobby in Pakistan are still refuting Khan's claim that the US removed him. Even though a letter sent by a US diplomat was produced as evidence, the army and justice system are adamant there was no US interference; with Pakistanis working for Washington's think tank the Hudson Institute like Hussain Haqqani arguing that Khan is "using the name of Allah and Islam to garner support. And he is invoking the spectre of threat from America,". One needs to ask him did he see the "spectre of threat" of America detailed in the 91,000 war logs in the Afghan War Diary (2010) where US led coalition forces killed and raped Afghan women and children indiscriminately, where NATO death squads terrorised locals through killing sprees, later covering up their crimes. And when US forces finally withdrew from the country it had originally gone to develop and "democratize" it left it one of the most underdeveloped poorest countries in the world. As Peter Koenig, a geopolitical analyst in 'Afghanistan: A New Pivot in the Greater Middle East' summarised the US left the country in the same mess it left Iraq and Syria, because "instability" ensures "a country remains weak." Pointing out the same is planned for Afghanistan as "Washington knows that Afghanistan offers perfect transit routes for the Belt and Road Initiative, which we know, the US despises." Raising the question what does it plan for Pakistan and does the Pro-US crowd care?

What is the way forward?

There are already signs that China Pakistan relations are being targeted through the Baloch Liberation Army, which according to reports has US support, after BLA stepped up their attacks, recently killing three Chinese working in Pakistan. Another plot was also thwarted in southwest Baluchistan where Pakistan police arrested an armed female suicide bomber who confessed her plan to kill Chinese nationals working on Belt and Road Initiative projects. There are also signs that Khan's "absolutely not" stance on US bases in Pakistan may soon become a reality by the "absolutely yes" group in power with indications that discussions are in progress with the US and the Army. Pakistan's new government is also it appears distancing itself from Russia according to US dictates, and the deal for discounted wheat and gas supplies that Khan was negotiating to benefit Pakistan. As much as it may pain Pakistanis to hear this, India, unlike Prime Minister Sharif's government is not buckling to US pressure and maintaining an independent foreign policy. Prime Minister Modi may be polarising his country internally through Hindu supremacist policies but has enough acumen to know what will benefit India where its foreign policy is concerned. He has refused to condemn Russia and gone against US

advice to not restrict the export of wheat after India announced that it will be restricting wheat exports to safeguard domestic food security. According to geopolitical analyst Andrew Korbko, India chooses to feed its own people while Washington “wants countless Indians to potentially starve to death in order to feed America's vassal states across the Global South whose governments it hopes to uphold for political reasons.” He argues “No genuinely patriotic individual anywhere in the world can support a foreign country that wants their own people to die in order to serve its interests. ”This is an important question for millions of Pakistanis to pose to the newly installed Pakistan government as the demand for fresh elections without foreign interference grows.

Why Imran Khan really matters for Pakistan?

By Sibtain Wahab

IK significantly increased exports and remittances, to transit to current account surplus in coming years, to render the economy sustainable, and prevent an economic default threatening our survival. Sri Lanka is a good case study of what had to happen if PMLN had continued. Seeing half-baked opinions, ill-informed perceptions and pretty biased narratives, I thought of writing a few words. The scope of this discussion is limited to Pakistan, what matters for Pakistan and what's the good and bad in this political drama. It isn't about Imran Khan's performance as PM. But being open about my views on his performance, I'd rate him 5/100, that too after including grace marks. You'd ask why 5/100? If I compare his performance with my standards, or with what should/could have been done, or even with his own promises, IK failed miserably. Literally no reforms in most major areas. Electoral reforms, judicial, police, education, agriculture, transparency.

IK had his share of issues

From embracing establishment to electives, poor team selection to narcissism to statements to minorities like “won't be blackmailed”, and rapid rise in inflation to governance issues. Every government has the likes of these, but we have a different standard for IK because we didn't expect anything from his predecessors, so the bar of expectations is set high, which IK didn't even touch.

Mujhay rahzanon say gila nahin, teri rahbari ka sawal hai..

But if I compare him with his predecessors, who are the successors too, IK has proved to be 1000 times better. Rather, he is in a league of his own, there's no comparison at all. He's just above zero, barely afloat, but they're in negative, so there isn't even a comparison. 1000x better seems like an overstatement, but why not look at it objectively? From Pakistan's perspective? Not as an IK fanatic, or a vocal anti-heroism hero.

Let's begin with the most important thing for a state: survival

Our survival has been at stake since ever, more so recently, and here's what Zardari, Shareefs and Imran did to Pakistan in their tenures. Pakistan is expected to go dry by 2025, (by 2030 per some forecasts), as we are pumping ground water faster than its replenishment. Nobody did anything for years, even when it was about survival. No water, no crops, no food, no life, no survival, no Pakistan? Makes sense? But IK did something. Rather a lot. Mohmand, Dasu and Diamer Bhasha dams are expected to be completed in next few years, adding more than 50% of

the capacity of Tarbela and Mangla. Even a kid knows we need dams to survive, but successive governments didn't? Were they naive or insincere? Decide for yourself. Current account (in layman terms, Total dollars in and out of the country annually; imports, exports, and remittances), if in deficit, leads to borrowing of dollars. CAD rose from \$2 bn to \$20 bn from 2013-18. For how long can you borrow \$20 bn annually? It's a sure default in a couple of years, or less. IK significantly increased exports and remittances, to transit to current account surplus in coming years, to render the economy sustainable, and prevent an economic default threatening our survival. Sri Lanka is a good case study of what had to happen if PMLN had continued.

Let's do a fact check here to validate this statement

Pakistan's exports (in billion dollars)

2008: 13

2013: 25

2018: 23

2022: 32-38 forecasted (already 25 in 9 months)

The almost stagnant remittances grew from 22 to 30+ bn dollars as well. Energy, too, is the lifeline for any country. What haunts today's Pakistan is not the lack, but the cost of it. Pakistan's share of hydel power was 70% in 1970, today thermal is 65%. Were we idiots? Or suicidal? Or corrupt? Why did this happen? Why were costly thermal power plants installed in all these decades, and negligible hydel and renewable projects whose per unit cost is just a fraction of thermal power plants? Whatever, all power projects launched in IK's tenure were either renewable or hydel, none was thermal. And by the way, 10k MW of hydel energy projects were added, which is huge. (For context, peak summer demand is 25k MW). Provision of services and basic amenities is next. What was the state of medical care after 70 years of independence? Overcrowded government hospitals serving only 30% of the population, rest left to hurt and die? And then IK comes, and gets a million rupee health insurance to every household, everybody, rich or poor, can now afford the best healthcare. Like a miracle? Why wasn't anything done in the past 70 years? How hard was it? If IK got it done in 3 years, why couldn't others in 4 and 5 decades if power they had? It was just because service provision, or people, weren't their priority at all. Is there any justification of this failure of decades? The difference between IK and others in a few major areas, clearly shows intent and sincerity. Not mentioning anything else because not discussing his performance here. Now about why he was ousted? Was it inflation? Governance? Not giving in to demands of allies? Not appeasing media? Not going easy on opposition? Did he lose public support? If I think this, I should think again. And if I believe the foreign conspiracy is a hoax, I should learn a little history, from Mursi to back in 80s, there are a lot of examples of regime changes or assassinations, judicial or otherwise, wherever leaders didn't toe the US line. Do you think it's a miracle that all 16 political parties, with no common ideology, made an alliance? And the ruling party MNAs got their conscience back after meeting US embassy staff? Or do the SC and ECP proactively and openly support the alliance? Or no 'body' responsible to thwart such plans, did anything?

Watan ki fikr kar nadaan, museebat anay wali hai..

Teri barbadion k mashwaray hain asmaanon mein..

If I still don't realize what's good for me and my country, and who's good, who's doing what, then nothing can help me. What next? I hope IK doesn't get assassinated or jailed, and the

public supports him in every possible way, somehow new elections are called, comes up with a two-third majority, gathers up a good team unlike last term, and goes ahead with his reforms agenda, that's apparently the only way forward. Public support, good team and a reforms agenda being the prime factors here, if Pakistan has to become a better state for its citizens, and if we have to survive and have better living standards. The writer is an aviator by profession, has an interest in governance, public policy and political economy. The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy of Global Village Space.

Pakistan's defining moment

Brig (R) Mehboob Qadir

Individuals, families, societies and nations sooner or later arrive at a fork in the road during their life. This happens either by the force of events, overwhelming external environment or powerful indigenous factors which tend to affect a qualitative change of direction. In our case, two forces impacted simultaneously or perhaps even in tandem. The US and the empathetic anti-Imran forces within. IK's redefinition of national sovereignty, a vigorous review of our past major regional and international alliances and alignments and a resurgent muscular nationalism were apparently causing anxiety and astonishment in the region and far abroad. Pakistan's geo-strategic significance was considered too sensitive to be left to its errant leadership alone, which appears to be the conclusion the US and its partners in South Asia seem to have reached early last year. That PTI government's foreign policy was too stridently divergent from the profitable articulation of global interests of the US and the West which must be checked and redirected. Therefore, they adopted a multitiered approach. Typically, they began to sponsor favourably disposed or even sold media and cultivated deeper contacts with wavering politicians, clergy and bureaucracy. Energized their anti-state proxies and ethnic dissidents within Pakistan and focused on derailing CPEC. For quite some time, they were trying to penetrate armed forces but apparently with little success. The recent uncovering and sentencing of their two high-level contacts in the Army and the nuclear hierarchy was a major upset in this regard. However, this sounded alarm bells in the services and serious attempts were made to plug holes in the security and secrecy net with reasonable success. Meanwhile, the PTI govt kept up their sharp criticism of the thankless way the US used Pakistan as their battlefield and cannon fodder during the 20 years of the Afghan War and went on to pour salt over the wound by naming and shaming us, instead of a word of thanks or appreciation. Pakistanis were feeling deeply hurt already, and the rising US arrogance, shabby treatment of Pakistan and courtship with India our arch-enemy did little to help. Their external manoeuvre was even more sinister and at times pathetically immature. They began to isolate Pakistan diplomatically but failed, used denial of a courtesy phone call to PM Imran as a tool of ridicule and looked silly. They used financial choke through FATF, IMF and ADB. Tried to prevent Pakistan's re-proachment with Russia fearing the emergence of a nearly insuperable power block in the Eurasian heartland. Inglorious US exit from Afghanistan after comprehensive military defeat has dented their confidence and global military prestige seriously. They tried once again to scapegoat Pakistan for their dismal military performance despite our invaluable

help during their helter-skelter withdrawal from Kabul. Then imperceptibly but quite impactfully ice began to melt among Pakistan Army High Command for different reasons but its timings and effects, regrettably, went on to reinforce US anti-regime grand manoeuvre. It became apparent after the COAS's address to Security Conference at Islamabad that certain views expressed were at variance with sensitive official policy. This transition was strangely described as Army's neutrality, instead of being apolitical, in the political affairs of the country. This was a faux pa of cinematic proportions. One wrong word put the Army on the mat. It was at once a unique admission of having done political manipulations in the past that now it would not. It also let another rat out of the old baker's shop. By implication, the Army considered itself as an equal and independent entity instead of a subordinate government institution. A flood of criticism hit GHQ from which it has not been able to recover nor will for a long time. Opposition leaders' tongue-in-cheek claims in the process of a no-confidence vote against Imran Khan and loud street whispers of High Command complicity tended to be substantiated by COAS's reported remarks during his address to officers at GHQ, Lahore and Bahawalpur. Thus, the term neutral became a derogatory slur and invalid before the ink with which it was written even dried. Regime change planners' carefully made calculations went awry because of three factors so imperiously dismissed; Imran's tenacity and massive popular support that erupted countrywide spontaneously. The third factor was actually never visualized but has become a nightmare now. That is the brilliant manner with which IK first welded the US threat with the PDM's vote of no confidence into a palpable conspiracy and then went on to link it with the question of national sovereignty a muscular nationalism with exquisite skill. It is truly a game-changer. Equally dexterously, he refocused public attention towards the mastermind of the conspiracy, the US, and weaved in the historic perspective of our unequal and bizarre mutual relationship over the decades very intelligently. His conviction and logic were able to instil a burning disdain for the disgraceful treatment of Pakistan by the US all along. In the process, he began to very methodically uncover local collaborators and facilitators of the conspiracy quite convincingly. Simultaneously, at considerable risk to himself, he defied threats and a very real danger to his life. His daring and challenge related well to our valiant and colourful folk heroes and endeared him that much more to people among which he descended directly from the PM's chair, unlike his crying pleading predecessor Nawaz Sharif. As if this was not enough by the time his power-packed whirlwind tour de force of public rallies culminated at Multan's Qasim Bagh Stadium, he seemed to have ascended from being a political leader to an icon of nationalism and resistance. He seems to have conquered the fear of death, fame and subsistence. This was evident from the roaring reception and response he got wherever he went to address after being deposed. Followers of such a man can surpass themselves if challenged, and the forces that he has set in motion have the enormous velocity to break through the toughest of obstacles. Meanwhile, the Coalition government is showing telltale signs of panic by uselessly trying to scare, squelch and submerge opposing voices among PTI, media and elsewhere. A harrowing economic meltdown is right around the corner. There is a flurry of consultations and social media activists are being harassed. Their major slip had been to arrest PTI MNA and ex-Minister Shireen Mazari on a ridiculous 50years old charge. That is when she was hardly 6years old. To add insult to popular injury Prime Minister's son was forcefully and fraudulently foisted as Punjab Chief Minister who has let loose a reign of Police terror in that captive province. These shenanigans of power capture will not last long and then

the backlash would be strong and unpredictable. Don't make a mistake, Pakistan's defining moment has arrived. Whoever can grasp the sense of the moment will be remembered by history.

