

Is Ukraine a Metaverse Nightmare?



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MOVING from a unipolar world to a multipolar world was always likely to be messy and risk-prone. But few saw how fast we moved from beating war drums to actual armed conflict between the Great Powers, the latest being in Ukraine. Are we on a march of folly to World War III, or have key players lost sight of reality?

Let's not forget, World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945) were fought to keep down rising powers—Germany and later Japan. Russia and China suffered the most casualties in WWII, and both were allies against German Nazis and Japanese militarists. The United States became the real winner, but decided after WWII to contain communism in both the Soviet Union (USSR) and China. Fifty years ago, in 1972, US President Nixon set aside enmity against China, restored US-China relations, and in one strategic stroke, isolated the Soviet Union, leading to its collapse two decades later.

The great achievement during the Cold War was the avoidance of nuclear conflict, with the Cuban missile crisis being a live test of brinkmanship. Both sides climbed down when the USSR removed missiles from Cuba, and the US quietly removed missiles from Turkey. President Kennedy understood that grandstanding on moral issues should be restrained, because in a nuclear war, mutually assured destruction is madness.

After seven decades of peace, the Western media has been painting the multipolar world as a black-and-white conflict between good vs evil, democracy vs autocracy—without appreciating that the other side may have different points of view that need to be heard. By definition, a multipolar world means that liberal democracies will have to live with different ideologies and regimes.

Today, YouTube and the Web provide a wealth of alternative views than



mainstream media, such as CNN or BBC. Prof John Mearsheimer, author of the influential book *"The Tragedy of Great Power Politics,"* offers the insight that the Western expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Nato) was the reason why Russia felt threatened. The more the Nato allies try to arm Ukraine, the more insecure Russia gets. In essence, Russia wants a buffer zone of neutral countries like Austria, which are not members of Nato, but that does not exclude trade with all sides.

Carnegie Moscow Center analyst Alexander Baunov described how "the two sides appear to be negotiating over different things. Russia is talking about its own security, while the West is focusing on Ukraine's." What he is describing are two sides that are each in their own social bubble or virtual reality (VR) Metaverse, deaf to the other side's views.

The term "Metaverse" came from a 1992 dystopian sci-fi novel titled "Snow Crash," where the Metaverse is the

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The real-life cost of war: People walk at the border crossing between Poland and Ukraine, in Medyka, Poland, on February 24, 2022.

PHOTO: REUTERS

virtual refuge from an anarchic world controlled by the Mafia. Today, Metaverse is an online virtual world where the user blends VR with the real, flesh-and-blood world through VR glasses and software augmented reality (AR). In other words, in Metaverse, your mind is colonised by whatever algorithm and virtual information that you get—real or fake news. Metaverse is escapism from reality, and will not help us solve real world problems, especially when we need to talk eyeball to eyeball.

The Metaverse designer is more interested in controlling or influencing our minds, feeding us what we want to hear or see, rather than what information we need to have to make good decisions. The risk is that we think VR conflict is costless, whereas real war has real flesh-and-blood costs.

In short, the more we look inward at our own Metaverse, the more we neglect the collective costs to the world as it lurches from peace to war. Surprisingly, I found the right-wing influential Fox commentator Tucker Carlson asking

better questions than CNN or BBC commentators. In his show *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, in the segment "How will this conflict affect you?" he asked bluntly why Americans should hate Putin and what the war will cost every American.

Carlson asked some really serious questions, even though his views are partisan—have the Democrats, with their moral concern to hate Putin, forgotten the big picture of war costs? First, would Americans be willing to go into a winter war with Russia? Second, would they pay much higher gas prices as oil prices have already hit above USD 100 per barrel? Although economic sanctions are applied, even Europe will not be willing to risk cutting off gas supplies from Russia, since Russia accounts for 35 percent of European gas supplies. Third, is Ukraine a real democracy? Carlson's 2018 book *"Ship of Fools: How a Selfish Ruling Class Is Bringing America to the Brink of Revolution"* is well worth reading to understand how conservative Americans think about elites who care about themselves more than society at large.

In sum, the decade of 2020s may face a tough period of escalating conflicts at local, regional and global levels, with proxy wars that disrupt each other's economies and social stability. If states fail, and poor and hungry people migrate at a larger scale, even more border conflicts are likely, since more will want to go to the richer countries in the North, such as Europe and America.

There is no ideal world where everyone is good and the other side is bad. In a multipolar world, there will be all kinds of people that we don't like, but we have to live with them. A negotiated peace is better than mutual destruction. In Metaverse, virtual life can be beautiful, moral and perfect, but the real world is lurching towards a collective nightmare. We should not kid ourselves that the Metaverse VR of self-deception is the real world. We either sleepwalk to war, or have the courage to opt for sustainable peace.

The real question is: Who is willing to climb down and eat the humble pie for the sake of peace?



Industrial Rainwater Harvesting - A Sustainable Approach to Water Management

BGMEA and WaterAid organised a roundtable titled 'Industrial Rainwater Harvesting - A Sustainable Approach to Water Management' on February 15, 2022. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.



Faruque Hassan, President, BGMEA
The ready-made garment industry of Bangladesh is committed to continue its efforts to minimise the environmental cost of production and reduce resource

consumption.

Bangladesh's RMG sector has made remarkable strides in the area of environmental sustainability, securing the leading position with the highest number of green garment factories in the world, and is making consistent efforts in that direction.

