

REFLECTIONS ON RUSSIA VS WEST IN UKRAINE

To attain peace, we have to demarket war



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WHEN the troops were being pulled out from Afghanistan, I was thinking where the next theatre of war would be. Ukraine was the last spot on my mind. It was also not in the high alert list of the Council of Foreign Relations, which regularly tracks these types of conflicts.

Two Slavic nations with close cultural ties are in conflict—brothers fighting brothers. The horrors of war are difficult to take. Deaths and destructions are piling up with no end in sight. The Western backing has given a new meaning to the war. It has turned out to be a contest between Russia and the West on Ukrainian soil.

Russia will not be able to continue a protracted war with economic sanctions and political isolation. It did not face anything like this in Chechnya or Georgia. The war has pushed Russia to a corner. It is an existential threat for the nuclear superpower. Can this lead to World War III? We will not be alive to confirm.

Wearing olive green shirt, the media savvy Ukrainian president is on the charm offensive. On April 5, 2022, he addressed the United Nations Security Council. In the Western media, he is being portrayed as a hero championing freedom. However, winning the media is different from winning the war.

The poor nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are facing political and economic pressure to side with the sparring parties. The people in these countries will be the unfortunate collaterals. Bangladesh will be dealt a heavy economic blow if its access to the Western garments market is closed. Bangladesh, Egypt, Iran, and Turkey buy 60 percent of their wheat from Russia and Ukraine. Bangladesh should take preventive measures, if possible.

The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the Security Council, “The war in Ukraine must stop—now.” It is “one of the greatest challenges ever to the international order... We need serious negotiations for peace, based on the principles of the United Nations Charter.”

Negotiations are taking place in Turkey. Both parties are evaluating the conditions on the ground and speculations about victory. So far, we have not seen any positive outcome. The world should strongly support Turkey’s President Erdogan’s peace initiative. Pressure must be put on both parties to come to a settlement.

Quest for a rationale
Russia is surrounded by many former Soviet Bloc countries who are now members of the European Union and Nato. Ukraine was just another nation that wanted to join this club. Why was it so different this time?

The answer lies in Crimea—which Russia annexed in 2014. For strategic reasons, Soviet-era naval base and entry to the Black Sea were critical for Russia. It also wanted to see a friendly government in Ukraine. There was a possibility that after joining the military alliance, Ukraine could try to retake Crimea with Nato’s support.

Given this, Putin had two bad choices: (i) fight Ukraine today; or (ii) fight Ukraine and Nato tomorrow. For him, fighting today was a better choice—a pre-emptive military move that made him the aggressor.

Placing a nation on a “war path” for a “membership” does not indicate good leadership. It is not a good trade-off, especially when nearly half of the Ukrainians were opposed to joining this organisation. As a country, Thailand has not been invaded by any external power in 1,000 years. The comedian president could learn from the Kingdom.

Now it is an old story to consider. The conditions on the ground have advanced very fast. Military and civilian casualties have overtaken the issue.

Strangulation by sanctions



Sanctions are legitimate civil courses of actions against any nation that does not follow the international order. Ever since the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, they have been used against belligerent countries.

Sanctions have mixed reactions. They weaken or embolden the leadership at home. Sufferings of the people increase but the regimes remain in power.

Nations are more permanent than their leaders. In the absence of Putin, Russia may inherit a leader who could be more hostile. Hitler came to power protesting against the strangulation of Germany stipulated by the Treaty of Versailles—the rest is history.

History repeats itself. In Bangla we say, “ek maghe sheet jai na.” The consequence of this war could be shockingly fatal.

Poor suffer the most

On April 5, 2022, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated in the Security Council that the conflict will increase the prices of food, energy and fertiliser affecting up to 1.2 billion people in 74 countries.

Historically, we have noticed that European conflicts have the potential to expand beyond the continent. Both World Wars started in Europe. America joined later. Rest of the world (some as colonies had no choice) were drawn into it against their will and have suffered miserably.

Nearly three million people died in the Bengal famine during World War II. The deceased people never heard the name of Churchill, Hitler, Mussolini, or Tojo.

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Global governance architecture

The United Nations Secretary General is right. The war reveals one of the greatest challenges of the international order since World War II.

Unipolar world is as bad as monopoly in economics. There is no force on the planet that can counter the diktat of the West and Nato combined. Both China and Russia have some deterrence, but they are distant rivals to the West’s economic, social, and political might. The non-aligned nations do not have the political power to stop a war like this.