Challenging times

By Maleeha Lodhi

There is a long history of Pakistan's state institutions being criticised and challenged by different political parties and actors. This is unsurprising for a country that has seen repeated military interventions in politics and controversial judicial decisions invoking the doctrine of necessity. But now when both the judiciary and military are acting according to the Constitution, they continue to face criticism. Today this criticism comes almost entirely from the former ruling party that wants both institutions to act in its support. When it finds that this is not happening and judicial verdicts are not to its liking its leaders intensify their critique to mount pressure on them to act otherwise. This prompted a statement by the Inter-Services Public Relations warning against dragging the army into politics. It took strong exception to “unlawful and unethical practices” and efforts to involve the military leadership in the “political discourse” by “direct” or “insinuated references”. The higher judiciary too reacted to the criticism. During a hearing last week, Chief Justice Umar Ata Bandial said it didn't behove someone to make insinuations just because a certain judgement did not please him. He said the Constitution unites the federation and the apex court being the defender of the Constitution would continue doing that despite any criticism. In similar vein, the chief justice of the Islamabad High Court, Athar Minallah, asked PTI's counsel to seek instructions from his party leaders whether they had any confidence in the judiciary. He said from statements made by the petitioner and his party leadership it seemed they had doubts about the IHC's impartiality and independence. Criticism by PTI leaders is not a random act of verbal excess committed out of pique and anger. It is a deliberate political tactic whose aim is to raise maximum public pressure to put both the judiciary and the military establishment on the defensive so that they accede to their demands or, in the case of the courts or Election Commission, rubber stamp the party's desires. This is politics by intimidation involving as it does criticism directed at state institutions at big public rallies to chants of approval by the crowd. In fact, inferences by the PTI leadership that these institutions may have colluded in the 'foreign conspiracy' to oust its government has the effect of denigrating these institutions. Imran Khan has also demanded that the chief election commissioner should resign and accused him of partisanship. He has been mocking sections of the media and often accused those criticising him of doing it at foreign behest. The question is whether the former prime minister and his loyal base realise the consequences of pursuing this political strategy, which is assuming a particularly offensive form in social media and messaging on other digital channels by PTI activists. Defiance of court orders and constitutionally prescribed procedures by PTI holdovers occupying high public offices shows that both in words and deeds there is reluctance to play by the rules and in accordance with the Constitution. This goes beyond a challenge to democratic norms. It is a challenge to the democratic system. When a significant section of the country is encouraged to deride and mistrust institutions that puts the entire political system at risk. Wittingly or unwittingly, this

conduct is putting the party on a destructive path where not just faith in institutions is being undermined but institutions themselves are being delegitimised in the eyes of its supporters, primed now to reject anything at variance with their leaders' whims. This has serious implications for the constitutional and institutional framework in an intensely polarised country. It is further weakening what distinguished lawyer Salman Akram Raja calls the long-standing tenuous relationship of the urban middle class with constitutionalism. This has a direct bearing on the general election that is widely seen as a panacea for the current political turmoil and the government-opposition confrontation that has all but paralysed the political system and is rendering it dysfunctional. Immediate elections are, of course, PTI's principal demand. Many independent observers also regard elections as the only way to resolve the country's growing political crisis. But the key question raised by the ongoing attack on institutions, including the Election Commission, is whether the electoral outcome, whatever it turns out to be, will be accepted by the losing side. If a party and its leaders cannot accept a parliamentary outcome in which its loss of majority led to its ouster; if it cannot accept a judicial outcome, which revived the National Assembly it had dissolved, what is the guarantee that it will accept an election result in which it is rejected by voters? There are many precedents of disputed elections. In fact, almost every election outcome has been disputed. In the 2013 elections, when Khan's PTI lost to PML-N, he alleged vote rigging and called the polls the "biggest fraud" in Pakistan's history. He demanded investigation into the alleged fraud, launched protests and held a prolonged sit-in for over four months in Islamabad. The roles were reversed in 2018 when Khan won the election. Both PML-N and PPP claimed the people's mandate had been stolen and ballot rigging deprived the PTI government of legitimacy. In the 1990s, PML-N and PPP took turns to cry foul and accuse the other of winning by unfair means. It is not just this history of disputed and divisive elections that casts a shadow on future polls. The country's unprecedented polarisation makes even the process leading up to elections highly contentious and uncertain. Consensus on composition of the interim government, which has to be established under the Constitution, will pose the first major challenge. Agreement on the code of conduct and rules of the road will present a greater challenge, especially if PTI continues to voice lack of confidence in the Election Commission. The most consequential question is whether all political contenders will accept the election result so that a way can be found to end the country's predicament.

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

CHINA

Japan should be open to China joining the CPTPP

Beijing's application is a one-off opportunity for Tokyo to exert influence

By Wang Huiyao

In 2012, two U.S. analysts penned an article in Foreign Policy headlined "A Tale of Two Asias," describing the continent's contrasting Jekyll and Hyde sides. On the one hand, there is "Economic Asia," a vibrant, integrated region with an economy worth over \$30 trillion that is the most dynamic on Earth and an engine of global growth. On the other hand, there is

"Security Asia," a fractious and increasingly militarized region riven by mistrust, nationalism, historical antagonisms and territorial disputes. Though crude, this dichotomy captures something of Tokyo's balancing act as it seeks to navigate a changing world. Like the rest of Asia, Japan is being pulled in two different directions as new trade pacts reinforce trends toward peaceful integration, even as growing security concerns cause friction in the region. Japan has long been a driving force in forging a more integrated and prosperous economic Asia. It set up the Asian Development Bank in 1966 and gave development assistance to support China's reform and opening-up in the 1970s and 1980s. After the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s, Tokyo pushed for monetary integration measures that led to the Chiang Mai Initiative currency swap arrangements. More recently, Tokyo led the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) to fruition after the U.S. pulled out and was a founding member of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade deal. In contrast, forces pushing Japan to focus on security Asia are never far away. Conservatives remain determined to amend the nation's pacifist constitution and Tokyo has signed up to new security arrangements like the Quad and reciprocal access with Australia's defense forces. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has sought to reinforce ties with NATO and Washington to bolster Japan's security, and former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has even raised talk of nuclear weapons and is agitating for a sharp increase in defense spending. Balancing economic and security interests amid U.S.-China competition will be Kishida's most important foreign policy task. This year, on the 50th anniversary of the normalization of ties with China, he faces several decisions that will set the tone for Tokyo's future relationship with Beijing. Perhaps the most significant is what stance to take on China's application to join CPTPP. As he considers this question, Kishida should keep an open mind and draw on the legacy of the Kochikai faction he leads, which has traditionally emphasized economic diplomacy and healthy ties with China. His current focus on narrow security alliances is understandable in the wake of war in Ukraine. But in the long-term, Japan's interests, both in terms of its domestic economy and long-term security, are best served by ensuring that Asia remains on a stable, rules-based track to become more integrated, more cohesive and more prosperous. CPTPP is an ideal vehicle to achieve this, and China appears increasingly ready to play ball. On Feb. 3, Chinese customs announced it would trial CPTPP rules in the nation's free trade zones. On March 1, vice minister of commerce Wang Shouwen affirmed China's willingness to "fully meet" the high standards of the trade pact. So far, Kishida's reception of Beijing's application has been tepid. But there are good reasons why Tokyo should be open to China joining CPTPP. First, it would support Kishida's domestic agenda to spur domestic growth and equality. Although Japan and China are both members of RCEP, CPTPP goes much further with tariff reductions and trade facilitation. Including China would increase Japan's real income gains from CPTPP in 2030 by \$68 billion and quadruple worldwide income gains to \$632 billion a year, according to projections by the Peterson Institute for International Economics, a Washington-based think tank. Since 2020, China has replaced the U.S. as the top destination for Japanese goods. Last year, exports of food, farm, forestry and marine products to mainland China soared by 35.2%. Under CPTPP, Japanese farmers and workers would be ideally placed to benefit from the growing demand of China's massive middle class. There would also be benefits for Japanese multinationals, for whom China continues to be a crucial manufacturing hub. Second, even before potential trade benefits come to fruition, accession negotiations could

provide a platform for productive dialogue with China. This would widen Kishida's scope for diplomacy and support efforts to promote regional harmony. Third, China's application to join CPTPP is a one-off opportunity for Tokyo to exert influence and encourage what is soon to be the world's largest economy to evolve in line with the highest international standards. These include behind-the-border issues such as economic, industrial and environmental policies. As well as benefiting Japanese companies and energizing China's reforms to build a modern, open economy, this would also help alleviate wider trade tensions, including with the U.S., creating a better global environment for Japan's development. CPTPP is one pathway to deeper integration and eventually realizing a Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific. But it is not the only one. If the CPTPP door is prematurely shut to China and other countries, momentum may shift to alternative tracks like RCEP. This would not be in Japan's interests, given that this would be a process geared to lower standards over which Tokyo has less say. For now, any prospect of China entering CPTPP remains distant. Accession negotiations are bound to be long and arduous. Other members remain divided on China joining and unanimous consent is required for accession. There is also the thorny issue of Taiwan, which has applied to join despite Beijing's opposition. Still, Japan has put itself in an advantageous position by taking up stewardship of CPTPP, and its stance on China's application will hold considerable sway. Moving forward, Tokyo should build on its achievements in helping to realize a thriving economic Asia and not allow hawkish voices to foreclose viable routes toward long-term stability and prosperity in the region. Professor Wang Huiyao is founder and president of the Center for China & Globalization and dean of the Institute of Development Studies at Southwestern University of Finance and Economics in Chengdu.

Memorandum Signed

Memorandum of Understanding Signed Between RFI and CISSS Think Tanks on May 18, 2022

Rabita Forum International (RFI) and Center of International Strategic Studies Sindh (CISSS) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU). It was signed by Mr. Nusrat Mirza (Chairman RFI) and by Ambassador M. Khalilullah Qazi (Executive Director CISSS). The following points were agreed upon in the MoU:

1. The parties shall jointly organize Seminars, Webinars, Workshops and Conferences on issues of Mutual Interest.
2. RFI shall provide space for op-eds, articles and research papers written by CISSS in RFI magazines and also assist for these to be carried by print and electronic media.
3. RFI shall electronically share its daily Bulletin of strategic issues published in Urdu language at the email address to be conveyed by CISSS.
4. The parties shall undertake joint research projects and collaborate in publication of books and articles.

5. CISSS faculty shall be given opportunity to participate in events hosted by RFI and vice versa.
6. RFI shall assist CISSS in Urdu and other languages translation of op-eds and articles written by CISSS and printing of CISSS booklets and newsletters.
7. The Parties shall jointly host, when possible, Track-2 events on important issues between Pakistan and SAARC countries.
8. RFI shall consider sharing its distribution and email circulation lists with CISSS.
9. The Parties shall separately discuss additional measures, if required, for the implementation of the provisions of these articles.





Balochistan's Geostrategic Significance, the Politics of Major Powers - Managing Its Impact

BTTN Seminar- 23 May 2022- Quetta

Lt. Gen.Khalid Ahmed Kidwai - AD NCA

Concluding Remarks of Lt Gen Khalid Ahmed Kidwai NI, HI, HI (M), (R) Advisor Development National Command Authority delivered at Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN) Seminar “Balochistan's Geostrategic Significance, the Politics of Major Powers Managing Its Impact” on 23 May 2022.

1. Honourable Governor Balochistan Mir Jan Muhammad Jamali Sahib.
 2. Brigadier Agha Ahmed Gul, Dr Farooq Sahib VC BUIITEMS, Brig Zahir Kazmi, Dr Zafar Khan, distinguished speakers of today's seminar, faculty of Balochistan Think Tank Network, esteemed guests, ladies and gentlemen.
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3. I would like to express my gratitude to all of you for gracing with your presence this first ever seminar by Balochistan Think Tank Network the BTTN. Some of you I know have traveled from distant places and we truly appreciate that.

4. We are especially grateful to the Honourable Governor for gracing the seminar with his presence. BTTN feels most encouraged by your presence.

5. I would like to commend the eminent speakers of today's seminar for their deep insight on a subject that not only remains current in Pakistan's national security discourse but also takes center stage in any debate or analysis of the regional geo-political scenario. All in all it has been a most educative and rewarding day.

6. Given the global and regional dynamics of today's competing power interests Balochistan with its strategic location has become a natural focal point or a pivot for regional rivalry and control. In some ways I am reminded of Mackinder's Heartland theory of 1904 and 1919 wherein he had expounded that control of East Europe was pivotal to the control of the World Island of Europe, Asia and Africa and thereby to the control of the world. Whether his theory has stood the test of time over the past 100 years or not is beside the point but I am tempted to stick my neck out in a similar vein by drawing a relatively modest regional analogy and say that he who controls Balochistan acquires a distinct advantage to the control of the gateway of Afghanistan, on to Central Asia, and beyond then to Mackinder's heartland. The key to Balochistan's centrality in regional great games therefore lies in its two-way connectivity of the heartland to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

7. As was rightly brought out by Brig Ahmed Gul in his opening address, Balochistan is geographically not only the largest province of Pakistan but is also located in a 'geo-political crush zone'. Many of the other eminent speakers also highlighted the significance of Balochistan because of its geo-economic and geostrategic importance for Pakistan whose positive and timely exploitation could immensely benefit the people of Balochistan and the people of Pakistan at large. Balochistan is a critical province of Pakistan that borders with Iran and Afghanistan and is therefore vital for the security of Pakistan's western borders and its economic wellbeing.

8. From Peter the Great of the old Russian Empire to his successor President Vladimir Putin of modern Russia, from the historic British Empire of the 19th and early 20th Centuries to the contemporary global powers the US and China, and today's regional powers of Pakistan, India, Iran and the countries of Central Asia, all have their respective strategic interests in this part of the world for a variety of

geo-strategic, economic and socio-cultural reasons. And that makes a long list of countries with converging or diverging interests. Many international scholars and indeed all the speakers of today's seminar have highlighted the significance of Balochistan because of these strategic imperatives.

9. There is no doubt that Balochistan has the potential to become one of the largest trade and transit regions for landlocked Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics that are interested in trade and economic activities with the countries of the Middle East, Africa and Europe. Simultaneously, it is also in Pakistan's interest to attract the Central Asian countries for transit trade through a peaceful Afghanistan and a peaceful Balochistan.

10. With the rise of China, the centrality of Balochistan in international politics and the furthering of economic interests has further enhanced as China attempts to develop regional connectivity via Pakistan through the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Gwadar Deep Sea Port. Once these are fully functional and developed, CPEC and Gwadar will ensure regional connectivity mutually benefiting Pakistan and China in general and Balochistan in particular. Thus through the imperatives of cooperation and competition rather than the misplaced strategies of containment and conflict, international and regional powers can ensure peace, stability and prosperity in the broader South Asian region where each stakeholder in a win-win situation can derive benefits through regional connectivity and the economic corridor with interwoven and integrated economic stakes.

11. Unfortunately however, the dream of reaping mutual economic benefits by regional countries has been relegated at the altar of geo-political competition and containment of China strategies of the US with India as willing facilitator. China's grand economic strategy of connectivity of Mackinder's World Island of Eurasia and Africa through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), of which CPEC is a flagship project, is perceived by the US as a threat to its world dominance as well as by India. The BRI and the CPEC also run counter to the grand US design of controlling the trade choke points of China in the Southern China Sea and the Straits of Malacca because it provides China alternative routes to possible interdiction and blockade of its strategic sea lines of communications.

12. In this context, the US and its allies are making all efforts to contain China's rise through groupings like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and the Australia, UK, US (AUKUS) axis while China on the other hand attempts to integrate economically with as many Asian countries including Pakistan as its response to neutralize the US strategy of containment. It is probably inevitable

therefore that along with cooperation and competition, the strategy of containment between the major powers is likely to continue and only accelerate further.

