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**The China factor**

The G7 summit of the world's most powerful economies and democracies was recently held in Cornwall, Britain. The purpose of the summit, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, was to play a leading role in resolving the problems facing the world today -- but the rapid rise of China dominated the meeting agenda.

Although most of the G7 summits are held behind closed doors, according to media reports, various issues related to China's growing influence in the region were also discussed. No doubt, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the largest economic project of the century. However, the US, on the occasion of the recently-held G7 meeting, has launched a global infrastructure plan to counter China’s growing influence. Known as the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative, the US-sponsored project aims to offer an infrastructure partnership with developing countries by providing support worth $40 trillion by 2035.

According to the US, there also was a consensus during the G7 meeting on the need for a shared approach regarding human rights violations in China. Which is why the G7 leadership also criticized China for mistreating minority communities and protests in Hong Kong. In response, the Chinese Embassy in London has recorded a strong reaction on behalf of the Chinese government, stating that: "The days when global decisions were dictated by a small group of countries are long gone.” The envoy emphasized that China always believes that countries, big or small, strong or weak, poor or rich, are equals, and that world affairs should be handled through consultation by all countries. In simple words, all countries in the world are honourable in their individual national status, and enjoy sovereignty in their internal matters.

The US is undoubtedly the world's number one economy and only superpower. According to analysts, the rapid growth of China will lead to transforming it into becoming the world's number one economic power by the end of the current decade. Its successful tackling of the Covid-19 challenge is in fact an example to be followed by the countries of the world.

Although US President Joe Biden ended many of the controversial policies of the Trump regime, the anti-China factor in foreign policy has apparently become more prominent. It seems that the US now intends to give China a tough time openly as was once practised against the Soviet Union. In my view, China has been recognized as a superpower rival and the US is now forming global alliances of like-minded countries against China.

Recently, Nato has warned of the emerging threats posed by China in the form of military and technological advancements. The US Senate has also recently passed a bill which also includes China-specific provisions.

On the other hand, it is a positive sign that not all G7 countries are in favour of going aggressively against China. Most Western countries enjoy cordial relations with China. That is why some heads of state had to clarify that the G7 is not hostile towards China.

Both the US and China are very significant for Pakistan on the diplomatic front. However, the first priority for us is to safeguard our own national interests. In the past, we have contributed a lot to world peace. Even today our foreign policy is based on establishing cordial relations with neighbouring countries and the international community on the basis of mutual respect and dignity. The current situation demands us to adopt a careful, practical and wise approach to handle such global issues.

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