[**Spheres of interest**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1666941/spheres-of-interest)

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ON Dec 20, at a long press conference, Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov mentioned what could be a precursor to a real breakthrough in relations between Russia and America. All that Russia now seeks is not Nato’s rollback from Eastern Europe, but a fair guarantee against Ukraine’s enrolment as a member of Nato. The talks will start immediately after the holidays.

It is reported that the main work of negotiations will be carried out with the US. Not with Nato. Holidays in Russia last till Jan 9. Nato’s secretary general Jens Stoltenberg has decided to convene a meeting of the Nato-Russian Council meeting on Jan 12, the Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov revealed.

Stoltenberg does not wish to be left out. He was subjected to some rude remarks by Lavrov though not without justification. He called Stoltenberg arrogant for his comments and added he should look for a new job, and that he was not performing the present job well. Lavrov does not suffer fools or pomposities gladly. He ticked off America’s then secretary of state Condoleezza Rice good and proper. She was every bit as boorish as reported to be.

We need to accomplish a regional accord on Afghanistan.

On the table are some documents which, one suspects, were under negotiation previously on a lower level. There is a Russia-America Treaty and a Russia-Nato Security Agreement; Russia seeks legal guarantees to rule out Ukraine’s membership of Nato and deployment of Nato weapons there. Besides America, Russia will also hold talks under the auspices of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. There will also be a rollback in Nato’s military deployments in Central and Eastern Europe.

Spheres of influence were once useful devices in European diplomacy. The Treaty for the Renunciation of War was signed by all, including Germany, in Paris in August 1928. In 1939, Germany went to war plunging the world into turmoil.

While it was under negotiation, the British foreign secretary, Sir Austen Chamberlain wrote to the US ambassador in May 1928. “The language of Article 1, as to the renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy, renders it desirable that I should remind your Excellency that there are certain regions of the world the welfare and integrity of which constitute a special and vital interest for our peace and safety. His Majesty’s Government have been at pains to make it clear in the past that interference with these regions cannot be suffered. Their protection against attack is to the British Empire a measure of self-defence. It must be clearly understood that His Majesty’s Government in Great Britain accept the new treaty upon the distinct understanding that it does not prejudice their freedom of action in this respect. The Government of the United States have comparable interests, any disregard of which by a foreign power they have declared that they would regard as an unfriendly act” — a hostile step.

This was a reference to the Monroe Doctrine which the US imposed on Latin America.

This still remains valid as the behaviour of great powers shows. The Soviet Union led by Josef Stalin and Britain led by Winston Churchill concluded in Moscow in 1944 a written agreement on spheres of influence in the Balkans. On May 13, 1950, the ace correspondent James Reston reported Stalin’s proposal for a global agreement on spheres of influence.

There is some logic behind them. Far better are spheres of interest. India will not like Pakistan to meddle in Nepal. Pakistan is justi-fied in resenting Indian meddling in Afghanistan.

It is time the wor­ld gave some attention first to Afgha­n­istan’s hu­­­manitarian needs, its human rights situation and not least to its future disposition. All its neighbours are interested in its future. A fair solution could be on the Austrian model; not for blind copying but for intelligent emulation. Under the Austrian State Treaty of May 16, 1955, the US, Britain, France and the Soviet Union withdrew their respective forces from Austria. It would not forge a union with any other country and in a separate article agreed to observe human rights and free elections. By the federal constitutional law of Oct 26, 1955, Austria declared her “permanent neutrality” and forswore military alliances or bases on its soil.

We need a second conference like the Bonn Conference to accomplish such a regional accord on Afghanistan under the auspices of the United Nations.

In such a conference, a large number of Afghans should be represented in in camera proceedings where there can be a lot of give and take among parties. The security concerns of Afghanistan’s neighbours can be discussed along with women’s rights in Afghanistan.

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