13. Many fear that the struggle between these opposing imperatives is likely to create a broader security dilemma that in turn could produce serious military conflicts between these powers. As far as Pakistan and Balochistan are concerned we already find ourselves in the eye of the storm as multiple pressures in the form of hybrid warfare are being generated to compel recoil from our CPEC commitment.

14. Pakistan is today faced with multiple security challenges consequent to the rise of China, the BRI and CPEC. Some of these are the US offshore balancing strategy, India's military and nuclear modernization along with outreach to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), the Chabahar Port versus Gwadar deep sea port, etc. One is not surprised therefore that Pakistan and its biggest province Balochistan have become a geo-political playground for major powers in their power struggles. It is sad to see the induced instability in a beautiful part of Pakistan which at one time was at peace with itself.

15. Personally, as an army officer I have served in Balochistan for over 11 years in the eighties and the nineties. As a family we have enjoyed every minute of our multiple postings. We have made homes in Quetta a number of times, in Sibi and in Zhob and enjoyed all that Balochistan has to offer in terms of its natural and pure rugged beauty, abundant shopping, delicious food, trips to Ziarat, the lakes and streams, and most certainly, the company and hospitality of the wonderful Baloch, Pashtun and Hazara people. Balochistan remains our favourite province and we love visiting there again and again.

16. But together with the joys of visiting Balochistan, one is also deeply saddened and appalled by the abject poverty and state of neglect in different sectors of human development that Balochistan has continued to suffer over the years. There is no doubt that it remains the most neglected province. And there is so much that needs to be done here and could have been done if only there was adequate political will and the mind and heart to apply to do good by the people of Balochistan.

17. What should Pakistan be doing as a response to the geo-political onslaught and addressing the developmental issues of Balochistan? In my opinion there is no meaningful alternative to sincere and honest fast track and focused economic and social development in key areas of Balochistan.

We have all been hearing for decades endlessly about any number of special economic packages earmarked for Balochistan by successive governments as if they were doing a great favour to Balochistan. What do we have to show on the ground for these packages? Not much.

18. While Pakistan needs to keep pace with the fast evolving geo-political dynamics affecting Pakistan and the province of Balochistan, we need to focus on economic development of the province and make up for lost time. Developing and implementing socio-economic strategies and cashing out maximum advantages to Balochistan will benefit and counter some of the difficulties.

19. There is a need to urgently resolve burning issues such as the rapidly diminishing water resources, which is now reaching the SOS level, insecurity of the local population, mismanagement of education, health, unemployment, poor governance, corruption, and many other longstanding grievances that our brothers of Balochistan are confronted with. Failure to address these issues has already aggravated the situation and it will continue to aggravate further if neglect and absence of political and economic will is allowed to persist. External forces will continue to exploit the vacuum and work against the vital interest of Pakistan and we should then not blame anyone except ourselves.

20. It is in the interest of Pakistan and Balochistan that we all work much harder and better than what we have done so far for bringing progress and prosperity to Pakistan's largest province. This is not a favour to Balochistan; it is its right as much as it is of any other part of Pakistan.

21. Before I end, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to offer my sincere compliments to Balochistan Think Tank Network for organizing today's seminar most professionally. It has been a very educative and useful day. It is really heartening to watch the progress that BTTN has made in a very short span of time, less than a year in fact, and it has earned a place of prominence and academic repute not only in Balochistan but across Pakistan. And for this all credit to Brig Ahmed Gul, Dr Zafar Khan and their wonderful team of professional academics.

22. A very special thanks to all the eminent speakers who have enlightened us and enriched our understanding of the issues of Balochistan. Thanks to our esteemed guests for finding the time to be here and honouring BTTN. And most certainly, no amount of words would ever be enough to express our gratitude to Vice Chancellor BUITEMS Dr Farooq Sahib for his consistent support to BTTN. Without your support BTTN would not have succeeded.

I Thank You

Balochistan's Geostrategic Significance, the Politics of Major Powers - Managing Its Impact

BTTN Seminar- 23May 2022- Quetta

Opening Address by Brig.Agha Ahmad Gul, (R)

1. Choice of Word. BTTN is hosting its 1st Seminar today before becoming one-year old. The Topic of the Seminar is, “Balochistan's Geostrategic Significance, the Politics of Major Powers Managing its impact”. I wish to start by explaining the choice of word, “Balochistan”. Balochistan is integral part of Pakistan and whatever importance it has, and its significance for major or small powers due to its geographical location, equally applies to Pakistan.

2. However, there are geographical and historical peculiarities of Balochistan which necessitated the selection of word Balochistan rather than Pakistan's Geostrategic Significance. I shall briefly explain.

3. Rigours of Geography. Balochistan is an arid semi-desert land with less than 3 inches yearly rain. Consequently, there are no rivers, no lakes. Ancient karezes and springs have all dried up, partly due to tube wells relentlessly mining water from depths of a 8-900 feet or about, with ever lowering water-table and partly due to persistent droughts. Even the 770 km long Balochistan's Coastline has no sweet water and has to depend on sporadic rain. In Kech (Mekran) the first line of four oasis which has allowed establishment of Hoshab, Turbat, Tump and Mand towns is nearly 100 miles north of the coastline with no water in between.

a. Northern Balochistan gets tail-end of monsoon rains and even westerly disturbances bring some rain in the winters. Besides, they have historically some legal, some illegal trade with Afghanistan and financially are better off. Nasirabad enjoys canal waters but is a small part of this huge province restricting economic benefits to them only.

b. The population in Southern Balochistan is the hardest hit by the rigours of geography. It gets very little rains, sometimes for years some areas do not get any rain. The climate is very harsh. Summers are worst with temperatures routinely reaching 50 c. Shad less, parched, dry terrain allows very sparse population which is very poor and has to survive on livestock or petty jobs. Barren, inaccessible plateaus and rocky mountains having no water for often hundreds of miles, used to once provide protection to highwaymen. Now militants find safe havens in these barren lands with no fear of being intercepted in areas having no tracks, not even wildlife due to complete lack of water.

C. Southern Balochistan's proximity to the Iranian border having Balochi speaking population and a porous border further facilitates militants who can slip into Iran's Seistan-Balochistan. Southern Balochistan, thus has become the soft-underbelly of Pakistan, hence the selection of this name for the Seminar, today.

4. Historical Background From Gedorasia to 3 Balochistans. The Coastline in the present day Southern Balochistan is first mentioned in post Alexander's invasion in 325. B.C as Gedorasia, and several centuries later, as Turan. Being barren and non-productive, this part of the world did not attract invaders, explorers and even attention of historians. However, from 18th Century onwards, the word Balochistan started emerging. There have been 3 Balochistans with different political-maps whose existence is generally unknown and thus creates wrong perceptions today, giving birth to expressions like 'Deprivations', 'Neglect' and 'Left-behind' in Pakistan. Allow me to explain this.

a. In 1739, Emperor Nadir Shah Qachar, the Shah of Persia conquered Delhi. However, he let the Mughal King rule in his name as a Tributary. In 1742 Nader Shah divided south-eastern Persia in two provinces, Seistan-Balochistan and Kalati-Balochistan. Kalati-Balochistan till then called Turan, was more or less the present day Southern Balochistan. After the death of Nadir Shah, his General Ahmad Shah Durrani, now the ruler of Eastern Persia and Khorasan, placed a Brahui Mir Nasir belonging to Ghandawah, south of Sibi, as Khan of Kalat to rule Kalati-Balochistan as his Tributary in 1761. This was the 1st Balochistan.

b. Let's fast forward now; in 1838, the British walked into Quetta known as Shalkot, to deter an apprehended invasion by the Czar of Russia through Central Asia. They established a military station in Shalkot naming it Quetta. They attacked Kalat and killed the sitting Khan of Kalat Mir Mehrab on suspicion of not being loyal-enough but let his brother and later son rule, as vassal state of Amir of Kabul. In 1856 the sitting Khan of Kalat Mir Khudaidad submitted to become a vassal state of British rather than Kabul, now called Afghanistan, a name given by the British which caught on.

c. After the Second Anglo-Afghan War in 1879, the British occupied a region south of Afghanistan to be directly ruled by them, later named British Balochistan. However, the British Army remained in Afghanistan even during the WWII and only evacuated it in 1919 when the Czar of Russia had been overthrown by the Bolshevik Regime.

d. The British Balochistan was formally created in November 1893 during a diplomatic meeting headed by the British Diplomat Sir Mortimer Durand and attended by ambassadors of Czar of Russia, Shah of Persia and King Abdul

Rehman of Afghanistan. Indeed, it decided upon the entire border of Afghanistan, drawing a line between Russian controlled Khanates of Central Asia, Iran and Colonial India. The British even ceded Wakhan Corridor, part of northern Chitral so that Afghanistan could become a complete buffer state between Russia and the Colonial British Empire of India. The British Balochistan governed as Chief Commissioner-ate comprised parts of Kalati-Balochistan, Persia, Nasirabad district of Sindh and Afghanistan. Mostly Pashtuns but also Hazaras, Settlers, Sindhis and Marri /Bugti Baloch, some Kurds and Brahuis lived here. They named it British-Balochistan. This is the 2nd Balochistan.

e. In 1947, on Independence, British Balochistan and Kalati-Balochistan were named as Quetta and Kalat Divisions, and administrated by West Pakistan under one Commissioner. During the next 23 years there was no Balochistan.

f. In 1970, with the One Unit being abolished, the Quetta and Kalat Divisions were merged and the present Balochistan emerged. This is the 3rd Balochistan. The 3rd and present Balochistan has peculiarities which other provinces of Pakistan do not share. These ought to be explained.

g. In 1843, the British had established all other provinces of Pakistan, Sindh, Punjab and KPK through conquests. These three provinces were created 127 years before Balochistan. Consequently, these provinces are socio-economically and in education far ahead, well integrated, politics and governance is also more mature. Tribes and feudalism have mellowed down to a large extent. Balochistan, especially the Southern Balochistan however, is totally still tribal, not allowing Police and a rag tag militia, Levies of the British rule still operates in Balochistan and behind the other three provinces of Pakistan in every aspect of HDI.

h. The British did not develop Kalati-Balochistan at all. Even the British Balochistan, which was directly run by them they undertook bare minimum socio-economic development, considered strategically necessary to defend against an apprehended Russian invasion. At the time of Independence, there were only 9 High Schools in British Balochistan and no college. In Kalati-Balochistan, there were only madrassas, no school was being run by the British.

i. In 1948 the first college was opened in Quetta and in 1971-73 the first University. In 1972, the first democratic government of Balochistan expelled 3,500 teachers (and 3,200 Policemen) from Punjab, which was nearly 80-85% of the total teachers. The dearth of educated persons was so great that near illiterate and at best class 5-pass were appointed as teachers, mostly on political considerations.

j. In 1986 on political considerations, 84 persons holding fake Masters Degrees were appointed as “Helpers” in UoB without any tests. A year later they were regularized without undergoing any Selection Board's scrutiny, again under political pressure. Many are still 'serving', generally as politicians and being incapable of teaching. However, some of them did acquire requisite education and became proper teachers.

k. The sum of all these happenings is, that cheating, buying fake degrees, even Ph.Ds. and taking proxy exams became socially acceptable. No politician and consequently no bureaucrats took notice. Indeed, one high public office holder bragged in a Convocation that he had, 'bought his B.A degree for Rs.42,000/-'. Yet another high public office holder ridiculed education by saying, 'Degree is Degree whether fake or real'. This has greatly lowered the standard of education in Balochistan at all levels. However, colleges and universities go on producing hordes of semi-literate degree-holders incapable of passing tests, doing jobs and thus being left behind. There are certainly exceptions and this is not universally applicable to all education institutions and graduates.

l. This sizeable youth only seeking government jobs becomes disgruntled when they fail to qualify in tests or don't have a strong political connection and remain unemployed. They blame Pakistan for their joblessness, deprivation and failing in competitions even within Balochistan what to talk of other provinces where the competitors are better educated. This group is an easy prey for foreign agents like Indian Naval Commander Kalbhushan Yadev who hire them for undertaking first propaganda against Pakistan, then militancy and finally terrorism. What starts initially as a well-paying job, tends to create some genuinely ideologues also willing to even get killed in their endeavours to seek 'independence' of probably the Southern Balochistan only.

m. The contours of 'Independent Balochistan' have never been explained by any Baloch/Brahui or even the militants. It's a vague term which apparently covers the entire Balochistan where a several times larger population patriotic population of different ethno-racial stock lives. However, this vagueness is capitalized by Pakistan's enemies, India, lately the US and her allies.

n. As it is, there are 7-8 times more Baloch living prosperously and happily in Punjab and 5-6 times more in Sindh than in Southern Balochistan. Northern Balochistan is inhabited by Pashtuns, Hazaras, settlers from all over Pakistan and many refugees Uzbeks, Tajiks and even Iranians and are die-hard Pakistanis.

5. Recent Geostrategic / Historic Developments.

a. In 1970, the Soviet Union decided to break the US's Containment in the south by destabilizing CENTO. They tried creating insurgency in Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, members of the CENTO. A so called London-Plan was hatched by KGB in London involving some Baloch and Brahui sardars belonging to Southern Balochistan and some from Seistan-Balochistan to create Greater Balochistan. Nawab Muhammad Akbar Khan Bugti was not part of this group and indeed, was against them.

b. In 1972 Pakistan transferred the political power to these very sardars who had won the election, of almost twice the size of Southern-Balochistan they wanted to cede with. The London-Plan lost its charm for them. However, this was the beginning of the talk of 'Independence of Balochistan'. In the beginning of 1973, the PM dismissed this government of charges of serious misconduct and attempts at genocide of Jamotes of Las Bella.

c. In 1973 the erstwhile BLA came into being starting KGB sponsored militancy astride two main roads of Balochistan only inhabited by Mengal and Marri clans. Indeed, the Mengal living in Noshki area did not join them. By 1975 the militancy withered away. There was complete peace in Northern and Southern Balochistan for next 33 years till 2008.

d. In 1974 India carried out a nuclear detonation, thus compelling Pakistan to counter the emerging threat. In 1998 Pakistan in response to Indian nuclear explosions also tested its nukes and thus we squarely became a target for the perpetual US disapproval and then antagonism.

e. In 2005, ironically, the table were reversed. Now the CIA revived the plan to contain China, Russia, Iran and keep Pakistan under pressure for strategic reasons. One Col Ralph Peter of CIA published a map showing Pakistan's disintegration by 2015. This map and write up was duly published in the US Armed Forces Journal. The old BLA of KGB era was revived, this time by CIA and RAW. Sporadic terror acts were launched all over Balochistan, which continue albeit now greatly reduced.

f. In the Southern Balochistan, the non-productive land for want of water, sparse population, abject poverty and history of erstwhile KGB sponsored BLA militancy in 1973-75 are being used as a catalyst. Development of Gwadar and CPEC all have provided justification to the enemies of Pakistan for unleashing 5th Generation War through Southern Balochistan.