We should seriously consider restructuring (perestroika?) the global governance architecture. Discussion should include Security Council membership, political power-sharing, dollar-based trade regime, ethnolinguistic fractionalisation, religious tolerance, and global inequality.

During the past 75 years, the economic and military landscape of the world has changed substantially. Restructuring the global governance architecture is likely to face serious challenges. Emerging nations should come forward to make a difference in global governance.

Demarket the current war

It is noticeable how the Ukraine war is being marketed to the American public. Below are my appeals to demarket the war.

1. Stand still and roll back: The moral justification of the current war is weak. It

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The war in Ukraine has turned out to be a contest between Russia and the West on Ukrainian soil.

PHOTO: AFP

has the potential to prompt World War III. A prolonged war and stalemate benefit the war industry as the body count increases. The situation is not acceptable to our conscious. Let us stand still and roll back.

2. Moral suasion: There is no better alternative than moral suasion. Academic, journalists, politicians, conscientious people, and social media—all must come forward to play their role. Active opposition against war can

change minds. For example, the death of four students at Kent State University (my Alma Mater) on May 4, 1970, literally stopped the Vietnam war.

3. Responsible media: To portray someone as a hero and the other as a villain in any conflict does not help the peace process. De-escalation and negotiation should be the focus of the media. The media must play a constructive role. Positive discussions must follow this line of thought.

4. Non-aligned leadership: Historically, leaders of the nonaligned nations have played a positive role in superpower conflicts. Lately, the movement has lost its impetus. The leaders of the emerging nations must take proactive measures to break the stalemate.

Our hegemonic desire to control the world and its resources puts us in conflicts. As a consequence, the war industry thrives. President Eisenhower noted this in his Farewell Address to the nation on January 17, 1961.

“This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience... Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications... Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defence with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

As a paradigm, demarketing war is likely to face natural opposition from the industry that benefits from war. Yet then peace efforts must continue.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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General Procurement Notice

BANGLADESH

Construction of Kewatkhali Bridge at Mymensingh Project

Transport

GENERAL PROCUREMENT NOTICE

Loan No. L0163A

Project ID No. 224344600 (GoB)

The People's Republic of Bangladesh has received financing in the amount of US\$ 260 Million (Two Hundred and Sixty Million US Dollar) equivalent from the **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)** toward the cost of the "Construction of Kewatkhali Bridge at Mymensingh Project" and it intends to apply part of the proceeds to payments for goods, works, related services and consulting services to be procured under this project. This project will be jointly financed by the Government of Bangladesh & AIIB.

The project includes the following components:

Part 1: Bridge and Approach Roads with Road and Rail Overpasses Construction Works

This component will include an international open competitive tendering for the following:

The total construction work of the project will be carried out through a single works package MKB WP-01 which encompasses:

- Construction of the 4-Lane Kewatkhali Steel Arch Bridge (1 No.);
- Construction of a two lane dual carriageway road, with construction of slow-moving vehicle lanes on both sides of the approach roads;
- Construction of road overpass bridges (02 Nos.) and rail overpass bridges (02 Nos.), culverts (09 Nos.) and other structures along the approach roads;
- Construction of a Toll Plaza;
- Construction of a Rest Area;
- Construction of entry and exit ramps near rail overpass at the Shambhugonj end (02 Nos.); Installation of a Bridge Health Monitoring System (BHMS) over the main bridge.

The bidding method for the selection will be one stage two envelop method.

The procurement will be done through International Open Competitive Tender (IOCT)

Part 2: Consulting Services

This component will include procurement of Consulting Services relating to the Bridge and approach Roads construction supervision.

Part 3: Project Management Support and Capacity Building

Procurement of contracts financed by AIIB will be conducted through the procedures as specified in the AIIB's Interim Operational Directive on Procurement Instructions for Recipients (June 2, 2016), and is open to all eligible tenderers as defined in the Instructions.

Specific procurement notices for contracts to be bid under the AIIB's international open competitive tender (IOCT) procedures and for contracts for consultancy services will be announced, as they become available,* in *UN Development Business* and the *AIIB Website* and in *Recipient's local newspapers or websites*.

***The REOI for the Construction Supervision Consultant has already been published on 24th January 2022.**

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