The green factories ensure thermal comfort of the workers and state-of-the-art hygiene, use daylight, have rainwater harvesting system and maintain indoor air quality as per the ASHRE standard that maximises workers' physical and mental health and productivity.

Bangladesh is blessed with monsoon rain, and rainwater is considered as green water. The potential of rainwater storage during the monsoon period has driven innovation in the apparel industry. We are actively encouraging factories to adopt rainwater harvesting, and have seen RMG manufacturing units prioritising rainwater.

BGMEA, as a progressive association, accepts the recommendation and shall be happy to launch Sustainable Water Management Cell in the new BGMEA office at Uttara. We will also observe rain day and organise rain convention for raising awareness and enhancing technical knowledge about sustainable water resource management.



Professor Dr Tanvir Ahmed, Director-ITN, BUET
The RMG sector generally uses groundwater for meeting its water needs. The process of removing salt from

groundwater is also time-consuming. On the other hand, rainwater is salt-free. Considering the rooftop catchment areas of the RMG factories, it is easily possible to make rainwater harvesting plants there. However, there are challenges for storing and preserving this water. If we raise awareness about the benefits of rainwater harvesting, and provide technical knowledge, then factory owners can implement rainwater harvesting systems in their factories.



Abdullah Al Maher, CEO and Head of Business, Fakir Fashion Limited
I would request for establishing a platform where all stakeholders can collaborate on making RMG and textile factories more sustainable. If we want to conserve groundwater then it is essential for the retailers, suppliers, and factories to share technology with each other, build awareness and focus on their R&D efforts.



Tanzida Islam, Programme Manager - Environment, H&M
H&M has been focusing on improving the infrastructure of its factories, and this is where we are emphasising rainwater harvesting. During our water audit, we noticed that around 0.2 million cubic metres of water were harvested from rainwater. We monitor water usage through our freshwater consumption KPI which is connected to our sustainability index. We incentivise factories to adopt such sustainable facilities through this mechanism.



Md Mahbubur Rahman, Senior Programme Manager - Environment and Climate Change, Embassy of Sweden
The existing water scarcity along with the deteriorating state of the climate needs the collaborative effort of all the stakeholders. In Bangladesh, textile

and garments consume a lot of water, and that's why we should be duly concerned about efficient usage of water resources. Our primary focus should be to make industries such as RMG and textile even more advanced and sustainable in the future.



Kazy Mohammad Iqbal Hossain, South Asia Regional Sustainability Manager, Lindex HK Ltd.
According to our studies, factories can fulfil 10 to 20 percent of their water needs through rainwater harvesting during the monsoon season. Keeping this in mind, we have planned and allocated funds to introduce rainwater harvesting in our 10 factories in the next two years.



Mohammad Zobair Hasan, Deputy Executive Director, Development Organisation of the Rural Poor (DORP), and Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) - South Asia CSO Representative
Rainwater harvesting can be a possible option for us to achieve some of the SDG 6 targets. To do this, we have to encourage collaboration between factory owners, NGOs, and the media to create a massive awareness campaign on this issue. Political willingness would help address this issue in a holistic manner.



Abil Bin Amin, Bangladesh Country Manager, Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)
We formed an advisory group recently which focuses on climate change and its impact on businesses. ETI can play a role in disseminating the expertise and knowledge of the stakeholders to national and international communities.



Abrar Hossain Sayem, President, BAYLA
Many factory owners are interested in making their factories more sustainable, but they do not have adequate knowledge on how to do it. If they are provided information on the challenges and benefits of rainwater harvesting, they will be able to make sound decisions to support their production system as well as the environment. BAYLA can also help them in this regard! It is essential to promote rainwater harvesting among the youth so that they can become youth advocates for this sustainable practice.



Hasin Jahan, Country Director, WaterAid
A rainwater harvesting plant would cost around 65 lakh taka for a typical factory. In comparison to the exorbitant cost of building an apparel factory, this sum is insignificant. Dhaka WASA has declared that

it will increase commercial water prices by 40 percent soon. BEPZA also charges high price for water. If factories shift to using rainwater for meeting their water needs, it will help them significantly reduce costs over time. At the same time, it will contribute towards improving the environment in the country.

To address the issue of depleting groundwater level, rainwater should be everyone's business. Industries having ample space on the rooftop can be easily used for rainwater harvesting, and they can, thus, demonstrate sustainable solution towards solving the growing water needs for the businesses. Thanks to BGMEA for demonstrating a unique example to help protect our scarce water resources by encouraging the factory owners to adopt rainwater harvesting. WaterAid is committed to working with business entities and private sector to fast-track efforts towards water security and environment.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish Sustainable Water Management Cell at BGMEA. It will be a platform for stakeholders to collaborate on improving sustainability of RMG and textile factories. Initiate following activities:
 - Commission feasibility studies, and encourage factories to adopt rainwater harvesting facilities understanding the cost, benefits, and payback period.
 - Share technical know-how through

- providing training on rainwater harvesting and demonstrating the benefits to factory owners
- Raise awareness about the benefits of rainwater harvesting by celebrating rain day for mass people and rain convention for practitioners
- Engage young entrepreneurs and buyers in the promotion of rainwater harvesting
- International buyers should incentivise factories to adopt rainwater harvesting facilities.