6. Geostrategic Location of Pakistan. The geographical location of Balochistan, indeed, Pakistan is very peculiar. In 1725, Peter the Great expressed his desire to

access Warm-Waters for Russia. The straight line from St. Petersburg comes to Pakistani shores.

a. China wants to use Pakistan as an Economic Corridor to access global shipping lanes and reach out to Iran and Afghanistan. Russia and CAR all can have this access. However, the US wants to contain China, Russia and even CAR and deny this Corridor. Iran does not want emergence of Gwadar as it will compete with Chahbahar for business, never mind the shallow port of Chahbahar.

b. India has long seaboards in the East and West but is actually landlocked. Pending resolution of disputes due to the unfinished Agenda of the Partition, Pakistan stands like a wall, blocking India's westward trade to Afghanistan, CAR, Russia, EU and Iran.

c. Thus Pakistan is located in a Geopolitical Crush-Zone confronted by competing demands of major powers. It is a challenge, yes, but also a great opportunity by providing connectivity to all the competing major powers.

d. How to manage it and how to become facilitators to all the major powers rather than becoming stumbling blocks for each one of them? That, then is the subject of today's Seminar for which we have gathered today to listen to the experts on the subject.

Balochistan and the Interests of Extra Regional Powers

Dr. Atia Ali Kazmi

A. Overview

This subject is related to the province of Balochistan and, at the same time, is the pivot of contemporary discourse on comprehensive national security of Pakistan. It is reassuring to see that in a short span of time, the Balochistan Think Tank Network has achieved the poise to provide impetus to the narrative on nation building.

If Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir are the jugular vein of Pakistan in the north, Balochistan has similar function in the south. If Punjab is the bread basket, Balochistan's natural resource are of immense value for national prosperity. Its development thus demands concerted consideration. If barren lands around the world are being developed through technology and innovation, challenges must not stop us too.

There is scanty literature on inimical interest of extra regional powers in Balochistan. They use rhetoric to disguise their actual interests. Considering that geopolitical games, great games, and the new great games will continue haunting

and affecting the Global South in myriad ways, it is time to set our focus more on inclusive growth and development, for having a stable economy and efficient institutions being run by the best human capital.

One has to look beyond the smoke screen and focus on the actions of these States; and gauge their stated words against actions on Balochistan whether their policies and actions respect the sovereignty, integrity, and interests of Pakistan. Before explaining their role, it is important to elaborate our core interests in Balochistan and its geostrategic importance. The conclusions will be apparent.

B. Core Interests and Balochistan

i. Our first core interest in Balochistan is ensuring sustainable socio-economic development. It includes three key dimensions, as also reflected in Human Development Index:

Health;

Education; and

Decent living standards

In this regard, steps for poverty alleviation will be instrumental. As per 2017 census, the poverty rate in Southern Balochistan was 46%, which was highest in the country. The Government must integrate the people of Balochistan in the process of economic development and they themselves must utilize any opportunities for their own capacity building.

Similarly, education is key to a better Balochistan. Quaid e Azam very aptly said that:

“Without education it is complete darkness and with education it is light. Education is a matter of life and death to our nation. The world is moving so fast that if you do not educate yourselves, you'll be not only completely left behind, but will be finished up.”

Hence, the people of Balochistan must focus on quality-learning, whether it's higher education or technical and vocational trainings. The prospects of utilizing learned skills are improving too. For instance, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a diversified development package that provides an opportunity to alleviate the grievances of Balochistan.

For that purpose, we need to train an efficient workforce here, by introducing new subjects in relevant institutes and specialized trainings, so that local skilled workforce is employed in Balochistan.

ii. Second core interest is providing safety and security to the people of Balochistan.

iii. Third is efficiently tapping and managing natural resources.

iv. Fourth is preventing any regional and extra-regional State or quasi-State actors from undermining our core national interests.

v. Water, food and energy security are other derivatives of these interests.

C. Geostrategic Significance of Balochistan

As regards the geo-strategic significance of Balochistan for us and any extra-regional power, it is easy to conclude:

i. First, that Balochistan is around 347,190 square kilometers gateway between South and Central Asia and the Persian Gulf.

ii. Secondly, the Gwadar Port in Balochistan has a strategic significance both from the economic and military points of view. It sits neatly in the 750 kilometers long Balochistan coastline. It is a deep warm water port, only 180 nautical miles away from the Strait of Hormuz, which is one of the three maritime choke points in the Indian Ocean Region, including Malacca and Bab-el-Mandeb. World's 20% oil passes through Gwadar Port and it provides vital trade routes, linking landlocked Central Asia with greater Asia Pacific region.

iii. Thirdly, the contribution of marine fisheries production from Balochistan is almost 34% of total fisheries production in Pakistan. Of our 1100 kilometers coastline, 750 kilometers stretch is in Balochistan. Pakistan's Exclusive Economic Zone is estimated to be 240,000 square kilometers. The coastal belt contains a vast wealth of marine resources, waiting to be efficiently managed.

iv. And lastly, it is a common knowledge that Balochistan has the largest reserves of copper and gold in the world and is also blessed with huge oil reserves. Unfortunately, most of these resources are so far untapped. The natural gas from Sui has been a source of energy for over five decades. But at the same time, it has been a source of discontent and disharmony among the people of Balochistan and the resource consumers in other parts of the country.

D. Role of External Powers

Here we must contemplate the reasons, challenges and gaps that make a certain territory of one state vulnerable to external pressures and intervention. In this context, let's now evaluate what role major extra regional powers have been playing here, including development and interference:

I. United States

The U.S. has supported development in Balochistan through a range of projects seeking improvement in livelihoods, community resilience, education, health services, and infrastructure; and providing support to farmers and businesses. The U.S. rehabilitated 111 kilometers section of Kalat-Quetta-Chaman road.

Scholarships and stipends are offered for youth to earn undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.

On the political side, separatism in Balochistan was never overtly supported by the US Government till the end of the twentieth century. Such an intervention can force the Pak-U.S. relations to a breaking point, which does not serve American interests or those of Pakistan's.

However, the geopolitical canvass is witnessing a sea-change in American foreign policy ever since the inclusion of India in the allied group of countries through initiatives such as the so called Indo-Pacific strategy and the Quad group. US-India agreements such as BECA, LEMOA, COMCASA, and the civil nuclear deal also exacerbated regional security dilemmas.

Lately, some Congressmen like Rohrabacher (RCA), and influential individuals like Ralph Peters, have tried to “stick it to Pakistan” through the U.S. Congress. Congressman Rohrabacher introduced a resolution in 2012 and testified that:

“Baloch people are divided between Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. [That] they have the right to self-determination and to their own sovereign country.”

Another shift occurred once in 2019, the U.S. Department of State designated the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Hizballah operatives as Specially Designated Global Terrorists. It had also designated Jundallah as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.

Then once again, while being focused on its policy of China's containment, the U.S. got concerned about the Chinese engagement in Balochistan since the start of commercial trade at Gwadar Port. The U.S. has occasionally expressed reservations, that the Port might be used by China to extend its economic and military sphere of influence. However, the collective benefits of trade through Gwadar Port must weigh more in the geostrategic calculations rather than promotion of zero-sum games.

li. Russian Federation

Russia is another significant extra regional player, which has expressed interest that its investors would provide all facilities and security in Gwadar. In 2018, Governor of Balochistan offered to Russian diplomat that Pakistan could provide Russia with an easy route to Central Asia for trade expansion.

Russian investors have been keen to explore business opportunities in Pakistan and strengthening trade and investment cooperation with Pakistani counterparts. These objectives have also been conveyed in official and track 2 meetings.

In response to Congressman Rohrabacher's resolution, Moscow maintained that Balochistan is an integral part of Pakistan, and it is the responsibility of the Government to resolve its "internal" issues, not of any global superpower.

ii. People's Republic of China

Besides being the most China offered CPEC for Pakistan in 2013, as part of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is a massive development package offered in the region and beyond.

In 2020, Pakistan allowed Chinese mining company a 15-year contract for copper and gold extraction in Saindak. This has angered some quarters in Balochistan who were of the view that they have not benefited from that deal. But they will surely benefit, in the long-term if not the shorter one, if such projects are adopted under proper rules and regulations.

Foreign sponsored insurgent groups in Balochistan have been targeting CPEC and the Chinese working in Balochistan and elsewhere. Special Security Division (9,000 Army and 6,000 Paramilitary soldiers) provides security to local and Chinese experts working on the project, but a better understanding and ownership of development projects by the public may provide positive-sum solutions.

lii. Europe

Likewise, European countries such as Germany, France, and UK, as well as Canada keep engaging with the government and people of Balochistan with more or less similar objectives. They bring in funds for development but also provide refuge and support to separatist leaders, who lobby in the West against Pakistan using smart terms such as ethnic exclusion and identity crisis.

The Canadian Barrick Gold Corporation has agreed to restart the Rejo Diq project in Pakistan, following 10 years of legal battles and negotiations, to develop one of the world's largest gold and copper mining projects. The Corporation's website stated that this development will make Balochistan the largest recipient of foreign investment in Pakistan, and it's expected to create about 4,000 long-term jobs.

E. The Imperatives of External Influence

No matter how effective the outsiders are in improving lives and livelihoods in a certain part of a state, there are no free lunches. They will always remain focused on their own interests while trying to find out gaps in the domestic political and development sectors and exploiting to fully achieve these interests and maintain their influence.

Interventions through investments may become good means to achieve bad results. Petty issues may become challenges once the people of the land join hands with external influencers. Also, notwithstanding the positive or dubious

actions of external actors, we must first improve our internal traditional and non-traditional security. To develop Balochistan, there is a need to focus on knowing and understanding the rules of the land and values of the people of Balochistan.

Glimpses of the BTTN Seminar



Lt. Gen.Khalid Ahmed Kidwai giving a briefing to staff



Book Review

Huiyun Feng, Kai He and Xiaojun Li,

How China Sees the World:

Insights from China's

International Relations Scholars (Singapore, Palgrave MacMillan, 2019)

By: Safia Malik

China is emerging as a global power by focusing on geoeconomic and geostrategic issues to lead the world. Beijing has extended its economic corridors which connect several parts of the world and is actively playing its role in the international political economy. To understand Chinese scholars' views about the Chinese perspective of the world, Huiyun Feng, Kai He and Xiaojun Li's book "How China Sees the World: Insights from China's International Relations Scholars" is interesting to read. The book presents the analysis of Chinese scholars synthesized through their writing and a survey. Chinese Community of Political Science and International Studies (CCPSIS) conducted a survey in which they selected top five Chinese research Journals' publications published during 2014-2017 to assess the changes in the perception of Chinese scholars over time. Research articles published in: (i) Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies; (ii) World Economics and Politics; (iii) Contemporary International Relations; (iv) Foreign Affairs Review; and (v) China International Studies are analyzed. The authors examined the views of scholars on key issues of Chinese foreign policy and China's interaction with the world. The book consists of two broader themes: (i) Chinese scholarship; and (ii) Global geostrategic developments. The authors have addressed these themes by dividing the study in five chapters.

Chapter 1, Taking Chinese IR Scholars Seriously: It mentions three strata in Chinese society which are: elites, sub-elites and masses. Elites are the policymakers, masses are common people and sub-elites are scholars, analysts and media groups. Authors drew a conclusion that analysts and intellectuals suggest as policy recommendations but the state is independent in deciding whether to follow those recommendations or not. Although it is intricate to define to what extent sub-elites can have impact on foreign policy because it is still unclear whether a state's decisions are influenced by public opinion or public opinion is manipulated by the state. However, authors agree that sub-elites help manage the masses-elite relationship as mediators. In this regard, their perspective matters in promoting a state's narrative among masses.

Chapter II, On China's Power and the International Order: Is China a Challenger? It assesses China's rise as global power and its impact on international order. The optimistic view is that "China's rise is within the existing Liberal order, and that China is becoming more socialized into the international system" [page 21]. The pessimistic view argues that China's rise is a threat to the US hegemony falling into the "Thucydides Trap" where war is inevitable between both powers [page 21]. Chinese scholars have mentioned "Great 2" which suggests that the future international order will be bipolar where the US and China will dominate the two poles. Their conclusions are based on the arguments that the power gap between the two countries is gradually narrowing. In terms of soft power, majority of the survey respondents agreed that China will surpass the US through Made in China policy 2025, the Belt and Road initiative (BRI) and the expansion of its aid to developing countries. Scholars have proposed that China's GDP is

the second largest but its GDP per capita ranked 80th in the world. Therefore, Beijing needs to work on enhancing its political and economic power.

Chapter III, *On US-China Relations: Problems and Prospects*, stresses the importance of US-China relations. Chinese scholars believe that Beijing's ties with Washington are complicated and problematic but are important one. The US involvement in the South China Sea, unconditional support for Taiwan and facilitating the Japanese stance on Senkaku Island could further worsen the bilateral ties. The two countries can cooperate on nuclear balance, economic interdependence, socio-economic linkages and global climate change [page 63]. The scholars have adopted the Realist and Liberal approaches to observing the US-China ties. Realists scholars believe: (i) The US considers China as its strategic competitor, their clash would manifest in military, geopolitical and geoeconomic spheres; (ii) The US has adopted mixed-strategy of engagement, containment, balancing and cooperation to counter China; and (iii) Tension and competition would create trust deficit in the US-China ties. Conversely, Liberals by holding optimistic approach have suggested that there are avenues of cooperation between the two on common interests in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa. Cooperative measures would enhance confidence and ultimately both would avoid the way to war and conflict.

Chapter IV, *On Chinese Foreign Policy and International Relations*: It focuses on China's foreign policy and its relations with other countries including Russia, Japan, India, North Korea, African Union, European Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Latin American countries. Scholars signaled positive bilateral Russia-China ties while having a disquieting view of China-Japan's possible conflict in the East China sea. "Our survey analysis shows that most Chinese IR scholars are positive and satisfied about China's foreign policy practices in general with respect to bilateral relationship with Africa, Russia, the EU and Latin America but are less optimistic with respect to India and Japan" [page 94]. This Chapter also explores Deng Xiaoping's "keeping a-low-profile doctrine", survey respondents supported Deng's doctrine, while textual analysis suggested that there was another group of scholars who wanted a change in Deng's doctrine. This discrepancy shows that Chinese scholars hesitate to challenge official policies in their publications.

Chapter V, *Understanding China's Rise Through the Eyes of Scholars and Beyond*: The authors have given observations about China's rise. They concluded that both the US and China should cooperate if they intend to share leadership and prestige as well as cope with common challenges in the future such as poverty, climate change and pandemics. In addition, the US and China can coordinate in peaceful settlement of Iran and North Korea's nuclear weapons program. "Therefore, the United States should consider welcoming a rising China to share some of the burden and responsibilities of global governance that it has had to bear alone in the past" [page111]. Authors also suggested that "Beijing seems to have no choice but to continue deepening its economic openness and market-oriented reforms and further integrating itself into the world economy to offset the negative impact of the trade war" [page 109].

The book presents a focused view of Chinese scholars' perception about Beijing's foreign policy, China's understanding of the world and its position in the international system. The four-year (2014-2017) comprehensive opinion survey and textual analysis of Chinese publications provide an interesting perspective. The authors have used qualitative and quantitative research methods to carry out this study. The book lacks the background of historical explanation of Chinese foreign policy, but it provides a valuable analysis of changing international geopolitical

and geoeconomic landscape. The authors have factored in domestic variables which may contribute to the development of China's international relations. Moreover, it is interesting to note that while authors envisioned a bipolar world in the future, they also suggest a world order in which two powers would cooperate for the greater good of the international community. The study is helpful for academics, policymakers, practitioners and students who are interested in China's foreign policy.

CHINA

Quadistan

By Mirza Kashif Baig

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, is an informal strategic alliance between the four key players in the Indo-Pacific regions namely India, US, Japan and Australia, and was created due to address the growing Chinese influence in the region. It has so far been considered a step aimed at keeping maritime routes open for coordination; however, its transformation into a military alliance within the growing US-China competition cannot be ruled out. The need for this alliance first proposed by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007; at the time, however, it did not happen due to Australia's reluctance, probably due to Chinese concerns. China has become a major investor in Australia and their bilateral trade reached AUD240 billion between July 2019 and July 2020. In 2014, the leaders of both countries described their relations as a full strategic partnership. However, their relations are deteriorating since April 2020, mainly due to trade bans and Australian criticism of China's actions in the South China Sea, and towards Taiwan and Hong Kong. India was fast to take advantage of these declining relations and invited Australia to join Quad. Thus, 13 years later, by 2020, four democracies transformed this vision into a reality and gave way to a long-awaited unity. In 2020, Australia again accepted India's invitation to join the Malabar Exercise 2020, making it the first time that all Quad members have joined the military. Quad is now in the process of developing new strategies to keep important maritime routes in the Indo-Pacific region free of Chinese influence. China's development of artificial islands, seen as a vicious Chinese navy strategy in the East China Sea by the US, also poses challenges to international maritime law. In addition, China's redefining of the Air Protection Index is viewed by the US with concern and is considered a threat to peace in the Indo-Pacific. The US main goal is therefore to embrace China's growing influence in the region. China has called Quad a "Asian version of NATO", despite the fact that Quad's influence extends beyond Asia. The combination of the QUAD members was well thought out and India was supposed to be a major player in South East Asia to counter China, Russia, and even Pakistan owing to the country's deep roots with China, particularly with regard to CPEC. The situation, however, changed with time as the gap between the Indian strategy and that of the other members widened. India initially took a different direction, from other QUAD countries, on the matter of the Beijing Winter Olympics. Later, India remained silent when on the matter of North Korea's nuclear missile tests which were condemned by the other three members in a joint statement. Recently, India chose to not speak against Russia on the matter of the Ukraine invasion despite the clear stance of the other members. Also, India has not aligned itself in line with the sanctions imposed against Russia.

India continues to conduct trade and buy Russian oil. These factors along with the growing human rights violations due to the government's support of Hindu extremist elements have made the US realize that it cannot rely on India and as a result, India was not made part of the AUKUS. QUAD alliance, however, requires a strong reliable South Asian member to counter China and therefore the US may look to induct Pakistan into this alliance to achieve the final result to make Quad a Quadstan. Would Pakistan go this trade, it seems impossible for the time being as Pakistan has learned lessons being ally of USA and was ditched by USA every time by abandoning it, In 1989 when USSR was defeated and in 2021 when USA left Afghanistan duly defeated and blaming Pakistan for its defeat and turning the world as multipolar instead of Unipolar. It was big blow to USA.

'China wants to keep pushing India'

'China doesn't want to settle the boundary dispute because that gives them a reason to pick a fight with India.'

By Archana Masih

"We have to increase our comprehensive power to take on China," says Lieutenant General P J S Pannu, (retired), former commander of the XIV corps which is responsible for the China border. "India needs to become strong, accelerate growth, strengthen the defence industry, increase GDP and ensure that the country is internally strong and well-integrated," General Pannu in the concluding part of the interview.

What is China's real objective?

1. Territory;
2. Prevent India from building infrastructure close to LAC;
3. Keep India on edge in view of India's proximity to the USA;
4. Ensure that India remains neutral till the next Dalai Lama is chosen;
5. Show its hegemony in Asia?

All of the above. China doesn't want to settle the boundary dispute because that gives them a reason to pick a fight with India. China thinks it's best is to keep the wounds open; keep pushing us around. China does not want any opposition from India. The Chinese do not want India to stake its claim anywhere and allow China to actually become a bully.

What does India need to do to keep China quiet?

India needs to become strong, accelerate our growth, strengthen our defence industry, increase our GDP and ensure that India is seen as a country which is internally strong and well-integrated. Unless India stands up as a country whose internal fabric is well knit, we will keep struggling as the economy will suffer if there are internal problems. We must have our own technology, industrial base, research and development and quality education. We have to increase our comprehensive power to take on China. To counter the Chinese threat, the Indian Army has shifted six divisions earlier deployed in counter terrorism in J&K to LAC. Does that increase vulnerability on the Pakistan border? No, not at all. The Indian armed forces have enough capability to throw in reserves because the entire army does not remain deployed all the time. If required for short to medium term, the Indian armed forces can muster in all resources and make sure that during hours of need we are well balanced and well poised for

two front war. There are a number of formation and units which are fresh and remain trained in the peace stations in the hinterland. They will all be pushed to the borders, and we will be able to maintain a strategic balance on both the borders.

What is the possibility of a return to the status quo ante of April 2020?

When you look at the claims, India's international border includes Aksai Chin (occupied by China). When we say status quo 2020, are we also saying that Aksai Chin is with China? India will never say or accept that because we have claims on entire Aksai Chin. China does not want that and as long as there are claims and counter claims, the situation is never going to get resolved. Till then, we have a status quo to maintain peace at the border. India has a notion of victory. China may also have a notion of victory, but they are unable to pull back because then what will they tell their people after losing men in Galwan? The two leaders and two countries have to decide. Some sort of Track II diplomacy is needed to create a win-win situation. Track II is extremely important. Diplomacy has to be given its own due and leaders have to show maturity and statesmanship to bring it to a win situation.

RUSSIA

What is at the heart of Ukraine story?

By Saeed Naqvi

On the eve of the Agincourt expedition in France, Shakespeare's model King, Henry V, is advised by the Bishop of Ely "if that you France will win, then with Scotland first begin." In other words, if China, marching ahead of the US is the biggest threat to western dominance, its friendship "without limits" with Russia increases the danger by geometrical progression. This must be terminated. The rise of the Sino-Russia duet would have proceeded for some time more, but it coincided with "US in decline; US in decline" chant rising to a crescendo at disorienting decibel levels. This chant was maddening for a super power afflicted by nightmares of the messy departure from Afghanistan. Some rearguard action was needed to restore self-esteem. True 1,50,000 Russian troops on the Ukrainian border would be perceived a threat by all "right thinking" people who watch TV but how would they discern that the 24/7 media they watch has overnight become part of the West's war effort? German Naval Chief, Vice Admiral Kay-Achim Schonbach attending a seminar in New Delhi spoke from his heart: "What Putin wants from the West is a little respect which he probably deserves." It is another matter that he had to resign. One reaction to the German was from a pretty, pert lady. "Parade Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, Joe Biden and Boris Johnson at a "swayamvara", (the ancient Indian custom where princesses selected their partners) who would be garlanded by the maiden?" Boris Johnson, holding onto his job by the skin of his teeth because of Partygate? Joe Biden of Afghanistan and Kazakhstan fame, now trying to redeem himself in Ukraine? Vladimir Putin who has 80 percent support for the war. Above all, he lifted Russia from the debris of the Soviet Union and made it into the power it is today. Xi Jinping who supervises a system which lifted 400 million people out of poverty in 30 years? Who would the maiden garland? British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss who has posed Ukraine as a contest between democracy and autocracy must be in the blues today: her chant was discarded at the hurriedly called meeting in Germany by the Defense

Consultative Group on Ukraine. US Defense Secretary, Lloyd Austin clarified the picture: the West was not in the game to help Ukraine's burgeoning democracy (Azov Nazi battalion et al) against the "barbarian" in occupation of the Kremlin. "We want to weaken Russia" he said bluntly. There could be no clearer admission of the fact that this war is not about Ukraine. I wrote as much two months ago. Indeed, Ukraine is being plied with billions of dollars plus the most sophisticated weapons in the world to fight a proxy war so that the Anglo-Americans do not lose control of world power. Thinkers and Statesmen of the old school like George Kennan and James Baker admired the Russian people for having brought about the "greatest bloodless" revolution in history. They were distressed that West, which had promised Gorbachev that NATO would not move east "even an inch", was not keeping its word. The so called "liberal" interventionists like Clinton brought Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic into NATO in 1999. Like there would be no tomorrow, in 2004 they gave NATO membership to Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia. This was in the heady days before the western decline became official. The dates are interesting. The Bucharest summit of NATO was attended by George W Bush on the one hand and Putin on the other like two sparring pugilists. Bush "lobbied like hell", for Georgia and Ukraine to be brought into NATO. Putin said over his dead body. Putin's red line was crossed. This was in April 2008. In August 2008, Putin invaded Georgia. Why then this surprise over Ukraine? Mikhail Saakashvili holding a degree from Columbia and a favourite of US Under Secretary of State, Victoria Nuland, became the handpicked President. He was given extensive TV time, but in vain. He projected himself as a darling of the West but eventually came a cropper in Georgia. Saakashvili's rehabilitation in Ukraine was facilitated by President Petro Poroshenko who made him the Governor of Odessa. All because of a good word from Nuland. When Poroshenko was shown the door so was Saakashvili. When Saakashvili's conflict with Putin was in its early stages, the earth moved from under the US feet. On September 15, 2008, Lehman Brothers collapsed. This was the beginning of the "US in decline" chant which drives Biden mad to this day. Ukraine is his response. Rise and fall of empires is routine but the decline of America has been exceptionally painful because the sole super power moment ended with such abruptness. "Decline" must never be mistaken for "fall", because the US remains the world's most powerful country. "Decline" is relative but continuous; it debilitates US conduct in world affairs. At that moment, when US neocons were sketching designs of the American century, full spectrum dominance, the chosen target to keep the Military Industrial complex in good humour became Islamic terrorism. The Soviet Union had condensed into modern Russia which the West had to celebrate as the success of democracy. But the visceral suspicion of Russia never went away. The visceral became real when Putin restored Russia to its present stature. Russia came in the way, first in Kosovo which after the 72 days bombing of Serbia, was carved out to be kept in European care. Various enclaves of Kosovo are protested by European troops. But Russia drove its tanks and occupied Pristina airport with the West flailing its arms. Russians are responsible for the US reversals in Syria. Leaders like Tony Blair had warned Barrack Obama to keep a steady focus on Islamic terror. Deviating into conflict with Russia would complicate relations with Europe which, wartime bravado apart, is heavily dependent on Russian energy. And now, as the tide turns in the battlefield and the secrets of Mariupol are about to be revealed, nervous punters on both sides are keeping their fingers crossed.

EU stumbles over Russian oil slick

OPEC has warned EU that it would be impossible to replace more than 7 million barrels per day (bpd) of Russian oil and other liquids exports potentially lost due to sanctions

By M.K. Bhadrakumar

The European Union officials are insisting that oil sanctions against Russia are coming. On Sunday, France's Ecological Transition Minister Barbara Pompili was certain that "we will reach (an agreement) by the end of the week." But the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has warned EU that it would be impossible to replace more than seven million barrels per day (bpd) of Russian oil and other liquids exports potentially lost due to sanctions or voluntary actions. The fine print here is that the Western entreaties on OPEC to increase oil production is falling on deaf ears not so much due to diplomatic recalcitrance as the group's genuine inability to implement higher hikes due to under-investment in oil and gas ventures that has left some Opec+ members with dwindling spare capacity (with the exception of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.) In fact, in March, OPEC+ production recorded a decline for the first time in 13 months and is currently around 1.48mn b/d under the coalition's quota system. OPEC+ members, including Russia, have agreed to raise output by about 432,000 barrels per day in May, as part of a gradual unwinding of output cuts made during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is seething anger in Washington that Saudi Arabia and the UAE refrain from stepping up production. Hence the renewed talk of the 15-year old Damocles' sword in the form of a US legislation to punish these countries NOPEC bill which aims to modify the existing antitrust law to revoke the sovereign immunity that has long protected OPEC and its national oil companies from lawsuits in American federal courts. If signed into law, the US attorney general would gain the ability to sue the oil cartel or its members Saudi Arabia or the UAE in federal court. (Other producers like Russia, which works with OPEC in wider group known as OPEC+ to withhold output, could also be sued.) But the energy superpowers know this threat is a load of baloney that the US is in no position to dictate terms. In fact, when the US Congress passed a version of the bill in 2007, it died under veto threat from President George W. Bush who said it could lead to oil supply disruptions as well as "retaliatory action against American interests." The "retaliatory action" that Bush feared, which President Biden should fear even more, could today include Saudi retaliation by way of terminating the use of the dollar for its oil trade, which would of course lethally undermine the dollar's status as the world's main reserve currency and significantly reduce the US influence in global trade. Some recent reports suggest that Saudis are already in talks with Beijing on usage of local currencies for some portion of their oil trade, something that China also has been seeking lately. Interestingly, in a recent commentary, the well-known Chinese political thinker Zhang Weiwei argued strongly in favour of a new thinking in Beijing against the backdrop of the US' harsh sanctions freezing the foreign exchange reserves of the Russian Central Bank and removing Russia from the Swift international settlement system. Prof. Zhang wrote: "The current (Russian) decision to link natural gas and other raw materials to the rouble can be said to be a revolution against the hegemonic order of the US dollar. Very inspiring. As the world's largest economy (based on purchasing power parity), the largest trader of goods, the largest consumer market and investment market, we (China) must boldly conceive and practice the construction of a financial system in the "post-American era"... We have a good hand, we have abundant natural

resources, including a large amount of rare metals, we have the most complete industrial chain in the world, we are the only one in the world that can produce almost everything from the first industrial revolution to the fourth industrial revolution All product countries. Linking the renminbi to our special resources, to many products, is a new idea that we can consider.” Be that as it may, Biden is highly unlikely to take the NOPEC path. The powerful American Petroleum Institute (which holds veto power on the Hill) thoroughly rejects the very idea of a lawsuit against OPEC for antitrust behaviour and market manipulation, which it fears could trigger “serious, unintended consequences” by giving OPEC members an opportunity to reciprocate against US companies and even undermine their ability to sustain growing production. Suffice to say, it is incredible that the EU is planning to commit harakiri this weekend by imposing oil sanctions against Russia. But then, it is one of those queer coincidences that at such a transformative period in world politics, the EU's executive branch is headed by two arch-Atlanticists and hawkish Russophobes Commission president Ursula von der Leyen and foreign policy chief Josep Borrell. When Biden is set to sign a \$40 billion bill to defeat Russia in the proxy war in Ukraine, the least these two decision-makers can do to supplement the war effort is to cut Europe's umbilical cord with Russia in oil trade something that had survived even the high noon of the Cold War era (US diplomatic skulduggery notwithstanding.) So, von der Leyen travelled to Budapest on Tuesday to persuade President Viktor Orban to join her chariot to storm the Russian citadel. Orban threatens to veto EU sanctions against Russia, since Hungary is critically dependent on Russian oil supplies, which come overland through the Druzhba pipeline at ridiculously low cost price. Orban visited Moscow on February 1 when he and President Putin agreed on a new long term gas contract at favourable price. Hungary needs more time (and investments) to reduce its dependency on Russian gas. But Orban is a smart politician too. Von der Leyen crossed Orban's path, irritated alike by his authoritarian tendencies at home and his warm ties with Kremlin, and in an itch to teach him a hard lesson decided in March to withhold EU funding for Hungary by invoking the “rule-of-law conditionality mechanism.” Perhaps, von der Leyen thought she could incentivise Orban. Of course, going slow on the EU's conditionality mechanism prescribing a “rules-based order” for Hungary is a counterfactual that is impossible to test. The word so far from Budapest is that no deal was struck. But the bottom line in the Hungarian saga is that EU member states can muster “smart power” within the group's treaties to frustrate the Commission using a mechanism outside of it to try and get to them. In systemic terms, this highlights the limits of European integration via the backdoor: what the EU can actually achieve institutionally without treaty change. It is far too premature for the EU to talk about stabilising prices or reducing dependence on Russian energy resources because these processes will take time. On the other hand, these sanctions won't deter the Russian operation in Ukraine, while the ensuing turbulence in the world oil market will not spare European economies too.

How Russia-Ukraine conflict could affect Europe

Ever since the Russia-Ukraine conflict erupted in February, the West, including eurozone countries, has imposed several rounds of sanctions aiming at crippling Russia's economy. However, some of these measures are feared to have backfired and jeopardized the overall European economy.

* The main channel through which the conflict in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia affect the euro area economy is raising global energy prices and energy security, the International Monetary Fund said in its World Economic Outlook report in April.

* Apart from a looming drop in the standard of living in many parts of Europe, the ongoing conflict and sanctions would cause a food crisis in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world. As the Russia-Ukraine conflict rages into the third month with no sign of truce any time soon, the entire European continent is bearing the brunt of the crisis. Against the backdrop of an economic slowdown, supply chain disruptions and weak consumer morale after more than two years into COVID-19, the Russia-Ukraine conflict and subsequent sanctions on Russia are wreaking more havoc in Europe, causing widespread panic over regional security, soaring food and energy prices and a looming drop in the standard of living.

Economic woes

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revised down its eurozone growth forecast for 2022 to 2.8 percent from 3.9 percent in its January estimate, with the region's biggest economy, Germany, taking a heavy hit. The main channel through which the conflict in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia affect the euro area economy is raising global energy prices and energy security, the IMF said in its World Economic Outlook report in April. The shockwaves of the conflict hurt countries like Italy and Germany more than other European nations because they had "relatively large manufacturing sectors and greater dependence on energy imports from Russia," said the report. Germany's economy is now expected to grow by 2.1 percent this year, down from the previous forecast of 3.8 percent. Italy will also drop, with a growth rate of 2.3 percent compared to an earlier forecast of 3.8 percent. Ever since the Russia-Ukraine conflict erupted in February, the West, including eurozone countries, has imposed several rounds of sanctions aiming at crippling Russia's economy. However, some of these measures are feared to have backfired and jeopardized the overall European economy. Two months into the conflict, prices are rising. Oil hovers over 100 U.S. dollars a barrel after reaching historic highs in March, while the prices of gas, wheat, aluminum, nickel and other raw materials have soared. As a result, the euro area's annual inflation reached an all-time high of 7.5 percent in April, according to the European Union (EU)'s statistical office Eurostat. Energy is expected to have the highest annual rate in April, followed by food, alcohol and tobacco, non-energy industrial goods and services, Eurostat said in a flash estimate published Friday. The estimate shows high inflation is ubiquitous among all 19 countries in the euro area, and the inflation rates in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands and Slovakia have topped 10 percent.

Sanctions backfire, calls for dialogue

By slapping sanctions on Moscow, most EU officials hold to an end of dependence on Russia for energy and other supplies. Yet some analysts think otherwise. In a recent interview with Xinhua, Italian economist Michele Geraci warned the Russia-Ukraine conflict could lead to "a weaker Europe because the economy there could take a serious hit." "We are imposing sanctions on energy products thinking that these would hurt the Russian economy. However, they would hurt the EU's economy more," said Geraci, former undersecretary of state at the Italian Ministry of Economic Development. As a result of this, he said Italy, Germany and a number of smaller countries in Eastern Europe would be stranded. The EU's export ban on luxury goods to Russia, for example, would hurt such brands as Gucci and Prada.

Russia was the EU's fifth-largest partner for exports and third largest for imports last year, with two-way trade in goods totaling 257.5 billion euros (279.4 billion dollars), according to data released by Eurostat. "Sanctions never work," Geraci said. "To solve this issue, we have to use diplomacy with Russia. We don't just need to go to Kiev. We need to go to Moscow." Hungarian political scientist Csaba Moldicz also calls for dialogue. "Sanctions alone won't work in ending the conflict," he told Xinhua in an interview, adding that the EU should hold dialogue with Russia instead of cutting off diplomatic and commercial ties. Geraci blames the eastward expansion of the U.S.-led NATO toward Russia as a root cause for the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. In 30 years, NATO has gone through five rounds of enlargement, moving eastward more than 1,000 km to somewhere near the Russian border, pushing the country into a corner step by step. The conflict is in a way a proxy one between Russia and the United States which is being fought in Europe and for which the Europeans are paying a heavy price, whereas the cost for the United States is minimal, he said. NATO's eastward expansion has not only triggered the crisis in Ukraine, but also threatened peace, security and cooperation worldwide, said Zivadin Jovanovic, former minister of foreign affairs of Yugoslavia. NATO's eastward push has deeply harmed the whole European continent by "militarizing its infrastructure, economy and even its education system," Jovanovic noted. Jovanovic, who currently presides over the think-tank Belgrade Forum for a World of Equals, said that instead of fueling the conflict further, the West should engage in a global high-level dialogue for peace and security, which would be vital to ending the crisis.

Livelihood in jeopardy

In many parts of Europe, rising energy prices and subsequent inflation are already jeopardizing the livelihood of the people and causing widespread concern over regional economic development. Countries like Hungary could not possibly end energy imports from Russia anytime soon and would therefore suffer more from the ongoing sanctions than Russia, said Moldicz, research director at the Eurasian Center of the John Neumann University in Budapest. About 85 percent of Hungarian households rely on natural gas from Russia for heating, he said. "We rely heavily on natural gas. Even if we replace gas with wood and coal, it will be technically impossible to change the entire heating system shortly." In addition to an energy crunch, Moldicz said the ongoing conflict and sanctions would cause a food crisis in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world. Ukraine and Russia are among the world's leading exporters of wheat. Disruptions of wheat exports will drive up grain prices and harm the low-income population worldwide. The IMF has warned that "increases in food and fuel prices may also significantly increase the prospect of social unrest in poorer countries." World food commodity prices soared in March to the highest levels ever, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reported earlier in April. The UN has allocated 100 million dollars to fight hunger in Africa and the Middle East as the spillover effects of the military operation in Ukraine threaten to push millions even closer to famine. In addition, the conflict has forced more than 11 million people to leave their homes in Ukraine so far. About 5.3 million of them have left for neighboring countries, while 6.5 million others are now internally displaced in their home country, according to the UN. The UN's children agency has said that two-thirds of all Ukrainian children have fled their homes. The conflict "has led to extensive loss of life, triggered the biggest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II, and severely set back the global recovery," said the IMF. "If the Ukrainian refugee crisis continues, it would clearly put a lot of stress on

facilities like schools and hospitals," said Lorenzo Codogno, founder and chief economist of LC Macro Advisors Ltd and a visiting professor at the London School of Economics. (Video reporters: He Xiyue, Chen Hao, Shi Zhongyu, Degryse Diedrick, Attila Volgyi and Geza Molnar; video editors: Jia Xiaotong and Cao Ying).

Deteriorating Israeli - Russian relations

Neutrality no longer an option for Gulf and Turkey

By Dr. James Dorsey

So far, the Biden administration has been restrained in its response to a Saudi and Emirati refusal to increase oil production to reduce prices and help Europe ween itself off its dependence on Russian energy. However, there is little doubt that the administration will remember who its friends were in a time of need and who were not. Israel's rapidly deteriorating relations with Russia contain a message for other Middle Eastern powers: attempting to remain on the sidelines of the conflict in Ukraine risks falling in between the cracks. Like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Turkey, Israel has sought to maintain good relations with the United States and Russia despite Washington and Moscow's principle of 'you are either with us or against us.' Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has good reason to apply the same principle even if Israel and Turkey have sought to use their good offices to mediate between the Ukrainian leader and President Vladimir Putin. They used their mediation to justify their failure to join US and European sanctions against Russia. Mr. Zelensky this week called out his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, after Turkey announced plans to encourage as many Russian holiday makers as possible to visit. The announcement came as a senior Russian tourism official said that less than half the 4.7 million Russians who traveled to Turkey in 2021 were likely to visit the country this year. "This is not entirely fair, and that is why I draw Turkey's attention to such processes. There is a need to choose," Mr. Zelensky said a day after meeting in Kyiv with Ibrahim Kalin, one of Mr. Erdogan's closest advisors. So far, the Biden administration has been restrained in its response to a Saudi and Emirati refusal to increase oil production to reduce prices and help Europe ween itself off its dependence on Russian energy. However, there is little doubt that the administration will remember who its friends were in a time of need and who were not. It's a message that may be registering in Abu Dhabi. In late April, France's Total Energies chartered a tanker to load Abu Dhabi crude in early May for Europe, the first such shipment in two years. Despite hubristic remarks by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in an interview in March with The Atlantic, relations between the kingdom, the UAE, and the United States have steered away from acrimonious public exchanges. That has not stopped former officials from trading swipes. Responding to former Secretary of State and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's suggestion that the US should use a carrot-and-stick approach to get the Saudis to boost oil output, former Saudi intelligence chief and ex-ambassador to the United States Prince Turki al-Faisal quipped: "We're not schoolchildren to be treated with a carrot and stick. When we're dealt with fairly and squarely, we respond likewise". Striking a less belligerent tone, Mohammed Khalid Alyahya, a Hudson Institute visiting fellow and former editor-in-chief of Saudi-owned Al Arabiya English, noted that "Saudi Arabia laments what it sees as America's willful dismantling of an international order

that it established and led for the better part of a century.” Mr. Alyahya quoted a senior Saudi official as saying: “A strong, dependable America is the greatest friend Saudi Arabia can have. It stands to reason, then, that US weakness and confusion is a grave threat not just to America, but to us as well.” Israel has not been afforded the luxury of more layered exchanges in its increasingly harsh tit-for-tat official verbal swaps with Russia. In the latest incident, Israel this week condemned Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's assertion that Adolf Hitler had “Jewish blood.” Mr. Lavrov used that to justify describing as a “Nazi” Mr. Zelensky, who is of Jewish descent. The foreign minister went on to say that “the wise Jewish people said that the most ardent antisemites are usually Jews.” In response, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, whose grandfather died in the Holocaust, said in a tweet that “Lavrov's remarks are both an unforgivable and outrageous statement as well as a terrible historical error. . Jews did not murder themselves in the Holocaust. The lowest level of racism against Jews is to accuse Jews themselves of antisemitism.” Subsequently, Mr. Lapid added that “we are making every effort to maintain good relations with Russia, but everything has a border, and this time it was crossed. The Russian government should apologize to us and to all the Jewish people.” Doubling down, the Russian foreign ministry accused Israel a day later of supporting neo-Nazis in Ukraine. The ministry said Mr. Lapid's statements were “anti-historical” and “explaining to a large extent why the current Israeli government supports the neo-Nazi regime in Kyiv”. Mr. Lavrov and the ministry's remarks were the latest salvo in the Israeli-Russian spat. A day earlier, a Russian television station disclosed the identity of ten Israeli consular officials and security guards who were on the Polish-Ukrainian border to help Israeli nationals escape from the war-torn country and described them as mercenaries. “Their names + passports are compromised. It can help Israel's enemies such as Iran intel,” tweeted Israeli national security reporter Yossi Melman. The disclosure came a day after media reports said that Israel had foiled an attempt to assassinate an Israeli consular employee in Turkey, an American general in Germany, and a journalist in France. Israel has walked a fine line in crafting its management of the Ukraine crisis. It rejected Ukrainian requests for arms sales, including its acclaimed Iron Dome anti-rocket system and access to Israeli surveillance technology, while providing humanitarian assistance to the war-torn country. Israel has also shared intelligence, voted for a United Nations General Assembly resolution condemning the Russian invasion, and convinced the United Arab Emirates to do likewise. Furthermore, Israel voted for an Assembly resolution suspending Russian membership in the UN Human Rights Council. Under pressure to get off the fence, Mr. Lapid sparked the deterioration of relations when in early April, he asserted that Russia had committed war crimes. In a statement at the time, the Russian foreign ministry charged that Mr. Lapid's remarks were “a poorly camouflaged attempt to take advantage of the situation in Ukraine to distract the international community's attention from one of the oldest unsettled conflicts the Palestine-Israeli one.” Shortly after that, Russia's ambassador to Israel, Anatoly Viktorov, told an Israeli television station that Israel and Russia were “still” friends but that Moscow expected a “more balanced (Israeli) position.” To increase pressure on Israel, Admiral Oleg Zhuravlev, the deputy chief of the Russian Center for Reconciliation of the Opposing Parties in Syria, disclosed that a Syrian-operated, Russian-made Buk M2E air defense system had recently intercepted a guided missile fired from an Israeli F-16 fighter jet in Syrian airspace. The disclosure constituted a warning that Russia may no longer tolerate future Israeli strikes against targets in Syria. “Israel risks falling off its carefully construed balancing act.

Others in the Middle East still have some rope left. How much is the \$64,000 question,” said a Western diplomat. A podcast version is available on Soundcloud, Itunes, Spotify, Stitcher, TuneIn, Spreaker, Pocket Casts, Tumblr, Podbean, Audible, Patreon, and Castbox. Dr. James M. Dorsey is an award-winning journalist and scholar, a Senior Fellow at the National University of Singapore's Middle East Institute and Adjunct Senior Fellow at Nanyang Technological University's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, and the author of the syndicated column and blog, The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer.

Finland and Sweden's NATO membership and its global implications

By Mirza Kashif Baig

The Russian Federation and the United States of America have been at each other's throats for a long time. They don't see eye to eye and have been each other's rivals. This is mainly due to the conflicting philosophies of the two nuclear powers but most importantly because their powers rival each other. These countries were both huge world powers until the decline of the Soviet Union after which the USA gained the status of the single superpower of the world and with that, the world marked the end of the Cold War or so it was perceived. In present times, a second cold war has begun between the two mighty nations according to many. There are some, let us say much, who believe that the Cold War never ended but became less intense and continued on a minuscule level. It is not that difficult to understand if one puts some thought into it. Although the Soviet Union disintegrated, the Russian Federation and its strong influence remained in the Central Asia States (CARs). On the other hand, America has a strong alliance with North American, South American, European, and certain Asian countries. Any country warming up to Russia and its allies in terms of trade was bullied by the West the only way to maintain good relations with the West and the NATO countries was to disown Russia and its allies completely. The nuclear weapons and the conventional weapons of both countries (USA and Russia) rival each other and therefore both the countries perceive each other as a significant threat. They couldn't warm up to each other; hence, they were competing in weapons and other trades all the while maintaining a strong check on each other. Both the countries were bent on expanding their region of influence with the intent to enhance their power and corner the other. Since the western block has the edge over Russia, its reach been greater and so was the say in global matters. As has been depicted in case of Pakistan. Despite Russia's efforts, it was not considered a part of Europe, mainly due to the bitter past where Russia has stretched and fought with the Europeans, and Russia was always marginalized by the western powers. All the while Russia worked on the same agenda and looked to keep the western block in check. These facts lay a strong foundation for the belief that Cold War had never ended and always continued on in the shadows. The Cold War could never end till one of the parties suffers a decisive defeat with little chance of recovery much like that suffered by Nazi Germany. This is a terrifying thought but one which is now closer to reality than ever as the Cold War between the two powers has again intensified and Russia's invasion of Ukraine is the starting point of a decisive battle. Russia feels that America's weaponization of Europe and the Baltic states by NATO is a breach of the treaty and is uncomfortable with NATO's extension toward Ukraine as this would handicap Russia completely. Despite multiple warnings from Russia when Ukraine decided to move forward with NATO membership, Russia displayed the

seriousness of her resolve by invading Ukraine, all the while issuing a warning to Sweden and Finland of dire consequences if they reached out to NATO. Considering that both Sweden and Finland are Russia's neighboring countries, NATO membership would mean a serious threat to Russia. Regardless of Russia's warnings, both the countries have submitted applications for NATO membership and this could have dire global implications as Russia would not tolerate it and the Western block may respond directly to any Russian aggression. In such a scenario, a conflict between these powers would mean a world war, one which will prove to be deadlier than its predecessors. It is, therefore, for concerned world powers to resolve their conflict over dialogue as the world cannot withstand such a conflict.

AMERICA

IPEF-desperate move by the Biden admin in Asia

Counter to China in Asia

By M K Bhadrakumar

A new economic bloc comprising twelve countries of the Indo-Pacific region and the United States was unveiled on Monday in Tokyo on the sidelines of President Joe Biden's visit. Christened as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), it is conceived as the economic correlative of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy. The Biden Administration expects that the IPEF will serve as an important tool of the US in the country's geopolitical and economic competition against China. Along with the US, initial participants in the framework include major economies like Australia, India, Japan and South Korea, as well as developing countries, including Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, and smaller nations like Brunei, New Zealand and Singapore. Broadly, the IPEF bloc would provide an early warning system for supply chain issues, encourage industries to decarbonise and offer US businesses reliable Asian partners outside China. In a nutshell, the US wants to boost its profile in Asia's economic realm, where China is the dominant country. The IPEF would include four different modules covering fair trade, supply chain resilience, infrastructure and decarbonisation, tax and anti-corruption. With Monday's kickoff, negotiations in each of these areas will soon ensue. Each of the 13 participating countries will be allowed to choose in which of the four areas to pursue deals without having to commit to all of them. Parameters for the negotiations should be set by late June or early July, and the Biden administration hopes to wrap up any agreements within 12 to 18 months to then submit to each government for ratification. In reality, the IPEF is a desperate move by the Biden administration to burnish its economic profile in Asia as a credible counterbalance to China. It is designed to project the US in the economic leadership of the Indo-Pacific region. The goal is to make a splash in the Asia-Pacific region after the US' ignominious exit during the Donald Trump presidency from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which, ironically, was Washington's brainchild in the first instance and President Obama's signature trade agreement. The IPEF is neither a "pact" nor a "deal," as the Indian media seems to think. It is what it says a loose framework of Asian countries that would provide an early warning system for supply chain issues, encourage industries to decarbonise and offer US businesses reliable regional partners outside China. It will make no binding commitments

regarding market access characteristic of trade deals or free trade agreements, because that will be a hard sell in the US where protectionist sentiments are well entrenched. But it will provide for ambitious labour and environmental standards and create new guidelines for how data flows between countries. A White House fact sheet comes straight to the point when it says, "IPEF will enable the United States and our allies to decide on rules of the road that ensure American workers, small businesses, and ranchers can compete in the Indo-Pacific." Under the IPEF, the Biden administration is trying to dominate the rules and standards of digital technologies like artificial intelligence and 5G. But the rules of digital trade and technology that the US wants to promote are too "American," and many countries in the region simply cannot meet the so-called high standards. The US' goal to isolate China from regional countries will make the implementation of IPEF rather problematic insofar as the framework serves US interests at the expense of regional countries by setting higher thresholds on digital economy, environmental protection and other fields in line with US economic policies. Besides, ASEAN countries are in no mood to decouple from China and the existing pattern of supply chain division has lasted a long time and has brought benefits to the countries of the Indo-Pacific. Importantly, China is spearheading a comprehensive free-trade effort in Asia, especially with the operationalisation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), whereas the IPEF has little to offer to Asian economies by way of tangible economic benefits such as opening up more of the US market to Asian people. There are no market access or tariff reduction provisions in the framework, which lacks trade incentives that countries in the region desire. Above all, the IPEF may take years to take shape and China gets ample time to render it ineffective. The Biden Administration is unsure as of now whether to get the IPEF pact ratified by the Congress where it may meet sudden death. Put differently, a question mark needs to be put on the sustainability of the IPEF beyond 2024. The few countries in the Asia-Pacific region who have joined the IPEF will keep their fingers crossed. Reportedly, India was initially reluctant to join the IPEF, as it is keener on having a bilateral trade pact with the US and plurilateral agreements under the Quad. India's concerns about a non-FTA deal are perfectly understandable, being cautious about the non-tariff-cutting multilateral framework and doubting whether it can really provide substantial benefits to any emerging economy in South Asia. However, Delhi and Washington reached an understanding during the Indian Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's visit to the US last month when it was agreed that although the IPEF will demand "high standards" by way of establishing and maintaining trade facilitation, supply-chain resilience and infrastructure, it will nevertheless be a "strategic move" that targets China, something in which there is a strong US-Indian congruence of interests. For the US, of course, it is almost necessary to get India onboard the IPEF, as the latter is considered as the key cornerstone for the US Indo-Pacific strategy. Delhi gave in to the US entreaties although its preference would have been to build a South Asia-Indian Ocean economic zone by obtaining bilateral FTAs with the US and negotiating the best possible market access. Conceivably, India would do some cherry-picking when the final IPEF package shapes up. On its part, the Biden Administration too would be aware of the futility of attempts to integrate India's quasi-autarkic economy and autarchic polity into the liberal world economy. Commenting on Biden's Asia tour, the New York Times wrote recently, "With prices rising, stock markets falling and fears of recession spreading at home, the president is eager to demonstrate that he is focused on stabilising the economy, especially with midterm elections five months away." But the IPEF is

going to be a hard sell in the Indo-Pacific. Ambassador M.K. Bhadrakumar is retired from the Indian Foreign Service. He writes extensively on foreign affairs.

Why Biden's visit to East Asia is on the wrong foot

By Victor Gao

On the heels of his visit to the Republic of Korea (ROK), US President Joe Biden is visiting Japan and is eager to stir up more anti-China hostility in East Asia and in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, focusing on the QUAD (allegedly an anti-China alliance), the Taiwan question and proposing a new "Indo-Pacific Economic Framework" (IPEF), allegedly aimed at excluding China. China is the largest economy in the world by purchasing power parity (PPP), and the second largest economy in the world by official exchange rate calculation, and is the largest trading nation with more than 130 countries and regions in the world, including most countries in the Asia-Pacific region. To exclude China economically in the present world is an act of lunacy, insanity and futility, and will hurt rather than help the fundamental interests of the American people. By all reasonable estimation, China will surpass the US as the largest economy before the end of this decade. No one can halt China's economic growth momentum. As a matter of fact, any attempt to deprive the Chinese people their right of economic development will probably be the largest crime against humanity and will fail miserably. What matters in East Asia, in the Asia-Pacific region, and in the world as a whole is peace, growth and development, rather than confrontation, war or a restart of another Cold War. China is a major force for peace and development in the world today, and the United States will need to get along with China, rather than confronting it. The real essence of the Taiwan question is the unfinished civil war in China in the later 1940s, which led to the establishment of the People's Republic China (PRC) in the Chinese mainland in 1949, and the fleeing from the mainland to China's Taiwan province by the then Nationalist government headed by Chiang Kai-shek in 1949. By today, more than 180 countries in the world and all the major international organizations in the world recognize that there is only one China, and Taiwan is part of China, and the PRC is the sole legitimate representative of China. The United States made such acknowledgment in 1979 in order to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC, on the precondition set by the PRC of withdrawing the US troops from the Taiwan region, abrogating the US "diplomatic relations" and "defense treaty" with Taiwan. The US position today regarding Taiwan is full of deliberate ambiguity aimed at misleading the American people to start with, misleading those in Taiwan who want to promote "Taiwan independence," and misleading the whole world about the real legal status of Taiwan, which is a part of China. The US decision-makers may believe that stirring up military confrontation across the Taiwan Straits may be a sure way of causing bloodshed involving Taiwan and deterring China's continued peaceful development. What the US is doing may, as a matter of fact, provoke the resurrection of the unfinished civil war, which is purely a Chinese internal matter, and neither the US nor any other foreign country has any legitimate justification to be involved in a resurrected civil war in China. The US may also completely miscalculate the situation because the people on the two sides of the Taiwan Straits are the same Chinese people, and the unification of China in the name of a united China is the mega-trend of the world today. No US president has any legal justification or moral decency to

send American soldiers to fight in the resurrected civil war in China, which the US government may be provoking with ominous and dangerous schemes. No other country in the world would serve the fundamental interest of their own people to fight in the resurrected civil war in China, which the US government is actively and viciously provoking. As far as the QUAD is concerned, to expect that the great nation of India can be hijacked to the war wagon of the United States against China, is a complete misreading of the independence of India as a great country. For thousands of years, China and India got along with each other peacefully. The territorial disputes which exist between the two countries today were created by neither of them, but by the British imperial colonists in British India. The Chinese nation and the Indian nation, the only two super-populations in the world, will surely have sufficient wisdom, courage and vision to overcome the conspiratorial schemes of the British colonists when they ruled the great Indian people as a second-class sub-species and schemed to invade and occupy China's Tibet Autonomous Region. As for Japan, it still has territorial disputes with Russia, ROK, China and China's Taiwan region, despite its unconditional surrender in 1945. A firm and stern message should be conveyed to the Japanese government that Japan is not allowed to possess offensive weapons or weapons of mass destruction of any kind in the world today, lest it suffers horrendous consequences. The best way for Japan to regain its normal and complete sovereignty is to fully commit to peace and to perpetually forswear war of any kinds. It will be against the fundamental interest of the Japanese people to agitate for war and forswear peace. Victor Gao is a current affairs commentator and the former interpreter for Deng Xiaoping and chairman of the China Energy Security Institute. He is also a chair professor at Soochow University and vice president of the Center for China and Globalization.

INDIA

The discovery of India's Heft

But not yet of how to use it

By Bharat Karnad

That India has clout if it acts independently in pursuit of narrowly defined national interest is something the Narendra Modi government apparently discovered, courtesy the Ukraine war. It reveals what is fundamentally wrong with Modi's world view and how the S. Jaishankar-led Ministry of External Affairs assesses the world and India's role in it. Initially skipping around moral issues to avoid condemning Russia for its messy military intervention, India became more forthright in pursuing its national interest. It was uneasy about running afoul of the United States and the West but unwilling to court President Vladimir Putin's wrath. The balance of Delhi's concerns was this: The US and European states could be persuaded to be flexible on account of China, West's other great rival, otherwise benefitting strategically. The Modi government hinted at the possibility of China using the Ukraine tensions to initiate hostilities across the disputed border as it had done in 1962 when exploiting the super powers' distraction with the Cuban missile crisis to start the mountain war that India lost. It is a danger heightened by an unpredictable Putin, in a pique, slowing down the flow of military spares and creating no end of trouble for the Indian armed services. It eventuated in India's "neutral" stance and abstentions on several UN votes, which preempted Putin from getting punitive. The success in

dealing with the US and Russia led Jaishankar, at the Raisina Dialogue 2022, to declare, a trifle triumphantly, that “It's better to engage with the world on the basis of who we are rather than try and please the world by being a pale imitation of what they are” and to not let “others define us, or, have the need to get approval from other quarters, which era”, he said, is “behind” us. This is very rah-rah and self-congratulatory, of course. But the era he would like the country to forget is the one in which he had ceaselessly talked up India as needing to be part of “a rules-based order” one dominated politically by the United States and the West, and economically by the US and China. It is a system, moreover, that because India had no part whatsoever in crafting, requires it to traipse through the minefields of clashing US, European, Russian and Chinese interests. In the event, like it or not, India and its interests are defined by whichever powerful country or countries it wants to sidle up to. Still, taking Jaishankar at his word, is he saying the extant correlation-of-forces was examined, India's choices pondered, and decision made to pursue national interest by relying on itself? In that case, what's not to like? Except, the success in resisting American pressure to disengage from Russia without alienating Washington, it must be noted, was at the sufferance of both the US and Russia. The Indian foreign minister's statement, however, suggested something else: A new, more disruptive, attitude and a departure from, what I have called, a “creeper vine” foreign policy that India adopted post-Cold War of clinging to the US to rise. Plainly, this is not so as Modi subsequently clarified. On the eve of his European tour, the PM reassured everybody that India's rise would not be at the “cost” of any other country. So, disruption of the existing international order is not on the cards. In reality, it means India remaining what it has always been a tame and timid country ready to ride any passing coattail with little gain in sight. That's not a surprise. The 2008 India-US civilian nuclear cooperation agreement promised “20,000 MW by 2020”, and the 2012 Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) advanced military technologies and high-value tech collaboration. Neither delivered. The only important project involving US help to design and develop a combat aircraft jet engine in India was terminated by President Donald Trump, notwithstanding the “Howdy, Modi!” and “Namaste Trump” galas in Houston and Ahmedabad respectively. And the series of DTTI and 2x2 meetings with the US have, like the Joint Working Group negotiations with China to resolve the border dispute, produced only promises to meet again. The “India as responsible state”-mantra that's routinely rolled out to explain the country's external behaviour has covered for India's foreign and military policy inaction, lack of political will, loss of nerve, and for compromises at every turn. India has failed to respond to China's nuclear missile arming Pakistan with like strategic arming of countries on China's periphery. Incidentally, this was a late 1970s-vintage provocation the US was party to. Delhi then delayed the export of conventional warheaded Brahmos supersonic cruise missile to Vietnam, Philippines, et al, until now but blamed Russia for not previously permitting such sale, when India had the indigenous short-range Prithvi missile that it could have liberally dispensed. And India did not instantly retaliate with air strikes against significant targets within Pakistan when terrorists attacked Parliament in December 2001 and Mumbai in November 2008. The fact is India never needed to placate the US, nor required the Ukraine issue to assert its policy freedom. It is America, the European Union, and Russia as I have long argued, that crucially need India to ringfence China. No other country in Asia has the location, size and the all-round heft. What is missing is an Indian government with the vision, iron will and self-confidence to talk straight with Washington and to demand a substantial price for partnering the US

expeditious transfers of high technology and such. Instead, New Delhi appears content with the H1B visa crumbs Washington throws its way. For reasons of economic and military counter weighting and access to its market, the US, EU, Russia and China alike find India indispensable to their plans. It is "India's moment" alright but not, as former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran roundaboutly argues, to get closer to America. That would be to squander a glorious opportunity for the country to emerge as international system balancer and great power, unconstrained by partnerships with big powers. Alas, that is not the path Modi and Jaishankar are taking.

The sycophants are dangerous

By Tavleen Singh

It should have been a good week for our Prime Minister. He has just returned from what appears to have been a very successful trip to Europe. As well as meeting important leaders, he would have been happily reminded of the good old days when he met members of the diaspora in Berlin and Copenhagen and they chanted Modi, Modi, Modi. The Prime Minister was in his element when Indian musicians in full costume appeared out of nowhere, allowing him, as usual, to try his hand at playing a big drum. Journalists who traveled to Europe to cover his tour were flattering in their reporting of his successes. A Hindi news channel reported that it was Modis' stature that would soon end the war in Ukraine. The Danish Prime Minister seemed to confirm this by publicly urging him to speak to Putin. Modi couldn't have asked for more. Within hours of returning to the motherland, however, some uglier realities began to surface. First came the news that the Asia-Pacific director of Reporters without Borders (RSF) had, during a congressional briefing, presented a report titled Indias Crackdown on Free Speech. Nobody wants to see India become a very strong dictatorship like China... said Daniel Bastard (but) the situation becomes more or less the same in some respects. The report he presented to the US Congress spoke of routine violence against journalists, mentioning Kashmir in particular, and said that the Indian media were forced into self-censorship. Then came alarming news from the World Health Organization that the Indian government had covered up Covid deaths to such an extent that the true figure was probably 10 times the official tally. The same officials who let us down so badly this time last year said the WHO was defaming India and using a methodology that was unreliable. They said India had a very strong birth and death registry and that indicated that the official figure of 4.81 lakh deaths at the end of 2021 was accurate. Let us now examine whether the accusations against Modi are true or malicious propaganda. This newspaper did a thorough analysis of the WHO charges and concluded that although there may have been an undercount, the actual figure falls far short of the WHO estimate of 47.4 lakh death. What we have to ask ourselves is why India's official numbers are being questioned, and the answer, IMHO, is that too many lies were told by too many officials at the height of this wave murderous Delta that swept India last summer. When bodies were seen floating in the Ganges, we were told this was normal as some Hindus believed in giving their loved ones jal samadhi. When the banks of our most sacred river began to be covered with thousands of shallow graves, the official explanation was that there were Hindu communities who believed in burial. When people started dying from lack of oxygen and hospital beds, the official explanation was that it was an exaggeration. When queues formed

outside the cremation grounds, we were told that there were vulture journalists who did not have to report from the cremation grounds. Few people did. The media was whipped into such submission. The courage we once showed in pointing out government corruption and failures began to die before Modi won his second term, and has died again in the past four years. Reporting on politics and governance has become difficult. Journalists who continue to show defiance are routinely punished by Indian government investigative agencies. And anyway, there are only a handful left. There are private news channels today that look so much like government mouthpieces that if poor, seedy old Doordarshan were shut down for good, it wouldn't be missed. The problem with forcing civil servants and journalists to become slavish sycophants is that the government begins to believe its own propaganda. So, when international organizations or newspapers report failures and loopholes, the response of the highest Modi's government officials is to speak of an international conspiracy against India. It's crazy talk. As the Prime Minister reportedly discovered during his tour of Europe, the West is keen for India to succeed so that it can act as a buffer against the emerging new world order led by China. If there is an international plot, it is for India to somehow overcome its governance and economic policy failures to emerge as a real challenge to China. When India performed well, it was applauded by the same Western newspapers that our officials accuse of being anti-Indian. It is because the media policy of the Modi government has essentially consisted of muzzling the national media that there has been bad press abroad. It is because we lied about the extent of the horror we experienced during the Covid killer wave last summer that there has been such a severe loss of credibility. Sycophants have a place in autocracies where, for a time, they thrive on singing praises to the Dear Leader, but even there they end up weakening him instead of helping him become a better autocrat. In democratic countries, the damage caused by sycophantic officials and servile journalists is incalculable. Until it's too late.

Indo - Pacific economic framework not a blessing to Asia

Such arrangement unlikely to be conducive to unity, regional economic integration

By Xin Ping

Pacific Economic Framework" (IPEF) will bring prosperity to the region. But its sole purpose is to advance the "Indo Pacific Strategy" and key interests of the US instead of driving post-pandemic recovery, development and prosperity of the region. Asian countries need to brace themselves for the negative impact brought on by the framework, which could be summed up as "four Ds".

Division

IPEF is created to encourage regional economies to "decouple" from the Chinese market by leading them to alternative supply chains, a step that Washington believes will help exclude China from the regional trading and supply systems. This would essentially install a closed, exclusive and confrontational arrangement within this region designed with clear geopolitical and ideological intentions, which runs counter to the principles of multilateralism. The US Trade Representative Katherine Tai has openly described the IPEF as an "arrangement independent of China". Given China's economic size and influence in the region and the possible consequences of artificially splitting the trading system and cutting off supply chains, such an arrangement

would not be conducive to the unity and regional economic integration of the Asia-Pacific. There are speculations that as far as Asean countries are concerned, the US is trying to recruit Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam to join IPEF, while leaving out Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Brunei, which will undoubtedly affect the development of the ASEAN community and undermine the unity of Asean.

Deprivation

The US claims to support the centrality of Asean, yet IPEF apparently takes little heed of Asean's preferred way of inclusive regional cooperation. A framework like this would only weaken and damage Asean's centrality in the regional architecture. IPEF's proclaimed high standards in the fields of digital economy, labour, market supervision, environmental protection and anti-corruption are way higher than the standards set by domestic laws in some Asean countries and even by international conventions. In a sense, the US could be forcing these countries to adopt certain domestic economic policies to serve US interests. The exclusive and even punitive provisions contained in IPEF may contradict the commitments made in regional free trade agreements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

Deviation

Putting forward IPEF is one of the 10 core tasks of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy. The US potentially aims to use IPEF to supplement its Indo-Pacific Strategy and establish a unilaterally dominant economic cooperation arrangement, rather than a true free trade agreement with mutual open market access and tariff exemption as desired by the regional countries. It is, therefore, a deviation from the principles of openness, inclusiveness, equality and reciprocity that multilateral mechanisms and arrangements in the region have long followed.

Disappointment

The US might hope to use IPEF to get regional allies and Asean countries on board to encircle China, but this is unlikely to materialise. China and Asean are each other's largest trading partners. Japan's exports to China are roughly the same as those to the US, and imports twice as much from China as from the US. South Korea's trade with the US is only half of its trade with China. With RCEP having entered into effect early this year, the cooperation potential among regional countries will only be further unleashed. The US has repeatedly reneged on its words about Asia-Pacific economic and trade cooperation: the Obama administration had pushed forward the concept of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) before the Trump administration exited from it after taking office. Now the Biden administration has come up with IPEF. Inconsistency in Washington's policy-making will only make regional countries question the US credibility and policy continuity. As Mary Lafley, a senior researcher at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, pointed out, "Asian allies, still reeling from the unpredictable and destabilising policies of the Trump administration, may be reluctant to invest much in new structures that can be as easily blown away as houses of straw." The writer is a commentator on international affairs who writes regularly for CGTN, global times and china daily.

MISCELLANEOUS

A Monroe doctrine for South Asia

By Saleem Akhtar Malik

The concept of a Monroe Doctrine for South Asia does not imply that the US has the authority to act in the region. On the eve of independence, Quaid e Azam proposed the notion. He mentioned a local Monroe Doctrine in response to a foreign journalist, which would seal the Sub-Continent against international influence. The Monroe Doctrine was a U.S foreign policy position that opposed European colonialism in the Western Hemisphere (North and South America and the surrounding waters). It held that any intervention in the political affairs of the Americas by foreign powers was a potentially hostile act against the U.S. The doctrine was central to U.S. foreign policy for much of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Even in the 21st Century, the U.S does not tolerate regimes in the Western Hemisphere that try to follow independent foreign policies. We have the examples of Cuba, Chile, Nicaragua, and Venezuela which were punished by the US for daring to exert their independence in their domestic and foreign policies. Talking about a Monroe Doctrine for South Asia does not imply extending the US right to intervene in the South Asian region. The idea was first mooted by Quaid e Azam on the eve of independence. While replying to a foreign correspondent, he talked about a local Monroe Doctrine which would seal the Sub-Continent against foreign interference. What the Quaid had in mind was an understanding between India and Pakistan, the two largest South Asian countries, that any foreign intervention in the internal affairs and foreign policy matters of the South Asian states would not be allowed, and construed as an act of aggression.

Quaid's wish could not materialize because the Congress leadership had nurtured different dreams

Congress' mindset can be gleaned from a letter written by Jawaharlal Nehru to Brigadier Kodandera Madappa Cariappa (later General Cariappa, independent India's first army chief). Cariappa was a member of the Reconstitution Committee formed by the British to oversee the division of armies between India and Pakistan. Nehru wrote: "Let things take shape for a while. But of one thing I am convinced, that ultimately there will be a united and strong India. We will have to go through the valley of shadows before we reach the sunlit mountain top".

Referring to Pakistan, this same Jawaharlal Nehru had once remarked to Braj Kumar Nehru (Then India's ambassador to the U.S): "let us see for how long they last".

Almost seventy years after the British left, the Sub-Continent remains the world's most militarized region and a nuclear flashpoint. Given the current state of affairs, it seems almost impossible that a regional understanding, like the one envisioned by Jinnah, will ever come to fruition. The major impediment to normal relations between India and Pakistan, and the cause of three major wars between them, is the Kashmir logjam.

To make the matters worse, the Indian Government, in a presidential decree issued on 5 August 2019, revoked Articles 370 and 35A of India's constitution that guaranteed special rights to the Muslim-majority state, including its right to its constitution and decision-making process for all matters except defence, foreign affairs, and communications. In the follow-up to the move, India sent thousands of additional troops to the region, imposing a curfew on parts of the besieged state, shutting down telecommunications, and arresting political leaders.

Almost three years after the abrogation of Article 370 and Article 35 A, Indian Held Kashmir remains a huge jail reminiscent of the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip and the West Bank of River Jordan. Revoking IJK's special status is a reflection of the mass paranoia and fear Modi and his cohorts are suffering. Far from finishing the Kashmir dispute, it has brought the dispute into the International limelight.

What is Modi up to?

He wants to fragment the disputed state and annex each shard with a contiguous Indian state (Province, as we call them in Pakistan). This, he thinks, will scatter the Kashmiris to the four winds, break their cohesive national identity, and render them unable to unify for a common cause and struggle. This is easier said than done. The Israelis, for the last half a century, are working on a similar plan. They have splintered the West Bank, dotted it with Jewish settlements, and encircled the Palestinian cities and villages, reducing them into several Bantustans (A term used by the white rulers in apartheid South Africa for the Black African towns surrounded from all sides by white settlements). Israelis have failed to achieve their objective of cleansing the West Bank from Palestinians. So will Modi.

Is war an option to break the logjam?

Both India and Pakistan lack the decisive conventional punch to knock out the other. With both the belligerents being nuclear powers, a limited war under a nuclear overhang is possible, that too only after the enemy is caused enough attrition to stop him from responding further. According to investigative journalist Steve Coll's 2009 article in the New Yorker, India, and Pakistan, after intensive track II diplomacy, had very nearly reached an agreement that would have demilitarized Jammu & Kashmir. The plan called for the creation of an autonomous region in which residents could move freely and conduct trade on both sides of the Line of Control. Over time, the line of Control would become irrelevant, and declining violence would allow a gradual withdrawal of tens of thousands of troops that now face one another across the region's mountain passes. The plan called for the creation of an autonomous region in which residents could move freely and conduct trade on both sides of the Line of Control. Over time, the line of Control would become irrelevant, and declining violence would allow a gradual withdrawal of tens of thousands of troops that now face one another across the region's mountain passes. The stillborn plan, the result of back door diplomacy between India and Pakistan, was also known as the Musharraf- Manmohan Formula. It was a win-win solution to the Kashmir problem. Why did politicians on both sides of the LoC shove the Musharraf Manmohan formula under the rug? Saleem Akhtar Malik is a Pakistan Army veteran who writes on national and international affairs, defense, military history, and military technology. The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy of Global Village Space.
